

Foster Carers CHARTER



EAST RIDING
OF YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

The Foster Carers' Charter

Ministerial Foreword

Too often we fail to appreciate the essential contribution made by the great unsung army of foster carers. With the majority of looked after children in England living with foster carers their role is invaluable and deserves to be recognised and supported. This Charter is an important step to do just that and make their job as straightforward and rewarding as possible.

With the growing pressures on the care system we need to attract new and dedicated prospective foster carers to come forward in tandem with making sure that existing carers are encouraged to carry on their caring responsibilities, and where appropriate, extend them. Yet, too often, I hear from foster carers that they feel isolated, insufficiently supported and even put upon. Whilst there are many examples of good practice amongst local authorities and agencies, the picture remains mixed – yet foster carers and the children they look after need to enjoy the experience of the best. A good quality foster placement helps achieve stability for the child, satisfaction for the carer and most important of all a vital element in helping often damaged children and young people to have a decent second chance at a safe and fulfilling childhood. It is a win win situation which relies primarily on people and relationships and the Government is determined to do everything to promote it further.

It is essential therefore that foster carers are at the heart of arrangements for looked after children and must be fully engaged, supported and consulted at every stage. Without understanding how important the role of a foster carer is and what they can expect from others, it is so much harder to do the best for these children and young people. At the same time everyone needs to be focused on what is best for the most important people of all – the children in their care.

That is why I hope that all of you can endorse not only the Charter but also the spirit of the Charter. I hope the Charter can be used to unite foster carers, local authorities and fostering services around a shared understanding. I hope that it will give people the confidence to question and make demands when the 'spirit' of the Charter is not being met. I want you to build on the foundations of the Charter and make it work for you locally. This means being confident enough to come forward and talk about where things are working well and not so well, and share experiences and ideas on how to make things better and how ultimately we can achieve a better experience for those children and young people in the care system.

TIM LOUGHTON MP
Children's Minister

The Foster Carers' Charter

Children come first

- Children in foster care deserve to experience as full a family life as possible as part of a loving foster 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 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.

Local authorities and fostering services must

- Recognise in practice the importance of the child's relationship with his or her foster family as one that can make the biggest difference in the child's life and which can endure into adulthood.
- Listen to, involve foster carers and their foster children in decision-making and planning, and provide foster carers and their foster 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 foster 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 foster 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 foster carers groups and seeking to respond to problems and disseminate best practice.
- Make sure foster carers are recompensed 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 must

- Provide positive adult role models, treat the foster child as they would their own child, and be a "pushy parent" in advocating for all aspects of the child's development, including educational attainment and physical and emotional health and wellbeing and co-operate fully as part of a team with other key professionals 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.

In signing this Charter the fostering service, child's local authority and foster carer agrees to reflect the spirit and intentions of the Charter in their actions.

Alison Michalska



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▪ **Foster carer/s**

East Riding of Yorkshire Council's Foster Carers.

East Riding of Yorkshire Council Foster Care Charter Commitment

The East Riding of Yorkshire Council Roles and Commitment

The fostering services 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. Foster carers 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 & support
5. Communication & consultation

What foster carers can expect from the East Riding of Yorkshire Council

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 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 regular supervision and regular 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.

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 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 East Riding of Yorkshire Council 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.

The following organisations have worked to develop the Charter and have pledged to support the Foster Carers' Charter and help make it a reality in all areas.

