

Private Fostering

Statement of Purpose



November 2012

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this Statement of Purpose is to ensure awareness of Northumberland County Council's duties and functions in relation to Private Fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out.

This document is designed to meet the needs of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, Standard 1. It aims to provide a clear guide in relation to Private Fostering for professionals, the public, council members and external organisations. The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually, through Northumberland County Council's Business Sub Group of the Safeguarding Children Board.

Any comments or enquiries regarding this Statement of Purpose should be referred to Audrey Johnson, Children's Services Manager. Email: Audrey.johnson@northumberland.gov.uk

This Statement should be read in conjunction with Northumberland's procedures and guidance for Private Fostering.

Northumberland's safeguarding children's Board is required through primary legislation and regulation to ensure there are appropriate policies and procedures for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. Working Together 2010 specifically notes that privately fostered children should be an area of specific interest for the Safeguarding Board and that arrangements are managed in compliance with procedures for safeguarding the welfare of children. .

Regulation

Northumberland's private fostering service is regulated by Ofsted. Their contact details are: Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Postal Address:
Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 1231231

Northumberland holds statutory powers and responsibilities as a local authority in relation to private fostering arrangements. Children's Social Care, a division of Children's Services, exercises these duties and responsibilities in relation to children who are privately fostered. The service works to ensure that equal opportunities are incorporated into all aspects of service delivery and all prospective foster carers are assessed and supported on the basis of the needs of the individual privately fostered child/young person regardless of race, religion, class, marital status, sexual orientation or disability.

Mission Statement

Northumberland's mission is to promote awareness of Private Fostering requirements in order to improve notification rates of children who are privately fostered. Improved notification rates will enable us to better safeguard the welfare of children who are being privately fostered in Northumberland and help to improve outcomes for these children.

1. Definition of a privately fostered child

In the definition provided by The Children Act 1989 a privately fostered child means:

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

- A parent of his/hers;
- A person who is not a parent of his/hers but who has parental responsibility for him/her;
- A close relative of his/hers, i.e. a close relative **is** an aunt/uncle/step-parent/grandparent/sibling but **not** a cousin of great-aunt/uncle
- And she/he has been cared for an accommodated by that person; for 28 days or more; or
- The period of actual private fostering is less than 28 days but the private foster carer intends to privately foster him/her for a period of 28 days or more.

In the case of a child with a disability the upper age limit is 18 years.

A child is **not** privately fostered if the person caring for him/her

- Has done so for a period of less than 28 days
- Does not intend to do so for any longer than 28 days

For the purposes of the Act, parent includes unmarried or putative fathers. Relative means as stated above, whether by full, half-blood or by affinity or step-parent. Affinity refers to the relationship resulting from marriage, between the husband and the blood relations of the wife and also between the wife and the blood relations of the husband.

An arrangement is deemed as private fostering if it meets the criteria above. A privately fostered child is not Looked After by the Local Authority. Parents and/or others with parental responsibility for the child retain and exercise full parental responsibility. They make the arrangement with the private foster carer for the child to be privately fostered.

Some common examples of private fostering arrangements are:

- Children living with a family friend
- Teenagers living with a friend's family or with the family of a girlfriend or boyfriend
- Children/young people with families overseas
- Children/young people whose parents are studying or working unsocial hours

2. The local authority's duties and functions under the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005

Local authorities have a duty to be notified about private fostering arrangements in their area and to satisfy themselves that the welfare of children who are being privately fostered in their area is safeguarded and promoted and to ensure that such advice is given to those caring for them as appears to the authority to be needed (The Children Act 1989 Section 67(1)).

3. Promoting awareness of Notification Requirements

Promoting awareness of notification requirements is a continual process in Northumberland. Throughout the year awareness raising takes place with a wide range of groups, organisations, professionals, the community and individuals, including the voluntary sector, churches, GPs, libraries. Publicity mediums include local and regional press, Northumberland News and Northumberland County Council central publication for residents. NCC website, facebook, twitter and other multi-media platforms are utilized. One of the press releases is made to coincide with the annual BAAF Somebody Else's Child campaign.

A publicity run takes place in Northumberland twice yearly. In September 2012 the publicity material included a case study and message from the Lead Councilor for Children. This highlighted the needs of privately fostered children and encouraged notifications of privately fostered arrangements.

Briefings have taken place with social care staff, health and education throughout the year, through the FACT newsletter, schools newsletters, at multi agency training events and face to face. This has led to further opportunities being identified to promote awareness, for example through the Travellers Practitioner Groups, conference and website and the County Youth Forum.

Northumberland leaflets, for carers, children, parents and professionals have been updated. A Northumberland poster has also been updated. There is also a flow chart for professionals to assist in determining when to refer. All the publicity material includes information about how to identify private fostering arrangements and a central contact point number so that arrangements are identified appropriately and notification data can be compiled. These will be shared in locality briefing sessions with professionals and community groups which are planned for the first quarter of 2013 and will be included in publicity runs.

Northumberland County Council's websites feature Private Fostering, including information and support for children, carers and parents. The website is reviewed and updated annually.

Pupils at a Northumberland school are producing a video and CD which will be put on Northumberland's organization and development elearning site. It will also be made available on the Northumberland website and will be made available to professionals through training events and awareness raising events.

4. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children who are being privately fostered

Within 7 days of receipt of notification of a proposed or actual private fostering arrangement an initial assessment is carried out by a social worker from the relevant locality social work team for where the child resides with the private foster carer. Any additional identified needs from the initial assessment are drawn up into an initial plan. It is expected that all privately fostered children will go on to have a full core assessment completed, which will be reviewed 6 monthly in order that any additional needs which they may have updated and appropriate support plans in place.

Also on receipt of notification, the social work team will initiate a full private fostering

assessment. The private fostering assessment involves the allocated social worker visiting the child and private foster carers and considering the suitability of the carers and their household. The Private Fostering Assessment should be completed within 35 working days from the date of notification, using the Private Fostering Arrangements Assessment Record document.

Once the private fostering assessment has been completed and references (including criminal bureau checks) have been received, the social worker will discuss the assessment with the team manager. The team manager will make a decision about the suitability of the arrangement or whether there is any reason to prohibit the placement or impose sanctions. Letters are then sent out to the family, child, carers and relevant professionals to inform them of the decision.

Northumberland are currently making arrangements to set up an independent panel, which will be situated in the Independent Reviewing Officer's team. The plan from April 2013 is for the social worker to present the private fostering assessment to the panel, which will be responsible for making recommendations with regard to the suitability of the arrangements to the Head of Safeguarding and Looked after Children.

Throughout the duration of the private fostering arrangement the child is visited by the allocated social worker at least every 6 weeks in the first year of the placement and at least three monthly in the second and subsequent years, or whenever it is reasonable to do so. The purpose of the visit is to ensure the child is safe and well, that their needs are being met, including health and education, that the carer is complying with any requirements and ensuring advice and support is provided to the child, the carer, parents and siblings/extended family.

The child is seen alone at social work visits and there is a requirement that the child's bedroom is seen.

The social worker and team manager review the private fostering arrangement after 3 months and then every 6 months.

Whilst the private fostering arrangement ends when the child reaches age 16 (or 18 if disabled) a review of the child's needs will take place before they reach age 16 and support will continue on a child in need basis after the arrangement ends. If the young person moves on in to independence it is Northumberland's policy for this to be as a qualifying care leaver up to the age of 21. Support may include advice, befriending and discretionary financial assistance.

5. Advice/support and information available to private foster carers, parents/those with parental responsibility and privately fostered children

The allocated social worker has dual responsibility for ensuring the privately fostered child is safeguarded and adequately protected and for supporting the private foster carers to help them meet the needs of the privately fostered child. The social worker is also responsible for offering advice, support and information to parents.

During assessment consideration will be given as to whether it is appropriate for the private foster carers to access specific training or information materials to support them in caring for the individual privately fostered child. Arrangements have been made for Northumberland's

Fostering Team to provide basic training for all private foster carers. Individual Safe Caring training can be carried out in carers' homes. Private Foster Carers can be invited to attend Behavior Management training arranged for mainstream foster carers and relevant support groups. Where appropriate the assessing social worker will offer advice on benefit entitlement, parenting strategies and techniques. The need for specific advice and support will also be addressed through the reviews of the arrangement and by the Independent Panel when it is in place. A referral for example can be made to the Children's Support Team or Family Recovery Project.

