

Private Fostering Statement of Purpose 2016/2017

**To be read in conjunction with
The London Borough of Islington's Policy and Procedures**

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1. Introduction

This document provides a description of private fostering arrangements within the London Borough of Islington. This Statement of Purpose is designed to meet the needs of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, Standard 1, which states that there is a clear description and guide to the service for the public, professionals, council members and external organisations. This document is a revised version of the statement of purpose dated 2013- 14 and will be updated on an annual basis.

Islington's Private Fostering Service is located within the Targeted and Specialist Children and Families Service, located at 222 Upper Street, Islington N11XR.

The Private Fostering Service has three functions;

- To raise public and professionals awareness about private fostering and the requirements to notify the Local Authority of any actual or planned private fostering arrangements
- To respond to any private fostering notifications, assess the arrangements and to provide support to the child/ ren and adults involved.
- To review and develop current private fostering processes and practice.

Islington Targeted and Specialist Children and Families Service have established clear policies and procedures on private fostering which sets out how the authority discharges its duties in relation to the Private fostering legislation. These documents are available on the Council's website. It is council policy that any private fostering notification will be screened by the Children's Services Contact Team and then allocated to a social worker within the Child in Need Team to undertake an assessment.

Islington is committed to achieving high standards in relation to their private fostering provisions. To achieve this Islington has a specialist lead for private fostering. The Private Fostering Lead undertakes work with the Marketing and Communications Officer and Islington Safeguarding Children Board to promote general awareness raising and offers advice to professionals and regularly visits voluntary, professional or other relevant groups. Support for the child, carer, or parent is provided by the relevant child care teams. Islington Targeted and Specialist Children and Families Services are committed to supporting the upbringing of children within and by their families of origin wherever possible, with the minimum of intrusion from the local authority. While the Council takes its responsibilities in relation to private fostering very seriously, it will seek to exercise those responsibilities in ways that are seen as supportive by children, parents and carers. It is not our intention to make judgements about, or interfere in, the arrangements that parents make for the care of their children, except where it is necessary to ensure that the welfare of the child is being adequately safeguarded.

It is our intention to work in partnership with children, carers and parents to ensure that:

- Children are provided with high quality care that meets their needs

- Private carers are provided with the support and training needed to help them provide such care
- Birth parents feel able to seek the support and guidance of the local authority

Our aim is to ensure that we create a culture whereby birth parents, individuals with parental responsibility and carers, feel comfortable in notifying the local authority of private fostering arrangements.

2. Definition of a Privately Fostered Child

The legal definition of a privately fostered child is set within Section 66 of the 1989 Children Act, which states that:

A privately fostered child means a child who is aged under the age of 16 (under 18 if the child is disabled) and who is cared for, and provided with accommodation by someone other than:

- A parent of her/him
- A person who is not a parent but who has parental responsibility for the child
- A relative of the child.

Relative in this sense is a brother, sister, aunt, uncle, grandparent or stepparent, none of whom would be classed as private foster carers. A child can be classed as being privately fostered by any other relative, such as a cousin or great aunt.

The child is not defined as privately fostered:

- unless the carer has accommodated the child for 28 days or more, **or**
- If the carer has accommodated the child for less than 28 days and does not intend to do so for a longer period than 28 days.

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 interference from the local authority. The 28 day period ensures that only the most exceptional of circumstances need to be notified.

Examples of private fostering arrangements are varied and include:

- Children with parents overseas
- Children/young people living with host families for a variety of reasons i.e. attending language schools, undergoing medical treatment
- Unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children who are living with other families
- Children staying with family friends as a result of parental separation or a prison or hospital stay etc...
- Local children living apart from their parents: i.e. adolescents estranged from their families

3. The Local Authority's Duties and Functions under the Children Act 1989 and Regulations

The duties of the Local Authority, in relation to private fostering, are set out in the Children Act 1989, the Children (Private Arrangement for fostering) Regulations 2005 and amendments are contained within the Children Act 2004. The National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005 set out the standards to be met by all local authorities in discharging their duties; covering the following areas:

- A Statement of Purpose
- Notifications
- Safeguarding and promoting welfare
- Providing advice and support
- Monitoring and compliance

4. The Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005

Measures introduced by the Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 are intended to strengthen the existing private fostering notification scheme.

These, along with the National Minimum Standards, focus the attention on private fostering and require local authorities to take a more proactive approach in identifying arrangements in their area. Local Authorities are expected to improve notification rates and compliance with the existing legislative framework for private fostering. These additional measures will improve the arrangements for safeguarding children in private fostering arrangements.

5. Promotion of Public and Professional Awareness

The Children Act 2004 includes a new paragraph (7A) into Schedule 8 of the Children Act 1989, which places a duty on Local Authorities to promote public awareness of notification requirements. Islington have developed a strategic plan to promote private fostering awareness amongst parents, individuals with parental responsibility, carers, professionals and the general public. The aim of the plan is to ensure that birth parents, people with parental responsibility, potential and actual private foster carers are aware of the need to notify the local authority of any proposed or actual private fostering arrangement. An additional aim is to ensure that professionals, who may come into contact with privately fostered children, understand their role to notify and to encourage notification to the Local Authority.

Creative programmes of promotional initiatives have been implemented; the effectiveness of these will be reviewed annually. The range of initiatives used are as follows:

- A strategic action plan, developed in line with Ofsted's (*Private Fostering; Better Information, Better Understanding*, July 2014) recommendations for good practice has been implemented.
- Islington's private fostering publicity materials have been updated and are being distributed within the wider professional and public community, and will be available in a number of languages.
- The dedicated internet page for private fostering has been updated with the relevant information, including this Statement of Purpose and other useful links.
- Private fostering presentations /training will continue to be provided to all staff members within Targeted and Specialist Children and Families Service and across the council.

- The Private Fostering Lead will continue to develop links with partner agencies and services within the local community to ensure good practice.
- The Private Fostering Lead will continue to offer and provide training to partner agencies and external services in an effort to raise awareness and encourage notifications.
- Articles on private fostering will continue to be placed in local newspapers, circular updates and newsletters.
- Private fostering campaigns will also continue to be undertaken
- Islington and other local Boroughs are in the process of establishing a North London Private Fostering consortium, to share resources, campaigns, and best practice models.
- Islington is keen to continually enhance and sustain its private fostering public and professional awareness raising strategies; we aim to achieve this by; evaluating our private fostering strategic plan on a yearly basis.

6. Assessment of the Suitability of Private Fostering Arrangements

Islington Targeted and Specialist Children and Families Service have a duty to assess the suitability of all potential or actual private fostering arrangements that come to our attention. The roles and responsibilities within Islington's Children's Services are set out in detail in Islington's Private Fostering Procedures.

The division of key responsibilities are as follows:

- A Private Fostering Assessment will be undertaken to determine whether the arrangements for a child/ young person fall under the regulations for private fostering. This will be carried out by a Social Worker within Targeted and Specialist Children and Families Service. (Unless the case is already allocated to another team).
- If the outcome of the Private Fostering assessment is that the arrangements for the child are suitable then the allocated Social Worker will continue to provide support to the child, carers and parents until the arrangement is longer held.
- It is the duty of the allocated Social Worker to monitor the private fostering arrangement, although support and oversight will be provided by both the direct line manager as well as the Private Fostering Lead.

On completion of the private fostering assessment the case must be presented to the Access to Care and Resources Panel (ACRP). The aim of ACRP is to ensure the provision of a high quality service that safeguard and promotes the welfare of privately fostered children. The panel ensures compliance with the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, that private fostering arrangements are safe and suitable for children/ young people and that children/ young people in such arrangements are protected from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The private fostering panel scrutinises the assessment and makes one of the following recommendations:

1. Agreement that the arrangement is suitable (subject to DBSchecks)

2. Defer

3. Impose Requirements

4. Prohibit the Arrangement

5. Disqualification

7. Advice and Information for Carers, Parents and Children

The Children's Services Contact Team or The Private Fostering Lead provides initial information to anyone seeking information or advice about private fostering.

