



**LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON CHILDREN  
SCHOOLS & FAMILIES DEPARTMENT**

**PRIVATE FOSTERING STATEMENT OF**

**PURPOSE April 2017**

Issue Date	Author	Date of Next Review	Lead Officer
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**Children, Schools & Families  
Department  
Statement on Private Fostering for London Borough of  
Merton**

**Introduction**

This Statement of Purpose explains our vision, objectives and services provided by Children's Social Care to identify, monitor and support Private Fostering arrangements in London Borough Merton. In doing so it sets out how the service meets the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005.

This Statement of Purpose is reviewed and updated on an annual basis. The review is signed off by the Director of Children's Services, the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Lead Member for Children and Young People.

Name	Signed	Date of Signature
<i>Director of Children, Schools and Families</i>		10.03.2017
<i>Merton Safeguarding Children Board</i>		10.03.2017
<i>Lead member for Children and Young People.</i>		10.03.2017

It is the duty of all Local Authorities to publish a Statement of Purpose in relation to Private Fostering Arrangements. The legal framework underpinning Private Fostering Arrangements is the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

In addition, the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering which came into effect on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2005 specify a minimum standard for local authority practice in the fulfilment of its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. These, along with the new measures in section 44 of the Children Act 2004 are intended to better focus local authorities' attention on private fostering, in part by requiring them to take a more proactive approach to identifying arrangements in their area.

This document is in fulfilment of Standard I of the National Minimum Standards which requires that:

<i>The local authority has a written statement or plan, which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out.</i>
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## **1. Service Overview**

The Private Fostering Service is located within the Vulnerable Children Team and has a dedicated private fostering social worker, who reports to the Team Manager of this team.

### **Private Fostering Team**

The service has two functions:

- To raise public and professional awareness about private fostering and the requirements to notify the local authority of any actual or planned private fostering arrangements.
- To respond to any private fostering notifications, assess the arrangements and to provide support to the child/ren and adults involved.

In Merton there are clear procedures for responding to notifications of private fostering arrangements. All private fostering notifications are initially screened by the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) where the arrangement meets the private fostering criteria a referral is sent to the First Response Duty Team to undertake a home visit with the Private Fostering Social Worker within 7 working days. Following the initial visit once it is confirmed as a private fostering arrangement the First Response Duty Team Manager transfers the case to the Vulnerable Children Team Manager for allocation on Care First.

The Private Fostering Social Worker undertakes a suitability assessment of the private foster carer and offers them advice and support where appropriate. A single assessment is also undertaken to ensure the child's needs are fully considered. Thereafter welfare visits are undertaken every 6 weeks in the first year and at 12 weekly intervals for the duration of the private fostering arrangement. An initial review is completed in the first year within 12 weeks of the arrangement and subsequently every 6 months to ensure that the arrangement remains relevant and appropriate.

The Merton Safeguarding Children Board has established a multi-agency Private Fostering Working Group which takes the lead on promoting awareness of private fostering and, also, considers which agencies are best placed to identify children in private fostering situations.

## **2. The Private Fostering Service holds the following values and principles:**

- The best interest of the child in a private fostering arrangement is paramount and services will be child-focussed.
- The private fostering service works holistically with private foster carers and their families to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child privately fostered by them.
- The privately fostered child will be seen alone during every visit to ensure that their wishes and feelings are listened to and recorded.
- The private fostering service will work with partner agencies in health and education to raise awareness of private fostering within the Borough.
- We will challenge discriminatory attitudes and practices and celebrate the diversity and difference of private foster carers, the children they care for and their families.

### 3. Legal definition of a privately fostered child

- i. A child is privately fostered if someone cares for them other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. The child must be under the age of 16, or under 18 if disabled.
- ii. The arrangement is one that is made privately by a parent or someone with parental responsibility. A privately fostered child is not a *looked after child* (i.e. not in care) and the Local Authority is not involved in making the arrangement. However, it is the duty of the Local Authority to satisfy itself that the welfare of the child who is privately fostered and living within their area is safeguarded and promoted.
- iii. Private foster carers may be from the extended family such as a cousin or great aunt.

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 the child.

- iv. 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.
- v. It is not a private fostering arrangement if:
  - 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 (a parent's unmarried partner is not a step-parent in this context).
  - The arrangement is not expected to last more than 28 days (continuous).
- vi. Examples of private fostering arrangements:
  - A single parent who has chronic health problems arranges for her 9 year old son to live with a friend on a permanent basis.
  - A single parent working away from home for 2 months at a time arranges for his three children to live with an extended member of the family (Great Aunt to children).
  - Parents arrange for their 14 year old girl to live with her school friend's family during the summer holidays (6 weeks).
  - Parents who reside abroad arrange for their two children of primary school age to live with an extended member of the family (older cousin to children).

