


Children, Schools and Families

PRIVATE FOSTERING STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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CONTENTS

	Page
1. Introduction	3
2. Regulation	3
3. Legal definition of a privately fostered child	3
4. The Local Authority's duties and functions under the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 1991	4
5. New duties under the Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005	4
6. Training for relevant staff	5
7. How awareness of the notification requirements will be promoted	6
8. Assessment of the suitability of private foster carers and their household	6
9. Advice/support and information available to private foster carers, parent/those with parental responsibility and privately fostered children	6
10. Ensuring the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted	7
11. The role of other agencies in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of privately fostered children, including encouraging notification	7
12. How relevant staff will have an understanding of the Department's duties and functions in relation to private fostering	8
13. 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	8
14. Monitoring the discharge of functions and compliance with part 9 of the Children Act 1989	8
15. Advice on private fostering	9

1. Introduction

This document is a description of private fostering arrangements within Hertfordshire County Council and is separate from Fostering Services Statement of Purpose 2006. This statement of purpose is designed to meet the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, Standard 1, and to provide a guide of the service for professionals, the public, council members and external organisations.

This document will describe the local authority's duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out.

2. Regulation

Private fostering services provided by local authorities are regulated by OFSTED. Their contact details are:

Address: Ofsted
Royal Exchange Building
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

Telephone: 08456 404045

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Hertfordshire County Council is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children, including those in private fostering arrangements. Hertfordshire County Council Children Schools and Families is committed to maintaining high standards in relation to private fostering service provision and to reviewing this on a continual basis.

Hertfordshire County Council Children Schools and Families holds statutory powers and responsibilities as a local authority in relation to private fostering arrangements.

The service works to ensure that 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.

Hertfordshire County Council Children Schools and Families Project Officer Private Fostering is based in the Policy and Practice Development Team which is part of the Policy, Practice and Quality Assurance Team managed by the Head of Policy Practice and Quality Assurance. Notifications of private fostering arrangements will be dealt with through Client Services and passed to the relevant East or West Area Team. The assessing of private fostering arrangements is undertaken within the Department's Area Teams and Fostering Teams. Monitoring of private fostering arrangements will be dealt with in the Locality Teams in the East and West Area.

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 parent 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;
- 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.

Some examples of private fostering arrangements include: children/young people with families overseas; black and ethnic minority 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.

4. The local authority's duties and functions under the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 1991

Local authorities have a duty to be notified about private fostering arrangements in their area and 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.

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

6. Training for relevant staff

Professionals

Hertfordshire has a commitment to ensure all professionals have a clear and defined understanding of the private fostering regulations and their role and responsibility to ensure that the Authority becomes aware of any Private Fostering arrangements that they become aware of within its catchment Area.

Hertfordshire Council Children School and Families will facilitate this by:-

1. Publication of this document pertaining to Private Fostering
2. Hertfordshire County Council Children Schools and Families Learning and Development will include training on private fostering in induction sessions, child care practice foundation training and ongoing child care training events, child protection and children in need training modules
3. Project Officer Private Fostering will provide awareness raising information for team meetings, training events, professional forums, school events etc. for professionals working with children on a regular basis.
4. Information will be available on CONNECT (internal internet service) and on www.hertsdirect.com
5. Regular update of information through the email network , Herts News, CSF update
6. Monitoring feedback for further training requirements.

Targeted professionals

Schools- Heads, teachers, designated teachers
Health care – school nurses, GP's, Health Visitors
Hertfordshire County Council Client Services
Social Workers, assessment and locality teams, family placement teams
Education Welfare Officers
Child Protection School Liaison Officers
Connexions
Youth Offending Team
CAR Team
Any other professionals within CSF who come into contact with children

Other agencies

Language Schools
Independent Schools
District and Borough Councils
Police

Department for Works and Pensions
Citizens Advice Bureaus
Faith and community groups
Libraries
CAFCASS
Youth Service
Leisure Centres
Courts

7. How awareness of the notification requirements will be promoted

Awareness of the notification requirements will be promoted through distribution of publicity materials and through undertaking information sessions with key professionals and partnership agencies. Hertfordshire County Council Children Schools and Families will work with Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Board to ensure the co-ordination and effective implementation of measures designed to strengthen private fostering notification requirements.

Publicity materials (leaflets and posters) which will contain information about the legal definition of privately fostered children/young people and the procedure for notification will be distributed to key access points e.g. Schools, libraries, faith and voluntary organizations, GP surgeries etc

These leaflets will have contact details for the public and professionals to make appropriate notifications through as well as providing further information if required.

These materials will be available in a range of languages and formats

Hertfordshire is committed to continue to evaluate its awareness raising activities.

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

All privately fostered children/young people within Hertfordshire County Council area will undergo a Private Fostering Assessment, which will also include elements of the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (2000). These Private Fostering Assessments will be completed and signed off, managerially, within 35 working days. All aspects of private foster carers' suitability including the suitability of their household will be assessed.

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

A named social care worker will be responsible for working with and supporting each privately fostered child/young person and private foster carer/parent, their contact details will be provided to all those concerned. The Fostering Team will provide advice and support either directly to the private foster carer or through the allocated social worker.

In addition to statutory visits, other visits when requested by privately fostered children/young people, their parents, private foster carers will be undertaken. 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.

Parents of proposed/current privately fostered children/young people will also 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.

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

Children Schools and Families will ensure that privately fostered children/young people's welfare is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted by staff undertaking an assessment of the child/young person's needs and an assessment of the suitability of the arrangements. This assessment will be signed off by the Team Manager Area Team and Team Manager Fostering Team within 35 working days of the notification.

Private Fostering Assessments will include ensuring that the child/young person's physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural development is satisfactory and needs arising from his/her religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background are being met. In addition, the assessment 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 Private Fostering Assessment and the 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 social care area 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 regarding 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 an enhanced CRB check undertaken on them. All privately fostered children/young people will have a named social care worker with their contact details and will be given information materials in relation to their age and understanding on what private fostering means. Those children/young people who have been deemed as 'children/young people in need' or 'disabled' whilst being privately fostered will at the age of 16/18 years have access to an after care service and be facilitated to undergo an adult community care assessment, as relevant.

Privately fostered children's welfare will further be promoted by awareness campaign regarding the notification requirements which will be carried out within the County. Training programmes on private fostering will be available and private fostering will also be a part of more generalised child care training. Partner 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, and will affect a policy for the use of requirements, prohibitions, disqualifications and appeals; decisions regarding offences will be made in consultation with the police. Decisions regarding the latter powers will be made whilst bearing in mind the best interests of the individual child/young person.

Where child protection concerns are identified, Section 47 enquiries will be carried out.

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

Hertfordshire County Council Children Schools and Families will work with Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Board to ensure that partnership agencies are given information on

their responsibilities regarding notification under the new Regulations 2005, particularly where they are not satisfied that the private fostering 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. The Project Officer Private Fostering 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.

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

Children Schools and Families own staff will have access to this Statement of Purpose, information materials and training on private fostering. Other directorates within Hertfordshire County Council and outside agencies will also have these documents, printed information and relevant training as part of the Local Safeguarding Children Board multi-agency training. The Project Officer Private Fostering will visit other departments within Hertfordshire County Council and partnership agencies, as appropriate, to inform them of the new guidance, safeguards and standards.

13.. 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

Children Schools and Families will ensure that its duties and functions in relation to private fostering are included in the annual training plan and will be reviewed in light of any changes in legislation, guidance and best practice developments.

At the end of training and awareness raising programmes, evaluation via feedback forms will be collated to assess if the training meets the needs of informing participants of the local authority's duties and functions regarding private fostering. In addition to this, individual workers' training needs in relation to private fostering will be assessed as part of their personal development.

All social care workers will undergo induction and ongoing training programmes in relation to the local authority's duties and functions that include private fostering and all child care training will include a component on these duties and functions.

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

Under Regulation 12, the Head of Policy Practice and 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.

15. Advice on private fostering

Advice on private fostering can be obtained from the Project Officer Private Fostering on 01992 588841.