



St. Helens
Council

Private fostering

Statement of Purpose

June 2013



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Introduction

This document is a description of St.Helens private fostering service and will describe private fostering arrangements, the assessment processes and the support and advice offered to private foster carers, privately fostered children and their parents, within St.Helens.

This Statement of Purpose is designed to meet Standard 1 of the National Minimum Standards for private fostering. It is separate from the fostering service's Statement of Purpose. 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.

St.Helens private fostering service is based at:

St.Helens Council

Foster Care Service
Atlas House
Corporation Street
St.Helens WA9 1LD

For any comments or enquiries regarding this Statement of Purpose please contact Jason Pickett, Assistant Director, on 01744 671810 or by email to: jasonpickett@sthelens.gov.uk

Regulation

St.Helens Council's private fostering service is regulated by Ofsted. Their contact details are:

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Enquiries should be made to:

Ofsted National Business unit (NBU)

Tel: 03001231231
Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
Website www.ofsted.gov.uk

St.Helens Council holds statutory powers and responsibilities as a Local Authority in relation to private fostering arrangements. The Service is committed to maintaining its standards in relation to private fostering service provision and to reviewing this on a continual basis.

The Service works to ensure that equal opportunities are incorporated into all aspects of service delivery and all prospective private foster carers are assessed and supported on the basis of the needs of individual private foster children/young people, regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, class, marital status, sexual orientation or disability.

The private fostering services are managed by the fostering team manager, with delegated responsibility to the assistant team manager in the fostering team. Two social workers undertake assessments of prospective private foster carers. Each privately fostered child also has an allocated social worker. In the absence of the social worker, their line manager will take responsibility for the day-to-day issues. There are also clear arrangements in place in the absence of a team manager. On day-to-day issues, social workers can access support and advice from the assistant team manager based in their team, and they also have access to service managers.

1. Legal definition of a privately fostered child

In the definition provided by 'The Children Act' 2004, 'a privately fostered child' means:

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 of his/hers
- A person who is not a parent of his/hers but who has parental responsibility for him/her
- A close relative of his/hers, i.e. aunt/uncle/step-parent/grandparent/sibling but not a cousin or great aunt/uncle.

And she/he has been cared 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 foster carer intends to foster him or her for a period of 28 days or more.

In the case of a child with disability, the upper age limit is 18 years.

A child is not privately fostered if the person caring for him/her:

- Has done so for a period of less than 28 days
- Does not intend to do so for a longer period.

For the purpose of the Act, 'parent' includes unmarried or putative father. 'Relative' means as above stated, whether by full, half blood or by affinity or step-parent. 'Affinity' refers to the relationship resulting from marriage, between the husband and the blood relatives of the wife and also between the wife and the blood relatives of the husband.

An 'arrangement' is deemed as private fostering if it meets the criteria above, whether for reward (monetary or otherwise) or not.

Some common examples of private fostering include:

- Children/young people with families overseas
- Black and ethnic community children, young people with parents working or studying in the UK
- Trafficked children/young people and asylum seekers and refugees
- Children/young people living with host families for a variety of reasons, i.e. attending language schools, undergoing medical treatment, Football Academies etc.
- Adolescents living with families of their peer group friends
- Asylum seekers and refugees -
Children may arrive in the country seeking asylum, travelling with adults who may not be known to them or their family. Other children, who have acquired refugee status, may be living in similar situations. Their isolation, immigration status, lack of understanding of available services and language problems will all contribute to their vulnerability
- Trafficked young people -
Generally young teenagers who are brought into this country for the benefit of adults and who often have a language barrier and rarely attend school. These children are at great risk of exploitation
- Local children living apart from their families -
Children may have only one parent taking responsibility for them and due to this parent's illness, imprisonment, or work commitments away from home, the child may be living with friends or kinship carer's. Some children whose parents are substance abusers may be left with different people for lengthy periods of time. Others may have parents with mental health problems or who are simply

unable or unwilling to care for them. In some cultures it is accepted cultural practice for children to be cared for in their wider local community

- Adolescents and teenagers estranged from their families. Children may become estranged from their families due to behaviour their parents find unacceptable. They may have run away because they are unhappy, have been abused or 'thrown out'. Changes in family relationships can lead to estrangement. Some parents may have tried to get their child accommodated by the Local Authority without success; others may allow them to live with family friends or with the family of a boyfriend or girlfriend
- Bereaved children - Children who due to bereavement require alternative arrangements for their care
- Children and young people at independent boarding schools - Children who attend independent boarding schools who do not return home during holidays and are cared for by other people
- Children and young people living with host families - Charitable organisations and other individuals arrange for children to come and stay in this country for a variety of purposes; including holidays, education, medical treatment and sports training. They may be placed with a 'host' family during their stay. This also includes children who attend a sports academy and are placed with a 'host' family to enable them to attend the academy on a daily basis
- Children and young people brought in to the UK with a view to adoption - Such children would be defined as privately fostered until formal notice of intention to adopt is given.



2. The Local Authority's duties and functions under The Children Act 1989 and The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 1991

St.Helens Council has a duty to be notified about private fostering arrangements in their area and to satisfy themselves that the welfare of children who are privately fostered in their area is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, and to secure that such advice is given to those caring for them as appears to the Authority to be needed (The Children Act 1989 Section 67 (1)). Broadly, the duties fall into three types of activity:

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

Additional measures in the Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 were brought in to strengthen and enhance the existing private fostering notification scheme. 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.

Since 2005, Local Authorities have been required to raise public awareness in their area of the requirements regarding notification of private fostering arrangements. This enables Local Authorities to ensure that the welfare of privately fostered children/young people is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted by ongoing assessments and monitoring of arrangements within statutory timescales.

3. Training for relevant staff

Training on private fostering is incorporated in the Children & Young People's Services (CYPS) foundation training, and ongoing child protection training, co-ordinated and arranged by the St.Helens Safeguarding Unit.

Within St.Helens Council's CYPS, there is an ongoing programme of specific training workshops on private fostering, focusing on the notification requirements and the assessment processes of the suitability of the private fostering arrangement.

A private fostering network meeting was established in January 2012 to raise awareness and promote knowledge of good public practice across the Borough.

St.Helens Council's CYPS 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, with partner agencies and with other professionals within the Borough.

4. Marketing & Communications

Awareness of the private fostering notification requirements will be promoted via a number of channels in order to ensure reach to residents of St.Helens. This includes promotional fliers and posters sent out periodically to local libraries, health centres, etc., as well as advertisements in local newspapers and other publications. Information is also available on St.Helens Council's website and fostering microsite - www.sthelens.gov.uk/fostering. The Raising Awareness Strategy details the Local Authority approach to promoting awareness of private fostering.

The private fostering Statement of Purpose, as well as other promotional materials, can be available in a number of other formats and languages on request. For example, a recent promotional poster regarding notifications of arrangements was produced in Polish.

Promotion of the requirements will be evaluated in terms of set objectives, on a regular basis by the private fostering team who will also monitor that responses to notifications are carried out within the required timescales.

Details of private fostering enquiries, notifications, assessments, registration and activities are reported to the LSCB on an annual basis.

5. Assessment of suitability of private foster carers and their household

Once a private fostering notification has been received by St.Helens Council, a child care social worker will visit the child/young person to conduct an initial assessment. This will take place within 7 working days.

The private foster carers will undergo an assessment. An initial visit to the private foster carers will take place within 7 working days, where initial safety checks will be undertaken. The private fostering assessment will be completed within 35 working days, and presented at the monthly meeting. All aspects of private foster carers', including the suitability of their household, will be assessed.

6. Advice, support and information available

Advice and support available to private foster carer's (including prospective private foster carers) and parents/guardians of privately fostered children.

A social worker from the fostering team will be responsible for working with, and supporting each carer. There will also be an allocated child care social worker who will visit the child in the private fostering arrangement, consult with the child's birth parents and any others concerned.

Initially, the supervising social worker will visit the carers within 7 days, and will provide both verbal and written information and advice. This visit will identify any support that is needed by them and the privately fostered child.

Private foster carers may access the fostering training programme provided for mainstream and connected persons registered with St.Helens. Interpreters can be accessed if appropriate.

Once a carer has been registered, they will receive continuous support, including home visits and supervision. They will also have an unannounced visit and annual review.

Parents of the proposed/current privately fostered children/young people are also entitled to support services, which is by CYPS Think Family procedures. These services will look to support rehabilitation to parents where appropriate.

7. Safeguarding issues

Ensuring the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted

St.Helens Council's CYPS Department will ensure that privately fostered children/young people's welfare is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted by staff who adhere to the regulations on private fostering.

All notifications of such arrangements are subjected to a private fostering social work assessment which will include ensuring that the child/young person's physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural development is satisfactory and needs arising from his/her religious persuasion, racial origin, cultural and linguistic background are met. In addition, the assessment includes the suitability of the accommodation and an evaluation of the parenting capacity of the prospective/current private foster carer.

To ensure the safeguarding of children, the initial assessment conducted by the child's social worker aims to prematurely identify and highlight safeguarding concerns.

Once completed, the private fostering assessment, along with the initial assessment, will be presented at the monthly meeting, which is chaired by a service manager to consider and approve/decline registration. This also provides an opportunity for management to provide direction and advice to both the child care and supervisory social worker, on safeguarding issues.

Private foster carers are given advice on the child/young person's individual needs, which may include advice on any medical conditions or learning disabilities, in order to enhance their ability to care for the child/young person. Carers, where necessary and appropriate, are encouraged to promote contact between the child/young person and his/her family and significant others.

The social worker in the fostering team will respond to notifications received within statutory timescales and, likewise, visits to privately fostered children/young people by the child's social worker correspond to the timescales for visits to Looked After Children. Written reports are completed following these visits, in accordance with the regulations, and these include whether the child/young person was seen alone, his/her wishes and feelings about the arrangement, any concerns raised and any relevant advice given.

All private foster carers will be asked to disclose any health issues, and will have enhanced CRB checks undertaken. All children/young people will have a named children's social worker with their contact details and will be given information materials on what private fostering means. This will be in the form of a brief children's guide and will be age-appropriate. They will have access to the children's rights officer.

Privately fostered children's welfare will be further promoted by an awareness campaign, which includes the distribution of information leaflets to schools, health centres and libraries. Partnership agencies are reminded of notification requirement within the safeguarding training.

The Department carries out internal file audits on a regular basis and has developed a policy for the use of requirements, prohibitions, disqualifications and appeals. Decisions regarding offences are made in consultation with the Police and DCS. Where child protection concerns are identified, a Section 47 investigation will be carried out following the St.Helens safeguarding procedures.

Monitoring compliance with duties and functions in relation to private fostering.

St.Helens Council's CYPS Department, through it's Performance, Management and Research Officer (in conjunction with the fostering service), monitors and reports to the Department For Education on the following:

- the number of notifications of new private fostering arrangements received during the year;
- the 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, the number of cases where action was taken within 7 working days on receipt of the notification;
- the number of new arrangements that began during the year;
- the percentage of private fostering arrangements that began on or after the 31st March of that year, where visits were made at intervals of not more than six weeks;
- the number of private fostering arrangements that began before the 1st April of that year where visits were made at intervals of not more than twelve weeks;
- the number of notifications of private fostering arrangements that came to an end during the year;
- the number of children under private fostering arrangements, and;
- the breakdown by age and place of birth (ethnicity);

All notifications that are received are recorded. This ensures that the department has clear records of when a private fostering arrangement began, as well as confirming when the arrangement ended. All Regulation 8 visits are recorded.

St.Helens Council's CYPS Department will ensure that awareness training in relation to private fostering is included in the annual training plan and this is reviewed annually as part of the training strategy.

All social workers undergo an induction and foundation training in relation to safeguarding. This will include a component on private fostering.

Under Regulation 12, the service manager will monitor and report back to the St.Helens Council's CYPS Department's management team, the way the department complies with, and discharges, it's statutory duties and functions in relation to private fostering, as defined.

8. The role of other agencies

Partnership agencies are given information regarding notifications under the Private Fostering 2005 Regulations. Information materials are sent to schools, faith groups, health organisations, etc. Other agencies have access to the private fostering social worker through the fostering team and first response team. (St.Helens Protocol on private fostering.)

9. Staff understanding of duties and functions in relation to private fostering

Social work staff will have access to this Statement of Purpose, St.Helens Protocol on Private Fostering Arrangements, information materials and training on private fostering.

10. Raising awareness

St.Helens Council's CYPS Department has adopted the following objectives:

- To raise awareness among private foster carers and children being privately fostered of the need to notify St.Helens Council regarding private fostering arrangements;
- To enable local partner agencies, faith and community organisations, education, health and other professionals to gain awareness of private fostering notification requirements;
- To raise awareness and understanding of private fostering among the general public.

Achievement of these objectives should contribute to increasing private fostering notification levels. To fulfil these objectives St.Helens Council's CYPS Department is committed to:

- The regular distribution of electronic information leaflets to raise awareness across the Borough and among partners; with emphasis on the health, social care and education sectors;
- Maintaining up-to-date and accessible web based information;
- Promoting training events;
- Media campaigning to raise awareness, including:
- Developing communication links with BME communities, local community organisations and faith groups;
- Articles in St.Helens Council publications and other local media outlets.

11. Advice on private fostering

Any enquiries regarding private fostering should be made via:

St.Helens Council
Contact Centre
Wesley House
Corporation Street
St.Helens
WA10 1HF

Tel: 01744 676789
Email: contactcentre@sthelens.gov.uk
Website: www.sthelens.gov.uk

Fostering Team
Atlas House
Corporation Street
St.Helens
WA9 1LD

Tel: 01744 671199
Email: privatefostering@sthelens.gov.uk
Website: www.sthelens.gov.uk/fostering



St. Helens Council

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