#### **4. Ensuring that the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted in Merton**

- a. The Children Act 1989 Guidance on Private Fostering comprehensively sets out the requirements for determining that the welfare of privately fostered children are safeguarded and promoted. These will be used by the designated social worker for private fostering and the line manager in reaching decisions in accordance with the regulations.
- b. If any safeguarding issues arise or are reported within the private fostering arrangement, the MASH Team will undertake an investigation under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.
- c. Where circumstances indicate that a privately fostered child may be a 'child in need', a single assessment will be carried out in accordance with the Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance. Any decision on the level and type of services that should be offered will be in line with the Children's Social Care policy on supporting children in need and their families.
- d. In Merton, notifications of Private Fostering Arrangements are received by the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) who undertake an initial screening, if the arrangement meets the Private Fostering Criteria, a referral is sent to First Response Duty Team who will arrange in consultation with the Private Fostering Social Worker :
  - A home visit to the proposed private foster carer within 7 working days to ascertain their understanding of the private fostering arrangement and to speak to other household members.
  - Establish that the accommodation is suitable.
  - Speak to the child alone, and ascertain their wishes and feelings about the private fostering arrangement unless it is not appropriate to do so.
  - Speak to or visit (if practical) the child's parents or person with parental responsibility for the child.
  - Ascertain the purpose and duration of the intended private fostering arrangement.
  - Establish whether there is a financial arrangement for the care and maintenance of the child/young person.
  - Establish the child's physical, intellectual, social and behavioural needs
  - Establish whether the child's religious, linguistic needs are being met in the arrangement.
  - Establish that the child or young person is registered with the family GP and Dentist.

- Ensure that the child is receiving education and liaise with the school or school.
- Establish that the child is receiving a good standard of care.
- Undertake checks in relation to the proposed private foster carer and anyone in their household over the age of 16 years.
- Make arrangements for each child who is privately fostered to be visited (at least every 6 weeks in the first year of the placement, and thereafter at least every 12 weeks). Also, to visit when reasonably requested by the private foster carer, child or parent or anyone with parental responsibility. A report will be provided after each visit. Children will be regularly asked for their views, wishes and feelings and these will be acted upon where appropriate.
- Assess the suitability of the proposed arrangements and provide a report within 42 working days of notification.
- Local Authorities do not approve private foster carers; however, they are required to assess and agree or not the suitability of the private fostering arrangement. In Merton, the Vulnerable Children's Team Manager has been designated as the manager to sign off decisions about the suitability of private fostering arrangements.
- Prohibit those persons from privately fostering deemed to be unsuitable.
- Impose requirements on each placement, where relevant.

## **5. Staff Training**

All Merton Social Care staff are given information about private fostering during their induction training when they start working for Merton.

Information about private fostering is included in all courses which form part of the annual child protection training programme.

Information about private fostering is also included in the training programme to implement the Merton Well Being Model and Early Help Assessment (CASA)

There are opportunities within the lunch time seminar programme for staff briefings on private fostering.

There are opportunities for the private fostering social worker to visit other teams within the department to raise awareness of private fostering and the procedure for referrals.

The private fostering social worker is a member of the BAAF Private Fostering Special Interest Group where she receives training on topical issues in relation to private fostering.

## **6. Promotion of notification arrangements**

A range of methods are used to ensure the public and relevant staff in the Children, Schools & Families Department, other Council departments and partner agencies in Merton are aware of the notification requirements. These include:

- Articles in Council magazine 'My Merton' which is distributed to every household in Merton.
- Information on Council website.
- Information on Merton LSCB webpages.
- General public leaflet (including language advice in most common languages and translated on request).
- Young person's guide to private fostering distributed to all schools in the borough.
- General public poster.
- Involvement (via Council Press Office) of local media in promoting private fostering issues.
- Presentations for targeted faith and community groups.
- Briefings provided to all staff in Children, Schools & Families, other relevant Council departments and partner agencies through lunch time seminars and team visits.
- Letters including leaflets to all private primary and secondary schools in the borough.



## **7. Advice and support to private foster carers, parents and others concerned with the privately fostered child**

- a. The designated social worker for private fostering is the professional best placed to offer advice and support to private foster carers, parents and others concerned with the privately fostered child. Details will be kept on the appropriate personal records of any advice or support provided.
- b. Where advice or support is to be provided by another agency this will also be recorded on the appropriate personal record.
- c. Key information such as the contact details of the designated social worker and any other professionals providing advice or support, and the Children's Social Care out of hours service will be given to each:
  - Private foster carer.
  - Prospective private foster carer.
  - Parent.
  - Other person(s) with parental responsibility.
  - Other person concerned with a privately foster child.
- d. All information (verbal or written) will be provided in a suitable format for the recipient. Requests for translation or interpreting will be provided in line with the Council's policy and procedure for all service users.

