



## **Southend on Sea Borough Council Statement of Purpose**

For the

### **Private Fostering Service**

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**Success for all**

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## Introduction

This document is the Statement of Purpose for Private Fostering in Southend. This statement of purpose is designed to meet the needs of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering (Standard 1) and to provide a clear guide of the service for professionals, the public, council members and external organisations.

This document 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 Southend.

Any comments or enquiries regarding this statement of purpose should be passed to the Group Manager for Young People & Family Support , Diane Keens Tele: 01702 534406 Email [dianekeens@southend.gov.uk](mailto:dianekeens@southend.gov.uk)

## 1. Regulation

Southend Private Fostering Service is regulated by the Office for the Standards in Education, Children's Services & Skills (Ofsted).

Ofsted can be contacted directly by telephone: 08456 404045

Email: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

Or in writing to:

Royal Exchange Buildings

St Ann's Square

Manchester

M2 7LA

Southend Private Fostering Service is based in the Southend Adoption and Fostering Service within the Department for People and is committed to maintaining high 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 the individual private foster child/young person regardless of race, religion, class, marital status, sexual orientation or disability.

The Local Authority discharges its duties and powers in respect of private fostering through the Department of People, Children's Services and a designated private fostering lead officer who managed by the Team Manager for Southend Fostering Services. There are clear arrangements in place in the absence of a Team Manager. On day-to-day issues, a Senior Practitioner will deputise for the Team Manager whilst in their absence, the designated lead officer can seek support and advice from the Group Manager for Young People & Family Support or a Service Manager within the Department.

## 2. Legal definition of a privately fostered child

A private fostering arrangement is essentially one that is made privately (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 there is a disability) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it

should last for 28 days or more. 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.

A person who is a relative under the Children Act 1989 i.e. a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt or step-parent will not be a private foster carer. For the purposes of the Act, 'parent' includes unmarried or putative father. A 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 relations of the wife and also between the wife and the blood relations of the husband.

Private foster carers may be from the extended family such as a cousin or a great aunt. They 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.

### **Examples of privately fostered children**

- ✓ A child sent to this country for education or health care by their parent(s) who live overseas
- ✓ A teenager living with a friend's family because they are not getting on with their own family
- ✓ A child living with a friend's family because their parents study or work unsociable hours
- ✓ A child from overseas staying with a host family while attending language school

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.

**OR** if the child has been placed by the Department of People. In these cases the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 apply.

Failure by a private foster carer or parent to notify the Local Authority of a private fostering arrangement is an offence and if Local Authorities are not aware of such arrangements they cannot carry out their duty to satisfy themselves that the welfare of the children is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted.

## **2. The Local Authority's duties and functions under the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005**

As previously stated Local Authorities have a duty to satisfy themselves that the welfare of children who are privately fostered in their area is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted and to ensure 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 the following types of activity:

- Acting upon notifications
- Ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child or young person about the arrangement and take this into account in assessing the suitability.
- Ascertaining the suitability of the private foster carer's household and their capacity to care for the child or young person.
- Ensuring that arrangements are in place to meet the child's health and educational needs.

- Ensuring that adequate and clear arrangements are in place between the private foster carer and the birth parents covering such areas as contact, financial support, decision making, health care etc.
- Monitoring the welfare of the child through visits within specified time scales, ensuring that the child is seen alone, and producing written records of visits.
- Providing such assessment and support as may be required under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 where the child is in need.
- Monitoring the discharge of its functions in respect of privately fostered children.

Where the Local Authority has received notification under Regulation 3, The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 they must arrange for an officer of the Authority within seven working days to:

- ✓ Visit the premises where it is proposed that the child will be cared for and accommodated
- ✓ Visit and speak to the proposed private foster carer and to all members of the household
- ✓ Visit and speak to the privately fostered child alone unless the officer considers it inappropriate
- ✓ Speak to and if it is practicable to do so, visit every parent or person with parental responsibility for the child and:
- ✓ Establish such matters listed in Schedule 2 (2005 Regulations) as appear to the officer to be relevant

Where notification is received about a child who is already being privately fostered the duties of the officer remain the same as in section 67 (1) of The 1989 Act.

