

FOSTER CARERS' CHARTER

December 2023



INTRODUCTION

The Government launched the Foster Carers' Charter in March 2011. It was jointly produced with fostering organisations, charities and children and young people. Recognising the invaluable work of foster carers, it sets out clear principles, based on the core belief that children come first, on how foster carers should be treated, the roles of carers and the pivotal role played by carers in helping children achieve to their full potential.

We have embraced the principles of the charter and through the consultation and involvement of children, young people, foster carers and various partners we have developed our own Wiltshire Foster Carers' Charter.

We recognise the excellent care, support and commitment shown by foster carers and the invaluable role they play in the lives of Wiltshire's looked after children and young people. This charter aims to re-enforce that recognition, demonstrate the joint responsibilities to the children and young people in our care and build on the success and achievements of fostering in Wiltshire.

We are dedicated to providing foster carers with the tools, resources, and support they need to create a nurturing and stable environment for children in their care. We believe that fostering is a vital role in society, and we are committed to upholding the following principles outlined in our Foster Carers Charter.

This charter builds on existing solid foundations and includes the ongoing commitment by Wiltshire Council to carers through day-to-day support, events and activities for foster families, to listen to carers, children and young people, to value highly the contribution of carers in all areas, to have high aspirations for the children and young people in our care and to further develop and expand foster care in Wiltshire. We believe this should be a 'living' document and should adapt to, and reflect, best practice.



MISSION STATEMENT

Children and young people come first.

Children and young people 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 their own child and without the child or young person feeling that they 'stand out' as a looked after child.

It is important that foster carers understand and empathise with the specific issues that looked after children and young people face without making them feel that they 'stand out'.

Children and young people must be given every support to develop their own identities and aspirations, fulfil their potential, and take advantage of all opportunities to promote their talent and skills. Above all, they should be listened to.

We strive to create a sense of belonging and stability, helping children heal from past traumas and develop their full potential. We work collaboratively with foster carers, professionals, birth families, and the wider community to ensure the best outcomes for the children in our care. Our ultimate goal is to make a positive and lasting impact on their lives, empowering them to thrive and succeed in the future.



Cllr Richard Clewer
Leader of the Council



Cllr Laura Mayes
Cabinet Member for Children's
Services, Education and Skills



Terence Herbert
Chief Executive



Lucy Townsend
Director of People/Director
of Children Services



Jen Salter
Director of Families and Children



Jay Williams
Fostering Team Manager



ROLES AND COMMITMENT

We are committed to supporting our foster carers in their vital role. We recognise that foster carers play a crucial role in providing a nurturing and stable environment for children in need.

We aim to provide and maintain stable, first rate foster care for children and young people who are valued, supported and encouraged to grow and develop as individuals. To achieve this aim, we recruit, train and approve foster carers and deliver ongoing support to them to give them the skills and confidence they need to develop meaningful relationships with the children and young people they care for and provide stable and loving homes while they are part of the foster family.

THE FOSTER CARER'S ROLE

Foster carers are at the heart of the fostering service. Foster carers are assessed, trained and supported to look after children and young people by developing meaningful relationships in a family environment, providing them with stability, care and an opportunity to grow and develop and to reach their potential.

Our working relationships are based on mutual trust and respect. This charter explains what we expect from each other to provide outstanding foster care for all children and young people placed in our care.



WHAT FOSTER CARERS CAN EXPECT FROM THE FOSTERING SERVICE AND ITS PARTNERS

1. Working in partnership

We recognise that foster carers have skills and expertise and make a unique and significant difference to the everyday lives of looked after children and young people which can endure into adulthood.

We as Wiltshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Recognise and value your skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals.
- Treat you without discrimination and respect you as a colleague.
- Recognise that you are the people who live with children and young people every day and therefore have a unique relationship with, and knowledge and understanding of, the child or young person placed with you.
- Recognise the importance of the child's/young person's relationship with you and the members of your household.
- When making a foster placement ensure the wishes and feelings of the child or young person are listened to and taken into account.
- Include you in all meetings that affect you and the children or young people you care for on a day to day basis through consultation or attendance.
- Ensure that Wiltshire Council Fostering Service meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Meet or consult with you regularly to share information and seek your views.

- Ensure transparency between all involved in the team around the child/young person.

2. Information

We know that information is vital for foster carers to provide care that meets the child' or young person's needs.

We as Wiltshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Make sure you have all the information you need to care safely for the child or young person and keep yourself and members of your foster family safe.
- Provide this information in writing prior to placement unless where they are emergency placements and it is not feasible to do so, when we will provide this information within five working days.
- Make sure foster children and young people have information about their foster carer, the foster home and members of the fostering household before placement, including during emergency placements.
- Ensure that there is a placement plan drawn up in discussion with you, the child's parents where possible, and the foster child/young person and agreed with you .
- Ensure that you are included, consulted with and updated following events in the child's/young person's life including appointments, contact and meetings.
- Provide you with written information on all financial matters including tax, allowances, and

additional entitlements which are updated as required.

- Provide you with full details of all relevant policies and procedures which are updated as required.
- Make sure you receive regular updates on events and issues relevant to the fostering service including Wiltshire's foster carers' newsletter and Newsflashes.

3. Clarity about decisions

We recognise that for children and young people to live a full family life foster carers must be able to make decisions regarding the children they foster.

We as Wiltshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Ensure that wherever possible you can make everyday decisions that mean that your fostered child or young person is not treated differently to their peers and can feel part of your family.
- Ensure that you and your foster child or young person have a clear agreement, included in the Placement Plan, on the decisions that you can make for each child or young person in your care.
- Provide clarity to you and your foster child or young person about any decisions you cannot make at the outset so that everyone understands who is responsible for what.
- Ensure foster children and young people understand who can make what decisions and the reason for this.

4. Support

We recognise that fostering is a challenging task and carers can feel isolated, and appropriate and timely support makes all the difference to the fostering family and to the child or young person in your care.

We as Wiltshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Provide and ensure you have access to the identified support that you need.
- Regularly review your support needs and respond positively, and in a planned way, to requests for additional support.
- Provide you with monthly supervision and support in line with foster carers supervision policy including regular phone contact.
- Listen to your concerns and take action when needed.
- Give you open and honest feedback and provide opportunities for you to do the same.
- Provide you with out of hours support and access to 24-hour support from appropriately qualified workers.
- Pay your allowances, expenses and fees in a timely manner.
- Provide clarity regarding payments to foster carers for young people who stay with their foster carer after they leave care.
- Have an open and transparent fee scheme open to all foster carers.
- Provide you with membership of the Fostering Network and Wiltshire Fostering Association.
- Ensure that there are local support groups recognised by the Fostering Service where you and your family can find support and share experiences with other fostering families.

5. Learning and development

We believe that foster carers should be enabled to access learning and development opportunities throughout their fostering career. This will ensure that carers have the skills and knowledge they need to develop their practice so they can help transform the lives of the children and young people they care for.

Wiltshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Provide you with the support you need to achieve the Training, Support and Development Standards.
- Make sure you have a personal Professional Development Plan outlining your training and development needs which is annually reviewed and updated.
- Provide you and your family with appropriate, relevant and progressive training by trainers who understand the fostering task.
- Enable you to develop meaningful relationships with the children in your care and the fellow members of the team around the child.
- Provide you with training as and when you need it to promote understanding of relevant issues such as mental health; behaviour management; and attachment etc.
- Provide training in a variety of formats and at times and venues to meet your needs with the support you need to access.
- Provide you with other developmental opportunities which make the best use of your skills and experience, such as diploma's or providing training or support.

6. Fair treatment

We will ensure that you and the children and young people in your care are listened to, treated fairly and with respect no matter what the circumstances.

We as Wiltshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Consult with you via Wiltshire Fostering Association before changing terms and conditions.
- Ensure openness in all our discussions and communications with you.
- Ensure that you are treated with respect, kept informed and provided with emotional support should you be subject to an allegation.
- Provide you with information on Wiltshire Council's framework for dealing with allegations and adhere to this framework and agreed timescales.
- Ensure that you are treated with respect, kept informed and provided with independent support should you be subject to an allegation.
- Ensure that you know the arrangements for the payment of fees and allowances if you are not able to foster while the subject of an allegation.

7. Communication and consultation

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship. Wiltshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Facilitate regular communication between you and foster children and young people with senior officers of Wiltshire Council Children's Services and Elected Members and the Children in Care Council where appropriate.

- Ensure that we consult with you in a meaningful way on matters that affect you and give you timely feedback from consultations.
- Ensure the Wiltshire Fostering Association can communicate regularly with the Fostering Service and staff members of the Association on behalf of carers.

- Show a willingness to work with birth parents, wider family and people significant in a child or young person's life.

- Support the child or young person to do well at school. Support the child or young person in their aspirations.

2. Respect for the child

Every child or young person should be respected as an individual and be supported in meeting their needs and achieving their aspirations and potential.

We as Wiltshire Council foster carers will:

- Develop a meaningful relationship with the child: understand their needs, support their growth.
- Be an advocate and champion for them .
- Respect and promote a child's religious, linguistic and cultural heritage.
- Afford the same level of protection and care to a child as we would our own child in accordance with the national minimum standards.
- Ensure the child has the right to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age and understanding.
- Listen to and respect the views of children/young people in our care.
- Commit to understanding the child/young person in our care and the issues in their lives and how this affects their actions and behaviour.

3. Support for the child

As Wiltshire foster carers we must have high expectations for the children and young people in our care, high ambitions for them and provide the support to achieve their aspirations.

Wiltshire Council foster carers will:

- Support the child or young person to achieve and maintain good health.

- Encourage and enable children and young people to form positive relationships with their peers.

- Show the child or young person we have high expectations and believe they can succeed.

- Support children and young people as they grow to gain life experiences and become independent by passing on our own life skills for example; communication, decision making, cooking, money management etc.

- Provide support and advice to, and advocate for, the children and young people in our care.

4. Information

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship and we will aim to build a meaningful and collaborative relationship with our supervising social worker.

Wiltshire Council foster carers will:

- Provide information about our family, hobbies, interests and home life for children and young people who may come to live with us.
- We will spend time to get to know children and young people placed in our care and not judge children or young people on the information given to us.
- Inform the Fostering Service about changes in our household.
- Inform the Fostering Service about any difficulties that arise for us.

WHAT THE FOSTERING SERVICE AND ITS PARTNERS CAN EXPECT FROM FOSTER CARERS

1. Working in partnership

We will deliver a high standard of care and conduct. Wiltshire Council foster carers will:

- Include foster children and young people as part of our family by including them in our daily routines and activities.
- Provide children with a positive experience of family life.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance and follow departmental policies and procedures.
- Demonstrate our expertise and make use of our skills to the best of our ability.
- Attend meetings, and provide information for meetings, about the children and young people we care for.
- Work with the agencies involved with the child such as school, health and religious establishments.

- Inform the Fostering Service/child's social worker/ emergency duty team immediately about any serious issues and incidents that happen to, or affect any child or young person in our care.
- Keep and share records in line with Wiltshire Fostering Service recording policy.

5. Learning and development

We must be enabled to access learning and development opportunities throughout our fostering career. This will ensure that we have the skills and knowledge we need, and allow us to develop our practice in order that we can help transform the lives of the children and young people we foster.

Wiltshire Council foster carers will:

- Complete the Training, Support and Development Standards within the required timescales.
- Be willing and able to develop our skills throughout our fostering career and use these skills in caring for children and young people to make a positive impact thus enabling the child/ young person to reach their potential.
- Take up opportunities offered to us.
- Regularly attend core and further relevant training.
- Attend and contribute to support groups and events.
- Be open to using support when offered to help make placements work well.

6. Communication and consultation

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship. Wiltshire Council foster carers will:

- Respond to local consultations and discussion to inform the development of the service.
- Meet with councillors, service managers, and others to promote dialogue and a good working relationship.
- Support children in our care to do the same.

