

Swindon Borough Council

Children Services

FOSTERING SERVICE

Statement of Purpose

Children, Families & Community Health
Civic Offices, Euclid Street, Swindon SN1 2JH

Swindon Borough Council

Fostering Services

Statement of Purpose

INDEX

- INTRODUCTION 4
- AIMS AND OBJECTIVES 5
- OUR VALUES AND BELIEFS 5
- WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP 8
- LEGISLATION GUIDANCE AND POLICY 8
- FOSTERING RESOURCES 9
 - Placement types for children and young people
 - Emergency Placements
 - Temporary fostering placements
 - Permanent Placements
 - Parent and Child Placements
 - Home and Away
 - Respite placements
 - Planned Placements
 - Connected persons placements
 - Supported lodgings
 - Matching of foster families with children and young people
- RECRUITMENT, ASSESSMENT, APPROVAL, AND REVIEW OF FOSTER CARERS 11
 - Recruitment and assessment
 - The Fostering Panel, Approval and Review of carers
 - Training
 - Finance

● **SUPPORT SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND CARERS**

16

- **Support and monitoring**
- **Supervising Social Workers**
- **Social Workers**
- **Fostering Network Membership**
- **New Family Social Membership**
- **Newsletter**
- **Support groups for Birth children**
- **Kids united**
- **Foster carer support Groups**
- **Family outings**
- **Discount scheme**
- **Leisure discounts**
- **Out Of Hours Support**
- **Emergency duty service**
- **Family placement Out of hours service**
- **Health Care**
- **Child and Adolescent Mental Health services**
- **Placement support for foster carers**
- **Education**
- **After care support**
- **Participation officer**
- **Independent visitor scheme**
- **Childrens rights advocacy**
- **Swindon foster care association**

● **MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING**

21

- 2.1 Organisation & Structure**
- 2.2 Staffing**
 - 2.2.1 Registered Manager**
 - 2.2.2 Family Placement Team**
 - 2.2.3 Qualifications and Experience**

● **COMMENTS, CRITICISMS AND COMPLAINTS**

23

Introduction

This Statement of Purpose sets out the aims, values, principles and the objectives of Swindon Borough Council Fostering Service and describes how these will be met in partnership with carers, children, young people, their families and other partner agencies. It also explains the facilities and services of the Fostering Service, which are delivered in accordance with relevant legislation and regulatory frameworks including:

- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services.
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: The Care Planning Placement and Case Review
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- The Fostering Services (England) Regulation 2011,
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011.
- Foster Carer Charter 2011.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Permanence, long-term foster placements

Swindon Borough Council places great emphasis on working with children and their families/carers to promote and maintain stability, safety and security for children. Children have a right to a family life where they can form and maintain effective relationships, fulfil their potential and achieve best outcomes within a caring and positive environment.

Those children who need to be Looked After by the Local Authority are likely to be the most vulnerable and in need of help and support. They may have experienced neglect, abuse, trauma and disruption in their childhood and could have complex needs as a result of their experiences.

A primary consideration in meeting such a child's needs is, wherever possible, to maintain or return them with their family of origin, including extended family.

For some children in order to safeguard, secure and promote their current and future needs an alternative placement outside of their birth family will be considered to best meet their needs.

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 for whatever reason to live within their own families.

As well as short-term/respice breaks to help support children within their own homes or foster placements in order to maximise stability and positive outcomes. The focus is on having a positive impact and achieving measurable improved outcomes.

The Fostering Service is a part of a broader Family Placement Service, which in turn is a core component of the Children's, Families and Community Health Directorate.

The Family Placement Service aims to ensure that all children looked after by the Authority receive the best possible care and attention to their individual needs. Placements are matched as closely as possible to their assessed needs and circumstances so that the children/young people can be offered security and stability for as long as is needed.

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

Our Values and Beliefs

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the Centre of their care.
- Children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefitting from excellent parenting and education, enjoying wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
- Children are entitled to grow up in a loving environment that can meet their developmental needs.
- Every child should have their wishes and feelings listened to and taken into account.
- Each child should be valued as an individual and given personalised support in line with their individual needs and background in order to develop their identity, self-confidence and self-worth.

- The particular needs of disabled children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.
- The significance of contact for children looked after and maintaining relationships with birth parents and the wider family including siblings, half siblings and grandparents is recognised as is the foster carers' role in this.
- Children in foster care deserve to be treated as a good parent would treat their own children and to have the opportunity for as full an experience of family life and childhood as possible without unnecessary restrictions.
- The central importance of the child's relationship with their foster carers should be acknowledged and foster carers should be recognised as core members of the team working with the child.
- Foster carers have a right to full information about the child.
- It is essential that foster carers receive relevant support services and development opportunities in order to provide the best care to the children.
- Genuine partnership between all those involved in fostering children is essential for the standards to deliver the best outcomes for the children; this includes the Government, local government and other statutory agencies, fostering service providers and foster carers.

Where possible, existing family attachments, cultural and ethnic identity and ties to communities through school, religious groups, leisure activity and friends will be promoted through placement within the child's own locality, and from within the Borough's own fostering resources.

In accordance with local policy and *Best Practice* considerations the service will where appropriate seek to place children within their own extended families, whilst applying the same rigor in the approval of 'Family and Friends' carers as for all other foster carer assessments.

The specific objectives of the Fostering Service are:

- Maintain a sufficient number of suitable foster care/supported lodgings placements, in relation to the numbers, needs, age range and characteristics of the looked after children. population, to meet the predicted need and provide placement choice.
- To increase the proportion of children looked after placed in foster placements rather than residential care.
- To increase the proportion of children looked after placed with in-house foster carers rather than with Independent Fostering Providers.
- To ensure that recruitment activity is focused on identified resource shortfalls (e.g. minority communities; carers for sibling groups, teenagers, supported lodgings) in accordance with the Fostering Recruitment Strategy.
- To increase the proportion of children looked after appropriately placed with Connected Persons carers with a view to Special Guardianship.
- To offer increased opportunity for young people to remain in their placement post 18years under Staying Put Agreement.
- To reduce the proportion of children experiencing multiple placement moves.
- To improve long-term placement stability.
- To reduce waiting times for children needing permanent fostering or adoptive placements.
- To improve our capacity for placing sibling groups together in foster care placements.
- To further develop and expand our capacity to provide planned respite care for children with disabilities, and their families.
- To further expand our capacity to provide Supported Lodgings placements for children over 16 years.
- To ensure compliance with national requirements in relation to the health and education needs of children looked after.
- To retain foster carers through effective training support and supervision.
- To ensure that staff are trained and equipped to deliver high quality and timely services within the context of National minimum standards and the regulatory framework.

Working in Partnership

Partnership is a key principle underpinning the Fostering Service. Working effectively in the best interests of children requires close collaboration and co-operation between all involved parties:

- Foster carers and their families who are at the heart of the service
- Children and young people placed in foster care
- Parents and families of these children
- Fostering Team Social Workers, Child Care Social Workers and other professionals such as teachers, youth workers, health workers and voluntary sector workers who support children and carers

Legislation, Guidance and Policy

The principal legislation governing the work of the Fostering Service, is the *1989 Children Act*, and its accompanying Guidance, Regulations and Schedules, and the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011. Its duties and responsibilities are further underpinned by the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Charter of Human Rights.

In seeking to provide the best possible quality of care to its looked after children, in collaboration with its foster carers, the service is committed to, full compliance with both the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards issued in 2011 and Training and development standards 2007. It accepts as best practice, and will seek to implement, the principles and guidance contained in the *Code of Practice on the Recruitment, Assessment, Approval, Training, Management and Support of Foster Carers*.

All local policies, procedures and guidance relating to the fostering service are designed to complement the above primary legislation, and to reflect and support the key elements of this Statement of Purpose.

Documents and manuals contain information on law, safeguarding, behavior management, health and safety matters, care planning, training, financial matters, meeting the needs of children and young people, education, complaints and grievances, record keeping and others.

Fostering Resources

Placement types for children and young people

The types of fostering we offer at Swindon Borough range from emergency placements to planned placements, as well as more specialised types of foster care such as parent and child assessment placements. The type of fostering we provide varies from case to case, depending on the needs of the individual child. If you're thinking of becoming a foster carer and you're not sure which type of fostering is for you, you will need to consider what skills and experience you have, as well as what would suit you and your family best.

