

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



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**Bridgend County
Borough Council
Special Guardianship
Orders
Financial Policy
March 2026**

Appendix 1

Document Name and Location	Special Guardianship Orders Financial Policy
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Updates, Revisions and Amendments

Version	Details of Change	Date
2	Full review of policy, removing means tested financial assessments and moving towards a no detriment policy for SGO carers.	March 2026

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with the Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) Special Guardianship Policy, which outlines the legislative framework and procedural requirements in relation to Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs). This policy relates specifically to the provision of financial support to Special Guardians and the governance arrangements for that support
- 1.2 Support to Special Guardians, including financial provision, is set out within the Special Guardianship (Wales) Regulations 2005, as amended by the Special Guardianship (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2018, and the Special Guardianship Code of Practice on the exercise of social services functions in relation to Special Guardianship Orders (2018).

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- 1.3 The Local Authority is required to make arrangements for the provision of financial support to Special Guardians where necessary to secure or maintain the SGO arrangement and to promote stability and permanence for the child.
- 1.4 This revised policy adopts a non-detrimental approach by removing the routine means testing calculation when determining the core Special Guardianship Allowance. The Local Authority will not routinely assess disposable income, household expenditure or capital in order to determine the weekly allowance payable. The core allowance will instead be determined by reference to Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) basic fostering allowance rates, subject to required child-related benefit deductions and, where applicable, the Universal Credit child element as required by legislation, and the review arrangements set out in this policy.
- 1.5 The purpose of this approach is to ensure that Special Guardians are not financially disadvantaged when providing permanence for children who would otherwise remain in foster care.
- 1.6 This document sets out:
- the basis on which the core allowance is determined and administered;
 - the role of child-related benefit deductions to avoid duplication of child welfare support;
 - the circumstances in which supplementary financial support may be provided;
 - the responsibilities of Special Guardians receiving support;
 - arrangements for review, variation, suspension and termination; and
 - governance arrangements to support lawful and consistent decision-making.

2. Financial Support for Prospective Special Guardians

- 2.1 The Regulations provide that financial support may be provided where necessary to ensure that arrangements for an SGO can be secured or maintained. Financial support should not be the sole reason for a Special Guardianship arrangement failing to proceed or failing to survive.

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- 2.2 The Local Authority will ensure that financial support arrangements are transparent and clearly communicated to prospective Special Guardians so that applicants can make informed decisions about the implications of Special Guardianship, including understanding the extent of parental responsibility and the changes from a looked after arrangement.
- 2.3 Financial support can be provided as:
- a single lump sum payment to meet a specific assessed need;
 - a series of lump sum payments to meet a specific assessed need; or
 - a periodic or regular payment payable at intervals determined by the Local Authority to meet an assessed ongoing need.
- 2.4 The type, amount, duration, conditions and review arrangements for financial support must be set out in the Special Guardianship Support Plan.
- 2.5 The Local Authority may begin providing financial support in circumstances including (but not limited to):
- where a child subject to an SGO is living with the Special Guardian and financial support is necessary to enable the Special Guardian to continue to care for the child; and
 - where a child in respect of whom an SGO is sought lives with a prospective Special Guardian and financial support is necessary to enable the prospective Special Guardian to continue to care for the child pending the Court's decision.
- 2.6 Financial support must be linked to the child's needs and the sustainability of the arrangement. The Local Authority will ensure that the financial support offered complements and does not duplicate financial support available through the child benefits and tax credits systems.
- 2.7 Financial support must not include an element of remuneration for the care of the child, except where permitted by Regulation (including circumstances where the Special Guardian was previously the child's foster carer and transitional arrangements for a fee element may apply).

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2.8 The Local Authority will maintain operational documentation to support the implementation of this policy, including the *Special Guardianship Financial Assessment and Review Form* (Appendix 1). These documents may be updated from time to time to reflect changes in operational practice or administrative processes. Such updates will not constitute a change to this policy.

