

**London Borough of Southwark  
Private Fostering  
Statement of Purpose 2007-8**

**In Conjunction with:**



**NCH Southwark Family Plus**

## Introduction

It is a regulatory 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 London Borough of Southwark. 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 18<sup>th</sup> July 2005 and the Children (private arrangements for fostering) Regulations 2005. This document provides key information of 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 including the support and advice offered to private foster carers, privately fostered children and their parents within the London Borough of Southwark will be met.

Any comments or enquiries regarding the Statement of Purpose should be forwarded to Paul Angeli Business Unit Manager. (Assessment, Safeguarding and Family Support Services).

[Paul.angeli@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:Paul.angeli@southwark.gov.uk)

0207 525 1902

## Location

Advice, Assessment and Family Support services for children, families and professionals involved in private fostering arrangements in the London Borough of Southwark is provided by National Children's Homes Southwark Family Plus (NCH SFP) Project. This is a partnership between NCH children's charity and the London Borough of Southwark.

The SFP Project is currently based at: -

231 Camberwell New Road  
London, SE5 0TH  
Tel: 020 7703 4934  
E-mail: [Southwark.FamilyPlus@nch.org.uk](mailto:Southwark.FamilyPlus@nch.org.uk)

NCH and the London Borough of Southwark are committed to delivering a high quality service to all children who are living in a private fostering arrangement within the borough. We also ensure that this provision is monitored and reviewed.

The service works to ensure that 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.

## **1. Key Principles and Standards of Care**

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

- The best interest of children will be of paramount importance in the work of the private fostering service
- The private fostering service will work with private foster carers, children and their families to safeguard and promote children's, physical, emotional, health, social and cultural needs
- We will ensure that children, young people will be treated with respect and dignity and will be safeguarded and protected from neglect, abuse and exploitation by the provision of safe, supportive private fostering arrangements
- In agreeing private foster arrangements we will ensure that a child's and young person's age, gender, health, personality, disability, sexuality, race, culture and life experiences will be taken into account in the assessment and decision making process and the provision of care and support services
- The private fostering service will work with the private foster carer, the child/young person and their parents to ensure that they retain their responsibilities and to remain as closely involved as is consistent with their child's or young person welfare
- In planning and agreeing the private fostering arrangement we will ensure that the children seen and their views heard about the private fostering arrangement
- We will work with and advise colleagues about their duties and responsibilities in connection with children who are privately fostered and work in partnership to meet the needs of the children, their carers and families

## **2. Definition of a Private Fostering Arrangement**

A private fostering arrangement is essentially one that is made privately, usually by the child'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-parent 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 or someone previously unknown to the child's family who is willing to privately foster a child. The period for which the child 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 in a way which will promote and safeguard his welfare. Overriding responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the privately fostered child remains with the parent or other person with parental responsibility.

### **3. Private Fostering situations**

**The situations that children are privately fostered can be complex. Children may be privately fostered for a variety of reasons. In Southwark these may include:**

#### **Local Children living apart from their families**

These children may be living apart from their families due to 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 the child. The child's parents may have been imprisoned. In some instances parents may be misusing drugs and alcohol and may have made care arrangements for their children.

#### **Children From Overseas**

Many children come to the United Kingdom for overseas to live with family friends or distant relatives. For instance many of the children already known to the project come from Bangladesh, African and African Caribbean countries.

#### **Child Care Arrangements**

Some parents may find it hard to afford child care and they make alternative child care arrangements by placing children outside the local community. Some children may be placed in rural areas where their carer's have very little understanding and awareness of the child's racial, cultural, language needs and the effects of the child's separation from their birth family.

#### **Asylum Seekers and Refugees**

Some of these children may arrive in the U.K seeking asylum, travelling with other adults who may not be known to them, or their family in their country of origin. Other children 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.

### **Parents who may be unwell**

A mother who is caring for her children alone becomes ill and has to go into hospital. She asks a neighbour to care for her children aged five and seven so that they can be with people they know and carry on going to the same school. There are complications and her stay extends to over four weeks. She still plans to care for the children when she is discharged from hospital.

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

A family agree to let their 15 year old daughter's school friend live with them for a while. She has fallen out with her mother following her parents divorce. Her mother agrees because she knows the family are responsible people and she would rather that than her daughter put herself at risk on the street. She keeps in touch with her daughter and her carers and hopes to patch things up with her daughter when things have cooled down.

### **Adolescents and Teenagers who are experiencing relationship breakdown in their families**

These young people may be experiencing difficulties where their own family relationships may have broken down. The parents may have made private arrangements for the young person or the young person may have decided to make their own arrangements which may place them in a vulnerable or unsuitable situation.

### **Children attending language schools**

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

### **Children at independent boarding schools who do not return home for holidays**

Some of these children may not return to their parents during holidays particularly where the parents are working overseas. If they are placed with a family for 28 days or more this may be private fostering.

### **Children living with another family for a variety of reasons**

Some Charitable Organisations and other individuals may arrange for children to come into their 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 U.K for adoption**

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

## **How is Private Fostering Arranged**

Private Fostering is arranged and agreed by a child's parents and the family which will be caring for the child. The law requires that both the parents 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. They are required to assess and say whether or not they agree and accept the private fostering arrangements.

## **4. 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's interest 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.
- Makes regular visits to ensure that children 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.
- Stop a private fostering arrangement if the carer is in unsuitable accommodation or the carer is unsuitable to look after children.
- The Children Act 1989 gives Local Authorities the general duty to consider whether a privately fostered child 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's needs.

## **5. New duties under the 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 Children's Safeguarding Boards are required to raise public awareness in their area of the requirements regarding notification of private fostering arrangements.

Notifications must now be given to the London Borough of Southwark when a child/ young person is proposed to be privately fostered or is being privately fostered. This will enable Southwark to ensure that the welfare of privately fostered children/ young persons is being properly supervised through ongoing visits and assessments and subsequent monitoring and reviewing of these arrangements within statutory timescales.

These new measures along with the national minimum standards for private fostering, July 2005, will focus all local authorities' attention on private fostering and require them to take a more proactive approach whilst working in partnership with agencies and other key professionals in identifying arrangements in their area.

Southwark is expected to improve notification rates and the compliance with the existing legislative framework for private fostering. The outcome of this is to strengthen the safeguards for all children privately fostered in the borough.

## **6. Training for relevant staff**

Training will be a joint initiative between NCH and London Borough of Southwark where all staff will have access to the appropriate induction and safeguarding training. The private fostering manager and private fostering co-ordinator will also provide presentations to all key staff ensuring that they have information about the notification requirements and the projects assessment process for all private fostering arrangements in the borough. Training will take into account the different levels and awareness about private fostering. This will be achieved by making presentations to professionals in health, education, housing, social services, faith and community groups and sending out information leaflets about private fostering via mail and e-mail.

- The project manager and the co-ordinator will continue to attend training, briefing conferences on private fostering, policy and practice
- We will ensure that all private fostering staff has a clear plan for training and staff development involved in private fostering.
- We will attend BAAF meetings to share information and improve policy and practice.

## **7. Raising awareness – How it will be promoted by Southwark Family Plus**

Raising awareness of the notification requirements will be promoted in the following ways:

- **Stage 1:** NCH will work in partnership with Southwark in targeting all key professionals working in health, education, housing, Social Services, libraries, sport centres and police through presentations and e-mailing information about private fostering.
- **Stage 2:** NCH will work in partnership with Southwark in targeting community and faith groups including independent agencies. Professionals and members of the public can access information about private fostering via Southwark Council's website. The website address is <http://www.southwark.gov.uk/YourServices/childrenandfamilies/YoungSouthwarkPartnership/StayingSafe/fostering.html>
- The publicity materials will contain information about the legal definitions surrounding privately fostered children and the process that members of the public and key professionals will need to follow when notifying us about a private fostering arrangement. Information will be provided to the public and professionals about the benefits of notification and the consequences of not informing us about a private fostering arrangement.
- We have produced leaflets aimed at private foster carers, professionals, parents and community groups. These will be distributed through key points of contact such as schools, libraries, Southwark Council's one-stop shops, council offices and relevant voluntary/ community groups. The information booklets contain :
  - Information about private fostering
  - What the law says
  - Different types of private fostering situations
  - What people need to do to notify us about a private fostering arrangement
  - Who to contact for information and advice
  - What Southwark Family Plus will do after we receive a notification.
- Where possible, we will ensure that publicity materials will be in the different languages when required.
- We will undertake Outreach work to develop links with voluntary and community groups that are in contact with children and young people ensuring that they are made aware of the notification requirements.
- We will continue to evaluate our Raising Awareness Campaign Strategy and this will be measured through the number of notifications generated from our publicity campaign. This information will be logged on NCH and Children's Services database.

- Southwark Family Plus will continually review their communications strategy and will discuss its progress at regular quarterly meetings with Southwark Council.

An annual communications plan will be drawn up by Southwark's Children's Services communications department.

### **8. How we will ensure that the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted in Southwark**

NCH working in partnership with the London Borough of Southwark will ensure that the welfare of privately fostered children/ young people are safeguarded and promoted by Social Care staff using the London Borough of Southwark's protocol and good practice guidelines on Private Fostering. These take into account the new regulations on private fostering and ensure that all private fostering arrangements have an up-to-date social work assessment, which is approved and signed off by the Private Fostering Manager located in Southwark.

In situations where notifications have been received that children are being privately fostered an initial joint assessment will take place with the Referral and Assessment Team to ascertain if there are any immediate safeguarding issues that need to be addressed. These will include looking to see if provision can be made so that there is no longer need for the private fostering arrangement to be made.

When we are notified of an arrangement, NCH SFP and the Referral and Assessment Team will ensure that all children are seen within 7 days. Following this, we will ensure that a core assessment on the suitability of the arrangement is carried out within 35 days. If any safeguarding issues arise in relation to any issues about parenting arise the Referral and Assessment team will carry out an assessment under S.47 of the Children Act 1989. (See also section 5.34 of the London Child Protection Procedures 2007).

Action that NCH SFP will take once notified of an arrangement:

- (a) visit the premises where it is proposed that the child will be cared for and accommodated;
- (b) visit and speak to the proposed private foster carer and to all members of their household;
- (c) visit and speak to the child, alone unless the officer considers it inappropriate;
- (d) speak to and, if it is practicable to do so, visit every parent of or person with parental responsibility for the child; and

- (e) establish the purpose and the intended duration of the private fostering arrangement;
- (f) establish the child's physical, intellectual, social and behavioural needs are;
- (g) identify whether the child's religious, cultural and linguistic needs are being met in the arrangement;
- (h) establish that the child is receiving a good standard of care and that the child is safe and looked after appropriately by the carers;
- (i) we will ensure that the child/ young person is registered with a GP and dentist;
- (j) we will ensure that the child/ young person is in appropriate nursery/ education placement;
- (k) the assessment will look at the suitability of the foster carer's ability to look after the child and the suitability of the foster carer's household;
- (l) we will establish whether the child's parents or an older is exercising parental responsibility for the child and we will consult with them to see what their future plans are for the child/ young person.
- (m) We will establish what the financial arrangements for the care and maintenance for the child/ young person is;
- (n) we will complete a report using the DOH core assessment framework for collating and analysing and making a decision about the suitability of the private fostering arrangement;
- (o) the completed assessment report will be submitted to the London Borough of Southwark and signed off by the Private Fostering Manager, Vyomesh Thanki ([vyomesh.thanki@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:vyomesh.thanki@southwark.gov.uk));
- (p) as part of the assessment process we will ensure that key information about all privately fostered children are logged onto the Council's CareFirst database. We will log the following information about each private fostering arrangement using Southwark's CareFirst and Integrated Children's System, the key information will record: -
- Each child will have a CareFirst number
  - Date notified
  - Where the notification came from
  - Details of the child e.g. name, date of birth
  - Ethnicity of the child and place of birth
  - Details of the carer and date of birth
  - Ethnicity of the carer and place of birth
  - Date initial assessment started and completed
  - Date core assessment of the private fostering arrangement started and completed

- Date health and safety CRB checks started and completed

## **9. The role of other agencies in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of privately fostered children, including encouraging notification**

In order to carry out our functions under this legislation, we will ensure that partnership agencies are provided with information about their responsibilities regarding notifications about privately fostered children.

Critical to the new regulations is a key message for all agencies about the requirement to notify social care about any private fostering arrangements. It is also imperative that all agencies are aware of the the relationship between private fostering and safeguarding activities. Some children who are privately fostered may also have been trafficked, be at risk of exploitation, child slavery and abuse.

In order to ensure key agencies are aware of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding issues NCH SFP on behalf of London Borough of Southwark will undertake visits, provide presentations, offer advice and provide information about the risks to children in some private fostering arrangements.

All key professionals and agencies who are involved with children/ young people are able to access NCH SFP for information and advice through:

Telephone: 020 7703 4934

E-mail: [Southwark.FamilyPlus@nch.org.uk](mailto:Southwark.FamilyPlus@nch.org.uk)

And on Southwark's website

Website: [www.southwark.gov.uk](http://www.southwark.gov.uk)

For further information or advice about private fostering, contact either Michael Sweetland (Private Fostering Co-ordinator) on 020 7703 4934 or Vyomesh Thanki (Private Fostering Manager) on 020 7525 3946.

## **10. Ensuring that relevant staff understand Southwark's duties and responsibilities regarding private fostering**

NCH SFP will work in partnership with the Council to ensure that key information about private fostering will be circulated to all staff. All staff in Children's Services, health, education and housing will be able to access Southwark Council's private fostering protocol through the Council's website.

NCH SFP are available to attend team meetings and briefings to provide staff with further information about private fostering and their responsibilities under the new 2005 requirements. We will ensure that outside agencies have information about private fostering via e-mail and direct mail. We will also undertake follow-up visits to outside organisations where appropriate.

**11. How Southwark will ensure that its duties and functions regarding private fostering are included in an induction and other training programmes and these are reviewed and evaluated annually in line with changes in legislation and guidance**

NCH SFP will work in partnership with Southwark Council to ensure that its duties and functions in relation to private fostering are set out in the key Business Planning documents and the Children and Young Person's Plan. This will also be reflected in Southwark's protocol for private fostering, which will be circulated to all key staff in the borough. The NCH contract will be monitored in regular quarterly meetings to ensure that they are satisfactorily carrying out our duties and functions in relation to children who are privately fostered in the borough. NCH SFP with the London Borough of Southwark will carry out a review of their Statement of Purpose, communications strategy and business plan. Private Fostering will be included in the induction to Children's Services. This matter will also be addressed by the Southwark Safeguarding Children's Board training sub group.

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

Under Regulation 12, the Business Unit Manager for ASAFs, will monitor the way that NCH SFP and Southwark Council work in partnership to discharge their duties and functions regarding children privately fostered in the borough. They will monitor compliance with the following duties and functions as laid out in the National Minimum Standards and in addition: -

- The promotion of awareness regarding notification requirements.
- How NCH SFP responds to notifications received and if these are within timescales.
- How NCH SFP and the Council manages disqualifications, prohibitions, requirements and appeals against these, and refusals to consent to disqualified persons being private foster carers.
- How NCH SFP/ the Council exercises its functions under section 67(5), Children Act 1989.
- How NCH SFP/ the Council processes decisions regarding offences committed bearing in mind the best interests of the child/ young person.
- How NCH SFP/ the Council assess the parenting capacity of prospective or actual private foster carers, members of their households and the suitability of their accommodation.
- How well NCH SFP carry out statutory visits within timescales and work with the Council to make decisions about suitability of arrangements which are approved by a senior manager in Southwark Council.
- To ensure that additional follow-up visits are made when requested by the child/ young person, private foster carer, parent or those with parental responsibility.
- Written reports are made in accordance with the Regulations, i.e. conclusions drawn on the arrangement, the child/ young person seen alone, wishes and feelings of child/ young person, any concern raised etc.

- Provided advice and support given to private foster carers, parents/ those with parental responsibility or any person concerned with the child/ young person and recorded.
- Privately fostered children/ young are provided with information and support.
- Independent interpreters are used as appropriate.
- To ensure that regular file inspections of the services carried out by a senior manager of Southwark Council to check that we are complying with the private fostering regulations.
- To ensure that any concerns or issues raised by privately fostered children/ young people are fully investigated and dealt with.
- NCH SFP will work with the Council to ensure that there is a system for recording the number and the nature of enquiries received in relation to private fostering, the responses given and the effectiveness of the action taken. This information is recorded on the Council's CareFirst database.
- NCH SFP will submit quarterly and annual reports to the Council which will provide information about how we are complying with the private fostering regulations.
- To ensure complaints are dealt with in a timely and responsive fashion.

### **13. Who to contact for advice and information about private fostering**

Copies of the Statement of Purpose can be obtained from:

SSCB website.

<http://www.southwark.gov.uk>

or

By contacting:

Michael Sweetland (Private Fostering Co-ordinator) at NCH SFP. The contact details are: -

E-mail: [michael.sweetland@nch.org.uk](mailto:michael.sweetland@nch.org.uk)

Tel No. 020 7703 4934

Vyomesh Thanki (Private Fostering Manager) at Southwark Social Services.

The contact details are:

E-mail: [vyomesh.thanki@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:vyomesh.thanki@southwark.gov.uk)

Tel No. 020 7525 3946