

PRIVATE FOSTERING SERVICES

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

To be read in conjunction with
the Private Fostering Policy
and Procedure and National
Minimum Standards for
Private Fostering

Hackney Children and Young People's Services

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INTRODUCTION

This document is a description of private fostering arrangements within the London Borough of Hackney. It is separate from the Statement of Purpose for the Fostering Service.

The statement is designed to meet the requirements as set out in the national minimum standards for private fostering (2005) most particularly in standard 1.

It will set out the functions and duties in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out, and provide a guide for the service and other professionals, the public, Council Members and external organisations. Within the London Borough of Hackney, the Referral and Assessment Service and the Looked After Children Service are both based at 205 Morning Lane, London E9 6JX. The Children In Need Service is based at 185, Morning Lane. All sections of the Department are committed to maintaining high standards in relation to private fostering provision and to review this on a regular basis.

The London Borough of Hackney holds statutory powers and responsibilities as a local authority in relation to private fostering arrangements. Privately fostered children and young people are not a homogenous group and will come from a diversity of backgrounds and circumstances. All professionals should take account of the specific needs of every privately fostered child/young person including that of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation, class, disability and marital status. The Council is committed to ensuring services are provided in a manner which does not discriminate at organisational, family or individual levels.

Private Fostering Services fall under Duty and Assessment, Children In Need, Looked After Children and Children's Resources Services. The Head of Service from these areas are responsible for ensuring good practice and will review practice bi-annually at senior management meetings (CSCMT).

The review and monitoring arrangements will be the responsibility of the Head of Service (Children's Resources) in conjunction with the Head of Service, Access and Assessment.

In terms of regulation, London Borough of Hackney, Private Fostering Service will be regulated by OFSTED. Their contact details are:-

OFSTED
South
Freshford House
Redcliffe Way
Bristol BS1 6NL
Telephone: 08456 404040

Any comments or enquiries regarding this statement of purpose should be passed to the Head of Service (Children's Resources), Paul Owen on 0208 356 6281 or paul.owen@hackney.gov.uk.

1. LEGAL DEFINITION OF A PRIVATELY FOSTERED CHILD

A child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) who is cared for, or proposed to be cared for, and provided with accommodation by someone other than:-

- A parent
- A person who is not a parent but has Parental Responsibility
- A close relative, ie. aunt/uncle/step-parent/grand-parent/sibling but not a cousin or great aunt/uncle
- Care 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 fostercarer intends to foster him/her for more than 28 days
- A child is not privately fostered if the person caring for him/her
 - had done so for a period of less than 28 days
 - does not intend to do so for any longer period
- The arrangement is seen as private fostering if it meets the criteria above whether for reward (monetary or otherwise) or not.

Common situations in which a child/young person may be privately fostered

It has been assumed that the majority of children and young people who are privately fostered are from West African origin. Historically this may have been the case but now increasing numbers of referrals are made about a wide range of situations and vary enormously.

It has been shown that increasingly, referrals are made about teenage children living under private fostering arrangements. These children have the characteristics and circumstances similar to those of looked after children and young people. Consequently much of the knowledge and understanding of the issues relating to looked after children/young people can be applied to children/young people in private arrangements. For this reason, ongoing support in Hackney has been set in the Looked After Children Service.

Other circumstances:

- Children and Young People with Parents or Families Overseas
Where parents have sent them to live with distant relatives or other acquaintances in the hope they will receive a better life and education. In such cases, parents who remain in their country of origin are unable to exercise Parental Responsibility.

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- Children or Young People with Parents Studying in the UK
Such children may be babies or toddlers and the parents have demanding study or careers. Such parents may arrange for children to be cared for by extended family members (but not members of the immediate family as defined by Children Act 1989) or by strangers known to them in the community.
- Asylum Seekers/Refugees
Often travelling to the UK with other adults and may have been subject to torture/trauma. Because they have been brought in by an adult they may not have been seen as unaccompanied at the time but later live with strangers. The same can apply to children and young people who have acquired refugee status.
- Trafficked Young People
Generally young teenagers, do not attend school and who are at risk of exploitation.
- Local Young People Living Apart from their Families
Adolescents and teenagers estranged from their families and may be living with former neighbours or kinship carers. Some children whose parents are drug users can be left with different people for lengthy periods of time.

