

Private Fostering Statement of Purpose

Introduction

Our aim is to raise awareness of private fostering, to provide guidance on our statutory responsibilities, to check that private fostering arrangements are suitable and meet the needs of the child and, if necessary, to prohibit unsuitable carers.

What is Private Fostering?

A Privately fostered child is a child under 16 years old (or 18 years old if disabled) living away from his/her birth parents for longer than 28 days with a person who is not:

- A parent of the child, or
- Someone who has parental responsibility for the child, or
- A close relative of the child

Definition of a Close Relative:

The Children Act 1989 (Section 105) defines a relative in relation to a child as: a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full blood or half blood or by affinity) or step parent (a married step parent, including a civil partnership). This excludes unmarried couples but in practice, unmarried or putative fathers will be included in all decision-making.

Examples of children living in Private Fostering arrangements:

- Local children living apart from their families / Adolescents and teenagers
- African and African Caribbean children with parents or families overseas
- Black and minority ethnic children with parents working or studying in the UK
- Asylum seekers and refugees
- Trafficked children
- Children attending language schools living with host families
- Children at independent boarding schools who do not return home for holidays
- Children living with host families for a variety of reasons (e.g exchanges)
- Children brought in from abroad with a view to adoption (“entrustment”)
- Children who are being cared for by another family whilst their parents are in prison or hospital.

The Legislative Framework relating to Private Fostering:

The Children Act 1989 (part IX) as amended by the Children Act 2004

- Part 9, and Schedule 8
- Regulations made under Part 9 of the Act, as amended by Section 44 of the Children Act 2004

The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 (which replaced the 1991 regulations)

Replacement Guidance Children Act 1989 for private fostering (issued 2006)

National Minimum Standards for Private fostering (18 July 2005)

The Human Rights Act 1998

Working together to Safeguard children - Department of Health 2006

Disqualification from Caring for Children (England) Regulations 2002

Oxfordshire County Council works within the legislative framework to satisfy themselves that the welfare of children who are, or will be, privately fostered within their area is being, or will be, satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted.

Private fostering arrangements will be assessed and monitored to ensure that the private foster carers, their accommodation, and the arrangements for the child are all suitable. The local authority does not approve or register private foster carers but can prohibit a private fostering arrangement in certain circumstances.

Training for Staff

Private fostering is included in Oxfordshire's Safeguarding training. It is a requirement that all permanent Social Work staff attend this training.

New employees will receive basic briefings on private fostering at new staff induction events.

All teams have the opportunity to receive Private Fostering training at team meetings at their manager's request

There is a child protection module delivered to all school staff by the Social Inclusion Team and private fostering is included within this training.

Trainee Social Workers on placement within the Assessment and Family Support Teams are offered private fostering briefings and shadowing opportunities within the Private Fostering Service (dependent on numbers).

Private Fostering Professionals:

The person within the local authority with expertise in private fostering, whom social workers can contact for advice is:

Gemma Jones, gemma.jones@oxfordshire.gov.uk telephone 01865 323126

Contact details for Gemma Jones, Senior Practitioner, Private Fostering are available on Oxfordshire County Council's website and also on Oxfordshire County Council's private fostering publicity material.

The Team Manager responsible for Private fostering is: Gill Evans,
gill.evans@oxfordshire.gov.uk Telephone: 01865 323126

The Area Service Manager responsible for private fostering is: Teresa Rogers,
Teresa.rogers@oxfordshire.gov.uk. Telephone: 01865 816257

Raising Awareness:

There is a programme of communication activities in place, designed to raise the awareness amongst partner agencies about their responsibilities with regard to private fostering. Communication activities are reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

Members of the public are reached via publicity materials distributed to a range of external agencies including schools, health centres and libraries. Each year during "Private Fostering Week" organised by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) Oxfordshire County Council publicises Private Fostering within Oxfordshire.

Private fostering posters and leaflets are displayed in the reception areas at all localities for Oxfordshire's Children, Education and Families Services.

Assessing the Suitability of Private fostering Arrangements:

Oxfordshire County Council will determine the suitability of all aspects of a private fostering arrangement in accordance with Schedule 2 and 3 of the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

As part of the assessment process the following checks must be completed:

- 1) The child will be seen alone in order to ascertain their wishes and feelings
- 2) The parent(s) will be spoken to ascertain their views and wishes and to ensure they are aware of their continued responsibilities towards their child and the expectation that they are to resume care if any concerns arise.
- 3) Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks will be completed for every member of the household over the age of 16
- 4) Checks will be made on Frameworki to identify any current or previous involvement with local Children's Services.
- 5) "Declaration of Suitability Forms" to be completed with all members of the household over the age of 16.
- 6) Risk assessment to be completed for any person within the household who has made a declaration or disclosure on either of the aforementioned forms.
- 7) The family's GP will be written to and asked to inform Oxfordshire County Council if they believe that the carer(s) or any member of their household may pose a risk to the child they are caring for or planning to care for.

Staff should consult the document: Interface protocol between private fostering worker and fieldwork teams which sets out the duties of social workers and the designated worker.

Ensuring that the welfare of privately fostered children is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted:

The welfare of privately fostered children in Oxfordshire is a matter of primary concern to all social work staff in accordance with the ethics and code of social work practice and the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board.

The Private fostering service is reviewed annually and a report is submitted to the Local Safeguarding Board and the Head of Children's Services.

Advice and Support for Parents and Carers of Privately Fostered children:

When Oxfordshire County Council are made aware of a Private Fostering arrangement parents and carers are given the appropriate "Guide to Private Fostering" leaflet which explains their respective responsibilities and Oxfordshire County Council's role in assessing and monitoring Private Fostering arrangements.

Carers are seen and where practical parents are seen to discuss the private fostering arrangement. Parents and carers are, where possible, invited to attend meetings together and are given guidance on issues to be clarified for the best interests of the child (such as finances, dietary requirements, discipline).

Parents and carers are given the contact details for the Private Fostering Service with details of who they, or any other person involved with the child, can contact directly for further information and advice.

Private foster carers have the opportunity to speak to the designated Social Worker to ask for advice and support during each Regulation 8 visit after the child has been seen alone.

Parents or carers along with the child can be referred to the Family and Placement Support Service (FPSS) for more intensive support to re-establish family relationships and/or to maintain the Private Fostering arrangement.

Parents and carers are informed and referred where appropriate to external organisations for additional advice and support.

Children and Carers are encouraged to maintain regular contact with parents. Parents are also given regular updates by, and they have contact details for, the allocated Social Worker who they can contact for support and advice.

Information and support for privately fostered children:

Privately fostered children are sent an age appropriate letter prior to the initial assessment visit explaining the purpose of the private fostering visits. This is explained again during the visit and a leaflet is given which was designed by, and for, privately fostered children.

Children will be able to talk to their designated Social Worker alone at least once every 6 weeks during the Regulation 8 visit. Every privately fostered child is given details of who to contact if they feel at risk and they are given contact details, including the email address and phone number for their allocated worker. They are advised that they can arrange to see their worker in between Regulation 8 visits. In addition visits are made to the child in a range of settings to maximise the opportunity for children to be able to voice any concerns they may have.

Referrals will be made by the allocated Social Worker to other agencies for any additional support that the child requires including CAMHS and the Early Intervention Service. If the child requires additional services under the Children Act 1989 a referral will be made to their local family support team.

Children who do not speak English or whose English is limited are given information about Private Fostering in their first language.

Training for Private Foster Carers:

Private Foster Carers are invited to attend the 2 day "skills to Foster" course which is a course designed for, and attended by, people who are training to become foster carers. The course covers all issues pertinent to carers of other people's children.

Private foster Carers are also invited to join the 'KEEP' 12 week programme for kinship carers which is an additional training and support group

The role of other agencies in assisting the local authority to carry out its duty under section 67(1) of the Children Act 1989:

External agencies are expected to identify Private Fostering arrangements and inform parents and carers of their legal duty to inform the Local Authority. If professionals from external agencies do not believe that the local authority has been informed of a Private Fostering arrangement there is an expectation that they will inform the local authority themselves.

There is a programme of communication activities designed to inform internal and external agencies about Private Fostering and the notification requirements. These activities are assessed and amended each year to ensure that new organisations are approached and the information is reaching organisations that may not be aware of their responsibilities.

Any agency interested in finding out more about private fostering is welcome to contact the Private Fostering Service to request a presentation, leaflets and/ or posters.

Details about private fostering, including information about how to notify the local authority and a printable notification form is available on Oxfordshire County Council's internet page.

Raising awareness within Oxfordshire County Council

Private fostering is included in Safeguarding training which is part of the induction training for all new members of staff and the refresher training for existing staff.

Relevant staff are trained in Oxfordshire through induction training and team visits by members of the private fostering service. At these meetings, details about procedures and relevant paperwork are passed on to individual workers.

Details about private fostering are available on the internal Insite Pages as well as the external internet pages. Communication activities for internal staff are reviewed and updated annually as part of the service's annual review.

Annual Review of the Private fostering Service:

The Private Fostering Service complete an annual review of all paperwork, procedures and training relating to Private fostering to ensure it is up to date and in line with current legislation. This is then passed onto Senior Management to amend and approve.

The PF1 form is submitted to the Department of Education in May every year.

An annual report on Private Fostering is submitted to the Local Safeguarding Board and the Head of Children's Services.

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