Advice and Information will also be provided to the proposed foster carer, parents, person's with parental responsibility for the child, or any other person concerned with the child during the assessment process or as required.

The social worker will ensure that all involved in the arrangement are aware of the range of support and services available to them from:

- The voluntary sector and community groups
- Universal services such as health and education
- Islington's own resources

The responsibility for the continuing monitoring of the arrangement and visits will continue to remain with the allocated social worker within the Targeted and Specialist Children and Families Service. The social worker will continue to visit the placement in line with Islington's requirements (Once every four weeks in the first year of the arrangement, then once every ten weeks in subsequent years) and ensure that all those involved continue to receive the advice and information they need. Specifically the social worker will ensure that privately fostered children:

- Are provided with information, in formats appropriate to the child's age and level of understanding, about their privately fostered status and what it means, their right to be safeguarded and the responsibilities of the adults who care for them.
- Have the contact details of the named social worker who will be visiting them while they are privately fostered
- Are given information about advocacy services, if s/he is a child in need
- Are provided with information in appropriate formats about Islington's arrangements for providing advice and assistance to privately fostered children who would be "qualifying" children as defined by Section 24(2)(e) of the Children Act 1989

The social worker will ensure that private foster carers:

- Are provided with any necessary advice and support which will assist them to safeguard and promote the welfare of the privately fostered child
- Are provided with information, in different languages and formats as appropriate, on the support that is available from other agencies, including Health Services, Schools, Housing Services, voluntary organizations and community groups

- Are given, where appropriate, advice about the child's needs arising from their religious identify, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background
- Are given, where appropriate, advice to enhance her/his ability to care effectively for the child, including in relation to sex, age and disability, and the opportunity to utilize any training or support services that may be available, including appropriate training and development opportunities that are available to local authority and kinship foster carers

The social worker will also:

- Ensure that birth parents:
 - Are encouraged to maintain regular contact with their child and the private foster carer
 - Are provided with advice and support to make alternative arrangements for the care of their child, where a private fostering arrangement has been prohibited.
- Consider in each case whether any support or referral to another agency would reduce the necessity for the child to be privately fostered and, where feasible and in the child's best interests, provide that support or make that referral

8. The Role of other Agencies in Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Privately Fostered Children

It is important that all those who might come into contact with a privately fostered child are aware of the need for such arrangements to be notified to the Local Authority. In particular professionals working in the universal services of health and education have a pivotal role as they will often be the first to become aware of such arrangements.

Such agencies share the Local Authority's responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of privately fostered children. Islington has produced a written guide for staff working in these and other relevant agencies that explains how to recognise a potential private fostering arrangement and how staff working in other agencies should respond. The guide outlines how staff must ensure that they notify Islington of any private fostering arrangement that comes to their attention where they are not satisfied that the Local Authority has already been notified. This policy has been agreed by all partner agencies who are members of Islington's Safeguarding Children Board. Islington Safeguarding Board maintains an overview and scrutiny function in respect to how Islington's Private Fostering Services discharges its duties.

9. Staff Training

Islington Targeted and Specialist Children and Families Service are committed to ensuring that all professionals have a clear and defined understanding of private fostering. All work relating to private fostering in Islington is carried out by professionally qualified and trained social work staff.

All staff working within Targeted and Specialist Children and Families Service receives training on;

- How to respond to notifications of private fostering
- Action to be taken on receipt of notification
- Assessing private fostering arrangements

- Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in private fostering arrangements
- Advising and supporting children who are privately fostered, their parents and their carers

Private fostering training/ information is also included in;

- Induction sessions
- Child protection training
- Team meetings
- Izzi the councils (intranet internet service)

The Private Fostering Lead maintains expertise in private fostering and is available to social workers to provide consultation and advice in accordance with National Minimum Standard 1.1. Laura Eden, Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance is responsible for monitoring the way in which Islington discharges their functions under Part 9 of the Children Act 1989 as required by Regulation 12 of the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.