

Wiltshire Council

**Department for
Children and Education**

**Statement of Purpose
of the
Fostering Service**

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WILTSHIRE COUNCIL
DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

Statement of Purpose of the Fostering Service

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1. The Fostering Service.

1.1 Aims of the Fostering Service

Wiltshire County Council's Fostering Service aims to provide high-quality family-based care for children and young people who are unable for whatever reason to live within their own families, or for whom short-term breaks are needed to maintain them in their own homes.

The Fostering Service is a part of a broader Family Placement Service, which in turn is a core component of the Children & Families Branch of the Department for Children and Education. The main focus of the Branch's work with children in need is to promote the well-being and development of each child throughout childhood by:

- ensuring secure care
- protecting children from harm
- respecting and promoting cultural ties and identity
- promoting life chances by supporting and enabling parents and extended family to care for their own children, wherever possible.

The Fostering Service also operates under the government's Every Child Matters: Change for Children initiative, with its 5 outcomes:

- Be Healthy
- Stay Safe
- Enjoy & Achieve
- Achieve Economic Well-Being
- Make a Positive Contribution

Where these aims cannot be met within a child's own family and alternative care is needed, the Fostering Service aims to ensure that all children looked after by the authority receive the best possible care and attention to meet their individual needs. As far as possible, children will be matched with carers who can meet their assessed needs and can provide the child with security and stability for as long as is needed.

This is based on our belief that positive outcomes for children are best achieved when families, carers and professionals work together in partnership to ensure the child's interests, wishes and feelings remain at the heart of the services provided.

The Fostering Service is committed to ensuring that anti-discriminatory practice informs all aspects of its work with colleagues, carers and service users, and that placement resources provide equal opportunities of access to all children in need, irrespective of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, age, gender, sexuality or disability.

1.2 Principles of the Fostering Service

- The child's welfare is the paramount consideration.
- The child's wishes and feelings (depending on age and understanding) will be taken into consideration when any decisions are being made with regard to the child
- Most children and young people are best cared for within their own families. Wherever possible, priority should be given to placing a child within their extended family network, when they cannot live either for a short period or longer term, with their birth parents.
- The authority may look after a child on behalf of the family in circumstances where the child is otherwise likely to suffer significant harm or there is a serious risk of family breakdown and there is no family member able or willing to care for the child.
- The local authority may look after a child on behalf of a family where fostering would enable the child to continue living in her/his family, through the provision of regular respite.
- Every child who it is proposed should be looked after will be assessed under the Department of Health's National Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families and will be subject to our Department's planning process.
- Every family will be offered a Family Group Conference to establish whether the wider family is able to make its own plan for the care of the child.
- Looked After Children will always be placed with foster carers approved under the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, who will encourage and promote continuing links with their families. These carers may sometimes be extended family members, specifically approved to care for a named child. A separate Family & Friends Care Policy is in place, where the aim is for relatives or friends to only be approved as foster carers where the child needs to remain in the care system.
- Where a child cannot be placed within their family network, the next consideration should always be to place a child with Wiltshire approved foster carers. However, where a child's needs cannot be met within local resources it may be necessary to arrange a placement with an approved and registered independent fostering agency.

- Family Group Conferences should be considered at regular intervals throughout the time the child is looked after. The aim will be to work towards returning a child to her/his family network (including significant relatives or friends) as quickly as possible.
- Parents will be actively encouraged to be fully involved in the planning and decision-making process and work should focus on helping families to care more safely for their children.
- Where it is not possible for a child to return to her/his family network, a permanent placement will be found and a permanence plan will be made at the child's second LAC review. The permanence options could include a long-term fostering placement, depending upon the child's age, wishes and circumstances.. However, the Department works to a policy of children not being brought up in public care.
- Children in foster care have regular LAC reviews, as set out in Regulations. Each review will consider whether the child's needs are still being met by the Care Plan and Placement Plan. The reviews are chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer.
- Children and young people will be treated with respect; diversity and difference should be valued and enjoyed.
- A child or young person's sense of identity and self-respect needs to be actively promoted through particular awareness of, and attention to, issues of race, culture, religion, gender, ability and sexual orientation.
- Every looked after child will be made aware of and encouraged to have access to the Children's Rights Service: Voice.
- At the point of placement every child will be provided with a Children's Guide to Fostering, which includes details of Viewpoint (see section 4.1.9 below), the Complaints procedure, Ofsted and the Children's Rights Service (see Appendix 2 for details of Ofsted).
- Carers have a unique contribution to make to a child or young person's growth and development; they will be regarded and respected as professional colleagues.
- Carers will receive training and support to enhance their skills and personal development, and will be expected to commit to developing their skills and knowledge in working with children and young people.

