
Charter

Supporting parents in and leaving care

As corporate parents we are committed to supporting mothers and fathers who are in care, or in the process of leaving care.

This charter was developed with care-experienced parents and professionals who work for charities and local authorities. The charter sets out what we will do to help you plan for being a parent, how we will support when you become a parent and what we will do to challenge stigma and disadvantage.

Before you become a parent

We will discuss sex and healthy relationships with you, and make sure you have access to family planning advice and contraception.

We would like you to start a family at a time that is right for you. We can help you prepare for being a parent. This could involve opportunities to learn about caring for babies and children, mentoring and advice from parenting role models (such as foster carers) and providing support to help you work through your thoughts and feelings about the parenting that you experienced.

When you are expecting a child or become a parent:

During pregnancy, the health and well-being of expectant mothers and babies is our priority. We are also committed to supporting the well-being and inclusion of fathers.

Individual needs and circumstances are different. Some parents will need little support, while others will need more help. We promise to listen to you, to be honest with you and to work with you to make sure:

- You have the things you need – including a place to live, money and essential items.
- You know your rights and entitlements – including benefits, grants and resources in your local authority.
- You know what to do – this could include how to change a nappy or bath a baby, when you need to seek medical advice or how to register for a school place, a dentist or optician. This support will be on-going, as what you will need to know will change as your child gets older.

Parenting can be rewarding but also challenging. We promise to work with you so that you know:

- Who is available to support you - we will make sure you know who you can contact if you need advice and support, even in the middle of the night or on weekends.
- What services and support are available in your local authority or local area – we will discuss these options with you and help you to attend if you would like to. This will include services available to all parents as well as those specifically available for care-experienced parents.

We will make sure you can have a break (if you want a break). This could be time for a rest, or time to pursue hobbies and interests, and we will make sure you can access our leisure centres and gyms.

We can help you plan for your future. We will support you to continue your education, access training or employment. This could include providing careers advice and guidance, and practical help with childcare, transport, and other things you need.

Challenging stigma and discrimination

We know that you and other parents in and leaving care, can experience stigma and disadvantage. This is unacceptable. We will:

- Make available resources that challenge unhelpful assumptions about parents in and leaving care.
- Make clear that referrals to Children's Services based only on care status or history are unacceptable. This is discrimination. Concerns about parenting should only be made when there is evidence of risk.

If concerns are raised about parenting, we will make sure:

- You have access to advocacy and legal advice.
- Your care history and records are not used against you. If a parenting assessment is needed, we promise to support you and make sure you are assessed as you are now and not how you were in the past.
- You are treated fairly and your rights are respected. Where you and your family are worried about being given a fair assessment, we will discuss options with you such as recording discussions with social workers or being assessed by an independent social worker.

We will support you to respond to concerns about parenting. This will involve making sure:

- You understand what is happening and what plans are in place.
- Your opinions are heard and included.
- You have access to support to address concerns and demonstrate change. This could include support with housing, mental health or counselling, relationship or parenting courses and drug / alcohol services.

If you are living apart from children

Parents may be separated from children for a range of reasons. This could include situations where there are no concerns about parenting (such as when children are living with another parent), as well as when children have been removed on a temporary or permanent basis.

Whatever the circumstances, we will support you in building and maintaining a relationship with your child. Depending on the situation, this support may be practical (e.g. assisting you to see and spend time with your child), financial (e.g. travel costs), emotional (e.g. discussing your thoughts and feelings) and ensuring you have access to advocacy or legal advice (e.g. to make sure your rights to see your child are respected).

If your child has been removed, we will not abandon you and will never give up on you. We will take time to support you and help you deal with the practical, financial, and emotional implications. This could include supporting you through the legal proceedings, attending

meetings, dealing with housing issues, managing benefit changes, as well as coping with grief and loss. We will support you to build and maintain a relationship with your child, even if this is through letter-box contact. The commitments laid out in this charter still apply to you and when you are ready, we will support you in planning your future.

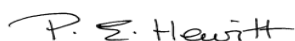
Finally

We are your corporate parents, doing our best to support parents in and leaving care is really important to us.

We promise to make this support available to parents up to the age of 25 and we expect to be challenged if we fail in our responsibilities.

We also promise to keep reviewing how we are doing and will continue to work with parents, services and charities to make sure parents in and leaving care are well supported and treated fairly.

Signatories



Paul Hewitt
Corporate Director People Services
Harrow Council



Cllr Christine Robson
Portfolio Holder – Children, Schools and Young People
Harrow Council



Development of this charter was supported by funding from Cardiff University's ESRC Impact Acceleration Account and carried out by CASCADE in partnership with VFCC, NYAS Cymru and TGP Cymru.

The charter is endorsed and featured on the Care Leaver Local Offer website. The research which prompted the developed of this charter was funded by Health and Care Research Wales.