



Pet Policy and Guidance for Fostering Households (including connected and kinship carers)

Fostering Panels (Establishment and Functions) (Wales) Regulations 2018

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Introduction:

When assessing or reviewing foster carers (and or potential foster/kinship carers) there is no statutory requirement to undertake a dog and / or pet assessment although **Regulation 7(5)(a)** states that a fostering services provider should obtain “*any other information it considers relevant*” and **Part 2 Schedule 1 para 15** refers to “*leisure activities and interests*”.

This policy sets out how the Fostering Services aim to take a balanced and proportionate approach to the role of dogs and pets in the prospective fostering/family household. Dogs and other domestic pets can help provide very positive outcomes for fostered children and assist with achieving positive, shared family experiences. However, dogs and some pets can also introduce serious challenges to a household and on occasions may even serve as a distraction or risk to the primary task of providing high quality care to children.

This policy recognises that safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child is of paramount importance. Recognising underpinning legislation and relevant guidance a pet assessment should form part of a fostering assessment and contain the following:

- Basic details including personality and history.
- Living arrangements, training, routines including health and hygiene
- Any issues of concern or safety and how these have / will be addressed.
- Practitioner’s observations of the pet and interactions with prospective foster parent and others pragmatic approach should apply.
- In some cases, a specialist pet assessment might be required.
- A pragmatic approach should be taken regarding all pet assessments and always be mindful of the fostering task.

Dangerous Dogs and Pets:

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council will not approve foster carers/kinship carers who keep any dog listed under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (amended 1997), or where the prospective foster carer/kinship carer owns any pet listed in the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976.

If an approved foster/kinship carer acquires a dangerous/banned dog, their approval would need to be terminated if s/he was not prepared to cease ownership.

The Fostering Service will seek appropriate advice and support from the RSPCA in the event of any uncertainty regarding the breed of animal or dog or potential of risk.

Assessing and Reviewing Dogs and Pets in the Fostering household:

Assessments will be required when there is a request to be considered as a prospective foster carer and whenever a new pet is introduced to an existing fostering/kinship household.

Initial assessment and guidance will be offered at the recruitment initial home visit stage for applicants and will be included in the home visit report. If there are any serious issues raised regarding pet ownership (e.g., breed banned under legislation) or pet management, then applicants will be advised that we will not pursue the application.

Initial assessment and guidance will be offered at the initial stage of family and friends assessments and included in the viability assessment report. If there are any serious issues raised regarding pet ownership (e.g., breed banned under legislation) or pet management, then applicants will be advised that we will not pursue the assessment.

At the outset of formal Form F/family and friends assessment, assessing staff will complete The Pet Assessment/Dog Information Questionnaire. The forms require the owner(s) to provide detailed assessment and risk management information on the type and number of dogs / pets in the household and any potential impact issues for children placed. The assessment forms require the pet owner(s) to take responsibility for providing details of why their dog/or pets have the appropriate temperament to accommodate foster children living safely within the family home and is compatible with the fostering task.

When assessing prospective carers, the Fostering Service will ensure dogs and pets receive attention and consideration, particularly the gathering of evidence regarding the temperament and personality of any dogs in the household. It is the responsibility of the applicant / foster carer to demonstrate that the temperament of a dog (or where applicable, another pet) is compatible with the fostering task.

Staff should ask owners for any supporting evidence (e.g., attendance at handling / obedience training; veterinary / vaccination records) which can assist with reassurance on pet behaviour and management. If there are serious issues of concern regarding a Dog's potential risk arising from the assessment a specialist assessment may be requested.

Applicant / carer signed Dog / Pet Assessment forms should be uploaded to the carer file and copies retained by the applicant / carer.

Any new dog or pet entering the household subsequent to approval or prior to foster carer review will require the Supervising Social Worker (Fostering) to complete a Dog / Pet Assessment Form with the foster carer and confirm this information in the next

Foster Carer Review. If there is any doubt about the suitability of an animal expert opinion should be sought from a vet or the RSPCA.

Matching:

Matching considerations before a child is placed within a foster family must include a risk assessment. This should include the child's attitude/experience of pets, any allergies, and any other risks and the child's capacity to live in a household where there are pets. For example, is the child fearful of dogs; does the child's culture view dogs in a certain light; has the child been known to mistreat animals?