1.3 Legislation, Guidance and Policy

The Fostering service in Wiltshire conforms to the requirements of:

- The Children Act 1989

- The Children Act 2004
- The Fostering Services Regulations 2002
- The Fostering Services National Minimum Standards
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (See Appendix 1)
- Article 8 of the Charter of Human Rights (See Appendix 1)
- The National Assessment Framework
- The Integrated Children's System (ICS)
- The Child Workforce Development Council's (CWDC) Training, Support & Development Standards for Foster Carers.

1.4 Working in Partnership

In line with the Children Act 1989, partnership is a key principle underpinning the Fostering Service. Working effectively in the best interests of children requires close collaboration and co-operation between all involved parties:

- Children, their parents and extended families
- Foster carers and their families
- Family placement officers and managers
- Children's social workers and managers
- Other internal professionals e.g. Independent Reviewing Officers, Children's Rights Service, Legal Section, Family Support Workers
- External professionals such as teachers, youth workers, health workers and voluntary sector workers who support children and carers.

1.5 Promoting Well-Being and Life Chances for Children

The Fostering Service's core aim is to recruit, prepare, assess, train, approve, supervise and support carers who are able to provide a safe, healthy, nurturing environment, in line with the Every Child Matters objectives, where children are:

- included, valued and respected
- emotionally supported
- listened to and understood
- praised for their achievements
- protected from harm, abuse, neglect or exploitation
- given appropriate boundaries and control
- encouraged to make choices e.g. career options
- given reasonable privacy and personal space
- offered good standards of nutrition, physical care, health care and hygiene
- enabled to achieve their full educational potential
- offered opportunities for leisure and social activity
- enabled to maintain contact with their family, religious and cultural ties
- able to have any special needs met.

In order to meet these aims and principles, we will ensure that all our foster carers are:

- selected, checked and assessed for suitability to care for vulnerable children
- committed to the principles of anti-discriminatory practice and inclusion
- committed to promoting children's family ties, cultural and ethnic identity
- committed to promoting children's contact with their birth families
- supported by social workers and other specialist services
- informed and involved in planning and decision-making
- provided with ongoing training opportunities, to increase their skills and competence, to meet the requirements of the Training, Support & Development Standards for Foster Carers
- provided with ongoing appraisal and evaluation, through their annual reviews
- valued as professional colleagues
- rewarded for their skills and commitment.

1.6 Child Protection

Wiltshire's foster carers are expected to care for children safely and securely, ensuring their protection and welfare at all times.

Every foster carer is required to undertake Safer Caring training and produces a household Safer Caring Policy, which sets out how they intend to ensure the protection of all children in the household. The Safer Caring Policy is reviewed at each annual review of the carer's approval and with each new placement of a child.

The Foster Care Agreement sets out the expectations of the Department with regard to corporal punishment.

The Department operates a non-smoking policy for the protection and health of looked after children, which foster carers are expected to work towards.

Allegations of abuse against foster carers or other members of the carers' household (including other foster children) may result in a formal investigation under the provisions of Section 47 of the 1989 Children Act and Working Together 2006. The Procedures and Protocol to be followed in such cases are contained in the Foster Carer Handbook and in staff procedures on the intranet. Wherever possible, 'Section 47 investigations' will be undertaken by an Independent Agency in conjunction with the police, and there is a Service Level Agreement with the NSPCC in place for this purpose.

There is a separate Service Level Agreement with Barnardos to provide support and advocacy to foster carers during an investigation.

1.7 The Fostering Task

Foster carers work in partnership with the child's social worker, their Family Placement Officer and other professionals in order to achieve the best outcomes for the children, in line with the Five Outcomes (see page 3).

- Foster carers must provide care that encourages children to have a positive understanding of their origin, culture, religion and language
- Carers must ensure that children are protected from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation, so that children **Stay Safe**.
- Carers must encourage and facilitate children to maintain contact with their family and friends, in accordance with their Care Plan and the Placement Agreement.
- Carers, working alongside the child's social worker and other professionals, must ensure that the children and their families are given the opportunity to express their wishes and feelings over any issues likely to affect their daily life and future.
- Carers must ensure that children receive appropriate health care to meet their physical, emotional and social developmental needs; together with information to enable informed involvement in decisions about their health needs, so that children can **Be Healthy**.
- Carers must ensure that high priority is given to ensuring children's educational needs are met and that children are encouraged to attain their full potential, so that they can **Enjoy and Achieve**.
- Carers must encourage and enable children to develop the skills, competence and knowledge needed for adult life, so that they can **Make a Positive Contribution and Achieve Economic Well-Being**.
- In line with the Department's policy on Open Recording, carers are required to maintain individual 'diary recordings' on each child placed. The children should be aware of, contribute to and have access to their records.

1.8 The Role of the Fostering Service

The Family Placement Teams are responsible for the recruitment, assessment, training, support and supervision of foster carers and adopters. They deal with all placement requests from locality team colleagues, matching individual needs to available resources, as far as possible.

The teams provide a full-time, county-wide duty service, to respond to emergency placement requests, on a rotating basis, with each team alternately covering duty for the whole county for a week.

Where “in-house” provision is not available, the External Placement Panel will be asked by the social worker to authorise funding for an external placement. Once funding is agreed the Family Placement Duty Team will identify external providers.

Other duties are:

- To ensure that only people deemed suitable to care for other people’s children are approved as foster carers. The Fostering Panel has responsibility for the approval of all foster carers.
- To ensure that children are carefully matched with carers (in their local area wherever possible) who are able to meet their assessed needs and can help to ensure that the child’s social and educational links are maintained.
- FPOs act as the nominated homefinder for children needing permanence placements.
- Following approval, to draw up a Foster Carer Agreement with the carers, which sets out the terms of the ‘contract’ between the Department and the carers.
- To provide regular supervision, support, information and advice to carers in order to assist them in carrying out the fostering task. This will include the allocation of a Family Placement Worker to act as ‘supervising social worker’.
- To ensure carers meet the National Standards and the CWDC Training & Development Standards by providing ongoing training and development opportunities to enable carers to develop their skills, knowledge and expertise. Each carer will follow their personal Professional Development Plan.
- To investigate any allegations or complaints made against foster carers, in line with Safeguarding procedures, including notifying Ofsted of specific events, as required by with Regulation 43(1) and Schedule 8.
- To ensure that Fostering Panel is made aware of the outcomes of any such allegations or complaints, and that panel makes a recommendation about their continuing approval.
- To ensure that the annual review of the foster carers’ approval is undertaken and that this includes reviewing the Foster Care Agreement, the Health & Safety checklist, the household’s Safe Caring policy and any Mid/End of Placement reports.

- To pay carers an allowance to meet the cost of caring for children and, where appropriate, a fee to recognise their level of skill.
- To provide the carers with full and detailed information regarding any child to be placed and further information that becomes available during the placement and ensuring that this is recorded on the carer's file.
- To provide every carer with a copy of the Foster Care Handbook, which sets out the detail of the fostering task.
- To maintain an individual case file of each foster carer, in line with the Department's Recording Policy, containing details which include their approval, reviews, placements and supervision records. Foster carers should be aware of, contribute to and have access to their case file.
- To maintain a register of current foster carers, including their registration details and current placements, as required by Regulation 31.
- The Fostering Panel will recommend the de-registration of any foster carers no longer deemed suitable to act as foster carers. The panel's recommendation is endorsed by the Agency Decision Maker.
- The Fostering Panel will note resignations of foster carers, in order to remove them from the register.

1.9 Service Objectives

The Fostering Service aims to meet a diverse range of need by providing:

Respite Care

These placements are used mainly to support families by providing regular, brief breaks, to enable them to continue as the primary carers for the child. They are also used to support the main fostering placement.

Short Breaks for Disabled Children

The Family Link Scheme delivers short breaks and other support for disabled children.

Short-Term Care

These placements are always used when a child first becomes looked after (whether a planned or an emergency admission); their needs are assessed and work will begin with the child and family, usually towards a return home.

Long-Term/Permanent Care

These placements are used when there is little or no prospect of an older child returning home and the carers will provide a permanent home for a child until independence can be achieved. For younger children, an adoptive home will be sought because children should not spend their childhood being brought up in public care.

Family & Friends Care

Where a long-term fostering placement is to be provided by a member of the child's extended family or social network, because the child needs to remain in Care, the applicants will undergo the same assessment and approval process as any other carer and will receive the same level of financial support and supervision.

Rail and Remand Placements: see 3.3 below

Specialist Fostering Scheme: see 3.4 below

Parent and Child Placements: see 3.5 below

1.10 The specific objectives of the Fostering Service in 2009/10 are:

- To maintain a sufficient number of suitable foster care placements, in relation to the numbers, needs, age range and characteristics of the looked after children population, to meet predicted need and provide effective placement choice. This will be in line with the Department's Commissioning Strategy for Looked After Children.
- To build on and extend existing recruitment targets to 10% (18 new carers) to increase placement choice, in line with the Fostering Service's Recruitment Strategy.
- To recruit and maintain sufficient carers to provide specific Bail and Remand, Parent and Child, and Solo Scheme placements, in line with the Commissioning Strategy and to meet the operational needs of the Locality and Family Support teams..
- To continue to increase the number of approved carers from the current level of **180** (166 in 2007/8) in line with the Commissioning Strategy, to be able to provide genuine placement choice.
- To increase the skills level of existing carers by providing ongoing training and development opportunities, in order to better meet the needs of looked after children, in line with the Training, Support & Development Standards for Foster Carers.
- To increase the proportion of looked after children placed in family placements, rather than residential care.
- To work towards the implementation of a specialist service to provide solo family placements for children who are at risk of entering residential care.
- To continue to work corporately with locality child care teams to reduce the proportion of children experiencing three or more placement moves in any year, to our PAF target.

- To continue to improve the proportion of children looked after for more than 2 ½ years who have been in stable foster placements for more than two years.
- To continue to improve our capacity for placing sibling groups together in family placements, by recruiting a diverse range of carers able to accommodate more than one child.
- To continue to ensure compliance with national requirements in relation to the health and education needs of looked-after children.
- To conduct a review of the Fee Paid Scheme, to ensure it meets the requirements of the Training, Support & Development Standards for Foster Carers.
- Maintain and increase the number of skilled placements available to children with complex needs.
- To respond creatively to the Aiming High for Disabled Children agenda by offering a range of support services to disabled children in the community, through Family Link foster carers.

2. Management and Staffing of the Fostering Service

2.1 Organisation and Structure

Decision-making and arrangements for management of the Fostering Service are delegated through the Director of the Department for Children and Education to the Assistant Director, Children and Families Branch.

Responsibility for the overall management and strategic direction of the Fostering Service is exercised through the Head of Looked After Children Placement Services. The post-holder is directly accountable to the Assistant Director, Children and Families Branch.

The County Family Placement Service Manager is the Registered Manager for the Fostering Service and the line manager of the three Family Placement Team Managers.

Three geographically-based Area Services Managers supervise the managers of the locality teams and Disabled Children teams, who are responsible for case planning in respect of individual children.

2.2. Staffing of the Fostering Service

2.2.1 The Family Placement Teams

There are three Family Placement Teams, one based in each area. Each team has a manager and the three managers are supervised by the County Family Placement Service Manager. The staff establishment of the Teams is as follows:

North and Kennet (based at Chippenham Resource Centre)

1 x Team Manager

10 x Family Placement Workers (working various hours)

West Wilts (based at Trowbridge Resource Centre)

1 x Team Manager

11 x Family Placement Workers (working various hours)

South Area (based at Riverside Resource Centre)

1 x Team Manager

9 x Family Placement Workers (working various hours)

Each team has clerical/admin support provided by the Local Business Support Team.

2.2.2 Staff Qualifications and Experience

All the managers and Family Placement Officers hold the minimum qualification of CQSW /DipSW and it is a requirement of employment within the Family Placement Team that staff will have experience in children & families social work or closely allied field.

Three members of the service have successfully completed the PQCCA.

Some Family Placement Officers hold specialised roles including fostering recruitment, adoption and disability.

The Family Placement Support Workers have relevant experience as children's support workers and as child care providers. They are all undertaking or have completed NVQ training.

Currently the length of service in Family Placement for all members ranges from new appointments to over 20 years.

The three Family Placement Managers all have considerable experience in child care social work and two have experience of Family Placement work. One has experience of managing a residential unit for children.

Two of the Family Placement Managers have achieved recognised Management qualifications and the third is undergoing Management training.

The County Family Placement Service Manager also has a recognised Management qualification.

3. Fostering Resources

3.1 'General Approval' Foster Carers

The Fostering Service, as at 31 March 2008, had **180** registered foster carers approved for "general purpose" fostering, including respite breaks for children living with their families or in foster homes (**166** in 2007). At that date, these carers were providing **172 in-house** placements for children (**154** last year).

64 placements were also purchased from external providers.

A total of **296** children were placed in family placements (fostering or adoption) representing 80% of looked after children.

3.2 Payment for Skills Scheme

Wiltshire has a payment scheme, which carers are able to apply to join at various points in their fostering career. Each scheme has a different fee level, according to the skills and experience of the carers:

i) Level One

Level One foster carers are newly approved and will usually receive the basic fostering allowance (Fostering Network's recommended rate) for the age of the child placed, unless they have skills and experience to care for young people with more complex needs. Funding may be available to cover any additional costs.

ii) Level Two

Carers can apply to be assessed at Level 2, once they have gained direct fostering experience. They will receive the basic allowance plus an extra fee for each child. This is assessed according to the foster carer's skills, as supported by the supervising FPO and manager.

iii) Level Three

Level Three foster carers receive the basic allowance plus an extra fee for each child. They will have considerable experience and skills in looking after children and a level of self-confidence which enables them to accept some placements known to present more difficulties than others. One carer must be available at all times.

This is assessed according to the carer's skills and commitment to the service, as supported by the supervising FPO and the manager. The fee is higher than at Level Two.

iv) Level Four

Level 4 carers have a high level of skills and experience either from fostering or from working directly with children. Usually this will involve providing care for teenagers or young people with complex needs or challenging behaviours. One carer must be available at all time.

Level Four foster carers receive the basic allowance plus an extra fee for each child, again assessed according to the carer's skills and commitment to the service, as supported by the supervising FPO and the manager. This fee is higher than Level Two or Three.

The Payment for Skills Scheme must comply with the requirements of the CWDC Training, Support & Development Standards for Foster Carers.

3.3 Bail and Remand Scheme

This is a specialist scheme that is run in partnership with the Youth Offending Team to provide mainly short term or emergency placements to young people aged 10 - 17 years who are involved in offending and are either on bail or remanded to the care of the local authority.

3.4 Specialist Fostering Scheme

This scheme is for children with complex needs and challenging behaviour. Carers with enhanced skills will provide placements for individual children only and will work in partnership with other agencies to support and maintain the placement.

3.5 Specialist Parent and Child Placements

This scheme is currently under development and should be implemented this year. The scheme will provide specific placements for parents and children to be placed together in a foster home, to assess the parents' ability to provide appropriate care for their child. The carer and parents will work alongside other agencies to provide a community-based assessment.

3.6 Family Link Scheme

This scheme is designed to provide short breaks, including overnight respite and/or day care for disabled children.

4. Support Services for Children and Carers

The Fostering Service is committed to providing whatever level of support is needed by the carers and child, in order to ensure a successful outcome to the placement.

4.1 Children

4.1.1 Social Work Support

Each looked after child in foster care has an allocated social worker who has overall responsibility for the child's welfare, care plan, reviewing of the plan at required frequencies and regular statutory visits to the child in placement.

Their specific responsibilities include:

- Seeing the child alone and with carers during visits.
- Periodically inspecting the child's bedroom.
- Ensuring that a Core Assessment of the child is undertaken, in conjunction with the carer and other relevant professionals.
- Ensuring that the child's family and other significant adults are appropriately involved in decision-making and kept informed of the child's progress.
- Ensuring there is regular contact between the child and her/his family, facilitating these arrangements, as required.
- Supporting the carers, within their primary duty towards the child, but where there are conflicts of interest, the duty to the child will be the overriding consideration.

4.1.2 After-Care Support

Staff from the Aftercare Team should always be invited to attend the young person's penultimate LAC Review prior to leaving Care.

There is a legal requirement for every young person, from the age of 15 ½ to have a Pathway Plan, which details how the young person will be supported towards independence and adulthood. This is prepared by the young person's social worker. However, it does not replace the LAC Reviews and will not be implemented until the young person leaves Care and transfers to the Aftercare Team.

Foster carers are partners in pathway planning and young people are encouraged to remain with or in contact with carers. Where it is the wish of the young person and the carers for the young person to remain in the placement after formally leaving Care, and this is in line with the Care Plan, the Aftercare Team will make arrangements to convert the foster home into a supportive lodgings arrangement.

4.1.3 Health Care

Foster carers are expected to ensure that the health needs of any child in placement are met, in line with the National Standards and five outcomes of Every Child Matters.

The health of looked after children has been recognised as a priority with the appointment of two Designated LAC Nurses

This has resulted in a change to the way that the health assessments are completed. The initial health assessments will continue to be completed by Community Medical Officers, while the annual health assessments will be nurse-led. The aim is to make the health assessments more acceptable to the looked after children and young people.

4.1.4 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

All referrals for CAMHS services for looked after children up to the age of 16, are channelled through the senior practitioners in the Pathways team, who act as the single point of contact and will signpost the referral on to other appropriate services, where necessary. This is to ensure that appropriate priority is given to looked after children in need of help and support.

In Kennet & North Wilts and in West Wilts the CAMHS service is involved in co-leading groups for foster carers, on attachment issues. A clinical psychologist is in post, with special responsibility for looked after children.

In South Wilts there is a partnership between placement services and the CAMHS team. One member of the team regularly attends the long-term foster carers' monthly support group to offer consultation and advice on behaviour problems. Members of the CAMHS Team will also offer telephone consultations directly to foster carers seeking advice and will offer a priority appointment, if necessary.

4.1.5 Education

There are a number of programmes in place to improve educational support services for looked after children, in recognition of the importance of education to a child's placement stability:

- A specialist Looked After Children Education Services Team (LACES) is headed by a Virtual School Head (VSH). The role of the team is to:
 - ◆ track the educational attainment of looked after children
 - ◆ provide individual support to young people and their carers to enable looked after children to reach their educational potential
 - ◆ assist in developing training for teachers, social workers, family placement officers and foster carers in respect of the education of looked after children.

- Every looked after child in Wiltshire has a Personal Education Plan, which identifies any particular needs a child has for additional support services.
- A project to provide all Wiltshire's foster carers with a laptop for use by the children placed with them, for educational and leisure purposes.

4.1.6 Children's Rights Service

Wiltshire Council provides a full-time Children's Rights Service (VOICE) with responsibility for looked after children. The role is to ensure that all looked after children are aware of their rights by:

- ensuring they are given opportunities to express their views, wishes and feelings
- enabling them to express their ideas about how services could be improved
- ensuring that any concerns about their care are actively responded to
- acting as an advocate when a child or young person wishes to make a complaint or needs their views represented.

The Children's Rights Service arranges an annual 'Achievement' event where looked after children are presented with awards to celebrate their achievements.

4.1.7 Independent Visitor Scheme

The role of the Independent Visitor is to make a long-term commitment to looked after children and young people who have no contact or extremely limited contact with their birth relatives; to befriend, visit and advise them.

The Independent Visitor Scheme in Wiltshire is based within the Children's Rights Service and managed by the Independent Visitor Manager. Currently, there are **18** Independent Visitors linked with **18** children/young people. A further **4** Visitors are awaiting matching, having undergone training. There are **3** young people who have been referred for a Visitor and are awaiting matching.

4.1.8 Support Groups for Foster Children

Social events are run for foster children and their carers e.g. barbeques, Christmas parties and occasional workshops.

These events are run in all parts of the county.

4.1.9 Viewpoint

Wiltshire uses the Viewpoint system, as one of the options to enable looked after children to participate in their LAC reviews, by means of a secure, child-friendly, age-appropriate, online questionnaire. The aim is to improve the percentages of children and young people who participate in their reviews.

The system is also designed to provide reports to enable more focussed planning of services and ultimately improving outcomes for looked after children.

Particular attention is being given to improving the participation of disabled children and children aged under 8. Viewpoint includes specific questionnaires aimed at these two groups of children.

4.1.10 Children's Guide to Fostering

Wiltshire provides every child entering a foster home with a children's guide to fostering, which sets out in child-friendly language the service they can expect to receive, including how to make a complaint and how to contact Ofsted.

4.2 Carers

4.2.1 Family Placement Officer Support

Each foster carer has an allocated Family Placement Officer to provide supervision, support and guidance. It should be noted that the Family Placement Officer's first duty is to the child in placement, even though they do not have case management responsibility for the child.

Their specific responsibilities include:

- Undertaking at least monthly supervisory visits to carers and weekly phone contact with Level 4 carers. Any exceptions to this frequency are recorded on the carers' file, with the reasons.
- Undertaking at least one unannounced visit to the foster home during the year.
- Ensuring that foster carers' annual reviews are completed in accordance with policies and procedures.
- Helping the carers deal with issues arising from the placement, such as finance, equipment, transport issues and insurance.
- Periodically seeing the carers' own children, discussing their views and the effect of fostering on them.
- Providing and encouraging attendance at training and support group activities for carers.
- Working closely with the carer, the child's social worker, and other professional colleagues to ensure that the child's needs are met as fully as possible.
- Ensuring that foster carers are provided with adequate information about the child and the family background.
- Monitoring safe levels of care in foster homes, including ensuring Safer Caring Policies are up-to-date and amended as appropriate, for each child placed
- Working with partners within the Agency and externally in the investigation of complaints and allegations against foster carers.

4.2.2 Support from Family Placement Support Worker

Each of the three Family Placement teams have Support Workers whose role is to supplement and enhance the work of the FPO by providing practical input, supervision and support to the carers, their children and foster children, under the supervision of the Family Placement Manager. They also assist with running social events and training for foster carers.

4.2.3 Out-of-Hours Support Line

The Fostering Service in Wiltshire provides an out-of-hours support line for its foster carers. This is a telephone consultation service, provided by Family Placement staff, to give advice and guidance about urgent issues in placements. It does not include home visits or direct work with the child.

4.2.4 Emergency Duty Service (EDS) Support

Wiltshire Council has a team of social workers available outside office hours to offer emergency social work support to all client groups. The service can offer telephone advice and support and has access to placement information and emergency fostering placements. In extreme circumstances, an EDS worker will visit to offer assistance and support to carers, and can advise on action to be taken, for example, in respect of children who are reported missing from placement.

4.2.5 Crisis Intervention Service (CIS)

This is a service, which acts as a supplementary resource between daytime fieldwork provision and EDS. The CIS workers are available to support foster carers in a crisis in the foster home or by working with the child in a neutral setting, to help de-fuse difficult situations. The aim is to return the child to the foster home as quickly as possible, when normal support can be resumed.

4.2.6 Fostering Network Membership

The Department automatically pays the annual subscription fees for all approved foster carers, from the time of their approval. There are a number of benefits to membership and these are set out in the Foster Care Handbook.

4.2.7 Foster Carer Peer Support

Wiltshire's foster carers have formed a Fostering Association, affiliated with Fostering Network, which the Fostering service supports. The carers meet regularly and a representative of the Fostering Service is invited periodically to give information and take back information and issues to the Department.

4.2.8 Recreational Support

Facilities are available for Wiltshire foster carers and their families to benefit from concessions at their local sports, recreation, and leisure facilities.

4.2.9 Financial Support

Wiltshire's foster carers are paid a weekly allowance, at the Fostering Network's recommended rates. In addition, carers are paid a fee to recognise their level of skill and experience.

Retainers are paid to some more experienced carers when they are holding a vacancy or when children are absent from placement.

4.2.10 Counselling and Advocacy Support

A counselling and advocacy support service is available to foster carers who have been profoundly affected by the fostering experience e.g. death of a foster child, s.47 investigation, complaint. This service is currently provided by Barnardos, with whom we have a contract.

5. Recruitment, Approval, Training, Support and Review of Foster Carers

The process follows the requirements and timescales of Regulation 27 of the *Fostering Services Regulations 2002*, supported by the advice and guidance contained in *The Children Act 1989 Guidance & Regulations, Vol. 3*. The process takes fully into account the requirements and expectations of the Fostering Service's *National Minimum Standards 2002* and the Child Workforce Development Council's *Training, Support & Development Standards for Foster Carers*.

The process is set out in detail in the Children's Services Procedures, which are available to all staff on the Intranet.

In brief, the process is as follows:

5.1 Recruitment, Assessment and Approval

- The Recruitment Family Placement Officers use a variety of strategies for encouraging members of the public to consider fostering, including the use of the media and the fostering & adoption website.
- Enquirers are sent an Information Pack and then followed up by a visit to their home by a Family Placement Officer who gives more information and takes basic family details to complete the initial assessment.
- If they wish to proceed and are deemed suitable, they will be invited to attend the next available preparation course, "Skills to Foster".
- After the preparation course the applicants will be invited to complete a formal application and will be allocated a Family Placement Officer to undertake the Home Study Assessment, using BAAF Form F (Fostering).
- Routine checks, including with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB), will be taken up and at least three personal referees will be interviewed.
- The applicants will be asked to arrange to have a full medical examination, for long-term placements or for a medical reference from their GP, if offering short-term or respite.
- The completed social work assessment part of the Form F is shared with the applicants, they are asked to sign it and are given a copy.
- The completed assessment is taken to the Fostering Panel for approval; the applicants are invited to attend and the assessing Family Placement Officer presents the case.
- Where the Agency proposes not to approve applicants, they may apply for a review by an Independent Review Panel, who will make a fresh recommendation about their suitability.
- After Panel, the applicants are notified in writing of their approval terms.
- Before any children are placed, the carers will enter into a Foster Care Agreement with the Department.

5.2 Review of Carers' Approval

Regulations require that all foster carers must have an annual review of their approval, to assess their continuing suitability:

- All reviews are undertaken by a Family Placement Officer other than the carers' supervisory FPO. The Reviewing FPO will consult with social workers who have children currently in placement or who have been in placement since the last review.
- The reviewing Family Placement Officer will ensure that there is an updated Health & Safety Checklist and Safer Caring Policy, together with any Mid/End of Placement reports.
- The review will make recommendations about any changes needed to the carer's approval terms and any training and support needs.
- A copy of the report of the **first** annual review is presented to the Fostering Panel.
- The Panel will look at a random audit of foster carers' reviews, as a Quality Assurance measure and any subsequent reviews where there are significant issues involved.
- Every 3 years the review will include a new CRB check and medical update.

5.3 The Role of the Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel in Wiltshire has been established and constituted in accordance with the provisions of Regulation 24 of *The Fostering Services Regulations 2002*.

See Wiltshire's Fostering Panel Constitution for full details. In brief, the role of the Panel is to oversee and monitor the quality of the fostering service, by:

- considering all applications for approval of prospective foster carers and recommending whether applicants are suitable to be approved as foster carers
- considering and recommending terms and conditions of the carers' approval
- considering written submissions by prospective carers who have been refused approval or whose approval has been withdrawn
- considering and recommending at the first annual review whether applicants are suitable to continue
- considering any recommendation for termination of a foster carer's approval
- considering requests for changes in carers' approval terms
- considering all requests for long-term placement matches

- in exceptional circumstances, considering the approval of 'matched' adopters as foster carers for the 'matched' child, pending the making of a Placement Order
- in exceptional circumstances, considering the approval of adopters as foster carers where a 'match' has been identified but not yet formally taken to Adoption Panel and the child needs an urgent change of placement
- considering requests for exemptions to the usual fostering limit
- considering variation requests for carers to take placements outside of the terms of their approval
- considering feedback from disruption meetings
- considering reports on incidents, allegations of abuse and complaints against foster carers
- undertaking random audits of foster carer reviews
- monitoring the quality of foster carer assessments
- monitoring the range and type of carers available in relation to needs of children locally, in line with the Department's Recruitment Strategy.
- producing an annual report of the Panel's work, including a summary of the outcomes of allegations and complaints, for Members, senior officers and other interested parties.

The Panel is chaired by an independent Chair who has substantial experience as a Chair, aided by a Panel Adviser who has substantial experience of Children and Families and Fostering work

The Fostering Panel includes elected Council members and independent members.

The Panel meets on a monthly basis or more often if necessary.

When arriving at recommendations about individual applications the Panel is guided by the Chair and Panel Adviser, who are responsible for ensuring that recommendations are consistent with statutory requirements, national standards, research evidence and County Council policy.

In the event of disagreement, the Panel may make a request through the Chair for further expert advice or additional information. The Panel has access, as necessary, to expert legal and medical advice. If consensus cannot be reached individual members of the Panel can have their views clearly minuted in the Panel record.

The Panel's recommendations are passed to the Agency Decision Maker (Service Director, Children & Families), who makes the final decision based on the Panel's recommendation.

Where there is a lack of consensus about the recommendation or particular difficulties about reaching a recommendation this is drawn to the attention of Decision Maker by the Chair.

If the recommendation is to refuse approval, the applicants are invited to make a written submission, which the Panel will consider or they may apply for a review by an Independent Review Panel, who will make a fresh recommendation about their suitability. The Agency Decision-Maker is required to take this, plus the Fostering Panel's original recommendation, into account when making the final Agency decision on approval.

5.4 Ongoing Training and Support

All approved carers are encouraged to attend a range of courses and workshops designed to enhance and develop their skills – examples of such courses include workshops on sexual abuse; managing difficult behaviour; valuing heritage; and first aid.

Training may be provided in-house by Family Placement Officers; through the Department's Staff Development Team, or may be commissioned from external sources.

Carers' training needs are usually identified at their annual review and training opportunities will be offered to ensure carers are able to work towards and meet the Children's Workforce Development Council's Training Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers.

Carers are encouraged and supported to undertake NVQ 3 in Health and Social Care.

Following approval, each carer receives a Foster Care Handbook which details local policy, information about fostering terms and conditions, guidance about requirements concerning care and control of children, record-keeping, complaints and child protection procedures.

6. Complaints Procedures

In seeking to constantly improve the quality of its fostering service, the Department for Children & Education welcomes and encourages constructive feedback from service users, providers and partners.

The Department recognises that children, their families, and foster carers themselves are best placed to identify the strengths and deficiencies of the fostering service, and therefore to inform the changes and developments needed to ensure continuing improvement.

There is a clear, robust framework for responding to complaints and ensuring that the views of looked after children and foster carers are heard. The Voice of the Child in Care provides independent people for complaint investigations.

6.1 Complaints

- In most fostering situations, areas of potential tension or conflict can be minimised through careful planning at the point of placement, or resolved through early discussion/negotiation involving the child's social worker and/or the carers' Family Placement Officer, as appropriate.
- Where foster carers have a specific complaint about their treatment as carers and are unable to resolve this locally with their Family Placement Team, they have access to the Department's Complaints Procedure.
- Foster carers may make a complaint on behalf of a foster child, under the Children Act procedures.
- Where necessary, more serious complaints, by children or their families, or by foster carers, will invoke the Department's formal complaints procedures.
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- Complaints may be taken to the Fostering Panel where further advice or action may be required.

This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually, or sooner, in the event of significant amendments to the contents.

APPENDIX 1

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Summary of relevant articles

- ❖ Article 3: all actions concerning a child should take account of his or her best interests. The State should provide adequate care when parents or others responsible fail to do so
- ❖ Article 5: the State has a duty to respect the rights and responsibilities of parents and the wider family to provide guidance appropriate to the children's evolving capacities
- ❖ Article 6: children have an inherent right to life and the State has an obligation to ensure the child's survival and development
- ❖ Article 8: the State has an obligation to protect and if necessary re-establish the basic aspects of a child's identity (name, nationality and family ties)
- ❖ Article 9: a child has a right to live with his/her parents unless this is not considered to be in his/her best interests. The child has a right to maintain contact with both parents if separated from one or both. The State has a responsibility to ensure this when separation results from an action of the State
- ❖ Article 19: the State has an obligation to protect children from all forms of maltreatment by parents and others responsible for their care and to carry out preventative and treatment programmes in this regard
- ❖ Article 20: the State has an obligation to provide special protection for children who do not have a family environment. The State should also ensure that alternative family care or care in an institution is available, taking into account the child's cultural background
- ❖ Article 21: adoption should only be considered when it is in the best interests of the child and with all the necessary safeguards and authorisation by the competent authorities

Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights

❖ **The right to respect for family and private life**

This Article provides that everyone has the right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence. This Article places an obligation on public authorities to adopt procedures and practices which secure the protection of family life.

APPENDIX 2

Ofsted- The Registration Authority

Ofsted is an independent, non-governmental public body responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting fostering services provided by both Local Authorities and independent fostering agencies, under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000.

The address of the local area office of the **Ofsted** is:

**Ofsted South Regional Centre
Freshford House
Redcliffe Way
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The national **Ofsted** address is:

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08456 404040 about anything else