

**Statement
of Purpose for
Private Fostering
Services
2014-2015**

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Accessibility

This document can be made available in large print, Braille, audio or in electronic format.

Copies in alternative languages may also be obtained.

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1 Introduction

The National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005, Standard 1, requires that there a clear description of the Council's services with regard to private fostering arrangements is available for professionals; the public; Council Members and external organisations.

This document defines what is meant by a private fostering arrangement; the requirement for all private fostering arrangements to be notified to the local authority; the assessment process; and the support and advice offered to parents, private foster carers and privately fostered children within Bracknell Forest.

2 Overview of Services

The Private Fostering Service has two functions;

- To raise public and professional awareness of the requirement to notify the local authority of any proposed or existing private fostering arrangement.
- To respond to any private fostering notifications, assess the arrangements and provide appropriate information and support for the children and adults involved.

There are clear procedures in place for responding to notifications of private fostering arrangements. Any notification is initially considered by the Children's Social Care Duty and Assessment Team. A visit to complete a written assessment will be made by a member of the Duty team, together, where possible, with a social worker from the Family Placement Team.

Where it is confirmed that the arrangement meets the criteria of private fostering a social worker will be allocated from one of the Children's Social Care social work teams. This social worker is responsible for monitoring the welfare of the child and to maintain contact with anyone holding parental responsibility for the child.

The Family Placement Team will allocate another social worker to undertake an assessment of the suitability of the private foster carer; and will offer advice and support to them where appropriate.

An Assistant Team Manager within the Family Placement Team has designated responsibilities for the private fostering service, including managing the Publicity and Recruitment worker to promote general awareness of private fostering; offer advice to professionals; and to visit voluntary, professional or other relevant groups with information and promotional material.

An annual report on the private fostering service is presented to the Bracknell Forest Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Children's Social Care meets the requirements of equal opportunity legislation through ensuring services are centred around the needs of the child or young person. All prospective private foster carers are assessed and supported on the basis of the needs of the child or young person regardless of race, religion, class, marital status, sexual orientation or disability.

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 it is 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.

A child is not privately fostered if the person caring for him/her has 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.
- teenagers who are staying with families of friends after a disagreement at home.

3.1 Boarding Schools

A person who proposes to accommodate a child under 16 years at school for more than **two weeks** during school holidays must give written notice to the local authority. The child is treated as a privately fostered child with the exception that requirements may not be imposed. Notice must also be given when a child ceases to be treated as a privately fostered child - see Schedule 8 Paragraph 9 Children Act 1989.

There are a number of independent boarding schools within Bracknell Forest. The Family Placement Team contact each school before the Christmas, Spring and Summer holiday periods with a request to complete a return to provide information of any child who may fall within this regulation or to confirm if there are no children in this category.

The Local Authority were not notified of any children falling into this category during 2013-2014

The regulations allow for a school to be exempt from these regulations. To date no school has requested that the Local Authority considers this.

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

Under the Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 Local Authorities are required to raise public awareness in their area of the requirements regarding notification of private fostering arrangements. Notifications must be given to the local authority when a child/young person is proposed to be privately fostered or is being privately fostered. This enables the local authority 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 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 anticipated to improve notification rates and compliance with the existing legislative framework for private fostering and, therefore, and ultimately improve the arrangements for safeguarding children and young people in private fostering arrangements.

5 The Bracknell Forest Policy, Procedure and Practice Guidance for Private Fostering

The Bracknell Forest Policy, Procedure for Private Fostering details all the actions required under the Children Act Regulations 2005. The policy includes full details of the legislative requirements, together with comprehensive practice guidance for social workers dealing with the notification and supervision of private fostering arrangements. It also sets out the actions required to ensure that these children are properly safeguarded with regard to the child protection matters, standards of care and welfare concerns. See: <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/private-fostering-policy.pdf>

6 Training for relevant staff

Training on private fostering has been provided for all social work staff. Training for all staff is reviewed annually in line with changing needs and legislation, and all programmes are evaluated by managers.

Awareness of private fostering is part of the induction programme for new social workers and staff recruited to the Family Placement Team.

Relevant staff will gain further understanding and expertise in relation to private fostering through workshops, team meetings and regular supervision.

7 Raising Awareness

The Family Placement Team have responsibility for raising awareness of private fostering amongst members of the children's workforce and the general community. A rolling programme of activity and events is regularly reviewed and updated.

Actions to promote the awareness of the notification requirements completed during 2013/2014 included:

- Adverts on the Bracknell Forest Partnership Community TV – which has screens in the library, College; leisure centres, local GP surgeries and Health Centre; cafés in a town centre bookshop, supermarket and a local garden centre.
- Community messaging to neighbourhood groups and other community groups
 - Attendance at Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action lunch to distribute posters etc.
 - Provided information in Spanish and Russian to PF arrangements
- Banners placed in the reception areas of the main council buildings at Time Square and Easthampstead House.
- Laminated prompt cards giving the summary of 'What is Private Fostering' and 'who to contact' have been provided to GPs, education professionals, designated teachers and social work staff.
- Private Fostering has been highlighted on the front page of BORIS, the internal Bracknell Forest web-site.
- The need for private fostering arrangements to be notified is promoted on the Bracknell Forest Council website, see: <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/living/liv-children-and-families/liv-private-fostering.htm>
- Provision of coffee mugs printed with private fostering information to LSCB members for dispersal; professionals attending the LSCB Annual Conference; GP surgeries; education department and voluntary groups.
- Letters and posters have been sent to the hospitals, GP practices, other voluntary and community groups and independent schools in the area.
- Independent schools requested to provide any PF arrangements termly.
- Reviewed and updated the four PF leaflets available to public

