



Fostering Service Policy for New Partners & Changes to the Fostering Household

DOCUMENT HISTORY

Version number:	1	Status: (draft/ final)	final
Date Written	October 2023	Dates of Issue for consultation	Nov 2023
Equality Impact Assessment			
Supporting documents			
Authorised by: Head of Service Children/ Adult Management Team	Date: 22.12.23	Ratified by: J Ilewellyn Council	Date: Jan 2024
Lead Responsibility: Joe Rhys Jones	Author: Laura Roberts	Implementation Date: March 2024	Review Date: March 2025
Outcome of Review:			

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Purpose of the policy

To ensure there is a clear process when there are changes to the original approval of a fostering household and that safeguarding measures have been taken. This includes new partners to approved foster carers, and approved carers who have a change to their fostering household.

Aim and legislative context

To ensure that adults involved in caring for Children Looked After (CLA) have undergone the necessary checks to ensure that they are suitable to be part of the care of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's Looked After Children and Young People.

Carers approved as single carers may develop personal relationships that will impact on the relationships within the household. Such relationships will require assessment and review by the fostering service to ensure that the new situation does not adversely impact on the fostering role, this is a requirement as set out in:

'The Fostering Panels (Establishment & Functions) (Wales) Regulations 2018, 7(2), 7(5) and 7(12), Schedule 1 Part 1 and 2 and sections 23(2)(a) and (9), 59(2) and 62(3) of, and paragraph 12 of Schedule 2 to, the Children Act 1989(2) require the Fostering Service to investigate and assess certain prescribed matters.

Also, within the career of foster carers there are occasions when there will be changes to the fostering household. Jointly approved carers may find themselves in the position of being a single carer due to bereavement, separation, or divorce. In such situations the fostering service will need to review the carer's approval to assess the impact of this change on the carer and recognise the new situation.

New Partners

For the purposes of this policy, new partner is defined as "a significant person with whom the Foster Carer is having or expected to develop a relationship, which is committed and serious".

During the assessment process of a prospective single carer, the assessing social worker will ensure the applicant is clear about their responsibility to notify the fostering service where there is a future relationship for the necessary processes to be undertaken in line with the Policy for New Partners and Changes to the Fostering Household.

For single foster carers approved with the fostering service their supervising social worker will ensure they are clear about the foster carer's responsibility to inform the fostering service regarding new relationships before the new partner meets any children they care for, has any form of unsupervised contact or becomes part of the fostering household.

Changes to the fostering household

For foster carers approved with the fostering service where there is a significant change in their circumstances, for example a new relationship, separation or bereavement, their supervising social worker will ensure they are clear about the foster carer's responsibility to notify the fostering service regarding future relationships in line with the Policy for New Partners and Changes to the Fostering Household.

Sharing information about personal and household changes is a key part of the supervisory relationship and relies on openness and transparency between carers and the fostering team. Foster carers need to understand the reasons why such information is required, how it may impact on their role and the needs of the children they care for.

Informing the fostering service of a new relationship

Whilst it is recognised that the fostering service may be asking the foster carer to decide upon the 'status' of their relationship before they might otherwise have had to consider this, the nature of fostering and the safe caring factors involved are such that the foster carer and the foster carer's new partner need to accept this position.

The fostering service expects foster carers to inform their supervising social worker of any new, significant relationships and conduct their relationships in a manner that is honest and transparent and within the context of any safe caring policy and agreement.

Safeguarding measures for all new partners

When a foster carer begins a new relationship, the following safeguarding measures must be taken in all cases:

- The foster carer must inform their supervising social worker of their relationship.
- The supervising social worker will arrange for a DBS check to be completed on the new partner. While awaiting the outcome of the DBS check the partner will not have any sole care of the foster child(ren) or involvement in contact arrangements.
- The supervising social worker will inform the social worker(s) for any foster child(ren) being cared for by the foster carer, and the Independent Reviewing Officer(s).
- Wherever possible the foster child should be consulted about their views on the new partner and their opinions considered.

- A meeting must be convened with the supervising social worker, the foster carer, and their new partner to discuss their understanding of fostering and their role within the household.
- A safe care agreement is to be completed with the foster carers and new partner regarding the foster children in the household.
- A confidentiality statement (appendix 1) is to be signed by the new partner.
- The foster carer should be aware that a full fostering assessment of the new partner and the foster carer will be required if the partner becomes a significant part of the fostering household, and the partner should not have any caring responsibilities for any foster child until this time.

Assessing new partners of approved foster carers

As the relationship progresses the new partner is likely to become a significant part of the fostering household, or look to join the fostering household, there will be the presumption that they will play a part in caring for any foster child(ren) in the household, therefore an assessment of their suitability to foster must have been completed and a positive decision made regarding their approval **before** they move in.

The foster carer and the new partner will be assessed as a couple, the same procedure for this assessment will be carried out as for any applicants and the assessment will be presented to the fostering panel and the fostering Agency Decision Maker. There should be no presumption that any such assessment will be approved.

The process for assessing new partners includes mandatory attendance of 'Skills to Foster Training'.

New personal references will be required that should include referees that are able to comment on the approved foster carer and their new partner as a couple.

In cases where the new partner and the foster carer are already approved separately with the fostering service, and have moved into one fostering household, a foster carer review of both should be undertaken within 6 months, to consider the new relationship created within the reconstituted household and their joint approval.

Should the new partner be an approved foster carer with another fostering service the need to undertake the safeguarding measures remains the same. Prior to the partner moving into the fostering household the new partner and foster carer will need to decide which fostering service they wish to be approved with as a couple and The Fostering Network's Transfer of Foster Carers Protocol Wales, June 2021 followed.

A recommendation from the Foster Panel and approval by the Agency Decision Maker **prior** to the new partner moving in remains the same with all new partners.

The first foster carer review of the carers as a couple, will be due within 12 months of a new partner being approved and should be returned to the Fostering Panel as a first review following approval.

Overnight Stays Prior to Approval

When the foster carer wishes the new partner to have overnight stays pending the outcome of any assessment, the safeguarding measures must have been undertaken and a risk assessment undertaken, which should also include (but not exclusively):

- satisfactory DBS check
- the numbers and ages of the children
- the views of any foster child(ren) as well as other household members.
- the significance and stability of their relationship (including how long they have known each other)
- the foster carer's history of fostering
- the new partner's parenting experience / history
- the view of the child(ren)'s Social Worker
- Local authority checks and out of county checks

Any risk assessment should be shared with the Foster Wales Team Manager prior to the overnight stay and saved on the foster carer's WCCIS file.

Non-Cohabiting New Partners

In circumstances where the foster carer's new partner does not live or intend to live in the carers home for any significant amount of time they would not need to be fully assessed. However, it is important that we are aware of them and the relationship they have with the foster carer, and the safeguarding measures must still be undertaken. The foster carer will always take responsibility for the care needs of the children and a safe care agreement should be completed to reflect this.

Overnight stays need to be subject to the same conditions as above.

As the partner will be a part of the foster child(ren)'s lives it is inevitable that the new partner will become aware of their personal circumstances to a greater or lesser degree and will therefore still be required to sign the Confidentiality Statement (appendix 1) to ensure they adhere to and respect the privacy of our children.

It will be the responsibility of the foster carer to notify us of any changes within this relationship and should the non-cohabiting partner look to spend an increasing amount of time within the fostering household, or wish to play a more active part in the caring responsibilities of the children, it is a requirement that they will then need to undergo a full assessment to assess their suitability to be considered an approved foster carer for the fostering service as detailed within the previous sections of this policy.

Approved foster carers with a change in circumstances

For foster carers approved as a couple who wish to continue to foster after a significant change in their circumstances, such as a separation or bereavement, a foster carer review will need to be completed, presented to foster panel and the fostering service agency decision maker.

Where both foster carers wish to remain approved with the fostering service as single foster carers, a foster carer review needs to be completed for each foster carer reflecting their new circumstances and how they will continue to meet the requirements to be an approved foster carer.

If one of the foster carers does not wish to remain as a foster the fostering service will need their written resignation to present to foster panel.

Non-Compliance with the required checks / assessment

If a new partner is not in agreement with the undertaking of the safety measures outlined or has plans to move into the fostering household and will not comply with these arrangements, the existing Foster Carer will be invited to resign on these grounds.

If this is not forthcoming, consideration must be given to the best interests of any foster child, if it is felt that their needs would not be best served by a change in placement, an interim assessment must be presented to fostering panel until the foster child(ren) have moved on or alternative arrangements made other than fostering, at which time it would be the fostering service's intention to terminate the foster carer's approval.

*'Being approved as a foster carer is subject to approval and the Local Authority has **statutory duties** to keep assessments up to date when circumstances change. This may be an interference with Article 8 of the Human Rights Act, but it is lawful (in fact it is a legal requirement to satisfy the Regulations), justified (on a safeguarding basis) and proportionate (the interference lasts until the assessment is complete and a decision made about approval).'*

Appendix 1

Foster Wales Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

Confidentiality Statement

It is important that the privacy of our children who are looked after is respected. As a prospective carer pending approval, or as a non-cohabiting partner it is likely that you will become privy to personal and sensitive information about that child, their siblings, and their wider family. You will therefore be required to maintain the confidentiality of any such information.

Confidentiality for this purpose is a duty to maintain confidence and respect the privacy and it applies us and the information we hold about you as well as the children and young people that are in Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's Care.

As such we expect that:

- All information about a foster child is confidential. This applies to any information which is given as part of a written record, passed electronically, or given verbally during meetings and discussions concerning the child and their family, as well as any information the child may choose to share with you.
- Disclosure of confidential information to someone (e.g., health professional) who has a need to know that information must be limited to the information they need.
- Where there is uncertainty about a person's need for information, advice should then be sought from the child's social worker or fostering service **before** any information is disclosed.
- No matter concerning the foster child should be discussed in a public place under any circumstances.

I agree to adhere to this confidentiality statement in respect of any information that may be shared with me, or I may become privy to whilst being involved in the lives of foster children for Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.

Name:	
Signature:	
Date:	

Feedback Form

Name of Procedure: Policy for New Partners & Changes to the Fostering Household

Please insert identifying details from 'Document History' from the front cover

Version Number:		Status:	Draft
Date Written:		Date of Issue:	

The **Team manager** would value your suggestions and comments for consideration for the next **Review**. We would really like your feedback on this document and would welcome your views on what should be added, taken away, or changed. We would also like to be advised of:

- Related evidence-based practice or training issues
- Any areas of practice which would benefit service user care by being added to the document, or any other aspects of practice which should be included here
- Any factual errors or inaccuracies in the document
- Other related issues which would help inform the Procedure.

Please use the space below and overleaf for your comments.

It would be helpful if you could date your comments.

Please feel free to add or withhold your own identifying details as you see fit.

Please return your views to Laura Roberts Foster Wales Team Manager

If you would like this information in another language or format, please contact Laura Roberts