

Foster Torfaen

Statement of Purpose

2021/2022

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Department/Team	Torfaen's Fostering Service				
Approved by:	Group Manager	Commissioning Manager	DMG	SMT	Cabinet
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1. Introduction

The Torfaen County Borough Council Fostering Service is part of the Social Care and Housing directorate, based in the Civic Centre, Glantorfaen Road, Pontypool NP4 6YB

Torfaen County Borough Council's Fostering Service has produced this Statement of Purpose in accordance with The Local Authority Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2018. PART 2 (5) of the regulations details the requirements for the review of the Statement of Purpose and the provision of the document to relevant stakeholders. Welsh Government has issued a Code of Practice for Local Authority Fostering Services, which elaborates further as to the contents and arrangements for reviewing the Statement of Purpose.

In line with the requirements of The Local Authority Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2018, the Statement of Purpose provides information about Torfaen County Borough Council's Fostering Service. The Statement of Purpose includes details of the management and staffing structure, the range of needs of the children for whom the service is provided and how the service is delivered to meet the needs of children and to support them to achieve their personal outcomes.

The Statement of Purpose will be available to Welsh ministers, approved and prospective foster carers, any child placed by the fostering service, the parents of any such child, persons working for the purpose of the local authority fostering service and any person on request.

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed and updated annually.

Torfaen Children and Family Services, Fostering Service is inspected by the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). The purpose of the inspection is to ensure that the service is fully compliant with legislation and regulations. The report becomes a public document and will be available on the CIW website <https://careinspectorate.wales>, or alternatively from:

Care Inspectorate Wales National Office
Government Buildings
Rhyd Y Car Business Park
Merthyr Tydfil
CF48 1UZ

In addition to the Statement of Purpose, there are a range of specific and procedural documents that support the aims, objectives, service principles and standards set out for the fostering service.

Consultation with parents, children and young people, social workers, foster carers, staff in the fostering service and other relevant stakeholders informs service improvement proposals.

We welcome feedback on our Statement of Purpose. Please email any comments to:

- Kirsty Cooke (Team Manager) kirsty.cooke@torfaen.gov.uk or
- Jacalyn Richards (Group Manager) jacalyn.richards@torfaen.gov.uk

2. Scope

Torfaen's Fostering Service provides a high quality service to children looked after through the provision of a wide range of appropriate foster placements to meet their assessed needs. We develop good working relationships with children and young people, their families, their social workers, foster carers and health and education services, to enhance the life chances of children looked after and ensure positive outcomes.

This document refers to "foster carers" or "carers" as mainstream foster carers who have been approved to care for children looked after. Torfaen's Fostering Service also supports foster carers who look after family members or who have a pre-existing connection with the child or their family. These carers will be referred to as kinship foster carers within this document.

3. Objectives

- To recruit foster carers who can provide high quality care in a family setting to meet the assessed needs of children looked after.
- To recruit carers from all backgrounds to ensure that the racial, cultural, religious and linguistic needs of all children and young people are appropriately met.
- To ensure that all children and young people are placed with carers who can provide stability, security, warm, safe and a caring environment
- To ensure that the physical and emotional health needs of children and young people are met and a healthy lifestyle is encouraged.
- To enable all children and young people to benefit from educational, training and employment opportunities.
- To promote contact with birth families and to encourage and facilitate this as appropriate.

- To ensure that all foster carers have an allocated supervising worker, who will offer support, guidance and regular supervision.
- To ensure that all foster carers receive the agreed Foster Carer Payment Policy and have the necessary equipment to provide a safe and warm environment for children and young people.
- To ensure that all foster carers receive and engage with a minimum of 15 hours training per year in line with the Learning and Development Framework, to enable them to provide quality care.
- To ensure that all foster carers have a review of their approval status at least annually.

4. Management Structure

Torfaen's Fostering Service is located within the Children and Family Services Division of the Social Care and Housing Directorate. The management structure is as follows.

Chief Officer, Social Care and Housing
Head of Children and Family Services
Group Manager
Team Manager

Keith Rutherford
Jason O'Brien
Jacalyn Richards
Kirsty Cooke

5. Staff

All staff in the Fostering Service are employees of Torfaen County Borough Council. They have the same rights, responsibilities and benefits of any employee within the council. Torfaen County Borough Council promotes the well-being of its employees through a number of schemes, which are available to staff, such as:

- Supervision and Work Smart Review.
- Flexible Working Scheme.
- Family Friendly Policy.
- Vectis Staff Reward and Savings scheme offering discounts on goods and services.
- Cycle 2 Work discounts on bicycle purchases.

Staff Structure

There are currently in post the following:

- Team Manager
- Assistant Team Manager
- Assistant Team Manager Kinship Care (fixed term)

- Qualified Social Workers x 7.1 full time equivalent (including a 0.6 FTE vacancy)
- Community Support Worker x 2 full time equivalent
- Placement and Business Support Officer
- Recruitment and Development Officer
- Community Support Worker (SGO Support) x2 full time equivalent (fixed term)

We commission the services of independent or agency staff to complete specific pieces of work e.g. Connected Persons Assessments, Form F assessments, deliver training, etc. These individuals are subject to the same level of checks as permanent staff, including enhanced DBS checks, to ensure that the welfare of children and young people is safeguarded and promoted.

All qualified social workers are registered with Social Care Wales and training opportunities are provided to maintain their registration, meet regulatory requirements and to promote continuous professional development.

Staff in other roles have learning and development opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge in their current roles and are expected to prioritise professional development as required to undertake their roles.

6. Services Provided

Torfaen's Fostering Service offer a range of placements for children and young people of all ages, which include both in house foster placements, Independent Fostering Agency placements and residential placements. We strive to 'match' placements to ensure that the needs of children and young people can be met by the skills and experience of carers. All of our carers are expected to attend mandatory pre-approval and core training and many have extensive experience in caring for children and young people.

6.1 Long Term Placements:

Many foster carers have an interest in providing placements for children and young people or sibling groups on a long-term basis, usually until a child reaches the age of 18 or independence.

6.2 Short Term Placements:

Many foster carers have an interest in providing short-term placements for children and young people or sibling groups on a short-term basis.

These placements can include situations where there are legal proceedings; working with children and their families towards reunification; preparation for adoption or long term/permanent fostering, or preparation for independent living.

6.3 Respite Care and Short Breaks:

We have a number of carers who provide respite placements for other carers. We also offer support to families to prevent their children becoming looked after. In these situations, the foster carer is proactive in supporting the child and their family.

6.4 Day Care:

We provide day care with experienced foster carers for foster children whose carers need to attend training, hospital appointments etc. and for children living with their parents who need to be cared for during the day e.g. young children who need a positive experience outside of their families as part of a package of support to the family.

6.5 Kinship Care:

In circumstances where children's care plans confirm that the best placement for a child or young person is with relatives or friends of the family and where that child or young person is the subject of a Care Order or Interim Care Order, Torfaen Fostering Panel can approve a relative, such as a grandparent or older sibling, as a specific or kinship foster carer for that child. In these instances, Torfaen's Fostering Service completes a Connected Person's Assessment.

The Connected Person's Assessment allows social workers and the family court to consider placing children with family or friends under the auspices of a Special Guardianship Order, Care Order or Child Arrangement Order and helps to identify what, if any, support may be necessary to the applicants.

6.6 When I'm Ready:

The When I'm Ready (WIR) scheme allows those over 18 who were in foster care prior to their 18th birthday to remain in the placement in order to complete their education or training opportunities. The scheme allows eligible care leavers to remain in the placement until the age of 21.

6.7 My Support Team (MyST) Project:

MyST is a Child and Adolescent mental health service for children looked after who present with complex needs. Its approach is multi-disciplinary and multi-agency for children and young people who are at risk of or who have been placed in out-of-area residential care because of their complex needs. It works with children looked after who have such significant challenging and risk-taking behaviour that their placement stability and security of relationships is threatened. These are young people with complex needs requiring considerable resources to help them, maintain their safety and improve their life chances.

Torfaen's Fostering Service has a designated Social Worker, who works closely with the MyST team, provides regular support and supervision to the carers and supports the recruitment, assessment and training of MyST foster carers. These carers require increased support due to the challenges they face in caring for children with complex needs and their placements are supported by the MyST team. These carers will be on a specific work contract and are entitled to regular respite and specific training.

6.8 Commissioning Independent Foster Agency Placements and Residential Care

Torfaen's Fostering Service negotiates placements via the CCSR database, which is managed by 4Cs. This is a regional service that has been established to improve opportunities in commissioning and placements for children looked after. The process of search, request, matching and contracting is managed by the team's Placement Officer, assisted by the duty social worker.

6.9 Special Guardianship Order Support Service:

The SGO project is a new development within Torfaen's Fostering Service. One Assistant Team Manager and Community Support Workers will offer services of support to Special Guardians within Torfaen. This support will include:

- **Allocated Worker** – The Special Guardian can have access to a social worker/support worker to undertake regular telephone calls and/or home visits to offer emotional support and advice, assistance with attending meetings/ provide advocacy, etc.
- **Support Group/Peer Mentoring** – The Special Guardian can have access to a special guardianship support group and peer support from other special guardians.
- **Training** – The Special Guardian can have access to training as offered to general and kinship foster carers on a variety of topics, this also includes e-learning.
- **Parenting Programmes** – The Special Guardian can have access to parenting programmes.
- **Direct Work With The Special Guardian** – Work on a variety of topics to include the impact of adverse childhood experiences, attachment, therapeutic parenting strategies, managing behaviours etc.
- **Direct Work With The Child/Young Person** – Age appropriate direct work on a variety of topics to include wishes and feelings, managing emotions and life story work can be undertaken with the child/young person who is subject to the Special Guardianship Order.

- **Direct Work With Children/Young People Within The Household** – Direct work can be undertaken with other children or young people within the household.
- **Birth Family Contact / Mediation Support** – Mediation can be offered to the family e.g. to assist with birth family contact.
- **Access to Psychologist Support**
- **Support for Court**
- **Signposting/Referrals To Other Agencies** – This may include Families First, Flying Start, Housing Support, Benefits Advice services etc.
- **Support With Education** – Liaising with schools if the child/young person who is subject to the special guardianship order is experiencing difficulties within education.

7. Principles and Standards of Care

- To comply fully with the requirements of The Local Authority Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2018.
- Wherever possible, children will be placed with carers who reflect their religious and cultural needs. In the event that this was not possible, opportunities would be sought to meet their needs, for example attendance at religious groups or provision of an alternative diet etc.
- Child protection concerns will be dealt with immediately and in line with the Wales safeguarding procedures and relevant legislation.
- Corporal punishment will **NOT** be used in any circumstances and carers will be provided with guidance and training around managing behaviour.
- All carers will be expected to adhere to the safe caring practices identified for each child or young person placed in their care.
- School attendance and academic achievement will be promoted by ensuring all children and young people attend school or the appropriate education provision.
- The health needs of all children and young people will be promoted by ensuring that all children are registered with a G.P, they attend all medical appointments, have regular check-ups by a dentist and optician and ensure attendance for any other health care service as needed.

- Carers will be expected to maintain accurate written records for each child in their care, and to keep these in a secure place. Carers will also be expected to be vigilant in all matters of confidentiality.
- Assessments will be completed by qualified and experienced staff.
- All mainstream foster carers will be expected to attend the 'Skills to Foster' pre-assessment Training.
- All carers will have a designated supervising worker who provides support, advice and guidance and who will visit carers regularly on both a planned and unplanned basis.
- Foster carers will be expected to engage in learning and development opportunities and will be supported to reflect on this learning and how it affects the care afforded to children looked after.
- Every foster carer's home will have a three yearly health and safety inspection and an additional health and safety inspection if they move properties. Foster carers who own static caravans will also require a healthy and safety inspection.
- All children placed will have their own bed and personal space, and wherever practically possible, their own bedroom. Children looked after by the Local Authority would not normally be expected to share a bedroom with another child in placement or a child of the family. The exceptions to this would be siblings or if a child expresses a wish to share a bedroom with an unrelated child (applicable for long-term placements), subject to risk assessment by the child's social worker.
- All foster carers work to the agreed Care Plan and within the terms of the Foster Care Agreement.
- Foster carers will promote and, where agreed, facilitate contact between children and young people and their families, unless it has been agreed that this is not in the child's best interests or the risks are not manageable.