Wherever possible the social worker will meet with the child's parents and ensure they are part of the assessment process and support plan. The social worker will offer advice about local service provision which may remove the need for the child to be privately fostered and ensure the needs and views of siblings/extended family are taken into consideration, for example with regard to contact with the privately fostered child/young person.

Each child in a private fostering arrangement will be given a copy of the BAAF Children's Guide to help them understand what private fostering means. They will also be given the Northumberland leaflet and advice about how to access the Northumberland website.

The social worker will visit the child in accordance with minimum statutory requirements and complete the Private Fostering Arrangements Record (Visit under Regulation 8) after each statutory visit. The child will be seen alone during each visit unless this is thought to be inappropriate in which case the social worker will record the reasons for not seeing the child alone.

Privately fostered children are encouraged to participate in reviews and their views are recorded by the social worker in the child's record in the integrated children's system.

In addition to the statutory minimum level of visiting the social worker will visit every privately fostered child when reasonably requested to do so by the child, the private foster carer, the child's parent or any other person with parental responsibility for the child.

6. Training for Staff

Private fostering is embedded in Northumberland's Safeguarding Training Programmes. This includes mandatory training and refresher training for designated teachers. By 2014 this will mean that all Northumberland schools will have at least one member of staff who has received the training.

Private fostering is also now included in the NSCB multi-agency child protection training which will communicate the message to 200 delegates per year, with 50% of these being health professionals.

Private fostering is included in the Children's Social Care induction programme and periodic face to face briefings and electronic information are given to social work Team Managers and social workers.

A private fostering e-learning module has been obtained via another local authority and is to be repurposed for Northumberland. It will be available by March 2013.

Audrey Johnson, Children's Service Manager, is the named person with expertise in private fostering and can be contacted by social workers and any other professionals for advice.

Training will be reviewed in line with any changes in legislation or guidance.

Periodic face to face briefings and electronic information are given to social work Team Managers and social workers.

Audrey Johnson, Children's Service Manager, is the named person with expertise in private fostering whom social workers and any other professionals can contact for advice

7. The role of other agencies in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of privately Fostered children, including encouraging notification.

Many professionals who work with children will come across children in Private Fostering Arrangements. These could be teachers, health visitors, play and youth workers and religious leaders. All professionals have a shared responsibility to work together to ensure that all privately fostered children are well cared for and are safeguarded from harm. All are required to ensure that Children's Social Care knows about any child who is being privately fostered in Northumberland. They can do this by contacting Client Relations on 01670 623978.

Private Fostering practice, procedures and guidance for all agencies can be found on the Northumberland Website at www.northumberland.gov.uk/privatefostering and at www.somebodyelseschild.org.uk

8. Monitoring and Evaluation

In order to ensure compliance and evaluate the services being provided for privately fostered children, individual child and private foster carer records will be audited at least annually by Children's Safeguarding Standards Unit.

The audits will check such matters as compliance with required timescales, decisions about the overall suitability of arrangements and subsequent visits; that additional visits are made when reasonably requested; that children are seen alone, unless it is considered inappropriate (and with an independent interpreter where the child's preferred language is not English); that written reports are made in accordance with the regulations; that decisions about the suitability of arrangements are signed off at managerial level; that any concerns raised by privately fostered children are addressed; and the satisfactory operation of all the Private Fostering procedures, and the effectiveness of actions, in relation to private fostering.

In addition to file audits, the Head of Safeguarding will undertake annual private fostering case reviews, which will involve meeting with social workers and team managers, with the overall aim of ensuring that children are protected and having their needs met and identifying where there may be service needs.

The Lead Officer for Privately Fostered Children will be responsible for providing an Annual Report for the Executive Director of Children's Services and for the Head of Children's Social Care and Safeguarding, detailing how the authority has complied with its duties and functions in relation to Private Fostering.

In addition the Lead Officer will report annually to the Northumberland Local Safeguarding Children's Board on how they satisfy themselves that the welfare.

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