



Private Fostering Statement of Purpose

Getting it right for privately fostered children

Policy Owner:	Michele Henry
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Policy Summary:

This statement of purpose sets out the definition of a Privately Fostered Child and Slough Children First's responsibilities.



A hands-on approach to help children in Slough be

..... Safe, Secure and Successful

Contents

Contents 2

Introduction..... 3

Definition of a privately fostered child..... 4

Determining if a care arrangement is private fostering..... 4

Examples of private fostering 4

Local children living apart from their families..... 5

Children staying with friends because of family difficultiesError! Bookmark not defined.

Children with parents overseas..... 5

Asylum seekers and refugees 5

Children brought into the UK for adoption 5

Slough Children First’s duties and functions 5

Training for relevant staff 6

Named person with private fostering expertise 7

Named manager for private fostering 7

Promoting awareness of notification requirements 7

Promoting awareness with other agencies 8

Promoting awareness with the local community..... 8

Determining the suitability of private fostering arrangements..... 8

Safeguarding privately fostered children 9

Advice/support and training for private foster carers and parents..... 9

Information and support for privately fostered children..... 10

The role of other agencies 10

Relevant legislation/statutory guidance on Private Fostering..... 12

12

Introduction

Slough Children First is committed to supporting the upbringing of children within and by their families of origin, wherever possible.

While Slough Children First fully discharges its responsibilities in respect of private fostering, it seeks to do so in a way that is supportive of children, young people, parents and carers. Slough Children First 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 are able to seek help and guidance from the Slough Children First
- Birth parents feel able to seek help and guidance from Slough Children First.

Slough Children First 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 Slough Children First of private fostering arrangements.

The National Minimum Standards for private fostering apply to local authorities. This document ensures that Slough Children First 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 by Slough Children First.

Slough Children First has three functions in relation to Private Fostering:

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

Slough Children First has a clear and comprehensive [written procedure for assessing private fostering arrangements](#).

Notification of a private fostering arrangement should be made to Slough Children First's Front Door where it will be processed and allocated for assessment by a social worker. Private fostering arrangements that are assessed as being suitable will be managed by the Safeguarding & Family Support 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.

Definition of a privately fostered child

The legal definition of a privately fostered child is found in [Section 66 of The Children Act 1989](#). 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 but excludes persons defined as a 'relative' under the Children Act 1989, that is, a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle/aunt (whether of full or half blood or by marriage) or a step-parent cannot be a private foster carer.

A child is not privately fostered if the person caring for him/her has done so for 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 statutory interference.

Determining if a care arrangement is private fostering

- Is the child being looked after by someone else for 28 days or more?
- Is the child under 16 years (under 18 years if disabled)?
- Is the child being looked after by a parent or close relative (step-parent, sister, brother, uncle, aunt or grandparent)?

If the answers are all 'Yes' then this is a private fostering arrangement and by law Slough Children First must be notified so that a statutory assessment can be completed.

Examples of private fostering

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

- **Local children living apart from their families**

- Children living with a family friend 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, separation/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.
- 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; however any form of trafficking is child abuse and Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 will also apply in these circumstances.

- **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.

Slough Children First's duties and functions

The Children Act 1989 and the [Children \(Private Arrangements for Fostering\) Regulations 2005](#) place a duty upon Slough Children First to ensure that the welfare of all privately fostered children is appropriately safeguarded and promoted. Slough Children First is also required to offer advice/support to private foster carers if needed. In addition, Slough Children First is required to undertake the following actions in respect of private fostering:

- Raise public awareness and make information available in Slough about the notification requirements.

- Develop a programme of communication activities, including for Slough Children First staff.
- Involve partner agencies and the wider community in raising awareness.
- Provide advice to parents, persons with parental responsibility, private foster carers and those proposing to privately foster a child.

Slough Children First must consider whether a privately fostered child is also a Child in Need under [Section 17 of the Children Act 1989](#) and what support and services, if any, is needed to increase the capacity of the private foster carer to meet the child's needs. A child with a disability for example falls within the statutory definition of a Child in Need under Section 17.

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 safeguarded and promoted.
- Providing advice and support to privately fostered children, their parents and foster carers, including prospective private foster carers.
- The local authority has systems in place to monitor how effectively it discharges its duties and functions to private fostered children.

Training for relevant staff

Private Fostering awareness is included within Slough Children First'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 Slough Children First 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 with a designated role or responsibility for safeguarding or child protection.

Slough Children First and the Slough Safeguarding Partnership have also commissioned online training to enable multi-agency practitioners and managers to understand private fostering and their responsibilities for notifying about any known 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.

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 Children First's named person with expertise in private fostering is:

Nasreen Agal
Social worker
Safeguarding and Family Support Service
nasreen.agal@sloughchildrenfirst.co.uk

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 Children First's named manager for private fostering is:

Michele Henry
Head of Service
Safeguarding and Family Support Service
michele.henry@sloughchildrenfirst.co.uk

In the absence of the named manager, private fostering decisions will be signed-off by:

Carol Douch
Director of Operations
carol.douch@sloughchildrenfirst.co.uk

Promoting awareness of notification requirements

The National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering requires local authorities to have a programme of activities for the public, local authority staff and other agencies to ensure that the obligation to notify the Local Authority of any existing/upcoming private fostering arrangements is understood.

Promoting awareness with other agencies

Slough Children First 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 privately fostered children.

Slough Children First promotes private fostering awareness to partner agencies through the Slough Safeguarding Partnership, direct communications with schools and partners and through publicity and fostering events. The Slough Children First website also carries relevant information.

Promoting awareness with the local community

Slough Children First promotes awareness of private fostering and the notification requirements with families and the local community in a number of ways. There is information on Slough Children First's website which has a page on private fostering providing information to partners / stakeholders and the public about private fostering <https://www.sloughchildrenfirst.co.uk/what-we-do/private-fostering/>

A media campaign will include advertisements and editorial in online and print publications using the Citizen (Slough Borough Council's free residents' magazine), local newspapers, digital advertising and social media.

Slough Children First will also engage with the wider community, targeting faith, women and youth groups in Slough in order to raise awareness about private fostering and the notifications requirement.

Slough Children First's Statement of Purpose for privately fostered children is also reviewed and updated annually to ensure that it contains accurate and up to date information.

Determining the suitability of private fostering arrangements

Slough Children First will respond promptly to notifications of a private fostering arrangement. A social worker will visit the privately fostered child/ren or young person to 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 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 Director for Improvement and Frontline

Practice 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.

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 minimum every six weeks during the first year and at least every three months thereafter; more frequent visits may be made if necessary. The child or private foster carer/s may also request additional visits.

During the visits the social worker will ensure that the child is developing satisfactorily, 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. The suitability of the private foster carer should be reviewed annually by the social worker and reported to the named manager.

Advice/support and training 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. Slough Children First will also provide information about health services, voluntary and community sectors groups that can offer support and access to support groups and training opportunities. Information and materials for private foster carers and parents will be reviewed and updated regularly.

The Slough Family Information Service (FIS) 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
- Leisure activities.

Telephone: 01753 476589

<https://www.sloughfamilyservices.org.uk/kb5/sloughcst/directory/home.page>

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

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

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 Children First. 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 reason they are being privately fostered.
- 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.
- Details of the advocacy service for children and young people.

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.

The role of other agencies

The responsibility of other agencies to notify Slough Children First 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.

Those who have day-to-day contact with children and families, particularly workers in universal education and health services, are more likely to encounter private fostering arrangements; however 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
- Make a notification to the local authority (Slough Children First).

All partners have access to the private fostering online training and are provided with information about private fostering and the notification requirements

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 Children Centre Workers	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)	NHS Frimley Health Foundation Trust
Community Police Officers Police Community Support Officers Relevant Police Staff	Thames Valley Police
Probation Officers	National Probation Service
Managers Staff Volunteers	Voluntary and community organisations in Slough that work with children and families.

The Slough Safeguarding Partnership has an important role in raising professional awareness of private fostering and the requirement for professionals in partner agencies to notify Slough Children First of private fostering arrangements.

Within Standard 7 of the National Minimum Standards for private fostering, the local authority is required to report annually to the Slough Safeguarding Partnership on how it ensures that privately fostered children in the area are appropriately safeguarded and promoted, including how it includes other agencies in this activity.

Slough Children First's annual report to Slough Safeguarding Partnership 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.

Relevant legislation/statutory guidance on Private Fostering

The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005

Details the role of the local authority, the parent (or other persons sharing parental responsibility) and private foster carer and related professionals with respect to private fostering.

National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005

The NMS are intended to better focus local authorities' attention on private fostering, by requiring them to take a more proactive approach to identifying arrangements in their area. Although they are not legally enforceable they should be complied with unless local circumstances indicate exceptional reasons for not adhering to these standards.

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.