



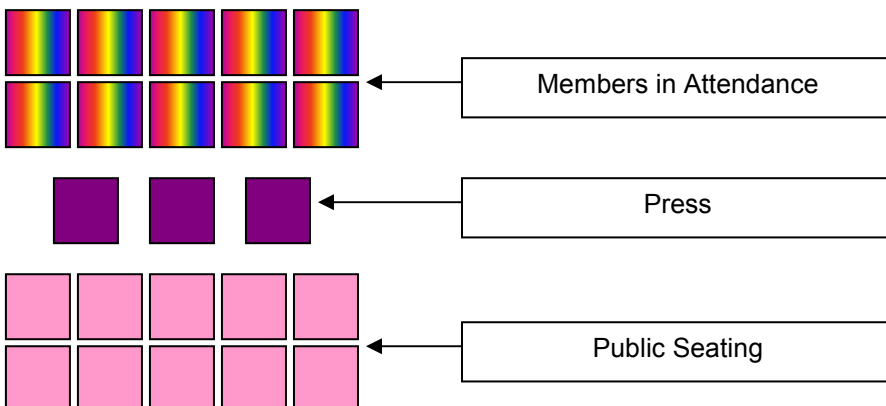
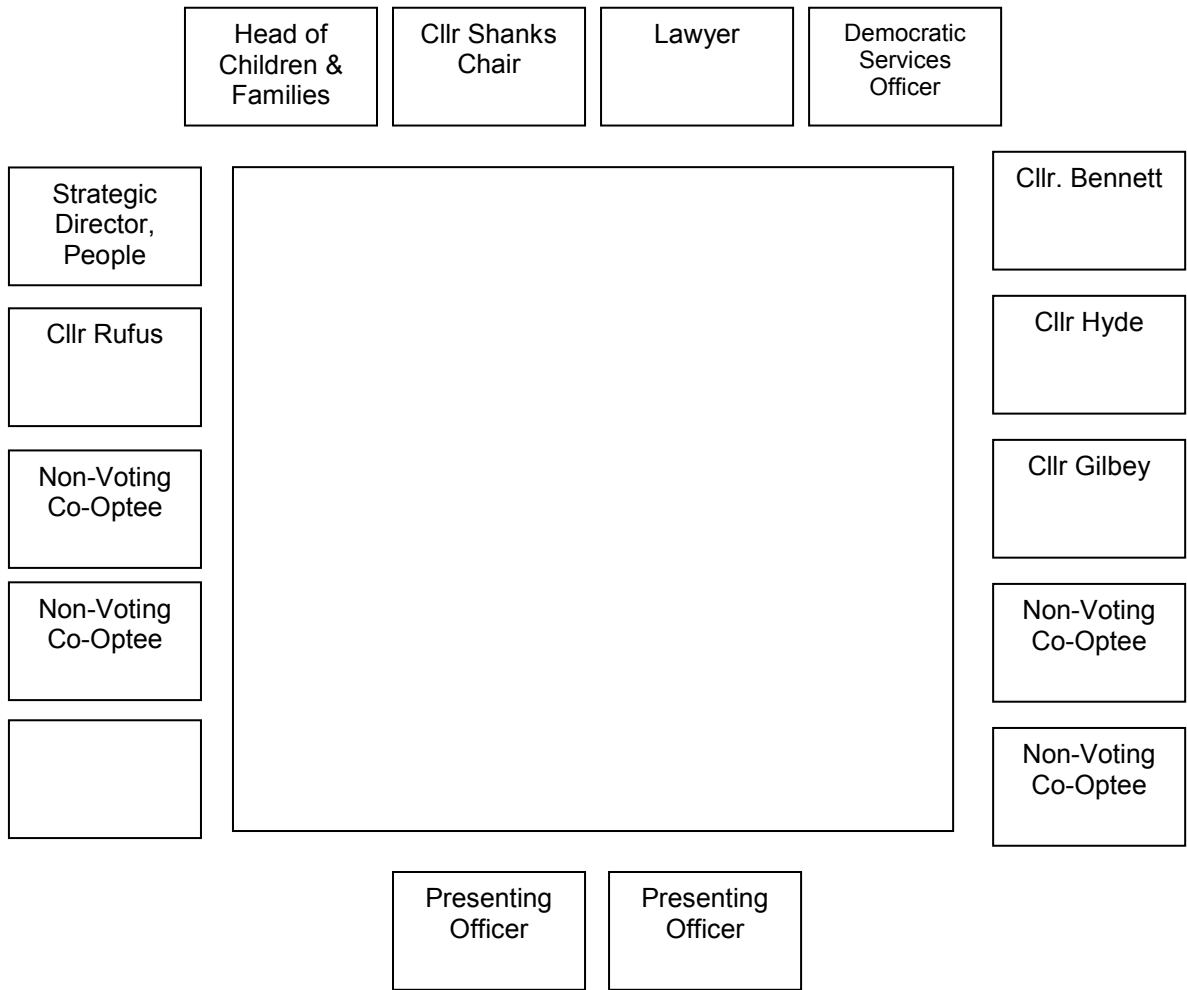
Brighton & Hove
City Council

Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee

Title:	Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee
Date:	17 October 2012
Time:	4.00pm
Venue	Committee Room 1, Hove Town Hall
Members:	Councillors: Shanks (Chair), Rufus (Deputy Chair), Bennett, Gilbey and Hyde
Contact:	Ross Keatley Democratic Services Officer 01273 291064 ross.keatley@brighton-hove.gov.uk

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Democratic Services: Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee



AGENDA

11. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

(a) Declaration of Substitutes: Where Councillors are unable to attend a meeting, a substitute Member from the same Political Group may attend, speak and vote in their place for that meeting.

(b) Declarations of Interest:

- (a) Disclosable pecuniary interests not registered on the register of interests;
- (b) Any other interests required to be registered under the local code;
- (c) Any other general interest as a result of which a decision on the matter might reasonably be regarded as affecting you or a partner more than a majority of other people or businesses in the ward/s affected by the decision.

In each case, you need to declare

- (i) the item on the agenda the interest relates to;
- (ii) the nature of the interest; and
- (iii) whether it is a disclosable pecuniary interest or some other interest.

If unsure, Members should seek advice from the committee lawyer or administrator preferably before the meeting.

(c) Exclusion of Press and Public: To consider whether, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, or the nature of the proceedings, the press and public should be excluded from the meeting when any of the following items are under consideration.

NOTE: *Any item appearing in Part Two of the Agenda states in its heading the category under which the information disclosed in the report is exempt from disclosure and therefore not available to the public.*

A list and description of the exempt categories is available for public inspection at Brighton and Hove Town Halls.

12. MINUTES

1 - 4

To consider the minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2012 (copy attached).

13. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMITTEE

14. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

To consider the following matters raised by members of the public:

- (a) **Petitions:** to receive any petitions presented to the full council or at the meeting itself;
- (b) **Written Questions:** to receive any questions submitted by the due date of 12 noon on the (insert date);
- (c) **Deputations:** to receive any deputations submitted by the due date of 12 noon on the (insert date).

15. MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

To consider the following matters raised by councillors:

- (a) **Petitions:** to receive any petitions submitted to the full Council or at the meeting itself;
- (b) **Written Questions:** to consider any written questions;
- (c) **Letters:** to consider any letters;
- (d) **Notices of Motion:** to consider any Notices of Motion referred from Council or submitted directly to the Committee.

16. FOSTER CARERS CHARTER

5 - 24

Report of Strategic Director, People (copy attached).

Contact Officer: Clare Smith

Tel: 01273 295547

Ward Affected: All Wards

17. FAMILY FIRST POLICY

25 - 32

Report of Strategic Director, People (copy attached).

Contact Officer: Karen Devine

Tel: 01273 295444

Ward Affected: All Wards

PART TWO

18. PART TWO MINUTES

33 - 34

To consider the part two minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2012 (copy attached).

19. MISSING CHILDREN POLICY UPDATE

35 - 42

Report of Strategic Director, People (copy attached).

Contact Officer: Andy Whippey

Tel: 29-5391

Ward Affected: All Wards

20. PART TWO PROCEEDINGS

To consider whether the items listed in Part Two of the agenda and decisions thereon should remain exempt from disclosure to the press and public.

CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMITTEE

The City Council actively welcomes members of the public and the press to attend its meetings and holds as many of its meetings as possible in public. Provision is also made on the agendas for public questions to committees and details of how questions can be raised can be found on the website and/or on agendas for the meetings.

The closing date for receipt of public questions and deputations for the next meeting is 12 noon on the fifth working day before the meeting.

Agendas and minutes are published on the council's website www.brighton-hove.gov.uk. Agendas are available to view five working days prior to the meeting date.

Meeting papers can be provided, on request, in large print, in Braille, on audio tape or on disc, or translated into any other language as requested.

