

Inspection Report

Foster Wales Bridgend



Level 2 the Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4WB



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Date of inspection visits:

23/06/2025, 24/06/2025, 25/06/2025,
26/06/2025, 27/06/2025

Service Information:

Operated by:	Bridgend County Borough Council Adults and Children's Services
Care Type:	LA Fostering Service
Main language(s):	English
Promotion of Welsh language and culture:	The service provider anticipates, identifies, and meets the Welsh language and culture needs of people.

Themes:



Well-being



Care & Support



Environment



Leadership & Management

Summary:

Foster Wales Bridgend recruit, assess, train, supervise and support general foster carers and connected person carers to meet the needs of children looked after. The service comprises of a general fostering team and kinship and permanence team. This inspection follows a previous inspection in November 2023 where eight areas were identified as requiring significant improvement.

This inspection has found the service has improved in five areas. Progress was initially impacted by instability in leadership, management and workforce. A new group manager and general manager have brought more stability and there is a clear commitment to develop the service to improve outcomes for children. We found improvements to safeguarding processes, oversight and governance arrangements, policies and procedures and the training and information provided to prospective carers. Areas which require further improvement include standards of care and support which includes matching processes, carers annual reviews of fostering and carer support and training. The service is undergoing a 'remodel' which is looking at all areas of service delivery. Most areas identified at this inspection as requiring improvement have already been identified by the Local Authority provider, who has provided assurances further action will be taken.

Findings:



Well-being

Children are encouraged to share their views about the care they receive. They are supported to attend their Children Looked After (CLA) reviews where possible and have access to independent advocacy. Foster carers play a vital role in advocating for children's needs and perspectives. While there are systems to gather children's views during carers' annual fostering reviews, consistency requires further improvement. Children are not always consulted about changes in their household, including the arrival of new children. The service has engaged with the Local Authority's youth voice forum, which includes care-experienced young people, to shape future service development. Efforts are ongoing to embed children's voices more meaningfully into service planning and delivery.

Carers support children's health by ensuring attendance at medical appointments, promoting healthy lifestyles, and supporting their emotional well-being. Health is monitored through annual assessments, CLA reviews, and supervision sessions. Carers act on health concerns and refer to specialist services when needed. Referrals can be made for children to receive support to understand their life journey and previous trauma, by an external provider. This provider offers weekly consultations to staff in the team, alongside training and support to carers to understand children's needs and how best to respond, using a trauma informed approach.

Carers promote school attendance and advocate for children's educational needs, working collaboratively with education professionals. The service monitors education and leisure during visits and CLA reviews, with tutoring being provided to children who require additional support with their education attainment. Children participate in enjoyable activities which support their well-being and reflect typical family life. This includes attending clubs, participating in sports, day trips and holidays. HALO leisure cards are provided to children and carers to access local facilities. This has been extended to include soft play for younger children. A charity established by carers raises funds for events and trips throughout the year for children and their foster families. These provide opportunities for children and their carers to have fun, create positive memories, develop friendships and links in the fostering community.

Children are supported to maintain meaningful relationships with family and friends, tailored to their individual needs. Some remain with carers into adulthood through "When I'm Ready" arrangements. Carers are supported if they wish to pursue Special Guardianship Orders for children, to provide them long-term stability. Safeguarding arrangements have improved, with prompt action taken when concerns arise. Staff report better communication and information sharing. However, matching processes still require improvement, as they do not always fully consider all risks to children's well-being.



Care & Support

The Local Authority works closely with colleagues from Foster Wales and has improved efforts to recruit more foster carers. Regional collaboration and targeted campaigns have been positively received and generated new carers being approved. Placement availability is an ongoing issue across the sector. There are not enough carers to meet the diverse needs of children who require foster care. Half the children who are supported by the service are cared for by connected person carers who already have an established relationship, supporting children's identity and sense of belonging. Leaders are focusing on carer retention alongside the recruitment efforts.

Referrals to the service are made to the placement team which no longer sits within the fostering service. Staff told us there has been improved collaboration and their professional input is increasingly recognised and valued when making decisions about suitable matches for children. We found improved processes around matching and these are in the early stages of being embedded consistently. This includes a matching form and records of planning meetings. Where used well, they provide valuable opportunities for key professionals to assess suitability, identify potential risks, and determine ongoing support needs. Some records do not provide a clear rationale for decision making or consider the views of all children. General carers told us they mostly receive enough information about children, prior to caring for them. Where planned, introductions are well managed. All general carers have an online profile which includes information about them, their household and photographs which are shared with children and support them to be prepared for meeting their new carers.

The service has identified an area for further development is their processes for assessing and planning longer-term care arrangements. We found no evidence of discussions with carers about their long-term capacity, commitment, strengths of these arrangements and potential impact. This would provide opportunities to identify potential risks and preventative measures which would support children's stability and longer-term outcomes. General carers are approved to care for a maximum of three children. In exceptional circumstances an exemption can be agreed for carers to care for more than three children. We found these have not been used in exceptional circumstances as described in legislation. Improvements have been made to documentation around these arrangements, but not all records of decisions evidence the service considers risks and impact on all children involved, to ensure the welfare and stability of each child is promoted. This remains an area which requires improvement.

Improvements have been made to safeguarding arrangements which ensure children are safe. Concerns are referred promptly, enabling swift intervention and support. Communication between the fostering and safeguarding teams has strengthened, ensuring there is a collaborative approach to child protection. Staff told us they are included in safeguarding meetings ensuring the fostering perspective is embedded in key decision-making processes. We found examples of comprehensive

safety plans being implemented to safeguard children's well-being. Safer care agreements have also been enhanced, are now tailored to each child's unique needs, identifying risks and providing guidance to carers on how they should mitigate these. Significant incidents are now recorded on carers records which include any safeguarding concerns and the actions taken. These include management oversight. Most staff have completed 'signs of safety' training which is embedded in other areas of children services. Leaders plan to embed this further into the fostering service.

Carers receive regular supervision support visits, which provide opportunity to discuss children's care and support. We found these did not consistently have a clear focus on how the care and support delivered is supporting children's personal outcomes. Leaders told us they are actively exploring ways to enhance the monitoring and evaluation of children's outcomes. Supervising social workers complete unannounced visits at least annually which provide a valuable opportunity to observe how children's needs are promoted and met.

Where risks are identified to children's stability, meetings are arranged and chaired by a senior social worker to identify support to prevent a breakdown in relationships. Re-unification workers based in the service provide immediate additional support to manage these risks. Leaders told us reflective discussions are being arranged for professionals who work with children who have experienced multiple breakdowns, to identify any patterns and lessons learnt.

Behaviour analysts from an external provider have been commissioned to offer support to children, carers and staff. They attend the service weekly and offer consultations, reflective discussions and training. Carers told us the trauma informed training provided is valuable and has supported them to better understand children's needs. The support children have received from the service includes therapy and life journey work to help them process their previous experiences. Carers report this service is invaluable, but more resources are needed. Leaders recognise the demand for these services and continuously review whether additional resources are needed to meet children's needs.



Environment

Foster Wales Bridgend is based within the local authority's civic offices, offering a well-equipped working environment. Staff benefit from a designated open-plan office space, situated near colleagues from other children's services teams, which supports collaboration and communication. Private meeting rooms are available to ensure confidentiality during staff supervision sessions. Service events, such as training sessions and coffee mornings, are hosted at various venues throughout the borough to enhance accessibility and engagement.

To support the service's hybrid working model, staff are provided with laptops and mobile phones. All information is securely stored electronically with password protection. An upgrade to the current database system is scheduled for early next year. The fostering panel has access to an office space within the building for in-person meetings, with the option for some members to participate virtually.

As part of the recruitment process for prospective carers, health and safety assessments are conducted to ensure the home is suitable for accommodating children's needs. Supervising social workers carry out both announced and unannounced visits where they can monitor the environment and children's bedrooms are routinely inspected. Most health and safety assessments are thorough and are reviewed as part of the carers' annual reviews. Updates are made as necessary, and any concerns identified are addressed promptly with carers.



Leadership & Management

Following the previous inspection, the service experienced ongoing instability due to changes in management and high staff turnover. This initially hindered progress in embedding necessary improvements. However, the appointment of a new Group Manager, General Team Manager, and a more stable permanent workforce over the past six months has brought greater consistency. Leaders and managers demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement and co-production, with increasing efforts to involve children, carers, and staff in shaping the service.

A comprehensive service remodelling is currently underway, reviewing all aspects of service delivery. Working groups, including carers and representatives from across children's services, have engaged in meaningful discussions. The first group focused on improving communication within the team around the child. This is an area carers told us requires improvement. Plans are in place to strengthen collaboration between children's social workers and supervising social workers to enhance carer support and promote stability for children.

