

Surrey Foster Carers' Charter

We are proud to have worked closely with our foster carers to create our Foster Carers' Charter.

This says how the Council and our foster carers will work together and what we can expect from one another. The Charter explains what the fostering service, professionals supporting children and foster carers will do to deliver the best foster care for children at all times and how we build relationships based on trust and respect. We are developing how we will show the ways the Charter makes a difference in practice and how we measure up each year so that we can keep improving.

We've agreed a set of joint principles with foster carers to support the way we work together in the best interests of Surrey children.

What Foster Carers can expect from the Council in the role of Corporate Parent

Working in partnership and valuing relationships

We must demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct. We understand that we must provide Foster Carers with the best possible opportunities to give the children in our care a loving stable home, to enable our children to enjoy a positive, nurturing experience of a blended family life – one that does not set them apart from their peers.

We must

- treat Foster Carers as experts on the child and include them in all meetings where planning and decision-making affect them or the children they care for
- treat Foster Carers without discrimination, respect them as colleagues and together build meaningful and collaborative relationships with them and other members of the team around the child
- recognise Foster Carers' skills and expertise equally to those of other colleagues in the network around the child
- embed the [Keep Connected Principles](#) into practice to support children to remain in contact with former foster families where it is in the best interest of the child
- respect confidentiality, unless it is a safeguarding matter

Information and Decision Making

We know that information is vital for Foster Carers to provide care that meets the child's need. We recognise that for children to live a fully blended family life, Foster Carers must be able to make decisions regarding the children they look after and are aware of any delegated authority.

We must

- share, with the fostering service and the Foster Carer, all the information needed 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 (and within 24 hours) in the case of emergency placements
- secure clear and consistent plans for the child's care
- ensure that Foster Carers can make everyday decisions that mean that their fostered child is not treated differently from their peers and can feel part of the fostering blended family
- provide clarity about any decision Foster Carers cannot make at the outset so that everyone is clear about their respective responsibilities
- deal swiftly (by acting within 3 working days) with any requests for decision making on matters that are outside of the Foster Carer's authority. Foster carers will be provided with the details of a Team Manager and duty worker if they are unable to contact their supporting team

Communication and Consultation

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

We must

- facilitate communication between Foster Carers and the Corporate Parent
- acknowledge and respond to Foster Carers communication within 48 hours (24 hours in a significant event)

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 must

- develop a meaningful relationship with the child - embed the [Keep Connected Principles](#) , understand their needs, support their growth, become an advocate and champion for them, and maintain relationships with them when they move on where in the child's best interest
- care for the child in a manner that recognises and respects their (recorded) identity - including their ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural heritage and family history to the best of our ability
- 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
- support the child to inform the development of the services which affect their care, as appropriate to their age, understanding and ability

What Foster Carers can expect from the Fostering Service

Working in Partnership and Valuing Relationships

We recognise that Foster Carers have skills and expertise and can make the biggest difference to the everyday lives of children in care.

We must

- value foster carers' skills and expertise equally to those of colleagues in the network around the child
- recognise that Foster Carers are the people who live with children every day and are likely to know them best
- include Foster Carers in all meetings that affect them and the children they care for
- ensure that our fostering service complies with fostering regulations and guidance, in accordance with [National Minimum Standards \(NMS\)](#)
- treat Foster Carers without discrimination, respect them as colleagues and together build meaningful and collaborative relationship with them and other members of the team around the child
- respect confidentiality
- recognise and champion the contribution Foster Carers and their families make to fostering through advocating for fostering at every opportunity, recognising and celebrating Foster Carers at an annual event and through other ad hoc events, and seeking carers views on what helps them feel valued and recognised

Information and Decision Making

We know that information is vital in order for Foster Carers to provide care that meets the child's needs.

We must

- share all information we have about the child in order to support the carer to support the child safely and appropriately
- provide this information in writing prior to a child coming to live/stay with you, or as soon as possible (and within 24 hours) in the care of emergency placements

- provide Foster Carers with information on all financial matters including tax, allowances and additional entitlements
- provide Foster Carers with full details of all relevant policies and procedures

Communication and Consultation

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

We must

- ensure that we consult with Foster Carers in a consistent way on matters that affect them
- give Foster Carers consistent feedback from consultations as soon as possible, including publishing the annual survey results and regularly providing 'you said, we did' updates
- provide clear information on how Foster Carers can give us feedback and report concerns

Learning and Development

We believe Foster Carers must have 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 to help transform the lives of the children they foster.

