

The Adopters' Charter

Cabinet Member(s)	Councillor David Simmonds
Cabinet Portfolio(s)	Deputy Leader and Education & Children's Services
Officer Contact(s)	Merlin Joseph, Deputy Director, Children & Families
Papers with report	The Adopters Charter DfE"

1. HEADLINE INFORMATION

Summary	The Adopters' Charter is designed to bring clarity and set standards for the contract between the Council and adopters
Contribution to our plans and strategies	Putting residents first, keeping children safe and supporting children to leave care to permanence without delay.
Financial Cost	There are no financial implications from signing the charter.
Relevant Policy Overview Committee	Education & Children Policy and Overview Committee
Ward(s) affected	All wards

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Cabinet:

- 1) Sign up to the Adopters' Charter which commits London Borough of Hillingdon's adoption agency to the service standards set out in the document.
- 2) Agrees that the Charter shall be signed by a delegated officer in the case of every adoption arranged by the London Borough of Hillingdon adoption agency

Reasons for recommendation

The adoption charter brings greater clarity to the commitments of all parties in adoption. As such it encourages citizens to adopt children allowing them to leave care and live permanently as part of a loving stable family.

Alternative options considered / risk management

The only possible alternative is not to sign which does not have any advantages over signing.

Policy Overview Committee comments

Elsewhere on this agenda, the Education and Children's POC have recently conducted a review of adoption and permanence, which looked at improving service standards for adopters. This charter offers a tangible route in taking forward some of the Committee's recommendations.

3. INFORMATION

Supporting Information

As part of its programme to reform the adoption process, Central Government has published an Adopters' Charter which sets out what adopters and prospective adopters can expect from adoption agencies.

In summary the Charter stipulates that adoption agencies must ensure that:

- Children are placed, with siblings wherever possible, within a timescale that is best for them and without unnecessary delay.
- They treat prospective adopters with openness, fairness and respect, and make prospective adopters' first points of contact informative and welcoming.

The Adopters' Charter says the following:

Children come first

- Adoption is first and foremost a service for children who cannot live with their birth family. Children should be helped to understand what adoption means and supported throughout the adoption journey and beyond.
- Adoption is a life-changing decision that affects the child, and his or her birth and adoptive families. It must be made with the child's best interests, wishes, feelings and needs at its heart and on the basis of sound evidence and high quality assessments.

Adoption agencies must:

- Ensure that children are placed, with siblings wherever possible, within a timescale that is best for them and without unnecessary delay.
- Treat prospective adopters and adopters with openness, fairness and respect.
- Make prospective adopters' first points of contact informative and welcoming.
- Approach adopter recruitment in the spirit of inclusiveness with a view to identifying potential and opportunity – no-one should be automatically excluded.
- Recruit prospective adopters who can meet all or most of the needs of children waiting for, or likely to need, adoption and signpost prospective adopters to other agencies if there is insufficient local demand.
- Explain to prospective adopters the needs and profiles of the children waiting to be adopted.
- Ensure preparation and training, the home study assessment, and approval process are explained and proceed efficiently.
- Regularly review progress on matching with prospective adopters, and inform them about the Adoption Register and refer them to this within required timescales.

- Provide adopters and prospective adopters with information, counselling and support, as and when needed, throughout the adoption journey and beyond.
- Provide prospective adopters with information about the Independent Review Mechanism.
- Work in partnership, and with other agencies and the Courts, to ensure that all decisions are timely and joined-up.

Adoptive parents must:

- Be aware that adoption often brings challenges as well as joy, be realistic about the needs of children awaiting adoption, and accept that with support they may be able to consider adopting a child with a different profile to the child they originally envisaged adopting.
- Make the most of opportunities to develop their parenting skills, and seek support when needed at the earliest stage.
- Do all they can to enable their adopted child to feel loved and secure, and to reach their potential.

Both parties sign the charter where it is agreed that children will be placed with specific adopters.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications from signing the charter.

4. EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

What will be the effect of the recommendation?

By signing up to this charter, local residents are encouraged to adopt children. They are given clear understanding and commitments.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

Consultation took place with adopters as part of the Policy Overview Committee review of adoption and permanence. The adopters consulted were all in favour of greater clarity and agreement.

5. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and confirms that there are no direct financial implications.

Legal

The Cabinet has before it a recommendation seeking the following authority:

- To ratify the Adopters Charter

There are no significant legal implications arising out of this report save to note that under the Council's Constitution, the Cabinet has the appropriate powers to agree the recommendations proposed at the outset of this report.

The statutory authority for adopting the Charter will be by virtue of Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 which makes provision for 'a general power of competence' for local authorities in England. The 'power' gives local authorities the same power to do anything an individual can do unless specifically prohibited by law. This includes the power to act in the interest of their communities. The Charter seeks to put Hillingdon's residents first, encourage residents to apply to adopt children, keep children safe and allow some children to leave care to loving stable homes.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL