

# **Foster Carer's Charter for London Borough of Hounslow**

## **Introduction**

This foster carers' charter places our foster carers and looked after children at the very centre of all we do. Our aim is to provide a positive experience of family life for our looked after children and in so doing lay the foundation for their future security and success.

This charter sets out Hounslow's basis for consistently good partnership working between staff, foster carers and all others who have an interest in achieving the best outcome for the children, especially those in its care.

Foster carers are at the heart of the service we provide to looked after children, many of whom will have distinct disadvantages and vulnerabilities arising from their earliest years as children. They need and deserve the very best possible care that can be given to maximise their life chances for the future. The London borough of Hounslow main aim is to ensure that their experience of foster care is memorable, nurturing, encouraging, and provides them with the opportunity to grow whilst realising their full potential. Such experiences for children will uniquely position them for addressing any possible adversity and to look to the future with optimism. This is what makes fostering such a unique challenge but rewarding experience from Hounslow's perspective.

This charter outlines:

- 1: The nature of the partnership between Hounslow and its foster carers that is central to ensuring a successful working in partnership experience.

## **Roles and Commitment**

### **The corporate parent's role**

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

- act in their best interests, and promote their physical and mental health and wellbeing
- encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings and take them into account
- help them to gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the placing authority and its relevant partners
- promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes for them
- ensure that they are safe, and that there is stability in their home lives, relationships, education and work
- prepare them for adulthood and independent living

### **The fostering service's role**

The fostering service aims to provide stable and first-rate 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, 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 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.

**This Charter explains what all parties can expect from one another.**



## 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 will:

- 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 will:

- 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 will:

- 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 will:

- 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 make the biggest difference to the everyday lives of children in care.**

**We will:**

- value your skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals
- recognise that you are the people who live with children every day and know them best
- include you in all meetings that affect you and the children you care for
- ensure that our fostering service comply with the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance
- treat you without discrimination and respect you as a colleague
- 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 will:**

- give you all the information you need in order to care safely for the child
- provide this information in writing prior to placement (except when there are emergency placements and it is not feasible to do so, we will provide this information as soon as possible)
- ensure that there is a placement plan drawn up in discussion with you and agreed with you in advance of placements (except in emergencies where this will be done as soon as possible)
- provide you with information on all financial matters including tax, allowances and additional entitlements
- provide you with full details of all relevant departmental policies and procedures.

### 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 foster.**

**We will:**



- Ensure that, wherever possible, you are able to make everyday decisions that mean that your fostered child is not treated differently to their peers and can feel part of your family
- Provide clarity about any decision you can or cannot take at the outset so that everyone understands who is responsible for what.

#### 4 Support

**We recognise that fostering is an isolating and challenging task and appropriate and timely support makes all the difference to the fostering family and to the child in your care.**

**We will:**

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

#### 5 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:**

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



## 6 Fair treatment

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

**We will:**

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

## 7. Communication and consultation

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

**We will:**

- 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 will:**

- demonstrate our expertise and make use of our skills to the best of our ability
- provide children with an 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, health and religious bodies
- 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.
- 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
- 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 will:**

- 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





- inform children about the development of the services which affect their care, as appropriate to their age, understanding and ability.

### **3 Learning, development and support**

**We must be enabled to 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 will:**

- be prepared to develop our skills throughout our fostering career
- attend relevant and mandatory training
- take up learning and development opportunities offered to us
- let you know if we are unable to attend our registered training courses/support groups
- attend and contribute to foster carer support groups.

### **4 Communication and consultation**

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

**We will:**

- respond to local consultations and discussion 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.
- attend professional meetings including Carers Consultation Forums