We must

- ensure all Foster Carers have an individual Professional development plan (this will be provided to Foster Carers within 14 days of their annual review reapproval letter)
- provide Foster Carers and their family with appropriate, accessible and relevant training by trainers who understand fostering , including opportunities for joint training with the wider children's services network
- support Foster Carers to develop meaningful relationships with the children in their care and the other members of the team around the child by providing additional support or training if needed
- provide all Foster Carers with other development opportunities which make the best use of their skills and expertise, such as mentoring or providing training or support

Support and Fair Treatment

We recognise that Foster Carers have a right to be treated fairly, no matter what the circumstances. We recognise that fostering can be an isolating and challenging task, and that appropriate and timely support makes all the difference to the fostering blended family and to the children in their care.

We must

- ensure there is a robust post-approval induction process shared with all new carers and publicised on the SharePoint information pages.
- respond positively to requests for additional support, including sleep-overs/short break support and out of hours support where this is in the best interests of the child and the carers and enables the best long-term outcomes for children
- provide Foster Carers with regular supervision, supervision notes and phone contact
- give Foster Carers honest and open feedback, treating them with a high standard of professional care and conduct in line with our Practice Standards and Social Work registration in accordance with [Social Work England](#)
- provide Foster Carers with access to support from people with fostering expertise during evenings, weekends and bank holidays
- pay Foster Carers' allowances, expenses and fees in a consistent manner
- ensure that there is a local group, recognised by the fostering service, where Foster Carers and their family can find support and share experiences with other fostering families
- support Foster Carers when facilitating Family Time and keeping in contact with birth families
- follow the [Keep Connected Principles](#) to support Foster Carers to maintain contact after a child moves on where it is in the best interest of the child
- consult with Foster Carers before changing terms and conditions of any policy or guidance that affects Foster Carers, and advise foster carers of any relevant changes to legislation or statutory guidance when this is received by the Fostering Service.
- ensure honesty, full transparency and openness in all of our discussions and communications with Foster Carers
- provide a framework for dealing with allegations, including access to independent support as detailed in the published [Procedure](#) and foster carer [handbook](#), and adhere to agreed timescales for single agency investigations. Where police or other agencies are investigating we will monitor progress, maintain communication and advocate for timely completion.
- ensure that Foster Carers are treated with respect, kept informed and provided with emotional support should they be subject to an allegation

- ensure that Foster Carers know the arrangements for the payment of fees and allowances in the event that they are not able to foster while the subject of an allegation

What Children's Services can expect from Foster Carers

Working in Partnership and Valuing Relationships

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 must

- demonstrate our expertise and make use of our skills to the best of our ability
- provide children with a positive experience of blended 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, and health and religious bodies
- work with birth parents, wider birth family and any other significant people in a child's life (with support if needed to ensure this is safe and in a way that meets the child's best interests)
- meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance and follow policies and procedures in alignment with [Training, Support and Development \(TSD\) standards](#) for Foster Carers
- respect confidentiality, unless it is a safeguarding matter

Information and Decision Making

We recognise that for children to live a fully blended family life, fostering service and the council as the corporate parent must be able to make decisions regarding the children they look after and are aware of any factors that may impact their welfare.

We must

- inform our Supervising Social Worker about issues that impact on our fostering or the children in our care, including changes in our household, (refer to Foster Carer handbook)
- inform the child's and Supervising Social Worker about any concerns we have related to the child

Communication and Consultation

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

We must

- maintain an open dialogue with the corporate parent and fostering service, treat Social Workers and Support Workers without discrimination and respect them and their role

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 must

- develop a meaningful relationship with the child - embed the [Keep Connected Principles](#) , understand their needs, support their growth, become an advocate and champion for them, and maintain relationships with them when they move on where in the child's best interest
- care for the child in a manner that recognises and respects their (recorded) identity - including their ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural heritage and family history to the best of our ability
- 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
- support the child to inform the development of the services which affect their care, as appropriate to their age, understanding and ability

Learning and Development

We believe, as carers, we must have the opportunity to learn and develop our skills to help transform the lives of the children we foster.

We must

- ensure that we have an individual Professional development plan
- ensure we complete all mandatory learning and development activities detailed in our L&D plan
- develop meaningful relationships with the children in our care and the other members of the team around the child by providing additional support or training if needed

- raise up to fostering service other development opportunities that we believe will make the best use of our skills and expertise, such as mentoring or providing training or support