For further details and general enquiries about this meeting contact Ross Keatley, (01273 291064, email ross.keatley@brighton-hove.gov.uk) or email democratic.services@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Date of Publication - Tuesday, 9 October 2012

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMITTEE

4.00pm 4 JULY 2012

COMMITTEE ROOM 1, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Shanks (Chair)

Also in attendance: Councillors Bennett, Gilbey and Hyde

Other Members present: Councillor Pissaridou

PART ONE

1. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

1a) Declarations of Substitutes

1.1 There were none.

1b) Declarations of Interest

1.2 There were none.

1c) Exclusion of Press and Public

1.3 In accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 ("the Act"), the Planning Committee considered whether the public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of any item of business on the grounds that it is likely in view of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during it, there would be disclosure to them of confidential information as defined in Section 100A (3) of the Act.

1.4 **RESOLVED** - That the public are not excluded from any item of business on the agenda.

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

2.1 **RESOLVED** – That the Terms of Reference be noted.

3. APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTees

- 3.1 The Sub-Committee discussed the arrangements for the appointment of co-optees and agreed representation from looked after children and foster carers would be preferable.

4. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

- 4.1 There were none.

5. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

- 5.1 There were no petitions, written questions or deputations received from members of the public.

6. MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

- 6.1 There were no petitions, written questions, letters or notices of motion raised by Councillors.

7. INTRODUCTION TO CORPORATE PARENTING

- 7.1 The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director, Place outlining an introduction to corporate parenting. The concept of corporate parenting was introduced with the launch of the Quality Protects Programme in 1998; the principle was that the local authority is the corporate parent for children in care and thus has the legal and moral duty to provide the kind of support that good parents would provide their own children. Elected Members have a responsibility for making sure that the Council meets all of its statutory duties and responsibilities.

- 7.2 **RESOLVED** - That the report be noted.

8. CORPORATE PARENTING SUB COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

- 8.1 The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director, Place in relation to the Sub-Committee workplan. The report provided guidance to the Sub-Committee for a future thematic workplan that would enable the Sub-Committee to discharge some of its corporate parenting responsibilities, in a summary of local and national context.

- 8.2 **RESOLVED** – That the report be noted.

9. PLACEMENT TYPE - WHERE CHILDREN LIVE AND CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE MISSING FROM CARE

- 9.1 As detailed in the Part 2 confidential report.

10. PART 2 PROCEEDINGS

- 10.1 **RESOLVED** – That the above items remain exempt from disclosure from the press and public.

The meeting concluded at 6.00pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 16

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Brighton and Hove Foster Carers' Charter		
Date of Meeting:	17 October 2012		
Report of:	Strategic Director, People		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Clare Smith	Tel: 29-5547
	Email:	Clare.smith@brighton-hove.gov.uk	
Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE.

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 The Foster Carers' Charter is a government initiative launched in April 2011 as part of the move to improve outcomes for children and young people in care. Foster carers are the main providers of care for looked after children and the Charter recognises and enshrines the role of the foster carer as being of key importance. The Charter provides a way for Brighton and Hove City Council to work together with foster carers and to build professional and respectful relationships that will lead to positive outcomes for children.
- 1.1.2 The government also intended for the Charter to be used as way to assist in the recruitment and retention of foster carers. It enshrines the importance of their role and gives clear messages about the status of foster care and that in order to carry out their task, foster carers need support and respect from those working with them. The Foster Carers' Charter fits with the council's aims of increasing the number of in-house foster carers.
- 1.2.1 It reflects changes in fostering legislation that places a stronger emphasis on the role of the foster carer in achieving positive outcome for children in care.
- 1.2.3 The Charter lays out the values, commitments and expectations of Brighton and Hove City Council when working with foster carers in terms of partnership working, training and supervision, information sharing, fair treatment, communication and decision making. Alongside this are the commitments and expectations placed on Brighton and Hove's foster carers both in looking after children and young people and working with the council, which include respect for children and young people, commitment to learning and development, openness and honesty, working in partnership and communication. The components of the Charter are considered key for foster carers when they are looking after children in care.
- 1.2.4 In addition to signing up to the principles and values of the Charter, foster carers annually sign a 'Foster Carers' Agreement' at the time of their annual fostering review. This agreement specifically lays out the expectations placed upon foster carers in terms of their role in meeting both the statutory requirements of the National Minimum Standards as well as meeting the needs of children in care and helping them their developmental potential in education and health.

1.2.5 The Charter is relevant to foster carers, the Fostering Service, other social work teams that work with foster carers forming the network to support the child and children in care.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 That the committee notes and approves the Charter on behalf of the council so this can be adopted as a way of working by Brighton and Hove foster carers are members of the council.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

3.1 The government launched the Foster Carer Charter initiative in April 2011 as a way of working with foster carers to improve outcomes for children in care. The Foster Carers' Charter was introduced to foster carers at a general meeting for Brighton and Hove foster carers in June 2011. From this meeting volunteers from the foster carer body formed a working party to produce a Brighton and Hove Foster Carers' Charter.

