

Private Fostering: Statement of Purpose 2020-21



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1	September 2020	Lorna Rook	Paul Coke	July 2021

Wandsworth Borough Council

Children's Social Care



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1. Introduction

This statement of purpose explains our vision, objectives and services provided by Children's Social Care to identify, monitor and support Private Fostering arrangements in the London borough of Wandsworth. In doing so it sets out how the service meets the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005.

This statement is in fulfilment of Standard 1 of the National Minimum Standards which requires that; the local authority has a written statement or plan, which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which it will be carried out.

The legal framework underpinning Private Fostering Arrangements is the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. In addition, the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering which came into effect on the 18/07/05 specify a minimum standard for local authority practice in the fulfilment of its duties and functions. These, along with the measures in section 44 of the Children Act 2004 are designed to provide a robust framework for local authority to undertake their duties and responsibilities.

This Statement of Purpose is reviewed and updated on an annual basis. The review is signed off by the Director of Children's Services, the Wandsworth Safeguarding Children's Partnership (WSCP) the Lead Member for Children and Young People..

2. Service overview

The Private Fostering service has two functions:

- To raise public and professional 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 or young person and adults involved.

3. Values of the service

The welfare of the child is paramount, and the Private Fostering service will work to ensure that the welfare of all privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted so that they are able to achieve good outcomes.

Services are child focused.

The service will promote multi-agency partnership working in order to improve service delivery and outcomes for privately fostered children by keeping all agencies and private and voluntary groups fully informed and involved regarding service provision and development and making appropriate referrals to services on behalf of the privately fostered child

The service will ensure that Wandsworth’s duties towards privately fostered children as set out in the Children Act 1989, the amendments contained within the Children’s Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 are fully discharged.

Where necessary, Wandsworth will exercise its powers within this legislation to ensure the safety and welfare of privately fostered children, including use of child protection procedures and finding alternative accommodation for the child.

Wherever possible, the service will respect the wishes of parents in relation to the private fostering agreement and work in partnership with parents and private foster carers to maintain this agreement in a way that promotes the child’s welfare.

The service will work to ensure that equal opportunities are incorporated into all aspects of service delivery and that all prospective private foster carers are assessed and supported on the basis of the needs of the individual private foster child regardless of race, religion, class, marital status, gender, sexual orientation or disability.

The service is committed to maintaining high standards in relation to private fostering service provision and to reviewing this on a continual basis in order to improve the quality of service delivery.

4 Structure of Wandsworth’s private fostering service

The Private Fostering service sits within the Special Guardian Order and Permanency team (SGOAPT) which is based in the Children Looked After Service. There is a dedicated private fostering social worker, oversight is provided by the Team Manager of the Special Guardians and Post Permanency team. Overall management lies with the Head of Service, Looked After Children. The Private fostering social worker receives regular supervision and there are clear arrangements in place for their continued supervision in the absence of the Team Manager. The Private Fostering social worker can seek support and advice from the Service Manager, Children Looked After.

Name	Designation
Ana Popovici	Director of Children’s Services

Paul Angeli	Assistant Director of Childrens Services
Paul Coke	Head of Service CLA
Steve Pearson	Service Manager CLA
Lorna Rook	Team Manager, SGOAPT
Beatrice Ogunbowale	Senior Social Worker, Private Fostering

5. Legal definition of a privately fostered child

The Children Act 1989 defines a privately fostered child as:

A child, under the age of 16 (or under 18 if they have a disability) if someone carers for them other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more.

A definition of a close relative are:

- Parent, stepparent or legal guardian
- Grandparent
- Brother or sister
- Aunt or uncle.

Private foster carers may be from the extended family such as a cousin or great aunt. A private foster carer may be a friend of the family, or a parent of a friend of the child, or someone previously unknown to the child's family who is willing to privately foster the child.

The arrangement is one that is made privately by a parent or by someone with parental responsibility. A privately fostered child is not a looked after child (i.e. not in local authority care) and the local authority is not involved in making the arrangement. However, it is the duty of the local authority to satisfy itself that the welfare of the child that is privately fostered and living within their area is safeguarded and promoted.

The period in 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 from this definition are set out in Schedule 8 of The Children Act, 1989.

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

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

For the purposes of the Act a parent includes an unmarried or putative father. A relative includes full-blood or half-blood relation, a relation by marriage, or stepparent.

Care arrangements that meet the above criteria are considered as private fostering arrangements whether or not there is any kind of payment, either monetary or in kind.

6. Wandsworth's duties and functions

As a local authority, Wandsworth has a duty to ensure that the welfare of children who are privately fostered living in the area is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted and that parents, private foster carers and privately fostered children receive any advice that they need about private fostering arrangements.

