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Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Board

PROCEDURES FOR CHILDREN IN SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES

STOKE-ON-TRENT SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD PRIVATE FOSTERING STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Section D 11



D 11 Private Fostering Statement of Purpose

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Introduction

It is a requirement for all Local Authorities to publish a statement of purpose in relation to Private Fostering. This statement of purpose is a description of Private Fostering arrangements within the Stoke-on-Trent City Council. It aims to meet the requirements as outlined in the 1989 Children Act, the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering which came into force on 18th July 2005 and the Children (private arrangements for fostering) Regulations 2005. This document provides key information about the service for the public, council members and external organisations. It addresses all the areas that must be covered in a statement of purpose.

This document will describe how Private Fostering arrangements, the national requirements and the assessment processes will operate to ensure that sufficient

support and advice is offered to Private Foster carers, privately fostered children and their parents so that privately fostered children within the Stoke-on-Trent are safeguarded.

Equal Opportunities are integrated into all aspects of our service delivery and we ensure that all Private foster carers are assessed and supported, taking into account the needs of the individual private foster child/young person and their race, religion, class, marital status, sexual orientation and disability.

01 Key Principles and Standards of Care

Our commitment to privately fostered children, young people, carers and their families;

The best interests of children are of paramount importance in the work of our private fostering arrangements. We work in partnership with private foster carers, children, and their families to safeguard and promote a child/young persons physical, emotional, health, social and cultural needs.

We ensure that children and young people are treated with respect and dignity and are safeguarded and protected from neglect, abuse and exploitation by the provision of safe, supportive private fostering services.

In agreeing private fostering arrangements, we ensure that a child and young person's age, gender, health, personality, disability, sexuality, race, culture and life experiences are taken into account in the assessment and decision making process and the provision of care and support services.

We work in partnership with the private foster carer, the child/young person, their parents and other organisations to ensure that all parties are clear about their responsibilities and for the parents to remain as closely involved as possible.

In planning and agreeing the private fostering arrangement we ensure that the child/young person is seen and their views heard. We also recognise the importance of listening to the voice of the children and young people who use our services in monitoring standards of service delivery and in planning future services.

We continue to advise professional colleagues about their duties and responsibilities in connection with children and young people who are privately fostered and work in partnership with them to meet the needs of the children, their carers and families.

02 Definition of a Private Fostering Arrangement

A private fostering arrangement is essentially one that is made privately, usually by the child/young person's parents (that is to say without the involvement of a local authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) 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 full blood or half blood or by marriage) or step-parents will not be a private foster carer.

A private foster carer may be a friend of the family, the parent of a friend of the child/young person or someone previously unknown to the child/young person's family who is willing to privately foster. The period for which the child/young person is cared for and accommodated by the private foster carer should be continuous, but that continuity is not broken by the occasional short break. Exemptions to this definition are set out in Schedule 8 to the Children Act 1989. The private foster carer becomes responsible for providing the day-to-day care of the child/young person in a way which will promote and safeguard his/her welfare. Overriding responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the privately fostered child/young person remains with the parent or other person with parental responsibility.

03 Private Fostering situations

The situations where children and young people are privately fostered can be complex which may include:

Local children living apart from their families

These children and young people may be living apart from their families and there may be no one available to look after them with parental responsibility. Parents may have died, divorced or for other reasons a parent is no longer available to care for their child. In some instances, parents may be imprisoned or may be misusing drugs and alcohol and may have made alternative care arrangements for their children.

Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Some of these children and young people may arrive in the UK seeking asylum, travelling with other adults who may not be known to them, or their family in their country of origin. Other children and young people may have acquired refugee status, maybe living in isolation and unsupported with a lack of knowledge about the available services and where to go for help; (see also Policy F04 'Safeguarding Children from Abroad').

Parents who may be unwell

Single parents who on a planned or unplanned basis need to be in hospital for more than four weeks and who arrange for care of their child or children with friends or neighbours on a temporary basis.

Children who may be staying with friends for a short time because of family difficulties

This involves an agreement resulting in a child or a young person staying with the parents of a friend for a period of time. Typically this might be in response to an illness or during a period where the relationship between the child/young person and parents means that they have reached a decision that they cannot live together at this time.

Children attending language schools

These children and young people may come from a range of different countries. A number of children and young people may be living with alternative families for more than 28 days, this will then become a private fostering arrangement and there would need to be safeguards in place for them.

Children at Independent Boarding Schools who do not return home for holidays

Some charitable organisations and other individuals may arrange for children to come into the country for different reasons. These may include holidays for disadvantaged children, medical treatment and sports trainees. During their stay in the UK, they may be placed with a family for more than 28 days and therefore this becomes a private fostering arrangement.

Children brought into the UK for adoption

Some children and young people may be brought into the U.K. to be adopted. These children and young people will be privately fostered until formal notice of intention to apply to adopt is given. Some, who are subject to a form of interim overseas order, which will be finalised in their country of origin, are also considered to be privately fostered.

It is NOT private fostering when:

- The person caring for the child is a close relative like an aunt, a brother, sister or grandparent.
- The arrangement is not expected to last more than 28 days

Notifying the local authority

Private fostering is arranged and agreed by a child/young person's parent/s and the family which will be caring for the child. The law requires that both the parent/s and carer must notify the Local Authority about the proposed placement before it takes place; failure to give notification is an offence. Local authorities do not approve private foster carers; however they are required to assess and say whether or not they agree and accept the private fostering arrangements.

04 Local authority's duties and functions under the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 1991

The law requires the Local Authority to:

- Consider the child/young person's interests first. Private fostering arrangements may be appropriate for short periods of time but the law says that Local Authorities must be told about all private fostering arrangements.

- Raise and promote awareness of Private Fostering in their area.
- Increase notification rates in their area.
- Make regular visits to ensure that children and young people are placed in a safe home environment and that they are well cared for.
- Ensure that checks on the carer and the household are carried out and say whether the arrangement is suitable.
- End a private fostering arrangement if the carer is in unsuitable accommodation or the carer is unsuitable to look after child/young person.
- The Children Act 1989 gives local authorities the general duty to consider whether a privately fostered child/young person is a 'Child In Need', and to consider where support and services can be provided to increase the capacity of the private foster carer to meet the child/young person's needs.

05 Duties under Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005

The new measures in the Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 are intended to strengthen and enhance the existing private fostering notification scheme. Local authorities and Local Safeguarding Children Boards are required to raise public awareness in their area about the requirements of those involved in private fostering arrangements to notify the local authority.

Stoke-on-Trent, like all other local authorities are expected to improve notification rates and the compliance with the existing legislative framework for private fostering in order to strengthen the safeguards for all children and young people who are privately fostered in the area.

06 Raising local awareness

Raising awareness of the notification requirements is carried out in the following ways;

Stage 1: this local authority will continue to focus on partners across the range young peoples services/facilities throughout the city. This will be undertaken via media coverage, specific campaigns as well as the production and distribution of printed materials, and electronic information.

Stage 2: this local authority will work with the Community and Faith groups including independent agencies. Professionals and members of the public can access information about private fostering via the Safeguarding Children Board website. The website address is: www.safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk

07 How the Local Authority will endeavour to ensure that the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted in Stoke-on-Trent

The local authority endeavours to ensure that the welfare of privately fostered children/young people is safeguarded and promoted by professionals who work in children's services settings. There are also clear legislative practice guidelines on private fostering which take into account the regulations on private fostering and ensure that all private fostering arrangements have an up-to-date social work assessment, which is endorsed by the relevant Principal Manager.

In situations where notifications have been received that children are being privately fostered an assessment is carried out within 7 working days. If any safeguarding issues arise or are reported following the assessment, further assessment may be required either under Section 17 or under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989. Action that the local authority will take once notified of an arrangement will include:

- Visit the premises where it is proposed that the child/children will be cared for and accommodated;
- Visit and speak to the proposed private foster carer and to all members of their household;
- Visit and speak to the child/children alone unless the social worker considers it inappropriate;
- Speak to and, if it is practical to do so, visit each parent or person with parental responsibility for the child/children;
- Establish the purpose and the intended duration of the private fostering arrangement;
- Establish the child/children's physical, intellectual, social and behavioural needs;
- Identify whether the child/children's religious, cultural and linguistic needs are being met in the arrangement;
- Establish that the child/children receive a good standard of care and that the child/children are safe and looked after appropriately by the carers;
- Ensure that the child/young person is registered with a GP and dentist;
- Ensure that the child/young person is in appropriate nursery/education placement;
- Carry out an assessment which will look at the suitability of the private foster carer's ability to look after the child/children and the suitability of the private foster carer's household;

- Establish whether the child/children's parents are exercising Parental Responsibility and consult with them to confirm their future plans for the child/young person.
- Establish what the financial arrangements for the care and maintenance for the child/young person is;

08 Complete a Single Assessment to collate and analyse presenting circumstances in order to make a decision about the suitability of the private fostering arrangement;

The completed assessment report will be submitted for sign off by the social worker to his/her senior line manager.

As part of the assessment process we will ensure that key information about all privately fostered children is logged onto the CareFirst Database. We will log the following information about each private fostering arrangement to record the following key information:

- Unique Identifying CareFirst number
- Date notified
- Where the notification came from
- Details of the child/children e.g. name, date of birth, ethnicity
- Any concerns
- Any action taken by professionals
- Details of parents/those with Parental Responsibility
- Ethnicity of the carer
- Details of the carer and their family
- Date assessment commenced and was completed
- Date health and safety DBS checks started and completed

09 The role of other agencies in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of privately fostered children and young people, including encouraging notification

The Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Board has a central role in overseeing the effectiveness of each agency's role in identifying and supporting private fostering arrangements.

All key professionals and agencies who are involved with children/young people are able to access the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Board website for information and advice through:

www.safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk

10 Who to contact for advice and information about private fostering.

To find out more about private fostering, please contact the local authority Family Information Service Hub on: 01782 232200

To report a Private Fostering arrangement, please contact the Safeguarding Referral Team (SRT) on: 01782 235100

11 Ensuring that relevant staff understand the local authorities duties and responsibilities regarding private fostering

Key information about private fostering is circulated to all partner agencies. All staff in Children's Social Care, Schools, Health, Police, Housing and other agencies/organisations in the local authority area can access the Statement of Purpose, guidelines, policies and procedures through the Safeguarding Children Board website.

12 Monitoring the discharge of functions and compliance with part 9 of the Children Act 1989

Under Regulation 12, the local authority must ensure that it discharges its duties and functions regarding children/young people who are privately fostered and are living in the local authority area. We will monitor compliance with the functions laid out in the National Minimum Standards.

Private fostering activity is overseen by the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Board. An annual report on activity is presented to the Board and to the Senior Management Team.