

Fostering in Bedford Borough

Foster Care Charter



BEDFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Introduction

This document represents the aspirations of Bedford Borough Council and the Bedfordshire Foster Care Association, and its commitment to strive for the best practice at all times to ensure children and young people in the care of the Council, receive the best possible standards of care, from foster carers who are viewed as an essential part of the professional team supporting the child. It also recognises the emotional commitment that foster carers offer children at Bedford Borough Council. This charter explains what we can expect from each other and applies equally to all foster carers whether related or unrelated to the children they care for on behalf of Bedford Borough Bedford Borough children. This Charter is endorsed by the elected members of Bedford Borough in their role as Corporate Parents.



Bedford Borough Fostering Services Role

The Fostering Services role is to provide stable and first rate foster care for children who are valued, supported and encouraged to develop as individuals. To achieve this aim, we recruit, train and approve foster carers and provide supervision and support.

The Foster Carers' Role

Foster carers are at the heart of the Foster Care Service. They are assessed, trained and supported to look after children and young people in a family environment. This provides children and young people with stability, quality care and an opportunity to grow and develop and to reach their full potential.

Children's Services Role

Bedford Borough Children's Services recognise the positive and central role that foster carers play in the lives of the children placed with them. In order to ensure the best possible outcomes for children, all members of Bedford Borough's Children's Services are committed to working in partnership with foster carers to ensure that the child placed with them can live as normal a family life as possible. Our working relationships are based on mutual trust and respect.

What foster carers can expect from Bedford fostering service:

Working In Partnership

We will:

- Work in partnership with foster carers, recognising that foster carers have the skills and expertise to make the biggest difference to the everyday lives of children in care.
- Value your skills and expertise and recognise that you know the children best.
- Include you in all meetings which affect the child you care for.
- Ensure that this service meets fostering regulations and standards and Bedford Borough



- Councils Statement of Purpose.
- Treat you fairly without discrimination and respect your confidentiality.
 - Welcome the Representatives of Bedfordshire Foster Care Association to Corporate Parents panel, where major policies are agreed.

Providing Information

We will:

- Undertake to give you all information available in writing prior to placements being made and will ensure that a placement plan is completed with you and is agreed in advance of the placement wherever possible.
- Ensure that all information is regularly updated so that you are best placed to care for the child placed with you. This will include information from the team around the child.
- Value the information that foster carers contribute.
- Provide you with the financial policy for foster carers and all financial matters including tax, allowances and additional entitlements. This will be disseminated annually.
- Provide you with full details of all relevant departmental structures, staffing, policies and procedures including any changes.



Clarity About Decisions

We will:

- Recognise that in order for children to live a full family life, foster carers must be enabled to make every day decisions using delegated authority. This will allow children placed with you to feel part of your family and to not feel different from their friends, whilst having regard for the wishes of parents and the courts.
- Clarify which decisions you can make from the start of the placement, at the child's placement planning meeting and at the child's looked after reviews.
- Ensure that everyone in Bedford Borough Children's Services understands the implications of delegated authority and will give timely and detailed information about decision making which allows you to act as an advocate in all aspects of the child's development.
- Also ensure that policy and practice does not place artificial barriers in the way of promoting a normal family, school and social life for the children placed with you.

Support

We will:

- Recognise that fostering can be an isolating and challenging task which can affect all aspects of family and social life. Appropriate and timely support makes all the difference to the whole fostering family and to the child in your care.
- Respond positively to requests for additional support and consider your needs in a timely and empathetic fashion.
- Provide you with regular supervision and frequent telephone contact which meets your needs and those of the children you foster.
- Commit to formally review your practice on at least an annual basis which will give you the opportunity to comment on your fostering experience.
- Provide you with systems that allow you to share electronic information and documents securely ensuring that data and confidentiality are protected.
- Give you honest and open feedback which allows you to reflect on your practice and develop your skills further.

- Provide you with access to out of hours telephone support from people with fostering expertise.
- Provide specialist support to inform the care that you provide in areas such as education, health, youth offending and / or behaviour.



- Pay your fostering allowances, foster carer expenses and fees in a timely manner.
- Provide a range of support groups for foster carers to attend including a mainstream foster carers support group, a connected carers support group and teenage carers group, where you and your family can find support and share experiences with other fostering families.

- Provide you with access to trained foster carers who act as mentors and who can support you with issues relating to fostering.
- Provide you with annual membership to The Fostering Network.
- Support the Bedfordshire Foster Care Association in its role supporting foster carers and providing them with information and access to social activities.

Learning And Development

We will:

- Believe that foster carers must be enabled to access learning and development opportunities throughout their fostering career. This will ensure that you have the skills and knowledge you need, and will enable you to develop your practice in order that you can help transform the lives of the children you foster.
- Provide you and your family with appropriate and relevant training by course trainers who understand the fostering task. We will encourage trainers to allow you opportunities for self-reflection so that you are able to apply learning to your practice.

- Provide you with other developmental opportunities which make the best use of your skills and expertise such as mentoring or providing training or support to other foster carers.
- Ensure all foster carers have an annual, mutually agreed training and development plan reflecting their knowledge, the needs of the child in placement and their fostering aspirations.
- Support foster carers to develop meaningful relationships with the children in their care and the other members of the team around the child.
- Recognise and value the knowledge and experience that foster carers bring as part of the team around the child.

Fair Treatment

We will:

- Consult with foster carers before changing terms, conditions and policies affecting fostering.
- Provide an independent advice and mediation service which you can access without recourse to the fostering service.
- Ensure openness in all of our discussions and communications with you.
- Ensure that you are treated with respect, are kept informed and provided with independent advice if you are subject to an allegation.
- Provide a framework for dealing with allegations 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.
- We will allow you timely access to records held relating to you and your family.

Communication And Consultation

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

We will:

- Facilitate regular communication between you, The Bedfordshire Foster Care Association, councillors, and the management network.
- Provide you with the opportunity to influence relevant policies and procedures and ensure that we consult with you and the Bedfordshire Foster Carers Association on matters that affect you in good time and take into account your advice and concerns. As foster carers, we will give you timely feedback from consultations and provide clear information on how you as foster carers can give us feedback and report concerns.

What Bedford fostering service and children's service can expect from foster carers:

Working In Partnership

We expect foster carers to:

- Demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct.
- Maintain open and honest dialogue with the fostering service and children's services.
- Aim to build meaningful and collaborative relationships with the supervising social worker, the child's social worker and others within the team around child.
- Demonstrate their expertise and make use of their skills to the best of their ability.
- Provide children with a good experience of family life, attend meetings about the children and young people we care for and work closely with education and health providers.
- Be willing to work with birth parents and people who are important to a child.

- Respect confidentiality.
- Meet the standards set out in the fostering regulations and follow Bedford Borough's policies and procedures.
- Maintain an open dialogue with the fostering service.
- Inform their supervising social worker about factors that impact on their fostering including changes in their household and about any difficulties that arise for them.



Respect For The Child

Every child and young person should be respected as an individual and supported to achieve their aspirations and reach their full potential.

We recognise that the experiences of each child and young person will have had a significant influence on their perception of what family life is and therefore their behaviours.

We expect foster carers to:

- Develop a meaningful relationship with the child, understand their needs, support their growth, and become an advocate and champion for them.
- Listen to the child placed with them and take their opinions into account including advocating for the child if needed.
- Provide children with an experience of a secure, positive family life that meets their needs.
- Respect and promote every aspect of a child's religious, linguistic and cultural heritage and offer the same level of care and protection as we would want for our own children.

- Give the children we care for, the best opportunities and support them to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age, understanding and ability.
- Attend meetings with the professional network around the child including health and education and other relevant agencies and will provide reports about the children and young people we care for.
- Work with the agencies involved with the child to promote their overall needs.
- Work in an open and transparent way.

Information

We expect foster carers to:

- Inform their supervising social worker about any changes in their household as any changes may impact fostering.
- Inform their supervising social worker about any difficulties that arise for them.
- Take part in regular supervision and an annual review of their fostering practice.
- Communicate regularly with the child's social worker to keep them fully informed of any developments in the child's life.
- Attend meetings and provide reports as requested in order to ensure the best possible outcomes for the child.
- Commit to keeping and sharing records with the Local Authority.
- Continue to undertake life story work, recognising the role you play in the child's personal identity and life journey not only now but for the future.

Learning, Development And Support

We expect foster carers 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 we can help transform the lives of the children they foster.



- Reflect on their fostering practice in order to improve the quality of care provided for the children and young people who live with them.
- Contribute to the ongoing development of the fostering service.

- Actively contribute to the development of a training and development plan which reflects their knowledge, the needs of the child in our care and their fostering aspirations.
- Continually develop their skills and understanding by attending relevant training and engaging in creative learning.
- Take up relevant training and development opportunities offered to them and inform the fostering service if they are unable to attend meetings or training as soon as reasonably possible.
- Attend and contribute to support groups and contribute to the training and mentoring of other foster carers where appropriate.

Communication And Consultation

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

We expect foster carers to:

- Respond to local consultations and discussion in order to inform the development of the service.
- Meet with councillors, managers and other professionals to promote dialogue and positive working relationships.
- Ensure that we communicate with the team around the child in a professional, sensitive and appropriate manner in line with the Department of Education, Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011 and the Department of Education Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers Guidance.
- Communicate all concerns and significant events that impact the child looked after to the fostering service and child's social worker in a timely manner.



CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES
At the heart of everything we do

Review date:

Signed by:

Director of Childrens Services

Chair of Bedfordshire
Foster Carers Association

Mayor of Bedford Borough

Chief Executive of
Bedford Borough Council

Councillor James Valentine

Written and produced by foster carers and Bedford Borough Council 2022