

BURY STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2011 – PRIVATE FOSTERING

This Statement of Purpose for private Fostering Services has been agreed by the Director of Children's Services, Bury Council.

This information can be made available in a number of other languages and formats. Contact: Lisa Bell, Team Manager, Bury Safeguarding & Quality Unit.

DEFINITION OF A PRIVATELY FOSTERED CHILD

A privately fostered child means:

A child under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled), who is cared for and accommodated for 28 consecutive days or more by someone other than a parent, other person with parental responsibility or a close relative (such as a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt - whether of full blood or half blood or by affinity - or step-parent). A cousin or a great aunt could therefore be a private foster carer.

Some examples:

- A 13 year old boy is going to live with his friend's family, following relationship difficulties within the family home.
- A 17 year old girl lives with her mother's friend. The girl has disabilities and her mother has died.
- An 11 year old girl lives with her mother's cousin. Her mother lives abroad but is very ill and the child is to stay in England whilst her mother has treatment.
- A child who attends a language school or is on a holiday exchange.

THE LOCAL AUTHORITY'S LEGAL DUTIES AND FUNCTIONS

The Local Authority has a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need and, so far as is consistent with this duty, to promote the upbringing of children within their families.

The legislation relevant to private fostering is set out in Part 9 of and Schedule 8 to, the Children Act 1989. This was further strengthened by measures in Section 44, Children Act 2004. This aims to address issues of poor notification and inconsistent responses by Children's Services to the needs of this group of children. The Children Act 2004 extends the general welfare duty of

Local Authorities to children who are proposed to be privately fostered.

Bury Children's Services duties in respect of privately fostered children include:

- Ensuring that the welfare of the children is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted and to provide necessary advice to those caring for them.
- Protecting privately fostered children from sexual, physical and emotional abuse, neglect and exposure to domestic abuse.
- Preventing unsuitable persons from engaging in private fostering of children.
- Considering the wishes and feelings of the child at all times and ensuring assessments of prospective carers focus on their ability to meet the needs of the child concerned.
- Monitoring private fostering arrangements through visiting and seeing the child alone in line with statutory requirements and regularly reviewing the arrangements to ensure they remain appropriate to the needs of the child.

PROMOTING AWARENESS OF NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

The Team Manager, Safeguarding Unit is responsible for developing a strategy for the publicity and dissemination of advice and information about private foster care. Notification of privately fostered children has already been encouraged by the distribution and dissemination of publicity material for members of the public and professionals.

- The publicity materials were widely distributed to all constituent partner agencies, including health, education, emergency services and all council departments. The publicity material can also be made available in a range of languages. The material emphasises the legal requirement to notify and includes a variety of information within a poster and three leaflets; for parents & carers, children & young people & professionals. The material was targeted to ensure awareness within the wider local community and adverts were placed in the local cinema.
- Internal services and partner agencies have been provided with team meeting awareness talks and supplied with leaflets and posters to display.

- Local authority schools, independent schools, language schools, nurseries, children's centres, the police, fire service, the health service, Bury youth football associations and the Bury army welfare service have all been sent leaflets and posters with a covering letter and a request that the poster be placed on view. This has been followed up with direct meetings with independent schools, health agencies, Head Teachers, the Fire Service, Private schools and the team supporting Asylum Seekers.
- Information is reviewed and updated as required on the local authority internet and intranet web site.

It is important to continue to raise the awareness of private fostering as the current known arrangement numbers are not thought to fully reflect the numbers of private fostering arrangements in Bury.

Ongoing initiatives will therefore support the existing distribution of information and will be developed based on experience and identified need. These are likely to include use of the media and other advertising opportunities.

A private fostering website is available to the general public and contains a range of relevant information which is frequently reviewed and updated. All services accessing the intranet are able to view the information and procedures for private fostering.

All presentations and publicity/information materials include a clear definition of private fostering along with the legal requirement for notifying the Local Authority of any known or proposed private fostering arrangements.

SUPPORT TO PRIVATE FOSTER CARERS (INCLUDING PROSPECTIVE PRIVATE FOSTER CARERS), PARENTS AND OTHERS WITH PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY AND PRIVATELY FOSTERED CHILDREN

A dedicated Social Worker will be allocated to support each private foster carer, birth parent and privately fostered child.

The Social Worker will assist the private foster carer in accessing any necessary advice or services which will enable him/her to meet the child's needs including racial, cultural, religious and linguistic needs. Advice should be given on appropriate play, nursery schools or playgroups, leisure activities and experiences that will provide appropriate stimulation and learning opportunities for the privately fostered child.

Appropriate support and advice will include any issues arising from the child's age, sex and disability and the advice and support provided to the private foster carer should assist the carer in safeguarding and promoting the child's welfare. All private foster carers can access the same training opportunities as Local Authority foster carers.

The social worker will ensure that birth parents and those with parental responsibility are supported and encouraged to maintain regular contact with their child and the private foster carer. Where particular support to the parent or referral to another agency would reduce the need for the child to be privately fostered, and would be in the child's best interests, the Social Worker will ensure that this is provided.

Privately fostered children will be provided with advice and support when required so that their welfare is safeguarded and promoted; privately fostered children should have access to advocacy services. It is imperative to establish and take into account the wishes of the privately fostered child regarding the private fostering agreement.

The child must be seen alone at each visit unless it is considered inappropriate. The child must be provided with the social worker's contact details in addition to the contact details of the advocacy service. The privately fostered child must be given details of their privately fostered status and the responsibilities of the adults caring for them. Such information must be in a format appropriate to their age and understanding.

