

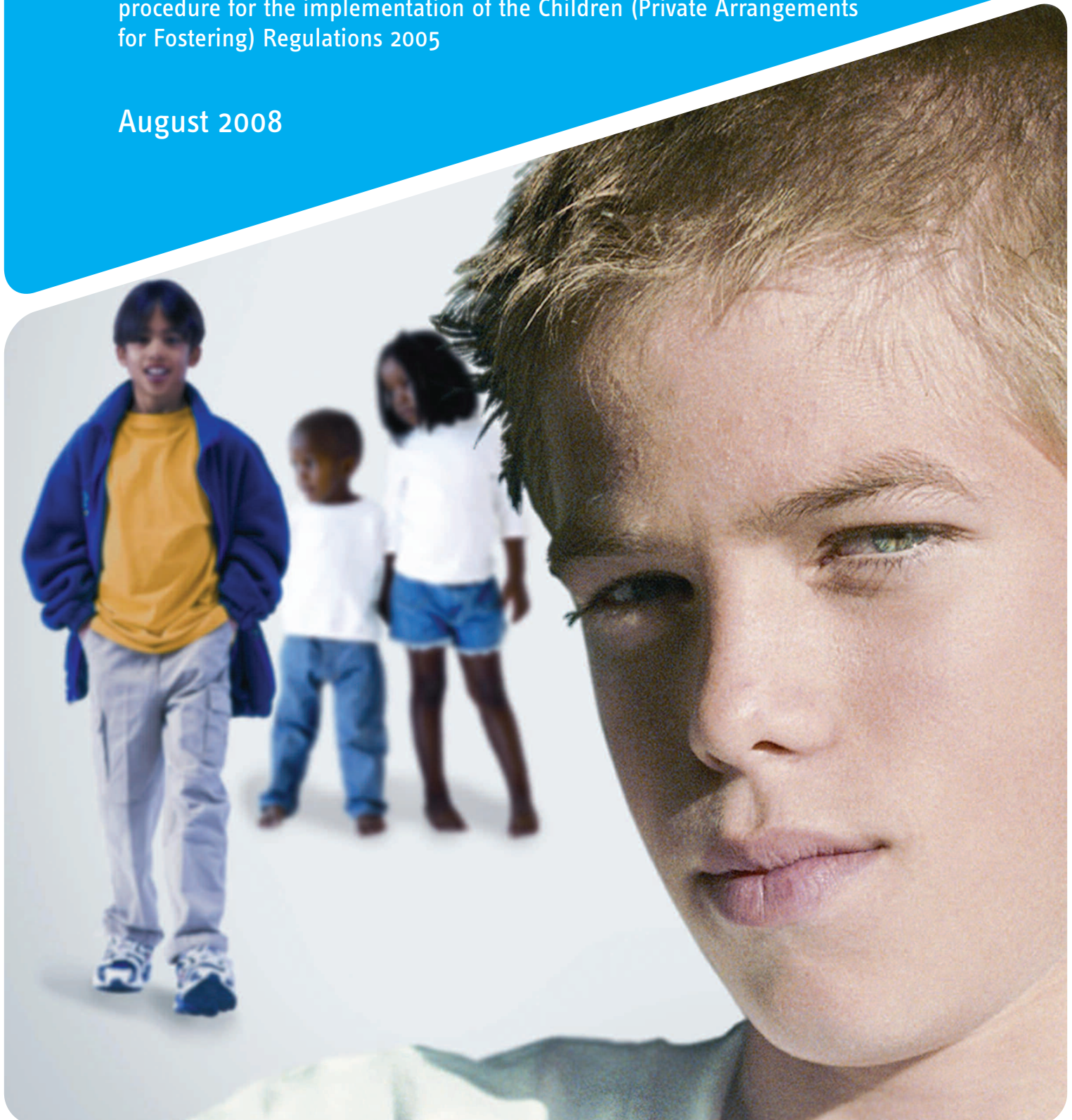


London Borough  
of Hounslow

# STATEMENT OF PURPOSE FOR PRIVATE FOSTERING SERVICES

To be read in conjunction with the London Borough of Hounslow policy and procedure for the implementation of the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005

August 2008



This Statement of Purpose for Private Fostering Services has been agreed by the Director of Children's Services, London Borough of Hounslow.

