



Foster Carers' Charter



Roles and Commitment:

OUR COMMITMENT:

"The role of the foster carer is vital to ensuring that the needs of children in care in Suffolk are met and met well. Foster Carers including Kinship foster carers deserve to be recognised and supported for what they do, and this Foster Carer Charter sets out to do this.

This Charter aims to bring together the responsibilities of staff and all types of foster carers into one simple document so we can be clear what is expected of us all. The best foster care families can change lives; and we want to support foster carers to achieve this. It is essential that foster carers remain at the heart of our arrangements for children in care and that they feel engaged, supported and consulted with.

This Charter will assist us with the task of developing and maintaining an excellent working relationship with foster carers, so that children and young people in foster care including kinship, can feel safe and thrive.

This Charter is a commitment to achieve the very best possible outcomes for children and young people and to strive to meet the expectations placed on us to deliver high quality support and supervision services to our foster carers."

Sarah-Jane Smedmor

Executive Director of Children's and Young People's Services

Suffolk County Council, in collaboration with its statutory partners, act as a corporate parent for children and young people and have made a pledge to all children in care and care leavers, based on [10 promises](#).

This promise is embedded in all decision making from the point of the child/ young person entering care of the Local Authority and throughout the duration of their care experience and beyond as a care leaver up to the age 25.

THE CORPORATE PARENT'S ROLE:

The role of the corporate parent, when placing and supporting children in a foster home, is to:

- act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people.
- encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings, and take them into account, while promoting high aspirations and trying to secure the best outcomes for them.
- make sure they have access to services that will assist them to achieve their potential.
- make sure that they are safe, with stable home lives, relationships and education or work.
- prepare them for adulthood and independent living.
- ensure children and young people in care are actively involved in co-producing the services designed to meet their needs.

THE FOSTERING SERVICE'S ROLE:

Our vision:

To ensure that every child or young person experiences a safe, loving and stable home for the duration of their time in foster care.

A place they can call home, where they feel a sense of belonging and hope for the future, with people who care and help them succeed.

The fostering and kinship services aim to provide stable and excellent foster care to children in care. The fostering service is responsible for ensuring that mainstream and LINK foster carers are recruited, trained and approved to meet the needs of these children. The kinship service ensures that the carers of children in care, who they know and are connected to, are assessed and approved fully.

The services must continue to deliver ongoing support to all types of foster carers, throughout their time fostering, in order to give them the skills and confidence they need to develop meaningful relationships with the children and young people they care for. The fostering and kinship services must work in partnership with their foster carers and wider social care services to ensure that children's best interests are kept at the heart of everything we do.

Forthwith, where this Charter uses the term 'Foster Carers', it also encompasses kinship foster carers. Where the term 'Fostering Service' is used, it can also mean Kinship Service.

THE FOSTER CARER'S ROLE:

Foster carers look after children by developing meaningful relationships in a safe and nurturing family environment. The stability, care and love provided by foster carers helps the child build a sense of belonging and security, a place where their needs can be understood and met and an opportunity to heal from past trauma and build resilience. A foster carer's relationships with other members of the team around the child should be based on mutual trust and respect.

Suffolk's fostering service and Suffolk's foster carers work in partnership in the best interests of the children for whom they care.

This charter outlines what foster carers can expect from the fostering service to support them in their pledge to children in care and for foster carers to outline what children and the fostering service can expect from them.



What foster carers and fostering services can expect from the corporate parent

1. Working in partnership

We understand that we must provide foster carers with the best possible opportunity to give the children in our care a loving, stable home, and to enable those children to enjoy a positive, nurturing experience of family life – one that does not set them apart from their peers.

We must:

- treat foster carers as experts on the child and include them in all relevant meetings where planning and decision making affect them or the children they care for
- treat foster carers without discrimination and respect them as colleagues
- value foster carers' skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals
- 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 must:

- share, with the fostering service and/or foster carer, all the relevant information needed in order to care safely for the child and to support the child in fulfilling their potential
- provide this information in writing prior to the placement, or as soon as possible in the case of emergency placements
- secure clear and timely plans for the child's care.

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 look after.

We must:

- ensure that foster carers are able to make everyday decisions that mean that their fostered child is not treated differently from their peers and can feel part of their family
- provide clarity about any decision foster carers cannot take at the outset so that everyone is clear about their respective responsibilities
- deal swiftly with any requests for decision making on matters that are outside of the foster carer's authority.

4. Communication and consultation

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

We must:

- facilitate communication between foster carers and decision makers
- provide foster carers with the opportunity to influence relevant policies and procedures.



What foster carers can expect from the fostering service

1. Working in partnership

We recognise that foster carers have skills and expertise and can make the biggest difference to the everyday lives of children in care.

We must:

- value foster carers' skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals
- recognise that foster carers are the people who live with children every day and usually know them best
- include foster carers in all meetings that affect them and the children they care for
- ensure that our fostering service will comply with fostering regulations and guidance
- treat foster carers without discrimination and respect them as colleagues
- respect confidentiality.

2. Information

We know that information is vital in order for foster carers to provide care that meets the child's needs.

We must:

- share all information we have about the child in order to care safely for them
- provide this information in writing prior to placement, or as soon as possible in the case of emergency placements
- provide foster carers with information on all financial matters including tax, allowances and additional entitlements
- provide foster carers with full details of all relevant policies and procedures.

3. Support

We recognise that fostering can be an isolating and challenging task, and that appropriate and timely support makes all the difference to the fostering family and to the children in their care.

We must:

- ensure there is a robust post-approval induction process
- respond positively to requests for additional support, including respite/short break support and out of hours support
- provide foster carers with regular supervision and phone contact
- give foster carers honest and open feedback
- provide foster carers with access to 24-hour support from people with fostering expertise
- pay foster carers' allowances, expenses and fees in a timely manner
- ensure that there is a local group, recognised by the fostering service, where foster carers and their family can find support and share experiences with other fostering families
- support foster carers when facilitating contact with birth families
- recognise and champion the contribution foster carers and their families make to fostering.

4. Learning and development

We believe foster carers must have 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 must:

- ensure all foster carers have an individual annual training plan
- provide foster carers and their family with appropriate, accessible and relevant training by trainers who understand fostering
- support foster carers to develop meaningful relationships with the children in their care and the other members of the team around the child
- continue to provide all foster carers with other development opportunities which make the best use of their skills and expertise, such as mentoring or providing training or support.

5. Fair treatment

We recognise that foster carers have a right to be treated fairly, no matter what the circumstances.

We must:

- consult with foster carers before changing terms and conditions
- ensure honesty and openness in all of our discussions and communications with foster carers
- provide a framework for dealing with allegations, including access to independent support, and adhere to agreed timescales
- ensure that foster carers are treated with respect, kept informed and provided with emotional support should they be subject to an allegation
- ensure that foster carers know the arrangements for the payment of fees and allowances in the event that they are not able to foster while the subject of an allegation.

6. Communication and consultation

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

We must:

- ensure that we consult with foster carers in a meaningful way on matters that affect them
- give foster carers timely feedback from consultations
- provide clear information on how foster carers can give us feedback and report concerns.

What fostering services can expect from foster carers

1. Working in partnership

We must demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct. We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship and we will aim to build a meaningful and collaborative relationship with our supervising social worker and the child's social worker.

We must:

- demonstrate our expertise and make use of our skills to the best of our ability
- provide children with a positive experience of family life
- attend meetings about the children and young people we care for
- work with the individuals and agencies involved with the child such as the child's social worker, fostering service, school, and health and religious bodies
- work with birth parents, wider family and any other significant people in a child's life
- meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance and follow policies and procedures
- inform our supervising social worker about factors that impact on our fostering including changes in our household
- inform our supervising social worker about any difficulties that arise for us
- inform the child's social worker about any concerns we have related to the child
- respect confidentiality
- maintain an open dialogue with the fostering service.

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 must:

- develop a meaningful relationship with the child - understand their needs, support their growth, become an advocate and champion for them, and endeavour to remain in touch with them when they move on
- care for the child in a manner that recognises and respects their identity - including their ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural heritage
- afford the same level of protection and care to a child as we would our own child
- support the child to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age, understanding and ability
- support the child to inform the development of the services which affect their care, as appropriate to their age, understanding and ability.

3. Learning, development and support

We must access learning and development opportunities throughout our fostering career in accordance with the needs of the children we are caring for. 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 must:

- be willing and able to develop our skills throughout our fostering career
- attend relevant training
- be willing to attend and contribute to support groups.

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