

Private Fostering Statement Of Purpose



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1. Introduction

This Statement of Purpose sets out Warrington Council's duties and functions in relation to Private Fostering and describes how Warrington will carry these out in accordance with the (then) Department for Education and Skills National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering (2005) and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

This Statement of Purpose should be read in conjunction with the Warrington Safeguarding Children Board Procedures (2014), Warrington Council Operational Policy and Procedures (Targeted services 2011, Revised 2012), and Warrington Council's Private Fostering Development Plan (2014-2015).

Overall responsibility for the oversight of the private fostering services lies with the Service Manager Children in Need.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) has the responsibility to regularly inspect and regulate Private Fostering to ensure that we achieve the aims and objectives as set out in this Statement of Purpose.

All inspection reports regarding Private Fostering can be found at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>

2. Mission statement

Warrington Council's aim is to focus on securing positive outcomes for children and young people who are privately fostered, and to reduce any risks to their welfare and safety.

We will work with parents and carers to ensure that they receive appropriate advice and support.

3. Legal definition of a Private Fostering arrangement

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. However, a person who is a relative under the Children Act 1989 i.e. a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether full blood or half blood or by marriage) 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.

The period for which the child is cared for by the private foster carer should be continuous, but that continuity is not broken by the occasional short break.

Exemptions to this definition are set out in Schedule 8 to the Children Act 1989.

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 the safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the privately fostered child remains with the parent or other person with parental responsibility”.

A child who has been placed by Children and Young People’s Services on behalf of the Local Authority is not privately fostered and the Fostering Regulations must be applied.

4. Examples of private fostering situations

Children and young people may be privately fostered for a variety of reasons. Often they are a positive response from adults within the wider extended family and community to care for a child or young person where the immediate family are unable to do so. Sometimes they involve children from abroad and sometimes the child or young person will not have met the private foster carer beforehand. The following are examples of possible situations:

Local children and young people living apart from their families

These children and young people may be living apart from their immediate families or other adult with parental responsibility for a variety of reasons:

- their parent(s) may have died, divorced or moved away from the local area.
- their parents are studying or working in the UK and their hours or location of work makes it difficult for them to look after their children.
- in some instances, parent(s) may be imprisoned or have health needs requiring lengthy (over 4 weeks) hospital admissions.
- there may also be difficulties within family relationships which result in children or young people going to stay with their friends families or moving to live with a girlfriend or boyfriends family.

Children from abroad

Some children and young people from abroad are living with private foster carers because:

- their parents live abroad but have made arrangements for their child to live with an alternative carer/extended family member for the purposes of education, medical treatment or participation in a cultural exchange programme in the UK – this includes some children and young people at boarding school during term time and those attending language schools where arrangements are made for them to stay with ‘host’ families for longer than 28 days.
- they may come to live with members of their wider extended family due to the death, ill health or loss of parents and/or other difficulties in their country of origin.
- they may arrive in the UK seeking sanctuary (asylum) with adults who are not immediate family members. In some instances, the adults may not have been known to them or their family prior to their journey to the UK and some of these children and young people may then be ‘passed’ to a new private foster carer in the UK.

- they may have been brought to the UK with a view to an adoption order being sought.

5. Duties and Functions of the Local Authority

The main duties and functions of the local authority in relation to private fostering are:

1. To promote awareness of the notification requirements amongst the general public and amongst professionals who may come into contact with privately fostered children.
2. To respond to notifications by visiting and assessing whether the welfare of the privately fostered child is being satisfactorily safeguarded or promoted.
3. To ensure that the placement has the person with parental responsibilities agreement and that the intended duration of the placement has been understood and agreed.
4. To supervise the welfare of the privately fostered child by visiting in accordance with regulations and keeping a written record of such visits.
5. To effectively implement a policy and process for prohibiting private fostering arrangements and imposing requirements where appropriate.
6. To provide advice and support to private foster carers, parents and children as needed.
7. To monitor the effectiveness of all arrangements in respect of private fostering.

These duties and functions are specified in detail in Warrington's Policies and Procedures in relation to private fostering.

6. Aims and objectives of the Local Authority in relation to Private Fostering

The Local Authority aims to promote awareness, increase notification rates and achieve an increase in private fostering arrangements being assessed, with the intention of privately fostered children's welfare being safeguarded and promoted.

This will be achieved by implementing The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005, the Replacement Children Act 1989 Guidance on Private Fostering, and the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering (DfES 2005). They will also be informed by the recommendations contained within the recent Ofsted report "Private Fostering : better information, better understanding" (January 2014)

These aims include:-

- **Raising public and professional awareness of private fostering and the requirement to notify the local authority of private fostering arrangements.**
 - A leaflet has been developed to give advice to parents, carers, children and young people, and professionals. This is designed to target young people estranged from their parents which appears to be the predominant local need.
 - All information about private fostering, including leaflets and all relevant forms, is available via the council's website.
 - The number of notifications and their nature are reviewed annually in the Annual Report. A development plan is then produced each year that identifies the action that will be taken in respect of encouraging and increasing notifications to the council over the following 12 months. The plan for 2014-15 includes learning and recommendations from the Ofsted report.

- **Ensuring relevant staff have the appropriate understanding and expertise in relation to Private Fostering arrangements.**
 - Warrington Children's Safeguarding Board has a multi agency policy in respect of Private Fostering.
 - Pan Cheshire policy and procedures are available via the Warrington Children's Safeguarding Board website.
 - Targeted Children's Services procedures are available on the council's intranet.
 - WSCB training sessions for professionals are available as part of the WSCB training programme.
 - Annual evaluation of private fostering services ensures that training needs are identified and met.

- **Ensuring notifications are responded to promptly, and that social workers undertake assessments to ascertain if the private fostering arrangement will satisfactorily safeguard and promote the child's welfare.**
 - The policy and procedures in relation to private fostering provides a clear framework to ensure all appropriate actions in to achieve this aim are undertaken.
 - All children identified as living in private fostering arrangements will be regarded as children in need and an initial assessment conducted by a qualified social worker.

- **Provide advice and support to carers and parents in relation to Private Fostering arrangements.**
 - Children in need plans are made for all children who remain in private fostering arrangements for 3 months or more. Children in need meetings provide a forum to review and meet carers and parents support needs.

- **All Private Fostering Arrangements will be monitored to ensure that all arrangements meet the standards required.**
 - The Service Manager (Safeguarding and Quality Assurance) has responsibility for maintaining the register of all current private fostering arrangements.
 - Each arrangement will be subject to independent audit by the principal manager quality assurance every 12 months. A report will be produced as

a result of this audit process and forwarded to the service manager for children in need.

- These reports will be used to inform the annual report, which is considered by the Director of Children and Young People's Services and Warrington Children's Safeguarding Board, alongside the statement of purpose and a development plan.

The Local Authority is supported in achieving its aims to safeguard and promote the welfare of privately fostered children, by the Warrington Safeguarding Children Board. The Warrington Safeguarding Children Board will promote all agencies and partners working together to ensure children who are the subject of private fostering arrangements are identified and referred to the Local Authority in order that statutory requirements are met and children are able to receive appropriate support.

Warrington Council wants the vulnerable, of whatever age, to enjoy the protection, care and support they need so that they have choices, can determine their own future, achieve their ambitions and play a part in their communities. This is also the objective of services to privately fostered children and will be delivered through children in need plans which aim to safeguard the children and promote their health and learning throughout childhood.

7. Information and Advice

Information is available electronically as part of the Council website information relating to Private Fostering.

Private foster carers will be provided with/advised about information available on:

- The legal requirements and responsibilities of private fostering.
- Entitlement to child and other financial benefits.
- Resources or facilities to assist them to meet the particular needs of the child they are caring for in respect of religion, culture, race and language.
- Support services available in the local area. This includes health, education and housing services, youth support services, voluntary organisations and community groups.
- The contact details of the social worker visiting them and the child.

Parents will be provided with information on:

- The legal requirements and responsibilities of private fostering.
- Support services available in the local area which may prevent the need for the child to be privately fostered. This includes health, social care, education and housing services, youth support services, voluntary organisations and community groups.
- The contact details of the supervising social worker.

Every privately fostered child will be given information suitable to their age and understanding about:

- What being privately fostered means
- The responsibilities of a private foster carer

- What to do if they are worried about their care or any other arrangements pertinent to their care
- The contact details of the supervising social worker and the social worker's role
- Advocacy services and their right to participate in decisions about their lives

Privately fostered children with a disability who may remain privately fostered up to the age of 18 years will be provided with additional information about:

- Transition arrangements for service provision by adult services
- After care provision under Section 24 of the Children Act 1989 as these privately fostered children 'qualify' for advice and assistance, in kind or in cash, under the Act

Information will be provided in a range of languages and formats as needed

8. Complaints

Warrington Borough Council Children and Young People's Services have in place a complaints policy and procedure and a designated complaints officer. The complaints procedure underpins all service areas and ensures comments and complaints are heard and responded to in a fair and timely way. The procedures reflect the three stages and timescales in line with complaints guidance. The service would aim to resolve any complaints within 10 working days.

When a private foster child or a private foster carer has a query or is not satisfied with the service they are receiving, every attempt will be made to resolve the problem. However, should the matter become a formal complaint, the complaints procedure would be followed. In such cases the complainant is advised to contact the complaints section and to put their complaint in writing. The member of staff dealing with the issue will provide the complainant with an information leaflet on the complaint process.

All privately fostered children will be provided with a leaflet about how to make a complaint and how to obtain access to an independent person who can help them with the complaint process. All children, birth parents and private foster carers are informed of their right to complain to Ofsted:

Ofsted, Royal Exchange Buildings, St. Ann's Square, Manchester M2 7LA

Tel: 08456 404045

9. Future Developments

In order to ensure continued development and improvement of Private Fostering in Warrington, a development plan will be published each year, which will be monitored via the Policy and Practice sub group of the WSCB.

10. Further information and advice in relation to private fostering

Advice and information is available on the Warrington Council website at:

http://www.warrington.gov.uk/info/200234/warrington_website_for_young_people

http://www.warrington.gov.uk/info/200221/children_and_young_people.

and the WSCB at:

http://www.warringtonlscb.org/professionals_private_fostering.html

In addition there is a specialist website created by British Association for Fostering and Adoption at:

www.privatefostering.org.uk

Advice about Private Fostering can also be obtained from

Warrington Council Targeted Services Duty and Assessment Team on 01925 443183