



Private Fostering
Services
Statement of Purpose
2007 - 2008

Introduction

This statement of purpose describes the private fostering arrangements within the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. It is designed to meet the needs of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, standard 1, and provides a clear guide of the service for professionals, the public, council members and external organisations.

This document will describe private fostering arrangements, the assessment process and the support and advice offered to private foster carers, privately fostered children and their parents within the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

Any comments or enquiries regarding this statement of purpose should be sent to Ros Whittaker on 01628 683138 or by email to ros.whittaker@rbwm.gov.uk

Regulation of the Private Fostering Service

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead private fostering service is regulated and inspected by the OFSTED. We are part of the South Regional Area and the address is:

Freshford House Redcliffe Way, Bristol BS1 6NL

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead private fostering service is currently based at the Town Hall, St Ives Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 1RF
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead holds statutory powers and responsibilities as a local authority in relation to private fostering arrangements.

Equal opportunities are incorporated into all aspects of service delivery and all prospective private foster carers are assessed and supported on the basis of the needs of the individual private foster child/young person regardless of race, religion, class, marital status, sexual orientation or disability.

The responsibility for the delivery of private fostering services lies within the Safeguarding and Specialist Service of the Learning and Care Directorate of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

Initially service delivery is the joint responsibility of whichever Children and Families Team is appropriate and the Fostering, Adoption and Respite Service. Where team managers are absent or unavailable each team has an assistant team manager who will deputize. The Permanency and Placements Service Manager has overall responsibility for this area.

1. Legal definition of a privately fostered child

In the definition provided by The Children Act 1989, a privately fostered child means: A child, under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled) who is cared for, or proposed to be cared for, and provided with accommodation by someone other than:

- A parent of his/hers;
- A person who is not a parent of his/hers but who has parent responsibility for him/her;
- A close relative of his/hers as defined by the Children Act 1989, i.e. aunt/uncle/step-parent/grandparent/sibling but not a cousin or great-aunt/uncle
- And she/he has been cared for and accommodated by that person;
- For 28 days or more; or
- The period of actual fostering is less than 28 days but the private foster carer intends to foster him/her for a period of 28 days or more.

In the case of a child with a disability the upper age limit is 18 years.

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 parent includes unmarried or putative father. Relative means as above stated, whether by full, half-blood or by affinity or step-parent.

Affinity refers to the relationship resulting from marriage, between the husband and the blood relations of the wife and also between the wife and the blood relations of the husband.

An arrangement is deemed as private fostering if it meets the criteria above whether for reward (financial or otherwise) or not.

Some common examples of private fostering arrangements include:

- children/young people with families overseas;
- black and ethnic community children/young people with parents working or studying in the UK;
- trafficked children/young people and asylum seekers and refugees;
- children/young people living with host families for a variety of reasons, i.e. attending language schools, undergoing medical treatment etc.
- Children and young people living with parent

2. The local authority's duties and functions under the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Private

Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 1991

Local authorities need to be notified about private fostering arrangements in their area and have a duty to satisfy themselves that the welfare of children who are privately fostered in their area is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted and to secure that such advice is given to those caring for them as appears to the authority to be needed (The Children Act 1989 Section 67(1)). Broadly the duties fall into three types of activity:

- Giving and receiving notifications.
- Ascertaining the suitability of private foster carers in their households.
- Monitoring placements through visits and written records of visits.

3. New duties under the Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005

The new measures in the Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 are intended to strengthen and enhance the existing private fostering notification scheme. Local authorities are required to raise public awareness in their area of the requirements regarding notification of private fostering arrangements. Notifications must now be given to local authorities when a child/young person is proposed to be privately fostered or is being privately fostered.

These new measures, along with the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, July 2005, focus local authorities' attention on private fostering and require them to take a more proactive approach with partnership agencies and other professionals in identifying arrangements in their area. They are expected to improve notification rates and compliance with the existing legislative framework for private fostering and, therefore, to address the key problems identified with the former scheme. It is intended that these additional measures will improve the arrangements for safeguarding children/young people in private fostering arrangements.

4. Training for relevant staff

There will be specific training programmes on private fostering for staff members within the Referral and Assessment Team, Children in Need Team, the Fostering, Adoption and Respite Service and other relevant teams working with children. Training would include information on the notification requirements, the assessment processes of the suitability of the private fostering arrangement and will be based on the premise that the child/young person's best interests and welfare are paramount.

Training will be at different levels for different professionals and supervision will further professional development in this area.