Improvements have been made to oversight and governance arrangements. The service now uses its database system more effectively to track key compliance data, enabling better information management. Policies and procedures are generally adhered to and are currently under review to ensure they remain fit for purpose. Business support has significantly increased, from one business support officer to five, enhancing the service's administrative capacity. A revised quality assurance framework has been introduced to support audits of records. Quality assurance reports identify both strengths and areas for development. Further analysis is required to evaluate the impact of changes on children's outcomes, which would inform ongoing service development plans.

There are established processes for monitoring carers' compliance and performance. Carer assessments are presented to the fostering panel, which advises the local authority whether carers meet the required competencies to be approved. Annual reviews are completed to review carers approval. These are presented to panel every three years or following significant changes. The panel, led by an experienced chair, has noted improvements in the quality of reports due to increased service stability. Panel members bring diverse expertise and receive relevant training. Annual reviews incorporate carers' views and feedback from health and education professionals. Efforts to gather input from children have improved, with more child friendly feedback questionnaires now in use. However, feedback from children, household members, and social workers remains inconsistent. Workforce instability has impacted timescales for reviews with delays noted. This remains an area which requires improvement.

Leaders and managers recognise the importance of foster carer retention and are actively reviewing support packages. The Group Manager and Team Managers have met with a range of carers to hear their experiences and provide reassurance about planned improvements. Biannual consultation events offer further opportunities for carers to share their views with leaders and managers. While many carers feel optimistic about the proposed changes, some remain cautious

due to the service's history of frequent changes. Multiple changes in supervising social workers have affected some carers. Although a few agency workers remain, there is a clear commitment to recruiting a suitable, stable, permanent workforce.

Training, advice, and guidance for prospective carers have improved. Prospective general carers now complete "Skills to Foster" training before approval, while connected person carers attend external preparation sessions. Where attendance is not possible for connected carers prior to their approval, assessing social workers provide alternative resources to ensure carers are well-informed. A foster carer handbook outlines roles, responsibilities, and available support. The service is working with regional partners to develop a formal induction programme for carers in their first year of approval.

Carer supervision is held regularly and considers their well-being, though records are not always consistently shared. The service hosts regular coffee mornings for carers which include guest speakers and provide opportunities for peer support. Carers told us training is an area which requires improvement. Internal audits show frequent cancellations due to low uptake. Carers cite short notice confirmation, inconvenient scheduling as barriers and report delays to completing mandatory training. The service is working with the training team to address these issues. We found no evidence carers have learning and development plans and records lacked analysis on how training has supported carers to undertake their role, meet the needs of children in their care and support positive outcomes.

Carers report the current out-of-hours support does not fully meet their needs, with difficulties reaching the emergency duty team and obtaining timely guidance. Leaders have acknowledged this and are considering how carers can feel better supported out of hours. Carers value the support provided by the services 'liaison carers', who assist with new carer inductions and serve as a point of contact for advice and guidance. The service is in the process of redeveloping these roles, to align to the national approach around fostering well-being. This will include more formal arrangements which aim to enhance the support provided to carers.

Managers told us they feel well supported in their roles and welcome the news of two deputy manager posts being created. These posts will ensure operational oversight while managers have opportunity to drive forward service developments and improvements. Staff feedback we received was mostly positive. Despite previous challenges, there is a growing sense of stability and confidence in the service's leadership. Staff report managers are approachable and they feel well supported. They told us improvements have been made to the collaboration between the fostering service and care experienced team. Staff express pride in working for Foster Wales Bridgend, optimism about future plans and would recommend working at the service.

Areas identified for improvement

Where we identify **Areas for Improvement** but we have not found outcomes for people to be at immediate or significant risk, we discuss these with the provider. We expect the provider to take action and we will follow this up at the next inspection.

The table below show the area's for improvement we have identified.

Summary of Areas for Improvement	Date identified
Further improvements are required to ensure all children are well matched with their carers, supporting their stability and overall well-being.	23/06/25
Further improvements are required to ensure systems for monitoring and reviewing carers' responsibilities are consistent and provide assurance children's needs are met.	23/06/25
Further improvements are required to training and support provided to carers, to ensure this supports children to receive responsive, informed care.	23/06/25

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