Emergency Placements

This is a placement that is made within 24 hours of it being requested, and where there has been no prior plan. The fostering service has a duty service staffed during office hours to deal with any emergency requests. A list of carers available to take emergency placements is provided to the out of hours service should this be needed.

Short-term fostering Placements

A child or young person in a short-term placement may be awaiting a return to their family or a permanent placement such as a long term foster family, or an Adoptive family. The period of this type of fostering placement could be anything from a few days to weeks or months, whilst permanent plans are made for the future of the child.

Permanent Placements

This is where a child or young person will remain in a foster family until they move to independence and be connected to them into adulthood and beyond.

Parent and Child Placements

This type of fostering placement is for young people who have become parents at a young age and who need support and guidance in caring for their own child. Support, observation and assessment work will be carried out.

Home and Away

This type of fostering supports families who are caring for children with Disabilities. It provides regular respite care to a child who will be linked with a specific foster carer.

Respite placements

Respite placements are provided to give foster carers a break or offer additional support if they do not have their own support network.

Connected Persons placements

These are foster placements for children or young people who are family members or who are otherwise connected with the child. Invariably these carers are approved for a specific child and are family members or friends who knew the child before they became looked after.

Supported Lodgings

This is the provision of family based supported placements for young people 16 - 21 and care leavers. It provides them with a supported environment where they can develop their skills in preparation for moving on to independence.

Matching of foster carers with children and young people

In Swindon Borough we recognise the importance of carefully matching children and young people with our foster carers. We work closely and in partnership with the child's Social Worker to ensure that the proposed placement supports the following:

- Reflects the expressed wishes of the child/children
- Takes into account the wishes of the child's family
- Will be able to meet the child's physical, educational, emotional, health, cultural, religious and social needs
- Will be able to meet the needs for contact
- Will not disrupt any child already in a placement
- Will not be harmful to any child of the carer
- Will bring no substantial risk to any member of the carers' household or their property

Recruitment, Assessment, Approval and Review of Foster Carers

Recruitment and Assessment

Requirements

- In 2011 revised Fostering Service Guidance and Regulations supported by new National Minimum Standards published the same year, defined the Fostering Service provider's responsibilities for recruiting, assessing, training and supporting foster carers. The guidance recognised the increasing range of placements that foster carers are being asked to undertake, such as parent and child placements. Also introduced was the concept of 'Staying Put', requiring fostering services to make provision to support young people (and their carers) to remain in their placement post 18.
- Our recruitment activity seeks to publicise our need for foster carers in all approval categories with a particular focus on Adolescents, Sibling groups and BME groups.

Principles

- Swindon Borough Council will actively recruit a full range of foster carer's in order to remain the primary supplier for placements for children in care
- Swindon Borough Council will work towards finding the widest placement choice within the geographical area to meet the needs of children
- Placement provision will be developed and secured to meet all placement types
- There will be transparency, openness and honesty with applicants at every stage of the process
- All prospective foster carer(s) will be treated without prejudice, openly and with respect. Enquiries are dealt with courteously and efficiently by staff that has the necessary knowledge and skills. Prospective foster carer(s) are provided with timely and relevant information following their initial enquiry and are kept informed about the progress of any subsequent application for approval.
- Prospective foster carer(s) are considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets the child's development needs.

- We will recruit foster carer's who have the potential to develop a full set of skills, knowledge and stick ability to meet the children's needs
- Swindon Borough Council will actively apply anti-discriminatory practice when it comes to recruiting, assessing and supporting carers.
- Applicants from all racial and ethnic communities, all religion and beliefs, heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian, bi-sexual or transgender persons, couples in marriages, civil partnerships or relationships, lone or single applicants or disabled people will be welcome.
- The complaints procedures will be available to all applicants.

How the recruitment will be undertaken

Enquiry Stage

All enquiries will be responded to by a staff member from The Recruitment and Assessment team within the fostering service. Enquiries will come from telephone, email, website, and face to face. The principle is to respond on the same day of the enquiry when on a working day or the first working day following a weekend or Bank Holiday and email enquiries within one working day and direct enquiries from members of the public will be seen if possible or be provided with contact details.

Wherever possible and appropriate an initial visit to the home to meet with the prospective carer and family members will be made within five working days however, if this is not convenient for the prospective foster carer(s) the time scale can be negotiated to meet their requirements.

There will be a number of foster carers who enquire at the early stages of fostering who are beginning their research and who will therefore only require information. The Recruitment and Assessment team will suggest a call back in four weeks, three months or six months for those prospective carers who are at the earlier stages.

Initial Visits

Initial visits will be undertaken usually by a member of the Recruitment and Assessment Team however any other member from the Fostering Team may undertake some visits. The purpose of the visit is to provide further information as well as completing a further assessment and analysis especially in regards to motivation, attitude, understanding and safeguarding.

If the decision is that the prospective foster carer(s) meet the criteria the staff member will:

- Application form for completion and to be returned to The Recruitment and Assessment team – this will need to be returned before the attendance to the Skills to Foster training
- Upon receipt of the application form the prospective application is then booked to attend the foster panel by The Recruitment and Assessment Team within six months
- Invite the prospective carer(s) to the Skills to Foster training
- Insure prospective foster carer(s) have all contact details

If there are outstanding issues or concerns that the staff member undertaking cannot resolve then a second opinion visit may be required

Second opinion visit

This second opinion visit must take place within five working days of the first visit and again notes taken contemporaneously on the electronic form. The outcome of the visit must be discussed with the manager within two working days of the visit and a decision to be made whether or not the applicant can progress to the next stage. If the decision is that the applicant can't progress the manager must send a letter with an explanation within five working days of the decision.

Assessments

All foster carer assessments, including those of 'family and friends' carers, are undertaken by social workers in the Fostering Team. The full assessment takes up to six months and includes:

- DBS checks on all household members over 18yrs
- checks of social services and local agency records
- Preparation Training based on the Fostering Network 'Choosing to Foster' Course
- Social work interviews - individual and whole family

- Full medical reports from the applicants' GP and review by the agency medical advisor
- At least two personal references in writing and follow-up interview, + a family reference
- Checks on gaps in CV and personal history
- Social networking site checks
- Employers references
- School references
- Assessment report following British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering "Form F" guideline

The Fostering Panel; Approval and Review of Carers

The Fostering Panel is a valuable and indispensable source of Quality Assurance, professional accountability and feedback. The Fostering Panel makes recommendations regarding the recruitment, annual review, re-approval, change of approval and / or termination of new or previously approved Foster Carers. The completed assessment report/Review report is presented to the Panel by the assessing social worker, and applicants.

The Foster Panel chair is independent of the council and brings to the role a balance of expertise and experience, providing effective quality assurance and contributing to the continued development and improvement of the fostering service. The panel can include the following people; a medical professional, foster carer (from another local authority, elected councilor, independent social worker, independent members who have a specific interest in fostering (and can be from a fostered background). Panel meets on a monthly basis or more often if necessary.

The role of the panel is:

To consider all applications for approval of prospective foster carers.

- To consider and recommend whether applicants are suitable
- To consider and recommend applicants' terms and conditions of approval
- To consider written submissions by prospective carers who have been refused approval
- To consider and recommend at first review whether applicants remain suitable
- To consider any recommendation for termination of a foster carer's approval
- To consider written submissions by carers when approval has been withdrawn
- To advise on the conduct of foster carer reviews

- To monitor the quality of foster carer assessments
- To monitor the range and type of carers available in relation to needs of children locally
- To produce an annual report of the Panel's work for Members, senior officers and other interested parties

When arriving at recommendations about individual applications the Panel is guided by the Chairperson who is responsible for ensuring that recommendations are consistent with statutory requirements, national standards, research evidence and borough council policy. In the event of disagreement, the Panel may make a request through the Chairperson for further expert advice or additional information. The Panel has access as necessary to expert legal and medical advice. If consensus cannot be reached individual members of the Panel can have their views clearly minuted in the Panel record.

The Panel's recommendations about individual applications for registration are passed, through the Panel Chairperson, to the Agency Decision Maker who makes the decision about approval and terms and conditions of registration. Where there has been lack of consensus about the recommendation or particular difficulties about reaching a recommendation this is drawn to the attention of the Agency decision maker by the Chairperson. If the recommendation is to refuse registration the applicants are invited to make a written submission which the Panel will consider.

Applicants who have been refused approval as foster carers have a right of appeal through the Independent Review Mechanism, details of which are automatically provided to unsuccessful applicants.

Annual review of foster carers

In compliance with the Children Act 1989 and the Fostering Service Regulations 2011, all Foster Carers and their approval status is reviewed annually. The Annual Review determines whether approval of the Carers should be renewed and / or whether there should be any changes made. The review is conducted by the Independent Foster Care Reviewing Officer and includes written feedback reports from the Carer's Supervising Social Worker, the child's Social Worker, children and young people in placement, parents, children of the household and the Foster Carers themselves.

The Panel sees and makes recommendations on first annual reviews of all carers. And every three years thereafter. The Panel will also look at all reviews where there have been changes in circumstances or where there have been significant issues, e.g. an allegation against a carer and when the review is indicating de-registration of the carer. In these cases the carer is invited to make written submission which the Panel will consider.

Finances

All approved foster carers receive an age related allowance for each child which meets or exceeds the minimum rates recommended by the National Fostering Network. Extra payments are also made for holidays, birthdays and Festivals/Christmas.

In addition a fee based scheme is in place which provides a three tier reward element according to each carers skills, experience, Training and the fostering task undertaken, Progression through the scheme is via the Annual Review process.

Training

Being a foster carer is a challenging and skilled task, in recognition of this Swindon Borough Council deliver a comprehensive training programme which covers all relevant areas including behaviour management, health and safety, first aid, attachment theory, etc. We also support our carers to complete and achieve the standards set out by the Children's Workforce Development.

The Training programme developed by the fostering team is in line with National Minimum Standards and the standards recommended by CWDC (Children's Workforce Development Council), to ensure that all Foster Carers receive relevant induction and continued professional development.

It is very important for us to recognise that every foster carer has a wealth of personal life experiences and skills which will contribute to the quality of their work and help them understand children and young people and their emotions and behaviours. However, at Swindon Borough Council we acknowledge that there are areas where our foster carers benefit from specialist training to help them understand and meet the additional needs of children in their care.

All applicants are required to attend "preparation" training as part of their assessment before approval can be given. In Swindon, the Fostering Network's modular training programme, *The Skills to Foster* is the preferred training course, which the fostering team social workers have been trained to deliver. In the case of applicants who are couples both partners are required to attend.

All new foster carers are required within one year of approval to show evidence of compliance with the Children's Workforce Development Council's *Training, Support, and Development Standards for Foster Carers*.

Post-approval, foster carers are expected to complete the core training programme within their first two years of approval. These are designed to enhance and develop their skills – examples of such courses include;

Core training includes:

- Safer Caring
- Managing challenging behaviour
- First Aid
- Attachment Theory
- Safer Care and recording
- Working with sexually abused children
- Valuing Diversity

NB. Changes to this programme may occur in line with national and local guidance and procedures

In addition there are a wide variety of courses available to support continued development and particular areas of interest.

Training may be provided in-house by the Fostering Team, or through the Department's training section, or may be commissioned from external sources. Foster Carers receive a training portfolio in which they can keep a personal record of training undertaken.

Foster Carers are encouraged and supported to undertake further training including relevant professional qualifications in child care.

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

Support Services For Children And Carers

Support and Monitoring

The Fostering Service is committed to ensuring as far as possible measures are taken to provide whatever support is necessary to maximize the chances of a successful placement.

We are committed to working as part of the 'team around the child'; foster carers, SSW's, Children's Social Workers and all other professionals are all responsible for ensuring children are cared for in a safe, nurturing and positive home environment. Although the fostering service supports foster carers to enable them to provide this environment their prime responsibility is towards children in the foster home.

Supervising Social Worker:

Each foster carer has an allocated supervising social worker (SSW) to provide supervision, support and guidance. The supervising social worker visits the foster carers regularly, is in regular phone contact with them and will accompany them to meetings as felt appropriate, in line with National Minimum Fostering Standards. The SSW is responsible for ensuring that carers receive timely recorded notes of their meetings. Supervising social workers also provide training and support, group activities for carers. The SSW works closely with the carer, the child's social worker, and other professional colleagues to ensure that the child's needs are met as fully as possible, and will be involved actively in the care planning for the child.

The SSW has a responsibility to see the carers children on a regular basis and also the child in placement.

Social Work Support

Each child looked after in care has an allocated social worker who has overall responsibility for the child's welfare, care plan, reviewing of the plan at required frequencies and regular statutory visits to the child in placement. The child should be seen alone and with carers during these visits. The child's social worker is responsible for ensuring that a statutory assessment of the child is undertaken, in conjunction with the foster carer and other relevant professionals. The child's social worker is also responsible for ensuring that the child's family and other significant adults are appropriately involved, informed and in contact with the child. The child's worker has a duty to support foster carers within their primary duty towards the child although in circumstances where there may be a conflict of interest, the interests and welfare of the child will be their paramount consideration.

Social Care Worker

In addition to the Supervising Social Worker we also provide support to foster carer through the Social Care Workers. These are non-social work qualified workers who provide practical guidance and support for carers in a wide range of areas. Their work with carers is planned and reviewed regularly and is envisaged to be short term rather than ongoing regular support. The support they give will normally be part of a plan following an annual review or part of the support package around a placement. These workers are part of the Fostering Team.

Swindon Foster Carer Forum

This is a group which meets every eight weeks to look at and discuss new policies and developments that affect foster carers in Swindon. The group is comprised of managers from Social Care and foster carers. Its' aim is to work in partnership with carers to enable greater consultation and engagement in the way in which fostering services are shaped in Swindon.

Fostering Network Membership

The Borough funds membership of the Fostering Network for all carers. This ensures that carers are informed of national developments and have access to information and support which is independent of the borough. This is particularly important to carers who may face allegations around their practice or behavior.

Discounts are also available for high street shops theme parks through the Network.

New Family Social Membership

The Borough is affiliated to New Family Social, a charity supporting and representing LGBT foster carers and adopters. LGBT carers are automatically enrolled as members and can receive support and advice from the moment their application is accepted for assessment by Swindon.

Newsletter:

The Fostering team produces a regular newsletter , keeping carers advised of new developments, training events, matters of interest and changes that affect them.

Support groups for Birth Children

Kids united

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. Led by the young people themselves, the group – “United Kids” - meets monthly and offers an opportunity for both serious discussion about the realities of fostering, and some fun-focused activities.

Foster carer Support Groups

We arrange and facilitate meetings where foster carers can meet like-minded people and share their experiences, learn from each other and get to know people who can become part of their support network. E.g. new foster carers group, teenage support group, home and away.

Family outings

We also organise and facilitate activity based events for foster carers and their families e.g. Family BBQs a trip to a theme park, beach or local adventure and an annual trip to the pantomime.

Leisure discounts

All Swindon foster carers are entitled to a free **SwindonCard** giving themselves, their families, and their foster children access to the Borough's sports, recreation, and leisure facilities at significantly discounted rates.

Out of hours support

Emergency Duty Service

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

Fostering Team Out of Hours Service

In addition to the above Emergency Duty Service, the Fostering Team also operates an out-of-hours support service to foster carers in the form of a telephone advice line staffed on a voluntary rota basis by members of the team. The service is available exclusively to foster carers and adopters. The service does not however provide for home visits, and in the

event of a crisis necessitating direct action the duty officer will refer on to the Emergency Duty Service.

Commissioning and Placement Team

This team manages all placements for children coming into the care of Swindon Borough. They are part of the Fostering Team and are the first line of contact for social workers wishing to request placements for children and will be the team that contact foster carers about taking placements.

Social Work Duty

During office hours there is a social work duty system which deals with enquiries around current placements in the absence of the Supervising Social Worker who is allocated to that case, i.e. if they were sick or on leave. The social workers from the fostering team staff this on a rota, so there will be a different person on each day. The duty workers also manage the allocation of Viability Assessments for Special Guardianship and Connected Persons Assessments.

Health Care

The Fostering service works with the Designated Doctor and Nurse to ensure that the health and emotional well-being needs of all children looked after are met. The service recognises that children looked after health needs are often greater than their peers. Foster carers have an important role in ensuring that children in their care stay healthy and have the knowledge and skills to continue to stay healthy after they leave care. Training and support is provided to enable foster carers to do this role.

The fostering team supports foster carers in their role to meet the health needs of children and young people looked after including attending appointments including health assessments, the completion of Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires and working with Placement Support and Child and Adolescent Mental Health.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

The Mental Health needs of children looked after are a high priority for CAMHS provision in Swindon. Services are provided through a multi-disciplinary team of child psychiatrists and therapists based at Marlborough House.

Placement Support for Foster Carers

In addition to the range of services available to all Swindon residents, a post has been established through CAMHS to provide specific advice and support to foster carers, to assist them in understanding the emotional well-being of children and young people being looked after.

Education

In July 2014 new statutory guidance for local authorities on the promotion of the education of looked after children was issued. The Children and Families Act 2014 amended the Children Act 1989 to require local authorities in England to appoint at least one person for the purpose of discharging the local authority's duty to promote the education of looked after children wherever they live or are educated. That person is the Virtual School Head (VSH). Local authorities must consider the educational implications of every decision taken about a child's care placement. This reflects their wider role as a corporate parent – local authorities must strive to offer all the support that a good parent would give in order to make sure that the children they look after reach their full potential.

Swindon's Virtual School Head and Lead Consultant provide:

- **support** to schools, looked after young people and their foster carers
- **training** for social workers, foster carers, school governing bodies and Designated Teachers in schools
- **challenge** to schools, social workers and others to placement and education decisions that might affect the educational outcomes of looked after young people

After/Leaving Care Support

Personal Advisers from the Care Leavers Team will become involved with the planning for a young person looked after following his or her 16th birthday and should consider whether a Staying Put arrangement should be an option. This will entail assessing the implications for both the young person and the foster carer beyond the age of 18. The role of the Personal Adviser will be to provide appropriate advice, assistance and support to facilitate preparation for adulthood and independence.

Participation Officer

Swindon has established a post of Participation Officer for vulnerable children and young people, managed independently of Children Services. The post-holder is responsible for

ensuring that systems are in place for enabling children's and young people's wishes and feelings to be heard, and their views understood

Independent Visitor Scheme

The Independent Visitor Scheme in Swindon is provided by CORAM VOICE. Independent Visitors are volunteers in the local community who have been through a lengthy recruitment and training process in order to befriend a young person in care. They have to commit to at least a 2 year post in which they will visit the young person approximately every 2 weeks until the young person turns 18 or decides they no longer require the service.

The volunteer enjoy the challenge of building a lasting friendship with an individual child and the children benefit greatly from a consistent, fun relationship with someone outside the care system.

Children's Rights and Advocacy

Independent Children's Rights service is commissioned and provided through "CORAM VOICE". The service provides advocacy for children looked after, including the investigation of complaints about services, In close conjunction with the Participation Officer, CORAM VOICE has developed and promotes mechanisms to ensure children's view are heard in improving our services to children and their families, and particularly to children looked after. A Children in Care Council is well embedded and delivered through CORAM VOICE

Advocates support, enable and empower young people to be heard. Advocates are professionals who are highly experienced and trained in working with our diverse communities of young people. They listen, champion and fight tirelessly for young people.

which provide a forum for meeting with agency staff and decision-makers, ensuring that children in care are fully included in the planning and development of our care services.

Swindon Foster Care Association

The Swindon Foster Care Association is a local voluntary organisation set up by Foster Carers, grant-funded by Children Services. The SFCA is affiliated to the national "Fostering Network". Membership is open to all Swindon foster carers and the committee work closely with management and staff of Swindon Social Services through joint working, consultation and lobbying to improve the fostering service provided by the local authority.

The role of the Foster Care Association is:

- Mutual support for Foster Carers
- Promoting working partnerships
- Representing foster carers as a group
- Developing skills
- Enabling children and young people to meet

More recent developments have included the establishment of a “buddying” scheme, linking experienced foster carers with newly-approved carers for support and guidance.

Committee members provide telephone advice and support to other carers, and where possible will assist in identifying sources of practical support such as baby-sitting services, etc. The Association is committed to a multi-agency approach to working to ensure that foster children and young people together with foster carers receive the best possible services.

Management and Staffing of the Fostering Service

2.1 Organisation and Structure

Decision-making and arrangements for management of the service, including the appointment of the Fostering Service Manager under Regulation 10 and approval of foster carer registrations under Regulation 27 of the *Fostering Services Regulations 2011*, are delegated through the Board Director, Commissioning, (DCS/DASS) to the Head of Children, Families and Community Health.

Responsibility for the operational management and strategic direction of the Fostering Service as a whole is exercised through four Service Managers, the post-holders being directly accountable to the Head of Children, Families and Community Health. Primary responsibility for the Fostering Service rests with the Service Manager, Children Looked After and Care Leavers who directly supervises the Manager of the Fostering and Adoption Team.

The Fostering Team

The team is responsible for all aspects of recruitment, assessment, training, support and supervision of the Borough’s foster carers and adopters. It also has responsibility for the delivery of a Supported Lodgings Scheme for older teenagers (16 – 18 years) and Care Leavers. The team deals with all placement requests from social work teams, matching

individual needs to available resources. The team provides a full-time duty service to respond to emergency placement requests.

The team is organised into two discrete sections (Fostering and Adoption)

Staffing of the Fostering Service

Team Manager (*Regulation 10.1 Fostering Services Regulation 2011*)

The appointed Manager is: Matt Dauncey

Date appointed: 14/03/16

The composition of the Fostering Team is as follows:

- 1 Team Manager
- 1.8 Assistant Team Managers
- 1 Consultant Social Worker
- 11.6 (fte) Supervising Social Workers
- 1.0 Social Worker (Private Fostering& Special Guardianship)
- 3.2 Fostering Resource Workers

The Fostering Team is supported by a Business Support Team Leader and Business Support Administrators.

The team has been structured to enable a greater focus to be placed on recruitment and training of carers, with staff caseloads reflecting individual skills and experience and, where consistent with the needs of the service, personal preferences. 2.4 team members hold primary responsibility for the discrete respite care (“Home and Away”) scheme for children with disabilities, and one member has primary responsibility for the Supported Lodgings Scheme. However, there is flexibility built into the structure to allow team members to develop experience and expertise in other areas.

Staff Qualifications and Experience:

All case-holding staff hold the minimum qualification of CQSW / DipSW and it is a expectation of employment within the Fostering Team that such staff will have had a minimum of two years’ experience in child care social work or closely allied field.

Comments, Compliments and Complaints

In seeking to constantly improve the quality of its fostering service, Swindon Borough Council welcomes and encourages constructive feedback from service users, providers and partners. The 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.

Where necessary, more serious complaints, by children or their families, or by foster carers, will invoke the Borough'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.

Complaints

In most fostering situations, areas of potential tension or conflict can be minimised through careful planning at the point of placement, or resolved through early discussion/negotiation involving the child's social worker and/or the foster carers' supervising social worker, as appropriate.

The Borough'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 address / telephone at the end of this document.

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

Children, Families & Community Health

FOSTERING PANEL COMPOSITION

CHAIR

Robert Tapsfield - Independent

VICE CHAIR

Carolyn Arkell - Independent

SOCIAL WORKERS

Kath Jones
Heather Jones
Sharon Isles

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

Rachel Tomlinson

NON-INDEPENDENT / OTHER PROFESSIONALS

Kate Hookings – Outreach Support Worker
Charlotte Paterson – Health
Anne Gray - Health

PANEL ADVISOR:

Matt Dauncey, Manager, Fostering & Adoption Team

OFSTED

From April 2007 OFSTED has been the public body responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting Fostering services provided by both Local Authorities and Independent Agencies, under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000.

All enquiries or contact with OFSTED should be addressed to:

**OFSTED
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Anne's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA**

Telephone: 08456 40 40 40

The Office Address of the Children's Rights Director:

**Office of the Children's Rights Director
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE**

Telephone: 0800 528 0731

Contact can also be made via the website: www.rights4me.org