8. Recruitment, Assessment and Approval of Carers

In order to provide a service, which meets the needs of children and supports them to achieve their personal outcomes, we aim to recruit a range of carers and support them to develop their knowledge and skills to understand the needs of the children and how to care for them.

On receiving an enquiry from a potential foster carer, we request basic information.

Within one week, a worker from the Fostering Service will visit the prospective applicant for an initial discussion. Further information will be provided and initial screening of the family will be undertaken, which will include assessment of the home and bedroom conditions.

If the prospective foster carer wishes to proceed, they will be invited to attend the 'Skills to Foster' course, which is a mandatory part of the assessment process. Their engagement in this training will form part of their assessment and feedback is actively discussed and included in their assessment.

The potential foster carer completes a detailed application form and gives consent for the local authority to complete the necessary checks and enquiries needed for the assessment.

Enhanced DBS checks are completed on all adult members of the family and members of the immediate support network. These involve disclosure of any convictions or other information that may be held by the Police or other agencies relevant to the protection of children. A criminal conviction will not necessarily preclude approval, but will be given careful consideration by senior managers and will be subject of a risk assessment.

Checks of Social Services records are undertaken for all addresses, as well as checks with CIW.

All applicants are required to have a medical examination completed by their GP. The completed report is made available to the Fostering Panel's Medical Advisor for their comment about the applicants health and any impact this may have on their potential to become foster carers.

Applicants are required to provide original copies of birth certificates, marriage and divorce certificates, national insurance number, driving licences, insurance documents, employment status and any other relevant papers that relate to their identity and history.

The applicant must give details of at least three personal referees. Written references will be requested and referees will be interviewed as part of the assessment process. There is an expectation that ex-partners will be asked to provide a reference unless exceptional circumstances apply. All children of the applicants will also be consulted as part of the assessment. References are also requested from the applicant's employer.

A social worker, suitably trained and supervised, will undertake a full assessment. This will involve several visits to the home to complete joint and individual sessions with the applicants.

The assessment will include family background, education and employment, previous relationships, lifestyle, experience of caring for children, attitudes, values and expectations, understanding of issues of discrimination, ability to work with the local authority, and their understanding of the role of foster carers.

The assessment process will also include a competence-based assessment where applicants are helped to compile a portfolio of written material and other evidence of their relevant skills and experience.

The completed assessment is shared with the applicants, and then presented to the Fostering Panel. The Panel makes recommendations about the suitability of the applicant/s to be approved as foster carers.

The Head of Children and Family Services receives the recommendation of the Fostering Panel in his role as Agency Decision Maker and, on behalf of the Local Authority, makes the final decision about approval.

Applicants are informed verbally and in writing about the decision.

In the event that the applicants disagree with the agency decision, they are informed of the appeals and representations procedures, including their right to have their application reviewed by the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM).

The assessment process generally takes 3-6 months, and all information gained during this process is held on file. Foster carers can, if they request, view some of the information. References and information from external agencies can only be shared with the consent of the subject and the relevant referees.

All foster carers are required to sign foster carer agreements in accordance with The Local Authority Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2018. The agreements set out clear tasks and expectations that are required of all carers.

Kinship Foster Carers

Those applying to become kinship foster carers will undergo a unified assessment agreed by the South East Wales Local Family Justice Board. This assessment will consider whether the applicant meets the fostering competencies and, if successful, will be recommended for approval as kinship foster carer/s. The assessment may also conclude whether or not an applicant is suitable to make his or her own application for a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or a Child Arrangements Order (CAO).

All foster carers are required to sign foster carer agreements in accordance with The Local Authority Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2018. The agreements set out clear tasks and expectations that are required of all carers.

All assessors will be fully appraised of the Good Practice Guide for the Assessment and Support of Kinship Foster Carers.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

Torfaen's Fostering Service has a placement commissioning strategy to determine the needs of the service.

Torfaen's Fostering Service has been, and continues to be, pro-active and innovative in its methods of recruitment of foster carers. We continue to advertise widely through social media and have commissioned advertising campaigns. We continue to work with National and regional colleagues to promote fostering for the Local Authority.

Torfaen have taken part in extensive marketing strategy workshops with our colleagues via the work of the National Fostering Framework (NFF).

Torfaen utilises Fostering Fortnight as an opportunity to raise further awareness of Local Authority fostering.

9. Learning and Development for Foster Carers

We recognise that fostering has become increasingly complex and demanding and we are committed to the provision of high quality learning and development opportunities for all of our foster carers. We expect all prospective mainstream foster carers to attend the 'Skills to Foster' course. The Post Approval Learning and Development Framework for Foster Carers identifies the following core learning and development opportunities:

- Child Development. Safeguarding.
- Safer Caring and Allegations.
- Supporting Education and Development.
- Working with Birth Families and Contact.
- Recording, Presenting and Information Sharing.
- Transition for Children and Young people.
- Life Journey Work.
- Promoting Good Health and Well-being.
- Develop a Secure Base and Promoting Attachment.
- Understanding Challenging Behaviour and Promoting Positive Strategies.
- Advocacy and Children's Rights.
- Health and Safety.
- First Aid.
- Foundation Legislation.
- Local Induction (including policies and procedures).

Other learning and development opportunities are available and will be determined on a case-by-case basis or in line with the child's individual needs. These include formal training courses, e-learning and a range of other opportunities. Carers are also encouraged and supported to achieve the QCF award, if they wish.

Learning and development is supported in order to:

- Help foster carers improve their knowledge and skills, and ensure that they are confident and competent in safe caring, identifying risks and protecting children from harm.
- Encourage foster carers to reflect on, and consider the effects of discrimination, loss, abuse, and other background and environmental factors on the development of the children in their care.
- Encourage foster carers to take responsibility for their own professional learning and development, utilising their Personal Learning Record and Development Plan to assist discussion within each supervision session.

Torfaen's Fostering Service is dedicated to reviewing our learning and development opportunities and works closely with our regional colleagues.

10. Support and Review of Foster Carers

Torfaen values the work that foster carers do and the contribution they make to the lives of children and young people. Appropriate support for our foster carers is vitally important in ensuring successful placements and in the development and retention of skilled and experienced carers.

Our foster carers can depend on their supervising worker to support them in the event of a complaint or allegation. If a child protection investigation is undertaken, as a result of an allegation, the supervising worker's role is to support the carer. However, our supervising workers do not take an active part in any investigations. We also refer foster carers to the Fostering Network for independent support at this time.

Supervision: Carers are provided with supervision from a suitably qualified and experienced worker from the Fostering Service. The frequency of supervision depends on the needs of the carer, the needs of children placed and will take place at least quarterly. Where supervision is not taking place on a monthly basis, it is expected that the supervising worker will make at least one contact per month with the fostering family, which is appropriately recorded.

It is expected that support for foster carers will include frequent visits and telephone calls from the supervising worker, including at least one unannounced visit per year.

Support: Torfaen's Fostering Service invites all foster carers to meet on a monthly basis at an informal support group. Foster carers are consulted in advance on any

identified themes or topics for future support groups. Separate support groups are held for Kinship foster carers.

A bi-monthly newsletter is circulated from Torfaen's Fostering Service to all foster carers by email. A further newsletter is disseminated by the Workforce Development Team to ensure that carers are aware of all Learning and Development Opportunities.

Torfaen's Fostering Service has a resource library, which is available to all foster carers in order to address any specific identified learning and development needs.

The Foster Carer Handbook is provided to all foster carers following approval.

The provision of respite care: The need for respite provision has been identified within Torfaen's market position strategy. Currently, respite requests are considered on a case-by-case basis for all foster carers, subject to agreement from the children's social worker and team manager and the availability of appropriately matched foster carers.

Out of hours support: Our out of hours support phone line is available 365 days per year. Monday to Thursday from 5:00pm until midnight, Fridays 4.30pm until midnight and Saturdays- Sundays 2.00pm until midnight.

Annual reviews of foster carers:

The main aim of the annual review is to determine whether approval should continue and whether there should be any changes to the terms of approval. The review includes a written report from the supervising worker, reports from the child's social worker, foster carers and comments from the child/ren in placement. All checks, including DBS checks are updated as per the regulations.

Annual reviews are presented to the Fostering Panel:

- following the first review.
- following 5 years of approval and every 5 years thereafter.
- where the recommendation is for a change of terms of approval.
- where there has been a serious complaint or allegation.

The panel are made aware of all exemptions to the 'usual fostering limit'. The panel may make recommendations regarding the number of children to be placed, as well as any learning and development needs or support needs of carers.

11. Financial Support

Carers who foster for Torfaen receive an allowance as recommended by Welsh Government. The level of this payment is age related and is intended to reimburse the carer for direct costs of caring for a child. The implication is that this payment is not treated as earnings, since it is wholly a benefit for the child.

The figures below are agreed from April 2021:

Weekly Fostering Allowances:

0-4 years £194

5-15 years £177

16+ years £220

Foster carers may also be eligible for a fee payment, if they meet the eligibility criteria, which includes demonstrating the skills and abilities to care for any child or young person the Local Authority matches with them.

Full details of the financial support available to foster carers can be accessed via the following link: <https://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/Related-Documents/FosteringandAdoption/SummaryOfFosterCarerPayments.pdf>

12. Complaints and Outcomes

Torfaen's Fostering service recognises the views of foster carers and the children and young people placed with them are important and essential for service delivery monitoring and improvements. As well as this promoting children's rights to be heard. Foster carers and the children/young people accessing the service will be encouraged to raise their concerns without recourse, with the assurances that their concerns, wishes or feelings have been heard appropriately.

Further information about the complaints process can be accessed via the following link: <https://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/AboutTheCouncil/Complaints/Service-Complaints/How-to-Complain.aspx>

13. Additional Support

When searching for general foster carers to care for our children, Torfaen Fostering Service uses all the information provided to assess the foster carers skills and ability to meet the cultural, linguistic and religious needs of children.

Torfaen Fostering Service supports our foster carers' learning and development to care for our children and to be able to support the children in relation to their sexual orientation and gender identity. We have offered foster carers new training opportunities from The Fostering Network such as the Fostering LGBTQ Children and Young People Masterclass and signpost our foster carers to relevant services such as Umbrella Cymru and Mermaid UK. Umbrella Cymru is a gender and sexual diversity specialist support organisation that offers a range of services to people across Wales, including advice and guidance, information and signposting, counselling, advocacy and emotional and practical support.

Torfaen Fostering Service also supports our foster carers in meeting all children's language and communication needs. Each child who is looked after has a health assessment completed by the Clinical Nurse specialist, to identify any speech and language problems and advise on the process for making a referral to the Speech and Language team. Foster carers who care for unaccompanied asylum seeking children have access to Language Line and interpreters provided, where appropriate, for the young person's wishes and feelings to be clearly established. Torfaen children have access to a range of schools, which deliver education in the Welsh medium and the local authority has a translation service to ensure information is provided in the Welsh language for children and adults in line with the Welsh Language Standards Regulations.

14. Useful contact details

Torfaen County Borough Council,
Civic Centre, Glantorfaen Road, Pontypool NP4 6YB
Tel: [01495 762200](tel:01495762200)
<http://www.torfaen.gov.uk>

Care Inspectorate Wales

South East Wales Regional Office
Government Buildings, Rhydycar, Merthyr Tydfil CF48 1UZ
Tel: 0300 7900 126
<https://careinspectorate.wales/>

Social Care Wales

South Gate House, Wood Street, Cardiff CF10 1EW
Tel: 0300 3033 444
<https://socialcare.wales/>

Children's Commissioner for Wales

Oystermouth House, Charter Court, Phoenix Way
Llansamlet, Swansea, SA7 9FS
Tel: 01792 765600
<https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/>

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed, Bridgend. CF35 5LJ
Tel: 0300 7900 203
<https://www.ombudsman.wales/>

