



Wandsworth Private Fostering Statement of Purpose 2022-23



**Children's needs
are changing.
So are we.**



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1. Introduction

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

The legal framework underpinning Private Fostering Arrangements is set out in the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. In addition, the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering specify a minimum standard for local authority practice in the fulfilment of its duties and functions. These, along with the measures in section 44 of the Children Act 2004 are designed to provide a robust framework for local authorities to undertake their duties and responsibilities.

This statement is in fulfilment of Standard 1 of the National Minimum Standards which requires that; 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 it will be carried out.

2. Legal definition of a privately fostered child

The Children Act 1989 defines a privately fostered child as:

A child, under the age of 16 (or under 18, if they have a disability) who is cared for by someone other than their parent, legal guardian, or a close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more.

A 'close relative' is defined as the child's mother, father, grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, aunt (whether of full blood or half blood or by marriage) or step-parent.

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.

A private fostering arrangement is essentially one that is made privately by a parent or a person with parental responsibility. The private foster carer becomes responsible for providing the day-to-day care of the child in a way which will promote and safeguard their welfare. Overarching responsibility for the safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the privately fostered child remains with the parent or other person with parental responsibility.

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 from this definition are set out in Schedule 8 of The Children Act, 1989.

Care arrangements that meet the above criteria are considered as private fostering arrangements, whether or not there is any kind of payment, either monetary or in kind.

3. Wandsworth's duties and functions

Any person who is involved in arranging for a child to be privately fostered must notify the appropriate local authority of their proposal at least 6 weeks before the arrangement begins, or as soon as possible after the arrangement has been made.

As a local authority within whose area the child is being privately fostered (or it is proposed that a child will be privately fostered), the London Borough of Wandsworth has a duty to ensure that the welfare of the child is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted by determining the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangement. The local authority must also ensure that the appropriate advice is given to those caring for the child if it appears to the authority to be needed. Parents will also be contacted and given advice on any alternatives to Private Fostering and provided with written information on Private Fostering. If this is not possible this should be noted, and reasons given.

Local authority duties fall broadly into the following activities:

- Acting upon notifications.
- Assessing the suitability of the private foster carer's household and accommodation, and their capacity to care for the child.
- Monitoring the welfare of the child through visits within specified time scales, ensuring that the child is seen alone (unless circumstances mean it is inappropriate to do so), and producing written records of visits in order to ensure the continued suitability of the placement.
- Providing such assessments and support as may be required under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, where the child is in need.
- Providing information and advice to parents, private foster carers and children around private fostering and, to raise awareness of private fostering within the local area (to include other professionals) in order to strengthen the notification scheme.

4. Structure of Wandsworth's private fostering service

In the London Borough of Wandsworth, the Private Fostering Service sits within the Kinship Team, which is based in the Fostering and Placements Service in the Children's Services Directorate. There is a dedicated Private Fostering Social Worker, who is managed by the Kinship Team Manager. Overall management lies with the Head of Service, Children Looked After and Leaving Care.

The Private Fostering Social Worker receives regular supervision and there are clear arrangements in place for their continued supervision in the absence of the Team Manager. The Private Fostering Social Worker can also seek support and advice from the Fostering and Placements Service, Service Manager and Head of Service, or another service manager within the directorate.

5. Raising awareness of private fostering

The London Borough of Wandsworth uses a number of methods to raise awareness of private fostering issues with professionals and members of the community, in order to help them understand when a child is privately fostered, and the need to notify the local authority.

To achieve this, Wandsworth has produced a series of information leaflets aimed at parents, private foster carers and professionals, which are available in the different languages. In addition, leaflets are widely distributed to:

- Voluntary/community sector organisations
- Council offices
- Health clinics and GP surgeries
- Nurseries
- Children's Centres
- Schools

Awareness of the notification requirements is also promoted through a widely read locally circulated newspaper, the 'Bulletin', as well as by publishing information on the following websites:

- [fis.wandsworth.gov.uk](https://www.fis.wandsworth.gov.uk)
- [Home - Wandsworth Safeguarding Children Partnership \(wscp.org.uk\)](https://www.wscp.org.uk)

Wandsworth also has links with other inner London boroughs to share information and expertise, and pool resources in order to raise awareness about private fostering.

6. Functions of the private fostering service

i. Responding to notifications

The Private Fostering Social Worker, together with the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) are the main point of contact for any enquiries regarding private fostering. MASH responds to notifications from parents, private foster carers and other professionals who inform Wandsworth of any private fostering arrangements that come to their attention by alerting the Private Fostering Social Worker and the Kinship Team Manager. Agencies that are concerned or believe that a child may be privately fostered must make a referral into the MASH.

