

Bridgend County Borough Council
Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr



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Bridgend County Borough Council

Foster Carers' Charter

Social Services and Well-Being

Vision Statement

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.

Roles and 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.

The corporate parent's role

The role of the corporate parent when placing and supporting children in a foster home is to:

- act in their best interests, and promote their physical, emotional and mental health and wellbeing
- encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings and take them into account
- help them to gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the Bridgend County Borough Council and its relevant partners
- promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes for them
- ensure that they are safe, and that there is stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work
- prepare them for adulthood and independent living.

The fostering service's role

The fostering service aims to provide both a stable home environment and first-rate family system, to foster and care for children who are valued, supported and encouraged to grow and develop as individuals. To achieve this aim the service recruits, trains and approves foster carers and delivers ongoing support

to them, in order to give them the skills and confidence they need to develop meaningful relationships with the children and young people they care for. In this way the service provides stable, inclusive, loving relationships within a home environment, continuing to nurture healthy attachments as part of the foster family.

The foster carer's role

Foster carers look after children by developing meaningful relationships in a safe and nurturing family environment. The stability, care and love provided by foster carers helps the child to achieve recovery and healing from past trauma and promotes resilience for the child to realise their full potential.

A foster carer's relationships with other members of the team around the child should be based on mutual trust and respect.

This charter explains what all parties can expect from one another.

What foster carers and fostering services can expect from the corporate parent

1. Working in partnership and valuing relationships

We understand that we must provide foster carers with the best possible opportunity to give the children in our care a loving, stable home, and to enable those children to enjoy a positive, nurturing experience of family life – one that does not set them apart from their peers.

We must:

- treat foster carers as experts on the child and include them in all relevant meetings where planning and decision making affect them or the children they care for
- treat foster carers without discrimination and respect them as colleagues
- value foster carers' skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals
- embed the [Keep Connected Principles \(Appendix 1\)](#) into practice to support children to remain in contact with former foster families where it is in the best interest of the child.
- respect confidentiality.

2. Information

We know that information is vital in order for foster carers to provide care that meets the child's need. We must:

- share, with the fostering service and foster carers, all the relevant information needed in order to care safely for the child and to support the child in fulfilling their potential
- provide this information in writing prior to the placement, or as soon as possible in the case of emergency placements
- secure clear and timely plans for the child's care.

3. Clarity about decisions

We recognise that for children to live a full family life, foster carers must be able to make decisions regarding the children they look after.

We must:

- ensure that foster carers can make everyday decisions that mean that their fostered child is not treated differently from their peers and can feel part of their family
- provide clarity about any decision foster carers cannot take at the outset so that everyone is clear about their respective responsibilities
- deal swiftly with any requests for decision making on matters that are outside of the foster carer's authority.

4. Communication and consultation

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

We must:

- facilitate communication between foster carers and decision makers

What foster carers can expect from the fostering service

1. Working in partnership

We recognise that foster carers have skills and expertise and can make the biggest difference to the everyday lives of children in care.

We must:

- value foster carers' skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals
- recognise that foster carers are the people who live with children every day and usually know them best
- include foster carers in all meetings that affect them and the children they care for
- ensure that our fostering service will comply with fostering regulations and guidance
- treat foster carers without discrimination and respect them as colleagues
- respect confidentiality.

2. Information

We know that information is vital for foster carers to provide care that meets the child's needs. We must:

- share all information we have about the child in order to care safely for them
- provide this information in writing prior to placement, or as soon as possible in the case of emergency placements
- provide foster carers with information on all financial matters including tax, allowances and additional entitlements
- provide foster carers with full details of all relevant policies and procedures.

3. Support

We recognise that fostering can be an isolating and challenging task, and that appropriate and timely support makes all the difference to the fostering family and to the children in their care.

We must:

- ensure there is a robust post-approval induction process
- respond promptly to requests for additional support, including respite/short break support and out of hours support
- provide foster carers with regular supervision and phone contact
- give foster carers honest and open feedback
- provide foster carers with access to 24-hour support from people with fostering expertise
- pay foster carers' allowances, expenses and fees in a timely manner
- ensure that there is a local group, recognised by the fostering service, where foster carers and their family can find support and share experiences with other fostering families
- support foster carers when facilitating contact with birth families
- follow the [Keep Connected Principles \(Appendix 1\)](#) to support foster carers to maintain contact after a child moves on where it is in the best interest of the child
- provide support to 'children who foster'
- recognise and champion the contribution foster carers and their families make to fostering.

4. Learning and development

We believe foster carers must have learning and development opportunities throughout their fostering career. This will ensure they have the skills and knowledge they need and allow them to develop their practice in order that they can help transform the lives of the children they foster.

We must:

- ensure all foster carers have an individual annual training plan
- provide foster carers and their family with appropriate, accessible and relevant training by trainers who understand fostering
- support foster carers to develop meaningful relationships with the children in their care and the other members of the team around the child
- continue to provide all foster carers with other development opportunities which make the best use of their skills and expertise, such as mentoring or providing training or support.

5. Fair treatment

We recognise that foster carers have a right to be treated fairly, no matter what the circumstances. We must:

- consult with foster carers before changing terms and conditions
- ensure honesty and openness in all our discussions and communications with foster carers
- provide a framework for dealing with allegations, including access to independent support and identified internal support mechanism, and adhere to agreed timescales
- ensure that foster carers are treated with respect, kept informed and provided with emotional support should they be subject to an allegation
- ensure that foster carers know the arrangements for the payment of fees and allowances if they are not able to foster while the subject of an allegation.

6. Communication and consultation

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

We must:

- ensure that we consult with foster carers in a meaningful way on matters that affect them
- give foster carers timely feedback from consultations
- provide clear information on how foster carers can give us feedback and report concerns.

What fostering services can expect from foster carers

1. Working in partnership

We must demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct. 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 and the child's social worker.

We must:

- demonstrate our expertise and make use of our skills to the best of our ability
- provide children with a positive experience of family life
- attend meetings about the children and young people we care for
- work with the individuals and agencies involved with the child such as the child's social worker, fostering service, school, and health and religious bodies

- work with birth parents, wider family and any other significant people in a child's life, inclusion in FGC where considered in the best interest of child.
- meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance and follow policies and procedures
- inform our supervising social worker about factors that impact on our fostering including changes in our household
- inform our supervising social worker about any difficulties that arise for us
- inform the child's social worker about any concerns we have related to the child
- respect confidentiality
- maintain an open dialogue with the fostering service.

2. Respect for the child

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

We must:

- develop a meaningful relationship with the child - understand their needs, support their growth, become an advocate and champion for them, and maintain relationships with them when they move on where in the child's best interest
- care for the child in a manner that recognises and respects their identity - including their ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural heritage
- afford the same level of protection and care to a child as we would our own child
- support the child to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age, understanding and ability
- support the child to inform the development of the services which affect their care, as appropriate to their age, understanding and ability.

3. Learning, development and support

We must access learning and development opportunities throughout our fostering career in accordance with the needs of the children we are caring for. This will ensure 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 we foster.

We must:

- be willing and able to develop our skills throughout our fostering career
- attend relevant training
- be willing to attend and contribute to support groups.



Keep Connected Principles

Children and young people who move within and out of the care system should be enabled and supported to maintain their relationships with their former foster families and other people who are significant to them.

Rationale

Moving on in foster care – to adoption, back home or to wider family, to another foster family, to residential care or to adulthood – is a time for a proper ending, not a forever goodbye, as abrupt endings are likely to lead to separation and loss issues for the child.

What we know about attachment in terms of transitions is very different from thinking 20 years ago. Previously it was believed that a child should be supported in transferring their attachment from one set of carers to another – old attachments would be replaced by a new attachment.

Now, it is widely held that an important role of the foster carer is to support a child to develop a strong internal working model¹ (incorporating resilience, confidence, self-esteem, problem solving abilities) and because of this children are capable of developing additional secure attachments.

This change in understanding is critical to the role that foster carers play in supporting a child in the transition to their new family or living arrangements, and advocates a need for the supportive and positive presence of the foster carers throughout and beyond the transition process. While there will be some occasions when it is not in a child's best interests to keep in contact with their previous foster families or others, these will be the exception rather than the rule. We need a culture shift to ensure that the starting position in any transition planning is for ongoing contact.

1. An internal working model is a set of expectations and beliefs about the self, others and the relationship between the self and others developed by John Bowlby, founder of attachment theory.

The Fostering Network has developed a set of principles, in consultation with foster carers, fostering services and organisations in the care sector, including those working with young people, to shape how transitions from and within the care system are approached across the UK. The aim is for all children and young people who are moving on from foster families to be enabled to keep in touch with them – and with other significant people in their lives – through better understanding of the importance of this, planning and support.

Principles

1. The child's relationship with their foster family is important and this relationship – alongside those with other significant people in the child's life – should not be ended abruptly, which could cause unnecessary trauma.
2. The child's feelings should be held in mind and responded to sensitively. Where it is possible, children should be consulted about the relationships that are important to them and how they would like to maintain contact.
3. Every member of the team around the child should understand the importance of the child's key relationships, particularly the foster family, throughout the transition and beyond.
4. Maintaining contact after a fostered child moves on should be routinely considered part of the role of a foster carer, and foster carers should be supported to carry this out.
5. The relationship between the foster carer and the new family, in whatever form that takes, should be promoted as an ongoing working relationship that needs to be sustained and supported sufficiently over a period of time.
6. Birth family members and adopters should be encouraged and supported to enable their children to maintain contact with former foster families.
7. Where it is not possible to maintain direct contact with foster families in the longer term, children and foster carers should be encouraged to keep in contact in other ways. This could include letters, cards, telephone calls and social media, but should not be used as substitutes for the initial face-to-face contact post-move, unless absolutely necessary.

