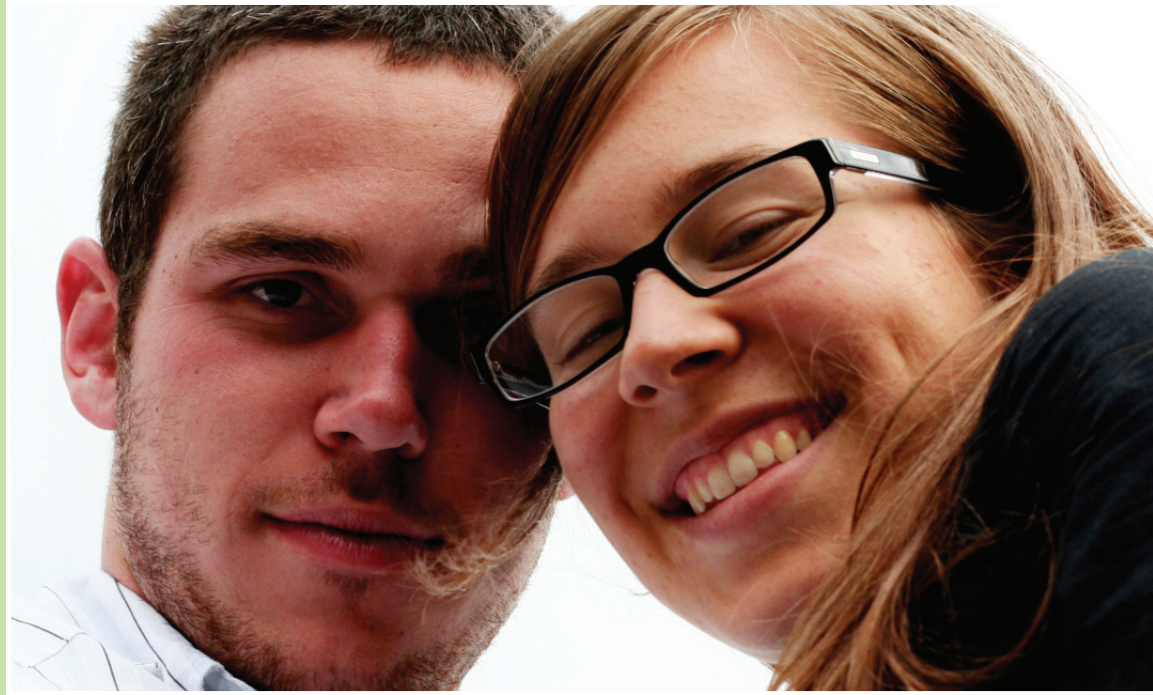


Foster Carers' Charter



putting it into practice

England
June 2011



the fostering network
the voice of foster care



Introduction

In March 2011, the Fostering Network welcomed the Government's foster carers' charter. We have long campaigned that foster carers should be regarded as full members of the team working with a child. A charter that is agreed by fostering services and their foster carers will help to make this a reality. For local authorities, the lead member should also sign the agreement.

We consulted with our members on how to make the Government's charter a living and effective document. The *Foster Carers' Charter: putting it into practice* is the result of our consultation. We hope this sample charter will help you to put the Government's charter into practice, so that foster carers get the recognition they deserve and need to provide children with the best possible care.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Tapsfield'.

Robert Tapsfield
Chief Executive
The Fostering Network

Here is how to use the Fostering Network's sample charter

- Step 1** Fostering services and foster carers need to get together to discuss the Government's charter.
- Step 2** Have a look at this sample charter. It might give you some ideas about areas you would like to think about in more detail.
- Step 3** Think about how foster care is delivered locally: which issues do you want to see in a charter for your fostering service?
- Step 4** Next, fostering services, foster carers – and councillors, where appropriate – should work together to draw up a local charter.
- Step 5** Finally, send your finished and signed charter to web@fostering.net so we can share good practice on our website.

Some things to remember when you are developing your charter

- Think about the new fostering regulations, guidance and National Minimum Standards 2011. Everything in the Government's charter is required in the NMS, and so the Government's charter includes things the fostering service must do.
- Your foster carers' charter should be read alongside your Foster Care Agreement, a legal requirement as specified in the regulations which covers responsibilities, requirements and expectations between the fostering service and the foster carer.
- Local authority fostering services should involve their lead councillor in drawing up a 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 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.

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 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 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)
- 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.

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 fostering service, where you and your family can find support and share experiences with other fostering families.

Foster Carers' Sample 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.

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.

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.