

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING

27 JULY 2022

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

IMPLEMENTATION OF A FOSTER CARER CHARTER

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting with an update into the development of a Foster Carer Charter for Bridgend Fostering Service; and to approve the adoption and implementation of the Charter on behalf of the Council as Corporate Parents.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives / other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:-

- **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focussed on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.
- **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
- **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

- 3.1 As part of Bridgend Fostering Service's Service Development Plan for 2022/23, a questionnaire was developed in conjunction with liaison foster carers and sent to all foster carers asking them a range of questions.

- 3.2 The questions included how satisfied foster carers are with the Service, what is working well and areas for improvement.
- 3.3 57 responses were received with scores ranging from “Happy” to “Extremely Unhappy”. Overall, most of the responses received were positive.
- 3.4 The key themes identified as requiring improvement were:
- Allowances
 - Communication
 - Support
 - Training and Development
- 3.5 Some of the comments received included:
- *Becoming very disillusioned with the lack of support and the failure to be treated as a professional.*
 - *Lack of support and communication. Feeling used and abused.*
 - *Communication between Departments and keeping foster carers updated with any information regarding the children in our care to make us feel appreciated. Volunteer drivers should be used again to take pressure off foster carers to allow us to look after the children in our care.*
 - *XX has been absolutely outstanding. She has been able to deal with a very complex and difficult case with grace and dignity but also with a firm hand to ensure the best possible outcome for our foster daughter. She has kept us updated every single step of the way and we feel confident that whatever the outcome for the child the right decision will be made as XX is extremely competent at what she does.*
 - *I would like to see foster carers opinions considered a little bit more in regard to matching in adoption. Foster Carers end up knowing these children better than anyone else.*
 - *I feel lots of carers go to private agencies as there has been no rise in payments in around 18 years. Who else would work for a company that doesn't appreciate the hard work of fostering.*
 - *No holiday allowance, no paid respite, no birthday allowance, no Christmas allowance.*
 - *Allowances and foster carer fees. Inflation affects foster carers too. There's not enough of a rise to compensate, look at the rise of fuel, gas and electricity. We don't get a minimum wage, we don't get holidays, we don't get sick pay. If you value your carers take this seriously or you'll end up losing them all to IFA's.*
 - *Great communication between Social Workers and ourselves, even throughout the Covid 19 pandemic.*
- 3.6 In addition to the above, a State of the Nation survey undertaken by The Fostering Network in 2021 highlighted that both foster carers and fostering services agree that

improving the status of foster carers in the team around the child is the number one thing that will change children's experience of foster care for the better.

- 3.7 Furthermore, since 2011, The Fostering Network has been campaigning for every fostering service to commit to a Foster Carers' Charter that sets out clear expectations for how foster carers should be treated, trained and supported which is agreed by the Corporate Parents, fostering service and foster carers. A Charter can help to build understanding between those involved in delivering care to children, promoting more cohesive working in the team around the child and improving experiences and outcomes for children in care.
- 3.8 The Foster Carers' Charter supports local authorities' responsibilities as Corporate Parents and sets out a framework of rights and expectations for foster carers. It sets out mutual roles and responsibilities, which are 'owned' by both foster carers and the fostering service. It covers issues such as supervision, involvement in planning and decision making, information and payments.

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 In order to address some of the areas for improvement identified within the Foster Carer feedback and to improve the status of foster carers, it is proposed that Bridgend County Borough Council implements a Foster Carer Charter (attached as **Appendix 1**) in line with the work and recommendations of The Fostering Network following their State of the Nation report in 2021.
- 4.2 The proposed Charter sets out Bridgend Fostering Service's Vision Statement (launched with our Foster Carers at the Information, Consultation and Engagement (ICE) Event on 19th May 2022. The vision is:

We aim to ensure that Foster Carers are recognised as professionals whose views are actively sought and considered when decisions are being made about children in their care. Foster Carers will be provided with the right support and skills at the right time to ensure that children and young people in their care achieve the best possible outcomes.

- 4.3 The Charter defines the roles and responsibilities of Corporate Parents, Fostering Service and Foster Carer. In simple terms, a Corporate Parent is intended to carry out many of the roles a parent would. They may not be able to provide everything a loving parent can, but they should still be able to provide our children and young people with the best possible support and care. At the heart of corporate parenting is an intention to encourage people and organisations to do as much as they can to make sure children and young people feel in control of their lives and able to overcome the barriers they face.
- 4.4 Corporate Parents need to be satisfied, and ensure, that there is a joined-up, effective and holistic approach to meeting the needs of care experienced children through the

local planning arrangements – the Foster Carers’ Charter is one element of committing to make this a reality for foster families.

4.5 The Charter sets out the following commitment:

The Foster Carers’ Charter represents a commitment on behalf of Bridgend County Borough Council in its role as the Corporate Parent, the fostering service and the foster carer to work in partnership in the best interests of the children for whom they care. It is a promise, owned by everybody involved, to always strive for best practice.

4.6 The proposed Charter was shared with foster carers at the ICE meeting on 19th May 2022, providing opportunity for discussion amongst carers and feedback. Overall the proposal and Charter were well-received by those attending and agreement that establishing this within Bridgend County Borough Council would assist in raising the status of foster carers.

4.7 If the proposal and Charter are accepted by the Committee the next steps would be the development of an Implementation Plan which will include a self-assessment for Councillors and Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) Officers and Foster Carers which will establish a baseline and set out the actions to be taken to improve on this baseline.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 There is no effect upon the policy framework and procedure rules arising from this report.

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

6.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics, on socio-economic disadvantage or the use of the Welsh Language. It is therefore not necessary to carry out a full EIA on this policy or proposal.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

7.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with five ways of working to guide how the Authority should work to deliver well-being outcomes for people. The following is a summary to show how the five ways of working to achieve the well-being goals have been considered in this report:

- **Long Term** – Central to Children’s Social Care’s Strategy to reduce the number of children who need to be looked after, is being able to place children with foster carers who live within the County Borough allowing continuity in terms of education, health care, peers and contact with birth family. This proposal will

deliver a message to our carers about how valued their contribution is, encouraging them to continue being foster carers for BCBC.

- **Prevention and Integration** - Having a sufficient number of foster care placements available for children who cannot continue to live at home with their family is a significant challenge across Wales. There is significant work taking place as part of Maethu Cymru/Foster Wales around both recruitment and retention in recognition of the size of the challenge. The proposal in this report would support BCBC's attempts to retain the Foster Carers we currently have, thereby preventing further reduction in the number of placements that are available, by acknowledging the resilience and dedication shown by our foster carers throughout the pandemic and demonstrating that they are a valued part of the wider social care team.
- **Collaboration and Involvement** – Regular consultation events (ICE meetings) are ordinarily undertaken by Bridgend Fostering that support consultation and collaboration with carers regarding matters that are going well and issues/concerns. In addition to this the service has 5 liaison carers who regularly support foster carers and provide further opportunity for consultation and feedback. At the ICE meeting held on 19th May 2022 foster carer were consulted with regarding the proposal to introduce the attached Foster Carer Charter and this was well received by those in attendance.

8. Financial implications

8.1 There are no specific financial implications arising directly out of this report.

9. Recommendation

9.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the information contained within this report and approves the adoption and implementation of the Foster Carer Charter on behalf of the Council as Corporate Parents.

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Background documents:
Foster Carer Consultation Questionnaire