



Northumberland
County Council

Private Fostering
Statement of Purpose
2019/20

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This statement sets out how the duties and functions in relation to private fostering are carried out in Northumberland.
- 1.2 This Statement of Purpose is a requirement of the National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Private Fostering, Standard 1 issued in 2005 which states that there is a clear description and guide to the service for the public, professionals, council members and external organisations.

Northumberland Children's Triage will act as the front door for enquiries and notifications about private fostering: childrentriage@northumberland.gov.uk or alternatively call Onecall: 01670 536400

- 1.3 Initial enquiries are screened by Northumberland Children's Triage and then allocated to a Social Worker so that an assessment and statutory checks/visits can be made and support for the child, parent and private foster carer can be provided.
- 1.4 The appointed Private Fostering Lead is Su Kaur (Principal Social Worker) who is managed by the Head of Safeguarding.

2 Background

- 2.1 The existing legislation relevant to private fostering is set out in Part 9 of and Schedule 8, of the Children Act 1989 with amendments to section 67 and Schedule 8 of the Act made under section 44 of the Children Act 2004. New regulations under The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 came into force in July 2005. These regulations are accompanied by guidance from the above Acts and National Minimum Standards for private fostering against which the local authority will be inspected. Further guidance is provided in Working Together (2018) and Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, 2011.
- 2.2 The above legislation strengthened and enhanced the previous private fostering notification scheme and requires all local authorities to be more proactive in identifying arrangements in their area.

3. Definition of private fostering

- 3.1 A private fostering arrangement is essentially one that is made privately (that is to say without the involvement of a local authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Private foster carers may be from the extended family such as a cousin or great aunt.

- 3.2 However, a person who is a relative under the Children Act 1989 i.e. a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or step-parent will not be a private foster carer. A private foster carer may be a friend of the family, the parent of a friend of the child, or someone previously unknown to the child's family who is willing to privately foster a child.
- 3.3 The child is not defined as privately fostered unless the carer has accommodated the child for 28 days or more or if the carers has accommodated the child for less than 28 days and does not intend to do so for a longer period than 28 days. Private Fostering arrangements do not cease where a child spends an occasional period with a parent or close relative but otherwise is ordinarily living with the private foster carer.
- 3.4 This 28 day period is intended to ensure that families are able to make arrangements for a child to stay with their extended family or friends without involvement from the local authority. Clearly such involvement would be totally inappropriate where children are having sleepovers or short term holidays / breaks with school friends, for example. The 28 day period ensures that only the most exceptional of circumstances need to be notified.
- 3.5 The private foster carer becomes responsible for providing the day to day care of the child in a way which will promote and safeguard his welfare. Overarching responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the privately fostered child remains with the parent or other person with parental responsibility.
- 3.6 Children and young people who are privately fostered are not 'children in care' but will often be children 'in need' because of their circumstances. The local authority does not 'approve' private foster carers, however they have a duty to satisfy themselves that children who are or will be privately fostered are cared for in a safe environment with a carer who understands and meets the needs of the child.

4 Examples of Private Fostering

- 4.1 Examples of where a child might be privately fostered are as follows (this list is not exclusive):
- An adolescent is living with friends as a result of family breakdown
 - Younger children are placed with friends of the family on a long term basis following family breakdown or parental ill-health
 - Children whose parents work unsociable hours making it difficult for them to use mainstream day care.
 - Students who are living with a carer for over 28 days

- Children in boarding schools who reside with another family during school holidays
- Unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children

5. Northumberland Council's Statement:

- 5.1 Northumberland Children's Services is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children who are privately fostered under the terms of the Children Act 1989; the Children Act 2004; the accompanying regulations and the National Minimum Standards for private fostering arrangements.
- 5.2 Whilst the ultimate responsibility for children who are privately fostered rests with their parents or those with parental responsibility, we will seek to work in partnership with parents, carers and each privately fostered child to ensure that the child is able to thrive in a safe and caring environment.
- 5.3 In line with the duties and responsibilities bestowed on the local authority, we will assess the needs of every child who is known to be privately fostered and assess the carer's suitability to look after the child. The authority does not 'approve' private foster carers but a record will be kept of all those who privately foster and appropriate guidance and assistance will be offered to all carers, parents and their children.
- 5.4 Where a child's welfare is not satisfactorily safeguarded the authority can impose a prohibition or requirement on the carer and/or remove the child if necessary. In these cases, its first duty will be to return the child to their parent(s) or those with parental responsibility or a close relative so long as it is safe and in the child's best interest to do so.
- 5.5 In all cases the promotion of contact between the child and his/her parents, family members and friends will be encouraged where this is appropriate. In all cases the child's racial, religious and cultural needs will be recognised and addressed.
- 5.6 Children assessed as in need and in private fostering arrangements will be entitled to the same services as any other child in need.
- 5.7 The provisions of Schedule 7 to the Children Act 1989 prescribe the usual fostering limit of not more than three children. This provision applies to private fostering arrangements as set out in the Replacement Children Act 1989 Guidance on Private Fostering (2005) p.4.

6. Local authority's duties and functions

6.1 Essentially, the local authority is required to satisfy themselves of the suitability of all private fostering arrangements.

In particular the local authority will:

- Receive and respond appropriately to notifications of private fostering arrangements.
- Respond appropriately to information about a private fostering arrangement where there has been no notification.
- Carry out visits to the child within 7 working days of receiving the notification and then no less than every 6 weeks in the first year, thereafter no less than every 12 weeks.
- Meet with the carer and parent, or person(s) with parental responsibility, and determine the duration of the arrangement.
- Assess the suitability of the arrangement and the private carer and all members of the carer's household.
- See the child alone and ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child (considered in the light of his/her age and understanding)
- Ensure that the arrangements for contact (with all persons significant to the child) have been agreed.
- Ensure that the child is registered with a GP and has access to appropriate health and dental care according to the child's needs.
- Ensure the child is receiving appropriate education and has access to out of home activities and leisure pursuits as required.
- Ensure that the child's racial, religious and cultural needs are being addressed.
- Ensure that the financial arrangements are satisfactory: agreements for how parental responsibility will be exercised have been made and how day to day decisions will be carried out between the carer and the parent.
- Ensure that the standards of care provided for each child is satisfactory and that it will meet the child's developmental needs.
- Carry out statutory visits as specified in the Act and visit at other times when required or when reasonably requested by the carer, parent or child.
- Ensure young people, nearing 18 years, who are privately fostered and disabled are offered an assessment for eligibility for adult community care services.
- Offer any other advice, guidance and support as needed to assist in the arrangement.
- Where the authority is not satisfied with the arrangements it will take such steps that are reasonably practicable to either return the child to the care of his/her parents or to consider to what extent they should exercise their functions under the Children Act. Additionally the authority has powers to prohibit or impose requirements on the private arrangement if this safeguards and protects the child.

- The authority will regularly monitor the way it discharges its duties and functions and improve practice where this is indicated.

7. How the duties will be delivered

- 7.1 Detailed procedures set out how Northumberland will carry out its duties and functions.
https://www.proceduresonline.com/northumberlandcs/p_private_fost.html?zoom_highlight=private+fostering. These explain the statutory requirements and advise workers of the scheme of delegation and appropriate actions to take to safeguard and promote the welfare of all privately fostered children in their area. Additional resources are available at https://www.proceduresonline.com/northumberlandcs/local_resources.html
- 7.2 The authority has agreed protocols and proformas for receiving and dealing with notifications from the public and other agencies and of acknowledging these with the referrer. It has agreed the allocation of private fostering work and the recording and data collection of private fostering cases as required. All private fostering cases known to the authority will be allocated.
- 7.3 The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) have been fully informed of the responsibilities of the local authority and through the activities of the Private Fostering Lead will review the service on an annual basis to ensure it is meeting assessed need.
- 7.4 Children's Triage will act as the front door for enquiries and notifications about private fostering: childrentriage@northumberland.gov.uk or Onecall: 01670 536400
- 7.5 On receipt of a referral or notification to Children's Triage, an initial screening will be undertaken and then passed to a Social Worker to undertake a Private Fostering Assessment and begin the process of completing appropriate checks on the carer (and members of the household).
- 7.6 Once the case has been identified as a private fostering arrangement and the appropriate assessments and checks have been completed, the case will be held by a Locality Social Worker who will carry out statutory visits and provide support to the child, parent and private foster carer.
- 7.7 The Private Fostering Lead will work closely with Children's Social Work to further develop the service and prepare for future inspection.
- 7.8 Each year the authority will promote private fostering across the city using a variety of methods. This includes distributing posters and flyers to community venues, regularly updating information on the council website, via social media and using events such as Private Fostering Week to bring

this information to the attention of members of the public. The authority will also raise awareness about Private Fostering with the council's Directorates, partners and other voluntary and community organisations via briefings and awareness sessions. The authority will continue to raise awareness about Private Fostering with Northumberland's schools and colleges.

- 7.8 The role of the Private Fostering Lead has been allocated to the Principal Social Worker who will undertake the monitoring functions as described in the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. Working with the Head of Safeguarding, they will manage regular audits of the service, which will include any information concerning disqualification prohibitions or requirements imposed and report annually to the NSSP and to the Director of Children's Services.

8. Staff Training

- 8.1 Northumberland Children's and Learning will ensure that all newly qualified social workers have a clear and defined understanding of private fostering.
- 8.2 The NSSP will provide multi agency awareness for all voluntary and statutory agencies working with children and young people.
- 8.3 The Locality Children's Service Managers will sign off decisions about the overall suitability of an arrangement
- 8.4 The assessment of the child, the carer and the accommodation will be undertaken under the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families with accompanying DBS and other statutory checks, to verify the suitability of the carer and their household. Any concerns over the suitability of the arrangement or carer will be taken up the management line to the Head of Service (Children's Social Work).

9. Persons within the local authority with expertise in private fostering

- 9.1 The private Fostering Lead and the Head of Safeguarding.
- 9.2 All completed assessments of privately fostered children and their arrangement will be seen by the Private Fostering Lead. In cases where there is doubt as to the suitability of the arrangement and/or concerns about the arrangement they will be reported to the Head of Service who will make a decision on the arrangement.
- 9.3 The appointed Private Fostering Lead in relation to private fostering services is Su Kaur. The Private Fostering Lead will report directly to the Head of Safeguarding and will report annually to the Director of Children's Services and to the Northumberland Safeguarding Children Committee

(NSSC).

10. Promotion of Notification Arrangements

- 10.1 The local authority has a duty to promote awareness of the requirement to notify private fostering arrangements with other agencies and within the wider local community.
- 10.2 A range of initiatives will be used to highlight the notification arrangements to staff within Northumberland Council, their partners and with the public.

This will include the following:

- Information on the Council Internet
- Information on Northumberland Website and social media
- General public leaflet
- Information for children & young people
- Leaflet for professionals
- Posters and flyers to be sent to public venues e.g. libraries, GP surgeries, Housing Offices etc
- Information for elected members (about private fostering and local authority responsibilities).
- Information for parents
- Awareness raising with Schools & College

11. Determining the suitability of all aspects of a private fostering arrangement in accordance with the regulations

- 11.1 The local authority's [procedures](#) detail the response that will be required when notifications are received.
- 11.2 On receipt of a referral or notification to Children's Triage, initial screening will be undertaken. A visit to the child, the proposed carer and the accommodation will be made within seven working days of the notification or within six weeks (and not more than 13 weeks) if notification is given in advance.
- 11.3 If the parent is contactable, efforts will be made to meet them within this timescale. In all cases the local authority will consider whether the direct provision of services or a referral to another agency would remove the necessity for the parent to have the child privately fostered. Where feasible, with the parent's consent and providing it is in the child's best interest social care will make such a referral or enquiry.
- 11.4 Where the child is to remain in private foster care or move to such an

arrangement, the assessing Social Worker will undertake the Private Fostering Assessment as prescribed under the *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* ('the framework'). This assessment will begin the process of undertaking appropriate checks on the carer i.e.

- A DBS check (and include checks on all those over 16 years in the household)
- Child protection checks
- Enquiries as to whether any member of the household has been disqualified from caring for children
- A medical assessment of the carer
- The taking of two independent references of the carer and his/her family, one of which will be visited.

11.5 The assessment will also gather as much information as possible as required under the regulations, including the duration of the Private Fostering arrangement and the arrangements in place to safeguard the child. Where possible, the child will be seen alone and his/her wishes and feelings ascertained. The assessment will include a brief assessment of the child's needs and the carer's ability to provide care, under the three dimensions of the framework (see below).

11.6 Once the case has been identified as private fostering a Social Worker will complete a Private Fostering Arrangement Record and any outstanding checks. The suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangement will be evaluated under the three dimensions of the framework. Specifically the suitability of the carer will be assessed within the 'parenting capacity' dimension and will include additional checks relevant to the arrangement taken from the BAAF form F2.

11.7 The suitability of the accommodation and other members of the household will be assessed under the 'family and environmental factors' dimension and include consideration of whether there are any members of the household whose behaviour or other difficulties would prejudice the welfare of the child in question. The child's needs will be addressed under the 'child's developmental needs' dimension and will include an assessment under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

11.8 A decision on the suitability of the arrangement will be made within 42 working days of the notification or as soon as the outcome from the DBS check is known, whichever is the sooner.

11.9 Separate case files and records will be maintained on the private foster carer and the child, although the two will be partied on the electronic system so that links can be affected if general enquiries are made. Children in the same arrangement will not be partied together, and to avoid any breach of confidentiality, records on one child's file will not be

copied into another.

- 11.10 In every case the authority will encourage all parties to enter into an agreement to confirm the arrangements as described above. This written agreement will be reviewed at least annually and sooner if required.
- 11.11 In assessing the suitability of the private foster carer, reference will be made to the standards of care required of mainstream foster carers (as identified in BAAF Form F) and the care standards required of child-minders and day care providers. However, it is recognised that due to the nature of the arrangement not all private foster carers will meet these standards, albeit the child is assessed as 'safe' and well placed. In these cases every effort will be made by Children's Services to encourage the carer to improve the conditions within the arrangement and to promote the developmental and other needs of the child. This will include addressing such areas as hygiene, lifestyle and discipline. Additional training will be considered for the carer if this is appropriate. If the child is in need, assistance under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 will be considered.
- 11.12 In cases of doubt or uncertainty about the standards of care, the case will be referred to the Team Manager and subsequently to the Head of Service.
- 11.13 In cases where the suitability of the carer, members of the household or the accommodation is unsatisfactory the authority will consider returning the child to the parents or suitable relative so long as it is in the interests of the child to do so; or the authority will consider exercising any other functions under the Children Act 1989 as required. This may include an assessment and provision of support under Section 17 or removal to alternative accommodation under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. The authority is also aware of the provisions under the acts to impose requirements or prohibitions as necessary.
- 11.14 In accordance with the regulations, the authority will undertake statutory visits as required and continue to assess the needs of the child in relation to his/ her care. The duties and functions as described above will be adhered to and the outcome of each visit, recorded on the Integrated Children's System.
- 11.15 Where the authority is made aware of a private arrangement but the relevant notifications have not been received, it will make every effort to encourage the respective carer and parent(s) or those with parental responsibility to inform the authority as required and seek to work in partnership with all parties. In cases where the officer of the authority is obstructed in their duties, consideration will be made as to whether an offence has been committed and whether to apply for a warrant to inspect the premises and see the child. The authority may also wish to consider prosecution of the carer within six months if they continue to fail to notify

Children's Services and in these cases legal advice will be sought.

12. The procedures in place to ensure the Local Authority is satisfied that the welfare of privately fostered children is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted.

12.1 As stated above, on receipt of a referral the duty social worker will begin enquiries to ascertain whether the child is to be or is already privately fostered. A visit to the child, the proposed carer and the accommodation will be made within seven working days of notification or within six weeks before arrangement, if notification is given in advance.

12.2 The local authority will assess the needs of the child under the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families using the Private Fostering Assessment which will be completed within 42 working days of the notification date.

12.3 The authority will seek to engage the child's parents in a dialogue, which will ensure that they, or any other person exercising parental authority, are fully aware of the implications of placing their child in private foster care. This will include agreeing the duration of the arrangement and putting into place financial agreements; consents to health treatment; school trips etc and other arrangements to maintain the care of their child throughout the arrangement. The authority will also seek to secure adequate contact arrangements so that the parents can keep in touch and monitor their child's progress and participate in decisions relating to the arrangement.

12.4 Providing the child is assessed as safe and protected within the arrangement and that private fostering is seen to be the best alternative form of care, visits to the child will be as a minimum at the intervals specified in the regulations. The child will be seen alone unless it is considered inappropriate. During these visits the child's wishes and feelings will be sought and noted.

12.5 Each child will be given a unique identification number and a separate case file/electronic record. A report will be made after each visit and where the visit is in accordance with the statutory requirements, it should address the areas specifically stated in the regulations, namely that:

- The child has been seen alone and his/her wishes and views recorded
- The contact arrangements between the child and his/her parents or other significant persons are satisfactory
- The child's religious, racial, cultural and linguistic needs are being met
- The child's physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural needs are being met.
- The child is receiving appropriate health care and any health

conditions are addressed; he/she is up to date with their immunisations; consent has been obtained for any treatment necessary. etc.

- The child is receiving appropriate education according to their age and that any difficulties the child encounters in school/college are being addressed.

The report should include the conclusions drawn, whether the child was seen alone and, where appropriate, the reasons why the officer considered it inappropriate to see the child alone.

- 12.6 The child will be provided with information in a format appropriate to the child's age and understanding about their status and rights. This will include contact details of the named worker who will be visiting them and a contact in case of emergency. The child will be given a copy of a care plan which will be explained to the child and which will identify key people who will support them during their arrangement.
- 12.7 Access to the National Adolescent Service (NAS) will be offered where appropriate and where the child is deemed to be in need.
- 12.8 All children living in a private fostering arrangement will be provided with an information pack which includes a feedback questionnaire. The findings from the feedback will be used to further develop the service to children and young people.
- 13. Arrangements for advice and information for private foster carers, (including prospective private foster carers) parents and others with parental responsibility and others concerned with the privately fostered child.**
- 13.1 Ideally, if notification is received in advance, a worker will visit the prospective carer, child and parents before a private arrangement is made. In these cases advice and support will be given to ensure the prospective arrangement is appropriate or whether any support or referral to another agency would reduce the necessity for the child to be privately fostered. In all cases consideration will be given to ensure that arrangement is in the child's best interests.
- 13.2 The social worker will, on each visit thereafter, ensure that the child's needs are being met and that the arrangement is and continues to be satisfactory. This will include giving advice, guidance and support as necessary - to all parties - and which will be provided in different languages and formats as appropriate. If the arrangement proves unsatisfactory the parents will be advised and supported to make alternative arrangements.
- 13.3 Private foster carers and prospective private foster carers will be advised of their entitlement to child and other financial benefits. The worker will seek to ensure that the carer is adequately recompensed for the care of

the child and negotiate with the parent or persons with parental responsibility to secure an arrangement whereby the child maintains an appropriate lifestyle according to his/her needs.

- 13.4 The worker will ensure that the child and carer have access to support from the education services whether this be nursery/school or college; the health service (including the Health Visitor and GP), housing, youth services and any other organisation connected to the child that is appropriate.
 - 13.5 Specific attention will be paid to address the child's religious, racial, cultural and linguistic needs as appropriate. Advice to enable the carer to promote the child's heritage and contact with the birth family and other significant friends and family will be offered and links made, where appropriate to keep the child in touch with organisations and groups within the community, which promote their culture and religious persuasion.
 - 13.6 The carer will be encouraged to meet the child's needs in accordance with the child's age, sex, disability, medical condition, any learning disabilities and general development. Where appropriate the carer will be offered training and support to address these issues.
 - 13.7 The carer and the parents will be given the contact details of the designated social worker and information about who to contact in an emergency. In turn, the worker will seek to ensure that all agencies connected to the child are aware of the child's legal status on a need to know basis and with the consent of the child and his/her parents.
- 14. Arrangements for information and support to privately fostered children**
- 14.1 Children who are privately fostered will be given a copy of the children's care plan, explaining why they are placed in private care and to whom they can turn for support and advice. The care plan will be translated into the child's first language where appropriate and be presented in a format appropriate to their age and level of understanding. Each child will have regular contact with the social worker (private fostering) who will explain the purpose of their visits and support the child in the arrangement. Children's Services will be aware that children in private foster care will have their own views on their care and status, which will need to be handled sensitively and balanced against their overall safety and welfare whilst in private care.
 - 14.2 Young people with a disability who are approaching 18 years and moving towards independence and adulthood will be offered services and in line with the transition planning (for disabled) young people and in accordance with Section 24(2)(e) of the Children Act 1989 respectively.

14.3 Where required, access to the advocacy service will be made available.

15. Training available to private foster carers (including prospective private foster carers).

15.1 Support for Private Foster Carers will be provided on a case by case basis and will depend on the needs that arise from assessment and from the Regulation 8 visits.

15.2 In some cases, it may be appropriate to refer the Private Foster Carer to local adult education or college training courses or to offer one to one mentoring or support to individuals.

16. The role of other agencies in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of privately fostered children

16.1 Other agencies have a clear role in assisting the local authority to carry out its duty under section 67 (1) of the Children Act 1989, in particular through notifying the authority of an arrangement where they are not satisfied that the local authority have been, or will be, notified of that arrangement.

16.2 A dialogue will be established with other agencies through the NSSC to raise awareness and promote the notification of private fostering cases. Training about private fostering will be delivered bi annually to agencies through NSSC.

16.3 Northumberland Early Help Service is also committed to engaging nurseries, schools and colleges in working together to support privately fostered children and guidance will be issued to all staff on the council's website.

16.4 We recognise that there is a risk some agencies may feel compromised in giving information about a privately fostered child to the authority without the full consent of the parent or carer. Therefore, all guidance and publicity about private fostering produced by the local authority reinforces the fact that the welfare of the child is paramount and that the failure to notify the local authority could constitute an offence.

16.5 In all cases where a child moves to another local authority or the carer moves with a child known to be privately fostered, the authority will send written notification of that move to the appropriate authority. Where the private carer has moved between authorities and this is known, the authority will undertake checks to ensure the carer is not disqualified or prohibited from caring for children or that there are any outstanding

requirements on their records.

17. All relevant staff have an appropriate understanding of the local authority's duties and functions in relation to private fostering.

17.1 This written statement of purpose will be made available to all staff and reviewed annually with the Director of Services.

17.2 Operational guidance is available on the [Northumberland County Council](#) website, [Procedures](#) and in written form where required. Staff are able to contact the private fostering lead for advice about private fostering.