

Foster Carers' Charter



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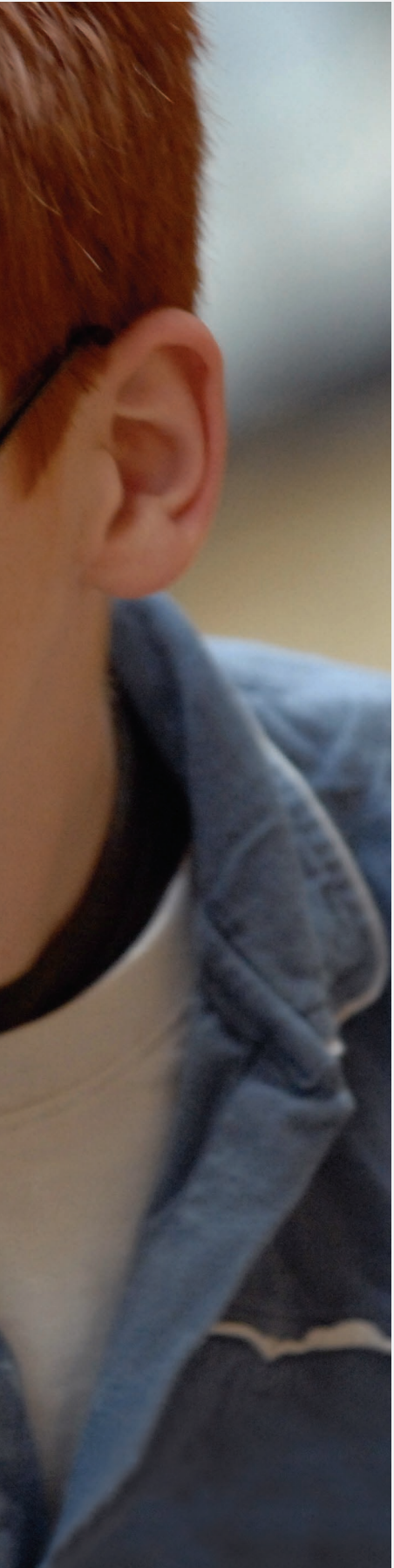
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Introduction



In March 2011, the Government issued guidance to local authorities requiring them to set up a Foster Carers' Charter.

The Fostering Network produced further guidance on how to make this charter into a living document, which is effective in ensuring that foster carers are regarded as full members of the team working with the children in our care. This has also coincided with the new Fostering Services Regulations, Guidance and National Minimum Standards (2011). Hampshire's Foster Carers' Charter incorporates this legislation into the final document.

Hampshire County Council Family Placement staff have used these documents, and have also consulted with foster carers, Hampshire Fostering Network, social workers, independent reviewing officers and Hampshire County Council's Executive Lead Member for Children's Services, to produce a Charter which is relevant for all Hampshire County Council foster carers.

This Charter will enable foster carers to get the recognition that they deserve and will help to ensure that we provide children with the best possible care.

Hampshire's Foster Carers' Charter is supported by the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services.

The Charter should be read alongside the Foster Carer Agreement, a legal requirement as specified in the Fostering Services Regulations which cover the responsibilities, requirements and expectations between Hampshire County Council and the foster carer.

Foreword from Executive Lead Member for Children's Services

We are always seeking to enhance and develop our services to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the county's most vulnerable children and young people.

Our team of dedicated foster carers are a very valued and vital part of our support to families in need. Their role deserves to be recognised and supported and this, Hampshire's Foster Carers' Charter, is designed to do just that.

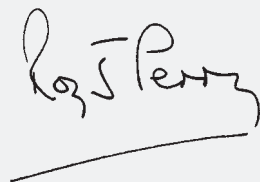
In bringing our staff and carers together we ensure that everyone knows what support they can expect and what is expected of them in their important role of foster carer. The Charter will unite everyone under the common aim of achieving improved outcomes for children and young people in our care by improving the quality of placements.

A good quality foster placement is vital in enabling vulnerable children and young people to feel safe and supported, to thrive and progress through childhood into adulthood.

It is essential that foster carers are at the heart of arrangements for looked after children and that they feel engaged, supported and consulted. I am pleased that in adapting the Government's Charter for Foster Carers, Hampshire County Council has worked with local carers and the Hampshire Fostering Network to agree the content of this Hampshire Charter, to ensure that it reflects the working relationship between us all and that we all continue to work together to achieve the best outcomes for children.

We must never lose sight of what is best for the most important people of all – the children and young people in our care. Securing better futures for them is our united aim.

I hope existing foster carers will see from this Charter that we do value them very much. I also hope the Charter will encourage those thinking about fostering to come forward by giving them confidence in the support and commitment we give our carers in return for the very important job they do.



Councillor Roy Perry
Deputy Leader &
Executive Member for Children's Services
Hampshire County Council



Roles and Commitment

The fostering service's role

The fostering service aims to provide stable and first rate foster care for children in care, who are valued, supported and encouraged to grow and develop as individuals. To achieve this aim, we recruit, train and approve foster carers and provide ongoing support for them.

Foster carer's role

Foster carers are at the heart of the foster care service. We are assessed, trained and supported to look after children and young people in a family environment, providing them with stability, care and an opportunity to grow and develop and to reach their potential.

Our working relationships are based on mutual trust and respect. This charter explains what we expect from each other:

The fostering service's commitment

You can expect from us:

- 1 Working in partnership
- 2 Information
- 3 Clarity about decisions
- 4 Support
- 5 Learning and development
- 6 Fair treatment
- 7 Communication and consultation

Foster carers' commitment

You can expect from us:

- 1 Working in partnership
- 2 Respect for the child
- 3 Information
- 4 Learning, development and support
- 5 Communication and consultation

What foster carers can expect from Hampshire's fostering service

1 Working in partnership

We recognise that foster carers have skills and expertise and make the biggest difference to the everyday lives of children in care.

We will:

- Value your skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals
- Recognise that you are the people who live with children every day and know them best
- Include you in all meetings that affect you and the children you care for
- Ensure that our fostering service will meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance
- Treat you without discrimination and respect you as a colleague
- Respect confidentiality

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2 Information

We know that information is vital in order for foster carers to provide care that meets the child's need.

We will:

- Give you all the information you need in order to care safely for the child
- Provide this information in writing prior to placement (except when there are emergency placements and it is not feasible to do so, when we will provide this information as soon as possible)
- Ensure that there is a placement plan drawn up in discussion with you and agreed with you in advance of placements (except in emergencies where this will be done as soon as possible)
- Ensure that agreement of delegated responsibility will be undertaken
- Provide you with information on all financial matters including tax, allowances and additional entitlements
- Provide you with full details of all relevant departmental policies and procedures



3 Clarity about decisions

We recognise that in order for children to live a full family life, foster carers must be able to make decisions regarding the children they foster.

We will:

- Ensure that, wherever possible, you are able to make everyday decisions that mean that your fostered child is not treated differently to their peers and can feel part of your family
- Provide clarity about any decision you cannot take at the outset so that everyone understands who is responsible for what
- Manage the delegated responsibility agreement as a working document, which will be reviewed at each Children Looked After (CLA) review

4 Support

We recognise that fostering can be an isolating and challenging task, and that appropriate and timely support makes all the difference to the fostering family and to the child in your care.

We will:

- Respond positively to requests for additional support
- Provide you with a minimum of six-weekly supervision and appropriate contact, via phone, e-mail, text, and through e-comms
- Give you honest and open feedback
- Provide you with access to 24 hour support from people with fostering expertise
- Pay you allowances, expenses and fees in a timely manner in line with National minimum allowances
- Pay fees that reflect the task as set out in Hampshire's guidance
- Ensure that there is a local support group, recognised by the fostering service, where you and your family can find support and share experiences with other fostering families



5 Learning and development

We believe that foster carers must be enabled to access learning and development opportunities throughout their fostering career. This will ensure they have the skills and knowledge they need and allow them to develop their practice in order that they can help transform the lives of the children they foster.

We will:

- Provide you and your family with appropriate and relevant training delivered by trainers who understand the fostering task
- Provide you with other development opportunities which make the best use of your skills and expertise, such as mentoring or providing training or support

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6 Fair treatment

We recognise that foster carers have a right to be treated fairly, no matter what the circumstances.

We will:

- Consult with you before changing terms and conditions
- Ensure openness in all of our discussions and communications with you
- Ensure that you are treated with respect, kept informed and provided with emotional support should you be subject to an allegation
- Provide a framework for dealing with allegations and adhere to our agreed timescales
- Ensure that you know the arrangements for the payment of fees and allowances in the event that you are not able to foster while the subject of an allegation

7 Communication and consultation

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

We will:

- Facilitate regular communication between you, Councillors, and the Director of Children's Services through Hampshire's Fostering Network
- Ensure that we consult with you in a meaningful way on matters that affect you
- Give you timely feedback from consultations

What Hampshire's fostering service can expect from foster carers

1 Working in partnership

We will demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct.

We will:

- Demonstrate our expertise and make use of our skills to the best of our ability
- Provide children with an experience of family life
- Attend meetings about the children and young people we care for
- Work with the agencies involved with the child, such as school, health and religious establishments, and with birth parents, wider family and people significant in a child's life, with understanding, ability and commitment
- Meet the standards set out in the Fostering Regulations and Guidance and follow departmental policies and procedures
- Respect confidentiality
- Treat you without discrimination and respect you as colleagues

2 Respect for the child

Every child and young person should be respected as an individual and be supported by meeting their needs and helping them to achieve their aspirations and potential.

We will:

- Respect and promote a child's religious, linguistic and cultural heritage
- Afford the same level of protection and care to a child as we would our own child in accordance with the National Minimum Standards and Hampshire's aspirations and standards for its children in care
- Ensure the child has the right to make decisions regarding their own lives, appropriate to their age and understanding



3 Information

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

We will:

- Inform our supervising social worker about changes in our household
- Inform our supervising social worker about any difficulties that arise for us
- Record and report information as per current policies and procedures

4 Learning, development and support

We must be enabled to access learning and development opportunities throughout our fostering career. This will ensure we have the skills and knowledge we need and allow us to develop our practice in order that we can help transform the lives of the children we foster.

We will:

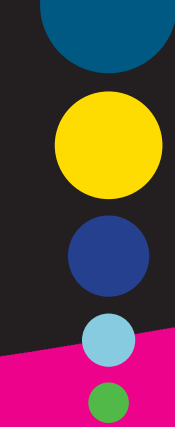
- Be prepared to develop our skills throughout our fostering career
- Attend relevant training
- Take up opportunities offered to us
- Let you know if we are unable to attend
- Attend and contribute to support groups
- Participate within the organisation

5 Communication and consultation

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

We will:

- Respond to local consultations and discussion in order to inform the development of the service
- Meet with Councillors, service managers and others in order to promote dialogue and a good working relationship
- Manage communications in a professional and respectful manner



Foster Carers' Charter



Information in this publication is available in other formats on request.
Please contact 01489 587 017

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