3.2 The working party consisted of 8 foster carers including members of the Brighton and Hove Foster Care Association. The Fostering Network, the U.K.'s leading charity for foster carers published a sample copy of a foster carers' charter which was used as a basis for the Brighton and Hove charter. However foster carers were very clear they wanted to make the Brighton and Hove Charter relevant to the issues affecting Brighton and Hove foster carers and hence have developed this document further. The working party met from January 2012 to March 2012 to produce the draft charter.

3.3 The Charter will sit alongside the Foster Carers' agreement that foster carers sign each year which outlines the requirements and expectations placed on them when looking after children on behalf of Brighton and Hove as well the requirements of the Fostering Service to provide support and supervision to foster carers. The Charter will be used as part of the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

3.4 Brighton and Hove currently has 128 fostering households plus 32 Family and Friends households. These households are looking after 204 children aged 0 -18 (July' 12).

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

4.1 Following consultation with Brighton and Hove foster carers in June 2011 a working party of foster carers was formed to compile the Brighton and Hove Foster Carers' Charter. This working party consisted of 8 foster carers including members of the Brighton and Hove Foster Care Association. The foster carers brought with them a range of different experiences to the working party. In addition, the working party consisted of the Team Manager for the fostering service and a Practice Manager from the Fostering Service involved in supervision and support of foster carers. The working party met on 4 occasions to produce the draft charter.

- 4.2 Currently there are 126 fostering households plus 38 Family and Friends foster carers. These households are looking after 204 children aged 0 -18 (July' 12). Foster carers have received the Charter positively and have welcomed its spirit and values. They believe this will help in the development of positive working relationships between themselves, social workers and the council, which they feel will help in the stability of fostering placements.
- 4.3 Following the completion, the draft document was circulated to social work teams for consultation. These teams would be directly involved in working with foster carers and children in care and hence would be directly involved in the application of the charter. Feedback from this consultation was received from these teams that were subsequently led to amendments in the draft Charter document.
- 4.4 The Team Manager, Fostering Service took the Foster Carers' Charter to the 2 operating Children in Care Councils for their views. Young people attending these councils' expressed a positive view of the Charter as they felt it supported their carers and also fed back about an areas that they thought was important for foster carers taking care of them Their comments has led to a further amendment being incorporated into the Charter.
- 4.5 Following the feedback received from the various bodies the working party met again to agree the final amendments to be incorporated into the Charter.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1.1 There are no financial implications for the introduction and implication of the Brighton and Hove Foster Carers' Charter

Finance Officer consulted: David Ellis Senior Accountant 02.09.12

Legal Implications:

- 5.2.1 The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 gives a greater emphasis to the role of the foster carers and the part they play in delivering improved outcomes for children in care. The standards see the foster carer as having a central and integral role in the care of children looked after. The Charter is viewed as part of the mechanism to ensure that foster carers receive the support they need to carry out their role. The Charter lays out the values, commitments and expectations of Brighton and Hove City Council when working with foster carers.
- 5.2.2 The Fostering Service is inspected regularly by Ofsted against the minimum standards. The Charter provides a basis and framework for how the council works with foster carers to meet the minimum standards. The charter is part of the services offered to foster carers and gives a clear message of the value placed on foster carers and their role in achieving positive outcomes for children in care.

- 5.2.3 The council has responsibility as the corporate parent to any looked after child to ensure that the care they receive in their home with any foster carer they are placed with is of an acceptable standard.

Lawyer: Natasha Watson Date: 04.10.12

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 The Charter provides a framework for working with foster carers who are looking after some of the city's most vulnerable children who cannot live with their own families and who have been abused. Providing high quality foster care is part of giving children the best start in life and able to maximise their capabilities.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 There are no immediate sustainability implications.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 High quality foster care is part of improving life chances for children who cannot live with their family and who have suffered abuse. The chance for children to engage in family life and form secure attachments with their care givers will aid young people in engaging in law abiding and socially acceptable behaviour. This Charter proposes a way of the council and foster carers working together to enable children to form positive attachments with their carers.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 The Foster Carer Charter relates to improving outcomes for children by providing a framework for the council to work with foster carers who are their main carers. This will have implications for reducing risk for children and young people.

Public Health Implications:

- 5.7 For children in foster care the opportunity for them to develop secure and lasting attachments with their foster carers will be a key factor in their on-going emotional health and well-being with implications for later life. The Charter aims to support foster carers in looking after children in care and aims to provide placement stability through working with their carers. Children coming into foster care see improvements in their health and foster carers play an integral role in this and ensuring these children have access to appropriate resources.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.8.1 The Foster Carers' Charter fits with the council's priorities of giving children and young people the best start in life by ensuring that the council works with its' foster carers to ensure they are supported in their task of looking after children in care.
- 5.8.2 The Foster Carers' Charter also has implications for increasing the number of in-house foster carers as part of the Value for Money Programme. It has a role of

both ensuring foster carers have the support they need to aid with their retention and ensure placement stability as well as being used as part of the strategy to attract potential new carers and demonstrates that the council is committed to working and supporting their foster carers.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 6.1 The Foster Carers' Charter is a government initiative relating to working with foster carers who are an integral part of improving outcomes for children in care and Brighton and Hove's Foster Carer's Charter meets this obligation. Foster carers have reacted positively to the proposal and have worked to produce a charter that reflects issues facing local carers.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The Brighton and Hove Foster Carers' Charter provides a positive framework for foster carers and the council to work together to promote positive outcomes for children in care. It is clear about the values and commitments for both the carers and the council and its members in working together that are necessary to achieve high quality foster care. It meets a government requirement which reflects changes in legislation placing a greater emphasis on the role of foster carer as being central to the care of foster children.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices

1. Brighton and Hove Foster Carer's Charter (Draft)

Background Documents

1. Fostering Network Sample Foster Carers' Charter



**Brighton & Hove
City Council**

Roles and commitment

Brighton and Hove City Council's role

The council 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.

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.

Fostering Service's commitment

You can expect from us:

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

Foster carers' commitment

You can expect from us:

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

What foster carers can expect from Brighton and Hove City Council:

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 recognising you receive training and knowledge
- recognise that you are the people who live with children every day and know them best
- Aim to include you in all relevant meetings that affect you and the children you care for. To provide you with an explanation and information if you are unable to attend.
- ensure that our fostering service will meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance
- treat you without discrimination and respect you as a colleague
- respect your confidentiality.
- Aim to ensure you receive a consistent approach
- Consult with the foster carers (the BHFCA) about the development of the fostering service
- Ensure you are treated courteously

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 we have in order to care safely for the child. We recognise the importance of this information
- provide this information in writing prior to placement or at the earliest opportunity from the start of a placement.
- ensure that there is a placement plan drawn up in discussion with you within the specified timescales.
- 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.
- To consult with you about change in policies and procedures that affect you.

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, if appropriate, 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 cannot take at the outset so that everyone understands who is responsible for what.
- provide you with explanations of why decisions are made
- if there is a difference of opinion provide opportunity for these to be explained or resolved

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:

- respond positively and in a non judgemental manner to requests for additional support
- provide you with regular supervision and regular phone contact
- give you honest, timely and open feedback. The feedback will be constructive
- 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
- continue to support the Brighton and Hove Foster Care Association who offer support and opportunity to meet and share experiences with other fostering families.
- Provide a range of support services to help you with your fostering task
- Recognise the role of foster carers sons and daughters play an important role in the fostering task.
- Recognise that the ending of placements can be traumatic for foster carers and ensure foster carers are provided with appropriate support following the end of a placement

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:

- provide you and your family with appropriate and relevant training by trainers who understand the fostering task. Where possible we will provide some flexibility in times of training to enable you to attend.
- 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 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.
- Provide prompt communication to carers following an investigation resulting from an allegation or complaint

7. Communication and consultation

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

We will:

- facilitate regular communication between you and the Lead Councillor for Children's Services.
- ensure that we consult with you in a meaningful way on matters that affect you
- give you timely feedback from consultations.
- Arrange regular opportunities for foster carers to meet with managers from the Fostering Service and others to raise issues of importance to carers.
- Aim to involve foster carers directly in the development of the Fostering Service.

What Brighton and Hove City Council can expect from foster carers:

1. Working in partnership

We will demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct.

We will:

- demonstrate our expertise and make use of our skills to the best of our ability
- provide children and young people with an experience of family life
- work with the agencies involved with the child such as school, health and religious establishments
- show a willingness to work with birth parents, wider family and people significant in a child' or young person'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 will:

- respect and promote a child's religious, linguistic and cultural heritage
- afford the same level of protection and care to a child as we would our own child in accordance with the national minimum standards
- ensure the child has the right to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age and understanding.
- Help collect and preserve memories of the time the child spends with our family.
- Ensure that if children have to move placements, they are moved in a respectful and considerate manner.

3. Information

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

We will:

- inform our supervising social worker about changes in our household
- inform our supervising social worker about any difficulties that arise for us.