## **8. Arrangements for information and support to the privately fostered child**

- a. Key information will be given to each privately fostered child (once of a suitable age and understanding). The information provided is reviewed at regular intervals to ensure it matches the child's circumstances and his or her developmental needs.
- b. As a priority, the privately fostered children will be given details of:
  - The name and contact details of the person who will be visiting them while they are privately fostered.
  - The dates and times of all planned visits.
  - Who they can contact (during normal office hours and out of office periods) if they have concerns about their care or if they wish to request a visit.
  - Any advocacy arrangements, if they are assessed as being a child in need.
- c. All information (verbal or written) will be provided in a suitable format for the recipient. Requests for translation or interpreting will be provided in line with the Council's policy and procedure for all service users.

## **9. Arrangements for any training that may be available to private foster carers (including prospective private foster carers)**

Private foster carers are encouraged and will be supported to attend training organised by the Merton Local Safeguarding Board and for foster carers to equip them in caring for the child they are caring for.

## **10. The role of other agencies in assisting the local authority to carry out its duty under section 67(1) of the Children Act 1989**

- a. The Merton Local Safeguarding Children Board established a Private Fostering Working Group in October 2005. This multi-agency forum plan, monitor and review the local response to implementing the requirements set out in the Children Act 2004, the Regulations and the National Minimum Standards. Terms of reference and membership of the Working Group have been produced.
- b. Partner agencies are routinely reminded of their duty to co-operate and to safeguard and promote the welfare of vulnerable children, including those who are privately fostered. The Private Fostering Working Group will continue to set out the expectations of partner agencies through relevant briefings and training.

## **11. Monitoring**

Regulation 12 of the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) 2005 provides that each local authority must monitor the way in which they discharge their functions under Part 9 of the Children Act 1989, and must appoint an officer of the authority for that purpose. The intention of this provision is to increase the focus of local authorities on private fostering and to improve compliance with the existing legislative framework for private fostering.

In Merton the Vulnerable Children's Team Manager has been designated in this role and will liaise with the Safeguarding Development Officer and the Quality Assurance Manager (Safeguards Team) in fulfilling the requirements set out in the Children Act 1989 Guidance on Private Fostering.

An annual report on the activities of Private Fostering Services is presented to the Merton Local Safeguarding Board and the Director of Children's Social Care.

## **12. Inspection**

The Private Fostering Service is inspected by OFSTED and the Merton Private Fostering Service was inspected in September 2008 with an outcome of Good. Details can be found on the OFSTED website, [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

### 13. Compliments, comments and complaints

London Borough Merton aims to provide high quality services. Your feedback is very important to us, we like to hear when we are doing something well. We realise that there may also be times when you are unhappy with a service or you might just want to make a comment about how we can improve it.

How to make a Compliment, Comment or Complaint:

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| • <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:childrensservicescomplaints@merton.gov.uk">childrensservicescomplaints@merton.gov.uk</a> |
| • <b>Telephone:</b> 020 8545 3086 (weekdays, 9am - 5pm)  |

#### Further Information

- a. Enquiries and referrals regarding proposed or actual private fostering arrangements:

Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)  
Children Schools and Families  
Department  
12<sup>th</sup> Floor, Civic Centre  
London Road  
Morden

SM4 5DX

020 8545 4226 or 4227

Email: [childrensdaysservice@merton.gov.uk](mailto:childrensdaysservice@merton.gov.uk) or [mash@merton.gov.uk](mailto:mash@merton.gov.uk)

- b. Information for partner agencies is available via the Merton LSCB webpages:

[www.merton.gov.uk/lscb](http://www.merton.gov.uk/lscb)

- c. Public information regarding private fostering is available in leaflet format from the address above and local libraries and also on the Merton Council website:

[www.merton.gov.uk/health-social-care/children-family-health-social-care/lscb/lscbprofessionals/privatefosteringregulations.htm](http://www.merton.gov.uk/health-social-care/children-family-health-social-care/lscb/lscbprofessionals/privatefosteringregulations.htm)

- d. Enquiries regarding the Merton Local Safeguarding Children Board and the LSCB Private Fostering Working Group:

Merton LSCB  
9th Floor, Civic Centre  
London Road,  
Morden, Surrey

SM4 5DX

020 8545 4866

Email: [mertonlscb@merton.gov.uk](mailto:mertonlscb@merton.gov.uk)