Having established these functions the Officer must undertake an assessment to be presented at the Private Fostering Panel which is chaired by the Group Manager for Young People and Family Support.

The assessment will include:

- The wishes and feelings of the child or young person about the arrangement
- The suitability of the private foster carer's household and their capacity to care for the child or young person
- That arrangements are in place to meet the child's health and educational needs
- That adequate and clear arrangements are in place between the private foster carer and the birth parents covering such areas as contact, financial support, decision making, health care etc.

The Local Authority's designated officer based in the Fostering Service will assess the suitability of the private foster carer and their household within 42 days of notification. A Children's Social Worker will be allocated and both the Social Worker and the designated officer will attend Child in Need Meetings and undertake statutory visiting of the child or young person. The Private Fostering Panel will consider the suitability of the private fostering arrangement and make further recommendations as needed.

#### **4. Training for relevant staff**

Training on private fostering will be provided in the LSCB foundation training, in the induction and ongoing child care, child protection and child in need training. The Fostering Service will provide training to relevant staff within the Fieldwork Teams including information on the

notification requirements, the assessment processes for the child and the private foster carer and the role of the Private Fostering Panel. All Social Workers within the Fostering Team and Fieldwork Teams have access to the procedures in respect of private fostering.

Training will be at different levels for different professionals and will cover different cultural child care practices and parenting styles. Relevant staff will further gain understanding and expertise in relation to private fostering through workshops, the private fostering procedures and regular supervision.

## **5. How awareness of the notification requirements will be promoted**

Local Authorities are required to raise public awareness in their area of the requirements regarding notification of private fostering arrangements.

The Fostering Service leads on promoting the understanding of private fostering across Southend and developing the framework and procedures within which partner agencies and Southend Borough Council will operate.

The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) in partnership with the Fostering Service leads on promoting the awareness of private fostering to the public and other professionals.

The LSCB in partnership with the Fostering service have developed a strategy to ensure that awareness of the private fostering notification requirements are promoted in

- a) Other agencies including health, education and adult services
- b) The local community
- c) Voluntary and independent agencies
- d) Council offices and library's

The focus of this strategy:

- ✓ Leaflets and posters in council offices, schools, libraries and other places visited by the public
- ✓ Media campaigns
- ✓ Presentations to the multi-agency groups attending the LSCB Meetings
- ✓ Information sessions with key professionals
- ✓ Presentations to faith and community groups
- ✓ Presentations to other council services promoting a consistent response to the general public and professionals
- ✓ Cascading information and training about private fostering through the Department of People and Children's partnership Services
- ✓ Information and guidance on private fostering on the Council's website [www.southend.gov.uk](http://www.southend.gov.uk)

Publicity materials contain information about the legal definition of privately fostered children/young people, the procedure for notifying, the benefits of notification and consequences of non-notification.

The information leaflets contain the contact numbers of the Private Fostering Service as well as the details of the First Contact Team where privately fostered children, their parents, private foster carers and professionals can refer in the first instance. Publicity can be made available in the different languages of the local community.

## **6. Assessment of the suitability of private foster carers and their household**

The First Contact Team will respond to all notifications and visit within 7 days. They will undertake a Single Social Worker Assessment on all notifications within Southend and refer any private foster carer to the Private Fostering Service.

Following the initial assessment and where it has been established the child is privately fostered, a private fostering assessment will be undertaken and the requirements as detailed in Schedule 2 of the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 will be covered in the resulting plan.

The designated officer for private fostering will visit at a minimum of 6 weekly intervals in the first year and 12 weekly thereafter, and will ensure that the requirements as detailed in Schedule 3 of the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 are covered in each visit with the child being seen alone and a written report produced after each visit.