Notifications received will be dealt with within the statutory timescale of 7 days, this will include the child being seen. The assessment will consider the holistic needs of the child and the capacity and abilities of the private foster carer(s) to meet these needs. It will also look at how the carer will be able to meet the cultural, religious and linguistic needs of the child. The suitability of accommodation will also be assessed, and the appropriate checks

made on all members of the household over the age of 16. A decision on the suitability of the private foster carer and the care arrangements, will be made by the Kinship team manager within 42 days of the date of notification.

If the assessment indicates that the child has unmet developmental needs, that there are child protection concerns regarding the care arrangements, or that there are concerns about the suitability of the carer, a referral will be made back to MASH to allocate for further assessment.

ii. Monitoring private fostering arrangements

To ensure that the child's welfare is safeguarded and promoted on a continual basis throughout the duration of the arrangement, the Private Fostering Social Worker will visit the child and the private foster carer every 6 weeks in the first year of the arrangement and then every 3 months, or as required by the private fostering regulations. The Private Fostering Social Worker will also undertake an annual review and a recommendation about the continuing suitability of the arrangement will be made.

At least once a year, an unannounced visit will be undertaken by the fostering service. This will take place during reasonable hours and will be recorded on the child's electronic case file.

iii. Advice and support

Parents who are considering private fostering can contact the service to discuss whether private fostering is in the best interests of their child, or to obtain advice on other services or help available as an alternative to private fostering.

Parents and private foster carers can also get advice on what issues need to be addressed in the private fostering agreement. For example, contact and financial support and information on how private fostering may impact on their child.

Private foster carers can access support and training through the Private Fostering Social Worker, who will discuss any extra support or training needs that will enhance their capacity to care for the child.

Children are provided with support and advice on private fostering from the Private Fostering Social Worker, who will visit them regularly to monitor their progress and ascertain their wishes and views.

All information (verbal or written) will be provided in a suitable format for the child or young person. If required, interpreters will be provided.

Privately fostered children who experience safeguarding issues, may, if appropriate, receive a social work service from Brief Intervention or the Family Safeguarding Service.

7. Quality Assurance

The Private Fostering Social Worker is guided by the appropriate national policy and legislation that enables them to carry out their duties to a high standard and within statutory timescales.

All decisions are approved and signed off by the Kinship Team Manager or Service Manager and there are clear procedures in place for a referral to MASH if there are concerns about any aspect of a private fostering arrangement.

The Team Manager provides quality assurance and oversight of the quality of work delivered; this is through supervision and oversight of assessments and visits.

In addition to service led audit, as part of the internal audit programme, case files of privately fostered children will be reviewed at least yearly.

8. Monitoring private fostering services

In fulfilling Private Fostering Regulation 12, the Head of Service for Children Looked After and Leaving Care will monitor the way the department complies with and discharges its statutory duties and functions in relation to private fostering.

The Head of Service is responsible for monitoring how effectively the authority discharges its functions and reports annually to the Wandsworth Safeguarding Children's Partnership. The Private Fostering Social Worker provides quarterly reports on Private Fostering activity. Scrutiny and governance are provided by the Private Fostering Strategic Group which meets quarterly.

9. Complaints

Complaints leaflets are provided to private foster carers once their approval is completed by the Private Fostering Social Worker.

Complaints leaflets are also provided to the privately fostered child or young person by the Private Fostering Social Worker who will also provide further copies when requested or when circumstances indicate that this is relevant. We are welcoming of feedback and adults and children are encouraged to discuss any concerns about the service with us.

Advice on making a complaint can be sought from the Complaints Team

Email: Ccomplaints2@wandsworth.gov.uk

Telephone: 020 8871 7300

Freephone: 0800 389 8257

10. Regulation

Wandsworth's private fostering service is inspected by Ofsted, as a service delivered by the local authority.

Contact details:

Royal Exchange Buildings St Ann's Square,

Manchester,

M2 7EF

Tel 03001233155

Email: whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk

Email: enquires@ofsted.gov.uk

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

11. Contacts

If any families, professionals, or communities have any comments or feedback on this document or the role of the private fostering service in Wandsworth, please contact us:

Private Fostering Service

Children's Services, 2nd Floor, Town Hall Extension,

Wandsworth High Street, London, SW18 2PU

Email: mash@wandsworth.gov.uk

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