This duty involves the following activities:

- acting upon notifications
- providing information and advice to parents, private foster carers and children around private fostering
- assessing the suitability of the private foster carer's household and accommodation, and their capacity to care for the child

Assessing the child's needs and ensuring that arrangements are in place to ensure that they receive universal services such as health and education

Ensuring that adequate and clear arrangements are in place between the private foster carer and the child's parents covering such areas as contact, financial support, decision making, health care etc.

Monitoring the welfare of the child through visits within specified time scales, ensuring that the child is seen alone, and producing written records of visits.

Providing such assessment and support as may be required under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 where the child is in need.

Providing private foster carers with advice and support on caring for the child

monitoring the discharge of its functions in respect of privately fostered children

raising public awareness of private fostering within the local area in order to strengthen the notification scheme

Ensuring other professionals are aware of their duty to notify Wandsworth of any private fostering arrangement of which they become aware.

7. Raising awareness of private fostering

Wandsworth uses a number of methods to raise awareness of Private Fostering issues with professionals and members of the community in order to help people understand when a child is privately fostered and the need to notify Wandsworth, and the Private Fostering service's role in assessing private fostering arrangements in order to safeguard the privately fostered child and promote their welfare.

To achieve this, Wandsworth has produced a series of information leaflets aimed at parents, private foster carers and professionals, which are available in the required language. In addition, leaflets are widely distributed to:

- Voluntary/community sector organisations
- Council offices
- Health clinics and GP surgeries
- Nurseries
- Childrens Centres
- Schools

Awareness of the notification requirements is also promoted through a widely read locally circulated newspaper, the 'Bulletin' as well as by publishing information on the following websites:

- wwwthrive.wandsworth.gov.uk
- wscp.org.uk.

In addition, information about private fostering is disseminated across the borough in the following ways:

Private fostering awareness is included as part of the safeguarding training carried out within Wandsworth Social Care Academy and by the Wandsworth Safeguarding Children Partnership, with professionals from partnership agencies and community and voluntary groups.

Information on private fostering is made widely available at co-ordinated events and functions planned throughout the year via the community engagement strategy.

Wandsworth has links with other inner London boroughs to share information and expertise and pool resources in order to raise awareness around private fostering issues with a number of boroughs.

8. Functions of the private fostering service

8.i Responding to notifications

The Private Fostering social worker together with the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is the main point of contact for any enquiries regarding private fostering. MASH responds to notifications from parents, private foster carers and other professionals who inform Wandsworth of any private fostering arrangements that come to their attention by alerting the Private Fostering Team. Agencies that are concerned or believe that a child may be privately fostered must make a referral into the MASH. Referrals should be made using the Multi Agency Referral Form (MARF) and the link is below.

Contact details:

Email: mash@wandsworth.gov.uk

Referral Link: www.wandsworth.gov.uk/make_a_referral_to_the_multi_agency_safeguarding_hub

Phone: 0208 871 6622

On receipt of a notification, the Private Fostering social worker will visit the privately foster carer and child or young person within 7 days of the date the notification was received.

The purpose of the initial visit is to provide advice and support, explain the procedures regarding assessment and visits, and to begin gathering information for the private fostering arrangement assessment.

8.ii Assessment of suitability of private fostering arrangements

The Private Fostering social worker takes the lead in assessing:

- The child's developmental needs
- The suitability of the private foster carer and their household to care for the child
- The suitability of the private foster carer's accommodation
- The suitability of the care arrangements to safeguard and promote the child's welfare as agreed between the parents and the private foster carer.

Assessment may take place on proposed or current arrangements depending on when notification was received. A record of all information gathered during the assessment process is taken including information about the agreement between the parents and private foster carer for the care of the child, an assessment of the child's developmental needs and the private foster carer's capacity to meet these needs.

As part of the assessment process, the child will be seen alone if appropriate and their wishes and feelings about the arrangement ascertained and recorded on the assessment.

To safeguard the child further, the suitability of the private foster carer and their household is also assessed by taking up various checks and searches against the carer and any member of their household who is aged 16 plus, including checks with the Disclosure and Barring Service.

The assessment considers the appropriateness of the private fostering arrangements and concludes with a recommendation as to whether or not Wandsworth should support the arrangement, whether any requirements should be imposed on the private foster carer, and any advice that needs to be provided in order to enhance the care arrangement.

If the assessment indicates that the child has unmet developmental needs, that there are child protection concerns regarding the care arrangements or that there are concerns about the suitability of the carer, a referral will be made back to MASH to allocate for further assessment.

A decision on the suitability of the private foster carer and the care arrangements will be made by the Fostering manager within 42 days of the date of notification.

8.iii Monitoring private fostering arrangements

Regulation 12 of the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) 2005 provides that each local authority must monitor the way in which they discharge their functions under Part 9 of the Children Act 1989 and must appoint an officer of the authority of that purpose. The intention of this provision is to increase the focus of local authorities on private fostering and to improve compliance with the existing legislative framework for private fostering. The team manager of the SGAPT fulfils this role and will liaise with the Head of Service for CLA in fulfilling this requirement.

To ensure that the child's welfare is safeguarded and promoted on a continual basis throughout the duration of the arrangement, the Private Fostering social worker will visit the child and the private foster carer *every 6 weeks* in the first year of the arrangement and then *every 3 months*, as required by the private fostering regulations.

The purpose of the visits is to monitor the care arrangements in order to ensure that the child's needs are being met and to look at any further support required by the child or the private foster carer in relation to caring for the child.

All visits are recorded to include information on the private foster carers household: records when the child, the carer and members of the household are seen by the social

worker, and how the care arrangements are meeting the child's needs and safeguarding and promoting their welfare.

The record also contains information on how arrangements for contact and financial support are working: checks that the child is in receipt of universal services such as health and education, and explores how the child's cultural, ethnic, religious and language needs are being met by the private foster carer.

The social worker will record any advice given or action to be taken, and any recommendations on whether the care arrangements remain suitable or if any requirements need to be imposed on the carer. The social worker may also recommend that a referral is made to MASH where the child has unmet needs or where there are child protection issues.

All records of visits are passed to the Team Manager to decide on whether the care arrangements remain suitable and what action to take, including whether or not to take action or intervention under the Children Act 1989.

8.iv Providing advice and support

The Private Fostering social worker is the principle source of advice and support on private fostering matters in Wandsworth for parents, private foster carers, professionals and children.

Parents

Parents who are considering private fostering can contact the service to discuss whether private fostering is in the best interests of their child, or to obtain advice on other services or help available as an alternative to private fostering.

Parents can also get advice on what issues need to be addressed in the private fostering agreement, for example contact and financial support, and information on how private fostering may impact on their child.

The purpose of the advice is to help parents make an informed decision on private fostering, and to help them make sure that any private fostering agreement they enter in to is right for their child.

Parents whose children are already privately fostered may also contact the service for advice on private fostering matters generally, or to discuss how the service is carrying out their role in safeguarding the child and what they can do to improve the care arrangements.

Private foster carers

Private foster carers can access support and training through the Private Fostering social worker, who will visit them regularly and will discuss any extra support or training needs that will enhance the carer's capacity to care for the child.

A range of training programmes are available to Wandsworth foster carers, which the private fosters carer can attend, for example: advice on parenting techniques, benefit entitlement, managing behaviour and how to access other resources available within the borough.

The Private Fostering social worker can also help private foster carers access information, advice and support in relation to the child's ethnicity, culture, religion, any disability and language if this is required in order to meet the child's needs

Children

Children are provided with support and advice on private fostering from the Private Fostering social worker, who will visit them regularly to monitor their progress and ascertain their wishes and views.

Key information is provided to each privately fostered child, (once of a suitable age and understanding). They are provided with:

- The name and contact details of the private fostering social worker.
- The dates and times of all planned visits.
- Who they can contact (during office hours and out of office periods) if they have concerns about their care or if they wish to request a visit?
- Any advocacy arrangements, if they are assessed as being a child in need.

All information (verbal or written) will be provided in a suitable format for the child or young person. If required, interpreters will be provided.

Privately fostered children when subject to safeguarding issues, who receive a social work service from the Child in Need Service will also have an allocated social worker to provide support and advice.

Professionals

Professionals, agencies and private and voluntary organisations are provided with information leaflets and training to raise awareness of their role regarding notification of private fostering arrangements. The Private Fostering service can also provide professionals with general advice on private fostering issues, such as recognising private fostering arrangements, making notifications, and accessing suitable services and resources for privately fostered children.

9. Functions of Children's Social Care and Social Work

The Children Act 1989 Guidance on Private Fostering comprehensively sets out the requirements for determining that the welfare of privately fostered children are

safeguarded and promoted. These will be used by the designated social worker for private fostering and the line manager in reaching decisions in accordance with the regulations.

The Private Fostering social worker will refer privately fostered children to the MASH if any safeguarding issues arises or reported within the private fostering arrangement, where indicated the MASH team will undertake an investigation under section 47 of the Children Act 1989. Referrals will be made on the same day whenever any child protection issues arise. The Private Fostering social worker will continue to work alongside the MASH social worker to support and assist the child and family assessment.

Where circumstances indicate that a privately fostered child may be a child in need, a child and family assessment will be carried out in accordance with the Working Together to Safeguard Children Guidance. Any decision on the level and type of services that should be offered will be in line with the Childrens Social Care policy.

10. Quality Assurance

10.i Policy and procedure

Wandsworth ensures that privately fostered children's welfare is satisfactorily safeguarded, and the council's statutory duties are fully discharged by ensuring that all staff involved in delivering the Private Fostering service have an understanding of their role and responsibilities.

