



Central Bedfordshire Council
and Bedford Borough Council
working together

Private Fostering Statement of Purpose 2009/2010

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in large print and in other languages**

Introduction

Bedfordshire focuses on securing positive outcomes for privately fostered children and young people and reducing any risks to their welfare and safety.

Within Central Bedfordshire, Private Fostering sits within the Adoption and Fostering and the Family Support Services. This is to ensure consistency in assessing the suitability of the private fostering arrangements whilst ensuring the welfare of individual children within those arrangements.

This Statement of Purpose sets out the definition of Private Fostering and how the Local Authority responds to its duties in assessing the suitability of those arrangements and monitoring the welfare of children in its area.

Definition of Private Fostering

If a child under 16 (or 18 if disabled) is looked after for more than 28 days under a private arrangement (made without the involvement of the Local Authority) in the home of someone who is not a close relative or guardian, the child is privately fostered. Relatives are defined as parents, step-parents, siblings, brothers or sisters of a parent and grandparents.

Private fostering is used in the UK as a means of providing care for children whose parents cannot undertake their day to day care. Children who are privately fostered include children with parents overseas, children from diverse communities with parents working or studying in the UK, unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children, trafficked children, local children living apart from their parents, adolescents estranged from their families, children attending language schools, children at independent boarding schools who do not return home for the holidays, children living with host families and children brought in from abroad with a view to adoption. These are private fostering arrangements between the person with parental responsibility and the carer. However, the Local Authority has a responsibility to check and monitor these arrangements and support the welfare of the child involved.

Local Authority Duties and Functions

The duties of local authorities in relation to Private Fostering are set out in the Children Act 1989, the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 and amendments are contained within the Children Act 2004. The National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005 set out a number of standards to be met by all local authorities in discharging their duties which cover the key areas of:

- Statement on private fostering
- Notification
- Safeguarding and promoting welfare
- Advice and support
- Monitoring compliance

Bedfordshire County Council has established policies and procedures on Private Fostering which set out how the authority discharges its duties in relation to the legislation. These may be found on the Bedfordshire County Council website.

The Local Authority must:

- promote awareness amongst professionals and the general public of their duty to notify the local authority of any actual or proposed Private Fostering arrangement
- respond to notifications and take appropriate action in line with the regulations
- take appropriate action in cases of non-notification where it appears that an offence may have been committed ensuring the paramountcy of the best interests of the child
- determines the suitability of all aspects of the arrangements in accordance with regulations in particular that the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted, that the proposed or actual private foster carer is capable of looking after the child (or children), that the members of the household are suitable and that there is no risk of harm posed to either the child who is to be privately fostered or any children living within the household.
- where necessary undertake an assessment under S17 of the Children Act 1989 where a child may not be achieving a satisfactory level of health or development without the provision of services
- offer advice and support to Private Foster Carers and parents of privately fostered children to assist them to meet the needs of privately fostered children and to the privately fostered children so that they can access advice and support when needed and that the children participate in decisions about their lives
- monitor how it discharges its duties in relation to private fostering and appoint an officer for this purpose and keep appropriate records of the number of privately fostered children, any disqualifications, prohibitions or requirements imposed on private foster carers and decisions about offences and whether or not to refuse consent to a disqualified person privately fostering a child.

Responsibility and Accountability for the Service

The Disruptions and Private Fostering Co-ordinator is responsible for the coordination of the service and ensuring that an ongoing publicity campaign is maintained. She undertakes some assessments along with social workers within the assessment team of the Fostering Service.

Central Bedfordshire Council has appointed a private fostering co-ordinator to act as a source of expertise and advice and offer training and advice to staff across Children's Services. Assessments of the suitability of arrangements are carried out by the specialist co-ordinator or by fostering social workers with particular expertise in assessments whereas assessments of children are undertaken jointly with Intake and Assessment or Family Support teams in accordance with the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families.

The Head of Adoption & Fostering Service has the responsibility of signing off private fostering arrangements. If there are serious concerns regarding the suitability of the arrangement, the Head of Service will consult with the Assistant Director for Children's Specialist Services. Following such consultation, the Head of Adoption & Fostering may issue any requirements, conditions, prohibitions or reasons for not granting consent for someone who has been disqualified.

Notification Process

The Council has established a detailed programme of communication activities for both professionals and members of the public to inform them of the definition of a privately fostered child, the notification requirements and the notification procedure, its benefits and possible consequences of non-notification. The Local Safeguarding Children Board plays an active role in the promotion of the notification requirements with professionals and includes the Private Fostering Policy and Procedures on its website.

Notification in respect of a private fostering arrangement to the fostering service is received from a variety of sources: through self referral from a carer, parent or child, from Intake & Assessment, from Family Support Teams, from schools and from health professionals.

The authority must respond to any notifications by visiting within 7 working days and preparing a written report. The prospective private foster carer, members of the household and the child must be seen and the suitability of the arrangements assessed. The child should be seen alone and his/her parents also spoken to and, ideally, visited.

Assessment Process

The Local Authority must complete an assessment of the suitability of the arrangement within 42 days and thereafter visit at a minimum of every 6 weeks for the first year, thereafter every 12 weeks. The child should be seen and spoken to alone. The Local Authority must provide advice, information and support for all private foster carers, privately fostered children and their parents and guardians.

On receipt of notification, a worker from the assessment team within the Fostering Service or the dedicated private fostering co-ordinator is allocated to assessment. This person will complete a joint visit with the allocated child care social worker or on their own if there is not allocated child care social worker. This visit will take place within 7 working days of notification.

If there is an allocated child care social worker, they will complete an initial and core assessment for the child/young person. The fostering social worker/dedicated private fostering co-ordinator will complete an assessment with the prospective private foster carer/s.

If there is no allocated child care social worker, then the fostering social worker/dedicated private fostering co-ordinator will complete the initial and core assessment for the child/young person and an assessment of the private fostering arrangement.

The assessment will be completed within 42 days of notification or as soon as the enhanced CRB disclosures are received on the proposed private foster carers and members of their household aged 16 and over.

Central Bedfordshire Council has a range of standardised forms to ensure consistency in the assessment process and to assist families in establishing an agreement with the private foster carer over issues such as day to day responsibility, medical treatment and finances.

Appeals Process

The authority is required to have a comprehensive appeals process where private foster carers have the opportunity to appeal against requirements, conditions, prohibitions or disqualifications placed upon them.

As part of the assessment process, if it becomes clear that the private foster carer will have grounds to lodge an appeal under Schedule 8 of the Children Act 1989, a face to face discussion will be held prior to the decision being formally issued to advise the private foster carer that this is the case, their right to appeal, how they may do that and the set timescales.

Statutory Visiting Arrangements

The assessing social worker undertaking the assessment of the proposed arrangement undertakes the six weekly visits to the household. If a child has a social worker from any of the child care teams, then this worker carries out the visit to see the child and records the statutory visits. It is important that the child is seen alone.

If the child does not have a child care social worker, then the assessing social worker carries out the six weekly visits to the child and records these statutory visits.

If and when the private fostering arrangement is endorsed, then the ongoing six weekly visits (in the first year – 3 monthly thereafter) are carried out by a fostering support social worker.

The allocated social worker ensures that the private foster carer, parents and those with parental responsibility receive appropriate support and advice. The social worker can access translation services and materials in different languages where English is not the first language.

The fostering support social worker visits the private foster carer on a six weekly basis. The worker uses the supervision template to record the visits and ensures the private foster carer received a typed copy of the notes which they sign.

Publicity

A range of initiatives is used to highlight the notification arrangements to staff within Central Bedfordshire, partner agencies and the public.

- Dedicated page on Central Bedfordshire Council website
- Private Fostering Awareness Campaign each autumn with letters and visits to local school and universities
- Presentations to all teams within Children's Specialist Services
- Leaflets on private fostering widely distributed within the community
- Information on private fostering and its requirements circulated via LSCB with encouragement to fellow professionals in partner agencies to notify Central Bedfordshire Council of any possible private fostering arrangement
- Adverts in local papers

Support and Training

There is no formal training programme for private foster carers. However, private foster carers are encouraged to access the training programme designed for foster carers. Courses available include first aid, valuing diversity, safeguarding children and safe caring. Training is offered through supervision visits by the fostering social worker.

Private foster carers have access to ongoing advice and support from their allocated social worker. Privately fostered children have access to this same named social worker or to their own child care social worker. They can attend events organised by the Children's Participation Officer and also have access to an advocate through a commissioned service from the National Youth Advocacy Service. Information packs have been put together and distributed to privately fostered children. Children's views about their living arrangements are constantly sought by their social workers. Support and advice are available to children's parents and others with parental responsibility. Parents are informed when an arrangement is agreed and social workers are proactive in maintaining contact with them.

The mentoring scheme which is newly established within the Fostering Service will also be accessible to Private Foster Carers to be able to discuss aspects of caring and peer support.

Staff Training

Support to other professionals is provided by fostering social workers, skilled and trained in fostering support and supervision. The training programme is open to all social workers and additional training is provided through LSCB training programme for other practitioners.

The Disruptions and Private Fostering Co-ordinator regularly attends team meetings within Children's Social Care to give refresher training as and when required.

CWDC induction training is undertaken for all new staff with their managers.

Quality Assurance

Private Fostering services are subject to inspection by Ofsted and Bedfordshire County Council had its first Private Fostering inspection in October 2008. The service was judged 'outstanding' by Ofsted. In addition to official inspection, there are arrangements in place to ensure the monitoring of arrangements.

All children who are notified as being Privately Fostered are entered on the SWIFT database under the category of Private Fostering. These children are then tracked by Team Managers and Heads of Service to ensure that reviews are timely and that children are seen regularly and spoken to alone.

A regular programme of file auditing is undertaken by managers and Private Fostering sits on the work programme of the Audit Manager to undertake internal audits on specific themes.

Policies and procedures on Private Fostering are freely available on the Central Bedfordshire Council website and are updated and reviewed regularly to cover new areas of good practice.

Private Foster Carers receive copies of the Service User Feedback Survey questionnaire to complete. The analysis of this survey is an additional tool for the monitoring the quality of the service and feeds into senior management team meetings which identify areas for improvement and innovation.



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Approved:

Signed.....

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Dated.....

Signed.....

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Dated.....