

Bridgend County Borough Council

**Social Services and Wellbeing
Directorate**

Children Social Care

**When I am Ready (WIR) Scheme
Policy**

April 2016

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The law and regulations supporting this document can be found in:

- Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (SSWBA) 2014
- Part 6 Code of Practice on Looked After and Accommodated Children 2015
- The Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- “When I am Ready” Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers. Welsh Government (October 2012)
- The Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003
- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- The Care Leavers (Wales) Regulations 2015
- The Care Planning Placement and Case Review (Wales) 2015
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

1. Policy Statement

Bridgend County Borough Council wants all our children and young people to

- thrive and make the best of their talents;
- live healthy and safe lives;
- be confident and caring individuals throughout their lives;
- know and receive their rights.

Children and young people themselves also aspire to this vision of what their lives can and should be.

The Local Authority is committed to ensuring it provides high quality services, considering a range of options to promote positive outcomes and meet the needs of each child under its corporate parenting responsibilities.

The Local Authority endeavours to ensure that all of our Looked after Children will be provided with the right type of placement which meets their needs, provides them with some choice about where they live, and enables them to benefit from positive experiences similar to those experienced by other children of the same age. Placements should support Looked After Children to transition into adulthood with confidence, a strong sense of self-worth, and the skills and abilities to thrive.

If good outcomes are achieved, the different needs of children and young people – social, physical, emotional, cultural and learning including the benefits of good health and being part of a stable and nurturing family will aid children and young people to develop the necessary personal and social skills or other attributes which will secure their safety and wellbeing during their transition into adulthood.

‘When I am Ready’ is a scheme developed by the Welsh Government in partnership with local government and key third sector partners to enable care leavers to continue to live with their former foster carers once they turn 18. The ‘When I am Ready’ Arrangement can continue until the young person reaches their 21st birthday or completes their agreed programme of education or training after their 21st birthday, if continuously living in the arrangement since their 18th birthday.

Section 108(3) of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act places a duty on Local Authorities to provide support for young people and foster carers who wish to remain in ‘post 18 living arrangements’. As an adult, the young person is no longer legally ‘in care’ or ‘looked after’ and the arrangement therefore differs from a foster placement.

The WIR Scheme is part of a wider package of support which the Local Authority provides to young people leaving care.

This policy details the arrangements for the implementation of WIR arrangements within Bridgend County Borough Council.

2. Aims of 'When I am Ready' (WIR)

2.1 This policy reflects the Local Authority's commitment to improve outcomes for children who are looked after. The aims of Bridgend CBC's 'When I am Ready' scheme are:

- Development of Independent Living Skills – Young people leaving care will receive on-going support from their WIR Providers to assist them in developing the necessary confidence, emotional and practical skills to prepare them for their transition to independent living.
- Stability and continuity - Young people leaving care continue to have security, protection, practical and emotional support and can continue to live in a supportive family and household environment.
- Improve the life chances for looked after children - The opportunities for care leavers to access post-18 education, training and employment opportunities are maximised and the number of young people experiencing periods of homelessness or housing instability is reduced.
- Provide young people with increased opportunities to exercise voice and control over their lives - Young people can influence the timing of their transition from care, and are not obliged to leave their former foster family before they feel ready to move to greater independence.

3. Entitlement to WIR

3.1 A 'WIR' arrangement can usually be made for a young person if they are in a situation described below:

- The young person was a 'looked after child' immediately prior to their 18th birthday and was living with foster carers in a placement arranged by the Local Authority AND
- The carers were acting as approved foster carers for the young person immediately prior to their 18th birthday AND
- The young person is deemed, under current legislation, to be an eligible child within the meaning of the Children Act 1989 immediately before they reached 18 ('Category 1' young people under the SSWBA 2014 AND
- The young person and the foster carers both wish to enter into a 'When I am Ready' arrangement, and the arrangement has been set out in the young person's pathway plan AND
- The Local Authority is satisfied that such an arrangement is not inconsistent with the young person's well-being AND
- A proportion of the allowance paid to the 'When I am Ready' carer will be paid for by the Local Authority.

