

# **CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMITTEE**

## **Agenda Item 16**

Brighton & Hove City Council

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Brighton and Hove Foster Carers' Charter</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>17 October 2012</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Strategic Director, People</b>		
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

### **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

