

## JUSTICE COMMITTEE

### CHILDREN (SCOTLAND) BILL

#### SUBMISSION FROM THE FOSTERING NETWORK

##### **About The Fostering Network**

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity. We have been leading the fostering agenda for more than 40 years, influencing and shaping policy and practice at every level. We are passionate about the difference foster care makes to children and young people, and transforming children's lives is at the heart of everything we do.

As a membership organisation we bring together individuals and services involved in providing foster care across the UK. In Scotland, we are proud to have 100 per cent organisational membership of local authorities and independent voluntary fostering providers and over 4,200 foster care households (which represents 94 per cent of fostering households) in membership. Our views are informed by our members, as well as through research; in this way we aim to be the voice of foster care.

##### **Question 9. Contact with siblings**

The Children (Scotland) Bill has the potential to transform the way local authorities support children's relationships. The Fostering Network welcomes the recognition of the importance of the relationship between children in care and their siblings. We are pleased to see it acknowledged that children form sibling-like relationship with other children with whom they've lived, for instance the sons and daughters of foster carers. However, there is a significant relationship, that is often overlooked, between looked after children and their foster carers. For many children, their foster carers become some of the most significant adults in their lives. It can be destabilising for them to move on and leave their foster carers, particularly if they cannot keep in touch. Therefore, the promotion of contact with former foster carers should be written explicitly into the Bill.

##### **Other areas for consideration**

Children in foster care have often experienced change in every aspect of their lives. Positive long-term relationships can have a protective effect and repair some of the damage that may have been caused by this instability. Therefore, it is essential that children in foster care do not lose contact with the people they care about and trust if they move within or out of the care system.

A survey of young people in care and care leavers showed that 55 per cent were not supported to keep in touch with their foster carers, despite 81 per cent saying it was important. The findings of this survey are published in our 2016 report, [Keep Connected: Maintaining Relationships When Moving On](#).

In our [State of Scotland's Foster Care 2019 report](#), 30 per cent of foster carers stated that they had been prevented from maintaining contact with a child they had fostered and two thirds said they received little or no support to keep in touch.

The decision to prevent contact between foster carers and the children they have looked after is often based on outdated thinking about attachment, rather than the

most current thinking alongside a full consideration of children’s wishes and best interests.

Likewise, without the right support, foster carers, adopters, special guardians and birth family are put in the precarious position of trying to establish boundaries and expectations during what can be a challenging transition period.

If a child never sees or speaks to their foster carer after they move out, they can feel forgotten or abandoned, undermining the progress they may have made and the relationships they have built during that foster placement. In the longer term, it can be beneficial for children to know the people who looked after them, with whom they can share memories and who help them better understand their life story.

Furthermore, for foster carers and their families, saying goodbye when a child moves on can be one of the hardest parts of their role. Without ongoing contact, foster families are left wondering what happened to the child that was part of their household, missing them and worrying that they are being missed in return.

The Fostering Network has developed a set of principles for supporting and encouraging children to keep in touch with their former foster families. We have been calling on fostering services, local authorities and the wider care sector to adopt the principles, but change is slow. Urgent progress is needed. It is essential that the duty to promote these vital relationships is embedded in legislation.

### **Recommendation**

We urge you to add the following amendment to give local authorities a duty to promote, on a regular basis, personal relations and direct contact between the child and their former foster carers, where practicable and appropriate.

Section 10 (Promotion of contact between looked after children and siblings)

In subsection (2)(b)—

- (i) The “and” following paragraph (a) is repealed,
- (ii) After paragraph (b) insert “, and  
  
(c) a former foster carer of the child.”.

We would expect the related guidance to detail how this would be facilitated and supported. There would also be a need for additional resources, to give foster carers the time and cover the costs of travel. This should be included in the financial memorandum.

### **More information**

There’s more information about the Keep Connected campaign on The Fostering Network’s website, including our principles for best practice: [thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/keep-connected](http://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/keep-connected).

The Fostering Network  
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