

Foster Carers' Charter

Introduction to the Foster Carers' Charter

The Foster Carers' Charter has been jointly produced by Government, fostering organisations, national charities and children and young people who are Looked After. 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 care for them, but also as proactive 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.

A Children's Minister once described foster carers as the unsung heroes of our care system who do a fantastic, selfless job helping often vulnerable children build stable relationships that can endure into adulthood. Shropshire Council share this view and recognise foster care as the most valuable resource offering children and young people an alternative family care experience if they can't live with their own birth family. We want to offer this care opportunity to all children and young people who need to be in the care of our local authority.

Foster carers are an integral part of a skilled team of workers providing stability and permanence planning for children and young people and need to be at the centre of our care planning process.

Shropshire Council and the Shropshire Foster Carers' Association are working in partnership to ensure that all foster carers within Shropshire have a voice and are listened to. Our charter sets out the way in which we will work together, recognises the important job 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 and without discrimination at all times
- Provide opportunity for you to contribute to all meetings that affect you and the children in your care Respect your confidentiality at all times sharing information about you and your family on a need to know basis and for child protection purposes only
- Adhere to the Standards set out in the National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Regulations to provide you with information and regular support guidance and training
- Ensure financial payments are made to you in a timely way and through our Payment Arrangements for Foster Carers policy ensure you receive financial reward that reflects the skills and care you provide to children and young people
- Undertake a risk assessment where necessary to ensure that you can work safely with children and young people in your care and their birth family

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 for children in your care within the timescales set out in the Care Planning Placement and Review Regulations 2010
- Provide information about financial matters/support and relevant policies and procedures in a foster carer handbook

Clarity about Decisions

In order that children and young people 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 carer

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 specific support via a link worker and the looked after children's nurse
- Provide membership to the Fostering Network and Shropshire Foster Carer's Association
- Ensure that your supervision and review meetings are held at a mutually convenient time and support you to attend/contribute to all meetings held in respect of care planning for children in your care
- Inform you when we are unable to attend any scheduled meeting in as timely as way as possible

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

February 2015

- Ensure that where an allegation is made against you we will follow investigations in line with safeguarding procedures in a way that is efficient and appropriately inclusive
- 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

Communication and Consultation

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

- Facilitate regular communication between you, Shropshire Council Members, and the Senior Management Team for Children and Young People's Services
- Ensure that we consult with you in a meaningful way on matters that affect you

What the Foster Care Association and Shropshire Council Children's Services 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 and/ or contribute to 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 positively and co-operatively with all agencies involved in the child's welfare and delivering the child's care plan.
- Work positively and co-operatively with birth parents, wider family and people that are important to the child as identified within the child's care plan
- 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 set out in the handbook
- Respect confidentiality 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 contribute to decisions made regarding their lives in accordance with their age and understanding
- Support young people to develop independent living skills in line with their age and abilities enabling them to move on to independence, helping them to live positive lives and become part of the community in which they live
- Ensure that if we feel unable to continue to meet the needs of any child or young person in our care that we will give as much notice as possible and work with agencies and the young person to ensure they are moved to an alternative placement in a positively, timely way

February 2015
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 must be enabled to access learning and development opportunities in order to gain the skills and knowledge we need to develop our practise in order to meet the complex needs of the children we care for. We will:

- 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:

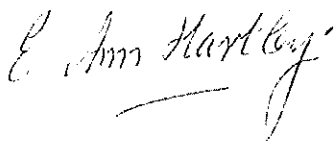
- Attend communication meetings with senior management staff to ensure good working relationships with the department as a whole
- Keep in regular contact with the Supervising Social Worker and Children and Young People's Services
- Ensure that we respond to you on matters that affect you/us in good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



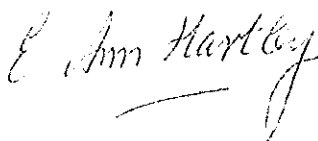
Ann Hartley 26.2.15

Chair of Corporate Parenting Panel



Tina Russell 25.2.15

Assistant Director, Children and Young People's Services



Ann Hartley 26.2.15

Lead Member for Children's Services



Tracy Griffiths 28.2.15

Chair of Shropshire Foster Carers' Association