

Appendix 2

Getting it Right for Privately Fostered Children

Private Fostering Statement of Purpose

June 2014

*To be read in conjunction with:
Slough Borough Council Private Fostering Procedures
National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering
Replacement Children Act 1989 Guidance on Private Fostering*

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1. Introduction

Slough Borough Council is committed to supporting the upbringing of children within and by their families of origin, wherever possible, with the minimum of intrusion. While the Council fully discharges its responsibilities in respect of private fostering, it seeks to do so in a ways that are supportive of children, young people, parents and carers. The Council does not intend to make judgements about, or interfere in the arrangements that parents make for the care of their children, except where this is necessary to safeguard and ensure the welfare of privately fostered children.

We will work together with children, young people, parents and carers to ensure that:

- Children and young people are provided with high quality care that meets their needs;
- Private foster carers are provided with support and training to help them to provide high quality care; and
- Birth parents feel able to seek help and guidance from the Council.

The Council recognises that privately fostered children are a diverse and potentially vulnerable group. Our aim is to get it right for privately fostered children in Slough and create a supportive culture where birth parents, others with parental responsibility and carers feel comfortable in notifying the Council of private fostering arrangements.

The National Minimum Standards for private fostering apply to Local Authorities. This document ensures that Slough Borough Council meets National Minimum Standard 1, which requires that the local authority has a written statement or plan setting out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. 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 Slough Borough Council.

Slough Borough Council has three functions in relation to Private Fostering.

1. To raise public and professional awareness about private fostering and the legal requirement to notify the Council about any actual or planned private fostering arrangements.
2. To promote the information advice and support that are available to: privately fostered children and young people; private foster carers and prospective private foster carers; parents and those with parental responsibility.
3. To respond to any private fostering notifications, assess the arrangements and to provide support to the children or young people and adults involved.

Slough Borough Council has a clear and comprehensive written procedure for assessing private fostering arrangements, which is available online:

http://sloughchildcare.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_private_fost.html

Notification of a Private Fostering Arrangement should be made to the First Contact Duty Team where it will be processed and referred to the Assessment and Children in Need Service, which will allocate it to a social worker in one of the Assessment and Children in Need teams for assessment. Private fostering arrangements that are assessed as being suitable will be managed by the Family Placement Service, which will allocate a social worker to the child and also provide advice and support to his/her parent(s) and private foster carers. Any future safeguarding concerns in respect of the child will be referred back to the relevant Assessment and Children in Need team.

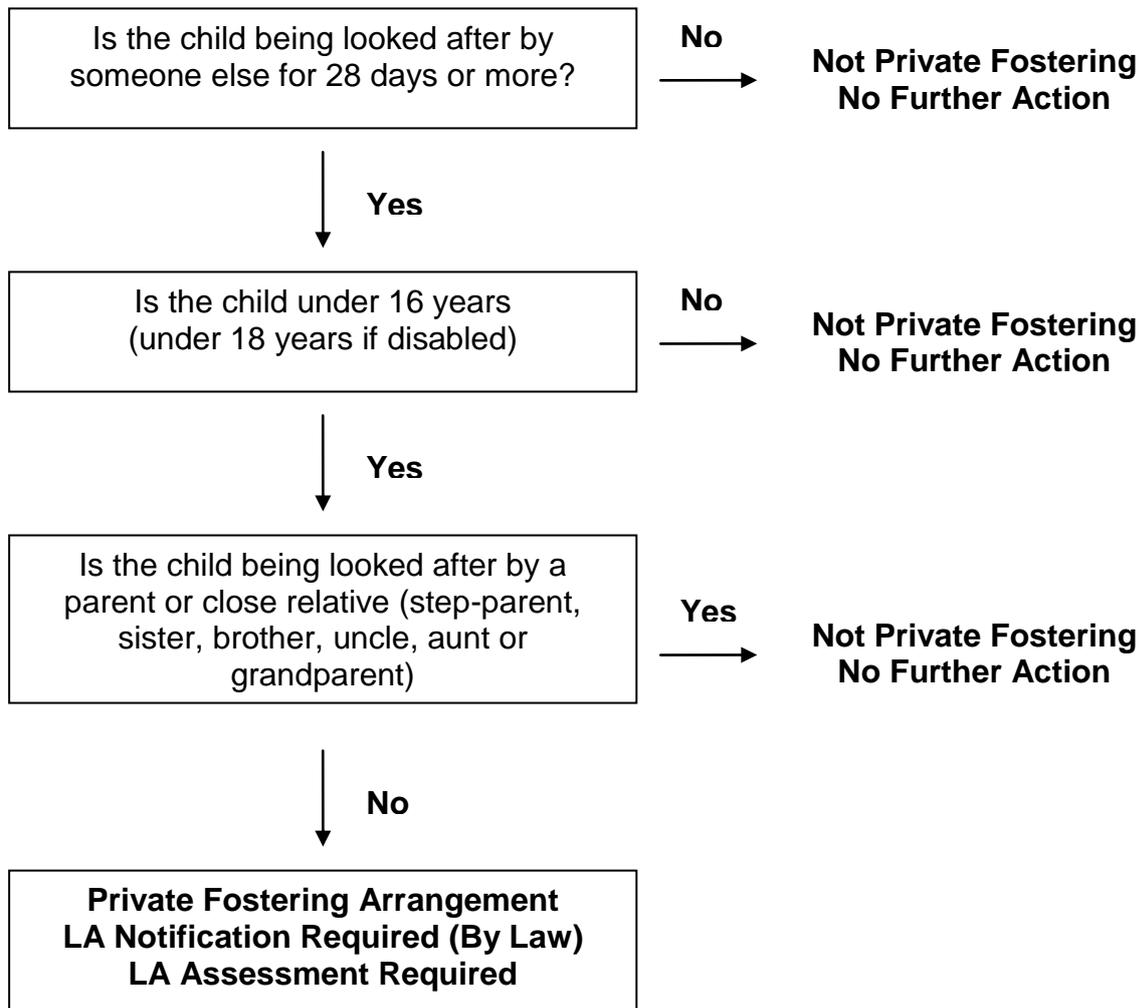
2. The Definition of a Privately Fostered Child

The legal definition of a privately fostered child is found in Section 66 of *The Children Act 1989* and is described in *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 the 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 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 a period longer than 28 days. The 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.

Determining if a care arrangement is Private Fostering



3. Examples of Private Fostering

Each private fostering arrangement will be different, depending on the child's circumstances and needs. Examples of private fostering arrangements include those below.

Local children living apart from their families

- Children living with a friend's family because their parents' study or work involves unsociable hours, which make it difficult to use ordinary day care or after-school care
- Children whose parents are not able to care for them (due to, illness, substance abuse, divorce or imprisonment) and have made alternative arrangements
- Single parents who are in hospital for four weeks or more, planned or unplanned, and who arrange for the care of their child/children with adults who are not close relatives

Children staying with friends because of family difficulties

- Children staying with another family because their parents have separated or divorced
- A teenager "sofa surfing" at a friend's house because they don't get on with their own family
- A teenager living with the family of a boyfriend or girlfriend

Children with parents overseas

- Children from overseas staying with a host family while attending a language school
- Children from overseas sent to this country, for education or health care, by parents who live overseas
- Overseas students at boarding school who do not return home during the holidays and stay with a host family in the UK

Asylum seekers and refugees

- Unaccompanied children who arrive in the UK seeking asylum
- Children who arrive in the UK seeking asylum travelling with adults who are not close relatives and might not be known to them
- Children who are trafficked into the UK

Children brought into the UK for adoption

- Children brought into the UK to be adopted will be privately fostered until formal notice of intention to apply to adopt is given

The following examples are not private fostering arrangements (but may still require services under section 17 of the Children Act 1989).

- A child's parents die in a car accident and the child goes to live with her mother's brother's wife (aunt by marriage).
- Following an argument with her mother, a 14 year old girl goes to live with her 22 year old half sister.

4. The Local Authority's Duties and Functions

The Children Act 1989 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 place a duty upon Slough Borough Council to ensure that the welfare of privately fostered children notified to the Council is being safeguarded and promoted, and give advice to those caring for them. The duties of the Council, where it is not satisfied that the welfare of a privately fostered child is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, will apply in the case of children who are proposed to be privately fostered.

Slough Borough Council is also required to undertake the following actions in respect of private fostering:

- Raise public awareness in Slough about the notification requirements;
- Develop a programme of communication activities, including for local authority staff;
- Develop a range of up to date publicity materials;
- Make available information on the notification requirements;
- Involve other agencies in awareness-raising activities;
- Provide advice to those parents, persons with parental responsibility, private foster carers and those proposing to privately foster a child; and
- Consider the overall developmental needs, in co-operation with other relevant agencies, of a disabled child who is privately fostered.

The Council must also consider whether a privately fostered child is also a Child in Need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and consider where support and services can be provided to increase the capacity of the private foster carer to meet the child's needs.

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. These standards cover the following areas:

- Producing a written statement, which set out the local authority's duties and functions in relation to private fostering (this document);
- Promoting awareness of notification requirements, responding to notifications and dealing with un-notified arrangements that come to their attention;
- Ensuring the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarding and promoted;
- Providing advice and support to privately fostered children and their parents and foster carers, including prospective private foster carers; and
- Monitoring the way in which the local authority complies with its duties and function in relation to private fostering.

5. Training for Relevant Staff

Private Fostering awareness is included within Slough Borough Council's safeguarding children training at both Level 1 (Basic) and Level 2 (Targeted).

Level 1 Safeguarding Children training is undertaken by a wide variety of Council staff and others in statutory and voluntary organisations that come into contact with children and families. Level 2 Safeguarding Children training is undertaken by staff who have a designated role or responsibility for safeguarding or child protection.

Slough Borough Council and the Local Safeguarding Children Board have also commissioned online training to enable multi-agency practitioners and managers to understand private fostering and their responsibilities for notifying the local authority of private fostering arrangements. This training requires no previous knowledge of private fostering and can be freely accessed by all staff and volunteers via the Internet.

All Council staff working in Children, Young People and Families are required to undertake the multi-agency online training, with the exception of children's social workers who undertake separate training (see below). Staff working in other service areas of the Council, ***including those employed by the Council's commissioned providers and through agencies***, who will often come into contact with children, young people and families in the course of their work are also required to complete the online training, including:

- Adult Social Care
- Community Wardens
- Housing
- Young People's Service
- Youth Offending Team

The private fostering multi-agency training online module can be accessed from the Workforce Development page of the Children and Young People's Partnership Board micro site at <http://www.slough.gov.uk/CYPPB>

A Private Fostering online training module forms part of the induction process for all new children's social workers employed by Slough Borough Council and is also available for all children's social workers to access at any time. This online training module for children's social workers can also be accessed via the CYPPB micro site or at:

<http://courses.econstruct.co.uk>

First time users of either of these courses will need to create an online account and upon completion of the course will be able to download a certificate as evidence.

In addition the Council's Named Person with private fostering expertise (see Section 6) delivers regular face-to-face private fostering workshops for social workers.

6. Named Person with Private Fostering Expertise

Local Authorities are required to provide the name of a person with expertise in private fostering, whom social workers can contact for advice.

Slough Borough Council's Named Person with expertise in private fostering is:

Joanne Neale (Practice Manager)
Family Placement Service
01753 690737
Joanne.neale@slough.gov.uk

7. Named Manager for Private Fostering

Local Authorities are required to provide the name of the manager(s) who will sign-off decisions about the overall suitability of private fostering arrangements.

Slough Borough Council's Named Manager for private fostering is:

Denise Goodwin (Head of Service, Assessment and Children in Need)
01753 690944
Denise.goodwin@slough.gov.uk

In the absence of the Named Manager, private fostering decisions will be signed-off by:

Kitty Ferris
Assistant Director, Children, Young People and Families
Telephone: 01753 690901
Email: kitty.ferris@slough.gov.uk

8. Promoting Awareness of Notification Requirements

The National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering require local authorities to have a programme of communication activities, including for the public, local authority staff and other agencies.

8.1 Promoting awareness with other agencies

Slough Borough Council is required to provide targeted and current information to those who may come into contact with privately fostered children (including teachers, health visitors, nurses, doctors, housing officers and community workers) about their role in assisting the local authority to carry out its duties in respect of private fostering.

The Council promotes private fostering awareness to partner agencies through Slough Children and Young People's Partnership Board (CYPPB), which it facilitates. In addition to the private fostering multi-agency online training (see Section 5) information is provided online via the CYPPB microsite (www.slough.gov.uk/cyppb). Partners are also provided with posters and leaflets to raise awareness about private fostering and the notification requirements, and information cards for staff to carry. The Slough Local Safeguarding Children website also carries relevant information.

8.2 Promoting awareness with the local community

Slough Borough Council promotes awareness of private fostering and the notification requirements with families and the local community in a number of ways.

A range of up to date publicity materials are available in an appropriate range of languages and formats, which are accessible to different groups of private foster carers, parents and communities. These are displayed and distributed in a variety of settings including Council buildings, GP surgeries and other healthcare settings, schools, children's centres and nurseries, community centres and places of worship.

Private fostering publicity materials include the:

- Legal definition of a privately fostered child with examples;
- Notification requirements;
- Procedure for notifying;
- Benefits of notifying; and
- Possible consequences of non-notification.

An annual media campaign will include advertisements and editorial in online and print publications and increasing the use of social media to communicate with the community. The media used will include:

- The Citizen (Slough Borough Council free residents' newspaper);
- Local newspapers;
- Local radio stations; and
- Slough Borough Council's Twitter feed.

The Council will also engage with community, faith and women's groups in Slough in order to raise awareness about private fostering and the notification requirements.

Further details of the publicity materials, media campaign and community engagement activity are contained in the Council's Private Fostering Awareness Plan, which will be updated annually.

9. Determining the suitability of private fostering arrangements

Slough Borough Council will respond promptly to all notifications of private fostering arrangements it receives. A social worker will visit all privately fostered children and young people during which the social worker must speak to them alone. The social worker will also make an assessment of the suitability of the private foster carer, or proposed private foster carer, including their parenting capacity and the suitability of the accommodation. The visit and assessment must be completed within 7 days of receipt of the private fostering notification.

As part of the assessment of suitability, all private foster carers and other members of the household over 16 must consent to an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check on them being obtained. Assessments will be signed off by the Named Manager or in his/her absence the Assistant Director, Children, Young People and Families within 45 working days or as soon as the outcome of the DBS check is known, whichever is sooner.

If a private foster carer, proposed private foster carer or member of the household over 16 refuses to cooperate with any of the checks they will not be recommended as suitable to privately foster the child. If during the assessment, including the DBS check, the social worker finds any information that may preclude the person from fostering a child then a report should be prepared for the Named Manager.

Where information that may preclude a person from fostering a child is discovered during an assessment of a private fostering arrangement that is already in place then the Named Manager must be informed and child protection procedures followed.

10. Safeguarding Privately Fostered Children

All privately fostered children and young people will have an allocated social worker who will undertake statutory visits in order to safeguard them and ensure their welfare. These visits will be made at least every six weeks during the first year and at least every three months thereafter; more frequent visits may be made if deemed necessary by the social worker and his/her manager. The child or private foster carers may also request additional visits.

During the visits the social worker will ensure that the child is developing satisfactorily and that his/her needs are being met, and speak to the child in order to ascertain his/her wishes. The social worker will speak to the child alone unless the child does not wish to or it is not appropriate because the child is too young.

Private foster carers will be given advice in order to enhance their ability to care for a child or young person and support services will be made available to them by the Family Placement Service. Private foster carers will be encouraged to promote contact, where safe, between the child or young person and his/her parents, siblings, extended family and significant others.

The suitability of the private foster carer should be reviewed annually by the social worker and reported to the Named Manager.

11. Advice and Support for Private Foster Carers and Parents

Private foster carers, prospective private foster carers, parents and others with parental responsibility will be provided with ongoing advice and information by the child's allocated social worker. The Family Placement Service will also provide information about health services, voluntary and community sectors groups that can offer support and access to support groups and training opportunities (see Section 13). Information and materials for private foster carers and parents will be reviewed and updated regularly.

Slough Borough Council's Family Information Service will provide information about universal services for children and families in Slough to private foster carers, including:

- Childcare;
- Children's centres;
- Early years learning;
- Schools and colleges;
- Adult learning;
- Healthcare; and
- Leisure activities.

Slough Family Information Service

Telephone: 01753 476589

Email: FIS@slough.gov.uk

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/family-information-service.aspx>

12. Information and Support for Privately Fostered Children

Children and young people who are privately fostered will receive a range of information and support from Slough Borough Council. Every privately fostered child and young person will be provided with the following information in their first language and in a format appropriate to their age and level of understanding:

- The reasons they are in private foster care;
- Details of their private foster carer;
- Their private foster carer's responsibilities;
- The meaning of their privately fostered status;
- Their right to be safeguarded;
- The name and contact details for their social worker; and
- Details of the advocacy service for children and young people.

Every privately fostered child with a social work plan (e.g. Child in Need Plan or Child Protection Plan) will also be provided with a copy of this social work plan in their first language and presented in a format appropriate to their age and level of understanding.

Unless the young person has a disability, private fostering arrangements will end when s/he is aged 16 years. Where the young person remains with the private foster carers after this age and requires continuing support s/he will be assisted as a Child in Need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

Children with a disability who are privately fostered and over the age of 16 years (and under 21 years) will be offered support, advice and assistance with their transition to independence and adulthood.

13. Training for Private Foster Carers and Parents

Training for private foster carers, including prospective private foster carers, will be provided on a case-by-case basis and will depend on the needs of the foster carers or prospective foster carers. For those already caring this will include the needs that arise from the assessment and social worker visits.

All private foster carers, prospective private foster carers, parents and other with parental responsibility will be provided with the opportunity to attend parenting programmes.

In certain cases private foster carers may be referred to specific adult learning or training opportunities, where this is necessary to address identified needs.

14. The Role of Other Agencies

Those who have day-to-day contact with children and families – particularly workers in universal education and health services – are most likely to identify private fostering. Slough Borough Council’s partners have a duty to notify the Council about private fostering arrangements to enable it to carry out its statutory functions.

The responsibility of other agencies to notify the Council of private fostering arrangements is underpinned by the *Replacement Children Act 1989 Guidance on Private Fostering* and the duty cooperate in *Section 10 of the Children Act 2004*.

It is essential that all workers who come into contact with children and families:

- Are able to recognise private fostering arrangements;
- Understand the private fostering notification requirements; and
- Can make a notification to the local authority.

All partners have access to the private fostering online training (see Section 5) and are provided with information about private fostering and the notification requirements (see Section 8).

Partners should ensure that the groups of staff outlined below complete the online training and have access to the information – including this document.

Staff Group	Agency
Teachers and Lecturers Support Staff (e.g. Teaching Assistants) Pastoral Staff (e.g. Family Workers) Administrative Staff (e.g. receptionists) Senior Managers (e.g. Heads and Deputies) Governors	Primary, Secondary and Special Schools, Pupil Referral Units, Alternative Provision centres and Further Education establishments.
Health Visitors School Nurses	Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
General Practitioners Practice Nurses Receptionists Practice Managers	NHS England
Emergency Doctors (A&E/MIU) Emergency Nurses (A&E/MIU) Midwives Paediatric Nurses Paediatricians Relevant support and para-medical staff Administrative Staff (e.g. receptionists)	Heatherwood and Wexham Park NHS Foundation Trust
Community Police Officers Police Community Support Officers Relevant Police Staff	Thames Valley Police
Probation Officers	Thames Valley Probation Trust
Managers Staff Volunteers	Voluntary and community organisations in Slough that work with children and families.

Slough Local Safeguarding Children Board (SLSCB) also has an important role in raising professional awareness of private fostering and the requirement for professionals in partner agencies to notify Slough Borough Council of private fostering arrangements. The Council will seek the agreement of partners on the LSCB to mandate that their relevant staff complete the private fostering online training.

Within Standard 7 of the National Minimum Standards for private fostering, the local authority is required to report annually to SLSCB on how it satisfies itself that the welfare of privately fostered children in its area is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, including how it cooperates with other agencies in this connection.

The Council's annual report to SLSCB will also include details of staff training in private fostering completed by staff in the local authority and all partners; the numbers of private fostering notifications received from each agency; and selected private fostering case studies. Partners will be asked to disseminate the annual report through their organisations and consider it at management and staff meetings in order to raise awareness of private fostering.

Replacement Children Act 1989 Guidance on Private Fostering

Education, health and other professionals should 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. This, of course, is a matter of good practice.

Children Act 2004

Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 requires each local authority to make arrangements to promote cooperation between partners and such other persons or bodies working with children in the local authority's area as the authority considers appropriate. The arrangements are to be made with a view to improving the wellbeing of children in the authority's area, which includes protection from harm and neglect.