4. Learning, development and support

We will 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 will:

- be prepared to develop our skills throughout our fostering career
- attend relevant training
- take up opportunities offered to us
- let you know if we are unable to attend
- play a role in identifying our own training needs

5. Communication and consultation

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship. We believe that it is important for foster carers to play an active role in this

We will:

- aim to respond to local consultations and discussion in order to inform the development of the service
- meet with managers others in order to promote dialogue and a good working relationship.

Feb 2012



Foster Carers' Sample Charter (Fostering Network)

Roles and commitment

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.

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.

Fostering Service's commitment

You can expect from us:

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

Foster carers' commitment

You can expect from us:

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

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 will meet 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 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, when 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 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:

- respond positively to requests for additional 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.

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:

- provide you and your family with appropriate and relevant training by trainers who understand the fostering task
- 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 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:

- facilitate regular communication between you, councillors and the Director of Children's Services
- ensure that we consult with you in a meaningful way on matters that affect you
- give you timely feedback from consultations.

What fostering services can expect from foster carers:

1. Working in partnership

We will demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct.

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 agencies involved with the child such as school, health and religious establishments
- 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 will:

- respect and promote a child's religious, linguistic and cultural heritage
- afford the same level of protection and care to a child as we would our own child in accordance with the national minimum standards
- ensure the child has the right to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age and understanding.

3. Information

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

We will:

- inform our supervising social worker about changes in our household
- inform our supervising social worker about any difficulties that arise for us.

4. 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 will:

- be prepared to develop our skills throughout our fostering career
- attend relevant training
- take up opportunities offered to us

- let you know if we are unable to attend
- attend and contribute to support groups.

5. Communication and consultation

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

Subject:	Family First		
Date of Meeting:	17 October 2012		
Report of:	Strategic Director, People		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Karen Devine	Tel: 295546
	Email:	karen.devine@brighton-hove.gov.uk	
Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 As a result of several key drivers including the transformation of social work agenda; the government's adoption action plan; and the family justice review, BHCC Children and Families Service is required to refocus social work intervention and planning in accordance with explicit Family First principles. The high numbers of looked after children in Brighton and Hove requires a robust 'Family First' approach to social work that achieves emotional, physical and legal permanence for children in a way that either avoids them coming into care or moves them out of care in a timely way. Children move out of care when a special guardianship, residence order or adoption order is granted by a court to an extended family member or friend, unrelated foster carer, or approved adopter. 'Family First' principles prioritise children remaining with or returning to their family, or being secured in the care of family and friends, local authority foster carer, or adopter via the aforementioned legal orders. 'Family First' principles must inform all social work practice and decision making in Brighton and Hove.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Corporate Parenting Sub Committee endorses the 'Family First' approach to social work as detailed in this report.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 The commitment to maintain children in their family of origin or in their wider network of family and friends underpins all children in need and care planning for children in Brighton and Hove. Children who cannot safely be cared for by their immediate or extended family become children in care.
- 3.2 The overarching purpose of Care is to support children to find permanence (Care Matters 2007). Guidance and Regulation define permanence as:

The framework of emotional permanence (attachment to primary caregiver), physical permanence (stability of placement) and legal permanence (the carer can exercise parental

responsibility for the child) which gives a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity and lays the foundation for the child's future development.

The objective of planning for permanence is therefore to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond.

3.3 Routes to Permanence for a child subject to Local Authority intervention in family life:

- Remaining with or return to birth parents where it has been possible to address the issues which led to the child becoming looked after or subject to legal proceedings. Birth parents retain legal parental responsibility for their child.
- Placement with family and friends carers who assume legal parental responsibility through a Residence Order. Legal parental responsibility is shared equally between carers and birth parents.
- Placement with family and friends carers who assume parental responsibility through a Special Guardianship Order. Parental responsibility is shared with the birth parents but the special guardian is able to exercise this to the exclusion of birth parents. The Local Authority provides varying levels of support to the special guardians according to the Special Guardianship Support Plan.
- Placement of child in care with approved adopters who obtain legal parental responsibility for the child which is initially shared between birth parent, Local Authority and adopters until the making of an Adoption Order at which point the parental responsibility of the birth parents and Local Authority is extinguished, leaving the adopters as sole holders of parental responsibility for the child.

3.4 Placement of a child in care with foster carers where legal parental responsibility is shared between the birth parents and the Local Authority as a result of a Care Order is **NOT** considered to achieve permanence for the child as the carers have no legal relationship with the child and cannot exercise parental responsibility for her/him.

3.5 The high numbers of children in care in Brighton and Hove place a significant financial burden on BHCC. This is a key driver in ensuring social work practice moves children out of the care system on to permanence in a timely and appropriate way. The Family First approach emphasises the importance of securing early permanence for children as being both in their best long term interests whilst also ensuring most effective use of council resources.

3.6 Research shows that age at time of a child's most recent entry into care correlates with the stability of permanent placements. It also correlates with the severity of children's emotional and behavioural problems, which themselves correlate with placement stability and endurance. So, whilst Family must be First, there is an imperative to make timely interventions and decisions within

family support and child in need provisions before legal proceedings are issued to maximise successful outcomes for children.

- 3.7 In order to maintain a shared and robust process for planning for permanence, consultation is provided to the child's social worker by the **Permanence Planning and Tracking Forum**. Cases are presented for consultation prior to the four month Child in Care Review meeting when a plan for permanence through adoption or long term fostering is recommended by the Social Work team, and reviewed by the child's Independent Reviewing Officer. The consultation focuses on the appropriateness of the plan for the child drawing on the assessment of the child's needs. The Permanence Planning and Tracking Forum tracks all cases where a child has a plan for permanence outside of their family until permanent placement is achieved ensuring drift and delay is avoided.
- 3.9 Adoption offers children the highest degree of legal security and should always be considered for young children who are not able to be cared for within their family or extended family networks. Placement for Adoption is the permanence option with the best longer term associated outcomes for children and young people and with least cost to the LA. However for some older children adoption may not be appropriate as it severs all legal links to the birth family. Adoption may not be achievable for some children with very particular difficulties or behaviours and permanence will need to be achieved via Special Guardianship.
- 3.10 BHCC will endeavour to place children where possible with in house foster carers if potential foster placements are available and able to meet the needs of the child. Fostering arrangements must where possible lead to foster carers being encouraged and supported to apply for Special Guardianship Orders in respect of children with a plan for permanence. As with adoption any plan for special guardianship needs to include a full support plan that has been agreed with the prospective special guardians and which is kept under review.
- 3.11 Whilst remaining in foster care in the longer term is not considered as achieving permanence for children and young people, where all other plans have been explored and exhausted, BHCC will continue to provide a high level of care to those young people through to independence.
- 3.12 During 2010/11 **27** children left Care via Adoption in Brighton and Hove. **13** children left Care through Special Guardianship to an extended family member. In 2011/12 **27** children left Care via Adoption and **22** via Special Guardianship to an extended family member. Since 1.4.12 **12** children have left care via Special Guardianship (**9** to an extended family member and **3** to existing unrelated foster carer), **22** children left Care through Adoption. A further **32** children have been matched with prospective adopters and will leave care through Adoption in the coming year once their adoption proceedings are concluded. In total **71** children have been placed for Adoption in the past 18 months and have either left care or are due to leave care at the conclusion of their adoption proceedings. There have been no disruptions of adoptive placements in Brighton and Hove for the past three years.
- 3.13 Key barriers to foster carers pursuing legal permanence via SGO or Adoption are identified in the Adoption Research Initiative study as being the foster carer's feelings about stepping into the role of managing relationships with birth family

members including complex contact arrangements; availability of financial support to match existing allowances; and a fear that they will not receive the same practical support once the child is no longer fostered.

- 3.14 In order to achieve the best outcomes for children who remain in the care of their extended families, capacity for support to SGO and RO carers needs to be built. Research tells us that family and friends placements have the potential to be more longstanding and stable in part because there is an existing emotional connection between the child and carer, there is a lived sense of belonging for the child from the outset of the placement, and carers who are related to the child tend to maintain a higher threshold of tolerance for more challenging behaviours than stranger foster carers. It is also likely, that there is meaning for older children and young people that their carer is not “doing it for the money”. Kinship carers are better able, with support, to manage direct relationships with birth parents than non related foster carers who in effect have to create new relationships with birth parents. Support and training for family and friends carers is essential to build capacity to manage the challenges ahead and this must continue to be available throughout the process of placement and beyond in order for them to feel confident in making a permanent legal commitment to the child.
- 3.15 Key challenges for BHCC in securing SGO by existing foster carers include:
- Foster carers require SGO Allowance to continue to match existing financial arrangements (this will reduce potential budget savings despite reducing numbers of children in care)
 - Reduction in the pool of available foster carers and consequent need to recruit more.
 - Development of the Contact Service to include services for children subject to special guardianship and residence orders.
 - Increase capacity within the Family and Friends Team to offer a support service to increasing numbers of special guardians and residence order holders.
- 3.16 Currently negotiations are taking place regarding the support package that existing foster carers can be offered in order to secure SGOs for the children in their care. BHCC is looking to match carer’s existing financial and social work support package. Any financial savings to the authority will be made in time by being able to reduce the social work/independent reviewing officer resource base as the numbers of children in care reduce and the numbers of children subject to special guardianship orders increase.
- 3.17 BHCC Children and Families Service aims to achieve special guardianship for 10 children currently in BHCC unrelated fostering placements by the end of this financial year. 28 children are expected to leave care via special guardianship to Family and Friends carers and 40 children are anticipated to move from care to adoption this year. In total BHCC anticipates 78 children leaving care via adoption or special guardianship during 2012-13.
- 3.18 Promoting Family First principles with Independent Fostering Providers has been placed on the agenda of the next Independent Providers Forum in November.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Appropriate consultation has taken place with BHCC foster carers and Family and Friends carers in promoting Special Guardianship as a preferred permanence option for Children in Care.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 There are no financial implications as a direct result of the recommendations of this report. The Family first principles forms part of the Value for Money programme which underpins the budget strategy within children's services. There will be no direct budget savings as a result of the move to Special Guardianship Orders as it is a stated principal that no carers should be financially disadvantaged by the move. It is important that robust monitoring of this policy is undertaken within the VFM methodology to ensure costs are maintained within current resources and that good value for money is achieved for the council.

