



Lewisham Children & Young People's
Private Fostering
Statement of Purpose 2023

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Introduction:

This Statement of Purpose sets out the Private Fostering arrangements within the London Borough of Lewisham, as requested within The National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering¹

This document defines what constitutes a Private Fostering arrangement; the requirement that the Local Authority is notified of all Private Fostering arrangements; the assessment process and the support and advice offered to parents, private foster carers, and privately fostered children within Lewisham.

The London Borough of Lewisham is committed to supporting the upbringing of children within and by their families of origin wherever possible, with the minimum of intrusion from the Local Authority whilst ensuring that the welfare of the child remains paramount.

Our aim is to ensure that we create a culture in Lewisham where birth parents, individuals with parental responsibility and carers, are aware of and feel comfortable in notifying the Local Authority of Private Fostering arrangements and that they are aware of the benefits to them and the children in their care of them doing so.

Lewisham's Vision:

- Families will tell us they understand why we are involved, the reasons for our decisions and the actions we take,
- Children and young people will tell us their Social Worker spent time getting to know them and has made a difference to their lives,
- Families are respected and supported to stay together whenever there is enough safety,

The Service works to ensure that equal opportunities are integrated into all aspects of our Service delivery. The welfare of the child will always remain paramount.

This Statement of Purpose will be updated on an annual basis.

Any comments or enquires regarding this Statement of Purpose should be passed to the Special Guardianship Post Order Support and Private Fostering Team Manager on SG.duty@lewisham.gov.uk

Legal definition of a privately fostered child and relevant standards:

Private Fostering is the term used when someone who is not a parent or a 'close relative' (eg. great aunt, cousin, parent's friend, or a neighbour) is looking after a child or young person under the age of 16 (under 18 if they are disabled) for 28 days or more in their own home. It also covers children who stay at a residential school for more than two weeks of the school holidays.

¹ The National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering: Standard 1
[national_minimum_standards_for_private_fostering.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

A relative is defined in the Children Act 1989 as a grandparent, uncle, or aunt (whether by full-blood, half-blood or by marriage or civil partnership), sibling or stepparent (if married/civil partnership)

Common situations in which children are privately fostered include:

- Children with parents or families overseas
- Children with parents working or studying in the UK
- Asylum seekers and refugees
- Trafficked children
- Local children living apart from their families
- Adolescents and teenagers
- Children attending language schools
- Children at independent boarding schools who do not return home for holidays
- Children brought in from abroad with a view to adoption

The relevant legislative framework in relation to Private Fostering:

- Children Act 1989 Guidance Private Fostering
- Children Act 2004 (Section 44 amends Section 67 in the 1989 Act)
- The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005
- National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering

[Overview of services and structure of Lewisham's Private Fostering Service:](#)

The Private Fostering Service has the following functions:

1. 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
2. When a possible Private Fostering arrangement has been identified, to carry out an assessment on the carer/s, their household and accommodation, to determine their suitability to be approved as a private foster carer for the subject child/ren
3. To provide supervision and support to the child and adults involved.
4. To review and develop Private Fostering processes and practice.

Lewisham employs a Social Worker who holds case work responsibility for all Private Fostering arrangements working with the care and the child

They undertake all assessment and support, as well as delivering awareness training. The Private Fostering work sits within the Special Guardianship Post Order Support Team.

The Private Fostering duties of the Council are presented in an annual report which is shared with the Local Safeguarding Partnership Board. There is also an annually reviewed communications and awareness raising plan.

The Local Authority's Duties and Functions under the Children Act 1989 and Regulations, The Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005

The duties of the Local Authorities in relation to Private Fostering are set out in the Children Act 1989, the Children (Private Arrangement for Fostering) Regulations 2005 and, amendments are contained within the Children Act 2004.

The National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005 set out several standards to be met by all Local Authorities in discharging their duties which cover the following areas:

- Statement of Purpose
- Notification
- Safeguarding and promoting welfare
- Advice and support
- Monitoring and compliance

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 secure 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) and Section 44 the Children Act 2004).

The Local Authority needs to ensure the following duties and functions are carried out:

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/s and to all members of the household.
- Visit and speak to the privately fostered child/ren 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.

- Establish such matters listed in Schedule 2 (2005 Regulations as above) 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. The assessment should 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.
- Arrangements being in place to meet the child's health and educational needs.
- Adequate and clear arrangements being in place between the private foster carer and the birth parents covering such areas as contact, financial support, decision making, health care etc.

All privately fostered children will have an assessment completed following notification of the Private Fostering arrangement to assess their needs and to ascertain whether they require the provision of any additional services.

Notifications:

It is the Council's policy that any Private Fostering notification will be screened by the MASH who will carry out the initial checks within 24 hours of receiving the notification. If it is established or thought to be a Private Fostering arrangement, the family details will then be passed to the Special Guardianship Post Order Support Team to progress a Private Fostering Assessment. If any safeguarding concerns are identified, then MASH ascertain whether a Child and Family Assessment should be carried out in parallel to the Private Fostering assessment.

If the Local Authority are unable to establish contact with anyone with legal parental responsibility for the child, a Legal Planning meeting will take place to establish whether the Council needs to take any action in this regard.

Assessment:

The Private Fostering Social Worker will carry out the initial assessment visit within seven days of receiving the notification and complete the assessment of the suitability of the private foster carer and their household within 42 days of notification.

They will also be responsible for seeing and meeting with the child, monitoring the arrangement and for providing the necessary support.

Assessments as to the suitability of the arrangement are quality assured by the Team Manager, and authorised by the Head of Service, Care Resources .

If a person is deemed unsuitable, then it may be necessary to take legal advice and possibly remove the child. The 2004 Act amended the 1989 Act to ensure that

responsibilities of the Local Authority extend not only to those children who are privately fostered, but also for those who are proposed to be privately fostered.

Local Authorities have the power to impose requirements on Private Fostering arrangements or to prohibit them altogether. The parents and carers will be advised of this in writing and advised of the appeals' process.

The Private Fostering Social Worker will visit the placement in line with Regulation 8 of the 2005 Regulations. They will also continue to make routine visits at intervals of not more than every 6 weeks in the first year of their placement and at least 12 weekly thereafter, (subject to agreement at the annual review). The Social Worker will make additional visits to a privately fostered child when reasonably requested by the child, the private foster carer, the child's parents, or any other person with parental responsibility for the child, or if deemed necessary.

The Social Worker will ensure that privately fostered children are seen alone at each visit; the exception being if an interpreter who is independent of the child's parents and of the private foster carer is used where the child's preferred language is not English.

Information, advice, and services may be provided by the Local Authority or other agencies as necessary. Any services provided will be reviewed in line with appropriate procedures.

Privately fostered children's health and development will be monitored through the regular visits undertaken to the child. Where there are any concerns that they may not be achieving a satisfactory level of health or development, this will be addressed with the private foster carer and agreed action taken with on-going monitoring and review by the Social Worker.

The Local Authority has a duty to monitor compliance with the duties regarding services and support to Private Fostering arrangements. The Director of Children's Services and the Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership receive an annual report on Private Fostering in Lewisham.

[Promotion of Public and Professional Awareness](#)

The Children Act 2004 includes a paragraph (7A) into Schedule 8 of the Children Act 1989, which places a duty on Local Authorities to promote public awareness of notification requirements.

Lewisham is committed to achieving high standards in relation to their Private Fostering provisions. To achieve this, there is a lead Private Fostering Social Worker. The Private Fostering Lead undertakes work with the Corporate Communications Team for public awareness raising and Lewisham's Safeguarding Children's Partnership to promote collaborative working across the partnership. They complete awareness raising with internal colleagues, offer advice and complete regular visits to community, professional and other relevant forums.

Lewisham have developed a communications plan which is reviewed annually, to promote Private Fostering awareness amongst parents, individuals with parental

responsibility, carers, professionals, and the public. The aim of the plan is to ensure that birth parents, people with parental responsibility, potential and actual private foster carers, and professionals, are aware of the need to notify the Local Authority of any proposed or actual Private Fostering arrangement and how to do so.

Examples of the activity undertaken are:

- Distribution of publicity materials, to key access points, e.g. schools, libraries, GP Surgeries, Health centres, Children Centres, voluntary/community sector organisations and Council offices, containing information about the legal definition of privately fostered children/young people, the procedure for notifying the Local Authority, the benefits of notification and consequences of non-notification
- Information published on a dedicated webpage for Private Fostering on the Lewisham Council website (<https://lewisham.gov.uk/myservices/socialcare/children/fostering/private-fostering>) which includes information on private fostering, notification process, Lewisham's Statement of Purpose and other useful links.
- Private Fostering presentations / training with partner agencies, community faith groups, private and voluntary agencies
- Targeted Private Fostering campaigns including seminar presentations and attending community events etc.
- Taking any other action which may be required to promote professional awareness of Private Fostering requirements across the council and within partner agencies.
- Publicity material will be made accessible and available in different languages, when requested or if a particular need is identified

Lewisham has on average 15 Privately Fostered children at any time, compared to their statistical neighbours this is a higher number. This is seen as a positive sign that our awareness raising is having an impact, and Private Fostering arrangements are being identified, assessed, and monitored.

[Assessment and monitoring of the Suitability of Private Fostering Arrangements](#)

As set out above, the Private Fostering Social Worker, in conjunction with their manager, undertakes assessments of any notified Private Fostering arrangement.

Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are undertaken for all private foster carers and renewed 3 yearly.

In Lewisham, annual reviews of all Private Fostering arrangements were introduced in 2023. This enables us to clarify arrangements and plans for children and to consider whether visits can be reduced to once every 12 weeks. This review is chaired by the Private Fostering Social Worker, inviting all relevant family and professionals, and reviewed and authorised by the Team Manager .

Line Management and Auditing

As well as managerial oversight through supervision and authorisation of visits, assessments and reviews, the Team Manager monitors compliance through carrying out audits of a sample of cases. The purpose of these audits is to ensure that all required areas of work have been completed to a high standard, within the required timescales and that this has been achieved through:

- multi agency working
- partnership with children and families
- child focused practice

A summary of audit practice will be incorporated into the annual report on Private Fostering.