All private fostering arrangements will be reviewed annually and presented to the Private Fostering Panel.

## **7. Advice/ support and information available to private foster carers, parents/ those with parental responsibility and privately fostered children**

The designated officer for private fostering based in the Fostering Service will offer support to private foster carers. Parents/ those who have parental responsibility may also contact the designated officer for advice and guidance or be referred for support by the field social worker.

The privately fostered child receives direct support through their allocated Social Worker in the Fieldwork Team. Currently, those children/young people who are living in privately fostered arrangements in Southend are considered to be a child in need. Therefore, they will have a Child in Need Plan which is reviewed after three months and then every six months thereafter.

Privately fostered children are provided with a leaflet which provides them with information about private fostering and their rights. The leaflet also provides them with the contact details of other agencies they may want to contact.

Private foster carers will have access to training programmes and information materials can be made available including Southend Procedures on Private Fostering in different languages for private foster carers, parents and privately fostered children.

In addition to statutory visits, other visits when requested by privately fostered children/young people, their parents, private foster carers will be undertaken. Interpreters who are independent of parents and private foster carers will be used where it is the request of the child/young person or where the preferred language is not English and the Social Worker does not speak this language.

Private foster carers (including prospective carers) will have access to advice on benefit entitlement, parenting strategies and techniques and other appropriate training and support that is required.

Parents of proposed/current privately fostered children/young people will also be advised, if in the best interests of the child/young person, of other service provision or other agency help available which would remove the necessity for the child/young person to be privately fostered.

## **8. Ensuring the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted**

The Department of People will ensure that privately fostered children/young people's welfare is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted by staff using Southend's Procedures on Private Fostering adhering to the regulations on private fostering.

Consideration of all private fostering arrangements as satisfactory or not will be considered by the Private Fostering Panel.

Private Fostering assessments 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 and cultural and linguistic background are being met. In addition, the assessment will include the suitability of the accommodation and an evaluation of the parenting capacity of the prospective/ current private foster carer. All private foster carers will have an enhanced DBS (previously known as a CRB) check undertaken on them and Local Authority checks.

Private foster carers will be given advice on the child/young person's individual needs, which may include advice on any medical condition or learning disability in order to enhance their ability to care for the child/young person. Support services will be made available to private foster carers as identified by the Private Fostering assessment. There will be a clear agreement, as part of the plan, between the private foster carers and the parents as to the contact arrangements between the child/young person and his/her parents, siblings, extended family and significant others.

The Private Fostering Team will respond to notifications received and likewise liaise with First Contact/ relevant Fieldwork Team to ensure visits to privately fostered children/young people take place within statutory timescales. Written reports will be completed following these visits, in accordance with the Regulations, and will include conclusions drawn on the arrangement, whether the child/young person was seen alone (if not, why not), his/her wishes and feelings about the arrangement, any concerns raised and any relevant advice given.

Privately fostered children's welfare will further be promoted by an awareness campaign regarding the notification requirements which will be carried out within the Borough. Training programmes on private fostering are available and private fostering is also part of more generalised child care training. Partnership agencies, voluntary/community sector and faith groups are and will continue to be made aware of the notification requirements and of their responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of privately fostered children/young people.

The Department carries out internal file audits on a regular basis and the Private Fostering Panel will consider any decisions in respect of the need for the use of the requirements,

prohibitions, disqualifications and appeals. Decisions will be made whilst bearing in mind the best interests of the individual child/young person.

Where child protection concerns are identified the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Child Protection Procedures (SET Procedures) will be followed.

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

Partnership agencies are given information on their responsibilities regarding notification under The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. The LSCB information materials are sent to schools, faith groups, housing and health organisations etc. The Private Fostering Team and representatives of the LSCB visit partnership agencies and workshops and training is made available to them on their role in promoting the welfare of privately fostered children/young people. Other agencies also have access to the Private Fostering Service via telephone, email and internet and via Southend's Procedures on Private Fostering Arrangements.

In addition to the above, partnership agencies will be asked to nominate a designated lead officer on private fostering.

## **10. How relevant staff will have an understanding of the Department's duties and functions in relations to private fostering**

The Department of People's own staff has access to this Statement of Purpose, Southend's procedures on Private Fostering Arrangements, information materials and training on private fostering. These documents are available to all agencies as well as information and relevant training as part of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board training. The Private Fostering Service visits other sections within the Department of People as appropriate, to inform them of the guidance, safeguards and standards.

## **11. How the Department 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**

Children's Services ensures that it is a priority that its duties and functions in relation to private fostering are included in the annual training plan. These are regularly reviewed by the Group Manager for Young People & Family Support in light of any changes in legislation, guidance and best practice developments.

In addition to this, individual workers' training needs in relation to private fostering will be assessed as part of the Department's Performance Management and Development System.

## **12. Monitoring the discharge of functions.**

The Group Manager for Resources and Quality Assurance with the Group Managers for Young People and Family Support and Fieldwork, monitors the way the Department complies with and discharges its statutory duties and functions in relation to private fostering. These officers report to the Corporate Director for the Department of People. The Group Manager will monitor compliance with the following duties and functions:

- The promotion of awareness regarding notification requirements
- How the Department manages disqualifications, prohibitions, requirements and appeals against these and refusals to consent to disqualified persons being private foster carers
- How the Department exercises its functions under Section 67(5) of the Children Act 1989
- How the Department processes decisions regarding offences committed bearing in mind the best interests of the child/young person
- How the Department assesses the parenting capacity of prospective or actual private foster carers, members of their households and the suitability of their accommodation
- That statutory visits are within timescales and decisions about the suitability of arrangements are also within timescales and approved at managerial level
- That additional visits are made when requested by the child/young person, private foster carer, parents or those with parental responsibility
- That 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 concerns raised etc
- That advice and support is provided to private foster carers, parents/those with parental responsibility or any person concerned with the child/young person and recorded
- That information and support is provided to privately fostered children/young people
- That independent interpreters are used as appropriate
- That a sample of individual child/young persons and private foster carer records are regularly reviewed to check that compliance is being fulfilled
- That any concerns raised by privately fostered children/young people are investigated
- That a system for recording the number and nature of enquiries received in relation to private fostering, the responses given and action taken is effective
- That separate files are kept for privately fostered children and private foster carers
- An annual written report is provided to the Corporate Director

### **13. Advice on private fostering**

This Statement of Purpose and the Procedure on Private Fostering Arrangements along with advice on private fostering can be obtained from the Private Fostering Service on 01702 212938 and on Southend's website [www.southend.gov.uk](http://www.southend.gov.uk)

Advice and information about Private Fostering can be obtained from Sue Snoxell on 01702 534442 or email: [suesnoxell@southend.gov.uk](mailto:suesnoxell@southend.gov.uk)

This Private Fostering Services' Statement of Purpose can be provided in other languages.

### **14. Complaints**

Complaints leaflets are provided to private foster carers, to privately fostered children and young people and to their parents. Privately fostered children and young people can also access an advocate and are given the contact details. The Private Fostering Service provides further copies when requested or when circumstances indicate that this is relevant. Adults and children are encouraged to discuss any concerns about the service with their Social Worker and/or Team Managers.

### **Making a Complaint**

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council, Department of People has a Complaints Manager. Complaints, or indeed general comments or compliments about the service can be lodged with the Complaints Manager. The contact details are:

Customer Services Manager  
Department of People  
PO Box 6, Civic Centre  
Victoria Avenue  
Southend on Sea  
Essex SS2 6ER  
Tele: 01702 215515  
Email: [childrenscomplaints@southend.gov.uk](mailto:childrenscomplaints@southend.gov.uk)  
Web: [www.southend.gov.uk](http://www.southend.gov.uk)