



**London Borough  
of Hounslow**

# **Hounslow Private Fostering Statement of Purpose 2020**

**To be read in conjunction with the Hounslow's Private Fostering Policy and Procedures**

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This document provides a description of private fostering arrangements within the London Borough of Hounslow. This Statement of Purpose is designed to meet the needs of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, Standard 1, which states that there is a clear description and guide to the service for the public, professionals, council members and external organisations.
- 1.2 Hounslow's Private Fostering Service is located within Children's Specialist Services located at the Civic Centre, Lampton Road, Hounslow TW3 4DN.
- 1.3 The Private Fostering Service has three functions:
- to raise public and professional awareness about private fostering and the requirements to notify the Local Authority of any actual or planned private fostering arrangements;
  - to respond to any private fostering notifications, assess the arrangements and to provide support to the child/children and adults involved;
  - to review and develop current private fostering processes and practice.
- 1.4 Children's Specialist Services have established clear policies and procedures on private fostering which set out how the authority discharges its duties in relation to the private fostering legislation. These documents are available on the council's website and on Hounslow Safeguarding Children Board's website.
- 1.5 Hounslow is committed to achieving high standards in relation to private fostering provisions. Private fostering is promoted by the Fostering Team who undertake work to promote general awareness raising and offer advice to parents or others with parental responsibility, private foster carers, professionals and other relevant groups.
- 1.6 It is our intention to work in partnership with children, carers and parents to ensure that:
- children are provided with high quality care that meets their needs;
  - private carers are provided with the support and training needed to help them provide such care;
  - parents or others with parental responsibility, feel able to seek the support and guidance of the local authority.

## **2. Definition of a Privately Fostered Child**

- 2.1 A privately fostered child means a child who is under the age of 16 (under 18 if the child is disabled) and who is cared for, and provided with accommodation by someone other than a parent or close relative, by private arrangement between the parent and carer with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more.
- 2.2 A close relative in this sense is a brother, sister, aunt, uncle, grandparent or stepparent, none of whom would be classed as private foster carers.
- 2.3 A cohabitee of the mother or father would not qualify as a relative, nor would extended family such as a cousin or great aunt/uncle.
- 2.4 In a private fostering arrangement, the parent retains parental responsibility.

2.5 The 28 day period is intended to ensure that families are able to make arrangements for a child to stay with their extended family or friends without interference from the local authority and ensures that only exceptional circumstances need to be notified. The period for which the child is cared for and accommodated by the private foster carer should be continuous. Continuity is not broken by the occasional short break.

2.6 Private fostering arrangements are varied. Common examples include:

- children or young people who are sent to this country for education or health care by their birth parents from overseas;
- children or young people who attend language schools;
- children at boarding schools who do not return to their parents during the holidays;
- children or young people whose parents work or study long and/or antisocial hours;
- children or young people staying with family friends as a result of parental separation, divorce, difficulties at home or a prison or hospital stay;
- children or young people living with host families for a variety of reasons i.e. attending language schools, undergoing medical treatment;
- children of asylum seekers whose parents are not in this country, who were not unaccompanied at the time of arrival; and who are living with other families.

### **3. The Local Authority's Duties and Functions under the Children Act 1989 and Regulations**

3.1 The duties of the local authority in relation to private fostering, are set out in the Children Act 1989, the Children (Private Arrangement for fostering) Regulations 2005 and amendments contained within the Children Act 2004. The National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005 set out the standards to be met by all local authorities in discharging their duties; covering the following areas:

- A Statement of Purpose
- Notifications
- Safeguarding and promoting welfare
- Providing advice and support
- Monitoring and compliance

The National Minimum Standards and intended outcomes are set out in Appendix 1.

3.2 The local authority has a duty to satisfy itself that the welfare of children who are privately fostered is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, and to provide the necessary advice to those caring for them. This includes the duty to ensure that parents and carers fulfil their responsibilities to the child.

3.3 Local authorities do not arrange private foster placements as the arrangements are made between the parent or person with parental responsibility and the private foster carer.

3.4 The duties placed on local authorities are supervisory and regulatory and include the following:

- raise public awareness of the need to notify the local authority of a private fostering arrangement;
- receive and respond effectively to notifications and situations that arise involving un-notified arrangements;

- assess the suitability of private fostering arrangements, private fostering carers and their households;
- monitor placements through visits and keeping secure case file records that document the continuing suitability of the placement;
- support private foster carers, parents and children by offering advice and giving information that ensures the child's welfare is safeguarded and promoted;
- prohibition and disqualification of a person proposing to become, or is acting in the capacity of a private foster carer to safeguard the needs and welfare of the child;
- be accountable to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and the executive side of the local authority as to how the service discharges its duties in relation to private fostering through the provision of annual reports.

#### **4. Promotion of Public and Professional Awareness**

##### 4.1 Activities to promote public and professional awareness of private fostering include:

- attendance at team meetings, circulating news briefs to local authority staff and delivering twice yearly professional seminars;
- writing to relevant GPs and educational settings to remind them of their duty to refer any private fostering arrangements they become aware of;
- circulation of promotional literature/briefings to libraries, GP practices, educational settings, Children's Centres and other relevant settings for display and via the LSCB and subcommittees;
- specific communications with language schools, churches and faith groups including promotional material to raise awareness and clarify responsibilities in respect of Private Fostering;
- work with Probation Services and Youth Services to promote awareness of Private Fostering;
- continue to work with School Admissions to identify Private Fostering arrangements;
- identification of Private Fostering Champions from partner agencies to lead on awareness raising
- provide on-line access to the Statement of Purpose and Private Fostering Procedures, which are up to date and clearly outline the roles and responsibilities for all staff.

#### **5 Assessment of the Suitability of Private Fostering Arrangements**

5.1 The local authority has a duty to assess the suitability of all potential or actual private fostering arrangements that come to our attention. Private fostering services are located within Children's Specialist Services, 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 roles and responsibilities within Hounslow's Children's Specialist Services are set out in detail in our Private Fostering Procedures which can be found on the local authority's private fostering webpage and on the Hounslow Safeguarding Children Board website.

5.2 People who wish to become private foster carers will be required to take part in a Private Fostering Assessment and then cooperate with regular visits from a social worker (every 6 weeks for the first year and every 12 weeks thereafter).

5.3 The practical responsibility of the local authority in a private fostering arrangement includes the following:

- receive notification from parents, which will be dealt with within the statutory timescale of 7 days;
- assess the suitability of the placement, which should be completed by a Social Worker within the statutory timescales of 42 working days from notification;
- visit the child in line with statutory requirements;
- ensure that carers are aware of the child's racial, cultural linguistic and religious needs and are helped to meet them.

Actions taken by the local authority on receipt of a notification are set out in appendix 2 on page 11.

5.4 Professionals can contact Sonia Mark, Team Manager, Fostering Team/ Claire Goodhead, Senior Social Worker, Fostering Team. [Sonia.mark@hounslow.gov.uk](mailto:Sonia.mark@hounslow.gov.uk)/ [Claire.Goodhead@hounslow.gov.uk](mailto:Claire.Goodhead@hounslow.gov.uk) for advice in respect of private fostering.

5.5 Completed Private Fostering assessments will be authorised by a Head of Service in Children's Specialist Services.

## **6 Advice and Information for Carers, Parents and Children**

6.1 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, gender 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.

6.2 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.

6.3 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, the social worker will provide support to the parent and/or make the referral to the relevant agency.

6.4 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 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.

6.5 Children with disabilities who are privately fostered must be provided with services appropriate to their disability and needs including access to transition services at the appropriate age. A referral for transition services would need to be instigated to the

Social Work Team for Children with Disabilities when the young person reaches 14½ 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.

- 6.6 Private foster carers will have access to a range of advice including advice on benefit entitlement, parenting strategies, 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.

## **7 The Role of other Agencies in Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Privately Fostered Children**

- 7.1 It is important that 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 professionals explaining how to recognise and respond to a potential private fostering arrangement. Other activities will be put in place to promote awareness of private fostering and the requirement for partner agencies to notify us of potential private fostering arrangements.

## **8 Staff Training**

- 8.1 Awareness of private fostering is incorporated into the induction programme for Family Placement staff. Additional understanding and knowledge is gained through seminars, team meetings and one to one supervision. Published materials, information leaflets and other relevant reading is also provided to relevant staff.
- 8.2 All work undertaken in relation to private fostering will be allocated to professional, qualified staff who are trained in undertaking private fostering assessments.
- 8.3 The Fostering Team are members of the Coram Baaf Private Fostering Special Interest Group which provides updates on legislation, support and good practice.

