

Swindon Borough Council

Fostering Service

Foster Carers Progression Scheme

The Foster Carers Progression Scheme enables Swindon to recruit and retain high quality Foster Carers. This ensures that children and young people are looked after by Foster Carers who have the experience, skills and training necessary to meet their needs. It aims to ensure that children are placed with carers whose experiences and competencies meet those needs. The scheme recognises carer's skills, experience and professional learning and development. The scheme also provides a simple and equitable structure for making fee payments to Foster Carers. This document details the payment levels linked to the progression levels, the specific tasks that are expected of the Foster Carer at each level and how Foster Carers can achieve progression.

Relevant Legislation and Guidance

- Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011 – Child-Focused Standards
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (amended)
- Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers
- Foster Carer's Handbook
- Foster Carer's Finance Handbook
- Foster Care Agreement
- Training Program for Foster Carers

Key Principles:

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

Progressing through the levels:

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

Approval at the different levels will depend on:

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

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- Supervision from the Supervising Social worker
- Annual Review process

A Foster Carer will receive a payment linked to their level of approval whenever a child or young person is placed with them. The scheme provides a clear "career pathway" for Foster Carers to progress if they wish to do so. Supporting Foster Carers to develop their knowledge and skills to progress is an integral part of their supervision.

Progression is not guaranteed and a recommendation to progress will be made if there is sufficient evidence that the requirements have been met. Progression through the scheme is by recommendation from a positive annual review and agreement by the Fostering Team Manager; this will be reviewed annually to evidence that the requirements are still being met.

It will be possible for Foster Carers to move down levels. If a Foster Carer wishes to retain their current level and have been unable to maintain certain competencies in order to support them to evidence these, an action plan will be agreed between the Foster Carer, their Supervising Social Worker, and Team Manager or Reviewing Officer this will be reviewed within 6 months.

Fee payments are made in addition to the basic age-related fostering allowances. Payment is calculated on a 'per night' basis.

Skills required for all those approved as foster carers for Swindon Borough Council:

It is recognised that newly approved Foster Carers may be developing their ability to practice the whole range of skills that are identified below identified below. All Foster Carers are expected to meet the Child-Focused National Minimum Standards for children.

Child Focused National Minimum Standards

- An ability to provide a standard of care for other people's children that promotes their safety and welfare and protects them from abuse and other forms of significant harm.
- An ability to promote and support children's emotional and social development and to enable children to develop emotional resilience and positive self-esteem.
- An ability to provide a home which can comfortably accommodate all who live there to a suitable standard and where the child enjoys access to a range of activities which promotes their development.
- An ability to work closely with children's families, and others who are important to the child, in a respectful and supportive manner.
- An ability to provide an environment and culture that promotes models and supports positive behaviour.
- An ability to listen and communicate with children appropriate to their age and understanding and communicate effectively with other professionals.

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- An ability to support and encourage children to maintain family contact and friendships in accordance with their care plan.
- An ability to interact and engage with children using play.
- An ability to advocate on behalf of children.
- An understanding of the importance of education and an ability to act as a positive advocate promoting the child's education both inside and outside the home as they would for a birth child. This includes working closely with schools, attending parent's evenings and attending Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings.
- An ability to develop positive strategies for supporting children where they encounter discrimination or bullying wherever this occurs.
- An ability to support permanence planning for the child informed by observations and positively contribute to their life story and the work associated with this.
- A commitment and ability to support a child's cultural and identity needs.
- The commitment to work as part of the team around the child or young person and contribute to the department's planning for the child/young person.
- Maintains records as required when a child is in placement, contribute to written reports for a child's review, and attend review meetings.
- Offer up to 100 miles per week transport where required unless there are exceptional reasons why this is not possible, for example the Foster Carer does not drive, conflicting needs within the placement. Foster Carers will continue to claim mileage for this transport that is specific to and only for the fostered child's identified needs outside of normal family activity.
- Produce a child-friendly profile about their household for children coming into placement.
- At the end of a placement provide a letter to the child summarising their time with them and highlighting positive memories.
- Foster Carers will normally be expected to give notice if a placement needs to end to avoid unplanned moves. The notice period is 28 days. Prior to reaching this stage, it is an expectation that placement stability meetings are held to ensure that appropriate support is offered to the child and Foster Carers to maintain the placement where possible and appropriate. Any decision to move a child should be based on the child's needs. If a placement needs to end, we would want to work with, and support the Foster Carer to continue to care for the child until a planned move can be made. We recognise that there are some rare occasions where for safeguarding reasons this may not be possible.

Carers own development:

- Demonstrate the commitment to access training and development opportunities and to improve skills as agreed in the individual Personal Development Plan.
- To maintain a record of the training that has been completed
- Complete the Training, Support & Development (TSD) Standards during their first year of approval, 18 months for Connected Carers. This applies to all approved Foster Carers in the household.
- Successfully complete specified mandatory training during the first year of approval:

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- Child Exploitation
- Child Protection Level 1
- First Aid
- PACE
- Safe Care and Recording
- Understanding and Supporting Attachment Difficulties

Where two people foster as a couple, both carers must complete the mandatory training. Both Foster Carers must also have undertaken any training specified at the point of approval or subsequently through supervision or annual review by the Supervising Social Worker.

Written records:

Swindon Borough Council has a record-keeping policy relating to Foster Carers. Foster Carers at all levels are expected to keep written records in accordance with this policy.

Level one carers

Level one Foster Carers are newly approved Foster carers, who are within the first two years of their approval. Level one Carers also include Connected Carers, i.e. Foster Carers who are specifically approved to care for a child or young person who is a relative or 'friend'.

Fostering Task

1. Level One Foster Carers provide a placement to a specific child/young person who is a relative or friend of the foster family or, where this is not the case, they provide placements to children/young people following careful matching and preparation.
2. Carers are expected to meet the child focused National minimum child focused.

Requirements of Level One Foster Carers

- Level One Foster Carers have completed Skills to Foster Training, ACE's Adverse Childhood Experiences (Online) Training and Attachment (Online) Training
- Successfully completed a full assessment, and have been approved by the fostering panel and the agency decision maker
- Ability to provide a bedroom for the sole use of each fostered child or young person over 2 years old apart from in exceptional circumstances e.g. sibling groups where a risk assessment has been carried out
- Level One Foster Carers attend training as identified in the training program and any additional training identified by their Supervising Social Worker
- Foster Carers should attend a minimum of three support groups each year.
- Foster Carers maintain written records on the child/young person placed in line with Swindon's record keeping policy.
- Foster Carers should complete their TSD standards within 12 months or 18 months for Connected Carers
- Foster Carers should be available for support and supervision

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- Foster Carers should allow access to the Supervising Social Worker for unannounced visits

Skills

All Level One Foster Carers are supported to develop the skills appropriate to the basic fostering task.

- Level One Foster Carers are expected to have embarked upon the mandatory training as set out in the training program.
- Understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people (National Minimum Standards)
- Understand and fulfil their role as a Foster Carer
- Understand health and safety requirements and cooperate with assessments, adhere to the advice, and complete the identified actions.
- Know how to communicate effectively use appropriate level of communication for the child's level of understanding development needs and any additional needs. Ensure that the child is listened to about their wishes and feelings.
- Understand the development of children and young people and attend appropriate training to enhance understanding of children who have experienced trauma.
- Promote children's and young people's safety and welfare protecting them from abuse and significant harm.

Level Two Foster Carers

Level Two Foster Carers have been approved for at least two years, this will include Connected Carers who can evidence the requirements. This group comprises the majority of Foster Carers.

Fostering Task

1. To provide placements for children and young people who generally are not previously known to the carers
2. Will have experience of parenting or working with children or young people
3. Placements may be requested at short notice which could include in emergencies in or out of normal working hours, but where possible this will be planned in advance
4. Foster Carers contribute towards the development and implementation of the child/young person's care plan. The aim may be for a return home, move to another foster placement, a permanent placement, or to independent living.
5. Foster Carers are expected to evidence that they meet National Minimum Standards in relation to their fostering role.

Requirements of Level Two Foster Carers

- Level two Foster Carers have completed the TSD Standards for Foster Carers.
- Foster Carers complete mandatory training within 2 years of becoming a Foster Carer.

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- In addition, Foster Carers have completed any training specified at the point of approval or subsequently jointly identified through supervision or annual review (with attendance evidenced in their Training Record)
- Foster Carers will be expected to have completed a minimum of 10 hours training each year.
- Level two Foster Carers attend a minimum of three support groups or Swindon Foster Care Association meetings per year.
- Ability and willingness to foster children from a wide range of circumstances and backgrounds
- An understanding of the basic principles of how children form attachments and how these affect their development
- Foster Carers maintain written records on children/young people placed, in line with Swindon's record keeping policy
- Foster Carers receive a positive annual review that reflects their continuing development as Foster Carers.

Skills

The skills and requirements at this level are seen as 'core' to the fostering task. Level Two Foster Carers are expected and supported to evidence the skills and competencies set out in the National minimum standards for Foster Carers.

Level Three Foster Carers:

Level Three Foster Carers are experienced and skilled Foster Carers who provide placements to children/young people who present a range of challenges. Placements may be requested at short notice and information may be limited. Alternatively, placements may involve working over a long period with children/young people who have major issues and present significantly testing behaviour. Level Three Foster Carers need to be able to demonstrate sound skills and underpinning knowledge that will enable them to, for example, contribute to multi agency or court assessments, actively work to improve relationships between children/young people and parents, and enable children/young people to express, manage and cope with their emotions. This may include Connected Carers who can evidence the requirements.

Fostering Task

1. To provide placements for children/young people who likely to present significant challenges are arising from their own needs or from their family circumstances.
2. Placements may be required at short notice and/or in emergencies, including out of hours. Information about the child/young person to be placed may be limited.
3. Foster Carers should have a good understanding of the needs of children who have experienced trauma.
4. Carers should be able to evidence the implementation of a therapeutic style of parenting.
5. Children/young people may be placed on a temporary or permanent basis.

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6. Level Three Foster Carers take an active role in developing and implementing the child/young person's care plan. This may involve contributing to the child/young person's assessment and/or working closely with others to carry out individual treatment or therapeutic programmes.
7. Foster Carers may be required to facilitate and supervise contact in line with the care plan.
8. Foster Carers may be involved in taking an active and central role to 'move a child/young person on', for example, a return home, to adopters or to independent living.
9. Level Three Foster Carers may be involved in providing highly skilled care to a child/young person with significant needs on a long-term basis.
10. Level Three Foster Carers contribute to the work of the fostering service, for example, through mentoring, training and recruitment activities.
11. Foster carers are expected to meet National Standards in relation to their fostering role.

Requirements of Level Three Foster Carers:

- Level Three Foster Carers have a minimum of three years' experience of fostering or equivalent experience of working with vulnerable children.
- Level Three Foster Carers have completed mandatory training.
- Foster Carers receive a positive annual review that reflects their continuing development as Foster Carers.
- Foster Carers complete any training jointly identified through supervision or annual review (with attendance evidenced in their training record) and demonstrate an active role in their learning and development.
- Foster Carers attend a minimum of three support groups or Swindon Foster Care Association meetings per year.
- Foster Carers maintain written records on children/young people placed, in line with Swindon's record keeping policy.
- Level Three Foster Carers are able and willing to contribute to the work of the Fostering Team e.g. recruitment activity, helping to run training and support groups.
- Level Three Carers are able and willing to act as mentors to less experienced carers

Review

The statutory annual review of Foster Carer's approval provides the opportunity to ensure that the expectations and requirements of Level Three Foster Carer status continue to be met. Where Foster Carers who were awarded Level Three Foster Carer status under transitional arrangements, or in other exceptional circumstances, still do not meet the eligibility criteria exceptional grounds will need to be shown for the current fee level to be maintained.

Fees

Level One Foster Carers will receive a skills payment of **£108** per child, per week alongside the fortnightly fostering allowance.

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Level Two Foster Carers will receive a skills payment of **£130** per child, per week alongside the fortnightly fostering allowance.

Level Three Foster Carers will receive a skills payment of **£185** per child, per week alongside the fortnightly fostering allowance.