Matters to be covered in the Annual Report on Private Fostering

This annual report will provide an overview of Private Fostering activity in the local area.

- To inform the Lewisham Safeguarding Children's Partnership (LSCP) about the Private Fostering activity and to assure the Partnership that Privately Fostered children are being adequately safeguarded.
- To inform the LSCP about the Private Fostering notifications received from partners and the public.
- To set out the extent to which Lewisham Children's Social Care are compliant with the statutory requirements, standards for assessment and support to be provided to Privately Fostered children and Private Foster carers.
- To outline the planned developments for 2023– 2024 to further reinforce good practice in the monitoring of Private Fostering arrangements within Lewisham.

Advice and Information for Carers, Parents and Children

The Private Fostering Social Worker supports carers, parents, and children through their Private Fostering journey. This is delivered through regular statutory visits and correspondence between visits. The families have access to a duty line if needed and children and adults are invited to participate in feedback opportunities to help monitor and improve our service.

Carers are signposted to support, and local resources and the Social Worker makes referrals to specialist services where necessary.

Team around the Child meetings and network meetings can also support the child and are promoted where needed.

Lewisham has a dedicated Benefits Advice Service which can be accessed by our Private Foster carers to help them navigate any benefits they may be entitled to. This can be requested via their Social Worker.

The Role of other Agencies in Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Privately Fostered Children

It is important that all those who might meet a privately fostered child are aware of the need for such arrangements to be notified to the Local Authority.

Professionals working in the universal services of health and education have a pivotal role as they will often be the first to become aware of such arrangements. Such agencies share the Local Authority's responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of privately fostered children.

Other agencies need to be aware that failure by a private foster carer or parent to notify a 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 concerned is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted.

The Local Authority provides guidance and briefings for staff working in these and other relevant agencies that explain how to recognise a potential Private Fostering arrangement and how they should respond.

Education, health, and other professionals should notify the Local Authority of a Private Fostering arrangement that comes to their attention, where they are not satisfied that the Local Authority have been or will be notified of the arrangement, so that the Local Authority can then discharge its duty to satisfy itself that the welfare of the privately fostered child concerned is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted.

In addition, other agencies may also be responsible for the provision of services for privately fostered children where there is an assessed need.

Consultation and feedback from Children, Parents, Carers and Professionals:

The Private Fostering auditing process is designed to check that the views of children, parents and carers are being sought, listened to and evident within the assessment and decision-making process. Children and adults are also regularly provided with feedback forms to complete to share their views.

Comments and complaints

If anyone has a complaint, or they'd like to give the Local Authority feedback about the Private Fostering Service, they are encouraged in the first instance to raise this with their Social Worker and/or the Team Manager (they can contact the duty Service on SG.support@lewisham.gov.uk) or by contacting the Compliments and Complaints team in writing or by filling in one of our online forms.

Compliments:

<https://lewishamportal.icasework.com/servlet/servlets.app;jsessionid=C2D5C924595FC87919B0E081B6F9E7F8?type=Compliment&Login=false&st=EMBED&db=gaxMSYtTa>

[T5FwoGtrW3Scg%3D%3D&csrfhash=WzXaTWhumMzyOoxi5MoVnvCkgPxXZOqTb1nDo4xW4lp32r-wn09yGtVLMvtpOWUgx9RDzc8jcDqRYA8-EPyU6D_muZxP2XcC0AZ2Dx9g0mobN_D9gwpY1EuyOhNtQCN90IUq2WPWhKjRoul00uGG9A%3D%3D.8MRec3Q6bfocj3nB3z_xMA%3D%3D%7E%21](https://www.lewishamportal.icasework.com/servlet/servlets.app?type=Complaint&Login=false&st=EMBED&db=gaxMSYtTaT5FwoGtrW3Scg%3D%3D&csrfhash=WzXaTWhumMzyOoxi5MoVnvCkgPxXZOqTb1nDo4xW4lp32r-wn09yGtVLMvtpOWUgx9RDzc8jcDqRYA8-EPyU6D_muZxP2XcC0AZ2Dx9g0mobN_D9gwpY1EuyOhNtQCN90IUq2WPWhKjRoul00uGG9A%3D%3D.8MRec3Q6bfocj3nB3z_xMA%3D%3D%7E%21)

Complaints:

https://lewishamportal.icasework.com/servlet/servlets.app?type=Complaint&Login=false&st=EMBED&db=gaxMSYtTaT5FwoGtrW3Scg%3D%3D&csrfhash=5w6kLmNvKTNwd aGvqNlcXcDVqamEKaol689qyE2clO_aLVVjU9itZO0QghbDRA3AgKN4hOXd1Na0CK_VnnnjbdmecJsTxMaijH-sc2s4qP3K0NlevTUqxzEw9stte-8i4Qt_Rm-F6A1PTIuc7d4xJA%3D%3D.pEUmzMV7F2h_MypJBLJ4Bw%3D%3D%7E%21

By Post:

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This is a FREEPOST address.