5. How awareness of the notification requirements will be promoted

Awareness of the notification requirements will be promoted via information and advertising in newspapers, as well as information sessions with key professionals, partnership agencies and members of the public, at faith and community organisations, and schools. Publicity materials will contain information about the legal definition of privately fostered children/young people, the procedure for notifying, the benefits of notification and consequences of non-notification. The LSCB will also have a role.

Publicity materials will be distributed to key access points, e.g. schools, libraries, G.P.s, one-stop shops, voluntary/community sector organisations and council offices. The information leaflets will contain the contact numbers of the Fostering, Adoption and Respite Service and be available for privately fostered children, their parents, private foster carers and professionals. Information will be sent to organisations that are in contact with children and young people. This work will be under continuous review.

6. Assessment of the suitability of private foster carers and their household

All privately fostered children/young people within the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead will have an initial assessment, this will include appropriate elements of the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (2000). All aspects of private foster carers' suitability including the suitability of their household will be assessed. These assessments will be completed and signed off by a manager within 35 working days

7. Advice/support and information available to private foster carers, parents/those with parental responsibility and privately fostered children

A named Supervising Social Worker (with their contact details) will be responsible for working with and supporting each private foster carer. Depending on the length of the placement a social worker from either the Referral and Assessment Team or the Children in Need team will work with the privately fostered children/young people. Private foster carers will have access to training programmes and there will be information materials provided, including the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead procedures on private fostering. Private foster carers can access the support of the borough's Foster Carer Professional.

Other visits, over and above statutory visits to privately fostered children/young people, their parents and private foster carers will be undertaken on request. Interpreters who are independent of parents and private foster carers will be used where it is the request of the child/young person or where the preferred language is not English.

Private foster carers (including prospective foster carers) will have access to advice on benefit entitlement, parenting strategies and techniques, and other appropriate training and support as will be identified, including information and preparation meetings. They will also receive copies of relevant sections of the foster carers' handbook.

During the course of the initial assessment parents of proposed/current privately fostered children/young people will be advised, if in the best interests of the child/young person, of other service provision or other agency help available which would remove the necessity for the child/young person to be privately fostered.

8. Ensuring the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted

The Specialist and Safeguarding Service will ensure that privately fostered children/young people's welfare is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted by staff following the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead procedures on Private Fostering; adhering to the new regulations on private fostering; and by undertaking an initial assessment. Approval of arrangements as satisfactory or not will be concluded and signed off by the team manager within 35 working days pending ratification by the Foster Panel. A final decision on approval of arrangements will be made by the Head of Safeguarding and Specialist Services. The Joint Foster Panel meets monthly. Private foster carers are invited to attend Panel. The Head of Safeguarding and Specialist Services will make emergency decisions, as and when needed, on any aspect of the private fostering process.

Initial assessments will include ensuring that the child/young person's physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural development is satisfactory, or how identified needs will be met, and that needs arising from his/her religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background are being met. A separate assessment by the supervising social worker will include the suitability of the accommodation and an evaluation of the parenting capacity of the prospective/current private foster carer. Private foster carers will be given advice on the child/young person's individual needs, which may include advice on any medical condition or learning disability, in order to enhance their ability to care for the child/young person. Support services will be made available to private foster carers as identified by the initial assessment. Private foster carers, where necessary, will also be encouraged to promote contact between the child/young person and his/her parents, siblings, extended family and significant others.

The Fostering, Adoption and Respite Service and the appropriate Children and Families Team will respond to notifications received and likewise visits to privately fostered children/young people within statutory timescales. Written reports will be completed following these visits, in accordance with the Regulations, and will include conclusions drawn on the arrangement, whether the child/young person was seen alone (if not, why not), his/her wishes and feelings about the arrangement, any concerns raised and any relevant advice given.

All private foster carers will have enhanced CRB checks undertaken on them. Private foster carers will receive regular visits from a named Supervising Social Worker and can access the support of the Foster Carer Professional. All privately fostered children/young people will have a named social worker with their contact details and will be given information materials in relation to their age and understanding on what private fostering means.

Planned reviews will take place for privately fostered children to which parents will be invited. Planned reviews will also take place for private foster carers.

Privately fostered children's welfare will further be promoted by an awareness campaign regarding the notification requirements which will be carried out within the Borough. Training programmes on private fostering will be available and private fostering will also be a part of more generalised child care training. Partnership agencies, voluntary/community sector, faith groups will all be made aware of the notification requirements and of their responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of privately fostered children/young people.

The Department will carry out internal file audits on a regular basis.

Where child protection concerns are identified, a Section 47 investigation will be carried out by following the Child Protection Procedures of the Berkshire Local Safeguarding Boards.

An annual report is presented to the local Safeguarding Children Board.

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

Partnership agencies will be given information on their responsibilities regarding notification under the new Regulations 2005, particularly where they are not satisfied that the social work team has been or will be notified of an arrangement. Information

materials will be sent to schools, faith groups, housing, health organisations etc. Social Workers will visit partnership agencies and there will be workshops and training made available to them on their role in promoting the welfare of privately fostered children/young people. Other agencies will also have access to the social work team members via telephone and email and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead's procedures on Private Fostering Arrangements will be available to them. The LSCB will also have a role.

10. How relevant staff will have an understanding of the Department's duties and functions in relation to private fostering

Staff of the Safeguarding and Specialist Service will have access to this Statement of Purpose, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead procedures on Private Fostering Arrangements, information materials and training on private fostering. Other directorates within the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and outside agencies will also have access to these documents, printed information and relevant training as part of the local Safeguarding Children Boards multi-agency training.

11. How the Department will ensure that its duties and functions regarding private fostering are included in an induction and other training programmes and these are reviewed and evaluated annually in line with changes in legislation and guidance

The Safeguarding and Specialist Services will ensure that training in relation to private fostering is included in the annual training plan and will be reviewed annually in light of any changes in legislation, guidance and best practice developments.

At the end of training programmes, evaluation via feedback forms will be collated to assess if the training meets the needs of informing participants of the Safeguarding and Specialist Services duties and functions regarding private fostering.

In addition to this, individual workers' training needs in relation to private fostering will be identified in their annual appraisal.

All social workers will undergo induction and ongoing training programmes in relation to the Safeguarding and Specialist Services' duties and functions concerning private fostering and all child care training will include a component on these duties and functions.

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

Under Regulation 12, the Service Manager Quality Assurance will monitor the way the Department complies with and discharges its statutory duties and functions in relation to private fostering. This officer will monitor compliance with the following duties and functions:

- The promotion of awareness regarding notification requirements.
- How the Department responds to notifications received and if these are within timescales.
- How the Department manages disqualifications, prohibitions, requirements and appeals against these, and refusals to consent to disqualified persons being private foster carers.
- How the Department exercises its functions under section 67(5), Children Act 1989.
- How the Department processes decisions regarding offences committed bearing in mind the best interests of the child/young person.
- How the Department assesses the parenting capacity of prospective or actual private foster carers, members of their households and the suitability of their accommodation.
- That statutory visits are within timescales and decisions about the suitability of arrangements are also within timescales and approved at managerial level.
- That additional visits are made when requested by the child/young person, private foster carer, parents or those with parental responsibility.
- That 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 concerns raised etc.
- That advice and support is provided to private foster carers, parents/those with parental responsibility or any person concerned with the child/young person and recorded.
- That information and support is provided to privately fostered children/young people.
- That independent interpreters are used as appropriate.
- That a sample of individual child/young person and private foster carer records are regularly reviewed to check that compliance is being fulfilled.
- That any concerns raised by privately fostered children/young people are investigated.
- That a system for recording the number and nature of enquiries received in relation to private fostering, the responses given and action taken is effective.

13. Advice on private fostering

This Statement of Purpose and the procedures on Private Fostering Arrangements along with advice on private fostering can be obtained from the Fostering, Adoption and Respite Service on 01628 683201.

Initial information and advice about Private Fostering can be obtained from Ros Whittaker / Joanne Madden.

Appendix 1

Staffing Position as at April 2007

Permanency and Placements Service Manager	Sheila McKeand, Interim Service Manager
Team Manager	Ros Whittaker
Assistant Team Manager	Marion Smalley
Admin Support	Claire Burns Linda Wallbank
Senior Practitioners	Gill Black Joanne Madden
Family Placement Workers Together with senior practitioner and sessional worker hours there are in total 6.38 fte social work staff	Sarah Taylor Samantha Watson Chris Palme Christine Burton Barbara Willsher sessional worker
Support Worker – full-time	Jenny Dean
Adoption Support Worker Senior Practitioner 22 hours	Liz James

Each team member, with the exception of the admin support workers and the team support worker, is social work trained, qualified and registered with the GSCC. They all have childcare experience and family placement experience. No one is newly qualified.