

London Borough of Waltham Forest Children Social Care and Families

PRIVATE FOSTERING STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

To be read in conjunction with Waltham Forest's Policy and Procedures on Private Fostering

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. LEGAL DEFINITION OF A PRIVATELY FOSTERED CHILD	4
3. THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES DUTIES AND FUNCTIONS UNDER THE CHILDREN ACT 1989 AND THE CHILDREN (PRIVATE ARRANGEMENTS FOR FOSTERING) REGULATIONS 2005	5
NATIONAL MINIMUM STANDARDS.....	5
4. TRAINING FOR RELEVANT STAFF	6
5. THE NAME OF THE PERSON WITHIN THE LOCAL AUTHORITY WITH EXPERTISE	7
6. NAME OF THE MANAGER WHO WILL SIGN OFF DECISIONS ABOUT THE OVERALL SUITABILITY OF PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS:	7
7. HOW AWARENESS OF THE NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS WILL BE PROMOTED WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND WITHIN THE WIDER LOCAL COMMUNITY.	8
8. HOW THE LOCAL AUTHORITY WILL DETERMINE THE SUITABILITY OF ALL ASPECTS OF A PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS.	9
9. HOW THE LOCAL AUTHORITY WILL SATISFY ITSELF THAT THE WELFARE OF PRIVATELY FOSTERED CHILDREN IN THEIR AREA ARE SATISFACTORILY SAFEGUARDED AND PROMOTED.....	10
10. ADVICE AND SUPPORT THAT WILL BE AVAILABLE TO PRIVATE FOSTER CARERS (INCLUDING PROSPECTIVE PRIVATE FOSTER CARERS), PARENTS AND OTHERS WITH PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY AND OTHERS CONCERNED WITH PRIVATELY FOSTERED CHILDREN.	11
11. THE ROLE OF OTHER AGENCIES IN SAFEGUARDING AND PROMOTING THE WELFARE OF PRIVATELY FOSTERED CHILDREN INCLUDING ENCOURAGING NOTIFICATION.	11
12. ALL RELEVANT STAFF HAVE AN APPROPRIATE UNDERSTANDING OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY'S DUTIES AND FUNCTIONS IN RELATION TO PRIVATE FOSTERING.	11
13. HOW WILL THE LOCAL AUTHORITY ENSURE ITS DUTIES AND FUNCTIONING IN RELATION TO PRIVATE FOSTERING ARE INCLUDED IN INDUCTION AND OTHER TRAINING PROGRAMMES.....	12
14. MONITORING COMPLIANCE WITH DUTIES AND FUNCTIONS IN RELATION TO PRIVATE FOSTERING.....	12
15. ADVICE ON PRIVATE FOSTERING	13
11. COMPLAINTS.....	14
12. OFSTED	15

1. Introduction

This document is a description of private fostering arrangements in the London Borough of Waltham Forest. It is a separate document to the Statement of Purpose for the Fostering Service.

The statement is designed to meet the requirements under the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering (2005) and most particularly, Standard 1, where it states that ‘ 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.’

This document sets out the functions and duties in relation to private fostering, and the ways in which they will be carried out in London Borough of Waltham Forest. It will provide a guide for the service itself, other professionals, members of the public, Council members and external organisations.

Within the London Borough of Waltham Forest, the Fostering Team is responsible for private fostering arrangements in the Borough. This service is located at the following address:

Waltham Forest Children Social Care and Families
Town Hall Complex
Fellowship Square
Forest Road
E17 4JF
Tel: 0208 496 3000

The London Borough of Waltham Forest is fully committed to maintaining high standards in relation to the private fostering provision and to review this on a regular basis.

The Assistant Directors for Children Social Care and Families are responsible for ensuring good practice and review practice regularly.

The review of service will be the responsibility of the Corporate Director Children’s Social Care in conjunction with the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting.

In terms of regulation London Borough of Waltham Forest private fostering service is regulated by OFSTED.

Any comments or queries about this Statement of Purpose should be directed to the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting: Tel 0208 496 3000

The London Borough of Waltham Forest holds statutory powers and responsibilities as a Local Authority in relation to private fostering arrangements.

Privately fostered children and young people will come from a diversity of backgrounds and circumstances. All professionals should take account of the specific needs of every privately fostered child/young person including that of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation, class, disability and marital status. The Local Authority is committed to ensuring that services are provided in a manner that does not discriminate at organisational, family or individual levels.

2. Legal definition of a privately fostered child

A child under the age of 16 (18 if disabled), who is cared for ,or proposed to be cared for, and provided with accommodation by someone *other* than: -

- A parent
- A person who is not a parent but has parental responsibility
- A close relative, i.e. aunt/uncle/step-parent/ grand-parent/ sibling but not a cousin, great grand-parent or great aunt/uncle.
- Cared for, or accommodated by, that person for 28 days or more, or the period of actual fostering is less than 28 days but the foster carer intends to foster him/her for more than 28 days
- 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
- The arrangement is seen as private fostering if it meets the criteria above whether for reward (monetary or otherwise) or not

Common situations in which a child/young person may be privately fostered:

Historically many of the children who were privately fostered were from West African origin, however, this is no longer the case, and increasingly referrals are made about a wide range of situations and vary enormously.

- Children and young people with parents and family who live overseas – where parents have sent them to live with relatives or other acquaintances in the hope that they will have better life experiences. In such cases parents who remain in their country of origin are unable to exercise Parental Responsibility
- Children and young people with parents who are in the UK –such children may be babies or toddlers whose parents have demanding study or careers. Such parents may arrange for them to be cared for by

extended family members (but not relatives as defined in the Children Act 1989), or by other people within the community

- Asylum seekers/refugees
- Trafficked young people, such children and young people are generally young teenagers who do not attend school and are at risk of exploitation
- Local young people living apart from their families: these may be adolescents estranged from their family and may be living with neighbours or friends
- Children and young people who are attending language schools or who are at Independent Boarding Schools
- Children and young people brought into the country for adoption – children in this situation would be viewed privately fostered until formal notification of adoption has been made

3. The Local Authorities duties and functions under the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Private arrangements for fostering) Regulations 2005

The London Borough of Waltham Forest has a duty to be notified about private fostering arrangements in their area and satisfy themselves that the welfare of privately fostered children is being safeguarded and promoted and give advice to those caring for them and to their parents. The Children Act 1989 (Section 67(1)) outlines 3 duties:

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

National Minimum Standards

The National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering (2005) Standard 7 requires the Local Authority to have in place an effective system for monitoring its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and to improve practice.

- The Local Authority provides a written report each year, for consideration by the Corporate Director Children’s Social Care, which includes an evaluation of the outcomes of its work in relation to privately fostered children within its area.
- The Local Authority reports annually to the, the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) on how it satisfies itself that the welfare of privately fostered children in its area is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, including how it co-operates with other agencies in this connection. A report is presented annually to LSCB

- The Local Authority presents a report Annually to the Children’s Scrutiny Panel to ensure that elected members have oversight of the operation of the service

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The London Borough of Waltham Forest is committed to these duties and has them enshrined into policy, procedure and practice.

Additional measures under the Children Act 2004 and the Fostering Regulations 2005 are intended to strengthen the notification scheme. Local Authorities are also required to raise public awareness in their area of the requirements regarding notification. Notifications must now be made to the authority when it is proposed that a child will be privately fostered and when he/she is privately fostered.

The purpose of these measures is to focus the authorities’ attention on private fostering and requires a proactive approach with partners and other professionals in identifying arrangements in the area and in improving upon notification rates and compliance with legislation.

4. Training for relevant staff

London Borough of Waltham Forest Children’s Social Care and Families Directorate has a clear and comprehensive written policy for private fostering arrangements, which is operational through written procedures and will actively promote this within the Department, with partner agencies and other professionals within the Borough.

London Borough of Waltham Forest will ensure that training on private fostering is mandatory for all relevant social workers and that it is specifically prioritised for all newly qualified and newly appointed social workers. Training can take the form of briefings to teams or individual social workers.

Training will include information on the context and legislative requirements and the assessment of the suitability of the private fostering arrangements.

Staff training on private fostering will also be promoted high on the agenda of the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board and is part of the monitoring of the Board with regular annual reports to the Executive Board from the Fostering Service on private fostering arrangements.

In addition, Waltham Forest is committed to ongoing regular workshops and surgeries to enhance a multi-disciplinary approach.

5. The name of the person within the Local authority with expertise in private fostering whom social workers can contact for advice.

Team Manager, Fostering Support Team. Tel 0208 496 1048
Marilyn.StAnge@walthamforest.gov.uk

Private Fostering Social Worker – Tel 0208 496 1575/ 07811417321
Charlotte.Andrews@walthamforest.gov.uk

6. Name of the Manager who will sign off decisions about the overall suitability of private fostering arrangements:

Fostering Team Manager
Head of Service for Placements & Resources at Panel

The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in Safeguarding and Family Support Teams will receive initial notification of all private fostering arrangements and will undertake an initial screening of that notification of the proposed or current private fostering arrangement.

Referral will then be made to the Fostering Team who will visit the child and the carers within 7 days of the notification and ensure that, if appropriate, the child is seen alone. A full private fostering assessment will be completed within 42 days of the initial notification. The assessment will consider the suitability of the arrangement, taking in to account the child's views, wishes and feelings, along with the carers ability to meet the child's needs.

This assessment will consider whether or not the Local Authority should undertake its duties under the Children Act 1989 and will consider with the appropriate Safeguarding and Family Support and Children in care Teams whether the child should be accommodated under Section 20 of the Act, or whether support should be offered under Section 17 if the child/young person is in need of Services but not accommodation. At every stage of the assessment and any subsequent support should safeguarding concerns be identified, they will be escalated to the MASH Team who will follow the procedures in place to assess and intervene as appropriate.

Decisions will be made in consultation with the Head of Service of the relevant Service. Implementing the child protection procedures for a child in need who is privately fostered is done in exactly the same way as for any child and care management procedures followed. The private fostering Social Worker will work alongside Social Workers from Assessment and Family Support Teams in these cases.

Once the private fostering assessment is complete and all safeguard checks are completed, the assessment will be authorised by the Fostering Team

Manager. Once the private fostering assessment is complete and has been confirmed as a suitable arrangement, the case will remain open in the Fostering Team, where there will be an allocated Private Fostering Social worker who will undertake the required minimum visits to monitor and support the private fostering arrangement.

The cases are reviewed at the Private Fostering panel by the Head of Service for Placement and Resources Service and the Head of Service for Safeguarding and Family Support Teams. The Private Fostering Panel is held every 6 months. Cases are presented at panel for continued approval and advice. Any recommendations about prohibition or the imposition of requirements on the private foster carers will only be made following legal advice and in consultation with the Head of Service for Safeguarding and Family Support Teams and Head of Service for Placements and Resources.

7. How awareness of the notification requirements will be promoted with other agencies and within the wider local community.

The London Borough of Waltham Forest has the following objectives in relation to promoting awareness of private fostering:

- To raise awareness and understanding about private fostering among the general public.
- To raise awareness of the need to notify among private foster carers, parents of privately fostered children and the children who are privately fostered.
- To enable local agencies, faith and community organisations, schools, health centres and other professionals to gain awareness of private fostering notification requirements.
- To increase private fostering notifications.

To achieve these objectives Waltham Forest has developed an Action Plan which documents proposed actions and timescales.

London Borough of Waltham Forest uses following communication strategies:

- Run a regular media campaign to reach the widest audience, including BME communities, usually through advertisements in the Waltham Forest News which is delivered free to every household in the Borough.
- To distribute our information leaflets and posters to all social care, health and education establishments, local libraries, schools, childcare providers, clinics and GP surgeries.
- To advertise in the Health newsletter, which is provided free-of charge in many NHS sites across the Borough. This is updated quarterly with new information.
- Develop further links with Local faith and community groups to promote awareness

- Distribute electronic material raising awareness to social care, health and education staff
- Consider consortium campaigns with our neighbours to raise awareness
- Regular surgeries for the social work teams in Waltham Forest to ensure social workers have good understanding locally.

The London Borough of Waltham Forest has redesigned the private fostering leaflet to attract more attention to the service. This will be regularly distributed throughout the community. The London Borough of Waltham Forest also has information about private fostering on the Council website:

www.walthamforest.gov.uk

All information contains clear information about the notification requirements, and contact details of all the duty and fostering contact numbers.

The Training and Development Officer for fostering and adoption will be responsible for enacting the strategy in terms of any promotional material. The London Borough of Waltham Forest has posters around the Borough, visible in relevant establishments clearly displaying the contact details for the local services.

8. How the Local Authority will determine the suitability of all aspects of a private fostering arrangement in accordance with the Regulations.

