

Statement of Purpose for Private Fostering Services 2020-2021

**Version 1
May 2020**

Document name & file location	g:\Policy and commissioning post holder\Policies Final	
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Review date	This document is to be reviewed a minimum of every 12 months, the next review to occur no later than May 2020.	
Accessibility	This document can be made available in hard and electronic formats. No copies in other languages are currently available.	
Version	Detail of change	Annual Review 2020
1.0	Document created	April 2020
2.0	Consultation with Staff	May 2020
3.0	Consultation with Children's Social Care Management Team	July 2020
4.0	Approval by Departmental Management Team and Executive Member	
5.0	Public document or Pre-print Design Circulation	

Accessibility

This document can be made available in large print, Braille, audio or in electronic format.
Copies in alternative languages may also be obtained.

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1 Introduction

The National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005, Standard 1, requires that a clear description of the Council's services regarding private fostering arrangements is available for professionals, the public, Council Members and external organisations.

This document defines what is meant by a private fostering arrangement; the requirement for all private fostering arrangements to be notified to the Local Authority, the assessment process; and the support and advice offered to parents, private foster carers and privately fostered children within Bracknell Forest.

2 Overview of services

The Private Fostering Service has key functions:

- To safeguard and promote the welfare of each privately fostered child by securing positive outcomes and by reducing any risks to their safety
- To raise public and professional awareness of the requirement to notify the Local Authority of any proposed or existing private fostering arrangement.
- To respond to any private fostering notifications, assess the arrangements and provide appropriate information and support for the children and adults involved.

There are clear procedures in place for responding to notifications of private fostering arrangements. Any notification is initially considered by the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and the Children's Social Care Assessment Team. A visit to complete a written assessment will be made by a member of the Assessment Team, together, where possible, with a social worker from the Family Placement Team.

Where it is confirmed that the arrangement meets the criteria for private fostering, a social worker will be allocated from one of the Children's Social Care social work teams. This social worker is responsible for monitoring the welfare of the child and to maintain contact with anyone holding parental responsibility for the child.

The Family Placement Team will allocate a social worker to undertake an assessment of the suitability of the private foster carer and will offer advice and support where appropriate.

The Assistant Team Manager within the Family Placement Team has designated responsibilities for the private fostering service, including working with the Publicity and Recruitment Worker to promote general awareness of Private Fostering, offer advice to professionals and to visit voluntary, professional or other relevant groups with information and promotional material. The Bracknell Forest Council Family Placement Team has overarching responsibility for undertaking assessments in relation to prospective private foster carers.

An annual report on the Private Fostering service is presented annually to the Bracknell Forest Safeguarding Board.

Children's Social Care meets the requirements of equal opportunity legislation through ensuring services are centred around the needs of the child or young person. All prospective private foster carers are assessed and supported based on the needs of the child or young person regardless of race, religion, class, marital status, sexual orientation or disability.

3 Legal 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 it is 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. aunt/uncle/step-parent/grandparent/sibling but not a cousin or great-aunt/uncle,

and she/he has been cared for and accommodated by that person for 28 days or more, or the period of actual fostering is less than 28 days but the private foster carer intends to foster him/her for a period of 28 days or more.

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. 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. Clearly such interference would be totally inappropriate where children are having sleepovers or short term holidays /breaks with school friends, for example. The 28 day period ensures that only the most exceptional of circumstances need to be notified.

For the purposes of the Act 'parent' includes unmarried or putative father. Relative means as above stated, 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. If the child visits her/his parent from the private fostering situation, including an occasional overnight stay, this will not break the private fostering arrangement period as long as the intention is for the child to return to the same private fostering situation. An arrangement is deemed as private fostering if it meets the criteria above whether for reward (monetary or otherwise) or not.

Examples of private fostering arrangements are varied and include:

- children/young people living with host families for a variety of reasons, i.e. attending language schools, undergoing medical treatment etc
- children/young people with families overseas
- black and ethnic minority children/young people with parents working or studying in the UK
- trafficked children/young people and asylum seekers and refugees
- teenagers who are staying with families of friends after a disagreement at home

4 Boarding Schools

A person who proposes to accommodate a child under 16 years at school for more than **two weeks** during school holidays must give written notice to the Local Authority. The child is treated as a privately fostered child with the exception that requirements may not be imposed. Notice must also be given when a child ceases to be treated as a Privately Fostered child - see Schedule 8 Paragraph 9 Children Act 1989.

There are five independent boarding schools within Bracknell Forest. The Local Authority was not notified of any children falling into this category during 2019-2020.

The regulations allow for a school to be exempt from these regulations. To date no school has requested that the Local Authority considers this.

5 Duties and Functions of the Local Authority

The duties of the local authorities 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 a number of standards to be met by all local authorities in discharging their duties which cover the following areas:

- ✓ Statement of Purpose
- ✓ Notification
- ✓ Safeguarding and promoting welfare
- ✓ Advice and support
- ✓ Monitoring and compliance

Under the Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 Local Authorities are required:

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

6 The Bracknell Forest Policy, Procedure and Practice Guidance for Private Fostering

The Bracknell Forest Policy and Procedure for Private Fostering details all the actions required under the Children Act Regulations 2005. The policy includes full details of the

legislative requirements, together with comprehensive practice guidance for social workers dealing with the notification and supervision of private fostering arrangements. It also sets out the actions required to ensure that these children are properly safeguarded with regard to the child protection matters, standards of care and welfare concerns. The policy was last updated in April 2018. See: <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/private-fostering-policy.pdf>

7 Promotion of Public and Professional Awareness

In line with the Children Act 2004, Schedule 8 paragraph (7A), Bracknell Forest Council has 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. The activity and events plan is regularly reviewed and updated.

Private Fostering presentations and written guidance will continue to be available to all staff members where they are likely to come into contact with children and families. Awareness of Private Fostering is part of the induction programme for new social workers and staff recruited to the Family Placement Team. Training for all staff is reviewed annually in line with changing needs and legislation, and all programmes are evaluated by managers.

Private Fostering information is also included in:

- Induction sessions
- Child protection training
- Team meetings
- DORIS (the council's intranet internet service)

Relevant staff will gain further understanding and expertise in relation to Private Fostering through workshops, team meetings and regular supervision.

The range of initiatives included in the 2020 – 2021 Private Fostering strategic action plan are:

- Information sessions for professionals who have face to face contact with children and families within the Council and partner agencies. These sessions give the legal definition of private fostering and information on services to support privately fostered children, their parents, private foster carers and professionals.
- Updates to the Bracknell Forest Council website, see: <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/living/liv-children-and-families/liv-private-fostering.htm>
- Adverts on the Bracknell Forest Partnership Community TV – which has screens in the library, College, leisure centres, local GP surgeries and health centre; cafés in a town centre bookshop, supermarket and a local garden centre.
- Posters placed in the reception areas of the main council buildings at Time Square.
- Mail drops with relevant information (e.g. leaflets & posters) to GPs, education professionals, designated teachers and social work staff.

- Independent schools requested to provide information each term on any private fostering arrangements
- Increase awareness activity during Private Fostering Week with a targeted awareness campaign amongst professionals and the general public
- Information can be made available on request in the different languages of the local community.

8 Assessment of the suitability of Private Foster Carers and their household

Notifications of private fostering are initially screened by the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and an initial visit undertaken within seven working days by the Assessment Team. This visit covers all of the relevant areas set out in the National Minimum Standards Annex A. When it is evident that the arrangement is going to last more than 28 days the case details are passed to either the Family Safeguarding Teams or the Children's Specialist Support Team, which will support the child, and the Family Placement Team, which will support the Private Foster Carers. A social worker from both teams visits the child and the Private Foster Carers and wherever possible this visit will be undertaken jointly. In the absence of the social worker, her/his line manager is responsible for ensuring another member of the team will undertake this visit.

An assessment is carried out in relation to all Privately Fostered children and young people (Single Assessment) and their carers (Family Placement Assessment) within Bracknell Forest. The assessments are completed in accordance with Schedule 3 of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering¹. All relevant statutory checks are made, including an enhanced disclosure from the Disclosure and Barring Service, agency enquiries and personal references for all adults in the household.

Written information is provided, through leaflets, for the child, carers and parents of any privately fostered child at the earliest opportunity.

Private fostering assessments include ensuring that the child/young person's physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural development is satisfactory and that identified needs arising from his/her religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background are being met. In addition, the assessment will include the suitability of the accommodation and an evaluation of the parenting capacity of the prospective/current private foster carer. The report should also conclude whether the child is a 'Child In Need', and therefore entitled to additional support services under Section 17, and if so which services should be provided.

Private foster carers are given advice on the child/young person's individual needs, which may include advice on any medical condition or learning disability, in order to enhance their ability to care for the child/young person. Support services are made available to private foster carers as identified by the assessment. Private foster carers, where necessary, are encouraged to promote contact between the child/young person and his/her parents, siblings, extended family and significant others.

The assessment is completed and shared with the carers before being presented to the monthly Bracknell Forest Foster Panel. This Panel meets the requirements of the Fostering

¹ See National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, page 22 at <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/socialcare/safeguarding/privatefostering/>

Services Regulations 2011 and makes recommendations about the approval of foster carers, the matching of children to long-term placements and the suitability of private foster carers. The Panel sets a standard for the quality of care a child should receive in a substitute family.

Having considered the information available, the Panel makes a recommendation to the Head of Life Chances, Children's Social Care, who will take the recommendation into consideration in deciding whether to continue to support the Private Fostering Arrangement or take further action to secure the wellbeing of the child. The Life Chances Team Manager or the Family Placement Assistant Team Manager informs the Private Foster Carer in writing of the Council's decision.

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

The Family Placement Team provides support, advice and training for private foster carers through the designated Family Worker. The child's social work team provides support for the Privately Fostered child or young person, acting as an advocate, liaising with the child's parent or person with parental responsibility and the private foster carer in order to ensure that the current and future needs of the child are being met.

Private Foster Carers (including prospective Private Foster Carers) have access to advice on benefit entitlement, parenting strategies and techniques, and other appropriate training and support as identified. Training is not generally mandatory but is available should private foster carers wish to access it. Private foster carers will have access to the Council's training programme for foster carers and other social care staff.

Whilst undertaking the Private Foster carers assessment, the social worker may consider it appropriate to stipulate attendance at a specific training programme for the suitability of a specific placement. If this is the case, the Private Foster Carer's social worker will discuss the matter with the Private Foster carers and will make a clear recommendation in their assessment report to the Fostering Panel. It will be clear in the report if the identified training is a requirement in order for the private foster carer to be deemed suitable. The Agency Decision Maker will make an appropriate decision and the Private Foster carers will be advised accordingly.

All Private Foster carers, children and parents are informed of their right to make a complaint and how to do so.

10 Ensuring the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted

All children and young people Privately Fostered will be given a copy of the leaflet 'Private Fostering - A guide for children and young people' according to their age and understanding. If required the allocated social worker for the child will assist the child in reading it or obtain a copy in other languages if applicable.

The child's social worker is required to visit the Privately Fostered child at a minimum of six weekly intervals and more frequently should this be appropriate. During the second and subsequent years, visits are required to take place at least every 12 weeks or as frequently

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as necessary. The social worker should speak to the child on his/her own and also ensure the child is aware of their right to raise any concerns about their care with a safe adult.

Parents of proposed/current Privately Fostered children or young people will be advised, if it is in the best interests of the child/young person, of other service provision or other agency help available, which could remove the necessity for the child/young person to be privately fostered.

The Head of Life Chances monitors the operational performance of services for Privately Fostered children and reports annually to the Bracknell Forest Safeguarding Board.

An electronic database is used to record all cases that are notified to the Local Authority, and the Family Placement Team collects data and any analysis that is required. The allocated social worker ensures that all statutory work is completed within the required timescales and reports any areas of concern directly to their line manager.

In addition to statutory visits, other visits are made at the request of Privately Fostered children/young people, their parents, or the private foster carers. Interpreters independent of parents and private foster carers will be used where required or requested by the child/young person or where the preferred language is not English.

There is no statutory obligation to visit the parents or those with parental responsibility to discuss the progress of their child. However, social workers will consider any necessary advice and support when undertaking their assessment and should visit when at the request of the parents/those with parental responsibility.

Any child protection concerns which may be identified are investigated in line with the requirements of the Safeguarding Board Child Protection Procedures.

Young people who have been privately fostered may qualify to receive advice and assistance from the Children's Social Care Leaving Care service. Where this is the case an assessment and support plan will be developed with the young person by the social worker and leaving care worker.

11 Information and Support for Privately Fostered Children

All privately fostered children/young people will have a named social worker and will be given their contact details and written information about private fostering appropriate to their age and understanding. They will be offered opportunities to attend local activities arranged by the Child Participation Development Officer. There is also a booklet and letter specifically for young people to help them understand what private fostering is.

12 Other notifications

Ending a Private Foster Placement

If the private foster carer ceases to care for the child they must notify the Local Authority. This should preferably be in advance but if the child has left, notification should be not more than 48 hours after the change. They must also tell the Local Authority the name and

address of the person who has taken over the care of the child (this does not apply if the child is returning to the Private Foster Carer within 27 days).

A notification of ending a private foster placement must state the reasons for termination. The parent or any other person who has parental responsibility for a privately fostered child must notify the Local Authority if the private fostering arrangement is ended.

Change of Address

Any person privately fostering a child must notify the Local Authority of any change of address which is likely to be effective for more than six weeks.

Change in Household

The Private Foster carer must notify the Local Authority of any person (child or adult) who begins or ceases to be part of the household whether on a permanent or temporary basis. This would include another child who is to be Privately Fostered for whom notification requirements would apply.

Convictions

The Private Foster carer must inform the Local Authority of any new convictions relevant to any person living or employed in the household. Such conviction may lead to the private foster carer being disqualified from caring for children.

Death of Child

If a child dies whilst in the care of a Private Foster carer the Local Authority must be informed immediately.

Notifications of changes must be made in writing to the Bracknell Forest Council MASH and Assessment Team. Under **Section 70 of the Children Act 1989**, persons failing to make the above notifications may be guilty of an offence.

13 Support and links with partner agencies

We aim to work with our partner agencies to provide all Privately Fostered children/young people with the information they need to access services and to liaise with relevant professionals. All partner agencies will be given information on their responsibilities regarding notification under the Regulations 2005. Information materials continue to be sent out to schools, health organisations, and faith groups following a rolling timetable.

14 Monitoring and reviewing arrangements

A child who is privately fostered is a Child In Need as defined under section 17, Children Act 1989 and the Child in Need Plan in respect of the child should be reviewed in accordance with Child in Need Review schedules and procedures. Child In Need Plans should be reviewed by the child's social worker at a minimum frequency of three months, and should involve contributions from the child, parents and all those involved with the child.

The Authority's Foster Carers' Reviewing Officer holds responsibility for reviewing the placements of Privately Fostered children who are resident within the Bracknell Forest Council area. The first review will take place within twelve months of the initial sign off by the Agency Decision Maker. More frequent reviews can be arranged if the particular circumstances of a case suggest this to be appropriate.

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The review will usually involve a face-to-face meeting between the Reviewing Officer and the foster carer. Where the child who is the subject of the review is of an appropriate age and understanding he/she will also be seen as part of the review process.

Case files of privately fostered children and Private Foster Carers are included in the file auditing schedule which reviews case files to ensure records are accurate, comprehensive, well organised, have management oversight and are up to date and that actions comply with Regulations.

Bracknell Forest Council has good quality management information systems. The following records will be maintained:

- 1) The numbers and placement details of privately fostered children in the area
- 2) The numbers and details of Private Foster Carers in the area
- 3) The number and details of new notifications which are also recorded on the statistical data return and submitted to the Department for Education as required.
- 4) The number and nature of enquiries received by Bracknell Forest Council in relation to private fostering, the responses given and any subsequent action.

The Business Intelligence Team and the Head of Life Chances monitor the timescales affecting children. This includes placement visits to privately fostered children. Reasons for potential or actual delay can therefore be identified, senior manager informed and actions taken to remedy the situation. All reports for children in these arrangements will be presented to the Head of Life Chances within 42 days of the initial notification. A report setting out the impact of the work relating to private fostering is presented annually to the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

15 Comments, compliments and representations

It is the policy of Bracknell Forest Council to actively encourage comments and representations concerning the delivery and nature of its service.

Any child receiving or refused a service from the Children or Family Placement Team, his/her parents, anyone who has parental responsibility for him/her or, any other such person as the Council considers has sufficient interest in the child's welfare, has a right to make a complaint when an issue cannot be satisfactorily resolved.

If more information is required regarding the Compliments and Complaints procedure, please contact: 01344 352020

16 Inspection

The Private Fostering Service is inspected by OFSTED as part of the Children's Social Care Single Inspection. Bracknell Forest was inspected in May 2017 with an outcome of Good. Details can be found on the OFSTED website – www.ofsted.gov.uk

Enquiries should be addressed to:

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