3. Overview of the Financial Support Process

3.1 Financial support assessments will be initiated:

- following a decision that a full assessment for an SGO will proceed;
- as part of a Connected Persons assessment; or
- where a potential eligible applicant requests a provisional financial determination to inform decision making.
- Any allowance payable will be paid into a nominated special guardian bank account.
- The financial assessment and subsequent reviews will be completed using the BCBC Special Guardianship Financial Assessment and Review Form (see Appendix 1).

3.2 The allocated Assessing Social Worker is responsible for ensuring that financial support arrangements are considered as part of the assessment and are recorded within the Special Guardianship Support Plan.

3.3 Under this policy, the Local Authority will determine the proposed core allowance by reference to the relevant basic fostering allowance rate (age-banded) and the required benefit deductions set out in Section 5.

The Assessing Social Worker must ensure that:

- the applicant(s) understand the basis of the allowance and deductions;
- the applicant(s) understand their responsibility to claim relevant benefits;
- any proposed supplementary support is identified, evidenced and authorised; and

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- transitional arrangements for former foster carers (where applicable) are considered.

3.4 The Assessing Social Worker must ensure that the Support Plan includes:

- the proposed amount of financial support;
- the start date and frequency of payments;
- the deduction child related benefits
- the arrangements for review, variation and termination; and
- any conditions attached to the financial support and the consequences of not meeting them.

3.5 Financial arrangements must be authorised at the appropriate level prior to submission to Court, in accordance with Section 6.4 (supplementary support and transitional fee arrangements) and internal financial delegation requirements.

3.6 Following the granting of the SGO, written confirmation must be provided to the Special Guardian(s) setting out:

- the amount, start date and frequency of payments;
- the deductions applied and the basis for those deductions;
- the requirement to claim benefits and provide evidence;
- the requirement to provide annual statements and supporting documentation; and
- the circumstances in which support may be varied, suspended or terminated.

3.7 A copy of correspondence and supporting documents must be retained on the child's electronic record within the Council's electronic case management system.

4. Required Documentation

4.1 Although routine means testing is removed, the Local Authority must administer financial support lawfully and in accordance with the Regulations, including

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ensuring that support does not duplicate benefits and that annual review requirements are met.

- 4.2 Documentation requirements are therefore limited to what is necessary to:
- verify benefit entitlement and apply deductions correctly;
 - confirm that the child continues to reside with the Special Guardian; and
 - identify any material and exceptional financial windfall that may trigger a review of the continued necessity of support.
- 4.3 Special Guardians are required to apply for Child Benefit within the first 3 months of the SGO being granted and provide evidence of the award.
- 4.4 Where applicable, Special Guardians are required to apply for and provide evidence of the Universal Credit child element awarded in respect of the child.
- 4.5 Where benefits are pending at the time SGO payments commence, the Local Authority will apply a practical approach to avoid delay in establishing support and will adjust deductions once benefit entitlement is confirmed. This will include deducting Child Benefit from the date the SGO was granted as this is a universal benefit eligible to everyone who has a child in their care which will be backdated by HMRC; and adjusting payments should Universal Child Elements payments be awarded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Any necessary adjustment will be communicated in writing.
- 4.6 Special Guardians in receipt of financial support must provide an annual statement of their circumstances, including:
- a written disclosure of household income sources
 - any changes to a Special Guardian's name, address or other contact information.
 - evidence of benefits relevant to deductions; and
 - a signed declaration confirming that the information provided in and for the annual statement is complete and accurate, and that they understand their responsibility to notify the Local Authority of any exceptional financial change.

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- 4.7 Special Guardians must provide three months' bank statements for all active current accounts held by the Special Guardian(s).
- 4.8 Bank statements are required to enable the Local Authority to:
- identify any significant one-off capital receipt that may constitute a material and exceptional financial windfall;
 - identify evidence that the child may no longer reside with the Special Guardian; and
 - support statutory annual review obligations and the proper administration of public funds.
- 4.9 The review of bank statements is limited to identifying obvious exceptional windfall events or indications relevant to residency. Officers are not required to undertake routine analysis of income patterns, assess disposable income, or apply means testing in determining the core allowance. Bank statements are reviewed solely to identify exceptional one-off financial windfalls or indications that the child may no longer reside with the Special Guardian.
- 4.10 Where documentation indicates a material transaction that may represent an exceptional financial windfall (for example, a large settlement payment), the Local Authority may request proportionate clarification.
- 4.11 For the purposes of this policy, an exceptional financial windfall refers to a substantial one-off financial receipt that materially alters the household's financial circumstances. Examples may include inheritance, lottery winnings, or significant legal settlements. The existence of such a payment will trigger a review of whether financial support remains necessary to secure or maintain the Special Guardianship arrangement.
- 4.12 Any such request must:
- be reasonable and proportionate to the issue identified;
 - be authorised by a Team Manager (or above where appropriate);
 - be recorded on the Council's electronic case management system; and
 - be communicated to the Special Guardian in writing, setting out what is required and why.

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5. Determining the Core Allowance and Deductions

- 5.1 The maximum rate of the core Special Guardianship Allowance is the equivalent of the basic fostering allowance rates, applied by age band. This approach reflects the Local Authority's commitment to supporting permanency arrangements while ensuring that Special Guardians are not financially disadvantaged in comparison with kinship foster care arrangements.
- 5.2 The Local Authority will not apply routine means testing of household income to determine whether the core allowance is payable.
- 5.3 In accordance with the Regulations, financial support must complement and not duplicate support available through the child related benefits or allowance system.
- 5.4 The core allowance will therefore be calculated as:
- the applicable basic fostering allowance (age banded), less
 - Child Benefit payable in respect of the child; and
 - the Universal Credit child element payable in respect of the child (where applicable).
- 5.5 Deductions will be applied based on evidence provided by the Special Guardian. Where entitlement changes, the Special Guardian must notify the Local Authority promptly.
- 5.6 The core allowance will increase in line with any approved annual uplift applied to BCBC fostering allowance rates, subject to the Council's annual approval of fostering allowance levels.
- 5.7 The uplift will be applied administratively from the same date as fostering allowance changes. This uplift will not require an annual review to be completed.
- 5.8 All existing Special Guardians in receipt of financial support at the date of implementation will transfer to the revised calculation arrangements from the effective date.
- 5.9 No Special Guardian will receive a reduction in their existing level of financial support as a result of implementation of this policy.

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5.10 Payments will not be backdated. Changes will take effect from the implementation date of this policy once approved by Cabinet.

6. Supplementary Allowance

6.1 The Local Authority may provide supplementary financial support where it is necessary to meet an assessed need in order to secure or maintain the Special Guardianship arrangement.

6.2 Supplementary support:

- is not automatic;
- must be based on assessed need and supported by evidence;
- must be set out within the Support Plan, including purpose, amount and duration; and
- must be authorised at the appropriate management level.

6.3 Supplementary support may be provided as a one-off payment, a series of payments, or periodic payments, depending on the nature of the assessed need.

6.4 Where an SGO is granted to an applicant who previously provided foster care for the child, the core allowance will be determined in accordance with Section 5.

6.5 Where the applicant previously received a fostering fee/skill element in respect of the child, the Local Authority may, in accordance with Regulation, provide a transitional periodic payment equivalent to the relevant fee element for a period of up to two years to support adjustment from Fostering to Special Guardianship.

6.6 The continuation of any fee element:

- must be authorised by the Head of Children's Social Care;
- must be recorded within the Support Plan, including the duration and end date;

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- will not automatically increase in line with inflation or fostering fee changes unless explicitly authorised; and
 - will cease at the end of the agreed period unless an extension has been approved.
- 6.7 In exceptional circumstances, where cessation of the fee element would place the arrangement at risk, an extension beyond two years may be authorised by the Head of Children’s Social Care. Any extension must be supported by a written rationale and reviewed annually.
- 6.8 Supplementary support may be considered for needs including (but not limited to):
- setting up costs and essential equipment required to meet a child’s assessed needs;
 - adaptations to the home to support a child with a disability;
 - therapeutic services required to meet the child’s assessed needs;
 - facilitation of contact arrangements where costs are necessary to maintain the arrangement and support the child’s welfare;
 - mediation or other support where necessary to preserve stability; and
 - court-related costs where evidenced and necessary to secure the arrangement.
- 6.9 Supplementary payments must not duplicate provision that can reasonably be expected to be met through benefits or other sources.
- 6.10 Authorisation must be obtained in accordance with delegated authority and internal financial procedures. As a minimum:
- supplementary payments up to £500 per financial year require Team Manager authorisation;
 - supplementary payments exceeding £500 per financial year require Group Manager authorisation; and
 - significant or exceptional arrangements (including transitional fee continuation) require Head of Children’s Social Care authorisation.

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- 6.11 These thresholds operate alongside the Council's Financial Procedure Rules and may be updated in line with corporate financial governance arrangements.
- 6.12 Where supplementary support is time-limited, the end date must be explicit within the Support Plan and review arrangements must be recorded.
- 6.13 BCBC will provide an annual incentive payment equivalent to 50% of council tax paid by Special Guardians, subject to:
- proof of payment being provided;
 - Special guardians having offered care for 90 days or more in the previous financial year;
 - payment being made annually in arrears; and
 - eligibility ceasing where the SGO ceases.
- 6.14 Operational arrangements for this reimbursement are governed by the Cabinet decision approving the scheme and associated implementation guidance. The policy does not replicate procedural detail that may be updated through operational delivery.

7. Special Guardian(s) Responsibilities

- 7.1 Special Guardians in receipt of financial support must notify the Local Authority within 14 days of:
- any change of address or contact details;
 - changes in household composition that are relevant to the child's living arrangements;
 - the child ceasing to reside permanently with them;
 - the child ceasing full-time education (between 16 and 18) and commencing employment;
 - the SGO ceasing to have effect; and
 - any exceptional financial change in circumstances (for example inheritance, lottery win or significant settlement).
- 7.2 The Local Authority must also be notified immediately if:

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- the child dies; or
- the child no longer resides permanently with the Special Guardian.

7.3 Special Guardians must notify the Local Authority of changes to benefit entitlement promptly to ensure deductions are correctly applied.

7.4 Special Guardians must complete and submit the annual statement and supporting documentation required under Section 4 within the timescales set by the Local Authority.

7.5 Failure to comply may result in suspension or termination of payments in accordance with Sections 8 and 9.

8. Financial Support Review

8.1 The Local Authority will review the provision of financial support at least annually, in accordance with statutory requirements.

The review will be undertaken using the BCBC Special Guardianship Financial Assessment and Review Form (Appendix 1).

8.2 Annual reviews will focus on:

- confirming the child continues to reside with the Special Guardian;
- confirming benefit entitlement and deductions are correctly applied;
- confirming completion of the annual statement and documentation requirements; and
- identifying any exceptional financial windfall that may require a review of the continued necessity of support.

8.3 The annual review documentation will be issued three months in advance of the review due date. Business Support will record the issue and return of documents on the Council's electronic case management system.

8.4 Upon receipt, the reviewing officer will:

- verify benefit evidence to ensure deductions remain accurate;
- confirm residency status through case record information and the annual statement; and

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- conduct a proportionate review of bank statements limited to identifying obvious exceptional windfall events or indications relevant to residency.
- 8.5 Where there is no indication of an exceptional windfall event and benefit deductions are correctly applied, the allowance will continue.
- 8.6 Where review documentation is not returned by the required date, the Local Authority will:
- in accordance with Regulation, issue a 28 day notice letter advising that unless the documentation and information for the annual Review is received by the end of the notice period, payments will cease on said date until the documentation is received; and
 - record all contact attempts on the Council's electronic case management system.
- 8.7 Failure to provide documentation may result in suspension of payments. Payment will not be reinstated until the required documentation is received and the review has been completed.
- 8.8 Where an annual statement or documentation indicates a material and exceptional financial windfall (for example inheritance, lottery win or significant settlement), the case will be escalated to the Team Manager.
- 8.9 Any decision to undertake an exceptional review must be proportionate and authorised at Group Manager level or above.
- 8.10 Following an exceptional review, the Local Authority may determine that:
- support remains necessary and will continue; or
 - support should be varied or ceased because it is no longer necessary to secure or maintain the arrangement.
- 8.11 Any decision to vary or cease support following an exceptional review must be confirmed in writing with reasons and must be recorded on the child's electronic record.

9. Termination of Payments

- 9.1 Payment of financial support will terminate on the earliest occurrence of:

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- the SGO ceasing to have effect (including discharge or variation by the Court where relevant);
- the child attaining the age of 18, subject to Section 9.2;
- the child ceasing to reside permanently with the Special Guardian;
- the death of the child;
- the Special Guardian refusing to submit required documentation for the annual review; or
- a decision following an exceptional financial change review that support is no longer necessary.

9.2 Where the child is aged 16 to 18, the Local Authority may require confirmation of the child's educational status to determine whether support remains payable in accordance with statutory requirements and the Support Plan.

9.3 The Special Guardian must provide evidence of enrolment in full-time education when requested. If the child ceases full-time education and enters employment post 16 years old, financial support will cease.

9.4 Where a household receives financial support in respect of more than one child under an SGO, termination for one child will not automatically terminate payments for other children. A review will be undertaken to confirm ongoing eligibility for the remaining child(ren).

9.5 Termination must be confirmed in writing to the Special Guardian(s) and must include:

- the reason for termination;
- the date the payment will cease; and
- information about overpayment recovery where applicable.

10. Overpayments and Recovery

10.1 An overpayment may arise where financial support has been paid in excess of the amount properly due under this policy.

10.2 Circumstances in which an overpayment may occur include, but are not limited to:

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- failure to notify changes in circumstances in accordance with Section 7;
- delay in notifying that the child has ceased to reside permanently;
- delay in notifying changes to benefit entitlement leading to incorrect deductions;
- payments continuing after termination conditions have been met; or
- administrative error.

10.3 As per section 8, where an overpayment is identified, this must be recorded on the Council's electronic case management system and referred to the Team Manager without delay.

10.4 The Local Authority will consider whether recovery is appropriate, taking account of:

- the cause of the overpayment;
- whether misrepresentation or non-disclosure is indicated;
- the financial impact on the household; and
- the potential impact on the stability of the arrangement.

10.5 The Local Authority may determine that recovery in full, recovery in part, or waiver is appropriate depending on the circumstances and the duty to safeguard public funds.

10.6 Where recovery is appropriate, the Local Authority may:

- agree a repayment plan with the Special Guardian;
- offset the overpayment against future payments; and/or
- recover through corporate debt recovery procedures.

10.7 Any recovery arrangement must be confirmed in writing and recorded on the child's electronic record.

11. Fraud and Misrepresentation

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- 11.1 Special Guardians have a continuing responsibility to provide accurate information in relation to financial support, including disclosure of exceptional financial windfall events and relevant changes of circumstance.
- 11.2 Where the Local Authority has reasonable grounds to believe false or misleading information has been knowingly provided, or that material information has been deliberately withheld, it may:
- suspend payments pending investigation;
 - cease payments;
 - recover overpayments; and
 - refer the matter in accordance with corporate fraud procedures.
- 11.3 Any decision to cease support on the basis of misrepresentation must be authorised at Group Manager level or above and confirmed in writing with reasons.

12. Recording and Governance

- 12.1 All decisions relating to financial support must be documented within the Support Plan and recorded on the Council's electronic case management system. Records must include:
- the basis for support;
 - the amount and frequency of payment;
 - deductions applied and the evidence relied upon;
 - any supplementary support, including purpose and duration;
 - authorisation level; and
 - review dates and outcomes.
- 12.2 All correspondence confirming commencement, variation, suspension or termination of support must be retained on the child's electronic record.
- 12.3 The Directorate will maintain oversight of:
- compliance with statutory review requirements;
 - consistency in application of this policy;

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- expenditure against budget; and
- authorisation and governance compliance.

12.4 Financial support arrangements may be subject to internal audit and must be capable of audit scrutiny.

13. Data Protection

13.1 All personal and financial information obtained for the purposes of administering financial support will be processed in accordance with UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018, and Council information governance requirements.

13.2 Information will be used only for the lawful purposes of administering support, applying deductions, undertaking required reviews, and safeguarding public funds.

13.3 Information will be stored securely, accessed only by authorised personnel, and retained in accordance with corporate retention schedules.

14. Equality and Fair Application

14.1 The Local Authority will apply this policy consistently and fairly.

14.2 Decisions to vary, suspend or terminate financial support will be based on evidence, authorised appropriately, and confirmed in writing with reasons.

14.3 In exercising discretion under this policy, the Local Authority will have regard to the welfare of the child and the impact on the stability of the arrangement.

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15. Appendix 1

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



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Special Guardianship Financial Assessment and Review **Form**

Name of 1st Special Guardian

_____ (Mr/Mrs/Miss/Other)

Date of birth: _____

Home Address:

Home Tel No: _____

Mobile No: _____

Email

Address: _____

Name of 2nd Special Guardian

_____ (Mr/Mrs/Miss/Other)

Date of birth: _____

Home Address:

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Home Tel No: _____

Mobile No: _____

Email Address: _____

Details of Income

Income Sources	Frequency Wkly/fortnightly/4 weekly	Amount Applicant 1	Amount Applicant 2
Salary			
If self-employed: please provide a copy of your latest tax return and any confirmation these have been accepted.			
Benefits/Allowances Please stat			
Income Support			
Job Seekers Allowance			
Universal Credit			
State Pension			
Pension Credit			
Occupational Pension			
Private Pension			
Chid Benefit			
Universal Credit Child Element			
Employment Support Allowance			
Other:			
Other:			
Other:			
Savings/Investments/ISA Please list details of all savings and investments and provide your latest 3 month statements for each account or yearly statement if applicable			
Type of Income received	Frequency	Amount	Amount
Name			
Name			
Name			
Name			
Do you have any other source of Income?	Frequency	Amount	Amount

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Have you gained a significant income as described in the SGO Financial Policy that you need to declare? Please provide details including amounts and frequency received.			
Name			
Name			
Name			
Name			

Please provide copies of bank statements for the last 3 months for all accounts

Please read this declaration carefully before you sign and date it.

- I/We declare that the information I/We have given on this form is correct and complete.
- I/We understand that you will use the information provided to assess if I/We remain entitled to financial support. I/We agree to you, where needed, checking some of the information with other council departments within Bridgend County Borough Council and with other councils. You may give some information to other council departments and government organisations as required by law.
- I/We know that I/We must let the Benefits Team and/or Permanence Team of the council know immediately in writing about any changes in my circumstances which might affect the amount of support I/We receive.
- I/We understand that if I/We knowingly give false information, action may be taken against me/us to recover all or part of the financial support I/We have been paid.

Signature of 1st Applicant: _____ **Date:**

Signature of 2nd Applicant: _____ **Date:**

How we collect and use information

- We will use the information we collect, both on this form and from supporting evidence you give us, to process your claim for a support allowance. Once we collect your information we may share it with other council departments to help provide a complete service to you.

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- We may check information you (or anybody else) have provided with other information we hold. We may also get information from other bodies and organisations, or give information to them to check the accuracy of your information, to prevent or detect crime, to protect public funds in other ways or for reasons allowed by law.
- We will use your information in line with the General Data Protection Regulations 2016 and the Data Protection Act 2018. We (Bridgend County Borough Council) are the data controller for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 2018.
- If you want to know more about what happens to the information that we hold about you and your rights and our obligations to you, the councils Fair Processing statement is available on the data protection pages of our website.