

Swindon Borough Council Children Services **Fostering** **Statement of Purpose 2024-2025**



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Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2024-2025

Foreword

As the Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, I have specific roles and responsibilities for the children we look after in Swindon. When a child comes into our care, Swindon Borough Council Children Services becomes their Corporate Parent. This means that the council, their employees, elected members, and partner agencies all have collective responsibility to keep them safe and provide them with the best possible care and support. We have a statutory responsibility to act for that child or young person in the same way that any good parent would for their own child. Our ambition is that the children growing up in our care will have equal life opportunities to their peers and are able to achieve their goals and aspirations.

We recognise that a child's needs are best met within a nurturing family. Where children are not able to remain within their own family, wherever possible we are endeavouring to place children and young people with Swindon Borough Council approved foster carers. To achieve this, we are committed to increasing the number of Swindon Borough Council foster carers so that more Swindon children can be placed within their home borough and that they can benefit from the love and nurture that can be provided within a family setting.

This statement of purpose sets out the framework for Swindon Borough Council fostering services. The main aim of our fostering service is to provide stable and high quality foster care placements for children of all ages that values, supports and encourages them to grow and develop as individuals. It outlines our aims, standards, processes and support mechanisms to ensure we work together to deliver quality outcomes for vulnerable children and young people in foster care.

We recognise the invaluable role our foster carers play in achieving good outcomes for our children, and we will strive to provide the best possible support to our fostering families to improve the life chances and choices for the children and young people they are looking after.



Councillor Paul Dixon

Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care

1. Introduction

This Statement of Purpose is prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000 (CSA) for the conduct of Fostering Services. The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 govern the work of fostering services throughout England and are used in the inspection and registration of fostering services.

Standard 16 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011), Regulation 3 (1) of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (Amended 2013) and Chapter 4 of the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4 require all Fostering Services to provide a written Statement of Purpose which sets out the aims and objectives and details of the range of services and facilities provided. The Statement of Purpose is to be reviewed and updated every year and is endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Advisory Board.

The Statement of Purpose is intended to be a useful source of information for foster carers, Supervising Social Workers, Childrens Social Workers, children & young people and their families, County Council staff, elected members, professionals in other agencies and members of the public.

Copies of the Statement of Purpose will be provided to foster carers and those being assessed as foster carers, staff involved in working with looked after children & young people, the Children in Care Council, the Swindon Foster Care Association and Ofsted.

2. Key Service Aims and Objectives

Swindon Borough Council's Fostering Service aims to provide high quality family- based care for children and young people who are unable to live within their own families. Swindon Borough Council is committed to provide the best possible outcomes for all children placed with their foster carers, ensuring the child remains at the centre of all that we do. Swindon Borough Council also strives to provide the best possible support to foster carers and staff in order that foster families can improve the life chances and choices for all of our children and young people.

The Fostering Service aims:

- To ensure that all children looked after by Swindon receive the best possible care and attention to meet their individual needs.

To recognise the importance of matching. Recognising that children need to be matched as closely as possible, considering their assessed needs and circumstances, with appropriately skilled and trained foster carers. This is in order that the children/young people can be offered security and stability for as long as is needed. Where there are gaps in matching e.g. culture, religion, language that these are addressed and resources put in place to ensure that these needs can be met.

- To ensure the voices of children, their parents and foster carers are sought and considered when evaluating services offered and planning new initiatives; To actively monitor, supervise and support all fostering households to ensure that all children placed are kept safe and free from harm, their needs are being met and their aspirations encouraged;
- To ensure that anti-discriminatory practice informs all aspects of the services' work providing equal opportunities of access to all children, irrespective of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, age, gender, sexuality, disability or social class;
- To provide an environment where children and young people can form and maintain effective relationships, fulfil their potential and achieve best outcomes;

- To ensure family time between a child and their birth families and friends is promoted and that contact is facilitated through a number of different means, as appropriate and in keeping with the child's care plan;
- Where it is in their best interests, to enable young people to 'Stay Put' with their foster families beyond their 18th birthday up to the age of 21 years;
- To ensure that all children have access to good quality education and health provision as well as having hobbies and social interests;
- To promote the Virtual School to all foster carers to enable them to have support for the children and young people in their care to improve educational attainment;
- To ensure that children who have a disability are placed in an environment which recognises and caters for their disability, as well as promote their social inclusion and encourage their aspirations;
- To provide suitably skilled, experienced and competent staff who can deliver a quality Foster Care Service ensuring that their own development and learning is addressed through supervision and training and clear lines of accountability;
- To ensure all staff employed in the Fostering Service and all foster carers have up to date DBS and other safeguarding checks;
- To work in partnership with Swindon Foster Care Association;
- To ensure the Swindon Borough Council Foster Panel remains effective and appropriately challenges the Fostering Service in relation to the standard of reports received.
- Swindon Borough Council's Foster Panel will focus on safeguarding and will put the welfare and safety of children at the heart of their work.

3. Organisational Structure of the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service is part of Children's Services under the overall leadership and direction of the Corporate Director of Children's Services. The Corporate Parenting Advisory Board (CPAB) is made up of elected members, foster carers, senior Children's Services managers, partner agencies which includes Health, Housing and The Virtual School. The Board meets every quarter and more often if needed. Once a year our children from our participation groups Raise Your Voice and the Voice and Influence Panel take over the Board meeting.

Swindon Borough Council has invested significantly in the Fostering Service; in line with the Sufficiency strategy to increase the fostering households' and Kinship Carers Strategy to improve offer for connected carers and those subject to Special Guardianship Orders. Swindon Borough Council have reintegrated the SGO post order support into the fostering service from April 2024.

There are now three distinct pods; the Recruitment and Assessment pod, the Support and Supervision pod, and Special Guardianship Order Support pod, each being led by an Assistant Team Manager. There is a high level of stability in the staffing team with the majority of both social workers, social care workers and managers being permanent. The Fostering Team Manager (including Registered Manager) is interim 12 month Swindon Borough Council employee to cover maternity leave of the permanent Registered Manager.

The role of Panel Advisor is undertaken predominantly by the Fostering Team Manager, with support from the Assistant Team Managers and the Advanced Social Workers. The Foster Panel remains an integral part of the service and continues to be quorate; recruitment to increase the diversity of the Foster Panel, remains a priority.

Fostering

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In addition to the above structure, the Fostering Service consists of:

- **Director for Corporate Parenting** who is the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for Fostering.
- **Service Manager for Corporate Parenting** who is the manager of the Fostering Team Manager (incorporating registered manager)
- **Independent Chair of the Foster Panel** is responsible for the leadership and chairing of the Panel. A new Independent Chair has been appointed in 2024.
- **Panel Advisor** is responsible for the management and operation of the Panel and is assisted by one full time administrator.
- **Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (FIRO)** is responsible for reviewing the suitability of approved foster carers on an annual basis.
- Three fostering pods who recruit, assess, train and support prospective and approved foster carers, including connected carers and Home from Home short break carers. Private fostering sits within the Assessment and Recruitment Team and consists of a 0.5 FTE social worker.
- **The Assessment and Recruitment pod** works with Swindon Children's Placements Team to ensure that they know current that market demand when considering recruitment campaigns. The team are supported in the delivery of Recruitment and Retention Strategy by the communication team and hold interactive engagement and retention events throughout the year.
- **Fostering South West** represents a partnership amongst the 15 local council from across the south west of England. For the first time, fostering services across the region are collaborating to recruit prospective foster carers. Whilst also coming together to improve the retention of foster carers, via the Mockingbird scheme (which is being implemented as a specialist fostering scheme in the Swindon Borough during 2024-2025). The ambition is that through utilising the collective

power of the combined local authorities, that we can generate maximum opportunities for fostering recruitment with local authorities across the South West region. More information can be found at [Fostering South West \(fosterwithyourlocalcouncil.org.uk\)](http://fosterwithyourlocalcouncil.org.uk). Fostering South West is now the 'front door' for all fostering enquiries for Swindon Borough Council.

- **The Recruitment and Assessment Pod** is responsible for managing all enquiries for non-related foster carers (referred by Fostering South West Hub) and from referrals to the team for assessment of connected carers, taking them through the assessment and ultimately to the Foster Care Panel or to Court Application for SGO. The Recruitment and Assessment pod undertakes all Stage 2 Viabilities, Regulation 24 Assessments, Connected Persons Assessments, Special Guardianship Order assessments and Private Fostering assessments.
- **The Support & Supervision Pod** provides training, support and supervision of approved fostering households. The team works closely with Swindon Borough Council Foster carers, including the Swindon Foster Care Association to ensure that issues of concern, new initiatives and service developments are managed in an inclusive manner. There are also regular manager attendance at support groups and online appointments can be arranged. Social care staff support foster carers with practical tasks and aid with the management of planned breaks for the foster carers. The pod is constantly looking to develop its offer to foster carers and continues to offer a wealth of training, including nurturing attachments and PACE.
- The Fostering Service works in close association with the Placements Team who match children and young people in need of a foster placement with Swindon foster carers. The team receive matching assessments of children and have a detailed knowledge of the foster carers who are available to care for a child or young person. The types of foster placements currently provided in-house are: short term, emergency, long term and respite care. When in-house foster carers are unable to provide a suitable match for a child or young person in need of a foster placement, the Placement Team will explore opportunities with the Independent Fostering Agencies giving priority to those who can provide a good foster home as close to the child's community as possible.
- **The Special Guardianship Order Support (SGO) Service** returned to Swindon Borough Council from Adopt Thames Valley (ATV), Regional Adoption Agency in April 2024. The team offers a daily duty help and advice between 9-5pm and this is supported by an SGO specialist social worker. The team are responsible for considering a proportionate support based on an assessment of need under the SGO regulations. The team make applications for therapeutic support through the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund where eligible (Child has previously been looked after).
- The SGO Support team offer monthly support groups and work with Special Guardians to ensure that they are reviewing support plans. The offer to SGO families is to provide advice and guidance; birth family support; a comprehensive training program; financial support, joining our support across the partnership including linking support with foster carers, access to 1:1 support in the home and a variety of local support groups

4. **The Fostering Service works closely with a range of professionals namely:**

Social workers for Children Looked After. Each child who is looked after has an allocated social worker who is responsible for their Care Plan. They undertake work with the child and their family, assessing their needs, care planning and supporting children in foster care by keeping in contact, undertaking regular visits and attending Children Looked after Reviews and Personal Education Plan Meetings.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) chair reviews of children looked after and will talk with the child or young person often just before the meeting takes place.

They look at the child's Care Plan and ensure that plans are implemented as stated.

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) role is outlined in *Working Together 2023* and their role is to ensure that allegations against people working with children is progressed in line with regulation and in a timely way. The LADO should be made aware of all cases where it is alleged that a person who works with children, including foster carers, has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child; or possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates he/she is unsuitable to work with children

Medical Advisor undertakes initial health assessments of children placed in foster care. They also provide advice to the Foster Care Panel regarding the suitability of applicants to foster on the ground of health, and similarly for approved foster carers. She also provides medical advice to the Agency Decision Maker (Adoption).