To achieve this, staff are provided with comprehensive policies and procedures that enable them to carry out their duties to a high standard and within statutory timescales.

The policy for private fostering also includes a rigorous procedure for the assessment and approval of private fostering arrangements, which sets out clearly the role of the Private Fostering service and the Childrens Social Care . All decisions are approved and signed off by the Team Manager or Service Manager and there are clear procedures in place for referral to MASH if there are concerns about any aspect of a private fostering arrangement.

The Team Manager provides quality assurance and oversight of the quality of work delivered; this is through supervision and oversight of assessments and visits.

In addition to service led audit, as part of the internal audit programme case files of privately fostered children will be reviewed at least yearly.

10.ii Staff training

Training for Children Services and staff on private fostering is delivered through staff induction training and information sessions. Private fostering is also included in ongoing childcare, child protection, child assessment and children in need training.

Training on private fostering is delivered in-house through internal training courses within the Social Care Academy .

The training needs of individual staff, and other front-line social work staff, is discussed and identified during regular supervision with line managers and tailored to the individual needs of the worker, depending on their role in providing a service alongside the Private Fostering social worker.

11. Monitoring private fostering services

In fulfilling Private Fostering Regulation 12, the Head of Service for Children Looked After will monitor the way the department complies with and discharges its statutory duties and functions in relation to private fostering. This officer will monitor compliance with the following duties and functions.

The promotion of awareness regarding notification requirements.

- How the service responds to notifications received and if these are within timescales.
- How the service manages disqualifications, prohibitions, requirements and appeals against these, and refusals to consent to disqualified persons being private foster carers.
- How the service exercises its functions under section 67(5), Children Act 1989.
- How the service processes decisions regarding offences committed bearing in mind the best interests of the child/young person.
- How the service assesses the parenting capacity of prospective or actual private foster carers, members of their households, as well as the suitability of their accommodation.
- Those statutory visits are within timescales and decisions about the suitability of arrangements are also within timescales and approved at managerial level.
- Additional visits that are made when requested by the child, private foster carer, parents or those with parental responsibility.
- Mosaic records of assessment and visits are made in accordance with the regulations, i.e. conclusions drawn on the arrangement, the child seen alone, wishes and feelings of child, any concerns raised, or action taken on concerns.
- Advice and support provided to private foster carers, parents or those with parental responsibility or any person concerned with the child.
- Information and support provided to privately fostered children.
- Independent interpreters are used as appropriate.
- That a sample of individual child/young person and private foster carer records are regularly reviewed to check that compliance is being fulfilled.

- That any concerns raised by privately fostered children/young people are investigated.
- That a system for recording the number and nature of enquiries received in relation to private fostering, the responses given and action taken is effective.

The Head of Service is responsible for monitoring how effectively the authority discharges its functions and reports annually to the Wandsworth Safeguarding Childrens Partnership. The Private Fostering social worker provides quarterly reports on Private Fostering activity. Scrutiny and governance is provided by the Private Fostering Strategic Group which meets quarterly.

Internal file audits are carried out on a regular basis (minimum annually) and will affect a policy for the use of requirements, prohibitions, disqualifications and appeals in partnership with the council's legal services.

12. Complaints

Complaints leaflets are provided to private foster carers once their approval is completed by the Private Fostering social worker.

Complaints leaflets are also provided to the privately fostered child or young person by the Private Fostering social worker who will also provide further copies when requested or when circumstances indicate that this is relevant. Adults and children are encouraged to discuss any concerns about the service.

Advice on making a complaint can be sought from the complaints and Complaints Team Children's services

FREEPOST RTKU-EGLA-ZZCT

Wandsworth Council

The Town Hall

Wandsworth High Street

SW18 2PU

Email: Ccomplaints2@wandsworth.gov.uk

Telephone: 020 8871 7300

Freephone: 0800 389 8257

Fax: 020 8871 7675

13. Regulation

Wandsworth's private fostering service is regulated by Ofsted, contact details:

WHBL, Ofsted National Business Unit

Royal Exchange Buildings St Ann's Square,

Manchester, M12WD

Tel 03001233155

Email: whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk

Email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Website www.ofsted.gov.uk

14. Contacts

Wandsworth's Private Fostering service is based at;

Children's Services, 2nd Floor, Town Hall Extension,

Wandsworth High Street, London, SW18 2PU

Email: mash@wandsworth.gov.uk

Telephone: 02088716622

If any families, professionals or communities have any comments or feedback on this document or the role of private fostering service in Wandsworth, then please contact us:

Lorna Rook: Team Manager, Special Guardianship Order Assessment and Permanence Team.

Email: Lorna.Rook@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk

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Tel: 02088517250

Email: Steve.Pearson@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk