

**Swindon Borough Council Policy on  
Checks and References within Fostering Recruitment.**

Check	Checks to be conducted
<b>Mental Health Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reference request letter to be issued as standard to confirm if the applicant is known to Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership Trust</li> </ul>
<b>Probation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reference request letter to be issued as standard to confirm if the applicant is known to Probation</li> </ul>
<b>Children's Information Service (CIS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reference request letter to be issued as standard to confirm if the applicant is known to Early Years.</li> </ul>
<b>Community Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reference request letter to be issued as standard to confirm if the applicant is known to Community Health Services.</li> </ul>
<b>Home / Previous Local Authority Checks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Home / Previous local authority checks will cover the last <b>twenty years</b> of address, unless there are concerns and then the checks would go back further.</li> <li>If the applicant has children and has lived elsewhere, the Home / Previous local authority will cover all addresses where they have lived with their children.</li> <li>If the applicant/s has/have lived out of the UK for a period longer than <b>six months</b> within the last ten years, then the fostering recruitment team will contact a local authority equivalent within that country. Also refer to the Enhanced DBS Checks section of this document for information relating to Criminal Records checks overseas.</li> <li>Applicants should have consulted with their children aged 18 and under, according to age and understanding, and taken account of their views.</li> <li>Generally, children aged 12 or older are deemed competent in this regard and should have had sight of the privacy notice – the assessing social worker will need to confirm this and record to evidence compliance with Data Protection.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Enhanced DBS Checks</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced DBS Checks will be undertaken on all household members to the home over the age of 18 years.</li> <li>• They will cover the last <b>five years</b> of addresses</li> <li>• If the applicant has spent more than <b>6 months</b> outside of the UK during this time additional checks will be conducted within the country they resided during this time.</li> <li>• Where applicants have recently moved to the UK (<b>within the last 10 years</b>), checks may also be made on all members of the household aged 18 and over. The application process for criminal records checks or 'Certificates of Good Character' for someone from overseas varies from country to country. For further information, see <u>GOV.UK - Criminal records checks for overseas applicants</u></li> <li>• If a DBS comes back with issues, a DBS risk assessment will be completed and reviewed by the Head of Service. This may terminate the assessment process.</li> <li>• Where the checks reveal that the applicant or a member of the household is a disqualified person (foster carer), see <u>Persons Disqualified from Fostering Procedure</u>.</li> <li>• Where the information relates to an offence, which does not automatically disqualify the applicant, for example because the applicant is seeking approval in relation to a specific child only, the manager must consider whether the application should still proceed. Such convictions will not necessarily preclude an application, but this will depend on the seriousness of the offence and how long ago it was committed. In a case where the conviction would usually disqualify an applicant, the case should be referred to the Fostering Panel and the Agency Decision Maker (Fostering) for a preliminary decision - see <u>Persons Disqualified from Fostering Procedure</u>. In any other case where there is doubt, an early referral should be made to the Fostering Panel and/or <u>Agency Decision Maker (Fostering)</u>.</li> <li>• If a person does not have the required identity documents to support a DBS application form, the person completing the form can put no in the section that asks about having seen the identifying documents. When this happens, the DBS will set up for the individual to provide fingerprints at the local police station.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>British Forces Check</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where an applicant has served with British Forces in Western Europe, it is good practice for a check to be undertaken with the organisation providing social services to that group.</li> <li>• Prior to 1<sup>st</sup> November 2014, that organisation was SSAFA, after which Core Assets took responsibility for this service. Where applicants cover both time periods, checks will be undertaken with both agencies.</li> </ul> <p>SSAFA Vetting Department Queen Elizabeth House 4 St Dunstan's Hill London EC3R 8AD     <a href="mailto:vetting@ssafa.org.uk">vetting@ssafa.org.uk</a> / 0207 463 9316</p> <p>Core Assets Children's Services British Forces Social Work Service Saxon Mews, Saxon Business Park Hanbury Road Bromsgrove B60 4AD <a href="mailto:childrensservices@coreassets.com">childrensservices@coreassets.com</a> / 01527 57162</p>
<p><b>Relationship Status Checks</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of the assessment process, Swindon Borough Council's fostering service will undertake checks with former partners.</li> </ul> <p><u>These will be undertaken where:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The applicant has been with a partner in a significant couple relationship, whether or not that has involved living together or jointly caring for children, and whatever the time period of the relationship.</li> <li>• The applicant has been married to, or parented a child with, a former partner, even if they were not living together at the same address.</li> </ul> <p>The requirement for completing the check can be waived at the discretion of the fostering team manager in the following contexts;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When the applicant has been an approved foster carer or adopter since the end of the relationship, and the fostering service or adoption agency can confirm that they completed a satisfactory check with that former partner;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When making contact with the former partner could put someone at risk, for example, when there was domestic abuse in the relationship.</li> <li>• When the former partner cannot be located despite reasonable efforts having been made to do this.</li> </ul> <p>Where a decision is made to waive a former partner check for reasons relating to risk such as domestic abuse or if they cannot be located, efforts will be made to seek independent corroboration of the relationship.</p> <p>Checks will not be waived simply because the applicant prefers that they are not undertaken or because the relationship ended acrimoniously, or because they do not want their former partner to know about their application to foster. If this occurs, consideration will need to be given to terminating the assessment.</p> <p>Applicants will be expected to provide contact details for former partners, of where they do not have this, to contribute to the best of their ability with information to help in locating them.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Process:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reference letter to be issued as standard. The Privacy Notice will be shared so they know how their data will be used. This will be recorded to prove compliance with Data Protection.</li> <li>• If there is anything identified from the written reference that requires exploration then an interview will be scheduled.</li> <li>• Where we are unable to contact ex partners, the relationship will be explored through additional sources including in discussion with referees to triangulate information.</li> </ul>
<b>Health Check</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The applicants will be provided with the relevant medical form to fill in with their details with a covering letter to provide to their GP requesting a medical. The GP will then complete the form and send it to the Medical Adviser for comment about the applicant's suitability to care for children.</li> <li>• Where the medical information suggests that the applicant may not be suitable for health reasons, this should be</li> </ul>

	<p>discussed in detail with the applicant(s) and withdrawal may be advisable at this stage. Additional advice may be sought from the Medical Adviser or the Medical Adviser may raise questions with the GP where this is appropriate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It may be necessary for reports from other health professionals also to be obtained and presented to the Medical Adviser and the Fostering Panel.</li> </ul> <p>The form from the GP is not shared with the Fostering Team, only the Agency Medical Advisors comments which will be kept on file.</p>
<p><b>Personal references</b></p>	<p>Swindon Borough Council will seek to obtain the following personal references;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For each applicant : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 2 x personal reference who has known the applicant for at least 5 years.</li> <li>▪ 1 x family reference</li> </ul> </li> <li>• If a couple within a household are applying then the following will be requested: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 2 x personal reference (each) who has known the applicant for at least 5 years.</li> <li>▪ 1 x personal reference / family reference that knows both applicants</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Additional references may be requested in order to provide additional information if required.</li> <li>• The fostering recruitment service reserve the right to take more references if they feel there is a need to do so.</li> <li>• The Privacy Notice will be shared with each referee so they know how their data will be used. This will be recorded on Care Director to prove compliance with Data Protection.</li> <li>• The issue of confidentiality with fostering references is complex and the issues are set out by the Information Commissioners Office 2014.</li> <li>• Whilst referees should be encouraged to be open and honest about their thoughts and feelings in respect of an applicant, they cannot be told that the reference will remain confidential. Best practice requires that fostering</li> </ul>

	<p>services assure referees that they will not actively share information if the referee does not consent to that, but ultimately they cannot guarantee what will happen if the applicant requests access to the reference or to data held about them more widely.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If an applicant requests to see a reference that has been received by a fostering service as part of an assessment, the fostering service must deal with this under the Data Protection Act 1998 and refer to the Information Governance Team for further advice.</li> </ul>
<b>Adult Children</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Adult children will be asked to complete a reference form and interviewed as part of the assessment process.</li> <li>• The Privacy Notice will be shared with each adult child so they know how their data will be used. This will be recorded on Care Director to prove compliance with Data Protection.</li> </ul>
<b>Employer references / Previous employment involving children or vulnerable adults</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A written reference must be obtained from each applicant's current employer regardless of the applicant's occupation. The Privacy Notice will be shared so they know how their data will be used. This will be recorded on to prove compliance with Data Protection.</li> <li>• Contact will be made with the applicants current employer and checks will go back <b>10 years</b> if the applicant has previously worked with children or vulnerable adults.</li> <li>• Some organisations will have a policy of providing only limited information such as dates of employment, job titles and other factual information such as any formal disciplinary actions. These references tend to be provided centrally from HR. In these circumstances, it would be beneficial to ask if a work colleague or former colleague is well placed to provide something in a personal capacity to supplement the formal employment reference.</li> <li>• For self employed applicants, the assessing social worker will need to make a judgement about the benefits of seeking a reference from a colleague or customer, but may consider that personal references are sufficient.</li> </ul>

<b>Formal / Informal Childcare</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the applicants are providing formal/informal childcare, a reference may be sought from the parents of that child to inform the assessment process. The Privacy Notice will be shared so they know how their data will be used. This will be recorded to prove compliance with Data Protection</li> </ul>
<b>Standard School reference</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reference request letter to be issued as standard where the applicant has a child or children currently in school / nursery / college or has left within the last year.</li> <li>• This may be extended if there are reasons for thinking a check outside of these timescales might be helpful in gathering evidence or otherwise informing the assessment.</li> <li>• If there is anything identified from the written reference that requires exploration then an interview will be scheduled.</li> <li>• The Privacy Notice will be shared so they know how their data will be used. This will be recorded to prove compliance with Data Protection.</li> </ul>
<b>Previous approval as foster carer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where the applicant has been a foster carer previously, a reference must be requested from that fostering service provider.</li> <li>• Where the applicant has been a foster carer within the preceding 12 months There is no requirement to interview personal referees. However, additional verbal and/or written references may be sought from personal referees.</li> <li>• If the previous fostering service does not provide a reference, each applicant will be asked to provide the names of two personal referees, who are adults, have known the applicant for at least five years and are not related to the applicant. In addition, two other referees will be sought from family members or personal friends. All referees should be people who know the applicants well in a personal capacity.</li> <li>• Where there is a joint application, referees should know both applicants, or additional referees will be required.</li> <li>• Where the prospective applicant has made a previous application to foster or adopt, the relevant agency must be</li> </ul>

	<p>asked to confirm in writing the outcome of the application and provide a written reference.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The assessing social worker should seek to view the applicants file and any assessments held by the other agency as part of the assessment process.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Health Visitor Checks</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reference request letter to be issued as standard where the applicant has an allocated health visitor or has had one within the last year.</li> <li>• This may be extended if there are reasons for thinking a check outside of these timescales might be helpful in gathering evidence or otherwise informing the assessment.</li> <li>• If there is anything identified from the written reference that requires exploration then an interview will be scheduled.</li> <li>• The Privacy Notice will be shared so they know how their data will be used. This will be recorded to prove compliance with Data Protection.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Financial Checks</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applicants are to run a personal credit check to inform the financial assessment completed by the assessing social worker – this can be done for free via Experian, Noodle etc. This will highlight historical and current financial information re: loans, credit cards, bank accounts, bankruptcy etc.</li> <li>• Credit checks also return a list of addresses and links to other people that could be used by the assessor to cross – reference the information provided by the applicant.</li> <li>• For self employed applicants, it will be useful to look at the most recent tax statement or tax return that will show total earnings for the year; where financial matters are particularly complex, a reference from their accountant may be helpful.</li> <li>• The Financial Statement and Checklist form will be completed within the assessment process to confirm that prospective applicants have a responsible attitude towards managing money generally and to ensure that they are not</li> </ul>



	<p>going to be left in a financially vulnerable position should they foster.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applicants will be expected to share the last 3 months statement and evidence of rent / mortgage payments as part of the assessment process.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Private Landlords</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is good practice to check with the landlord of rented property that they are happy with / have knowledge of the applicants intention to foster within that property.</li> <li>• Reference request letter to be issued as appropriate. The Privacy Notice will be shared so they know how their data will be used. This will be recorded to prove compliance with Data Protection.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social Networking Websites and Internet Search Engines Checks</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of the assessment process, Swindon Borough Council Fostering Service will routinely undertake social media and internet checks that will initially consist of using search engines and social media platforms to enter the names of applicants or family members.</li> <li>• This check may be expanded depending on any information that emerges from the initial checks or in relation to any other information that has become available in the course of the assessment.</li> <li>• Checks will only be in relation to public space on the internet and applicants will not be asked to provide any passwords to private spaces.</li> <li>• If information emerges from the checks, this will be discussed with the applicants to seek their views before making any judgements about their suitability. The only exception to this will be in cases where safeguarding matters arise, in which case child protection procedures will be followed.</li> <li>• The nature of checks undertaken and the outcome of these will be recorded and made available within the assessment report.</li> <li>• In addition to undertaking social media and internet checks, the fostering service will provide advice and information about the use of the internet as part of the assessment process.</li> </ul>

<b>Home Safety Check</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Coram BAAF “Home Safety Checklist” will be completed as part of the assessment process.</li></ul>
<b>Pet Assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Coram BAAF “Dog” and “Pet” Assessment will be completed as necessary as part of the assessment process.</li></ul>

Agreed by Ian Langley – Fostering Service Manager 23.07.2022

Swindon Borough Council’s Fostering Team Privacy Notice can be accessed here;  
[Privacy Notices - Swindon Borough Council Fostering Team Privacy Notice | Swindon Borough Council](#)