



FOSTERING
IN OXFORDSHIRE

Fostering Service
Private Fostering
Statement of Purpose

Working
together
to change
Lives...

Updated June 2019



OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL

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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 after disagreements or arguments, often this is adolescents and teenagers.
- Children whose parents are in the armed forces who stay with friends whilst their parents are serving overseas
- Children whose parents are working or studying elsewhere in the UK.
- 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 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. Oxfordshire County Council will consult with its legal department if considering prohibitions.

Private Fostering Professionals

The professionals within Oxfordshire County Council with expertise in Private Fostering, whom social workers and other professionals can contact for advice are:

Kerry Chrisp, Senior Practitioner, Private Fostering
kerry.chrisp@oxfordshire.gov.uk telephone 01865 323126

Debra White Private Fostering Social Worker
debra.white2@oxfordshire.gov.uk Telephone 01865 323126

Contact details for the Private Fostering Team 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: Elisabeth Reid
elisabeth.reid@oxfordshire.gov.uk Telephone: 01865 323126

The Service Manager responsible for Private Fostering is: Jackie Giles
jackie.giles@oxfordshire.gov.uk. Telephone: 01865 816257

Raising Awareness within Oxfordshire

There is a programme of communication activities in place, designed to raise awareness amongst partner agencies about their responsibilities with regard to

Private Fostering. Communication activities are reviewed and updated on an annual basis alongside the Private Fostering development plan.

Members of the public are reached via publicity materials distributed to a range of external agencies including schools, health centres and libraries. In previous years CoramBAAF (British Association for Adoption and Fostering) organised a Private Fostering week nationwide. This was something that Oxfordshire took part in, however CoramBAAF are no longer doing so. Oxfordshire County Council see the value in highlighting Private Fostering in such a way, so are considering continuing Private Fostering Week without additional support from CoramBAAF.

Private Fostering posters and leaflets are displayed at all localities for Oxfordshire's Children, Education and Families Services.

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

A meeting has been scheduled for June 2019 with OSCB (Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board) to discuss private fostering being included in their safeguarding training, which is delivered to the wider community of health, education and social care staff in Oxfordshire.

All teams have the opportunity to receive Private Fostering training at team meetings at their manager's request. Regular emails are sent to managers requesting attendance to their team meetings to raise awareness about private fostering. At these meetings, details about procedures and relevant paperwork are passed on to individual workers.

There is a child protection module delivered to all school staff and Private Fostering is included within this training.

Trainee Social Workers on placement can request private fostering briefings and shadowing opportunities within the Private Fostering Service (dependent on numbers).

Oxfordshire County Council have a Social Work Academy for newly qualified social workers. The Senior Practitioner for private fostering attends a day of training to promote awareness.

Oxford Brookes University has welcomed a talk on private fostering to their under graduates and post graduates, this will start in January 2020.

This year we have ensured that all social care teams have been reminded about Private Fostering and we have offered to attend a team meeting for every team to speak to staff.

Information about Private Fostering is 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.

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 about the arrangement.
- 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 Liquid Logic 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) "Declaration of Private Foster Carers" to be completed for each Privately Fostered Child.
- 7) Risk assessment to be completed for any person within the household who has made a declaration or disclosure on either of the aforementioned forms.
- 8) 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.

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). Effort must be made to contact parents of language school students to ascertain their wishes and feelings of the arrangement. Currently we send letters via email or post to parents of foreign language school students, in their native language.

Parents and carers are given the contact details for the Private Fostering Service with details of how they, or any other person involved with the child, can contact us 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 (these take place a minimum of 6 weekly).

Parents and carers are informed and referred where appropriate to external organisations for additional advice and support. The Private Fostering social worker can work alongside young people, parents and carers to carry out restorative work, support in improving relationships, setting boundaries and expectations and working towards the child returning home in a safe and appropriate way.

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. As a team we are mindful where appropriate to include all those with parental responsibility for the child or significant others that can offer support. Consideration to family group conference is always given.

Information and support for privately fostered children

Where time allows, 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. Visits are made based on risk and need, in some cases visits are made as frequently as weekly to support families and address individual needs.

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 Help teams. If the child requires additional services under the Children Act 1989, a referral will be made to their local Safeguarding Teams. The private fostering social worker works alongside teams who may hold the child under Child in Need planning or Child Protection planning.

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

Training for Private Foster Carers

Private foster carers are given advice of how to access relevant online training through the OSCB website.

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.

Annual Review of the Private Fostering Service

An annual review of all paperwork, procedures and training relating to Private Fostering is completed to ensure it is up to date and in line with current legislation.

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

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