## **Appendix 1: Private Fostering – National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Local Authorities**

The NMS specify a minimum standard for local authority practice in relation to private fostering to comply with the relevant Children Act duties and functions. They are intended to focus local authority attention on private fostering and lead to improvement, in part by requiring a more proactive approach to identifying arrangements in the area.

The standards are grouped under a series of key topics:

1. Statement on private fostering
2. Notification
3. Safeguarding and promoting welfare
4. Advice and support
5. Monitoring compliance

Each standard/group of standards are preceded by the intended outcome of the standard.

### **1 Statement on private fostering**

**Outcome: relevant staff are aware of local authority duties and functions in relation to private fostering**

#### **STANDARD 1**

The local authority has a written statement or plan, which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out.

### **2 Notification**

**Outcome: the local authority is notified about privately fostered children living in its area.**

#### **STANDARD 2**

The local authority:

- promotes awareness of the notification requirements and ensures that those professionals who may come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in notification;
- responds effectively to notifications;
- deals with situations where an arrangement comes to their attention, which has not been notified.

### **3 Safeguarding and promoting welfare**

**Outcome: the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted.**

#### **STANDARD 3**

The local authority determines effectively the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangement in accordance with the regulations.



## **4 Advice and support**

**Outcome: private foster carers and parents of privately fostered children receive advice and support to assist them to meet the needs of privately fostered children; privately fostered children are able to access information and support when required so that their welfare is safeguarded and promoted.**

### **STANDARD 4**

The local authority provides such advice and support to private foster carers and prospective private foster carers as appears to the authority to be needed.

### **STANDARD 5**

The local authority provides advice and support to the parents of children who are privately fostered within their area as appears to the authority to be needed.

### **STANDARD 6**

Children who are privately fostered are able to access information and support when required so that their welfare is safeguarded and promoted. Privately fostered children are enabled to participate in decisions about their lives.

## **5 Monitoring compliance**

**Outcome: the local authority monitors the way in which it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering.**

### **STANDARD 7**

The local authority has in place and implements effectively a system for monitoring the way in which it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. It improves practice where this is indicated as necessary by the monitoring system.

## **Appendix 2: Actions to be taken on receipt of a notification**

### **Notification**

1. Notification and referral of possible private fostering arrangements should be made to Early Help Hounslow.

### **Referral Process**

2. A social worker from the Intake and Support team will visit the private fostering carer and child within 7 working days to assess:
  - if the arrangement comes under private fostering regulations
  - the reason for the arrangement
  - the welfare of the child and if there are any child protection or safeguarding concerns.
3. If the arrangement is assessed to be private fostering, Intake and Support make a referral to the Placements Team, using the **Request for Placement Form** on LCS, specifying a private fostering arrangement.
4. If it is not a private fostering arrangement and there are no child protection or safeguarding concerns the referral will be closed.
5. If Intake and Support have child protection or safeguarding concerns regarding the child in the private fostering arrangement they do not close the case after referral to the Placements Team. Intake and Support retain case responsibility working with the family and a private fostering assessment is undertaken by the Fostering Team, parallel to the work undertaken by Intake and Support.
6. If there are no concerns about the private fostering arrangement, Intake and Support close their involvement after referral to the Placements Team and the Fostering Team begin an assessment.

### **Fostering Team Private Fostering Process**

7. Private fostering referrals to the Fostering Team are received via the Placements Team through LCS along with the Request for Placement form.
8. A social worker from the Fostering Team will visit within 7 working days and begin an assessment of the suitability of the private fostering arrangement. This assessment should make a decision about the suitability of all aspects of a private fostering arrangement and should be completed within 42 working days from notification or as soon as the outcome of the DBS check(s) is known, whichever is the sooner.
9. Assessments are authorised by a Head of Service from Children's Specialist Services. If the private fostering arrangement is suitable the privately fostered child is allocated to a social worker from the Fostering Team.
10. The allocated social worker will visit the child and private foster carer/s at least every 6 weeks in the first year of the arrangement to monitor the suitability and offer ongoing advice and support to both the carer and the child. Thereafter the visits will be every 12 weeks, or more frequently if required.
11. If a private fostering arrangement is not deemed suitable, the fostering team will follow policy and procedure and consider prohibition.
12. The Fostering Team's role is to assess the private fostering arrangement, and to monitor and support suitable arrangements. If, during a private fostering assessment or during regulatory visits, the Fostering Team have safeguarding or child protection concerns, a referral will be made back to the Intake and Support Team for further assessment.