- Children Social Care workers and other Children's teams are regularly updated with information about private fostering and processes. This has included the Community Mental Health Team, Special Education team, School admissions, Children centre managers, Adviza (Connexions) and the Youth Offending Service. A certificate and balloon promotion has been used to reinforce the message through highlighting any arrangement identified by professionals.
- Information can be made available on request in the different languages of the local community.

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

Notifications of private fostering are initially screened by the Duty and Assessment Team and an initial visit undertaken within seven working days. This visit covers all the relevant areas set out in the regulations National Minimum Standards Annex A. When it is evident that the arrangement is going to last more than 28 days the case details are passed to the relevant fieldwork team, who will support the child, and the Family Placement Team, who will support the carers. A social worker from each team visits the child and the carers and wherever possible this visit will be done jointly. In the absence of the social worker, their line manager is responsible for ensuring another member of the team will undertake this visit.

Assessments are carried out in relation to all privately fostered children and young people (Single Assessment) and their carers (Family Placement Assessment) within Bracknell Forest. The assessments are completed in accordance with Schedule 3 of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering¹. All relevant statutory checks are made, including an enhanced disclosure from the Disclosure and Barring Service, agency enquiries and personal references for all adults in the household.

Written information is provided, through leaflets, for the child, carers and parents of any privately fostered child at the earliest opportunity.

Private fostering assessments include ensuring that the child/young person's physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural development is satisfactory and that identified 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 are 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 are made available to private foster carers as identified by the assessment. Private foster carers, where necessary, are encouraged to promote contact between the child/young person and his/her parents, siblings, extended family and significant others.

The assessment is completed and shared with the carers before being presented to the Bracknell Forest Foster Panel. This Panel meets the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. It considers recommendations about the approval of foster carers; matches children to long-term placements; and the suitability of Private Foster Carers and sets a standard of the quality of care a child should receive in a substitute

¹ See National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, page 22 at <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/socialcare/safeguarding/privatefostering/>

family. The Panel meets monthly.

Having considered the information available, the Panel makes a recommendation to the Head of Service for Looked After Children, Children's Social Care, who will take the recommendation into consideration in deciding whether to continue to support the placement or take further action to secure the wellbeing of the child. The Family Placement Team manager informs the private foster carer in writing of the Council's decision.

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

The Family Placement Team provides support, advice and training for private foster carers. The children's social work team provide support for the privately fostered children or young people; acting as an advocate; liaising with the child's parent or person with parental responsibility and the privately fostering carer in order to ensure that the current and future needs of the child are being met.

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

The child's social worker is required to visit the privately fostered child at a minimum of six weekly intervals and more frequently should this be appropriate. The social worker should speak to the child on their own from time to time and also ensure the child is aware of their right to raise any concerns about their care with a safe adult.

The Head of Service (Looked After Children) monitors the operational performance of services for privately fostered children and reports annually to the Bracknell Forest Local Safeguarding Children Board

An electronic data base is used to record all cases that are notified to the local authority, the Performance Analyst collates data and any analysis that is required. The allocated Social Worker ensures that all statutory work is completed within the required timescales and reports any areas of concern directly to their line manager. Regular meetings are held with relevant people to ensure that the action plan is on target and what departmental action might be required.

In addition to statutory visits, other visits are made at the request of privately fostered children/young people, their parents, or the private foster carers. Interpreters independent of parents and private foster carers, will be used where required or requested by the child/young person or where the preferred language is not English.

Private foster carers (including prospective carers) have access to advice on benefit entitlement, parenting strategies and techniques, and other appropriate training and support as identified.

Any child protection concerns which may be identified are investigated in line with the requirements of the LSCB Child Protection Procedures.

Young people who have been privately fostered may qualify to receive advice and assistance from Children's Social Care Leaving Care service. Where this is the case an assessment and support plan will be developed with the young person by the social worker and leaving care worker.

11 Information and Support for Privately Fostered Children

All privately fostered children/young people will have a named social worker and will be given their contact details and written information /materials appropriate to their age and understanding of what private fostering means. They will be offered opportunities to attend activities arranged locally by the Child Participation Development Officer.

12 Support and Links with Partner Agencies

We aim to work with our partner agencies to provide all privately fostered children/young people with the information they need to access their services and to liaise with relevant professionals. All partner agencies will be given information on their responsibilities regarding notification under the Regulations 2005. Information materials were sent out to schools, health organisations, and faith groups during 2013/2014 following a rolling timetable.

13 Monitoring

A report setting out the impact of the work relating to private fostering is presented annually to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.

14 Inspection:

The Private Fostering Service is inspected by OFSTED and the Bracknell Forest Service was inspected in March 2009 with an outcome of Good. Details can be found on the OFSTED website - www.ofsted.gov.uk/

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