

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE FOSTER CARERS' CHARTER

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet and seek their support regarding the North Lincolnshire Council Foster Carer's Charter.

2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 North Lincolnshire has a well-established and effective Fostering Service with a stable population of carers who provide a high quality service to Children in Care. Over the last 2 years, the service has prioritised recruitment, training and support to carers. This is now showing real success with a substantial increase in carers, low numbers of placement moves and carers who say they value the support they receive resulting in very high retention rates.
- 2.2 We have demonstrated our commitment to further improving the choice, quality and sufficiency of family placements by substantial investment in the Fostering service including the creation of a dedicated Service Manager post, 2 additional Fostering Social Workers and 2 Senior Social Workers in the service.
- 2.3 The Government launched the Foster Carers' Charter in March 2011. It was jointly produced with fostering organisations, charities and children. Recognising the invaluable work of foster carers, it sets out clear principles, based on the core belief that children come first, on how foster carers should be treated, the roles of carers and the pivotal role played by carers in helping children achieve to their full potential.
- 2.4 The national fostering organization 'Fostering Network' subsequently produced guidance: '*The Foster Carers' Charter: putting it into practice*' as a tool to enable Local Authorities put the Government's charter into practice and develop their own local charters.
- 2.5 North Lincolnshire has embraced the principles of the charter and, using the Fostering Network guidance, undertaken consultation with children, young people and foster carers to develop our own '*North Lincolnshire Foster Carers' Charter*'.

- 2.6 This charter builds on the existing solid foundations and includes the ongoing commitment by North Lincolnshire Council to carers through day-to-day support, events and activities for foster families, to listen to carers and children, to value highly the contribution of carers in all areas, to have high aspirations for the children in our care and to further develop and expand foster care in North Lincolnshire.

3 OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 The North Lincolnshire Foster Carers' Charter includes:

- What foster carers can expect from North Lincolnshire Council Fostering Service and its partners
- What the North Lincolnshire Fostering Service can expect from Foster Carers
- What Children in Foster Care expect From North Lincolnshire Council and North Lincolnshire Foster Carers

3.2 It includes commitment to continuing to work in partnership with carers, to ensure they are given advice and support, that they are included in decisions regarding children and that carers views are listened to and taken into account. It also includes the promise to treat carers with fairness and respect and continue to support them in their learning and development.

3.3 The charter also includes commitment from carers to work in partnership, always treat children in their care with respect, to share information appropriately and their ongoing personal investment in their own learning and development.

3.4 The North Lincolnshire Foster Carers' Charter was launched at the annual 'Foster Fun Day' which was held on the 10th September 2011.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

4.1 The charter will underpin fostering in North Lincolnshire, it highlights the core principles and values the service adheres to and our aims of achieving:

- Better choice of placements in families
- Children who feel safe and well cared for
- Children who achieve to their full potential
- A relationship with a stable adult who works with and supports them
- The gap is narrowed between them and their peers.

4.2 It provides an opportunity to demonstrate our determination to continue to improved outcomes for children and will emphasise the importance of placing the child at the centre and all partners working together to make a real difference.

4.3 The charter will be used in the recruitment, assessment, induction and training of carers and will be a key focus in the induction and training of staff.

4.4 The charter will be reviewed regularly and the views of carers, children and young people will be sought regarding it's success and any amendments they feel are needed.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

5.1 The Council and Elected Members are asked to continue to support foster carers and the children we look after through ongoing support to the Corporate Parenting agenda.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

6.1 The Fostering Service is a regulated service inspected by Ofsted, the development of the charter demonstrates commitment to improvement and ongoing development in line with the standards, regulations and inspection requirements.

6.2 An integrated impact assessment has been undertaken in relation to this report and any issues identified have been addressed.

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

7.1 The involvement of carers and children has been integral to developing the charter and all parts of the charter are based on feedback from carers and children on the things they feel are most important.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 That Cabinet agrees to the Charter and commits to offer support though their Corporate Parenting role.

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

The Foster Carers' Charter (DfE March 2011)

Foster Carers' Charter: putting it into practice (Fostering Network March 2011)

The North Lincolnshire Council Foster Carers' Charter (September 2011)



North Lincolnshire Council Foster Carers' Charter

Introduction

North Lincolnshire Council recognises the excellent care, support and commitment shown by Foster Carers. This charter aims to re-enforce that recognition, demonstrate the joint responsibilities to the children in our care and build on the success and achievements of fostering in North Lincolnshire.

The Government launched the Foster Carers' Charter in March 2011. It was jointly produced with fostering organisations, charities and children. Recognising the invaluable work of foster carers, it sets out clear principles, based on the core belief that children come first, on how foster carers should be treated, the roles of carers and the pivotal role played by carers in helping children achieve to their full potential.

North Lincolnshire has embraced the principles of the charter and through the consultation and involvement of children, young people and foster carers we have developed our own '*North Lincolnshire Foster Carers' Charter*'.

This charter builds on the existing solid foundations and includes the ongoing commitment by North Lincolnshire Council to carers through day-to-day support, events and activities for foster families, to listen to carers and children, to value highly the contribution of carers in all areas, to have high aspirations for the children in our care and to further develop and expand foster care in North Lincolnshire.

What Foster Carers can expect from North Lincolnshire Council Fostering Service and it's Partners

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 as North Lincolnshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Recognise and value your skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals
- Treat you without discrimination and respect you as a colleague
- Understand that the children live in your household, therefore you are the people who know them best
- Include you in all meetings that affect you and the children you care for
- Ensure that the North Lincolnshire Fostering Service will meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance
- Respect you and your families confidentiality
- Meet with you regularly to share information and seek your views
- Ensure transparency between all involved in the team around the child

2 Information

We know that information is vital in order for foster carers to provide care that meets the child's need.

We as North Lincolnshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Make sure you have all the information you need in order to care safely for the child
- Make sure that you are communicated with efficiently
- Ensure that you are updated following events in the child's life including appointments, contact and meetings
- 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 policies and procedures.
- Make sure you receive regular updates on events and issues relevant to the foster service including the quarterly North Lincolnshire Foster Carers' Newsletter

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 as North Lincolnshire Council with the support of our partners will:

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- 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
- Ensure that you have a clear agreement, included in the Placement Plan, on the decisions you can make for each child in your care
- Provide clarity about any decision you cannot make 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 as North Lincolnshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Provide and ensure you have access to the support you need
- Provide you with regular supervision and telephone contact
- Give you honest and open feedback
- Listen to your concerns and take action when needed
- Provide you with out of hours support from suitably qualified workers
- Pay you allowances, expenses and fees in a timely manner
- Pay allowances that reflect the Fostering Network's agreed rates
- Ensure that the North Lincolnshire Foster Care Association, where you and your family can find support and share experiences, is supported by the fostering service

5 Learning and development

We believe that foster carers must be enabled to access learning and development opportunities throughout your fostering career. This will ensure you have the skills and knowledge you need to develop your practice so you can help transform the lives of the children you care for.

We as North Lincolnshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Provide you with the support you need to achieve the CWDC Training, Support and Development Standards
- Make sure you have a Personal Professional Development Plan outlining your training and development needs
- Provide you and your family with appropriate and relevant training by trainers who understand the fostering task
- Provide training at times to meet your needs with the support you need to attend
- Provide you with access to the North Lincolnshire online Learning Pool
- 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 want to make sure that you are treated fairly and with respect.

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We as North Lincolnshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Ensure openness in all of our discussions and communications with you
- Ensure that you are treated with respect and listened to
- Provide you with information on North Lincolnshire's framework for dealing with allegations
- 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
- Keep you informed and provided with independent support should you be subject to an allegation and adhere to our agreed timescales

7 Communication and consultation

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

We as North Lincolnshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Facilitate regular communication between you, senior officers of the council and Elected Members
- Ensure that we consult with you in a meaningful way on matters that affect you give you timely feedback from consultations
- Ensure you are invited to the North Lincolnshire Foster Carers' Information Meeting
- Ensure the North Lincolnshire Foster Carers Association is able to communicate regularly with the Fostering Service on behalf of carers

What the North Lincolnshire Fostering Service can expect from Foster Carers

1 Working in partnership

We will demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct.

We as North Lincolnshire Foster Carers will:

- Include children as part of our family
- Use our knowledge, expertise and skills to the best of our ability
- Attend meetings about the children and young people we care for
- Work with the team around the child for example education and health colleagues
- 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

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 as North Lincolnshire Foster Carers will:

- Respect and promote a child's religious, linguistic and cultural heritage
- Provide a safe and secure environment for the child as we would our own child
- Ensure the child has the right to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age and understanding
- Advocate for children in our care when necessary

3 Support for the child

We should have high expectations for the children in our care, high ambitions for them and provide the support to achieve their aspirations.

We as North Lincolnshire Foster Carers will:

- Support the child to do well at school
- Support the child in their aspirations.
- Show the child we have high expectations and believe they can succeed
- Support children as they grow to gain life experiences and become independent
- Provide support and advice to the children we care for
- Help children to make friends

4 Information

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

We as North Lincolnshire Foster Carers will:

- Inform the Fostering Service about changes in our household
- Inform the Fostering Service about any difficulties that arise for us
- Inform the Fostering Service/child's social worker/out of hours team immediately about any child protection concerns and incidents of bullying

5 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 as North Lincolnshire Foster Carers will:

- Complete the CWDC Training Support and Development Standards within the required timescales
- Be prepared to develop our skills throughout our fostering career
- Attend relevant training
- Attend and contribute to support groups and events

6 Communication and consultation

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

We as North Lincolnshire Foster Carers will:

- Take an active role in local consultations and discussions in order to inform the development of the service
- Meet with elected members, senior managers and other professionals during consultation and support events
- Encourage children to attend local consultation groups such as the Children in Care Council/GPK.

What Children in Foster Care expect From North Lincolnshire Council and North Lincolnshire Foster Carers

The following is from consultation undertaken with children in care in North Lincolnshire

We as children in foster care in North Lincolnshire expect

- To be included as a part of the family
- To be listened to, understood and believed
- To be safe
- To be healthy and attend regular checkups
- To be advised on our diet and healthy food
- To be cared for, fed and clothed
- To have contact with our own family if we want it and it is safe
- To be given pocket money
- To be able to make our own decisions and be given choices, with support
- To make friends and to be able to have friends to visit/sleepovers
- To be given boundaries and structure
- To know the rules of the house
- To have our own space
- To be supported in our education and given help with homework
- Our Foster carers to attend school meeting and functions
- To be taught the skills we need for our independence
- To be supported and not to be judged
- To be invited to activities, consultation groups and events