

Foster Carer Charter

Our Commitment to each other



**Making sure that Children come first
valuing, respecting, supporting and
training Foster Carers**

Staffordshire County Council's Foster Carer Charter



A foreword from County Councillor Mark Sutton

We recognise the enormous contribution you make as a Staffordshire County Council foster carer. We want you to feel valued and be confident that we will support you to make a difference to children's lives across the County.

We've been working with foster carers from across the county to put this document together; this is the second Staffordshire Foster Carer Charter, which sets out our commitment to you, and what we expect in return.

We pledge to make fostering as straightforward and rewarding as possible.

We pledge to ensure that you feel valued and supported,

We pledge to be open and honest, and treat you with the respect you deserve. This Charter is your assurance of all this and more.

Thank you for your continued commitment to supporting children across Staffordshire.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Sutton'. The signature is stylized and cursive.

County Councillor Mark Sutton
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
Staffordshire County Council

Introduction

Staffordshire County Council recognises the excellent care, support and commitment shown by foster carers and the invaluable role they play in the lives of Staffordshire's looked after children and young people. This charter aims to re-enforce that recognition, demonstrate the joint responsibilities to the children and young people in our care and build on the success and achievements of fostering in Staffordshire.

'A good quality foster placement helps achieve stability for the child, satisfaction for the carer and, most important of all, is a vital element in helping children and young people to have a decent second chance at a safe and fulfilling childhood'

Tim Loughton MP Children's Minister, The Foster Carers' Charter, Ministerial Forward.

The Government launched the Foster Carers' Charter in March 2011. It was jointly produced with fostering organisations, charities and children and young people. 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.

Staffordshire County Council has embraced the principles of the charter and through the consultation and involvement of foster carers and various partners we developed our own Staffordshire Foster Carers' Charter.

This revised charter builds on existing solid foundations and includes the ongoing commitment by Staffordshire County Council to carers through day-to-day support, events and activities for foster families, to listen to carers, children and young people, to value highly the contribution of carers in all areas.

We have high aspirations for the children and young people in our care and aspire to further develop and expand foster care in Staffordshire. We believe this should be a 'living' document and should adapt to and reflect best practice.

Mission Statement

Children Come First

The child's relationship with their foster family can make the biggest difference in the child's life.

Foster carers, Staffordshire County Council and other professionals will work together to ensure that the child comes first by ensuring services are available to children and families to enable the child to reach their potential, regardless of their economic or social background, home circumstances, ethnicity, gender, ability or health.

Children and young people in foster care deserve to experience as full a family life as possible. Growing up as part of a loving family with carers who can make everyday decisions as they would their own child and without the child or young person feeling that they 'stand out' as a looked after child.

It is important that foster carers understand and empathise with the specific issues that looked after children and young people face without making them feel that they 'stand out'.

Children and young people must be given every support to develop their own identities and aspirations, fulfil their potential, and take advantage of all opportunities to promote their talent and skills. Above all, they should be listened to and their views are acted on.

All our children are different; different ages, genders, ethnicities, personalities and care needs. But they all need stability, consistency and a loving family environment so they can develop and grow.

To meet the diverse needs of our children there are different types of Foster Care, task centred, long term, disability, short stays, short breaks for children with disabilities, family and friends fostering and resilience fostering but all with the same goal to support Staffordshire's children.

Roles and commitment

Staffordshire County Council aims to provide and maintain stable and first rate foster care for children and young people 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.

The foster carer's role

Foster carers are at the heart of the fostering service. They 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, to reach their potential. Our working relationships are based on mutual trust and respect. This charter explains what we expect from each other in order to provide first rate foster care for all children and young people placed in our care.

Fostering service commitment

You can expect from us:

1. Working in partnership
2. Information
3. Clarity about decisions
4. Support to increase confidence and resilience
5. Learning and development
6. Fair treatment
7. Communication and consultation

Foster carer's commitment

You can expect from us:

1. Working in partnership
2. Information
3. Respect for the child
4. Support for the child
5. Learning and development and support
6. Communication and consultation

What foster carers can expect from the fostering service and its partners

1. Working in partnership

We recognise that foster carers have skills and expertise and make a unique and significant difference to the everyday lives of looked after children and young people which can endure into adulthood.

We as Staffordshire County Council with the support of our partners will:

- Recognise and value your skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals.
- Consider your observations, experience and knowledge of the child when planning for the child's future.
- Treat you without discrimination and respect you as a colleague.
- Recognise the importance of the child's/young person's relationship with you and the members of your household.
- When making a foster placement ensure the wishes and feelings of the child or young person are listened to and taken into account.
- Include you in all meetings that affect you and the children/young people you care for on a day to day basis through consultation or attendance.
- Work to ensure that Families First Social Workers are consistent in their practice and approach.
- Ensure that Delegated Authority is considered appropriately and that you are clear on what decisions you can make with regards to the young person in your care. This should continue to be reviewed in line with the status of the child and the time they have been in placement.
- Ensure that Staffordshire County Council Fostering Service meets the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance.
- Respect you and your family's confidentiality.
- Meet or consult with you regularly to share information and seek your views.
- Ensure transparency between all involved in the team around the child/young person.

2. Information

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

We as Staffordshire County Council with the support of our partners will:

- Ensure that information records are clear, comprehensive and of a high quality, and that you and the foster child are fully aware of the details of the child's care plan.
- Make sure foster children/young people have information about their foster carer, the foster home and members of the fostering household before placement, including during emergency placements.
- Make sure you have all the information you need in order to care safely for the child/young person and keep yourself and members of your foster family safe
- Provide this information in writing prior to placement unless where they are emergency placements and it is not feasible to do so, when we will provide this information within five working days.
- Ensure that there is a Placement Plan drawn up in discussion with you, the child's parents where possible, and the foster child/young person and agreed with you.
- Ensure that you are included, consulted with and updated following events in the child's/young person's life including appointments, contact and meetings.
- Provide you with written information on all financial matters including tax, allowances, and additional entitlements which are updated as required and accessible via the foster carers Handbook.
- Provide you with full details of all relevant policies and procedures which are updated as required.
- Make sure you receive regular updates on events and issues relevant to the fostering service including Staffordshire County's foster carers' newsletter – Fostering News.

3. Clarity about decisions

We recognise that in order for children and young people to live a full family life foster carers must be able to make decisions regarding the children they foster.

We as Staffordshire County Council with the support of our partners will:

- Ensure that wherever possible you are able to make everyday decisions that mean that your fostered child/young person is not treated differently to their peers and can feel part of your family.
- Ensure that you and your foster child/young person have a clear agreement, included in the Placement Plan, on the delegated decisions that you can make for each child/young person in your care.
- Provide clarity to you and your foster child/young person about any decisions you cannot make at the outset so that everyone understands who is responsible for what.
- Ensure foster children and young people understand who can make what decisions and the reason for this.

4. Support

We recognise that fostering is a challenging task and carers can feel isolated, and appropriate and timely support makes all the difference to the fostering family and to the child or young person in your care.

We as Staffordshire County Council with the support of our partners will:

- Provide and ensure you have access to the identified support that you need.
- Regularly review your support needs and respond positively, and in a planned way, to requests for additional support.
- Provide you with regular and timely supervision and support in line with foster carers supervision policy.
- Provide you with copies of your supervision documents.
- Listen to your concerns and take action when needed.
- Give you open and honest feedback in all our dealing with you and provide opportunities for you to do the same.
- Provide you with out of hours support and access to 24 hour support from appropriately qualified workers.
- Hold stability meetings to identify support needs, to improve placement stability and give extra support at times of crisis.
- Pay you allowances, expenses and fees in a timely manner that reflect the governments recommended rates.
- Provide clarity regarding payments to foster carers for young people who stay with their foster carer after they leave care under staying put arrangements.
- Have an open and transparent fee scheme open to all foster carers.
- Provide you with membership of the Fostering Network.
- Ensure that there are local support groups where you and your family can find support and share experiences with other fostering families.
- Value your own sons and daughters with support groups and advice.

5. Learning and development

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

We as Staffordshire County Council with the support of our partners will:

- Allocate you an experienced mentor during your assessment.
- Provide you with four levels of training, Introduction, Foundations, Continuous Professional Development and Specialist.

- Provide you with the support you need to achieve the Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD).
- Make sure you have a Personal Development Plan outlining your training and development needs which is regularly reviewed.
- Provide you and your family with appropriate, relevant and progressive training by trainers who understand the fostering task.
- Provide you with evidence based training programs, based on Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care principles of social learning theory.
- Provide you with training as and when you need it to promote understanding of relevant issues such as behaviour management; attachment and loss etc.
- Provide you with Social Pedagogy training.
- Provide training in a variety of formats and at times and venues to meet your needs with the support you need to access including homebased E Learning.
- Invite you to Forums to share best practice, consult with you and seek feedback to support innovation and improvements.
- Provide you with other developmental opportunities which make the best use of your skills and experience, such as mentoring or providing training or support.

6. Fair treatment

We will ensure that you and the children/young people in your care are listened to, treated fairly and with respect no matter what the circumstances.

We as Staffordshire County Council with the support of our partners will:

- Consult with you via the Foster Carers Advisory group and /or Staffordshire's Fostering Association before changing terms and conditions.
- Ensure openness in all our discussions and communications with you.
- Provide you with information on Staffordshire County Council's framework for dealing with allegations and adhere to this framework.
- Value your skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals.
- Ensure that you are treated with respect, kept informed and provided with independent support should you be subject to an allegation.
- Ensure that allegations are addressed in a timely fashion and with consideration to the impact on the Fostering household
- 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.
- Invite you to panel to enable honest two way feedback.

7. Communication and consultation

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

We as Staffordshire County Council with the support of our partners will:

- Listen to what you say, respect your views, take them into account and make sure that you are part of decision making processes.
- Support you to contribute your views, and make sure that you are empowered to take part in all placement and care planning decisions in the child's best interests.
- Facilitate communication between you and foster children/young people with senior officers of Staffordshire County Council Children's Services and Elected Members and the Children in Care Council where appropriate.
- Ensure that we consult with you in a meaningful way on matters that affect you and give you timely feedback from consultations.
- Ensure the Staffordshire Fostering Association is able to communicate regularly with the Fostering Service and members of the Association on behalf of carers.

What the fostering service and its partners can expect from foster carers

1. Working in partnership

We will deliver a high standard of care and conduct ourselves in a professional manner.

We as Staffordshire County Council Foster Carers will:

- Uphold the standards and expectations as set out in 'fostering agreement'
- Include foster children and young people as part of our family by including them in our daily routines and activities.
- Provide a safe, warm and caring home.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance and follow departmental policies and procedures.
- Use our knowledge, expertise and skills to the best of our ability.
- Attend meetings, and provide information for meetings, about the children and young people we care for.
- Work co-operatively with the team around the child/young person for example work with education and health colleagues.
- Show a willingness to work with birth parents, wider family and people significant in a child's/young person's life.
- Seek to solve problems quickly by using our available formal and informal support networks; taking on the role of the 'pushy parent'.
- Complete paperwork in advance of annual reviews and encourage our son's and daughters to give feedback.

2. Respect for the child

Every child/young person should be respected as an individual and be supported in meeting their needs and achieving their aspirations and potential.

We as Staffordshire County Council Foster Carers will:

- Provide for the child/young person a loving, caring, safe, supportive and secure family environment.
- Listen to and respect the views of children/young people in our care.
- Commit to understanding the child/young person in our care and the issues in their lives and how this affects their actions and behaviours.
- Respect and promote children's and young people's identity and religious, linguistic and cultural heritage.

- Manage risk effectively to empower children to improve independence skills.
- Empower and allow children and young people to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age and understanding.
- Advocate for children and young people in our care when necessary.

3. Support for the child

As Staffordshire County foster carers we must have high expectations for the children and young people in our care, high ambitions for them and provide the support to achieve their aspirations.

We as Staffordshire County Council Foster Carers will:

- Promote the Staffordshire Pledge.
- Support the child/young person to achieve and maintain good health.
- Support the child/young person to do well at school.
- Be aspirational for all the children in our household
- Encourage and enable children and young people to form positive relationships with their peers.
- Show the young person we have high expectations that they can succeed.
- Inform the supervising social worker and child's social worker of achievements and success and about any difficulties and concerns
- Support children and young people as they grow to gain life experiences and become independent by passing on our own life skills i.e. communication, decision making, cooking, money management etc.
- Provide support and advice to, and advocate for, the children and young people in our care.

4. Information

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

We as Staffordshire County Council Foster Carers will:

- Provide information about our family, hobbies, interests and home life for children and young people who may come to live with us.
- We will spend time to get to know children and young people placed in our care and not judge children/young people on the information given to us.
- 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/emergency duty team immediately about any serious issues and incidents that happen to, or affect any child or young person in our care.
- Keep and share records in line with Staffordshire County Council Fostering Services recording policy.

5. Learning and development

We must be enabled to access learning and development opportunities throughout our fostering career. This will ensure that 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 and young people we foster.

We as Staffordshire County Council Foster Carers will:

- Complete the Training, Support and Development Standards within the required timescales.
- Be prepared to develop our skills throughout our fostering career and use these skills in caring for children and young people to make a positive impact thus enabling the child/young person to reach their potential.
- Regularly attend relevant training as detailed in our Personal Development plans for at least 21 hours each year.
- Attend and contribute to support groups, forums and celebration events.
- Embed Social Pedagogical principles within the Fostering Service and wider Children's services.
- Be open to using support when offered to help make placements work well.
- Encourage son's and daughters to attend training offered by the Fostering Service.

6. Communication and consultation

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

We as Staffordshire County Council Foster Carers will:

- Consult and communicate with the foster children/young people in our care when making decisions in line with delegated authority.
- Take an active role in local consultations and discussions in order to inform the development of the service.
- Support the work of the Foster Care Advisory group and the Foster Carers Association.
- Consider representing others by meeting with councillors to give an account of the challenges and achievement of being a Staffordshire Foster Carer.
- Promote the Fostering Service and the recruitment of foster carers where appropriate and whenever possible.
- Encourage our own, and foster children and young people, to attend local consultation groups such as the Children in Care Council and the Sons and Daughters Group.

Thank you for being a Staffordshire County Council Foster Carer.

Do you have any questions? Please call us on 01785 895363

www.staffordshire.gov.uk/fostering