Copies of this Statement of Purpose can be made available on request in large print, Braille, audio, electronic format or in languages of the local community.

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## 1. Introduction

This statement of purpose is designed to comply with the needs of the National Standards for Private Fostering, Standard 1, and to provide relevant information and guidance in relation to private fostering for professionals, the public, council members and partnership agencies. It provides a description of private fostering arrangements including the assessment process and the advice and support provided to privately fostered children and their parents/those with parental responsibility within the London Borough of Hounslow.

The London Borough of Hounslow is committed to ensuring that equal opportunities are incorporated into all aspects of service delivery and to maintaining high standards in relation to private fostering service provision. Prospective private foster carers are assessed and supported in relation to the needs of the privately fostered child regardless of race, religion, marital status and sexual orientation. The welfare of the child will remain paramount at all times and in every circumstance.

## 2. Overview of Services

Private fostering services are located within Children Services and Lifelong Learning, with the fostering team holding operational responsibility for the assessment and support of private foster carers and ensuring the day to day needs of privately fostered children are met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

The Registered Manager of the fostering team, Tom O'Neill (Fostering Team Manager), is responsible for ensuring that the service operates in compliance with the relevant legislation and associated National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering. The Registered Manager reports to the Service Manager, Placements and Services for Children with Disabilities. There are clear arrangements in place in the absence of the Fostering Team Manager. The Assistant Team Manager Fostering, Gurinder Kaur, will deputise for the Team Manager and in the unlikely event of both managers being absent the relevant Service Manager will provide advice, support and guidance as required.

There are clearly defined arrangements in place for responding to notifications of private fostering. All notifications will initially be screened by the Assistant Manager of the Placements Service, Trevor Shillingford, who will then refer the notification to the Fostering Team Manager for allocation to one of the social workers in the fostering team to carry out an assessment of the suitability of the private fostering arrangement. On completion of the assessment the case will be presented to our Fostering Panel for consideration and the recommendation of the Fostering Panel will be forwarded to the Assistant Director, Children's Services who is the Agency Decision Maker, for endorsement.

Following allocation, the appointed social worker will visit the private foster carer and privately fostered child on a 6 weekly basis in the first year of the agreement to monitor the suitability of the private fostering arrangement and to offer ongoing advice and support to both. Thereafter the visits will be every 3 months or more frequently if required. The privately fostered child will on each visit be seen alone for part of the visit to ascertain his/her wishes and feelings about the care provided and to raise any queries or concerns arising. The supervisory visits will also enable the private foster carer to be provided with advice, support and guidance by the appointed social worker on all matters relating to the privately fostered child. The appointed social worker will regularly report to the fostering team manager on the progress of the private fostering arrangements.

### **3. 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 parental responsibility for him/her,
- A close relative of his/hers, 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 and 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 (monetary or otherwise) or not.

Examples of private fostering arrangements are varied and include:

- Children/young people living with host families for a variety of reasons, i.e. attending language schools, undergoing medical treatment etc.
- 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.

#### **4. The Local Authority's duties and functions under the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005**

Local authorities have a duty to be notified about private fostering arrangements in their area and to satisfy themselves that the welfare of the children who are privately fostered in their area are being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted and to ensure 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.

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

The 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 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. This will enable local authorities to ensure that the welfare of privately fostered children/young people is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted by ongoing assessments and monitoring of arrangements within statutory timescales.

These measures, along with the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, July 2005, focus all 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 the

additional measures will improve the arrangements for safeguarding children/young people in private fostering arrangements.

## **6. London Borough of Hounslow Policy, Procedure and Practice Guidance for Private Fostering.**

The Local Authority's Policy, Procedure and Practice Guidance for Private Fostering details all the actions required under the Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering Regulations 2005). The policy incorporates full details of the legal requirements along with comprehensive practice guidance for social workers involved with the notification and supervision of private fostering arrangements. The Policy, Procedure and Practice Guidance can be accessed at: [www.hounslow.gov.uk/privatefostering](http://www.hounslow.gov.uk/privatefostering)

## **7. Raising awareness**

Throughout 2007/08 awareness of private fostering notification requirements has been promoted through a range of initiatives which has included:

- Distribution of posters and information leaflets to local community groups, schools, nurseries, childminding associations, citizen advice bureau, housing and education departments, shops, social services offices, local churches and faith groups, police stations, GP surgeries and health visitors.
- A private fostering advertorial was placed in Hounslow Magazine (a borough wide magazine for Hounslow residents distributed to around 250,000 homes)
- Private fostering advertisements were placed on an almost monthly basis in local newspaper throughout the year.
- A private fostering webpage was set up on London Borough of Hounslow website providing carers and professionals and the general public with information about private fostering and the duties and responsibilities relating to some.
- The production and distribution of four separate information leaflets for private foster carers, birth parents/those with parental responsibility, professionals and looked after children/young people.
- In February 2008, a presentation on private fostering was made to an estimated group of 30 health visitors.
- A presentation was made to the Asylum Team in May 2008.
- A presentation was made to a varied group of professionals which included health, housing and education personnel.

- The private fostering webpage was updated in 2008 to enable the downloading of private fostering information leaflets and which includes Hounslow private fostering policy procedure and guidance.
- Further seminars and information events to raise awareness of private fostering will continue throughout 2008 and an outline plan for 2009/10 has been devised which will continue to promote public awareness of private fostering.
- In all presentations, seminars and publicity/information materials, a clear legal definition of private fostering is given along with the legal requirement for notifying the local authority of any actual or proposed private fostering arrangements.

### **8. Assessment of the suitability of private foster carers and their family**

Notifications and referrals of private fostering will initially be screened by the Assistant Manager, Placements Service, who will then pass the case details to the Fostering Team Manager or in his absence, the Assistant Fostering Team Manager. The case will then, where appropriate, be allocated to one of two dedicated social workers to carry out an initial assessment visit within 7 days and where appropriate a full assessment of the suitability of the fostering arrangements will be completed within the defined timescale. Criminal Records Bureau disclosures will be sought for the private foster carer and all members of their household who are aged over 16 years; additional checks will be undertaken with other relevant agencies including Local Authority Checks, the probation service and the NSPCC.

The private fostering assessment will include ensuring that the child/young persons physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development is satisfactory and that defined needs arising from his/her racial origin, cultural and linguistic background are being met. The parenting capacity of the private foster carer and the suitability of the accommodation provided will also form part of the assessment.

Private foster carers will be encouraged to promote contact with the child's birth family and will be given advice in relation to meeting any particular needs which the child may have, such as needs arising from a medical condition or learning disability.

The assessment, following endorsement by the relevant manager, will be presented to the Fostering Panel who will make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker, who is the Assistant Director of Children's Services, and if appropriate the Agency Decision Maker will endorse the panels recommendation. The private foster carer will be notified of the decision in writing.

## **9. Advice support and information available to private foster carers, parents, and those with parental responsibility and privately fostered children.**

A dedicated social worker, experienced in private fostering work, will be responsible for working with and supporting each private foster carer, birth parent and privately fostered child. The social worker will assist the private foster carer in accessing any necessary advice or services which will enable him/her to meet the child's needs including racial, cultural, religious and linguistic needs. Advice should be given on appropriate play, nursery schools or playgroups, leisure activities and experiences that will provide appropriate stimulation and learning opportunities for the privately fostered child. Appropriate support and advice will include any issues arising from the child's age, sex and disability and the advice and support provided to the private foster carer should assist the carer in safeguarding and promoting the child's welfare.

The social worker will ensure that birth parents and those with parental responsibility are supported and encouraged to maintain regular contact with their child and the private foster carer. Where particular support to the parent or referral to another agency would reduce the need for the child to be privately fostered, and would be in the child's best interests, to provide this support to the parent and make the referral to the relevant agency.

It is imperative to establish and take into account the wishes of the privately fostered child regarding the private fostering agreement. The child must be seen alone at each visit unless it is considered inappropriate. The child must be provided with the social workers contact details in addition to the contact details of other organisations such as NSPCC and Childline which may be of assistance to the child. The privately fostered child must be given details of their privately fostered status and the responsibilities of the adults caring for them. Such information must be in a format appropriate to their age and understanding. If he/she is a child in need under the provisions of the Children Act 1989, he/she should be given information about advocacy services.

Children with disabilities who are privately fostered must be provided with services appropriate to their disability and needs, and on reaching the age of 17 years, must be given details of the Authority's procedure for assessing eligibility for adult community care services. These details must be provided in a format appropriate to the child's ability.

## **10. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of privately fostered children**

Privately fostered children are potentially a particularly vulnerable group of children whose welfare must be safeguarded and promoted. Many of these children will not have a parent or person with parental responsibility to safeguard their welfare. Whilst overall responsibility for the privately fostered child remains with the parent/person with parental responsibility, the

responsibility for the day to day care of the child lies with the private foster carer.

A database containing relevant information about notifications, referrals and private fostering arrangements is held in the London Borough of Hounslow Family Placements Service; The Fostering Team Manager monitors the operation of services for privately fostered children and will report annually to the Head of London Borough of Hounslow Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Director of Children's Services.

The responsible manager and relevant staff will ensure that privately fostered children's welfare is safeguarded and promoted by adhering to the councils operational policy and procedure for private fostering, complying with the regulations on private fostering and by undertaking a private fostering assessment. Private fostering assessments will be completed within the defined timescale and placed before the fostering panel for a recommendation as to whether the private fostering arrangement is acceptable or not. The Agency Decision Maker endorses, or otherwise, the panels recommendation.

The nominated social worker will ensure that all statutory work is completed within defined timescales and will promptly notify the responsible manager of any concerns arising. In any case where child protection concerns are identified the All London Child Protection Procedures 2007 will be followed.

In addition to statutory visits, the nominated social worker will visit when requested to do so by the private foster carer, the privately fostered child or birth parents. Interpreters, independent of the foster carer child and his/her parent, will be used where it is requested by the child/young person or where the preferred language is not English.

Private foster carers will have access to a range of advice including advice on benefit entitlement, parenting strategies on behaviour management and related matters. They will also be entitled to attend training courses for foster carers and will be given priority booking on defined courses.

Children/young people who are deemed to be 'children in need' or 'disabled' and are being privately fostered as they approach adulthood, will have access to transition services. In the case of a young person, a referral for transition services would need to be instigated when the young person reaches 17 years. This is to enable an appropriate period of time for a care plan to be put in place by the time the young person reaches the age of 18 years and the private fostering arrangement ceases.

## **11. The role of other agencies in safeguarding and promoting welfare of privately fostered children**

It is important that members of the public and professionals who are likely to become aware of a privately fostered child are aware of the need for such arrangements to be notified to the local authority. Professionals who are

working in services such as health, education and housing are often the first to encounter such arrangements, and share the local authority's responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of privately fostered children. The London Borough of Hounslow has produced information leaflets for such professionals explaining how to recognise and respond to a potential private fostering arrangement. Additionally, seminars, roadshows, publicity materials/advertising and training events will be held to promote awareness of private fostering and the requirement for partner agencies to notify us of potential private fostering arrangements.

## **12. Staff training**

Training on private fostering has been provided for all relevant social work staff, and is renewed annually. Awareness of private fostering is incorporated into the induction programme for Family Placement staff. Additional understanding and knowledge is gained through staff attending workshops, seminars, team meetings and one to one supervision. Published materials, information leaflets and other relevant reading is also provided to relevant staff.

All work undertaken in relation to private fostering will be allocated to professional qualified staff who are trained in undertaking private fostering assessments. Further training in private fostering is scheduled for September 2008 and will be available to all family placement staff.

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