Designated Nurse for Children Looked After is supported by a **Specialist Nurse** and a full-time administrator. Together this team undertake review health assessments of the majority of Swindon's children placed in residential and foster care, provide training and support to foster carers, and manage the two-health clinic held each week.

The Virtual School provides support to children looked after as well as to foster carers and social workers. The team also provide management information to the Corporate Parenting Advisory Board on a regular basis. They undertake training for foster carers and staff and support schools with Personal Education Plans as well as providing resources in the form of the Pupil Premium. Swindon Borough Council has invested in e-Pep via Welfare Call which allows all staff to have online access to PEP's and school attendance.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and Primary CAMHS can provide specialist mental health services for children in foster care. The Fostering Services have access to a Clinical Mental Health Practitioner who is employed on a full-time basis and sits within the CLA health team and who can provide support on a 1:1 basis to children and foster carers.

Participation Team who coordinate and facilitate the two participation groups 'Raise your voice' and 'Voice and influence panel. Participation is not simply the process of engaging with children and young people but is also about young people having the ability to influence decisions about their lives which ultimately lead to positive changes.

Independent Visitors which is facilitated by CoramVoice on behalf of Swindon Borough Council. They can be contacted on www.coramvoice.org.uk. CoramVoice recruit, train and support independent visitors to work with children who are in foster care or residential care.

5. Functions of the Fostering Service

5.1 Recruitment, Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers

Swindon Borough Council has a Recruitment and Retention Strategy for 2024-2025 which has been developed in partnership with foster carers and SBC colleagues.

Information about fostering for Swindon Borough Council can be obtained from our Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team and Fostering South West:

[Foster with Swindon | Swindon Borough Council](#)

Or fosteringrecruitment@swindon.gov.uk

or calling us on 07917503447



Please follow this link to learn more about Fostering with Swindon Borough Council



SCAN ME



Fostering South West www.fosterwithyourlocalcouncil.org.uk

Calling on: 0300 456 0120

Or info@fosterwithyourlocalcouncil.org.uk

All enquiries are processed in a timely manner and all enquirers are contacted within one working day. As a number of people will be wishing to explore the concept of fostering, there are regular information sessions held both during the daytime and evenings where members of the team and foster carers are present to answer any questions.

Home visits to explore fostering in more detail and the type of fostering the applicant(s) are interested in are undertaken by a member of the Fostering Service who will provide detailed information about fostering, the process and predicted timescales of each of the two stages of assessment.

When both parties feel it is appropriate to proceed an application form is completed. As the process is in two stages, Stage 1 is where all checks and references are completed and a date given for the next Skills to Foster preparation course for potential foster carers. Stage 2 is when the assessment commences subject to satisfactory check and references having been received at Stage 1.

The assessment comprises of on average up to nine visits by a qualified social worker who will assess the applicant's suitability to foster as well as preparing them for the fostering role.

Swindon Borough Council aims to complete all assessments within the eight months specified by Fostering regulations. At the end of Stage 2 assessment is provided to the applicants. This will have explored their own past, what they can offer to a child/ren, their ability to work with others including birth families and their commitment to training and development.

5.2 Skills to Foster preparation course for prospective foster carers

Preparation courses are run by experienced foster carers and qualified social workers and attended by prospective mainstream carers, connected person's carers and temporarily approved foster carers. They are run over a number of weeks during the day, evening and weekends, some home practice may be required. The course is designed to provide an overview of the range of tasks an approved foster carer will undertake as part of their role. Time is put aside to ensure all

questions are answered and contact details for applicants to keep in contact with the Recruitment Team are circulated.

6. Swindon Borough Council's Foster Panel

Swindon Borough Council's Foster Care Panel meets twice a month. The Foster Care Panel's membership is set out in the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

The central list consists of a number of members from different professions and differing experiences which are all relevant to fostering. Recruitment of panel members is ongoing and we are actively recruiting new members to increase diversity.

All new panel members will receive an induction within 10 weeks of joining the Panel, annual appraisals take place for all members and regular training is provided by the Fostering Service. Panel Members as part of their induction receive a copy of the Fostering Services Regulations and associated legislation as well as a copy of Effective Panels published by Coram BAAF.

Recommendations from the Panel are passed via the Panel Advisor to the Agency Decision Maker (Fostering) who in Swindon Borough Council is the Director of Corporate Parenting. The Panel Advisor ensures that the timescales for sending letters, and foster care agreements when appropriate are adhered to.

The Foster Panel emphasises the need for applicants and approved foster carers to attend the Panel whenever their case is being considered. The Panel Administrator takes minutes of each Panel meeting.

The Foster Panel meet in person, with some applicants joining remotely via MS Teams where this needs to be accommodated

6.1 Approvals

All foster carers are approved through the Swindon Foster Panel recommendation and Agency Decision Makers Decision (otherwise known as a Qualifying Determination). Applicants attend with their Assessing Social Worker and can bring someone to support, if required.

Applicants will have received a brochure with photographs of the Panel Membership and a short piece written by each member, this is aimed to put the applicants at ease as it is recognised that this can be a daunting experience for potential applicants.

Applicants will be asked some general questions, such as how they enjoyed the training, why they decided to apply to be foster carers before moving on to questions specific to their assessment. There are also questions asked of applicants that our children have written for the fostering panel.

Applicants are also invited to ask any questions of the Panel before exiting. The Foster Panel will consider the terms of approval such as the age, gender and number of children to be placed and will make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker. The applicants will be informed of the Panel's recommendation immediately after the case has been concluded at Panel.