Children with disabilities who are privately fostered must be provided with services appropriate to their disability and needs, and on reaching the age of 17 years, must be given details of the Authority's procedure for assessing eligibility for adult community care services. These details must be provided in a format appropriate to the child's ability or to their parent/carer to advocate on their behalf.

Support given to private foster carers (including prospective private foster carers), parents/others with parental responsibility and privately fostered children must ensure that the child is safeguarded and protected, and that the welfare of the child is paramount. Practice must be consistent with current legislation, guidance and regulations. This is summarised in the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 and the Replacement Children's Act 1989 Guidance on Private Fostering, and the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, 2005.

Working in partnership with parents and carers should be based on clear understandings of the purpose and duration of the placement, and be balanced by the rights of the child and the statutory duties of the Authority.

Specific aims for services for privately fostered children and their families will be consistent with services available to support children in need:

- To ensure efficient systems for the private fostering assessment of the needs of children and families, with clear criteria and procedures for access to services.
- To offer flexible services to private fostered children and their families without avoidable delay, supported by a private fostering plan.
- To share with other agencies responsibility for providing a safe and effective service that safeguards children.
- To offer a high quality, integrated and comprehensive service which promotes and safeguards the welfare of privately fostered children.
- To meet the assessed social care needs of privately fostered children with disabilities.
- To provide services which are culturally sensitive and accessible.

DECISION MAKING

The overall suitability of each individual private fostering arrangement is determined following a full assessment of a child's needs and of the carer's suitability.

As soon as notification of a proposed (or emergency) arrangement is received by the Advice and Assessment Team, a social worker will be allocated and they will undertake an initial assessment to determine the immediate suitability of the arrangement. If the young person or private foster carer is in receipt of social services support then the Advice and Assessment team will inform the allocated social worker who will undertake the assessments. This will include visiting the child, carers and parents to make an immediate assessment of their views, the needs of the child, the suitability of the carers, other members of the household, and suitability of the accommodation. The welfare of the child is

paramount and particular care should be given to ensure children are safeguarded from harm and a holistic assessment of their needs is made.

At the end of this assessment the Team Manager, Advice and Assessment Team will determine whether the arrangement appears initially suitable or whether there are any requirements which should be imposed. The Service Manager will make any final decision should any person be disqualified or prohibitions imposed. If the arrangement appears viable, then a full Private Fostering Assessment will be completed to determine the long term suitability of the placement. This includes a Criminal record check for all adults within the household.

Local authorities do not formally approve or register private foster carers; they do have a duty to satisfy themselves that the welfare of children who are or will be privately fostered within their area is being or will be satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted.

A decision regarding the suitability of the arrangement should be made within 42 days of notification or as soon as the outcome of the Criminal record check is known, whichever is the later. This decision will be made by the Team Manager.

At this point a Child in Need Meeting will be convened by the Social worker responsible for the case. This will be chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer, and the meeting will consider the overall suitability of the arrangements, including contact with parents and the extended family, and the child's plan ratified. If at any time the arrangements proposed do not appear to be satisfactory, the parent will be advised not to proceed with the placement and alternative courses of action will be considered; these may include considering whether the local authority should exercise any of its functions under the Children Act 1989. In this event, the welfare and support needs of the child must be considered and assessed by the Social Work team.

MONITORING PRIVATE FOSTERING IN BURY

The allocated Social Worker is responsible for visiting within a week of notification and then at intervals of no less than 6 weeks for the first year and every three months thereafter. Review meetings chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer will take place no less than every 6 months to oversee the Child's Plan and ensure that it is being implemented effectively.

Local Authorities are required to monitor their compliance with all their duties and functions in relation to private fostering. In Bury the Safeguarding and Quality Unit for Children's Social Care is responsible for monitoring such compliance. Audits are undertaken to monitor compliance, including that the welfare of privately fostered children is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted.

The Private Fostering Working Group has devised an Action Plan which is inclusive of the monitoring of privately fostered children & young people. Reports about private fostering are submitted annually to the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

THE ROLE OF OTHER AGENCIES IN SAFEGUARDING AND PROMOTING THE WELFARE OF PRIVATELY FOSTERED CHILDREN

The roles and responsibilities of other agencies involved with privately fostered children must be recognised and promoted in relation to:

- A continuum of children in need and the safeguarding of children within a family support model of service.
- Encouragement to notify situations where children are, or are proposed to be privately fostered.
- Access to educational opportunities.
- All health needs are acknowledged and supported.

Key local agencies, especially those involved with children and families have been made aware of the nature and requirements of private fostering and asked to assist in the publicity and dissemination process. The Local Safeguarding Children Board will continue to be informed about Private Fostering developments within Bury.

STAFF AWARENESS AND TRAINING

All relevant staff within the Directorate for Children and Young People have received appropriate information related to private fostering, including associated Procedures and Practice Guidance. Key staff and managers have been provided with team meeting awareness talks and supplied with leaflets and posters.

A formal training programme covering the Authority's duties and functions in relation to private fostering, for education services and other multi-agency professionals will continue to be offered.

Further efforts are being made to increase the awareness of the available training for multi-agency professionals within the emergency services and the voluntary sector.

Presentations have been provided to the multi-agency child protection trainers.

Training which is provided for Bury's foster carers is open to applications from private foster carers. All training is reviewed and evaluated each year and information from any changes in legislation and/or guidance informs the training review and subsequent programmes.