

The Foster Carers Charter

Introduction

We want Thurrock to be at the **dynamic** heart of the Thames gateway, a place of **ambition, enterprise & opportunity**, where communities and businesses **flourish**.

It is our ambition to develop a work environment where people feel they want to live and work, where people have opportunities to progress and where people want to be.

Although the work we do is challenging and complex, we are proud to say that we do not give up on the children and young people. We call on carers and staff to make decisions every day, many of which have serious consequences.

The charter has been developed to assist all of us to reflect and evaluate our actions and offer the support and recognition to all caring for children.

Thurrock recognises good practice, we would like to reassure all carers that their work is highly valued and appreciated.

This charter expands on the outline version proposed by the Government, and has been produced in consultation with foster carers and social work staff to form a clear statement of our mutual expectations.

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.

Fostering Service's commitment:

The Fostering Service Role:

Thurrock Council aims to provide stable and outstanding 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.

We want our working relationship to be based on mutual trust and respect. We also want to make it as easy as we can for you to provide a safe, caring, nurturing environment for some of the most vulnerable children in our society.

This Charter sets out clear principles on how foster carers should be treated, recognises their invaluable work and aims to encourage more people to sign up to be foster carers.

What you can expect from us:

1. Recognition and work in partnership

We recognise that foster carers have skills and expertise and make the biggest difference to the everyday lives of children in care. Working in partnership with carers ensures that we have the best insight into the children and young people's needs and we are able to offer them the best support to achieve their full potential.

We will:

- Value your skills, knowledge and expertise equally to those of other professionals
- Recognise that you are the people who live with children every day and know them best
- Enable you to have a say in any matter that affects you. We will support you in your day to day decisions in relation to boundaries and routine you put in place in your home.
- Include you in all meetings that affect you and the children you care for
- Treat you without discrimination and respect you as a colleague
- Respect confidentiality
- Be clear about which other agencies we are working with in respect of children you are caring for and ensure you know how to contact them
- Make available information about other agencies who can support you in your role as a foster carer

- Ensure to make every effort to pass on your messages and respond to them promptly
- Respect the life journey you have taken to become a carer.
- Consider the impact of fostering on you and your family. We will give consideration of your family dynamics when placing children with you
- Listen to you with understanding and sensitivity and recognise and appreciate your emotional involvement.
- Take into account the child in your care has an emotional connection to you which needs to be considered in decision making and placement planning.
- Provide you with the consideration and acknowledgement of the challenges your role as a carer presents.
- Recognise the individual needs of your own sons and daughters and offer relevant support.

2. Making 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 you know the everyday decisions you can make so that your fostered child is not treated differently to their peers and can feel part of your family. We will provide you with clarity in respect of decisions/requirements/expectations relating to the child you care for.
- Enable you to make certain decisions regarding the day to day care and control of the child in your care (as determined by the care team). [We will use the Designated Authority tool to give you clear and concise framework to be able to make decision in the best interest of the children]

3. Information

Having information is vital in order for foster carers to provide care that meet the child's need.

We will:

- Ensure that you will be provided you with honest, clear and accurate information about the child to enable appropriate safe care for that child and other in your home. We know that information is vital in order for foster carers to provide care that meets the child's needs.

- Provide you with information about departmental policies and procedures
- Provide you with information on financial matters including tax, allowances, additional entitlements, progression to a higher level of fostering.

4. Support

We recognise that fostering is a challenging task and good support makes all the difference to the fostering family and also the child in your care.

We will:

- Respond positively to requests for additional support
- Provide you with supervision, support groups and phone contact as required by yourself, with a minimum of monthly supervision meeting.
- Give you honest and open feedback
- Provide you with 24 hour support (Emergency Duty Team, Fostering Out of Hours)
- Pay you any allowances, expenses and fees in a timely manner
- Find ways to help foster carers come together for mutual support
- Make, or advocate for, appropriate referrals for specialist advice or intervention required by the child.
- As a new carer, we will provide you with a comprehensive orientation process and establish sound supportive relationships with allocated workers.
- Ensure you are made aware of all policy, standards and guidelines that apply to the provision of care.

5. Fair treatment

Every way we deal with you we will have processes that are open and fair. We recognise that like other child care professionals, foster carers are open to the possibility of allegations being made against them.

We will:

- Ensure that you are treated with respect, kept informed and provided with emotional support while suspended from the fostering task should you be subject to an allegation
- Provide a framework for dealing with allegations and adhere to those timescales that are within our control.
- Provide written response in relation to the outcome of allegations.

6. Communication and consultation

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

We will:

- Ensure that we consult with you on matters that affect you in good time
- Give you feedback from consultations
- Provide you with information on all financial matters including tax, allowances and additional entitlements
- Provide briefings to update you, including keeping you in the picture if there are any changes
- Provide a regular newsletter to keep you informed about what is happening in Thurrock Council (Jigsaw Magazine, Circulars via e-mail, etc)

7. 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:

- Review your training needs with you
- Provide you and your family with appropriate and relevant training delivered by trainers who understand the fostering task
- Provide you with other development opportunities which make the best use of your skills and expertise such as mentoring or providing training or support
- Ensure that training is arranged at times that suit you
- Ensure workers discuss with your own children what fostering is about and their role, make it child friendly and age appropriate during the assessment process.
- Run training courses for your own children (Skills to foster)
- Provide training to prepare you where you are expected to supervise family contact

The Foster Carer's role

Foster carers are at the heart of the foster care service. We 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.

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

Foster carers' commitment

You can expect from us:

1. Working in partnership
2. Respect for the child
3. Information sharing
4. Learning, development and support
5. Communication and consultation.
6. Providing a greater sense of normality for the child
7. Providing the child with a sense of security as a member of the family

1. Working in partnership

We will demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct

We will:

- Demonstrate our expertise and make use of our skills to the best of our ability.
- Provide children/young people with an experience of family life.
- Attend meetings about the children/young people we care for
- Work with the agencies involved with the child such as school, health and religious establishments
- Show a willingness to work with birth parents, wider family and people significant in a child's life
- Meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance and follow departmental policies and procedures
- Respect confidentiality
- Use appropriate channels to resolve areas of conflict constructively, and avoid actions which damage the reputation of the authority.

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 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.
- 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 open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

- We will inform our supervising social worker about changes in our household.
- Inform our supervising social worker about any difficulties that arise for us.
- We will ensure the need for transparency in all aspects of information sharing including information in the care needs of the child/young people we foster.

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:

- Be prepared to develop our skills throughout our fostering career.
- Attend relevant training.
- Take up opportunities offered to us.
- Let you know if we are unable to attend.
- Attend and contribute to support groups.

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 discussions in order to inform the development of the service.
- Meet with councillors, service managers and others in order to promote dialogue and a good working relationship.

6. **Providing a sense of normality for the child/young people and providing the child/young people with a sense of security as a member of the family**

We believe that most of the children we foster will have experienced some form of trauma which may present certain difficulties for them. We believe that offering the child a sense of safety, sense of security and emotional warmth helps to provide a secure base. We believe that some of the children/young people we foster might have experienced loss through the immigration process, rejection or death.

We will:

- Aim to provide positive life experience/s to help offset any trauma and/or feeling of low self worth.
- Endeavour to help the child/young person appreciate the sense of being an individual and working with difference whilst maintaining trust and respect as important in relationships.
- Provide a family environment which enhances the feeling of normality and normalisation.
- Adhere to the child/young person's religious and cultural needs including dietary and other care requirements.
- Recognise the daily care needs of disabled children/young people including their day to day social needs as may be required from time to time.
- We hope to achieve these within the content and the quality of the relationship between us and the child/young person.
- We recognise the need for the term 'sensitive parenting' as identified by Schofield and Beek (2008)
- Through an empathic approach, help provide a family environment which helps provide re-assurance.
- Have an awareness of the impact of loss and bereavement and be part of the team around the child in helping to work through any presenting difficulty for the child/young person.