The London Borough of Waltham Forest will ensure that all privately fostered children and young people within Waltham Forest will undergo a private fostering assessment. This will include an assessment of the suitability of the arrangement and will also include aspects of the framework for the assessment of Children in Need and their families and the London Borough of Waltham Forest's Private fostering policy and procedures.

All assessments will be presented to the Fostering Team Manager and Head of Placements and Resources for consideration of the suitability of the arrangement. All aspects of the foster carer's suitability will be assessed, including the suitability of their household.

All assessments completed will be presented to Private Fostering Panel for advice and recommendations.

Ongoing statutory visits will be the responsibility of the Fostering Team, except in circumstances where safeguarding or child protection concerns have resulted in a Child Protection plan when they will be held in

Safeguarding Families Services. In such cases the two teams will work in partnership.

9. How the Local Authority will satisfy itself that the welfare of privately fostered children in their area are satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted.

This will be achieved by first undertaking an assessment. During this assessment the child voice will be listened to. The child will be spoken to on their own (if appropriate according to the age and understanding of the child) by the visiting social worker to gain their perspective of the placement and any concerns. This will form part of the assessment to ascertain the suitability and safety of the arrangement. If during this assessment there are any concerns or safeguarding issues identified, the appropriate children in need or child protection procedures will be followed

This assessment process will be completed within 42 days from the time of the notification and will be signed off by the Fostering Team Manager before being considered by the Head of Service for Placements and Resources, and where appropriate, in consultation with the Head of Service for Safeguarding and Family Support Team.

Private fostering assessments will take account of all aspects of the arrangement and include a thorough assessment of the parenting capacity of the carer. Private foster carers will be given advice in order to enhance their ability to care appropriately for the child and support services made available to them including family support.

Private foster carers will be encouraged to promote contact between the child and the parents/family including siblings, extended family members, and significant others.

The first visit to a privately fostered child(ren) will take place within 7 days of notification of the arrangement, and subsequent visits will be undertaken within statutory timescales:

- Not more than 6 week intervals during the first year of the arrangements;
- In the second or subsequent years not more than intervals of 12 weeks.

All visits will be recorded as required, under Regulation 8 of The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005/
All private foster carers will have an enhanced DBS check.

All privately fostered children will have details of the Private Fostering social worker and will be given their contact details.

Links will be made to Education and health leads and those privately fostered children who have been identified as in need of a service as children in need or because they are disabled, will have access to specialist services, and a community care assessment where appropriate.

A bi-annual review will be carried out by the Private Fostering Social Worker.

10. Advice and support that will be available to private foster carers (including prospective private foster carers), parents and others with parental responsibility and others concerned with privately fostered children.

Private foster carers and the privately fostered child will have a named social worker to support the arrangement.

Ongoing advice about the suitability of the private fostering arrangement will be provided by the Fostering Service and whilst it should be made clear to private foster carers, their different status within the Children Act, they will have access to and be encouraged to take part in, the foster carers training programme.

The named Private Fostering social worker will also offer advice on benefits, parenting strategies, appropriate training, and any other support deemed appropriate. They will undertake the statutory visits to the carer and the child and provide advice and support to promote the communication and partnership with parents. They will monitor the welfare of the child at all times.

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

All partnership agencies will be given regular and updated information and leaflets and be made aware of the policy and the Statement of Purpose in relation to private fostering and of their responsibilities in informing and notifying the local authority of any arrangement. Materials will be sent to schools, faith groups, GPs, housing, leisure centres and libraries. Other agencies will be made aware of who to contact and where. It is considered good practice for agencies to appoint a lead officer on private fostering in their area.

12. All relevant staff have an appropriate understanding of the Local Authority's duties and functions in relation to private fostering.

All children's social care staff and other agencies will have access to the Policy and Statement of Purpose in relation to private fostering which is published on the Council's website.

The on-going awareness programme will further enhance and develop understanding and working protocols.

13. How will the Local authority ensure its duties and functioning in relation to private fostering are included in induction and other training programmes.

Private fostering is part of the annual training programme and all social workers will undergo induction and training. The private fostering worker will offer a full programme of workshop/surgeries to further enhance the knowledge and skills of social workers and other professionals. Tailored training for specific agencies / team can be delivered on request.