6.2 Annual Reviews of Foster Carers

In addition to considering all new fostering applications, Swindon Foster Panel will also consider the first Annual Review of all foster carers and every third review thereafter. However, whenever there is a significant change in terms of a foster carers approval or if there has been an allegation, serious standard of care concern or complaint then an early review will be held and this will be referred to Foster Panel for consideration.

6.3 Termination of Approval

From time to time the Fostering Service will form the view that the standard of care provided by a foster carer, does not meet the required level. While training and support will be given to improve the standard of care, should this be unsuccessful then the matter may be presented to the Foster Panel for their consideration. The foster carer will be given the opportunity to express their views, write a statement in response and attend the Panel meeting, with support if required.

The Fostering Network does provide additional support to foster carers in this situation and carers are provided with their contact details at the earliest opportunity. If Panel recommends that the foster carer is unsuitable to continue to act as a foster carer, the Agency Decision Maker makes their decision which is called a 'qualifying determination' once the final set of minutes has been passed to him/her. The Agency Decision Maker will send a letter to the foster carer stating the decision to terminate approval and the reasons for this. The foster carer has 28 days within which to make representation to the Agency Decision Maker or apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for an independent review.

7. Long term Family Finding

When a child is identified as needing a long-term home the Fostering Service will work with the child's social worker to ensure the best possible match is achieved. The family finder will take the lead in placement searches and in partnership with the child's allocated social worker, will look at the best match for the child.

Searches will involve looking at the child's family and friends' network as well as in-house and IFA carers. Attention will be given to matching the child based on culture, religion and interests as well as ensuring the proposed family can meet the child's needs. A record of the match will be made. Permanency Planning Meetings are held regularly to ensure that the child's Permanency Plan does not drift. When children are to be matched with their long-term carers, this will be presented to the Foster Panel for a recommendation.

8. Support to Foster Carers

8.1 Supervising Social Workers

Upon approval, as foster carers foster carers will be allocated supervising social worker from the fostering support & supervision pod. A transfer meeting will be arranged by the assessing social worker from the fostering recruitment & assessment pod. This will include foster carers and their allocated Supervising Social Worker. Prior to this meeting the allocated supervising Social Worker will have read the Form F, associated documents and the Panel Minutes about you to get to know you.

It should be noted that the supervising Social Worker's first responsibility is to the child in placement, even though they do not have case management responsibility for the child. Research shows that one of the key indicators of successful placements is the relationship between the child's Social Worker and the foster carer's Supervising Social Worker.

Whilst a child is in placement the Supervising Social Worker will:

- Help the foster carer to assist children and young people to understand and value their identity including racial, ethnic, cultural, religious and sexual identity.
- Visit the foster carer regularly while children are placed with them and keep in regular contact when there are no children in placement. Supervision visits will take place on at least a six-weekly basis, in addition telephone contact will be made on a need's assessment basis.

- Undertake an unannounced visit to the foster carers home, at least annually, in line with regulations.
- Help the foster carer to deal with issues arising from children in placements, such as finance, equipment, insurance issues and transport.
- Ensure that the foster carer can complete the relevant recording sheets including keeping a medical health record. These will be read and countersigned by the Supervising Social Worker and will need to be made available to the child's social worker.
- Support the foster carer to carry out the placement plan, assist them in problem solving, and dealing with any misunderstandings, difficulties or uncertainties.
- Ensure the foster carers understand and can work to the child's Care Plan.
- Attend reviews of children placed with the foster carer, placement planning meetings and any other meetings where it is appropriate for them to attend.

As supervisors of foster carers, the Supervising Social Worker will:

- Ensure the foster carers are informed of, understand and fully comply with, all standards, policies and guidance, including safer-caring guidelines.
- Ensure all foster carers have an ID card which identifies them as a foster carer for Swindon Borough Council.
- Act as a link between the foster carer and Swindon Borough Council and work with others to ensure any difficulties are resolved quickly.
- Help the foster carer to develop your skills, establishing your training needs and ensure these are met.
- Ensure the foster carers are made aware of, and understand the child protection investigation processes and procedures.
- Ensure a supervision record is used at visits with foster carers, which you will sign and receive a copy for their records.
- Ensure that a foster carers annual review is carried out annually.
- Ensure that foster carers understand how to use and can access the out-of-hours emergency duty support service.
- Provide support to other members of the fostering household, particularly their children or relatives who are also involved in the fostering task. This may be via our children who foster, support group.
- Ensure foster carers know when support groups and local activities are taking place.
- Ensure that statutory checks and references (Police checks etc.) are carried out on any person who becomes a member of the fostering household and regular visitors to the household.
- Help foster carers to express their views at meetings, reviews etc.
- Assist foster carers with the Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS) as detailed below
- In the event that a placement ends in an unplanned way (not in keeping with the child's Care Plan), the Supervising Social Worker will contribute to the disruption meeting and support the foster carer to attend, ensuring that minutes of any meetings held are discussed with you and that a copy is placed on your file.

- Ensure the foster carer is aware of Swindon Borough Council's Complaints procedure and that they know how to use it.
- Declare to their manager if they are connected to any foster carer outside a professional relationship.

8.2 Telephone Support

During the working day the Supervising Social Worker is able to offer telephone support to foster carer as foster carers to talk through stressful situations. If it is felt that a member of staff needs to visit the foster home this will occur as soon as practically possible.

If the allocated Supervising Social Worker is not available, then a duty social worker and duty team manager is available 8.30am-5pm on 01765 465700 . Between 5pm-8.30am the Emergency duty service provide urgent out of hours support and can be contacted on 01793 436699.

8.3 Support Groups

Support Groups for foster carers are a useful source of support and include mainstream as well as connected persons foster carers. The groups take place during the day and some during the evenings.

They may cover specific topics as well as being a general forum for mutual support. Your Supervising Social Worker will be able to tell you which groups are available and to plan for you to link up with another foster carer to attend with, if you wish. The Fostering Service expects all foster carers to make every effort to attend support groups, which is an excellent way of making relationships with other foster carers and learning from each other's experience. A minimum of 3 support groups per year is the expected minimum level of attendance.

Foster Carer Forums have taken place each year and are run both during the daytime and evening to ensure maximum attendance by foster carers. This is an excellent opportunity for you as foster carers to engage in an open dialogue with the Registered Manager of the fostering service. The Agenda for the meeting is planned and co-facilitated by the Swindon Foster Care Association (SFCA) and the Fostering Service senior management team.

8.4 Swindon Foster Care Association (SFCA)

The association act as an independent voice for foster carers and is linked with the Fostering Network. The association arranges social events, manages caravan bookings; Swindon Borough Council foster carer association have a caravan available to rent for all approved foster carers. Swindon Borough Council and Fostering Service liaise directly with the SFCA about matters such as finance, service development and any matters of concern to its members.

Upon approval all foster carers are sent a welcome letter from the Chair of the Association. The Fostering Service and Senior Managers liaise regularly with members of SFCA.

There are a number of events organised and run by the SFCA including summer picnics and pantomimes.

8.5 Support groups for birth children

In recognition of the vital role played by foster carers' own children in welcoming foster children into their homes and lives, the Fostering Team facilitates a support and activity group for the sons and daughters of fostering families. There are two active support groups called "Kids United" for ages 8 to 12 and "Inspiring Youths" for ages 12 to 17. The groups meet monthly and offers an opportunity for both serious discussion about the realities of fostering, and some fun-focused

activities.

8.6 Personal Development Plan – learning and development Framework for Foster Carers

Once approved, all foster carers will contribute to your own Personal Development Plan (PDP) which is an outline of all training required to be undertaken within the next 12 months. The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services rightly places considerable emphasis on the learning and development of foster carers.

Personal Development Plans (PDP)– what is the purpose of the framework?

- It creates a clear pathway for Foster Carers to map your own professional development
- It provides a resource for Supervising Social Workers to discuss with Foster Carers their learning and development needs
- To promote a range of learning and development opportunities
- It places an expectation upon Foster Carers to take greater ownership of their own learning and development
- It creates clear and transparent standards to strive to achieve

The PDP will be reviewed during supervision visits and updated in preparation for the foster carer's annual review. As part of their PDP, newly approved foster carers will be required to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS) within 12 months of approval. Newly approved connected persons foster carers are allowed 18 months to complete the standards. The TSDS consist of seven standards designed to support foster carers and give them a framework for training. The TSDS will be discussed in foster carers supervision meetings and support given by the fostering service until the standards are completed.

Supervising Social Workers will ensure that all approved foster carers receive a copy of the annual training programme which involves on-line as well as taught courses. Training needs of foster carers are discussed during each Foster Carers Annual Review and specific bespoke training can be arranged as required.

It is a requirement that all Foster Carers should evidence their training and learning at the level and frequency that is agreed within their Personal Development Plan (PDP). PDPs provide the opportunity for Foster Carers and their Supervising Social Worker to reflect upon wellbeing and development.

The PDP will be reviewed during supervision visits and updated in preparation for the Foster Carer's annual review. Each Foster Carer will have a PDP based on their approval status, individual learning, support and development needs.

This plan should agree how the Foster Carer will meet the pre-approval training, induction, TSD Standards and post-approval training requirements. The plan will identify appropriate training programmes and learning and development activities and include timescales for completion.

Learning activities may include (but are not limited to) formal training programmes, events, peer mentoring, professional consultancy, discussion with Supervising Social Worker or any other relevant professional, online or self-guided study.

The aim of the PDP is to encourage Foster Carers to take responsibility for their own learning and development; considering at each stage how learning impacts upon their capacity to care for a child, themselves and their family.

The document should be used as a tool to:

- Capture each Foster Carer's learning and development on an annual basis, in a consistent way
- Ensure that this information is fed into Foster Carer's supervision and the review process
- Develop the basis of a plan for the Foster Carers continuous learning and development
- **All Foster Carers will be required to undertake no less than 10 hours of development/training activity per year**

8.7 **Training**

Some training is mandatory and these are:

Pre-Approval: These learning and development opportunities are deemed as being an essential foundation for all Foster Carers.

- Skills to Foster Session 1: What do Foster Carers do?
- Skills to Foster Session 1: What do Foster Carers do?
- Skills to Foster Session 2: Identity and life chances
- Skills to Foster Session 3: Working with others
- Skills to Foster Session 4: Understanding and caring for children
- Skills to Foster Session 5: Safer caring
- Skills to Foster Session 6: Transitions
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (Online)
- Child Exploitation (Online)
- Child Protection Level 1 (Online)
- Health and Safety (Online)

Post Approval-

These learning and development opportunities build upon the foundation and are deemed as being essential for all foster carers. Foster Carers may require additional learning and development opportunities at any point of their fostering journey to ensure that they can meet the needs of the children and young people in their care. These must be completed within 3 years and renewed in line with their PDP.

- **Allegations, complaints,**
- **Standards of care and Safe Caring***
- **Child development (Online)**
- **Education for Children Looked After**
- **Health for Children Looked After**

- **Life Story Work (Online)**
- **Managing challenging behaviour (Online)**
- **PACE***
- **Paediatric First Aid***
- **Recording, presenting and information sharing**
- **Working with birth families and managing Family Time**

***to be renewed every 3 years**

POST-APPROVAL: Additional Training

These learning and development opportunities build upon the foundation and core training, reflect the development needs of individual Foster Carers.

Foster Carers may require additional learning and development opportunities at any point to ensure that they can meet the needs of the children and young people in their care. It is recognised that other opportunities outside of this framework may be required to meet specific needs.

- **ADHD Adolescent Brain Autism Caring for the sexually abused child Child Exploitation Advanced**
- **Child Protection Level 2**
- **Contextual Safeguarding**
- **County Lines**
- **Deaf Awareness**
- **Deliberate Self-Harm Domestic Violence Drug and Alcohol Awareness Dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia Empowering language in foster care Female Genital Mutilation**
- **Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder**
- **Fostering Asylum Seeking Children**
- **Growing Up In Care: The Lived Experience**
- **Honour based abuse and forced marriage**
- **Keeping safe online and cyber exploitation**
- **Disabilities LGBTQ+ Managing feelings and dealing with secondary trauma Missing from care Moving children on to adoption**
- **Parent and Child**
- **Parental substance misuse**
- **Permanency**
- **Relationships and sex education**
- **Suicide Prevention**

- **Supporting bereaved children Tax and National Insurance Theraplay Youth Justice System Youth Mental Health First Aid**

8.8 Out of hours support - Emergency Duty Service (EDS)

Swindon Borough Council has a team of advanced social workers available outside office hours to offer emergency social work support to all client groups. The service can offer telephone advice, and has access to placement information and emergency placements with foster carers.

EDS can advise on action to be taken in respect of children who are reported missing from placement etc. and /or where there are immediate safeguarding concerns.

8.9 Home from Home Foster Carers – Short Break Scheme

Short break scheme foster carers must undertake Manual Handling Training, this can be done on an individual basis with the child's Occupational Therapist in addition to the mandatory training listed above. Specific training for health needs is carried out by health professionals as required. Your Supervising Social Worker will ensure that all necessary training is completed before a child is placed with you.

8.10 Financial Support

The Fostering Service worked in partnership with Swindon Borough Council to produce an updated financial handbook for foster carers during 2023. Any updates will be sent via email to all foster carers.

Swindon Borough Council pays above the minimum maintenance allowances recommended by Fostering Network. The payments made to foster carers are:

1. Maintenance allowance payable to all foster carers or all children and young people, according to their age band
2. A skill level payment to all foster carers which commences upon completion of the TSDS
3. Additional skill level payments paid to foster carers who are approved to look after a range of unrelated/unknown children.

The skill level payments are based on the skills of the carer and an assessment of the child or young person needing to be placed in foster care. In addition, a number of additional allowances are paid to foster carers e.g. birthdays and Christmas and two weeks maintenance payment at the start of the school summer holidays.

Full information is provided in the Foster Care Financial Handbook.

9. Progression Scheme

The Foster Carers Progression Scheme enables Swindon to recruit and retain high quality Foster Carers. This ensures that children and young people are looked after by Foster Carers who have the experience, skills and training necessary to meet their needs.

The scheme recognises carer's skills, experience and professional learning and development. It provides a simple and equitable structure for making fee payments to Foster Carers.

9.1 Key Principles

- To recognise and reward Foster Carers for their skills and experience, ensuring they are valued.
- To ensure that there are placements available to meet the specific needs of the children coming into care, including increasing the number of Foster Carers able to offer placements to sibling groups and children with more complex needs.
- To be clear about the Local Authority's expectations of Foster Carers and their roles and responsibilities.
- To provide Foster Carers with the training and learning opportunities to help them develop their skills and set out clear expectations in relation to this.
- To recognise the skills and experiences of new Foster Carers, including those who are transferring from independent fostering agencies or from other local authorities.

9.2 Progressing through the levels:

The Progression Scheme offers a pathway for the development of Foster Carers. One of the scheme's central principles is that the skills, experience and training of Foster Carers are recognised and properly regarded.

Approval at the different levels will depend on:

- The Foster Carer's assessed skills at the time of approval and at each review
- The Foster Carer's ability and willingness to undertake the agreed tasks
- Their length of experience as an approved Foster Carer
- The training that has been undertaken
- Supervision from the Supervising Social Worker
- Annual Review process

9.3 Review

Progression is not guaranteed and a recommendation to progress will be made if there is sufficient evidence that the requirements have been met. Progression through the scheme is approved either through the annual review process or by the Fostering Team Manager. It is possible for Foster Carers to move down levels. If a Foster Carer wishes to retain their current level and have been unable to maintain certain competencies, an action plan will be agreed and reviewed within 6 months.

10. Planned Breaks or Respite Care

The Fostering Service recruits foster carers to cover holiday and emergency situations for foster carers in the event that a family link has not been identified. During your assessment you will be asked to identify a family member or friend who can act as an emergency carer in the event that this is needed. The reason this is raised at an early stage is that the Fostering Service endeavors to prevent children and young people who are looked after from moving to unfamiliar foster carers in an emergency situation. If you have not identified a family link carer please discuss this

with your Supervising Social Worker.

When a family link has not been identified or is unable to assist, a planned break will be provided by an approved carer. It is important that introductions are undertaken so that the child becomes familiar with the home and the carer before the planned break occurs. Planned breaks are not usually provided for children aged 0-2 years as babies and toddlers need the consistent care of one caregiver.

