

Stoke on Trent City Council

FOSTER CARERS CHARTER



You can
be the
difference

STOKE-ON-TRENT
FOSTERING

Foster
Council for
your

City of
Stoke-on-Trent

Introduction to the Foster Carers Charter

The Foster Carers' Charter was jointly produced by Government, fostering organisations, national charities and children in care. The overall aim is to make sure that all children in care have greater stability, less upheaval and a better chance at a stable family life.

The new Charter underlines the huge value that Government place on foster carers. Not only as role models to the children who look up to them, but also as proactive professional parents who put those children first. The Charter sets out clear principles of what support should be available and what foster carers can expect from their local authority.

Children's Minister Will Quince MP often writes open letters to foster carers, celebrating the fact they "do the most demanding and rewarding job. There are few things more challenging than meeting the needs of looked after children - and few things more inspiring than seeing these children and young people progress and succeed in life. Stoke-on-Trent City Council couldn't agree more and recognises that a huge part of the progress and success of our looked after children and care leavers is down to our foster carers.

Foster carers are an integral part of a skilled team of workers providing stability and permanent planning for children, and need be at the centre of our care planning process. The overarching aim of our children in care service is to find children a family that they can be part of forever. Foster carers and their families have a key role to play in this process.

We have already begun the process of changing the way in which we deliver our services via the Making a Difference Project. Social work pods will operate in an inclusive way and ensure that the foster carer's voice is heard. Our charter sets out the way in which we will work together, recognises the important job that foster carers do and builds on the good working relationships that are already in place.

Working together in this way we can all ensure that we make a real difference to children's lives.

What Foster Carers can expect from us

Working in Partnership

We value your skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals and recognise that you make the biggest difference to the everyday lives of children in care. We will:

- treat you with respect, without discrimination
- include you in all meetings that affect you and the children in your care (with the exception of Strategy Meetings in the event of an allegation being made against you)
- respect confidentiality at all times
- adhere to the Standards set out the National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Regulations

Information

We know that information is vital in order for Foster Carers to provide care that safely meets the child or young persons' needs. We will:

- provide full information and a placement plan within the timescales set out in the Care Planning Placement and Review Regulations 2013
- provide information about financial matters/support and relevant policies and procedures in a foster carer handbook

Clarity about decisions

In order for children and young people to feel part of your foster family, foster carers must be able to make day to day decisions, in line with the care plan. We will:

- ensure that you can make everyday decisions, making it clear from the outset, who is responsible for what regularly review the decisions that are delegated to the foster carers

Support

We recognise that fostering is a unique and sometimes demanding profession, and that foster carers have the right to on-going support. We will:

- provide every foster carer with a Supervising Social Worker, who will be available for support, supervision and guidance on a regular basis
- provide support groups for foster carers and their children
- provide allowances, fees and expenses in a timely manner
- provide advice and support through the Emergency Duty Team
- provide specific support via Placement Support Team, Psychological Services, the Virtual School and the Looked After Children' Nurse
- provide every foster carer membership with an Independent National Fostering Organisation for advice and mediation and the Stoke-on-Trent Foster Carers' Association

Learning and Development

We believe that foster carers need to access learning and development opportunities in order to meet the complex needs of the children and young people they care for. We will:

- ensure that all foster carers have a Personal Development Plan
- offer comprehensive training opportunities provided by the Fostering Service as well as through other agencies who understand the fostering task
- encourage foster carers to take responsibility for their own personal development

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 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 subject of an allegation

Communication and Consultation

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

- facilitate regular communication between you, Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Cabinet Member for Education and the Senior Management Team of Children and Young People's Services
- ensure that we consult with you in a meaningful way on matters that affect you give you timely feedback from consultations

What the Foster Service expects from Foster Carers

Working in Partnership

We will demonstrate the same commitment to high standards of care and conduct as required by all professionals. We will:

- attend all appropriate meetings about the child we care for
- ensure that the child attends school and work in partnership with the teaching staff to enable them to reach their full potential
- work with all agencies involved in the child's welfare
- show a willingness to work with birth parents, wider family, and people that are important to the child
- ensure that we are actively involved in contact arrangements, including transport, unless it is agreed that this is inappropriate.
- carry out our role following all relevant procedures and policies
- respect confidentially at all times

Respect the child

Every child should be respected as an individual and be supported in meeting and achieving their aspirations and potential. We will:

- respect and value the child's religious, linguistic and cultural diversity
- provide a safe happy stable home as we would our own child within the national standards. This involves our wider family as well as us as foster carers.
- ensure that children have the right and opportunity to make decisions regarding their lives in
- accordance with their age and understanding
- support young people to move on to independence, helping them to live positive lives and become part of the community in which they live.

Information

We will:

- inform our Supervising Social Worker of any changes within our household
- inform our Supervising Social Worker of any difficulties that may arise for us

Learning and Development

We will:

- access learning and development opportunities in order to gain the skills and knowledge we need to develop our practise and meet the complex needs of the children we care for.
- be prepared to develop our skills and knowledge throughout our fostering career
- take up relevant training and opportunities offered to us
- inform you when we are unable to attend any scheduled training

Communication

We will:

- attend communication meetings with senior management staff to ensure good working relationships with the department as a whole
- keep regular contact with the Supervising Social Worker & Children and Young People's service
- ensure that we respond to you on matters that affect you/us in good time

Consultation

We will:

- attend communication and consultation meetings with senior managers to ensure that we continue to work in partnership and develop the service.
- ensure that foster carers have representation at the Corporate Parenting Panel

Signed



Lisa Lyons
Director of Children and Family Services



Councillor Dave Evans
Lead Member for Children's Services



Bob Yeo
Chair of the Stoke-on-Trent
Foster Carers' Association