

Shropshire Council Safeguarding Group

Private Fostering Statement of Purpose

December 2012



1 This statement is prepared in accordance with Standard 1 of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering.

2 Definition

2.1 Shropshire will use the definition as that provided by the Replacement Children Act 1989 Guidance on Private Fostering. “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 of the full 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 and accommodated 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”.

2.2 A child is not privately fostered if the person caring for him (her): -

- has done so for a period of less than 28 days, and
- does not intend to do so for any longer period.

2.3 An arrangement is deemed as private fostering if it meets the criteria above, whether for reward (monetary or otherwise) or not.

2.4 Examples of private Fostering may be:

- children who attend language schools;
- adolescents temporarily estranged from their parents;
- children at boarding schools who do not return to their parents during vacations;
- children on holiday exchanges;
- children brought from abroad with a view to adoption;
- children whose parents work unsocial hours and whose parents have chosen to make Private Fostering Arrangements as a consequence (the Chinese community, in particular, is known to foster privately);
- Children of asylum seekers whose parents are not in this country but were brought in by someone and so were not unaccompanied at the time of arrival.

- Minority ethnic children with parents working or studying in the UK who have chosen to make Private fostering arrangements for their children.
- Children with parents overseas.
- Children living with host families for a variety of reasons.

2.6 Practice Guidance

- (a) If the period of placement is less than 28 days, it may be one of a series of placements that add up to more than 28 days. A break in the period for the child to visit his (her) parents at the weekend would not effect the calculation or the interpretation of the foster parent's intention. A period does not cease to be a period just because a child spends occasional weekends at the home of his (her) parents. For a break to cause a restart in calculating the period it must result in a genuinely fresh arrangement.
- (b) A private fostering arrangement is made by parents, or a person with parental responsibility, directly with the private carers not through a voluntary child care agency or a Local Authority Children's and Families Service. What distinguishes this type of arrangement from public fostering is that it is not paid for or arranged by the local authority. If the local authority is sufficiently involved in arranging or financing the arrangement, the young person may be more properly viewed as a 'child looked after' within the meaning of the Act.
- (c) Parent includes the unmarried or 'putative' father.
- (d) Close relatives are defined in the Act as parents, step-parents, siblings, brothers or sisters of a parent, and grandparents.
- (e) For a definition of disabled for the purposes of the Children Act 1989, Part 111, see s 17(11): for further guidance on private fostering of a disabled child see, **The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 6 Children with Disabilities**, Chapter 12.

3 Duties and functions

- 3.1 Local authorities do not approve private fostering arrangements. The duties placed on local authorities are supervisory and regulatory. Officers of Safeguarding will carry out Shropshire Council's duties in respect of private fostering arrangements. The assessment of carers and the suitability of household are undertaken by the Social Worker in the Fostering Service. The assessment of child's needs and proposed arrangements is undertaken by a Social Worker from one of the Children in Need Teams.

- 3.2 In respect of privately fostered children the local authority has a duty to satisfy themselves that the welfare of children who are privately fostered is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, and provides the necessary advice to those caring for them. This includes the duty to ensure that parents and carers fulfil their responsibilities to the child.
- 3.3 These duties will be provided in accordance to required legal obligations and available resources.
- 3.4 It is Shropshire Council's intention to carry out these duties in a way that maintains a balance between the rights of the parent to make a private arrangement for the care of their children, and the local authority's obligation to satisfy themselves about the welfare of the children.
- 3.5 In fulfilling this duty the Council will seek to establish good partnership arrangements not only with the private foster carers, the children and young people and their parents but also with other organisations and agencies.
- 3.6 The Private Fostering Officer will provide the Local Children's Safeguarding Board with the Private Fostering Annual report detailing how the authority has complied with its duties and functions in relation to Private Fostering in the preceding year.

4 Training and awareness for staff

- 4.1 Training relating to private fostering will be included in the mandatory child protection training for all children's social workers, fostering social workers and professionals from other agencies involved with children and families.
- 4.2 Presentations about private fostering will be delivered to all relevant children social work teams within the Children and Young People's Directorate, these will be updated and delivered annually.
- 4.3 Procedures are in place, which clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities for all staff, and are easily accessible for all staff.
- 4.4 Staff will also be encouraged to attend additional training provided by specialist and national organisations as appropriate.

5 Named person within local authority to contact for advice

The Private Foster Care Lead Person for Shropshire is Lesley Redge-Edwards, who is employed as a Senior Social Worker within the Safeguarding Group. The Private Foster Care lead Person will offer the necessary expertise and advice to social workers and professionals from other organisations as appropriate.

6 Signing off arrangements

- 6.1 Completed Assessment reports will be presented in accordance with the authority's procedures to suitability forum for a discussion about the suitability of the arrangement. It state whether the arrangement is deemed to be appropriate and should include any additional requirements, which should be imposed, and/or any prohibitions the forum to consider.

The full report must be written and the following points should be addressed: -

- Date child placed/to be placed;
- The purpose and intended duration of the arrangement;
- The child's physical, intellectual, educational, emotional, social and behavioural development;
- Whether the child's needs arising from his religious persuasion, racial origin, cultural and linguistic background are being met;
- The financial arrangements for the care and maintenance of the child;
- The standard of care which the child is being given;
- Whether the private carer is being given any necessary advice;
- Whether the contact between the child and his parents, or any other person with whom contact has been arranged is satisfactory;
- Whether the child's parents or any other person, are exercising parental responsibility for the child and;
- The ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child regarding the arrangements;
- The environmental factors and its influence on the child.

7 Promoting Awareness of notification requirements

Other agencies and the wider community will be informed of notification requirements through a series of activities, which will include:

- Promotional literature e.g. role specific leaflets and posters.
- Advertising in the local press and radio.
- Direct contact e.g. face-to-face or written letter.
- Invitation to joint training.
- Specific professional meetings e.g. Stakeholders events, conferences.
- Newsletters.

- Private fostering presentations to the Multi-agency team's development days annually and to other relevant staff teams who may come into contact with privately fostered children.
- Attendance at core group meetings e.g. staff meetings, management group meetings.
- Local and national networking.

8 Determining suitability of arrangements

8.1 The local authority's role is to satisfy themselves that private fostering arrangements are satisfactory, and that private carers and premises are suitable

8.2 The practical responsibility of the local authority in a private fostering arrangement includes the following:

- receive notification from parents;
- assess the suitability of the arrangement;
- visit the child in line with statutory requirements;
- ensure that carers are aware of the child's racial, cultural linguistic and religious needs and are helped to meet them;
- offer advice and support to parents, carers and children involved in private fostering arrangements;
- assess applications for exemptions to usual fostering limits;
- consider the need for specific requirements and prohibitions.

9 Welfare of privately fostered children are safeguarded

9.1 In considering the welfare of the children privately fostered within Shropshire, the general principals set down in Section 1 (3) a-f Children Act 1989 (Welfare Principal) and the Every child matters outcomes are used as a basis for good quality practice.

The following values and principals inform such practice: -

- The welfare of the child is considered as paramount.
- Parents and guardians primary responsibility for their child is recognised and respected.
- Children have a right to be treated with dignity and respect.
- Children should be valued as individuals with regard to race, culture, language, religion, gender and disability.
- Children have a right for their physical and emotional needs to be met.

- Children have a right to a safe, child-centred environment.
- Children need opportunities for independence and exploration within safe boundaries.
- Children have a right to continuous and consistent care.
- Due consideration should be given to the wishes and feelings of children and parents/guardians.
- Partnership between parents/guardians, care givers and local authority is valued.

9.2 The enquiries Shropshire Safeguarding Group make, are linked to the duty of the local authority, to satisfy itself that the welfare of a privately fostered child is being satisfactorily safeguarded. The arrangements or proposed arrangements are likely to provide a stable and safe environment, in which the child's physical, social, intellectual and emotional needs are met. These needs also include those arising from the child's religious, racial, cultural and linguistic background and are as follows;

(i) Assessment of Suitability of arrangements

Factors and issues to consider in completing the assessment.

- The suitability of the carers and the household members.
- The suitability of the accommodation in which the child is to be privately fostered.
- The needs of the individual child.
- The proposed and actual arrangements.
- The Private Fostering Regulations specify the information, which the local authority has to obtain during their enquiries. The regulations also state that the same issues are addressed at all visits made to the private foster placement.

(ii) Suitability of Person and Household

In order to assess the suitability of the person who intends to privately foster, Shropshire use the criteria contained within the Child minding Practices (1989 Children Act Guidelines and Regulations Vol. 2 p.54).

- Although these specifically refer to those caring for children under 8, Shropshire have regarded the following points in relation to all private foster placements;
- previous experience of looking after or working with children and young people;
- qualifications and/or training in relevant fields such as child care, early years, education, health visiting, nursing or other caring activities;
- ability to provide warm consistent care;

- knowledge of and attitude to multi-cultural issues and people of different racial origins;
- commitment and knowledge to treat all children as individuals and with equal concern;
- physical health;
- mental stability, integrity and flexibility;
- Known involvement in criminal cases involving abuse to children including persons living or working on the premises.

(iii) Suitability of Premises

- The Local Authority is required by law to inspect the premises where a privately fostered child is being, or is proposed to be accommodated and to satisfy itself about the suitability of the accommodation.
- When deciding the suitability of the accommodation, Officers consider the points made in Appendix 2 as the minimum requirements depending on the age and stage of development of the privately fostered children.

10 Advice and Support and training for carers

- 10.1** As a part of initial contact and assessment of the carers, the fostering Social Worker will ensure that the prospective private foster carers have received a copy of Shropshire's Guidance and Standards for Private Fostering and that they are aware of their duties and responsibilities as a private foster carer.
- 10.2** The Private Foster Carer will be invited to attend training offered to statutory foster carers if required (eg. "Child Protection" and "Promoting Equality").
- 10.3** The allocated social worker for the child will undertake statutory visits, which are required to take place within 7 days of notification of the arrangement and then at least every 6 weeks during the first year of placement. During the second and subsequent years, visits are required to take place at least every 12 weeks or as frequently as necessary.
- 10.4** The Social Workers visiting the child and private foster carers will assist them and the carers through advice and guidance in accessing services from other agencies as well as Children's Services to help the child if they are necessary.

11 Advice and support for parents

There is no statutory obligation with regards to visiting frequency to the parents or those with parental responsibility to discuss the progress of their child. However social workers will visit as necessary when reasonably requested at the request of the parents/those with parental responsibility.

12 Information and Support for privately fostered children

All children and young people privately fostered will be given a copy of the Shropshire leaflet Private Fostering (specific to them) and if necessary the allocated social worker for the child will assist the child in reading it with them or obtain a copy in other languages if deemed necessary. The child's allocated social worker will also visit when reasonably requested at times other than statutory visits.

13 Role of other agencies

Good links and partnership and joint working arrangements and a robust promotional campaign with other agency and organisation professionals will take place to ensure that they are aware of their duty of care to notify the local authority of a private fostering arrangement that comes to their attention where they are not satisfied that the local authority have been, or will be, notified of the arrangement, so that the local authority can then discharge its duty to satisfy itself that the welfare of the privately fostered child concerned is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted.

If you think you might become, or are currently, a private foster care then ring the council's customer centre on 0345 678 9008 for further information.

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