11. Additional Support to foster carers

a. Foster Care Handbook and Foster Carer Finance Handbook

The Foster Care and Foster Carer Finance Handbook were distributed in 2024, following the increase of Fostering Skill Levels and Allowances. The foster carer handbook and foster carer finance book are shared with all approved foster carers upon approval.

b. ID Cards

All newly appointed carers will be issued with an identity card which confirms that they are carers for Swindon Borough Council. The purpose of the card is to assist carers in situations where they need to be able to show proof of identity, e.g. to gain admission to a children's ward to visit a foster child, or when dealing with the police or any outside agency.

The card has a telephone number on the back so that the person asking to see the card can check its validity.

c. Membership of Fostering Network

Swindon Borough Council funds the membership of the Fostering Network for all approved foster carers. The benefits of belonging to the Fostering Network include: -

- The Foster Care magazine
- Information about national training courses
- Information leaflets about fostering
- An annual copy of 'Foster Care Finance – advice and information on the cost of caring for a child'
- Free legal telephone advice
- Legal representation in actions brought against the carer as a result of the fostering activity
- Foster carer's Help line (for advice and to talk through problems)
- Conciliation Service (in some areas).

d. Nationwide Rucksacks for children placed

When a child is placed with foster carers they are presented with a rucksack which contains items of comfort. Foster carers report that the rucksacks are appreciated by the children placed with them which ensures they are welcomed into their foster placement.

12. Children's Guide

Children cared for by Swindon Borough Council Foster and Connected Carers should receive an age appropriate guide in line with their understanding. The current guide is being reviewed with

the children's participation scheme and will be published as a priority in 2024-2025.

13. Description of Terms of Foster Carers Approval

Foster carers can be approved for a number of different fostering tasks and the main ones are:

a. Short Term and Emergency Fostering

Short term foster carers look after child or young person for a limited period of time while the care planning of the child is undertaken by the child's social worker to establish if the child can return to their birth family or if an alternative permanent placement is needing to be sourced.

Short term can be anything from a few days to up to two years. A number of children will achieve permanency through Adoption or Special Guardianship Orders. Short term foster carers play a crucial role in preparing the child for permanency and for providing consistent care through a period of uncertainty.

Emergency foster carers are contacted during the daytime and in the evening to provide care to children who may be distressed and need a lot of re- assurance, comfort and acceptance. Children can stay longer with their emergency foster carer but usually this is for a time limited basis moving the child either back to their birth family or to a short-term foster placement.

b. Planned Breaks

Planned breaks, formerly referred to as respite care, provides care to an approved foster carer and will be undertaken as part of the child's Care Plan. This can be a 'link' whereby the child returns to their planned break carer once a month and sometimes in the school holidays, or sometimes it will be a one- off arrangement however it is of vital importance that the child has introductions to their planned break carer prior to the care commencing.

Foster carers are entitled to 14 nights respite each year; additional planned breaks can be requested if required to support the child's needs.

c. Long Term Fostering

Long term fostering, is when a foster carer makes a commitment to provide care for a child until they are at least 18 years of age and is expected to continue under a Staying Put arrangement. All long term matches of children with their foster carers are presented at Foster Panel for recommendation, with each child/ carer receiving a letter to confirm their permanent match.

d. Connected Persons Foster Care

Connected Persons foster carers are approved only for the child/ren known to them. Connected Persons foster carers are invited to specific support groups as well as mainstream support groups and all training opportunities are available to them.

e. Parent & Child Foster Carers

This area of fostering is deemed to be a specialism as the parent and child foster carer has a primary responsibility to ensure the welfare and safety of the child/ren placed with them. Their role is to support and help the parent to bond with their child/ren and develop their parenting skills in order that they can parent with confidence. Parent and child foster carers are required to provide detailed recordings on a daily basis as set out in the Placement Planning Meeting and must be aware that the daily reports are likely to be used in court should the plan be for the child to be placed for adoption or permanency with a family member. The parent and child foster carer can also be requested to attend court and give evidence. Support with this will be given by the Supervising Social Worker and Swindon Borough Council's legal team.

f. Early Permanence Carers

Swindon Borough Council is committed to an approach in planning for children where the number

of placements for any child pre-adoption, is kept to a minimum. Carers can be granted dual approval in order that a concurrent placement can be made, where it is envisaged that the child will not need to move from foster carers, who are also approved as adopters.

Adopt Thames Valley (ATV) Regional Adoption Agency undertakes all adoption work on behalf of Swindon Borough Council. If you are interested in exploring the concept of fostering for adoption please speak to your Supervising Social Worker who will arrange for a member of ATV's team to visit you and your family to discuss in more detail.

Temporarily Approved foster to adopt carers are entitled to all the same support, supervision and expectations for training. Their supervision is provided by the ATV adoption Social worker with oversight from the Assistant Team Manager in the Support and Supervision fostering team.

g. Specialist Fostering Scheme-Mocking Bird

The fostering service will work with the Fostering network and Fostering South West team during 2024-2025 to implement a MockingBird specialist fostering scheme.

This will lend much needed support to those involved in the scheme and for the children they care for. Mockingbird is a pioneering programme delivered by The Fostering Network in partnership with 62 fostering services across the UK. The program nurtures the relationships between children, young people and foster families supporting them to build a resilient and caring community of six to ten satellite families called a constellation. Relationships are central to Mockingbird. The hub home carer builds strong relationships with everyone in the constellation, empowering families to support each other and overcome problems before they escalate or lead to placement breakdown, which increases protective factors around the children.

14. Complaints and Representations

To continue to improve the service provided Swindon Borough Council's Fostering Service welcomes and encourages constructive feedback from service users, providers and partners. Swindon Borough Council 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. We seek to work to seek the views of carers and children on a regular basis by providing open forums for discussion.

Where necessary, more serious complaints, by children or their families, or by foster carers, will invoke Swindon Borough Council's formal complaints procedures. The Department's Complaints Manager has an important Quality Assurance role in receiving and recording complaints, determining where the complaint should be directed, and monitoring responses to complaints. Further information is available here: [Complaints, compliments and feedback | Swindon Borough Council](#)

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 foster carers' supervising social worker, as appropriate.

Swindon Borough Council's complaints procedure involves three stages. Where the complaint cannot be resolved by the relevant Team Manager, within 10 days (Stage 1) an Independent Manager will be appointed to investigate (Stage 2). This should take no longer than three months. If the complainant is still not satisfied, referral to an Independent Review Panel can be requested who will consider the complaint and make recommendations to the Director of Children Services. The Director will then confirm the outcome in writing.

Customers of Council Services can refer more serious or unresolved complaints to the Ombudsman.

In addition, complaints about the Fostering Service can be made directly to OFSTED, at the email/ telephone at the end of this document.

14.1 Allegations of abuse against foster carers or other members of the carer's household (including other foster children) may result in a formal investigation under the provisions of Section 47 of the 1989 Children Act. The Procedures and Protocol to be followed in such cases are contained in the Foster Carer Handbook.

14.2 Systems for Monitoring and Evaluating the Service

Swindon Borough Council is committed to ensuring the Fostering Services operates in a culture of continuous improvement and has made significant changes to improve the quality of service delivery and internal processes. The way in which the Fostering Service is monitored and service delivery is evaluated is as follows:

- Quality assurance is monitored in line with the fostering regulations by the Registered Manager. This includes monitoring of key areas of practice and continuously improving practice in line with the national minimum standards and statement of purpose.
- Fostering specific audits will be implemented in August 2024 undertaken by the assistant team managers and advanced social workers, and moderated by the Team Manager. 2 per month will be undertaken and learning will be shared at Team Meetings.
- Duty placement search audit has been introduced in July 2024 to ensure good quality and thorough matching for children who need placements is evidence based and we ensure that we maximise the use of Swindon Borough Council foster carers where there is an appropriate match.
- Fostering Recruitment and Retention Board takes place monthly and is chaired by the Director of Corporate Parenting. Quality Assurance reports are presented and reviewed by the board detailing data and performance of the fostering service.
- Children's Social Care Performance Board takes place monthly and is chaired by the Director of Corporate Parenting and/or the Director for Safeguarding and Support. Quality assurance reports are provided detailing information pertaining to performance of the fostering service and is attended by the Registered Manager and Service Manager.
- Implementation of a Service Improvement Plan for the Fostering Service in line with Swindon Borough Councils Childrens Social Care Improvement plan. This takes place monthly and attended by the Registered Manager with individual Team Action Plans supporting the overall strategy. The managers will report on activity and track the progress of service improvements.
- Fortnightly Placement, Recruitment and Retention Meetings, attended by both the Fostering Service and the Placements Team.
- A robust Foster Care Panel with Panel Members having independent status with annual appraisals scheduled throughout the year.
- The Agency Decision Maker reviews all Annual Reviews completed by the Fostering Service for all approved foster carers.
- Panel Advisor to assist with the quality assurance of documentation being submitted to the Foster Panel and ADM, this role includes recruiting new Panel Members and working with the Fostering Service providing training, support and guidance to the staff team.
- Independent Foster Carer Reviewing Officer (FIRO) based in the IRO team. The FIRO chairs all annual reviews providing feedback to both the ADM and the Fostering Service on service delivery and matters of concern.
- Supervision of all staff in the Fostering Service and managers and all foster carers having a named Supervising Social Worker.

- Use of Supervision and Unannounced Visits proforma.
- Use of Coram BAAF's Annual Review Form FR template
- Feedback forms provided to all who attend the Foster Panel evaluated by the Panel Advisor. The Panel also provides feedback to the Fostering Service on the quality of reports presented and the presentation of the Fostering Service staff members/Independent assessing social workers.
- Agency Decision Maker decisions and feedback is provided to the Foster Panel.
- Tracking of initial enquiries through to presentation at the Foster Panel and reported monthly Recruitment and Retention Board.
- Tracking of Regulation 24 temporarily approved foster carers, twin tracking with SGO assessments as necessary and reported monthly to the Recruitment and Retention Board.

15. Useful Contacts

15.1 Ofsted

Ofsted is responsible for the regulation and inspection of Children's Social Care Services including Local Authority Fostering Services. The National Minimum Standards and Fostering Regulations are designed to set minimum acceptable standards for the safe running of Fostering Services.

Ofsted's contact details are:

Ofsted Tel: 0300 123 1231

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

15.2 The Children's Commissioner for England

The Children's Commissioner for England is Dame Rachel De Souza.

Help at Hand is the Children's Commissioner's advice and assistance service for children in care, children who have a social worker or are working with social services, children living away from home and care leavers.

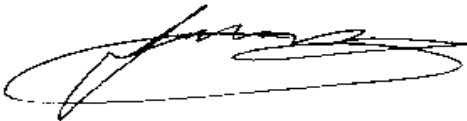
Children, young people, or their advocates can get in touch with Help at Hand for free by phone, website or email.

Website [Contact - Help at Hand \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](http://childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)

Email: help.team@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

Phone: 0800 528 0731

If you need this information in another language, large print, Braille or audio cassette, computer disk or by email please telephone the Team Manager, Fostering Service Tel: 07917 503447



Signed:

**Laurie-Mo Gullachsen,
Interim Registered Manager 19.07.2024**