

Swindon Borough Council

Fostering Recruitment Criteria – Best Practice Guidelines

- Applicant must be over 21 years of age
- Applicant must have a spare bedroom, unless they are only interested in fostering babies (0-2 years).
- We will consider applications from those who are self-employed or employed part-time. We will consider applications from applicants who work full time who either have flexible working or suitable alternative care arrangements for a child.
- Applicants who childmind must be prepared to stop childminding altogether in order to progress with a fostering application. Fostering and childminding are not compatible due to the need to focus on and prioritise the children who are looked after who would be placed in their care.
- A criminal record does not necessarily stop them from becoming a foster carer. The law states that the only criminal convictions that prevent people from fostering are those that relate to an offence against children or a sexual offence. Any other convictions will be considered on a case-by-case basis and will need to be risk assessed.
- Applicant must live within 20 miles of the Swindon area
- Applicant must be able to use public transport independently if they are not able to drive or own their own car – they will be expected to meet the needs of the child in their care which will include transporting to school, contact and all appointments within Swindon.
- The main carer must be a British resident or have indefinite right to remain in the UK to foster in order to ensure continuity for a child placed in their care.
- If the applicant is in a relationship and they live separately they will need to make a sole application to foster but their partner will need to be included within the assessment process as part of their support network, including DBS checks.
- If during the fostering process, either within assessment or post approval, they decide to move in with one another, a reassessment will need to be undertaken at this point – it will be important for them to keep their Assessing

Social Worker or Supervising Social Worker up to date with any changes in their circumstances.

- If the applicants are in a relationship and living together, they must have been together for a minimum of 2 years on a stable and continuous basis and they must have lived together for a minimum of 12 months before making an application.
- Applicant must own their own property or have permission from their landlord to foster in a rented property
- Ideally, applicants should wait until their youngest child is at least 2-years-old before applying to foster, but in some cases we may accept an application sooner. How they would manage this would need to be explored further in the Initial Home Visit (IHV).
- If the applicants have children in their family, the fostering team would advise that consideration will be given to placing a child closer than 2 years in age to any of the children. This can be explored further in the Initial Home Visit to consider how they would manage this if it were to happen.
- Foster carers who smoke or vape cannot look after children under the age of 5 years. No one is allowed to smoke or vape inside the house of a foster carer.
- Applicants who have experienced infertility difficulties are expected to have completed any ongoing investigations, treatment or counselling for infertility before proceeding with a fostering application.
- If the applicant has experienced any of the following, the date of the end of treatment needs to be ascertained - a) Investigation / diagnosis / and / or treatment for infertility b) Any form of assisted reproductive technology e.g. I.V.F, donor insemination c) Miscarriage d) Termination e) Counselling for infertility or infertility related issues. The applicant/s should be advised of the benefits of having a break until the anniversary of the treatment. This is because experience suggests that people need time to address their loss before they can fully embrace the positive benefits of fostering – preferably a minimum of 12 months- although this can be reviewed on a case by case basis by a Manager in Fostering.
- If the applicant has recently suffered significant loss i.e. death of a close family member / ending of a relationship, we advise them to wait for a period

of time before proceeding with fostering – we can discuss this with them and help them to decide when the time is right – it could be suggested that they wait 6 months before progressing their enquiry.

- If the applicants have dogs, this will need to be explored in more detail. Depending on the type and number of dogs/pets, a specialist assessment may be required.
- If they have more than 3 dogs, we will progress with an Initial Home Visit which will need to include an observation of the dogs in the home and with household members. Where the recommendation is to invite enquirers to make an application, discussions with management will need to take place to consider and prioritise a specialist dog assessment.
- If the applicants have a rescue dog, consideration will be given to a specialist assessment.
- Having mental health difficulties does not rule people out of being able to foster however there is an expectation that their mental health will have been stable for a minimum of 12 months. A medical and further checks and references will be required to understand this further.
- If applicants are currently accessing coaching/counselling/therapy or similar, clarification is needed to understand when this started, what the plan of support is (purpose, planned ending). Advice may be given to the timing of application and will be considered on a case by case basis – they may be advised to come back 12 months after their plan of support has ended - and we will seek a reference from the identified support service.
- If applicants have accessed coaching/counselling/therapy or similar in the past, this will need to be understood further in assessment and we will seek a reference from the identified support service.
- Ex-partners – the expectation is that we undertake ex-partner references as part of the assessment process. If this poses a risk to the applicant i.e. Domestic Violence (DV), we need to obtain other evidence in order to validate this and get an understanding of their experiences - potentially through other references, court orders, police report etc. If no context is provided as to why ex partners can't be contacted despite a conversation regarding this – discuss this with the Team Manager / Assistant Team Manager / Assessing Social Worker as this may mean that we can't progress with the enquiry.

- If applicants have been supported by children services for their own children, this must not be current. Previous involvement with children services will be considered on a case by case basis, within initial checks at the point an Initial Home Visit is booked.
- If applicants have children who are accessing other services, including therapeutic services, they may be advised to come back 6-12 months – this will be considered on a case by case basis.
- If the applicant is part of a currently serving military family, consideration given only to respite/Home From Home (short breaks for children with disabilities). Unless they have a specific agreement about posting or primary foster carer has a permanent housing plan, then consideration will be given to all types of fostering.
- If the applicant wishes to care for 0-2 years and have shared they currently smoke however will give up, we would progress to an Initial Home Visit to understand this further (triggers, plan, motivation). We would advise a period of at least 6 months of smoking cessation before progressing to Form F assessment.

REMINDE THE ENQUIRER/APPLICANT THAT WE HAVE A STANDARD OF CARE TO THEM AND THEIR FAMILIES. THEIR WELLBEING IS ALSO A PRIORITY WHICH IS WHY THESE GUIDELINES ARE SET.