

FOSTER CARERS' CHARTER

Cabinet Member	Councillor David Simmonds
Cabinet Portfolio	Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services
Officer Contact	Linda Sanders, Social Care, Health & Housing
Papers with report	Appendix 1 - Foster Carers' Charter Appendix 2 – Hillingdon's Foster Carers' Charter

HEADLINE INFORMATION

Summary	<p>The Government's Foster Carers' Charter sets guidelines on how local authorities, social workers and foster carers should work together in the future. This Charter is part of the Government's wider programme of reform to improve the entire care system – including reducing barriers and delays to adoption and improving the quality of children's homes. The overall aim is to make sure that all children in care have greater stability, less upheaval and a better chance at a stable family life.</p> <p>While it is proposed that Cabinet agree with the principles of the Charter, this has also been translated into a local Charter, which the London Borough of Hillingdon will work towards.</p>
Contribution to our plans and strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Draft Placements Strategy- Hillingdon Children & Families Trust Families
Financial Cost	No direct financial cost to the Council.
Relevant Policy Overview Committee	Education & Children's Services
Ward(s) affected	All

RECOMMENDATION

That Cabinet:

1. Adopt the principles of the Government's Foster Carers' Charter (Appendix 1).
2. Approve the local Foster Carers' Charter (Appendix 2), which sets out how the principles of the Government's Charter will be implemented and delivered locally.

INFORMATION

The London Borough of Hillingdon's Draft Placement Strategy for 2011-2014 is based on the premise that we will do all we can, where appropriate, to prevent children coming into care and where prevention is not possible or appropriate, it sets out the approach taken by the Council to provide the range and quality of placements required to meet the anticipated needs of children and young people who will be looked after over the next three years and beyond. The strategy is based on accepted commissioning principles and adopts the council's agreed commissioning framework.

The Council's objective is 'to increase the number of looked after children who are placed in a family setting within the borough or its immediate surroundings.' It is based on the principle that looked after children will, in appropriate cases, benefit from regular contact with their immediate and extended family. Furthermore, within their community they will have access to those services provided by local Hillingdon partnerships which are specifically designed to support vulnerable children and young people. Re-integration into a long term family setting or transition into young adulthood are likely to be more successful where the child or young person has an established support or service network in place.

Hillingdon's fostering service aims to provide safe and secure foster homes for our looked after children and young people by recruiting foster carers from a wide range of ethnic, cultural, religious and economic backgrounds. Our foster placements value diversity and reflect the needs of children requiring placements with respect to race, religion, gender, age, sexuality, disabilities and keeping siblings groups together. It provides placements for children and young people that maintain and build upon community links, in order that their identity, self-esteem and feelings of belonging are maintained.

The fostering service recruits, assesses and continuously develops foster carers to provide quality care to children through assessment and review processes that thoroughly evaluate carer's on-going competences and ability to care for children and young people. It provides continuous support via supervising social workers who offer advice and assistance to enable carers to provide quality care. It also monitors and supervises these placements in accordance with the National Minimum Standards, and Fostering Regulations 2011. It aims to ensure that all foster carers receive comprehensive training and development to enable them to carry out their role effectively and provide quality care to the children and young people they care for.

The Government's philosophy is that foster parents should be able to play the role of any parent looking after his or her own children and should be authorised to make everyday decisions about their fostered child wherever possible, within the legal framework, and Hillingdon endorses this ethos. Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, Fostering Services Regulations 2011, and associated statutory guidance, which came into force in April 2011, underline the importance of social workers liaising closely with parents, children and foster carers from the start of a foster care placement, to enable proper planning to take place about who does what.

In order to achieve the most appropriate care arrangements social workers have to work sensitively with carers to ensure that they are well prepared and clear about the responsibilities they are being asked to undertake. This is important for our children and young people as they often say they feel different from other children and sometimes they miss opportunities due to delays in getting the necessary consents from managers within Children's Services. The Hillingdon Foster Carers' Charter sets out our promise to work in partnership with foster carers

to ensure our children come first and that they receive the best possible care and that sensible, timely decision and arrangements are made to meet their every day needs.

Reasons for recommendation

The Hillingdon Foster Carers' Charter sets out the overarching principles and framework, which will enable the borough to improve and meet the needs of foster carers and children and work towards reducing bureaucracy, barriers and delays.

Alternative options considered / risk management

The Cabinet could agree not to sign-up to the national Charter or approve the local Charter.

Comments of Policy Overview Committee(s)

None at this stage.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. For the current year, activity will be funded within existing resources. Any future budgetary implications that arise in relation to the delivery of the plan will be fully considered as part of the Council's medium term financial forecast (MTFF).

EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

What will be the effect of the recommendation?

The new plan is aimed at improving the outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and their families within Hillingdon. The plan aligns the priorities of the Children and Families Trust alongside the Council's priorities and those of Hillingdon Partners and the Sustainable Communities Strategy.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

The Charter was discussed at the Children in Care Council 'Step up' and was given strong support. If the Charter is adopted, in the first instance we would expect all new Carers to sign Charter and then roll it out to existing Carers.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Finance

There are no additional financial comments from Corporate Finance.

Legal

Under the Council's Constitution the Cabinet has the appropriate powers to agree the recommendations proposed at the outset of this report. There are no other significant legal implications arising out of this report to bring to Cabinet's attention.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL