



Children & Families Services

Private Fostering Arrangements

Statement of Purpose

2022-23

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1. Introduction

It is a regulatory requirement for all local authorities to publish a statement of purpose in relation to private fostering. This Statement of Purpose is a description of private fostering arrangements within the London Borough of Southwark. It aims to meet the requirements as outlined in the 1989 Children Act, the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering which came into force on 18 July 2005 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. This document provides key information in regard to private fostering for the public, council members and external organisations. It addresses all the areas that must be covered in a statement of purpose.

This document describes how private fostering arrangements will be assessed and monitored according to the national requirements and how support and advice will be offered to private foster carers, privately fostered children and their parents living within the London Borough of Southwark.

Any comments or enquiries regarding the Statement of Purpose should be forwarded to Joyce Patton, Service Manager, Safeguarding and Family Support Service.

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2. Definition of a Private Fostering Arrangement

"A private fostering arrangement is essentially one that is made privately (that is to say without the involvement of a local authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Private foster carers may be from the extended family such as a cousin or great aunt. However, a person who is a relative under the Children Act 1989 i.e. a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of full blood or half blood or by marriage) or step-parent will not be a private foster carer. A private foster carer may be a friend of the family, the parent of a friend of the child, or someone previously unknown to the child's family who is willing to privately foster a child. The period for which the child is cared for and accommodated by the private foster carer should be continuous, but that continuity is not broken by the occasional short break. Exemptions to this definition are set out in Schedule 8 to the Children Act 1989."

National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering UK Government

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-minimum-standards-for-private-fostering>

3. How is Private Fostering Arranged?

Private Fostering is usually arranged and agreed by a child's parents and the family which will be caring for the child. The law requires that both the parents and carer must notify the local authority about the proposed arrangement before it takes place; failure to give notification is an offence. Local Authorities do not approve private foster carers. The local authority is required to assess and say whether or not they agree and accept the private fostering arrangement in regard to a particular child.

4. Private Fostering

The private fostering service is located within the London Borough of Southwark's Safeguarding and Family Support Services. The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub(MASH) team is responsible for all new notifications to the Local Authority. Once the notification is received, checks completed and the private fostering arrangements are confirmed, the case will be allocated to the Specialist Private Fostering Social worker who will undertake the relevant assessments and any further required checks. This social worker will be responsible for the overview of children in privately fostered arrangements and will be based in the Safeguarding & Family Support Service.

Following the completion of this assessment, the case is presented to the private fostering panel for the purposes of ratification and the role of monitoring (including undertaking visits).

The London Borough of Southwark is committed to delivering a high quality service to all children who are living in a private fostering arrangement within the borough. We also ensure that private fostering service delivery is monitored and reviewed.

The Service Manager for private fostering ensures that equalities issues are integrated into all aspects of our service delivery and we ensure that all private foster carers are assessed and supported, taking into account the needs of the individual private foster child/young person and their race, religion, class, sexual orientation and disability.

5. Key Principles and Standards of Care

Our commitment to privately fostered children, carers and their families:

- The best interests of children will be of paramount importance in the work of the Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker
- Being child-centred is hearing and championing the voice of children by understanding their lived experience and responding to this, with active listening and participation at its heart

- Social Work teams will work with private foster carers, children and their families to safeguard and promote children's, physical, emotional, health, social and cultural needs
- We will ensure that children and young people will be treated with respect and dignity and will be safeguarded and protected from neglect, abuse and exploitation by the provision of safe, supportive private fostering arrangements
- In agreeing private foster arrangements we will ensure that a child's and young person's age, gender, health, personality, disability, sexuality, race, culture and life experiences will be taken into account in the assessment and decision making process and the provision of care and support services
- The Social Work teams will work with the private foster carer, the child/young person and their parents to ensure that they retain their responsibilities and to remain as closely involved as is consistent with their child's or young person welfare. Being family minded is about providing adults and children with the opportunities and tools they need to set goals together, create plans and achieve those goals
- In assessing and agreeing the private fostering arrangement we will ensure that the children are seen and their views heard in relation to the private fostering arrangement. Subsequently, if children continue to remain living in the private fostering arrangement, they we will ensure that they are visited 4 weekly in during the first 12 months and every 12 weeks thereafter.
- We will work with and advise colleagues about their duties and responsibilities in connection with children who are privately fostered and work in partnership to meet the needs of the children, their carers and families

6. Private Fostering Situations

The situations in which children are privately fostered can be complex. Children may be privately fostered for a variety of reasons. In Southwark these may include:

Local children living apart from their families

These children may be living apart from their families due to no one available to look after them with parental responsibility. Parents may have died, divorced or for other reasons a parent is no longer available to care for their child. The child's parents may have been imprisoned. In some instances parents may be misusing drugs and alcohol and may have made alternative care arrangements for their children.

Children from overseas

Many children come to the United Kingdom from overseas to live with family friends or distant relatives. For instance many of the children already known to the private fostering service come from Bangladesh, Africa and African-Caribbean countries.

Child care arrangements

Some parents may find it hard to afford child care and they make alternative child care arrangements by placing children outside the local community. Some children may be placed in rural areas where their carer's have very little understanding and awareness of the child's racial, cultural, language needs and the effects of the child's separation from their birth family.

Where parents have left their children in the care of friends or family when leaving the country and have not returned or have returned after 28 days.

Asylum seekers and refugees

Some of these children may arrive in the UK seeking asylum, travelling with other adults who may not be known to them or to their family in their country of origin. Other children may have acquired refugee status, maybe living in isolation and unsupported with a lack of knowledge about the available services and where to go for help.

Parents who may be unwell

A parent who is caring for his/her children alone becomes ill and has to go into hospital. The parent makes private arrangement for the children to be cared for by neighbours, and this extends for more than 28 days

Children who may be staying with friends for a short time due to family difficulties

Adolescents and teenagers who are experiencing relationship breakdown in their families. These young people may be experiencing difficulties where their own family relationships may have broken down. The parents may have made private arrangements for the young person or the young person may have decided to make their own arrangements which may place them in a vulnerable or unsuitable situation.

Children attending language schools

These children may come from a range of different countries. A number of children and young people may be living with their host families for 28 days or more - such arrangement will be private fostering arrangements and safeguards would need to be in place for these children.

Children at independent boarding schools who do not return home for holidays

Some of these children may not return to their parents during holidays particularly where the parents are working overseas. If they are placed with a host family for 28 days or more this may be a private fostering arrangement.

Children living with another family for a variety of reasons

Some Charitable Organisations and other individuals may arrange for children to come into their country for different reasons. These may include holidays for disadvantaged children, medical treatment and sports trainees. During their stay in the UK they may be placed with a family for 28 days or more and therefore this becomes a private fostering arrangement.

Children brought into the UK for adoption

Some children may be brought in to the UK to be adopted. These children will be privately fostered until formal notice of intention to apply to adopt is given. Some children who are subject to a form of interim overseas order, which will be finalised in

their country of origin, are also considered by the Department for Education to be privately fostered.

A child is not privately fostered if the person caring for him/her:

- Had done so for a period of less than 28 days;
- Does not intend to do so for any longer period.

For the purposes of the Act a parent includes an unmarried or putative father. A relative includes full-blood or half-blood relation, a relation by marriage, or stepparent.

Care arrangements that meet the above criteria are considered as private fostering arrangements whether or not there is any kind of payment, either monetary or in kind.

7. Duties under the Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005

The Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 are intended to strengthen and enhance the previous private fostering notification scheme. Local Authorities and Local Children's Safeguarding Boards are required to raise public awareness in their area of the requirements regarding notification of private fostering arrangements.

The London Borough of Southwark must be notified when a child/young person is proposed to be privately fostered or is being privately fostered. This will enable Southwark to ensure that the welfare of privately fostered children/young persons is being properly supervised through ongoing visits and assessments and subsequent monitoring and reviewing of these arrangements within statutory timescales.

The law, regulations and the National Minimum Standards for private fostering have focused all local authorities' attention on private fostering and require them to take a more proactive approach whilst working in partnership with agencies and other key professionals in identifying arrangements in their area.

Southwark is expected to improve notification rates and the compliance with the existing legislative framework for private fostering. The outcome of this is to strengthen the safeguards for all children privately fostered in the borough.

8. Local Authority's duties and functions under the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 1991

The law requires the Local Authority to:

- Consider the child's interest first. Private fostering arrangements may be appropriate for short periods of time but the law says that **local authorities must be told about all private fostering arrangements**.
- Raise and promote awareness of private fostering in their area.
- Increase notification rates in their area.
- Make regular visits to ensure that children are placed in a safe home environment and that they are well cared for.
- Ensure that checks on the carer and the household are carried out and say whether the arrangement is suitable.
- Stop a private fostering arrangement if the carer is in unsuitable accommodation or the carer is unsuitable to look after children.

The Children Act 1989 gives Local Authorities the general duty to consider whether a privately fostered child is a child in need, and to consider where support and services can be provided to increase the capacity of the private foster carer to meet the child's needs.

9. Training for relevant staff

Appropriate induction and safeguarding training will be provided to all relevant London Borough of Southwark staff. The Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker and lead Service Manager will also provide presentations to all key staff ensuring that they have information about the notification requirements and the assessment process for all private fostering arrangements in the borough. Training will take into account the different levels and awareness about private fostering. This will be achieved by making presentations to professionals in health, education, housing, social services, faith and community groups and sending out information leaflets about private fostering via mail and email.

- The Service Manager in Safeguarding and Family Support Service who is lead for private fostering will attend training courses, briefing conferences on private fostering, policy and practice to ensure that research and policies inform our practice and service delivery
- We will ensure that the Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker and safeguarding staff have a clear plan for training and staff development involved in private fostering.

10. Raising awareness - how it will be promoted by London Borough of Southwark

Raising awareness of the notification requirements will be promoted in the following ways by targeting all key professionals working in health, education, housing, leisure services and police through presentations and e-mailing information about private

fostering. In addition community and faith groups including independent agencies will be identified and provided with information about private fostering.

Professionals and members of the public can access information about private fostering via Southwark Council's website. The website address is:

[Private fostering - Southwark Council](#)

Information can be obtained from the website where leaflets and links can contain:

- Information about private fostering
- What the law says
- Different types of private fostering situations
- What people need to do to notify us about a private fostering arrangement?
- Who to contact for information and advice
- What the London Borough of Southwark will do after we receive a notification.

Where possible, we will ensure that publicity materials will be in the different languages when required.

We will undertake outreach work to develop links with voluntary and community groups that are in contact with children and young people ensuring that they are made aware of the notification requirements.

London Borough of Southwark will continually review their communications strategy and will discuss its progress at regular quarterly Steering Group meetings.

11. How we will ensure that the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted in Southwark

The London Borough of Southwark will ensure that privately fostered children/young people are safeguarded and their welfare promoted by Children's Social Care staff using the London Borough of Southwark's procedures which take into account the private fostering regulations and ensure that all private fostering arrangements have an up-to-date social work assessment, which is approved and signed off by the Team Manager followed by ratification of this arrangement by the Private Fostering Panel, chaired by the Service Manager and Lead in Southwark.

In situations where notifications have been received that children are being privately fostered an initial visit assessment will take place by the Assessment and Intervention Service to ascertain if there are any immediate safeguarding issues that need to be addressed. These will include looking to see if provision can be made so that there is no longer need for the private fostering arrangement to be made.

When we are notified of an arrangement, the Assessment and Intervention Service will visit all children within 7 working days and the lead social worker will aim to complete the assessment of the private fostering arrangement within 42 days of receiving the private fostering notification. If any safeguarding issues arise in regard

to the welfare of the children the Assessment and Intervention Service will carry out an assessment under S 47 of the Children Act 1989.

Action that the lead social worker will take once notified of an arrangement:

- a) Visit to the premises where it is proposed that the child will be cared for and accommodated;
- b) Visit and speak to the proposed private foster carer and to all members of their household;
- c) Visit and speak to the child, alone unless the officer considers it inappropriate;
- d) Speak to and, if it is practicable to do so, visit every parent of or person with parental responsibility for the child; and
- e) establish the purpose and the intended duration of the private fostering arrangement;
- f) establish the child's physical, intellectual, social and behavioural needs are;
- g) identify whether the child's religious, cultural and linguistic needs are being met in the arrangement;
- h) establish that the child is receiving a good standard of care and that the child is safe and looked after appropriately by the carers;
- i) establish that the child/ young person is registered with a GP and dentist;
- j) establish that the child/ young person is in appropriate nursery/ education placement;
- k) assess the suitability of the foster carer's ability to look after the child and the suitability of the foster carer's household;
- l) Establish whether the child's parents or any other person is exercising parental responsibility for the child and we will consult with them to see what their future plans are for the child/young person.
- m) establish what the financial arrangements for the care and maintenance for the child/ young person is;
- n) complete a report assessing private fostering arrangements to collate, analyse and make a decision about the suitability of the private fostering arrangement;
- o) Submit the completed assessment to the Team Manager for authorisation and notify the Service Manager for private fostering in the Safeguarding and Family Support Service in order to arrange presentation of the assessment to the Private Fostering Panel.

p) Log key information about all privately fostered children onto the Council's database. The key information will record:

- Each child will have a Mosaic Identification number
- Date notified
- Where the notification came from
- Details of the child e.g. name, date of birth
- Ethnic origin of the child and place of birth
- Details of the carer and date of birth
- Ethnic origin of the carer and place of birth
- Date initial assessment started and completed
- Date assessment of the private fostering arrangement started and completed
- Date health and safety checks started and completed
- Date 'Disclosure and Barring' checks started and complete

Private fostering service delivery will be monitored in regular audit and service evaluations to ensure that the service is satisfactorily carrying out its duties and functions in relation to children who are privately fostered in the borough.

12. The role of other agencies in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of privately fostered children, including encouraging notification

In order to carry out our functions under this legislation, we will ensure that partnership agencies are aware of information about their responsibilities regarding notifications about privately fostered children.

Critical to the private fostering regulations is a key message for all agencies about the requirement to notify social care about any private fostering arrangements. It is also imperative that all agencies are aware of the relationship between private fostering and safeguarding activities. Some children who are privately fostered may also have been trafficked, be at risk of exploitation, domestic servitude and abuse.

In order to ensure key agencies are aware of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding issues the London Borough of Southwark will undertake visits, provide presentations, offer advice and provide information about the risks to children in some private fostering arrangements.

All key professionals and agencies who are involved with children/young people are able to access advice from MASH in the Assessment and Intervention Service on 020 7525 1921 or email MASH@southwark.gov.uk.

13. Ensuring that relevant staff members understand Southwark's duties and responsibilities regarding private fostering

The London Borough of Southwark will ensure that key information about private fostering will be circulated to all staff. By accessing the Council's website all staff in Children's Social Care, health, education and housing will be able to access information on how to make a Private Fostering Notification to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Private fostering will be included in relevant induction and training programmes.

The Service Manager and Lead for private fostering and designated staff within the wider Safeguarding and Family Support Service are available to attend team meetings and briefings to provide staff with further information about private fostering and their responsibilities under the 2005 requirements. We will ensure that outside agencies have information about private fostering via e-mail and direct mail. We will also undertake follow-up visits to outside organisations where it is considered appropriate.

14. Review of the Statement of Purpose

The London Borough of Southwark will carry out an annual review of their Statement of Purpose and communications strategy. This matter will also be addressed by the Southwark Safeguarding Children's Board training sub-group.

15. Monitoring the discharge of functions and compliance with part 9 of the Children Act 1989

Under Regulation 12, the Service Manager and Private Fostering Lead, Safeguarding and Family Support Service, will monitor how the London Borough of Southwark discharges its duties and functions regarding children privately fostered in the borough. The Service Manager and Private Fostering Lead will monitor compliance with the following duties and functions as laid out in the National Minimum Standards and in addition:

- The promotion of awareness regarding notification requirements.
- How the Practice Groups respond to notifications received and if these are within timescales.
- How the London Borough of Southwark manages disqualifications, prohibitions, requirements and appeals against these, and refusals to consent to disqualified persons being private foster carers.
- How the London Borough of Southwark exercises its functions under section 67(5) Children Act 1989.
- How the London Borough of Southwark processes decisions regarding offences committed bearing in mind the best interests of the child/young person.
- How the London Borough of Southwark assess the parenting capacity of prospective or actual private foster carers, members of their households and the suitability of their accommodation.

- How well the London Borough of Southwark carries out statutory visits within timescales and makes decisions about suitability of arrangements which are approved by a senior manager in Southwark Council.
- To ensure that additional follow-up visits are made when requested by the child/young person, private foster carer, parent or those with parental responsibility.
- Written reports are made in accordance with the regulations, i.e. conclusions drawn on the arrangement, the child/young person seen alone, wishes and feelings of child/ young person, any concern raised etc.
- Provided advice and support given to private foster carers, parents/those with parental responsibility or any person concerned with the child/ young person and recorded.
- Privately fostered children/young people are provided with information and support.
- Independent interpreters are used as appropriate.
- A senior manager of Southwark Council will ensure that regular audits of case records take place to ensure that private fostering service delivery is complying with the private fostering regulations.
- To ensure that any concerns or issues raised by privately fostered children/young people are fully investigated and dealt with.
- The London Borough of Southwark will work to ensure that there is a system for recording the number and the nature of notifications received in relation to private fostering, the responses given and the effectiveness of the action taken. This information is recorded on the Council's mosaic database.
- The London Borough of Southwark will prepare annual reports that will provide information about how we are complying with the private fostering regulations.
- To ensure complaints are dealt with in a timely and responsive fashion.

16. Private Fostering Panel

The private fostering panel, chaired by the Service Manager and Private fostering Lead, is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the outcomes and reviews of all private fostering assessments and annual reviews.

The private fostering panel will include the Service Manager Private fostering Lead for Safeguarding Service, a Service Manager for MASH/Assessment and Intervention Service, Service Manager for Clinical Service, Service Manager from the Quality Assurance Service and identified lead from the Special Guardianship team. A representative from Family Early Help will also be periodically invited to sit on the panel.

The panel will review each private fostering assessment to satisfy and ensure that the arrangement is in the best interests of the child. The panel will confirm on behalf of the local authority the suitability of each private fostering arrangement. It will also advise on any follow up actions and recommendations in regard to the private fostering arrangement.

If after an assessment of a private fostering arrangement has been completed Southwark Council has concerns about the welfare of the child in such an arrangement the panel will also be responsible for addressing issues such as disqualifications, prohibitions and imposing on carers appropriate requirements.

All private fostering arrangement reviewed at this panel are ratified by the Head of Service of Safeguarding and Family Support Service.

17. Multi-Agency Private Fostering Steering Group

The Private Fostering Steering Group maintains an overview of Southwark's compliance with National Minimum Standards and issues arising for the Children's Social Care.

The group enables the Council to improve and strengthen links between all the relevant professionals including social care staff who come into contact with privately fostered children and our colleagues in external agencies such as the UK Border Agency.

The steering group will meet quarterly to evaluate the private fostering service. The meeting will be chaired by the Head of Service, Safeguarding and Family Support.

The Service Manager and Private Fostering Lead will be required to produce an annual report. The reports will include the following data:

- Date of private fostering notifications
- Commencement date of assessment
- Completion date of assessments of private fostering arrangements
- Dates of statutory visits
- Individual support needs
- Duration of private fostering arrangements
- Ethnic origin of privately fostered children
- Disqualifications/prohibitions

Reports will need to include a section on service development. This section will detail overall progress in regard to private fostering. Members of the steering group include:

- Head of Service- Safeguarding and Family Support.
- Service Manager and Lead for private fostering
- Health Representative.
- Education Representative
- Southwark Communications Team Representative
- Children's Rights and Participation Officer
- Faith Group Member
- Housing Officer

18. Who to contact for advice and information about private fostering

Copies of the Statement of Purpose can be obtained from the Southwark Council Private Fostering website at:

[Private fostering - Southwark Council](#)