

# KINSHIP AND FOSTERING STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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## **Introduction**

The Statement of Purpose for foster care is an important document that provides an overview of Wiltshire Council's goals, values, and commitment to providing a safe and nurturing environment for looked after children. It serves as an introduction to Wiltshire Council's mission and sets the tone for the services we provide to both children and foster families.

This Statement of Purpose is a requirement of the National Minimum Fostering Standards, the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, the Children Regulations 2005 (Private Arrangements for Fostering) and National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering. This statement is written to inform you about the service, what it does and how it works.

The Wiltshire Kinship and Fostering Services Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually. The Statement of Purpose has been endorsed by the Children's Services Senior Management Team.

Copies of the Statement of Purpose will be available to those working in the Kinship and Fostering Services, team managers and social workers. It will also be available to the Wiltshire Fostering Association, to all foster carers in Wiltshire as well as be available on the Council websites.

The Statement of Purpose shares Wiltshire Council's dedication to the well-being and development of every child in our care, as well as our commitment to supporting and empowering foster families throughout the fostering journey.

## **Statement of Intent**

Our purpose is to foster a supportive and empowering environment where children and young people can thrive, grow, and reach their full potential. We believe that by offering a helping hand, creative solutions, guidance, and a friendly approach, we can create a positive impact on the lives of those we interact with.

Children and young people come first.

Children and young people who are looked after in foster care deserve to experience as full a family life as possible, as part of a loving family, with carers who can make everyday decisions as they would with their own child and without the child or young person feeling that they 'stand out' as a looked after child.

Wiltshire's Kinship and Fostering Services are committed to providing high quality care to looked after children and young people to maximise their life chances and ensure that they can develop and achieve in all aspects of their lives.

Our mission is to provide assistance that goes beyond the ordinary, aiming to understand and address the unique needs and aspirations of children and carers. We strive to create a safe space where children and carers feel comfortable expressing themselves and seeking guidance.

Our approach is rooted in empathy, understanding, and respect for diversity. We value the individuality of every child and carer we meet and embrace the opportunity to learn from their perspectives.

By fostering a supportive and empowering environment, we aim to help individuals overcome challenges, develop new skills, and build self-confidence. Our ultimate goal is to contribute to the well-being and happiness of those we assist, ensuring their personal and professional success.

We are here to support you, guide you, and celebrate your achievements every step of the way.

### **Principles of the service**

As a fostering service, we are dedicated to supporting carers to providing a safe, nurturing, and loving environment for children who have experienced trauma and can no longer live with their parent/s. The care children receive from approved foster carers should meet the children and young people's holistic needs, including their cultural, physical, emotional, health, social, educational and developmental needs. Foster carers have a significant impact on the lives of the children and young people they care for and commit to upholding the following principles in their role as foster carers.

**Child-Centred Approach:** The well-being and best interests of the child are at the heart of all decision-making processes. The service ensures that the child's physical, emotional, and developmental needs are met, and their rights are respected and upheld. Children and young people will be fully involved in all aspects of their care. Foster placements should provide a high standard of physical and emotional care in a safe and secure environment where children are protected from harm.

**Partnership and Collaboration:** Foster carers work with birth families, social workers, and other professionals involved in the child's care. They actively engage in open and transparent communication, sharing information, and working together to achieve the best outcomes for the child. Formal decisions regarding individual children and young people in foster care should be taken in full consultation with them, their parents, and their foster carers. The views of other significant adults will also be considered.

**Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusion:** The Kinship and Fostering Services recognise and respects the diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds of the children and their families. The Fostering Service support foster carers to actively promote inclusive practices that celebrate diversity, ensuring that the child's cultural identity is nurtured and respected. Services will be provided which meet individual needs in terms of age, gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality.

**Identity:** The Kinship and Fostering Services will actively promote and support appropriate family time between children who are looked after and their parents and birth families. The Kinship and Fostering Services recognise the importance of birth

families and continuity of relationships so that children and young people can maintain and develop their identity and their physical and mental wellbeing is promoted.

**Training and Support:** The Fostering Service offers comprehensive training and ongoing support to foster carers. This includes pre-approval training, continuous learning opportunities, and access to experienced professionals who provide guidance and assistance throughout the fostering journey.

**Stability and Continuity:** The Fostering Service strives to provide stable and consistent placements for children in foster care. Efforts are made to minimise disruptions and maintain long-term placements whenever possible, ensuring that the child can form secure attachments and experience continuity in their relationships and environment.

**Safeguarding and Protection:** The Fostering Service prioritise the safety and protection of children in our care. Robust safeguarding procedures are in place to ensure that children are protected from harm, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Any concerns or allegations are promptly and thoroughly investigated.

**Advocacy and Empowerment:** The Fostering Service advocate for the rights and well-being of children in care. They ensure that the child's voice is heard and actively involve them in decision-making processes, taking into account their wishes and opinions. Foster carers are encouraged to advocate for the child's needs and provide them with opportunities to develop self-advocacy skills. Children and young people who cannot live with their birth families have a right to be consulted where possible about the choice of suitable foster placements.

**Permanency Planning:** The Fostering Service works towards prioritising achieving permanency for children in care. They explore options such as reunification with birth families, adoption, or long-term fostering, ensuring that the child has a stable and permanent home environment where they can thrive.

**Trauma-Informed Care:** The service recognises the impact of trauma on children in foster care and provides trauma-informed support and interventions. Foster carers and the Fostering Service are trained to understand and respond to the unique needs of children who have experienced trauma, ensuring that they receive the necessary therapeutic support.

**Preparation to independence:** The Fostering Service will offer appropriate preparation and support to young people and their foster carers in the transition to leaving care to ensure that they make a successful transition to independence which recognises that all young people continue to need support into adulthood, working alongside the Children in Care teams to ensure a joined-up approach to leaving care.

**Continuous Improvement:** The Fostering Service is committed to ongoing evaluation and improvement of their services. Actively seeking feedback from children, foster carers, birth families, and professionals involved in the child's care, and use this feedback to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the service delivered.

The Fostering Services will provide quality and consistency in the provision of supervision, support and information to foster carers to enable them to meet the

individual needs of the child or young person and to develop their skills as carers on a continuing basis.

Foster carers, children and young people and their parents should be able to challenge decisions and plans made by the Fostering Service and be aware of the formal procedures by which they can exercise their right of challenge.

By upholding these principles, the Fostering Service aims to create a nurturing and supportive environment for children in care and foster carers, promoting their development and helping them to reach their full potential in life and in their role.

## **Aims and objectives of the service**

The Fostering Service aims to provide high quality care for children and young people in a family setting that reflects their individual needs and cultural values by:

### **Providing a Safe and Nurturing Environment:**

Undertaking a rigorous assessment of all carers based on their competencies, skills and ability to meet the needs of looked after children, regardless of the carer's age, disability, gender, reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Recruiting, assessing, and training foster carers to develop a diverse range of carers who can provide safe, secure, warm and supportive homes, where children with a wide range of needs can positively develop all aspects of their lives.

Organising both targeted and general recruitment campaigns to attract prospective foster carers to the service and raise awareness of the needs of children and young people looked after by Wiltshire Council.

### **Promoting Stability and Continuity:**

The Fostering Service aims to provide a foster home that is assessed as being in the child or young person's best interest by carefully matching with a carer capable of meeting their individual needs and where the care given is most likely to promote and safeguard their welfare, enabling them to form secure attachments and build meaningful relationships with their foster families.

Ensuring that foster families promote stability and positive achievements for our children and young people by working in partnership with children, young people, carers, birth families and all those involved in care planning and service delivery for children looked after.

### **Supporting Family Reunification:**

Promoting family time where this is in the child's best interests, with birth families and significant others. Placing siblings together as far as this is practically possible and consistent with their individual needs.

Our priority is to promote kinship care, where it is safe and appropriate to do so, for children and young people who cannot live with their birth parents.

Ensuring that arrangements made under the Private Fostering Regulations 2005 provide appropriate care for the child which promotes and safeguards their welfare.

When possible and in the best interests of the child, we aim to support family reunification. Our objective is to work collaboratively with birth families and relevant professionals to address the issues that led to the child's placement, providing support and resources to help families overcome challenges and create a safe and nurturing home environment.

**Facilitating Permanency Options:**

If family reunification is not possible or appropriate, our aim is to explore and facilitate other permanency options for children in foster care. Our objective is to actively engage in adoption planning, long-term fostering, or other suitable arrangements that provide children with a stable and permanent home environment where they can thrive.

**Empowering Children and Promoting their Voice:**

Ensuring that, where appropriate, children can exercise choice within their fostering experience (s) and are fully involved and consulted on all matters regarding their care.

Providing children and young people with written information about foster care and the kinship and fostering teams.

Listening, consulting and involving children and young people in the review and development of our services directly within the kinship and fostering teams but also in collaboration with the Voice and Participation team, and promoting the Children in Care Council (CIC) and through the use of the Mind of My Own app/website.

Our objective is to actively listen to their wishes and opinions, ensuring their views are considered and respected in matters related to their care, education, and overall well-being.

**Providing Training and Support to Foster Carers:**

Providing foster carers with the supervision, support, training and written guidance they need to develop their skills to provide high-quality care to Wiltshire's looked after children and young people.

Ensuring high quality ongoing supervision and support for all foster carers through the provision of an allocated supervising social worker.

Maintaining a working relationship with foster carers based on mutual trust and respect. This relationship will be based on the principles described in the Wiltshire Foster Carers' Charter.

**Continuous Improvement:**

Continually monitoring the service to ensure that high standards of care are achieved and that legal responsibilities are discharged appropriately.

Aiming to continue to increase the number of local foster carers to improve placement choice which reflects the views and wishes of the children and parents.

Raising the public profile of Wiltshire's Kinship and Fostering services.

Fully supporting the function of Corporate Parenting in achieving best outcomes for looked after children.

Supporting young people to develop the necessary skills and knowledge in preparation for independent living. Supported by social workers and leaving care personal advisors to make a successful transition to adulthood.

**Promoting Identify and Well-being:**

Aiming to provide a service that reflects the cultural, racial, and religious identities of children and young people from a diverse range of groups across Wiltshire.

We aim to continuously evaluate and improve our foster care service. Our objective is to seek feedback from children, foster carers, birth families, and professionals involved in the child's care, using this feedback to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our service delivery.

By striving to achieve these aims and objectives, our foster care service aims to provide a positive and nurturing environment for children in care, supporting their individual needs and helping them to reach their full potential.

**Management structure**

The Kinship and Fostering Service is located within the Families and Children's Service of Wiltshire Council. The Kinship Team Manager and Fostering Team Manager, two assistant team managers, plus an ASYE Development manager, oversee and direct the operational delivery of the service that is provided by a complement of social workers and key workers, supported by a number of administrative and varying support staff.

The Kinship and Fostering managers' report directly to the Service Manager for Children in Care and Placement Services who in turn reports to the Head of Service. Responsibility for the overall management and strategic direction of the Kinship and Fostering Service is exercised through the appropriate Head of Service, who is directly accountable to the Director of Families and Children's Services. The Fostering Team Manager has their name logged with Ofsted as the 'Fostering Manager' and the Responsible Individual is the Head of Children in Care and Young People.



Our service is made up of experienced and qualified supervising social workers. These professionals are responsible for overseeing the day-to-day management of foster carers and providing them with guidance, support, and supervision. They ensure that foster carers receive the necessary training and resources to meet the needs of the children in their care. All social workers employed within the Kinship and Fostering Services hold a qualification in Social Work (CQSW / DipSW / SW degree) and are registered with Social Work England. The Kinship and Fostering Service also employ support workers to provide additional support to connected carers and foster carers. These workers all have relevant experience within the childcare field and in most cases an alternative relevant qualification.

Kinship and Fostering staff are supervised monthly and appraised annually to ensure ongoing professional development.

All Wiltshire Council approved foster carers are allocated a supervising social worker who visits the fostering household as statutorily required, including completing unannounced visits as required, with a minimum of twice per year.

Each looked after child or young person has a qualified social worker from one of the Wiltshire Council Children in Care teams or Safeguarding teams allocated to them.

Our foster care service has robust quality assurance and monitoring processes in place to ensure that the highest standards of care are maintained. We conduct regular reviews, audits and assessments of our work, foster carers and placements to monitor the well-being and progress of our children in care. We also actively seek feedback from foster carers, birth families, and professionals involved in the child's care to continuously improve our service delivery.

## **Services provided**

The Fostering Service carefully assess the needs and circumstances of each child in care and match them with foster carers who have the skills, experience, and resources to meet their specific needs. We consider factors such as the child's age, background, interests, and any additional support requirements to ensure a successful placement.

We provide comprehensive training to our foster carers to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the diverse needs of the children in their care. Our training covers areas such as child development, attachment, behaviour management, and cultural competence. We also offer ongoing support and guidance through regular supervision, support groups, and access to a dedicated case manager.

The Fostering Service recognise the emotional challenges that foster carers may face and provide them with emotional support to help them navigate the complexities of foster care. Our team of experienced social workers are available to offer guidance, advice, and a listening ear. We also provide practical support such as assistance with administrative tasks, access to respite care, and financial allowances to cover the costs of caring for the child. All Wiltshire Council approved foster carers receive

payment in accordance with the Council's Foster Carer Handbook (details listed in the Finance section of the handbook).

We conduct regular reviews and assessments of foster carers and placements to ensure that the needs of the child are being met and that the foster carer is providing a safe and nurturing environment. We actively seek feedback from foster carers, birth families, and professionals involved in the child's care to continuously improve our service delivery and address any concerns or issues that may arise.

By providing a comprehensive and supportive foster carer service, we aim to create positive outcomes for the children in our care. We strive to empower foster carers to make a significant difference in the lives of these children, offering them stability, love, and the opportunity to grow and thrive in a caring and supportive family environment.

### **Over Night Short Break ( O N S B ) Care**

Our overnight short break care service is for families with children with disabilities and provides opportunities for short, planned regular breaks with an ONSB carer. The service is for children and young people living in Wiltshire, aged between 0 – 18 years who meet the criteria for support from the Children and Young People with Disabilities Team (CYPDT).

During this time, the child in foster care will be placed with trained and experienced respite carers who can provide a caring and supportive environment. We work closely with the child's family to understand the child's routines, preferences, and any additional support requirements to ensure a smooth transition during the respite period.

We recognise the importance of maintaining continuity and stability in a child's life, we work alongside CYPDT and the child's family to match the child with carers who can provide a nurturing and familiar environment that aligns with the child's family. This approach helps to minimise disruption and provides a sense of security for the child during the short break period.

### **Short- term fostering**

Our short-term fostering service is an occasional (respite) care service, dedicated to providing a safe and nurturing environment for children in need of temporary care.

Our short-term fostering program provides a temporary arrangement for children who require immediate care due to various circumstances such as family crisis, emergency situations to enable the birth family to resolve any short-term difficulties or while longer-term plans are being made. We offer a compassionate and stable home environment where children can feel safe, loved, and supported during this challenging time.

