

The Foster Carers' Charter

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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 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

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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.