



Bedford Borough Council Foster Carer Charter

Introduction

This document represents the aspirations of Bedford Borough Council and Bedfordshire Foster Care Association, to ensure children and young people in the care of the Council, receive the best possible standards of care, from foster carers who are viewed as an essential professional part of the team supporting the child.

The Charter acknowledges that national charter launched by the Government in England in April 2011 and is based on a national template produced by the Fostering Network, which has been adapted to reflect the local needs of the Bedford Borough fostering Service

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, Regulations and Statutory Guidance sit alongside the Charter. They provide the detail on many of the topics set out in the Charter and cover the fostering services regulatory duties. The Charter should be read alongside the Foster Care Agreement, a legal requirement as specified by the regulations which covers responsibilities, requirements and expectations between the fostering service and the foster carer.

This document has been written to take into account all of these regulations and guidance.

Context

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 children's social care service's role

The Social Care service recognises the positive and central role that carers play in the lives of the child placed with them. In order to ensure the best possible outcomes for that child all members of Children's Services are committed to working in an informed partnership with carers for as long as the child is placed with them to ensure that the child can live as normal a family life as possible.

The foster carer's role

Foster carers are at the heart of the foster care 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.

This document applies equally to all foster carers whether they are related or unrelated to the child that they foster. Equally whether they are Bedford Borough Carers or Carers from elsewhere who look after Borough children.

Our working relationships are based on mutual trust and respect. This charter explains what we expect from each other.

Fostering & Children's Social Care Services 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 and development
- 5 Communication and consultation

What foster carers can expect from the fostering & children's social care service:

1 Working in partnership

We recognise that foster carers have skills and expertise and make the biggest difference to the every day 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.
- Understand that, unlike other professional partners, you have invited vulnerable children and young people into your homes, which impacts on every aspect of your family life.
- Include you in all meetings that affect you and the children you care for.
- Ensure that our fostering & children's social care service will meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance, as well as those agreed in the placement plan.
- Ensure that our fostering and children's social care service at all times seeks to meet Bedford Borough Council's Pledge to looked after children and corporate Parenting strategy.
- Treat you without discrimination and respect you as a colleague.
- Respect confidentiality.

2 Information

We know that accurate and timely information is vital in order for foster carers to provide the high quality care that meet the child's need.

We will:

- Give you all the information including that provided by other corporate parents in education and health that 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 structure, staffing, policies and procedures.
- Ensure that all information is regularly updated so that you are best placed to care for the child placed with you.

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 every day decisions using delegated authority that means that your fostered child is not treated differently to their peers and can feel part of your family.
- Ensure that everyone in Children's Services understand the implications of delegated authority.
- Give timely and detailed information about decision making which allows you to act as an advocate in all aspects of the child's development.
- We will ensure that policy and practice does not place artificial barriers in the way of promoting a normal family, school and social life for the children placed with you.
- 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 can be an isolating and challenging task that should affect all aspects of family and social life. Appropriate and timely support makes all the difference to the whole fostering family and to the child in your care.

We will:

- Respond positively to requests for additional support and consider your needs in a timely and empathetic fashion.
- Provide you with regular supervision and frequent phone contact which meets your needs, those of the children you foster and national minimum standards.
- Commit to formally review your practice on at least an annual basis which will give you the opportunity to comment on your fostering experience.
- Provide you with systems that allow you to share electronic information and documents securely ensuring that the data and confidentiality are protected.
- Give you honest and open feedback which allows you to reflect on your practice and influence others opinions of you if appropriate.
- Provide you with access to out of hours telephone support from people with fostering expertise.
- Provide specialist support to inform the care that you provide in areas such as education, health, youth offending and / or behaviour.
- Pay you allowances, expenses and fees in a timely manner.
- Pay fees that reflect the task where appropriate.
- Ensure that there is a local foster carers group, recognised by the fostering service, where you and your family can find support and share experiences with other fostering families.
- Provide you with access to trained foster carers who are mentors who can support you with issues relating to fostering.

- Provide membership of an independent national fostering organisation so that Bedford carers are able to benefit from understanding the wider issues relating to fostering.

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.
- Encourage trainers to allow you opportunities for self reflection so that you are able to apply the training to your home.
- Provide you with other development opportunities which make the best use of your skills and expertise such as mentoring or providing training or support.
- Produce a mutually agreed development plan reflecting your knowledge, the needs of the child you care for and your fostering aspirations.
- Offer the opportunity for local foster carers to contribute to training of fellow carers.

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 and your local foster care group before changing terms, conditions and policies affecting fostering.
- Provide an independent advice and mediation service which you can access without recourse to the fostering service.
- Ensure openness in all of our discussions and communications with you.
- Ensure that you are treated with respect, kept informed and provided with independent advice and 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.
- Allow you timely access to records held relating to you and your family.

7 Communication and consultation

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship recognising that carers are expected to act as a 'pushy', corporate parent.

We will:

- Facilitate regular communication between you, the Bedfordshire Foster Carer's Association, councillors, senior managers in the fostering & children's social care services and the Director of Children and Adult's Services.
- Ensure that we consult with you and the Bedfordshire Foster Carers Association on matters that affect you in good time and take into account your advice and concerns.
- Give you timely feedback from consultations.

What fostering and Children's Social Care services can expect from foster carers:

1 Working in partnership

We will demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct.

We will:

- Support the child's education and raise aspirations for any child that we care for and in so doing demonstrate our expertise and make use of our skills to the best of our ability.
- Provide children with an experience of a secure and high quality family life meeting their needs and cultural identity.
- Attend meetings and provide reports about the children and young people we care for.
- Work with the agencies involved with the child such as school, health and religious establishments and act as a 'pushy parent' to advocate for the child to contribute to them achieving the best possible achievements and outcomes.
- Make reasonable arrangements to support, raise aspiration, transport and care for the child as a good parent would.
- Show a willingness to work with birth parents, wider family and people significant in a child's life in an open and transparent way according to the child's needs.
- Meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance and follow departmental policies and procedures.
- Work with the fostering and children's social care service in seeking to meet Bedford Borough Council's Pledge to looked after children.
- Respect confidentiality and ensure that all confidential material in our care is kept securely.

2 Respect the child

Every child and young person should be respected as an individual and be supported in meeting their needs and actively encouraged to achieve 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.
- Listen to the child placed with us and take their opinions into account including advocating for the child if needed.
- Provide positive support and encouragement in all aspects of the child's life including health, leisure and education.
- 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 timely and accurate information is essential in allowing professionals to make the right decisions for children. The role of carers is central to providing the up to date information.

We will:

- Inform our supervising social worker about the changes in our household.
- Inform our supervising social worker about any difficulties that arise for us.
- Take part in regular supervision and an annual review of our fostering practice.
- Regularly communicate with the child's social worker to keep them fully informed of any developments in their life.
- Attend meetings and provide reports as requested in order to ensure the best possible outcomes for the child.

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:

- Reflect on our fostering practice in order to improve the service that we offer to the child.
- Be prepared to develop our skills throughout our fostering career.
- Make an active contribution to our training development plan.
- Continually up date our skills and understanding including attending relevant training.
- Take up opportunities offered to us.
- Let you know if we are unable to attend meetings or training as soon as reasonably possible.

- Attend and contribute to support groups.
- Contribute to the training of other carers where appropriate.
- Provide case studies for the foster carer toolkit of best fostering practice.

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, the local foster care group and others in order to promote dialogue and a good working relationship.
- Ensure that we communicate with all partners, especially the child's social worker in a professional and secure fashion in line with the Borough's policy.

Bedford Borough Council
Bedfordshire Foster Care Association

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