This includes the use of Short-Term Emergency Placement Scheme (STEPS) foster carers. Some children and young people will return home to their family or members of their extended family whilst others may move to long-term fostering arrangements or become adopted.

We work closely with the internal teams supporting the child and birth parents to gather as much information as possible about the child's background, preferences, and any specific support requirements. This allows us to match the child with a foster family who can provide the necessary care and support tailored to the child's individual needs.

We work to ensure that the child's routines, school placements, and connections to family and friends are maintained as much as possible during their stay with the foster family. Our goal is to minimise disruption and provide a sense of security and familiarity during this transitional phase.

Through collaboration, open communication, and comprehensive support, our goal is to make a positive difference in the lives of these children during their time in foster care. We strive to empower foster families to provide a loving and supportive environment that promotes the child's well-being, growth, and development.

## **Long-term fostering**

Our long-term fostering service is dedicated to providing a loving and stable home environment for children who cannot return to their family, particularly older children who maintain close and significant relationships with birth families. Long-term fostering may be a more appropriate placement choice than adoption.

We understand the significance of permanency and continuity in a child's life and identify a suitable approved foster carer as a suitable match for the child or young person. We strive to create a loving and secure home environment where children can form meaningful attachments and develop a sense of belonging.

Each child in our long-term fostering service is unique, with their own set of needs, strengths, and challenges. We work closely with internal teams, birth parents, and any other professionals involved to gather comprehensive information about the child's background, history, and aspirations. This enables us to match the child with a foster family who can provide the specialised care and support they require.

Our long-term fostering service aims to provide a loving and stable home environment for children who require a more extended period of care. Through individualised support, education, therapeutic interventions, and strong family connections, our goal is to empower these children to overcome challenges, reach their full potential, and develop into resilient and successful adults.

## **Kinship foster carers (sometimes known as Connected carers or Family and Friends carers)**

Wiltshire Council is dedicated to providing a loving and supportive home environment for children who cannot live with their birth parents and know that being cared for by relatives or close family friends is beneficial to children and young people in a variety of ways, where it is safe and appropriate.

Kinship care is rooted in the importance of preserving family connections and relationships. We recognise the significance of maintaining a child's connection to their birth family and work closely with the birth parents to ensure ongoing family time whenever appropriate and in the best interests of the child. We believe in the value of these connections to support the child's sense of identity and belonging.

The Kinship and Fostering teams assess and provide support and training to Kinship carers to enable them to provide appropriate care for the child or young person where they are in care to the local authority.

The support may be short-term or long-term depending on the needs of the child or young person based on their individual assessments and their legal status.

This approach is supported by legislation and statutory guidance as being the right approach when it is decided that a child is unable to remain living with their parent(s) for a period of time. A kinship arrangement is automatically considered to be 'long-term matched' by the nature of their kinship relationship.

The Kinship team assesses and provides support to the increasing number of special guardians.

Through maintaining family connections, providing stability and continuity, individualised care, education, therapeutic interventions, and strong emotional support, our goal is to empower these children to overcome challenges, reach their full potential, and develop into resilient and successful individuals.

## **Parent and child foster care placements**

Our parent and child foster care is committed to providing a safe and supportive environment for vulnerable parents and their young children. We understand the unique challenges faced by these families and aim to offer a nurturing and empowering space where they can develop and strengthen their parenting skills, overcome challenges, and build a strong foundation for a positive future.

Our primary focus is to support the parent-child relationship and promote healthy bonding. By providing a safe and nurturing environment, parents can develop a secure attachment with their child, enhancing their ability to provide consistent care and meet their child's emotional and physical needs. We work closely with the Support and Safeguarding Assessment team, birth parents, and any other professionals involved

to understand the specific needs and goals of the parent and child, ensuring that our support is tailored to their unique circumstances. This service is often court directed.

We are currently seeking to recruit parent and child carers to undertake this complex but worthwhile care work.

## **Private fostering**

Our primary goal for private foster carers is to provide a safe, nurturing, and loving environment for children and young people who are not living with their birth parents but are placed in our care by their families. We understand the unique circumstances and challenges that come with private fostering and are committed to ensuring that each child entrusted to us receives the highest standard of care, support, and guidance.

The Kinship Service assesses and monitors the suitability of Private Fostering arrangements made for a child by their parents according to statutory requirements. Private foster carers are offered advice, training and support by the Kinship and Fostering Service.

The Service is also responsible for continuing to raise professional and public awareness and understanding of the need for Private Fostering arrangements to be notified to Families and Children's Services.

## **Procedures and processes for recruiting, approving, training, supporting, and reviewing foster carers**

### **Recruitment, assessment, and approval**

The Kinship and Fostering Service has staff dedicated to marketing and the recruitment of mainstream foster carers.

The workers within the team follow detailed guidance on the recruitment, assessment, and approval of foster carers. The process follows the requirements and timescales of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, Fostering National Minimum Standards, and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 and National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering.

We are committed to ensuring that all potential foster carers are thoroughly assessed and approved, providing a safe and supportive environment for our children and young people. We employ various means to advertise our foster care program, including online platforms, local community networks, and partnerships with relevant organisations. Online Fostering information sessions are held regularly and include opportunities for members of the public to speak to experienced foster carers.

Initial enquiries from members of the public who are interested in becoming foster carers are passed to the recruitment support workers and enquirers are contacted

within 24 hours. At this early point we ask a few basic questions, including details of their family, their motivation to foster and their accommodation.

Enquirers are sent an information pack and where appropriate, are offered either a virtual visit or physical visit to their home by a recruitment support worker who provides more information and completes an initial assessment of the prospective foster carers.

Prospective foster carers are invited to attend information sessions where they learn about the responsibilities, expectations, and rewards of being a foster carer. These sessions also provide an opportunity for individuals to ask questions and gain a deeper understanding of the foster care process. Our goal is to reach a diverse pool of individuals who are interested in becoming foster carers.

A social worker conducts a comprehensive home visit to assess the suitability of the prospective foster carer's home environment. The visit includes an evaluation of the physical space, safety measures, and suitability for accommodating a child. The social worker also discusses the impact of fostering on any other children living in the household, the prospective carer's family dynamics, support network, and their understanding of the foster care process.

We request references from the prospective foster carer's personal and professional contacts to gain insight into their character, abilities, and suitability for fostering. Additionally, thorough background checks, including criminal records and child protection checks with the Disclosure and Barring Service, are conducted on all persons over the age of 18 in the household, to ensure the safety and well-being of the child.

Prospective foster carers are required to participate in a comprehensive training program that covers various aspects of foster care, including child development, attachment, trauma-informed care, and managing challenging behaviours. The training helps prospective carers develop the necessary skills and knowledge to provide high-quality care.

There will also be a requirement for a medical examination with the applicants GP and interviews with significant former partners (especially where parenting has been shared reference) to take place as part of the assessment. Once completed, a social worker prepares a detailed assessment report. This report provides an overall evaluation of the prospective foster carer's ability to meet the needs of children in foster care, including their strengths, areas for development, and any concerns that may impact their suitability.

The completed assessment report is presented to Foster Panel, which consists of experienced professionals. The applicants are invited to attend and the assessing fostering social worker presents the case. The panel carefully reviews the report, supporting material and recommended details of approval and makes a recommendation regarding the suitability and approval of the prospective foster carer. The final decision is made by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who will make their final decision regarding approval. The applicants are notified verbally and in writing of their approval terms.

In conclusion, our recruitment, assessment, and approval procedures are designed to carefully select individuals who have the necessary skills, qualities, and commitment to provide a safe and supportive environment for children in foster care. By following these procedures, we aim to ensure that all children placed in our care are provided with the highest standard of care and have the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

## **The Fostering Panel**

The Wiltshire Council Foster Panel plays a crucial role in the foster care approval process. It is a group of experienced professionals who review and make decisions on the suitability and approval of prospective foster carers. The panel consists of individuals from various backgrounds, who are residents within and outside of Wiltshire, all are independent of Wiltshire Council.

The purpose of the fostering panel is to ensure that all decisions regarding the approval of foster carers are fair, unbiased, and based on a thorough assessment of the prospective carer's abilities, skills, and commitment. The panel considers the assessment report prepared by the assessing social worker, which includes information gathered through home visits, references, background checks, and training.

The panel is independently chaired and includes elected members and independent members. The membership complies with the requirements set out by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. The Council appoints an employee with the relevant fostering social work practice knowledge and experience to act as the 'Panel Advisor' and the panel has access to specialist health and legal advice as required. In addition, we have introduced a young people's panel which meets with all foster carer applicants and provides additional feedback to the foster panel to assist them to make their recommendations.

The panel also considers any terminations of approval, the outcome of any significant complaints or allegations made against foster carers, plus a sample of reviews as decided by the service and the long-term matching of children in care to specific foster carers.

The fostering panel typically follows a structured process that includes the following:

### **Presentation of Assessment Report:**

The social worker who conducted the assessment presents the assessment report to the panel. The report provides a comprehensive evaluation of the prospective foster carer's suitability, strengths, areas for development, and any concerns that may impact their ability to provide quality care.

### **Discussion and Clarification:**

The panel engages in a discussion with the social worker to seek clarification on any aspects of the assessment report. They may ask questions to gain a deeper understanding of the prospective carer's abilities, motivation, and understanding of the foster care role.

**Deliberation and Recommendation:**

After reviewing the assessment report and discussing the prospective carer's suitability, the panel members deliberate and reach a consensus on whether to recommend the approval of the prospective carer. The recommendation is based on their collective expertise and professional judgment.

**Decision-Making:**

The final decision regarding the approval of the prospective foster carer is made by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), taking into account the recommendation of the panel. The decision is communicated to the prospective carer in a timely manner, along with any necessary feedback or guidance.

## Annual Reviews

The foster carer annual review is a critical process that ensures the ongoing suitability and effectiveness of foster carers in providing a safe and nurturing environment for children in their care. It serves as a comprehensive evaluation of the foster carer's performance, progress, and development over the past year.

Annual reviews are carried out in accordance with statutory guidance of The Fostering Service Regulations 2011.

The Annual Review is chaired by the Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (FIRO), who are employed by the Conference and Reviewing Service in order to bring rigor and independence. The FIRO will consult with foster carers, their own children, any foster children and young people in the household and social workers who have children currently in the home, or who have been in the home since the last review to inform the review process.

All first annual reviews are presented to the Foster Panel regardless of the recommendation. The review is presented by the supervising social worker and the carers may attend. Subsequently, a carer's annual review will be presented to panel on a three-yearly cycle, unless approval terms require amending, or an allegation or concern is made.

Here are some key aspects included in the foster care annual review:

**Purpose:**

The statement begins by outlining the purpose of the annual review, which is to assess the foster carer's ongoing suitability, effectiveness, and commitment to the well-being of the children in their care. It emphasises the importance of providing opportunities for feedback, reflection, and improvement.

**Performance Evaluation:**

The annual review assesses the foster carer's overall performance, taking into account factors such as their ability to provide a safe and nurturing environment, meet the needs of the children in their care, and work effectively with professionals and birth



families. It also evaluates foster carers adherence to agency policies, procedures, and standards.

**Children and professionals Perspective:**

The review incorporates the perspectives and experiences of the children in foster care. This may involve gathering feedback from the children, observing their interactions with the foster carer, and considering reports from professionals involved in their care.

**Support and Development:**

The annual review examines the support and development provided to the foster carer over the past year. Ensuring any concerns, complaints or allegations are taken into consideration in their recommendation regarding the carers' continuing suitability. The review will also include the completion of mandatory training and optional training opportunities, access to support networks, and any additional resources or services needed to enhance their skills and knowledge.

**Identification of Strengths and Areas for Improvement:**

The review identifies the foster carer's strengths, acknowledging the positive contributions they have made to the lives of the children in their care. It also identifies any areas for improvement or further development, with specific recommendations for training or support.

**Documentation and Record-Keeping:**

The review emphasises the importance of maintaining accurate and comprehensive records of the annual review process, including the health and safety checklist, and Safer Caring policy update. The review also checks that all DBS checks have been completed and are up to date for all members of the household, over the age of 18.

**Follow-up and Monitoring:**

The review will also discuss the follow-up and monitoring, which includes ensuring the foster carers have received monthly supervision visits including a minimum of two unannounced visits a year and highlighting any recommendations of changes needed to the carer's approval terms.

By conducting a thorough and comprehensive annual review, Wiltshire Fostering ensure the continued well-being and development of children in foster care while providing support and guidance to foster carers in their vital role.

**Termination of approval**

Termination of approval refers to the process by which a foster carer's approval to care for children is ended or revoked.

If a carer wishes to stop fostering for Wiltshire Council their approval will be automatically ceased 28 days following receipt by the Fostering Service of their written resignation. As a result of their resignation, their name will be removed from Wiltshire

Council's register of foster carers and a brief report will be presented to fostering panel to note their resignation.

The decision by Wiltshire Council to terminate a foster carers approval is typically made when it is deemed that the foster carer is no longer suitable or capable of providing a safe and nurturing environment for the children in their care.

The Foster Panel will be notified and will consider the carers de-registration and make a recommendation.

Where the Agency Decision Maker agrees with the panel's recommendation to de-register, they will issue the carer a 'qualifying determination' of their intention to de-register them.

Written representations can be made by the foster carer to the Fostering Service if they do not agree with their approval being terminated, up to 28 days of the date of the qualifying determination.

The foster carer has this time to appeal the decision to de-register either by asking for the matter to be reconsidered by Wiltshire Foster Panel or by appealing to the IRM (Independent Review Mechanism). Details of how to appeal will be sent to the carer along with the 'qualifying determination' letter.

Once a decision to terminate approval is made, the foster carer is formally notified of the decision and the reasons behind it. They are also informed of their right to appeal the decision and the process to do so. The foster carer may have the opportunity to present additional evidence or arguments to support their case during the appeal process.

### **Support and Transition:**

Throughout the termination process, support is provided to the foster carer, as well as to the children who may be affected by the decision. Transition plans are developed to ensure the children are placed in a safe and suitable environment, whether it be with another foster carer, adoptive family, or biological family.

### **Record-Keeping and Documentation:**

Thorough documentation of the termination process is maintained, including the evidence, decisions, and actions taken. This is important for legal and record-keeping purposes.

## **Support to foster carers**

### **Supervision:**

Foster carer supervision provides ongoing support, guidance, and oversight to foster carers by their supervising social worker. The purpose of supervision is to ensure that foster carers are equipped with the necessary skills, resources, and knowledge to effectively care for the children placed in their homes.

Each foster carer has an allocated supervising social worker from the Fostering Service who is responsible for ensuring that safe care is practiced within every foster family home in order that children are protected from harm.

Some of the key aspects of foster carer supervision include:

**Regular Meetings:**

These meetings take place in person. The frequency of supervisions are once per month, however the frequency of support visits may vary depending on the needs of the foster carer and the children in their care.

**Case Management:**

Supervision involves discussion and review of each child's case. This includes updates on the child's progress, any changes in their needs or circumstances, and the formulation of plans and goals for the child's care and development.

**Training and Development:**

Supervision provides an opportunity for foster carers to receive training, guidance, and support. This can include topics like trauma-informed care, behaviour management techniques, cultural sensitivity, and understanding the legal and regulatory aspects of foster care.

**Support and Problem-solving:**

Supervising social workers provide support and guidance to foster carers in addressing challenges and difficulties that may arise in their role. This can include helping foster carers manage difficult behaviours, navigate complex family dynamics, or access additional resources and services for the children in their care.

**Monitoring and Compliance:**

Supervision also involves monitoring compliance with agency policies, regulations, and standards. This ensures that the foster carer is meeting the required standards of care and maintaining a safe and nurturing environment for the children placed in their home.

**Record-keeping and Documentation:**

Supervision sessions are documented to ensure accurate records of discussions, plans, and progress. These records are important for maintaining a comprehensive history of the child's care and foster carers support, as well as for legal and administrative purposes.

Foster carer supervision is a critical component of the fostering service, as it helps ensure that foster carers have the necessary support and resources to provide high-quality care to the children in their homes. By providing ongoing supervision, foster carers can feel supported, valued, and equipped to meet the unique needs and challenges of fostering.

**Training:**

The Wiltshire Kinship and Fostering Service encourages all approved foster carers to complete training courses designed to provide them with the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to effectively care for children in foster care. Training is an essential part

of the foster carer role as it helps them to understand the unique needs of children in care, develop appropriate parenting techniques, and navigate the challenges that may arise in the foster care journey. All carers are required to complete the core foster carer training pathway as required by Fostering Standards for their approval terms. Mainstream Foster carers are required to complete the statutory requirement of the Training, Support and Development standards within the first year of approval, Kinship carers have an extended period of 18 months evidencing their learning and practice.

The Kinship and Fostering Service has a dedicated Training and Development Coordinator, based across both Kinship and Fostering teams, who supports foster and kinship carers to access and complete training and development opportunities. These may include workshops, e-learning, or online courses on topics such as trauma-informed care, attachment and bonding, managing challenging behaviours, and understanding the impact of abuse and neglect on children as well as bespoke training opportunities.

Foster and kinship carers are provided with a Fostering Training Handbook each year, that details all the current training available and a summary of each course, with the next available course dates. This ongoing professional development ensures that our foster carers are equipped with the latest research and best practices to provide high-quality care to the children in their care.

Foster carers receive an online Foster Care handbook which details all relevant policies and guidance about requirements including care of children, record keeping, complaints, child protection procedures, safe care and health and safety.

### **Support Groups:**

The Kinship and Fostering Service runs various support groups for foster carers meeting regularly across Wiltshire. We encourage foster carers to participate in regular support groups facilitated by our Fostering Service. These support groups provide a platform for foster carers to connect, share experiences, and seek advice from their peers. They offer a supportive network where foster carers can discuss challenges, celebrate successes, and access additional resources and training opportunities.

There are specific support groups for Connected Persons and Special Guardianship carers and foster carers who care for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people.

Foster carers have their own organisation - the Wiltshire Fostering Association, which meets regularly and liaises with fostering managers.

The Fostering Service hold a summer fun day and a Christmas party for foster carers and their children. Other events may also be organised.

### **Branches Support Group for Sons and Daughters of Foster Carers:**

The Fostering Service runs a support group for foster carers own children called Branches. This enables children to meet other children in a fostering family. The group provides a forum for children to discuss issues and concerns, provides support for children in their role within a fostering family and organises social activities and events. In 2024 we will also be organising some mixed events for both carers' own children and our looked after children.

**Support from fostering support workers:**

Support from fostering support workers is an integral part of the Fostering Service. Support workers provide guidance, assistance, and resources to foster carers throughout their fostering journey.

Some key aspects of the support provided by fostering support workers can include:

Support workers provide ongoing guidance and advice during the placement process to facilitate a smooth transition for both the foster carer and the child.

Once a child is placed in a foster home, support workers continue to provide regular support and supervision. They make regular visits to the foster home, assess the child's well-being, and offer guidance and advice on parenting strategies, behaviour management, and meeting the child's individual needs. Support workers also ensure that the foster carer has access to necessary services, resources, and training opportunities.

Fostering support workers are available to assist foster carers in times of crisis or when challenges arise. They provide emotional support, help navigate complex situations, and offer problem-solving strategies. Support workers may also coordinate with other professionals involved in the child's care, such as social workers or therapists, to ensure a comprehensive support network.

Support from fostering support workers is crucial in helping foster carers navigate the challenges of fostering and providing a safe and nurturing environment for children in care. Their expertise, guidance, and ongoing support contribute to the overall well-being and success of the foster care experience.

**Children's Guide to Fostering:**

The Fostering Service provides every child entering a foster home with a guide which sets out the service they can expect to receive, including how to make a complaint and how to contact OFSTED.

**Fostering Out-of-hours support line:**

The Fostering Service provides an out of hours support line for foster carers. This is a telephone consultation service provided by staff for advice and guidance on important matters after hours during the weekend and on bank holidays.

**Children's Social Care Out of Hours Service:**

The Children's Social Care Out of Hours service has a team of social workers available outside office hours to offer emergency support to any members of the public, including foster carers. The service offers telephone advice and support and access to placement information and can advise on action to be taken, for example, in respect of children who are reported missing from placement. Children's Social Care Out of Hours may also contact foster carers for a child or young person, seeking availability.

**Stronger Families:**

Wiltshire Council's Stronger Families Team is an intensive service working with young people aged 10 -18 and their families who are on the edge of care. They can provide

intensive support to families, including foster carers. The service is 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-escalate difficult situations and find solutions with the aim to return the child to the foster home as quickly as possible, where normal support can be resumed. The aim is to rebuild young people's relationships with their families.

### **Staying Put:**

In line with statutory guidance, Wiltshire Council has a Staying Put policy which allows young people to remain living with their former foster carers once they are 18 under a Staying Put arrangement. There is an enhanced offer that allows the continued payment of fostering fees until a young person completes school or college in the summer term following their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Support to implement the Staying Put policy is provided by the supervising social worker and the child's social worker and personal advisor.

### **Fostering Network membership:**

The department automatically pays the annual subscription fees for all approved foster carers, including those who offer Staying Put arrangements, from the time of their approval. There are many benefits to membership, and these are set out in the Foster Care Handbook.

### **Counselling Support:**

A counselling service is available to foster carers who may have been profoundly affected by the fostering experience. This is a bespoke service, and carers can access this support via their supervising social worker who will support them to identify and access the most appropriate avenue of support. Foster carers can be referred via their supervising social worker or social worker or directly through a self-referral.

### **Independent support for foster carers subject to an allegation:**

Independent support for foster carers subject to an allegation is essential to ensure a fair and unbiased process. It is crucial that they have access to independent support to help them navigate the investigation and ensure their rights are protected. Support is offered by The Fostering Network or another appropriate organisation. The service provided includes information and advice, mediation, advocacy, emotional support, and signposting. Supervising social workers can provide information about this. A similar service can also be offered by Wiltshire Fostering Association (WFA), and is usually provided by an experienced foster carer, to support and advocate for a foster carer(s) who are subject to an allegation.

### **Access to therapeutic support services:**

Therapeutic support is provided to foster carers to support them and social workers to think about children's emotional needs and the type of care required to look after emotionally vulnerable and traumatised children and young people.

This is provided by Placement Services therapists, who are employed within the 'In-Reach' team based within the Families and Children's Services Department of Wiltshire Council. Albeit they are employed by CAMHS, contracted from Oxford Health.

**Recreational support:**

Wiltshire Council foster carers and their families can benefit from Wiltshire Council employee staff benefits and Wiltshire Rewards. Discounts have been negotiated on goods and services from both local and national suppliers including house and home; hair and beauty discounts; entertainment; eating out; family deals; finance; travel deals; health and fitness; shopping; computers; motoring.

Foster carers and their families are also entitled to receive a free leisure centre family concession membership. Family membership covers two adults and all children within the family whether they are foster children or not.

There are also other incentives available.

**Communication and newsletter:**

The Fostering Service text facility supports the sending of texts to carers for urgent requests and information/signposting. The service is provided through the GOV.UK Notify Dashboard.

The out-of-hours social workers may provide the carer with their mobile number for them to be able to text them throughout the evening and to have support during a challenging time after normal working hours.

The Kinship and Fostering service provides a quarterly newsletter for foster carers. This includes all the latest fostering news and information about training opportunities, service developments and other relevant information that would be of interest to fostering families. Kinship and Fostering Service feedback for foster care is welcomed as well as feedback about the performance and development of the service.

**Other support services:**

Foster carers can also get support from other services such as:

The looked after children's nurses regarding health issues for children.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) provide advice and consultation regarding the mental health needs of children.

The Virtual School service provides support and advice to ensure that looked after children receive the education they need.

The independent visitor scheme provides a befriending service to look after children and young people who have no contact or limited contact with their birth family.

## Complaints

Wiltshire Council Kinship and Fostering Service aims to provide the best possible service to children and families and recognizes if they are unhappy with any aspect of

the service, there is a clear framework for responding to complaints and ensuring that looked after children in foster parent views are heard.

It is the responsibility of the staff or managers within the Kinship and Fostering Service to deal with complaints in the first instance and attempt to reach a local resolution. If the complaint cannot be resolved at the initial stage, the council's complaint procedure can be accessed.

If a child or young person makes a complaint about the service provided for them, then the Children's Act complaints procedure must be followed. In this event, the child or young person involved in the complaint will be entitled to an advocate to support and represent them in the process.

Advice on making a complaint can be sort by the Customer Complaints Team who can be contacted via an online form at [Corporate complaints form - Wiltshire Council](#) or directly to the team via telephone or email. Address; Complaints Team, Wiltshire Council, County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, BA14 8JN. Telephone number (01225) 718400 or email [complaints@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@wiltshire.gov.uk)

## Regulation

Ofsted is the office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills in the UK. They inspect and regulate services that care for children and young people, including foster care providers.

Fostering services and regulator are regularly inspected by OFSTED. Its inspection reports are published on their website. OFSTED is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting fostering services.

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