Finance Officer Consulted: David Ellis *Date:* 3.10.12

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 In considering the report it will be important for Members to understand the different legal status afforded to different types of carer.
- 5.2.1 Where children are the subject of final care orders parental responsibility is shared between the local authority and the birth parents. Under S33 of Children Act 1989 it is however a matter for the discretion of the LA as to the extent that the parents are able to exercise their parental responsibility, and so effectively the day to day responsibility and decision making for the child rests in law with a corporate body. Thus despite offering a child a home and their day to day care, a foster carer has no direct legal relationship to the child for whom they are caring.
- 5.2.2 Were the child to be adopted the adoption order has the effect of ending the legal status of the birth parents, who are then not afforded any rights to the child or legal recognition as parents in law. Thus this order is not suitable in every case.
- 5.2.3 A way of establishing a legal relationship with the child which falls short of adoption is by the carers for the child obtaining a Special Guardianship Order. This is a relatively new order which was brought in with the Adoption and Children Act 2002. It gives the recipients, known as Special Guardians, parental responsibility for the child, and allows the Special Guardians to exercise it to the exclusion for all others with parental responsibility, save for very limited exceptional circumstances. The order lasts for the child's minority.
- 5.2.4 The report correctly identifies the challenges to the authority in ensuring that more foster carers feel able to become Special Guardians to their foster children. In addition to the issue of financial support, all Special Guardians are entitled as a matter of law to a Special Guardianship Support Plan. Orders are unlikely to be granted by the court unless the potential Guardians and the Court can be

satisfied that the support plan is appropriate. The plan will reflect the needs both of the individual child, and the capacity of the potential Special Guardians.

- 5.2.5 Given the range of challenges faced by foster carers in caring for children who may have suffered serious abuse or have a range of special needs, including in particular the management of contact arrangements with the birth family, for some children even with the granting of a Special Guardianship Order they may continue to be children in need, and require ongoing support services from the local authority. Nothing in the “Family First” approach outlined in the report undermines the duties of the local authority in this respect.

Lawyer Consulted: Natasha Watson Date: 03.10.2012

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 Achieving permanence for children positively affects their life chances and prioritising Family First principles ensure that where possible children remain in their birth family and where this cannot happen they are secured permanence via carers with whom they have developed a trusting and positive relationship or are carefully matched with adopters who can meet their needs.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 Securing permanence either via adoption or special guardianship for children in the care system optimises their future outcomes and decreases demand on high cost care services.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 Securing permanence for children and young people maximises their potential and minimises the likelihood of them becoming not in employment, education or training.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 Risks relevant to the process of securing permanence for children both within and external to their family are carefully considered and scrutinised within the permanence processes of BHCC.

Public Health Implications:

- 5.7 Achieving permanence for children and young people optimises their life chances including health and well being.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.8 Achieving permanence for children in care removes them from the care system, maximises their potential and contributes significantly to Corporate Value for Money objectives.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 6.1 The alternative of not actively promoting the achievement of permanence for children in care will lead to poorer outcomes for children and young people and continued pressure on the resources of the council.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 To improve the ability of BHCC to achieve permanence for children within their extended families, foster families and prospective adoptive families, thereby maximising their life chances and reducing the cost of the disproportionately high numbers of children in care in Brighton and Hove.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. None

Documents in Members' Rooms

1. None

Background Documents

1. None

Document is Restricted

Document is Restricted