As long as the young person is in a situation outlined above a WIR arrangement can usually be made regardless of whether they are in full or part time education, training or employment or none of these activities. However, there will be an expectation that any young person accessing WIR will commit to undertaking skills development for the future.

3.2 If a young person is aged under 18 is in one of the follow circumstances and tells us that they would like the opportunity to live in a WIR arrangement after they turn 18 we will explore this option. The circumstances are:

- A young person is under 18 and living in a residential home
- A young person under 18 would like to remain in a stable setting post 18 but the foster placement in in danger of breaking down before the young person's 18th birthday
- A young person would like to remain in a stable setting but not with their current carers
- A young person is under 18 and would like to remain in a stable setting but their current carers do not wish to enter into a WIR arrangement

It would be a usual expectation that the young person has remained stable in the foster placement for a period of at least 6 months prior to turning 18 and all the other aspects of the scheme's criteria above are met. Young people living in residential accommodation cannot stay in that setting in a WIR Arrangement beyond their 18th birthday.

3.3 WIR arrangements are transitional and the expectation is that the young person will move on to more independent living arrangements. There are young people whose care and support needs are complex and ongoing and for who a move on to independent living will not be an appropriate longer term option. The WIR scheme cannot be used to facilitate an Adult (Shared Lives) placement and cannot be used as an interim arrangement whilst such a placement is being made.

4. Legal status

4.1 WIR arrangements are centred on family, stability and preparation for independence. Legally a WIR arrangement is recognised as a 'post 18 living arrangement' between adults not a foster care placement.

4.2 As part of the WIR arrangement the young person and WIR carers will agree how they will live together as adults. This will be outlined in a Living Together Agreement (LTA) which replaces the young person's Care Plan and Placement Information Record. This will cover the same range of issues whilst focusing on the young person's specific independent living needs associated with them remaining in a WIR arrangement. The LTA will outline what is expected of both the young person and the WIR Provider to ensure that the young person is adequately prepared for their transition to independent living.

4.3 The WIR Provider and the young person must sign an Excluded License Agreement which outlines the commercial basis on which the young person is affectively lodging in the WIR Provider's home

Despite the changes in legal status, the over-riding principle is that the young person continues to be part of the home and that he or she remains a member of the family.

Young Person

- No longer a 'Looked After Child' or 'Accommodated'.
- Will be a Category 3 Care Leaver (Care Leaver aged 18 or over) and is entitled to relevant support – including a Pathway Plan, personal advisor and certain financial entitlements.
- Will not be living at home as a 'foster child' but as an 'excluded licensee'.
- Will be expected to make financial contributions to the WIR Provider.

Foster Carer(s)

- No longer foster carers for the young person but 'WIR providers'.
- Will no longer receive 'Fostering Allowance' for the young person. Separate WIR financial arrangements apply.
- Can remain registered foster carers for other children. Fostering regulations must continue to be complied where Provider remains registered.
- Must have appropriate household and liability insurance.

Full details of the WIR financial arrangements can be found in the separate WIR Financial Arrangements Policy document.

5. Planning and Preparation for a WIR Arrangement

- 5.1 The young person and the foster carer will be talked through the WIR scheme by their Social Worker / YPA or Supervising Social Worker and will be given written information around the time that the young person turns 15 ½.

Written information will include:

- WIR Policy. A copy of the policy will also be available online and updates will be provided on any changes to the policy or practice around 'WIR' which occur during the period covered by the pathway plan or during the young person's WIR arrangement.
- What a 'When I am Ready' arrangement is and eligibility for the scheme
- The financial implications for young people and carers
- A summary of the key arrangements, roles and responsibilities of the young person, the WIR Provider and others
- Information about how to request an arrangement
- Alternative supported accommodation options
- Information about the support available from the Local Authority to a young person and their WIR Provider(s) during the course of a 'When I am Ready' arrangement
- Information on other sources of advice and support, including advocacy services and peer support groups available to the young person

- 5.2 The Supervising Social Worker should initially gain the views of the foster carer before any discussion takes place with the young person. The young person's Social Worker also needs to assess how appropriate such an arrangement would be for the young person and explore all accommodation options open to them.

- 5.3 If a WIR arrangement is thought to be suitable and both the young person and the carer express a wish to enter in to the arrangement, this will be written in more detail at the first Pathway Plan review completed after the young person's 16th birthday. The plan will be monitored through the Pathway Planning process until the age of 17½ when a more formal assessment will take place and be presented to the Accommodation and Permanence Panel for agreement. Approval and review of WIR providers will take place at the WIR panel will meets on a quarterly basis and is chaired by the Group Manager for Regulated Services
- 5.4 An excluded licence agreement must be agreed and signed for all WIR placements

6. Support, Monitoring and Reviewing Arrangements

- 6.1 Once the WIR arrangement is operational, the young person's allocated social worker is responsible for co-ordinating the provision of services and has a central role in keeping in touch with the young person and monitoring the progress of the WIR arrangement.
- 6.2 The young person can request advice at any time from their allocated social worker or personal advisor and will continue to have all entitlements consistent with their care leaver status.
- 6.3 Where other foster children remain in placement, the Supervising Social Worker from the Local Authority Fostering Service will continue to provide support to the carer in relation to the WIR young person when they transition to WIR Provider. However, where no foster children remain in the home or in the case of WIR transition from Independent Foster Agency placements, the role of the Supervising Worker will be undertaken by a member of staff from Bridgend Foster Care
- 6.4 The WIR arrangements and Living Together Agreement should be reviewed at the Pathway Plan Review not less than every 6 months. The Living Together agreement provides a framework for monitoring; this should include a review of what is working well and outcomes achieved by the young person as well as any problems or difficulties which have emerged. A review can be arranged earlier by agreement between the young person, WIR Provider and professionals involved. All WIR placements will be expected to evidence outcomes as requested by Welsh Government.

7. Duration of and Ending a WIR Arrangement

- 7.1 The 'WIR' arrangement extends until: -
- The young person leaves the 'WIR' arrangement, or;
 - The young person reaches their 21st birthday if continuously living in the arrangement or;
 - The young person completes their agreed programme of education or training after their 21st birthday, if continuously living in the arrangement since their 18th birthday.

- In cases of exceptional circumstances, it is deemed by the Local Authority that the placement is no longer consistent with the young person's wellbeing. The Group Manager for Disability, Transition and case Management or the Group Manager for Regulated Services, will be responsible for agreeing that a placement is ended.

7.2 The 'WIR' arrangement can be ended before the young person's 21st birthday by the young person or the 'WIR' Provider giving relevant notice. Both parties should give as much notice as possible and in most circumstances a minimum of 28 days' notice. In extreme circumstances, where an arrangement suddenly and irreparably breaks down, it may be considered reasonable for the young person to leave on the same day (although this will be extremely rare, and the Local Authority would continue to have a duty of care if this did happen). The parallel move on plan would become active immediately.

7.3 Where a young person moves on from a WIR arrangement into more independent living, but then wishes to move back in with their carer (for example, if they have found living alone harder than anticipated) the arrangement will no longer be a WIR arrangement. The Local Authority will consider its duties under the relevant legislation and decide if it would be appropriate to support the arrangement on another basis.

8. Alternative WIR Arrangements

8.1 Higher Education

8.1.1 Where a young person attends Higher Education and lives away from the WIR placement during the term and returns to their WIR arrangement for the course vacations. The Local Authority will provide vacation accommodation (or the funds to secure it) during the summer holiday and the support allowance pro rata for overnight visits to the WIR Providers home at other times.

8.1.2 Where a young person remains living with the WIR Provider and attends Higher Education on a daily basis, they will be expected to apply for all grants, loans and bursaries available to them. From these funds, the young person will be expected to pay the rental charge for their WIR Arrangement and the contribution towards their utility costs as in all other cases.

8.2 Armed Forces

8.2.1 Where a young person in a WIR arrangement joins the Armed Forces, the WIR arrangement will remain available until they have completed their initial training period. The Local Authority will pay the support allowance pro rata for each overnight period when the young person returns to the WIR arrangement during this period. After the initial training period, if the young person remains in the Armed Forces, the WIR arrangement will come to an end and any continuing relationship will be a private relationship between the young person and former foster carer.

8.3 Other Circumstances

- 8.3.1 In exceptional circumstances, a retainer may be paid to a WIR Provider where a young person is held on remand or in hospital. The maximum timescale for the payment of a retainer will be equivalent to that allowed under the Local Housing Allowance system. Decisions around the payment of the retainer can only be authorised by the Accommodation and Permanence Panel and with agreement from the Head of Service.

9. Safeguarding

9.1 Foster Children in WIR Household

- 9.1.1 Where a young person reaches the age of 18 and fostered children are also living in the placement, all aspects of the legislation relating to fostering continue to apply and govern the regulation of the whole household.

Once the young person has turned 18 and moved on to the WIR Arrangement they will require a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check

A Risk Assessment will always be undertaken to ensure that the Authority is satisfied that there are no other concerns about the young person remaining in the placement with foster children.

These processes will need to have commenced in sufficient time to ensure that the check and risk assessment are completed by the young person's 18th birthday.

- 9.1.2 Additionally, foster carer/s should be reviewed and returned to the Fostering/GM Panel for a change of circumstances (new adult member of the household – 'WIR' young person). Fostering/GM panel will need to give due deliberation to the impact of the 'WIR' arrangement on foster carer's terms of approval, including the numbers approved for, and whether this number includes the 'WIR' young person. The WIR arrangement is not part of a regulated service, therefore does not necessarily have to impact on the number of foster placements a provider is approved for.

9.2 No Foster Children in WIR Household

- 9.2.1 When a young person turns 18, and there are no other foster children in the household, the legislation relating to fostering will no longer apply. Where it is clear that the 'When I am Ready' carer will not be fostering any further children, it is appropriate to terminate their approval as a foster carer.
- 9.2.2 Where it is possible that the WIR Provider may foster again in the future, it would be inappropriate to terminate their approval, given the length of time that re-approval would take. The Local Authority will need to ensure that the WIR Provider does what is necessary under the fostering regulations to keep their approval status open.

10. Supervision, Support and Training

10.1 The Local Authority is committed to ensuring WIR Providers receive support and supervision for their role and will do this by providing:

- An identified support worker will provide not less than 2 monthly supervision (to support attendance and information being shared in/at Pathway Plan, Living Together and WIR Provider Reviews), support and guidance to help the WIR Provider operate within the standards and policies of the WIR scheme.
- A copy of written material relating to the WIR scheme to guide the WIR Provider in appropriate and effective support of the young person. This will include guidance around the Local Authority's policy and procedures as well as emergency contact information.
- The young person's allocated Social Worker or Personal Advisor will assist the WIR Provider in dealing with, or coordinate access to, other services to practically support the development of the young person's personal and independent living skills.
- Encouragement and support of the WIR Providers continuing development needs by providing training in key areas, relevant to needs as identified in supervision meetings.

11. Complaints and Representations

11.1 Young People or Foster Carers / WIR Providers may wish to make complaints or representations about aspects of the WIR Scheme or decisions made about them. If the matter cannot be informally resolved following discussion with the allocated Social Worker or their Line Manager or the Group Manager Disability, Transition and Case Management or the Group Manager Regulated Services, then complaints can be made through the Local Authority's Complaints procedure.

12. Monitoring and Evaluation

12.1 The Group Manager Disability, Transition and Case Management, the Group Manager Regulated Services and a Finance Officer for the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate will meet:

- Bi-annually to review the profile and uptake of the WIR Scheme
- Annually to review qualitative information collated regarding the outcomes of the WIR scheme
- To discuss the reporting of the above information to the appropriate monitoring mechanisms within the Council.

This information will be collated in line with the recommendations made in the Welsh Government 'When I am Ready' Guidance document April 2015 and to support the Supporting People Outcomes evidence presented to Welsh Government annually.

12.2 This policy will be reviewed 12 months after implementation and every 3 years thereafter.