

Isle of Wight Council
Fostering Service

FOSTER CARERS' CHARTER
December 2011

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

The Foster Carers' Charter

MISSION & VISION STATEMENT

Children come first

- Children in foster care deserve to experience as full a family life as possible as part of a loving family with carers who can make everyday decisions as they would their own child and without the child feeling that they 'stand out' as a looked after child.
- Children and carers will be given specialist advice and support and challenge to help them overcome early experiences of neglect and abuse, compounded by separation and loss.
- Children must be given every support to develop their own identities and aspirations, fulfil their potential, and take advantage of all opportunities to promote their talents and skills. Above all, they should be listened to.
- Children will be supported to achieve emotional permanence through secure and stable placements that offer the possibility of legal orders that confer parental responsibility on the carers.

Isle of Wight Council, Childrens Services will

- recognise in practice the importance of the child's relationship with his or her carers as one that can make the biggest difference in the child's life and which can endure into adulthood.
- listen to, involve carers and the children in their care, in decision-making and planning, and provide carers and the children with full information about each other.
- in making placements be clear about the continuing care or support there will be (including for the child into adulthood), be sensitive to the needs of the foster carer and the child in making and ending placements and have contingency plans should the placement not work.
- treat carers with openness, fairness and respect as a core member of the team around the child and support them in making reasonable and appropriate decisions on behalf of their foster child.
- ensure that carers have the support services and development opportunities they need in order to provide their foster child with the best possible care. That includes liaising with local carers' groups and seeking to respond to problems and disseminate best practice.
- make sure carers are paid on time and are given clear information about any support, allowances, fees, and holidays they will receive including in cases of dispute with the service or during gaps in placements.

Foster carers will

- provide positive adult role models, treat the child in their care as they would their own child, and be a proactive parent in advocating for all aspects of the child's development, including educational attainment, supporting them to get to school, transporting them if

required to promote physical and emotional health and wellbeing and co-operate fully as part of a team with other key professional in the child's life.

- support their foster child and do all they can to make the placement work. Take part in learning and development, use skills and approaches that make a positive impact and enable the child to reach his or her potential. Support their foster child to help them to counter possible bullying and discrimination as a result of their care status.
- help the child in their care achieve emotional permanence through secure relationships and stable placements, considering in appropriate cases substituting legal orders that confer parental responsibility on the basis of the ongoing levels of advice and support necessary throughout childhood and leaving care.

ISLE OF WIGHT COUNCIL, FOSTERING SERVICE

Foster Carers' Charter

Roles and Commitment

The Fostering Service's role

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

The foster carer's role

Foster carers are at the heart of the fostering service. They 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.

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. High quality care
4. Information
5. Learning and development
6. Problem solving
7. Communication and consultation

Foster Carers' Charter

What foster carers can expect from the 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

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 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)
- provide you with information on all financial matters including , allowances and additional entitlements ,and tax matters to enable you to obtain your own financial advice.
- 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

4. Support

We recognise that fostering is an isolating and challenging task and 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 monthly supervision and weekly phone contact
- 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
- pay fees that reflect the task
- ensure that there is a local group, recognised by the Family Placement Service, where you and your family can find support and share experiences with other fostering families.

Foster Carers' Charter

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 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

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
- ensure that we consult with you in a meaningful way on matters that affect you
- give you timely feedback from consultations.

Foster Carers' Charter

What fostering services 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
- show a willingness to work with birth parents, wider family and people significant in a child's life
- meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance and follow departmental policies and procedures
- respect confidentiality

2. Respect for the child

Every child and young person should be respected as an individual and be supported in meeting their needs and achieving 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
- ensure the child has the right to make decisions regarding their own lives, as 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. Inform the fostering Service/child's social worker/emergency out of hours team immediately about any serious issues and incidents that happen, or affect any child or young person in our care.
- Keep and share records in line with the Isle of Wight Fostering Service recording policy

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

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

Agreement signatures to Fostering Charter

Ian Anderson - Director of Community Well-Being & Social Care

Signature Date.....

CLLr Dawn Cousins – Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Education

Signature Date.....

Ali Matthews – Deputy Director – Safeguarding

Signature Date.....

Simon Dear – Commissioner for Long Term Interventions

Signature Date.....

Karen Cheeseman – Group Manager, Fostering & Adoption Service

Signature Date.....

Foster Carer(s) – (individual name(s) to be inserted)

Signature Date.....