



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Private Fostering
Statement of Purpose**

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Introduction

Private fostering is an arrangement made without the Local Authority, when someone who is not a close relative looks after a child under 16 (18 if the child is disabled) for 28 days or more.

By law, Wokingham Children's Services needs to know about children living in private fostering arrangements so we can make sure the child is being properly looked after and offer parents/carers support and advice.

A child might be in private foster care for several reasons, for example:

- Living with friends or family due to parental conflict or separation.
- Birth parents living abroad who have sent their child for education or health care.
- If there is a particular reason the parent can't look after the child, such as ill health, being in hospital or in prison.

There are lots of signs that a child might be in private foster care, for example:

- Someone new started bringing them to school, play dates, appointments, or other activities.
- A child not previously known suddenly starts living with a neighbour, or they have a number of different children staying with them.

This Statement of Purpose is designed to meet the statutory requirement established by the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005 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 they will be carried out."

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

- Children are provided with high quality childcare that meets their needs.
- Safeguarding and protecting children is prioritised.
- The children's physical, emotional, health, educational, social and cultural needs is safeguarded and promoted.
- Private carers are provided with advice, and support which helps them to provide such care.
- Birth parents feel able to seek the help and guidance of the Local Authority.

Wokingham Children's Services aims to ensure that Wokingham is a place where birth parents, individuals with parental responsibility and carers feel comfortable in notifying the

local authority of private fostering arrangements.

Discussions will be child-focused from the start, with the welfare of the child remaining of paramount importance at all times and in every circumstance.

Any comments or enquiries regarding this Statement of Purpose should be passed to the Service Manager for Corporate Parenting:

At the time of publication, the Service Manager for Corporate Parenting is:

Isabel Prinsloo

isabel.prinsloo@wokingham.gov.uk

The legal definition of a privately fostered child

'Private Fostering' is defined by [The Children \(Private Arrangements for Fostering\) Regulations 2005](#) as a private arrangement made for the care of a child or young person under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled) by someone other than:

- A parent
- A person who has parental responsibility for the child
- A close relative (i.e. an aunt / uncle / step-parent by marriage / grandparent / sibling)

The Regulations have been interpreted to include within the definition of 'parent', unmarried or putative fathers.

For the private arrangement to be within the statutory definition of Private Fostering:

- The child must have been cared for and accommodated by that person for 28 days or more.

or

- The period of actual private fostering is less than 28 days, but the private foster carer intends to privately foster the child for a period of 28 days or more.

Private Fostering arrangements are diverse. However, arrangements which can be considered for private fostering typically include:

- Children and young people sent from abroad to stay with another family, usually to improve their educational opportunities.
- Unaccompanied children who are fleeing conflict and arrive in the UK via a dedicated Government scheme, for example those placed with sponsors via the Homes for Ukraine programme.
- Teenagers who, having broken ties with their parents, are staying in short term arrangements with friends or other non-relatives.

- Children of prisoners placed with distant relatives.
- Language students living with host families.
- Children and young people from another country who are staying with someone who is not a relative which includes trafficked children.

A child or young person who is Looked After or placed in any residential home, hospital or school is excluded from the definition.

Duties and functions relating to privately fostered children

Under the [Children Act 1989 \(Section 67\(1\)\)](#) and the [Children \(Private Arrangements for Fostering\) Regulations 2005](#), Wokingham Borough Council has a duty to be notified about all private fostering arrangements in its geographical area of responsibility, and to satisfy itself that the welfare of children being privately fostered is of utmost importance.

As soon as the Local Authority becomes aware of a proposed arrangement to privately foster a child or young person within their area, or where a child or young person is being privately fostered within their area, the Local Authority will assess the suitability of the arrangement.

Where a child or young person already has an allocated Social Worker, then the private foster carer, those with parental responsibility or any professional working with the child or young person must contact the Social Worker to notify them of the arrangement. The allocated Social Worker then makes a referral to the Family Placement Team and organises a joint visit.

The allocated Social Worker undertakes the child element of the assessment, and the family placement worker undertakes the adult assessment.

Where a child or young person does not have an allocated Social Worker, then the private foster carer, those with parental responsibility or any professional working with a child or young person must contact the Wokingham Children's Services Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to notify the Local Authority of the arrangement:

Email: triage@wokingham.gov.uk

Phone: 0118 908 8002

Webpage: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/children-and-families/child-protection-and-family-support/private-fostering/>

Arrangements will be then made to undertake an assessment of the child's needs and the private fostering arrangement.

Whilst local authorities do not formally approve or register private foster carers, Wokingham Borough Council has a duty to satisfy themselves that the welfare of a privately fostered child or young person within their area is being safeguarded.

Training

Relevant staff will be trained to ensure they have appropriate understanding and expertise in relation to private fostering. The Service Manager for Corporate Parenting is also the Designated Manager for Private Fostering, and has lead responsibility for ensuring that relevant staff have appropriate understanding and expertise in this area of practice. The responsibilities include the review and updating of Practice Guidance and assessment documentation, undertaking briefing sessions of staff and maintaining awareness of Private Fostering.

The Designated Manager reports on activities undertaken to the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (BWSCP) and the Director of Children's Services through the preparation and presentation of the Private Fostering Annual Report.

The Designated Private Fostering Expert

The Designated Private Fostering Expert is a designated employee with expertise in private fostering, whom social workers can contact for advice. At the issue of this Statement of Purpose, the Designated Private Fostering expert is:

Isabel Prinsloo
Service Manager for Corporate Parenting
isabel.prinsloo@wokingham.gov.uk

The designated expert has responsibility for coordinating the return of required private fostering data to the Department for Education, and is also responsible for producing the Annual Report on Private Fostering.

Where it is unclear whether a care arrangement for a child or young person is or is not a private fostering arrangement, discussion will take place with the Designated Expert for Private Fostering. The Designated Expert may seek legal advice as to whether the arrangement does or does not fall within the statutory definition of private fostering. Learning from this process will then be shared by the Designated Expert as relevant.

Decisions on suitability of arrangements

The Service Manager for Corporate Parenting will sign-off decisions about the overall suitability of private fostering arrangements. At the issue of this statement, the Service Manager for Corporate Parenting is:

Isabel Prinsloo
isabel.prinsloo@wokingham.gov.uk

Safeguarding Managers with responsibility for the oversight of assessment and review of private fostering arrangements have delegated responsibility to come to a professional decision about the suitability of a private fostering arrangement, taking into account the statutory requirements of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, the Private Fostering Regulations 2005 and the Children Act 1989.

Promotion of notification requirements: other agencies and the local community

The following describes how Wokingham Children's Services promotes awareness of private fostering statutory notification requirements with other agencies and within the wider local community, as required by The Childrens Act 2004.

The Designated Manager and the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children's Partnership (BWSCP) are responsible for developing a strategy to raise public and professional awareness about private fostering.

This is done using a range of distribution methods, including posters, leaflets, social media, web articles and training opportunities. The Designated Manager reports annually on activities undertaken to raise awareness of notification requirements through the preparation and presentation of the Private Fostering Annual Report.

Wokingham Children's Services and the BWSCP is committed to maintaining high standards in relation to Private Fostering and to reviewing these on a regular basis.

Our aims are:

- To increase the notification of private arrangements by raising awareness of private fostering.
- To provide guidance on our statutory responsibilities to members of the public, parents, children, all local authority and partner agencies.
- To establish and assess the suitability of private fostering arrangements.
- To ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people living in such arrangements and that their needs are being met.
- To provide support and advice to private foster carers, children/young people and their parents as appropriate.

This is achieved by regular review of private fostering data at the Independent Scrutiny and Impact Group (ISIG), and through auditing activity.

Determining suitability of private fostering arrangements

The following sets out how Wokingham Children's Services will determine the suitability of all aspects of a private fostering arrangement in accordance with the Private Fostering Regulations.

Private Fostering Regulations require that an 'Initial Visit' commencing the assessment must be made to the proposed or actual private foster carers within seven working days of notification. This will be conducted by a qualified Social Worker tasked with conducting a full assessment of the suitability of the Private Fostering arrangement.

It is locally determined that an assessment of the suitability of the Private Fostering arrangement should take no more than 45 days from the Notification.

However, additionally, a locally devised Private Fostering Assessment document will be used to record additional information obtained in the course of assessment. This will include consideration of:

- Any issues emerging from the declarations required by Private Foster Carers.
- Any issues resulting from DBS Certificate of Disclosure for all adult household members.
- Any issues resulting from Private Fostering Home Safety Checklist.
- Any issues resulting from two non-relative references obtained.

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of privately fostered children

The following explains how Wokingham Children's Services will ensure that the welfare of privately fostered children in its area is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted.

Children and young people cared for by Private Foster Carers will be visited frequently to ensure that they are safe and appropriately cared for. The frequency of visits will be determined by the circumstances of the case and should take place whenever reasonably requested by the child or private foster carer. However, at a minimum a child or young person should be visited:

- Within 7 working days of the arrangement having commenced.
- Not less than every six weeks during the first year of the arrangement.
- Not less than every twelve weeks after the first year of the arrangement.

The child will be seen alone on each visit unless this is not appropriate having regard to the young age of the child or if the child does not wish to see the Social Worker alone. The child's bedroom will be seen on some visits.

The care of a child or young person in Private Foster Care will be reviewed regularly. The review of private fostering arrangements is dependent upon whether the child or young person is receiving services additional to the ongoing support and monitoring provided to comply with *The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005* or not.

Where the child or young person is also receiving additional services under a Child in Need Plan, the Plan will be reviewed every three months in accordance with Children's Services Practice Standards.

Where however, there are no additional services provided to that of support and monitoring of the arrangement under the Regulations, the arrangement will be reviewed at least every six months via a joint visit with the children's social work team and the Family Placement Team.

The review of the arrangement will cover:

- Duration of placement
- Financial arrangements
- Contact arrangements
- How the child's health needs are being met
- How the child's educational needs are being met
- How the child's emotional social and behavioural needs are being met
- How the child's religious, racial, cultural and linguistic needs are being met
- Role of parents in exercising their parental responsibility
- How the placement will be monitored by Children's Social Care until the next Review.
- As in all reviews, parents, children and carers will be actively encouraged to participate and contribute to the review and planning process.

If an arrangement continues, the private foster carer's will be required to renew their DBS forms every 3 years.

Advice and support available to private foster carers and others

The following sets out the advice and support that will be available to private foster carers (including prospective private foster carers), parents and others with parental responsibility, and others concerned with the privately fostered child.

The allocated Social Worker assessing the suitability of the arrangement and ensuring the privately fostered child is safe and well cared for, has responsibility to identify the advice and support required by the child, private foster carers, parents and others.

During the assessment, consideration will be given as to whether it is appropriate for the private foster carers to access specific training or information materials to support them in caring for the individual privately fostered child.

Where appropriate, the assessing Social Worker will offer advice on benefit entitlement, parenting strategies and techniques. Wherever possible, the Social Worker will meet with the child's parents and offer advice about local service provision which may remove the need for the child to be privately fostered.

Children and young people cared for by Private Foster Carers will be visited frequently to ensure that they are safe and appropriately cared for. The child will be seen alone on each visit unless this is not appropriate having regard to the young age of the child or if the child does not wish to see the Social Worker alone. Where appropriate, a privately fostered child or young person may be referred to the Children's Rights and Advocacy Officer for advocacy advice and support.

Training available to private foster carers (including prospective carers)

During assessment, consideration will be given as to whether it is appropriate for the private foster carers to access specific training or information materials to support them in caring for the individual privately fostered child. This will be kept under review.

The role of agencies in notifying the council of arrangements

The Designated Manager for Private Fostering along with the BWSCP is responsible for developing a strategy to raise multi-agency professional awareness about private fostering, as required by Section 67 (1) of the Children Act 1989. This will be done using a range of media, including posters, leaflets, web articles and training opportunities.

The Designated Manager reports annually on activities undertaken to raise awareness of Notification requirements to the BWSCP and the Director of Children's Services through the preparation and presentation of the Private Fostering Annual Report.

Monitoring and evaluation of private fostering within Wokingham

The National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005 require that:

“The Local Authority provides a written report each year, for consideration by CYSCP and the Director of Children’s Services, which includes an evaluation of the outcomes of its work in relation to privately fostered children within its area.”
(7.9)

Accordingly, the Designated Manager for Private Fostering will prepare and present an ‘Annual Report’ for consideration by the Director of Children’s Services and the BWSCP giving an overview of activities in relation to Privately Fostered children in Wokingham Borough Council over a twelve-month period.

The report will detail how Wokingham Borough Council has complied with its duties and functions in relation to Private Fostering and include how the welfare of privately fostered children has been satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted over the past 12 months. The report will also outline the activities undertaken to promote local awareness of the notification requirements regarding children who are living in Private Fostering arrangements.

Additionally, the report will include a summary of the statistics provided by Wokingham Borough Council to the Department for Education, as part of the annual Private Fostering Return (PF1) required of all local authorities concerning numbers of new notifications, arrangements and visiting patterns. Historical and national comparative data is provided for context.

Following consideration by the Director of Children’s Services and the BWSCP, this report will be reviewed by the overview and scrutiny panel.

This report will be considered by the Director of Children’s Services and the Children's Services leadership team, and presented to the BWSCP Independent Scrutiny and Impact Group.