Children and young people attending language schools or who are at independent boarding schools.

Children and young people brought in to the UK with a view to adoption. Such children would be equally defined as privately fostered until formal notice of intention to adopt is given.

2. THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES DUTIES AND FUNCTIONS UNDER THE CHILDREN ACT 1989 AND THE CHILDREN (PRIVATE ARRANGEMENTS FOR FOSTERING) REGULATIONS 2005

The London Borough of Hackney have a duty to be notified about private fostering arrangements in their area and satisfy themselves that the welfare of privately fostered children is being safeguarded and promoted, and give advice to those caring for them. The Children Act 1989 (Section 67(1)) outlines three duties:-

- Giving and receiving notifications
- Ascertaining the suitability of private fostercarers in their households
- Monitoring placements through visits and written records of visits

The London Borough of Hackney are committed to these duties and have them enshrined in both policy and procedure and practice.

Additional measures under the Children Act 2004 and the Fostering Regulations 2005, are intended to strengthen the notification scheme. Local authorities are also required to raise public awareness in their area of the requirements regarding notification. Notifications must

now be given to the authority when a child/young person is proposed to be privately fostered and when he/she is being privately fostered.

The purpose of these measures is to focus the local authorities' attention on private fostering and requires a pro-active approach with partners and other professionals in identifying arrangements in the area and improving upon notification rates and compliance with legislation. Detail of Hackney's promotion and awareness strategy is in Section 5.

3. **TRAINING FOR RELEVANT STAFF**

Hackney's Children's and Social Care Department has a clear and comprehensive written policy for private fostering arrangements which is operational through written procedures and practice guidance and will actively promote this within the Department and with partner agencies and other professionals within the borough.

Hackney will ensure that training on private fostering will be mandatory for all social workers and that it is specifically prioritised for all newly appointed social workers as part of induction.

Training on private fostering will be given priority by the Training Board in its formulation of the annual training programme as part of Child Protection, Children In Need and Looked After Children Services ongoing training. Training will include information on the context and legislative requirements, on notification requirements and the assessment processes regarding the suitability of private fostering arrangements.

Staff training in private fostering will also be promoted high on the agenda of the local Area Safeguarding Board and is part of the monitoring of the Board. There will be four half-day seminars annually.

In addition, Hackney will commit to ongoing workshops to enhance a multi-disciplinary approach and will review the statement of purpose and private fostering procedures annually at integrated forums across children's workforce, ie. TLT, CAHMS, PCT.

4. **THE NAME OF THE PERSON WITHIN THE LOCAL AUTHORITY WITH EXPERTISE IN PRIVATE FOSTERING WHOM SOCIAL WORKERS CAN CONTACT FOR ADVICE**

Rory McCallum (Head of Service, Access and Assessment)
Telephone No: 0208 356 5527
E-mail: rory.mccallum@hackney.gov.uk

5. **NAME OF THE MANAGER(S) WHO WILL SIGN OFF DECISIONS ABOUT THE OVERALL SUITABILITY OF ARRANGEMENTS**

The local authority are required to satisfy themselves of the suitability of a proposed arrangement or an arrangement already in place.

The Referral and Assessment Team will most likely be the first to receive notification of proposed or current private fostering arrangements and will undertake a core private fostering social work assessment within 7 days or 35 days as appropriate. This assessment will need to consider whether or not they should undertake their duties under the Children Act 1989, including whether or not to consider accommodating the child/young person under Section 20 of the Act or offering support under Section 17 if the child/young person is in need of services but not accommodation.

Decisions will be made in consultation with the Group Manager of the relevant service as necessary. Implementing child protection procedures for a child in need who is privately fostered is done in the same way as for any other child and care management procedures followed. If ongoing child protection issues preclude, the matter will be transferred to the Children In Need Service for ongoing support and assessment or accommodation.

Once arrangements in both these areas have been deemed satisfactory, the relevant Group Manager will sign off the decisions about suitability and will arrange for a transfer to the Looked After Children Service with a full report and recommendations. The Looked After Children Service will then allocate a social worker to undertake subsequent statutory visits who will be assisted by a member of the Fostering Service who will advise on the ongoing suitability of the carer(s) for the scrutiny of the Kinship Panel. This Panel will monitor ongoing private fostering arrangements. For a full detailed flowchart please see appendices 1 and 2 in the Private Fostering Policy.

6. HOW AWARENESS OF THE NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS WILL BE PROMOTED WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND WITHIN THE WIDER LOCAL COMMUNITY

Hackney has the following objectives in relation to raising awareness:-

- To raise awareness and understanding of private fostering among the general public.
- To raise awareness of the need to notify among private fostercarers and children being privately fostered.
- To enable local agencies, faith and community organisations, schools, health centres and other professionals to gain awareness of private fostering notification requirements.
- To increase private fostering notification levels.

To achieve these objectives Hackney commits to:-

- Run a bi-annual media campaign to reach the widest audience(s) including BME communities.

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- To distribute our information leaflets to social care, health and education establishments, local libraries, GPs, Surgeries.
- To advertise in the Hackney Today (free local newspaper), quarterly and to advertise in the Hackney Gazette.
- Develop further our links with community and faith groups and conduct workshops.
- Raise awareness through strategically placed articles.
- Distribute electronic information mail outs to raise awareness among health social care and education staff.
- Consider consortium arrangements with our neighbours in terms of campaigns and surveys.

Hackney has in recent years developed leaflets for carers, children and professionals which have been widely distributed and been part of Members' Surgeries across the borough.

Hackney has information published on the Council's website
www.hackney.gov.uk/fostering-private.htm

Details of notification requirements are included as well as downloads to the leaflets and a child information form, in addition information and advice for private fostercarers. All information contains the contact numbers of the Duty and Fostering Teams and is translated into different languages ie. Turkish, Bengali, Vietnamese.

Outreach work will be undertaken as part of a rolling programme.

The Marketing Officer (with Fostering and Adoption) will be responsible for enacting the strategy in terms of promotional material.

Hackney already has a series of posters around the borough and will develop a bus and billboard campaign and media packs for other agencies.

7. **HOW THE LOCAL AUTHORITY WILL DETERMINE THE SUITABILITY OF ALL ASPECTS OF A PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS**

We will ensure that all privately fostered children/young people within the London Borough of Hackney undergoes a private fostering social work assessment, which will also include elements of the framework for the assessment of Children In Need and their Families (2000) and the London Borough of Hackney Private Fostering Policy and Guidance. These private fostering social work assessments will be signed off, managerially within 35 working days. All aspects of the private fostercarers suitability will be assessed including the

suitability of their household. Details of the assessment can be found in the policy. Ongoing statutory visits will be with the Looked After Service.

8. **HOW THE LOCAL AUTHORITY WILL SATISFY ITSELF THAT THE WELFARE OF PRIVATELY FOSTERED CHILDREN IN THEIR AREA IS SATISFACTORILY SAFEGUARDED AND PROMOTED**

This will be achieved by first undertaking a private fostering social work assessment. Approval of arrangements as satisfactory or not will be concluded and signed off within 35 days by the Group Manager in Duty and Assessment or Children In Need Services in consultation with the Consultant Social Worker.

Private fostering social work assessments will take account of all aspects as outlined in the policy 5.3 and include a through examination of parenting capacity and speaking to the child or young person alone. Private fostercarers will be given advice in order to enhance their ability to care for a child/young person and support services made available to them, including family support.

Private fostercarers will be encouraged to promote contact, where safe, between the child/young person and his/her parents, siblings, extended family and significant others.

The Duty and Assessment Team will respond to notifications received within 7 days and likewise visits to privately fostered children/young people will be completed within statutory timescales. Written reports will be completed following these visits.

All private fostercarers will have an enhanced CRB check and all privately fostered children/young people will have a named social worker with their contact details (looked after children if deemed satisfactory after assessment) and will be informed about what private fostering means. Links will be made to the Looked After Children Education and Health Teams and those children who have been deemed as 'Children In Need' or 'disabled' whilst being privately fostered will have access to specialist services, and a community care assessment as relevant.

9. **ADVICE AND SUPPORT THAT WILL BE AVAILABLE TO PRIVATE FOSTERCARERS (INCLUDING PROSPECTIVE PRIVATE FOSTERCARERS), PARENTS AND OTHERS WITH PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY AND OTHERS CONCERNED WITH PRIVATELY FOSTERED CHILDREN**

Private fostercarers and prospective carers will have a named social worker to support the arrangement for the child. Ongoing advice on the carers' suitability will be undertaken by a Fostering social worker and private fostercarers will have access to information and training (accessed via the fostering training programme).

The named social worker will also offer advice on benefit entitlement, parenting strategies and other support. They will also undertake statutory visits and see the children/young people regularly giving advice on all matters pertaining to the children's welfare.

10. **THE ROLE OF OTHER AGENCIES IN SAFEGUARDING AND PROMOTING THE WELFARE OF PRIVATELY FOSTERED CHILDREN INCLUDING ENCOURAGING NOTIFICATION**

All partnership agencies will be given regular and updated information and leaflets and be made aware of the Policy and Statement of Purpose and of their responsibilities in informing and notifying the local authority of any arrangement. They will be part of joint training and workshops. Materials will be sent to schools, faith groups, GPs, housing, leisure centres etc. Other agencies will be made aware of who to contact and where.

It is considered good practice for agencies to designate a lead officer on private fostering in their area.

11. **ALL RELEVANT STAFF HAVE AN APPROPRIATE UNDERSTANDING OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY'S DUTIES AND FUNCTIONS IN RELATION TO PRIVATE FOSTERING**

As Stated in Section 3, all Children's Social Care staff and partner agencies will have access to the Policy and Statement of Purpose. The ongoing awareness programme will further develop these understandings and working protocols.

12. **HOW WILL THE LOCAL AUTHORITY ENSURE ITS DUTIES AND FUNCTIONING IN RELATION TO PRIVATE FOSTERING ARE INCLUDED IN INDUCTION AND OTHER TRAINING PROGRAMME**

The Training Board will review the annual programme. Private fostering will be part of the annual training plan and all social workers will undergo induction and training. We will endeavour to also include private fostering as a component of other child care training.

13. **MONITORING COMPLIANCE WITH DUTIES AND FUNCTIONS IN RELATION TO PRIVATE FOSTERING**

The local authority will monitor through its Performance Team, the performance measures as required for the year and returns. These are:-

- Number of notifications of new private fostering arrangements received during the year.
- Number of cases where action was taken in accordance with the requirements of Regulation 4(1) of the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 for carrying out visits.
- Of these, record the number of cases where this action was taken within 7 working days on receipt of the notification.
- Number of new arrangements that began during that year.

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- The percentage of private fostering arrangements that began on or after 31st March of that year, where visits were made at intervals of not more than six weeks.
- The percentage where visits were made of not more than twelve weeks.
- Number of notifications of private fostering arrangements that came to an end during the year.
- Number of children under private fostering arrangements.
- Breakdown by age and place of birth (ethnicity).

The Head of Service (Children's Resources) will monitor the promotion of awareness regarding notification requirements and make recommendations annually to the Assistant Director (Social Care) on how the Department is responding to notifications and if these are within timescales.

Further reviews will be undertaken to monitor compliance in the following areas:-

- How the Department handles disqualifications and prohibitions.
- Ensure accurate and comprehensive confidential records are kept for each privately fostered child and private fosterer.
- Decisions about offences and whether to consent or refuse to consent to a disqualified person privately fostering a child.
- How the Department assesses the parenting capacity and suitability of accommodation.
- That statutory visits are within timescale (Head of Service, Looked After Children).
- That additional visits are made when required.
- That the system for recording information and enquiries is robust.
- That advice and support is provided and matters of concern are highlighted.
- That a sample of young people's files and private fosterer records are regularly reviewed (part of the monthly audit) to ensure compliance.
- That decisions about the suitability of arrangements are signed off correctly and at appropriate managerial level.

- The local authority investigates any pattern of concern raised by privately fostered children.
- That the local authority reports annually to the Chair of the local Safeguarding Board on how it satisfies itself that the welfare of privately fostered children in its area is safeguarded and promoted, including how it co-operates with other agencies in this connection.

14. **ADVICE ON PRIVATE FOSTERING**

This Statement of Purpose along with the Policy can be obtained from

Access and Assessment Team
205 Morning Lane
London E9 6JX
0208 356 5500

or on www.hackney.gov.uk

Advice about private fostering can be obtained from the Duty Team or the Recruitment and Assessment Team on 08000 730 418.