



Coventry City Council

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*Internet and Social Media Policy –  
Fostering Service*

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## Coventry City Council

### **1. Introduction**

This document outlines the policy for prospective foster carers, connected persons carers and special guardians, as well as approved foster carers and connected persons carers. This document includes information about why we complete social media checks as part of the assessment process as well as appropriate use after your approval as a carer for Coventry City Council's Fostering Service.

It is the responsibility of the Fostering Service to ensure prospective and approved carers are suitable to work with children and young people and will be setting an example as good role models for the children and young people in their care.

### **2. Purpose**

We understand that the world is changing and so is the way that we communicate. The internet and various forms of social media have become an integral part of not only gathering but also sharing information. Therefore, it is vital that in order to ensure your safety and privacy and that of a child or young person in your care, these checks are carried out. We also want to make sure that your conduct in a public area is appropriate and adheres to the Services' high standards and expectations of our carers.

### **3. Legislation**

The law does not require social media and internet checks to be undertaken on prospective foster carers. However, Regulation 26(2)(c) of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (as amended) permits the fostering service to obtain "any other information consider relevant". This is also linked to Standard 2 (Promoting a positive identity, potential and valuing diversity through individualised care) and Standard 3 (Promoting positive behaviour and relationships) of the Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011.

### **4. Process - What Checks will be involved and how will they be carried out?**

As well as the other statutory checks we complete during our involvement with you, we will also conduct an internet search. Social media checks will be undertaken either by the assessor or supervising social worker, who will be inputting personal details such as your name (as well as that of a member of your household or of a person who will have access to a child in your care) into a search engine such as Google, and viewing any websites that link to this name. We may also search sites and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and others in a similar way. For prospective foster carers, checks will be undertaken as part of Stage 1 of the assessment process by using the log in profile of the Fostering Service.

The assessment consent form permits assessors to undertake these checks and the implications of internet use and appropriate privacy settings, will be discussed with you



## Coventry City Council

throughout the assessment process. You are not able to withhold consent for an internet check because the information that will be accessed is in the public domain and accessible to all.

Checks will only reveal information that is in the public domain and only show information to which access has not been secured. We would not seek to review other information on the internet that is not publicly available unless there was specific information suggesting a need to do so. We would therefore not normally ask you to provide any passwords or to provide access to any personal area of a social networking website or similar site unless we had reason to feel that this was necessary as a result of information obtained. This decision would be taken after discussion with a senior manager.

### **5. Sharing Information with you**

Your social worker will need to consider information from the internet about you and/or about others who will have contact with a child in your care, some of which may have been placed on the internet by a third party. All information gleaned from an internet search that raises concern will be shared and discussed with you. This information and any discussion will be recorded and considered in the context of the assessment as a whole. The only exemption to this will be where safeguarding concerns arise, in which case child protection procedures will be followed.

### **6. Good practice for approved foster carers**

#### **6.1 Confidentiality**

- Set maximum privacy settings and limit access to your posts; other settings may open your content to a wider audience and your privacy and that of your family, friends and children in your care could be compromised.
- Review your security and confidentiality settings regularly and reset them if necessary.
- Foster carers should consider the consequences before posting anything on social networking sites and the impression it may give to those who access the information. Remember that anything posted online could end up in the public domain to be read by birth parents, children / young people or your social worker.
- Be careful what you share; for example you should not share any information relating to your fostering role and daily routines or which can identify a child or former child in your care.
- Information and photographs of children in care must never be posted on social media sites without written consent from the local authority, parents and the children, if they are of an appropriate age. Once an image is on the internet it can be viewed and stored by other people within their friends' network and may reveal the location of the child / young person. Think about the implications of this for your own safety and that of the children you are caring for.



## Coventry City Council

- Carers' immediate family and friends, who are aware of their fostering role, should also be reminded of expectations around social media and the dangers of identifying a fostered child.

### 6.2 Professionalism

- Foster carers and children/young people can be friends on social networks if both parties feel comfortable with this, however, this will need to be reviewed if a child/young person moves on as the type/nature of acceptable communication is likely to change. Adding a young person as a 'friend' means you can assess/monitor their contents, but it also means they can access yours. Before doing so, discuss this with your supervising social worker and the child / young person's social worker.
- In order to maintain appropriate professional boundaries, foster carers should not have family members of looked after children as 'friends' nor should employees of the fostering service and foster carers be 'friends' on social media websites.
- Whenever you go online, professionally or personally, you must use your judgement and think carefully about what you are posting and how it reflects on the Council. You should be mindful to make clear that any views posted are your own and not those of the Council and make sure that any comments you make, do not bring the Council into disrepute.

Any breaches of confidentiality or the publication of material that is a cause for concern, may affect an applicant's assessment, or a carer's approval status and placements. The contents of this document should be considered in conjunction with all relevant Policies/Guidance in the Foster Carer Handbook.

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