Key Risk Assessment Issues:

It is recognised that dogs and other pets can attack children. While the size of a dog is important, especially where vulnerable children are involved, the breed of the dog may indicate the tendency or capacity for aggressiveness. Small dogs may attack, but it is larger dogs that have the strength to maim or kill. Therefore, when assessing a family this should be taken into consideration when making the final recommendation to the Panel.

The Fostering Panel should consider any dogs or pets when approving a family and for matching consideration. The assessments must include the potential risk posed by a specific animal and the carer's attitude and approach to owning a pet(s).

Foster/kinship carers should be asked for any details of dog training/obedience classes undertaken.

Actions in the Event of Injury to child by Pet:

If a dog or other pet in the household bites, scratches or in any way injures a fostered child, the foster/kinship carer must take the following actions immediately:

- Remove the animal from the household.
- Give the child appropriate first aid and seek medical advice / attention as soon as possible
- Notify the Fostering Supervising Social Worker and Child's Social Worker (or out of hours services outside of the working day)
- Complete and forward to the Supervising Social Worker an Accident / Incident recording form and record the incident on the Daily / Weekly dairy recording sheet.

Appendix 1

BASIC DETAILS

Name of owner(s)			
Name of dog			
Sex	Male/Female	Neutered?	Yes/No
Date of birth		Age	
Breed			
Breed information			

PERSONALITY AND HISTORY

Describe the dog's personality and general behaviour
Describe what is known about the dog's history

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS, TRAINING AND ROUTINES

Where does the dog live and sleep?

What are the dog's daily routines?

Has the dog been formally or informally trained?

To what extent will the dog follow basic commands?

HEALTH AND HYGIENE

What are the arrangements for feeding the dog?

Where does the dog toilet and, if applicable, how is the waste disposed of?	
Does the dog have routine vaccinations and preventative treatment for worms, fleas and lice, etc?	
Is the dog registered with a vet?	Yes/No
Is the dog covered by health insurance or other arrangements?	Yes/No
<i>If the answer is 'no' to either of the above, then provide details below</i>	
Details/any further information in relation to health and hygiene	

SAFETY

How does the dog respond to other dogs?
How does the dog respond to people in public and when they visit the home?

What contact does the dog have with children and how does s/he respond to them?

SAFETY CHECKLIST

Has the dog ever bitten anyone?	Yes/No
Has the dog ever snapped or snarled at anyone?	Yes/No
Has the dog ever shown signs of aggression to anyone?	Yes/No
Has the dog ever fought with another dog other than in play?	Yes/No
Does the dog chase and/or kill small animals?	Yes/No
Is the dog scared by crying babies/shouting children?	Yes/No
Does the dog get overly excited when people run around?	Yes/No
<i>If the answer is 'yes' to any of the above, then provide details below and give careful consideration as to whether a specialist dog assessment is required</i>	
Can the owner touch the dog's food bowl when eating?	Yes/No
Can the owner remove toys from the dog if very excited?	Yes/No
Does the dog tolerate being stroked/physically examined?	Yes/No
Can the owner push the dog around in a playful manner?	Yes/No

If the answer is 'no' to any of the above, then provide details below and give careful consideration as to whether a specialist dog assessment is required

Is a specialist dog assessment necessary because of answers above or for any other reason?

Yes/No

Details/further information

BREEDING/EMPLOYMENT

If the owners use their home for breeding, grooming or running kennels, then set out the implications of this for fostering or adoption below

SOCIAL WORKER OBSERVATIONS

Assessing social worker's observations of the dog during visits to the home, including any comments on behaviour, hygiene or safety

SOCIAL WORK SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Suitability/significance of this dog in relation to fostering or adoption

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What action, if any, needs to be taken to reduce any foreseeable risks?

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Name of assessing social worker

Signature of assessing social worker

Date

APPLICANT/FOSTER CARER DECLARATION

- The information provided above is factually correct and I/we have shared fully and honestly all the relevant information regarding our dog.
- I/we undertake to provide any necessary supervision of the dog and child/children to minimise risk of harm to either.

Any comments

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Signature of applicant/foster carer 1	
Date	
Signature of applicant/foster carer 2	
Date	