14. Monitoring compliance with duties and functions in relation to private fostering.

The Local Authority will monitor through the Performance Team and the inclusion of Private Fostering performance in the children's services dashboard, the performance measures as required for the year and the Government annual returns.

These are:

- Number of notifications of new fostering arrangements received during the year
- Number of cases where action was taken in accordance with the requirements of Regulation 4(1) of the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 for carrying out visits
- Of these the number of cases where this action was taken within 7 working days of receipt of notification
- Number of new arrangements that began during that year
- The percentage of private fostering arrangements that began on or after 31st March of that year, where visits were made at intervals of not more than 6 weeks
- The percentage of private fostering arrangements of over a year, where visits were made at no more than 12 weeks
- Number of notifications of private fostering arrangements coming to an end during the year
- Number of children under private fostering arrangements
- Breakdown of age and gender

The Head of Service for Placements and Resources will monitor the promotion of awareness regarding notification of arrangements and make recommendations annually to the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting and the Corporate Director Children's Social Care on how the Authority is responding to notifications and if these are within timescales.

Further reviews will be undertaken periodically to ensure compliance in the following areas:

- How the authority deals with requirements, disqualifications and prohibitions
- Ensure accurate and confidential records are kept for each privately fostered child and private foster carer
- Decisions about offences and whether or not to allow disqualified or barred people from privately fostering
- How the service assesses the parenting capacity and suitability of the household
- That statutory visits are within timescale
- That additional visits are made when required
- That the system for recording information and enquiries is robust
- That advice and support are provided and matters of concern are highlighted
- That a sample of carers and children's files are regularly monitored via monthly file audits to ensure compliance
- That decisions about the suitability of arrangements are signed off at a suitable managerial level and in a timely way
- That all private fostering arrangements are reviewed at least annually
- The Local Authority investigates any pattern of concern raised by privately fostered children
- That the Local Authority reports annually to the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board on how it satisfies itself that the welfare of privately fostered children in Waltham Forest are safeguarded and promoted, including how it cooperates with other agencies in regard to this.

15. Advice on Private Fostering

This Statement of Purpose, along with the Private Fostering Procedures and other Private Fostering information leaflets, can be obtained from:

The Fostering Team
Town Hall Complex
Fellowship Square
Forest Road
Walthamstow

E17 4JF

Tel: 0208 496 1598

It is also available on the Waltham Forest Council Website:

www.walthamforest.gov.uk

Advice on private fostering can also be obtained from the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub on 0208 496 2310 or MASHrequests@walthamforest.gov.uk

11. Complaints

Making a Formal Complaint:

We always try to provide good, quality services but we know that sometimes we may get things wrong. Comments and complaints can help us to get things right. We try to resolve differences as soon as they arise between people.

If people are not happy with the service that they or a member of their family are receiving, or if they have applied for a service and been refused, they have the right to complain. They will normally receive our reply within 10 days.

The complaints procedure has three stages –

1. At Stage One, the staff or agency providing the service will deal with a complaint. We can sort out many complaints this way.
2. If the reply you have received does not bring satisfaction, this can go to Stage Two. A formal investigation by an investigation officer who does not work for us will commence.
3. If this still does not bring resolution, Stage Three can be started. We will refer your complaint and our reply to a review panel made up of two of our officers (not involved in the complaint) and an independent person who will chair the panel.

You can either write directly or we will be happy to send you the complaints form.

All formal complaints should be sent to:

The Complaints Manager

Social Care Complaints Team
Residents First

Waltham Forest Council
Waltham Forest Town Hall
Forest Road
Walthamstow
London
E17 4JF

Tel: 020 8496 3000

Alternative contact: corporate.complaints@walthamforest.gov.uk

You can discuss your problem with your local Councillor or MP at any time. Details of local Councillors and their surgeries are available on Waltham Forest's website at www.walthamforest.gov.uk/councillor-contact.

MP's details are available at www.walthamforest.gov.uk/political-structure-mp.

You may also contact the Local Government Ombudsman if you are not satisfied with the response to your complaint by calling 0845 602 1983 or via their website at www.lgo.org.uk

12. Ofsted

Local Authority Social Care services are regularly inspected by Ofsted. If you have a concern or query about Waltham Forest's Private Fostering Service, you can contact Ofsted at:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 123 1231

0161 618 8524 for mini-com users.

E-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk