

Swindon Borough Council's Private Fostering Statement of Purpose 2024-2025

This should be read in conjunction with Private Fostering Procedure **Content:**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Statement of Purpose is a description of private fostering arrangements within the Swindon Borough Council. The **National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, Standard 1**, requires that there is a clear description of and guide to the service for professionals, the public, council members and external organisations.

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 Swindon.

Swindon Borough Council 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. While Swindon Borough Council takes its responsibilities in relation to private fostering very seriously, it will seek to exercise those responsibilities in ways that are seen as supportive by children, parents and carers. It is not our intention to make judgements about or interfere in the arrangements that parents make for the care of their children, except where this is necessary to ensure that the welfare of the child is being adequately safeguarded.

It is our intention to work in partnership with children, carers and parents to ensure that:

- Children are provided with high quality child care that meets their needs;
- Safeguarding children and their best interests at all times are of paramount importance;
- We work together to safeguard and promote children's physical, emotional, health, educational, social and cultural needs;
- Private carers are provided with advice, support and training which helps them to provide such care;
- Birth parents feel able to seek the help and guidance of the Local Authority.

Our aim is to ensure that we create a culture in Swindon where birth parents, individuals with parental responsibility and carers, 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.

The service works to ensure that equal opportunities are integrated into all aspects of our service delivery. The welfare of the child will remain paramount at all times and in every circumstance.

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed, updated and modified whenever necessary, but not less than annually.

Any comments or enquiries regarding this Statement of Purpose should be passed to the service responsible for Private Fostering:
privatefostering@swindon.gov.uk.

2. OVERVIEW OF SERVICES

Swindon Borough Council has established clear policies and procedures on private fostering which set out how the authority discharges its duties in relation to the private fostering legislation; these can be found on the Council's website.

Swindon's Private Fostering Service is located within the Fostering Team at Clarence House, Euclid Street, Swindon, SN1 2JH.

The Private Fostering Service has two functions:

- To raise public and professionals awareness about private fostering and, the requirements to notify the Local Authority of any actual or planned private fostering arrangements;
- To carry out the full assessment on the carer, their household and accommodation and to provide support to the child and adults involved.

It is the Council's policy that all private fostering notifications are referred to Swindon Borough Council's initial point of contact- Contact Swindon where they will be recorded and screened. The assessment (with the exclusion of host families / children from other local authorities) will then be passed to the Assessment and Child Protection Team (ACP), who will be responsible for completing the statutory assessment in respect of the child / young person and monitoring their welfare.

The private fostering social worker will be responsible for the assessment of the private foster carer, their household and accommodation and supporting the carers. A joint visit will take place by the social workers from each team.

Swindon Borough Council is committed to achieving high standards in relation to their private fostering provision. To achieve this a social worker has been designated as the specialist private fostering social worker. They will undertake work to promote general awareness raising of private fostering and will offer advice and information to the public, professionals and external agencies including voluntary and community groups. The private fostering social worker is the designated person to who requests for advice and information about private fostering should be referred to. In the absence of the private fostering social worker, the Fostering Assistant Team Manager / Team Manager should be consulted.

The Private Fostering Social Worker is line managed by the Fostering Service. The Service Manager has the ultimate decision making responsibility with respect to findings of suitability, imposition of requirements, prohibitions, disqualifications and exemptions for proposed or actual private fostering arrangements.

Accountability: Roles and Responsibilities of Staff

The Children and Families Service staff and the Private Fostering Service have overlapping duties in relation to private fostering and a shared responsibility to assess and evaluate the suitability of private foster placements. The respective responsibilities of the allocated staff are outlined below, but these are not intended to be definitive or exclusive.

Responsibilities of Contact Swindon / ACP

The primary responsibilities are to:

- Respond to all notifications regarding a proposed or actual private fostering arrangement;
- Make initial contact with the private foster carer, the child, parents and anyone else with Parental Responsibility to gather basic information about the proposed or actual placement and ascertain that it is a private fostering arrangement;
- Conduct an Assessment of the child's needs, suitability of the carer, their household and the accommodation;
- Carry out initial checks to ensure that the welfare of the child is safeguarded and protected;

- Evaluate whether the provision of support or other services would diminish the need for the child to be placed with private foster carers;
- Ensure that proper arrangements are made between interested parties as to the child's care;
- Evaluate the extent to which the child's needs are being or are likely to be met by placement with the specific private foster carers;
- Consider what other action should be taken or services provided to promote the child's welfare; In the event of any concerns, take action in accordance with the department's wider policies and procedures;
- On completion of the Assessment, transfer case to the appropriate Locality Team to continue with full assessment, monitoring of the arrangements and on-going provision of support, advice and information.

Responsibilities of the Child's Social Worker when involved;

The primary responsibilities are to:

- Carry out Regulation 8 visits these will be the Child in Need or Child Protection visits;
- Provide ongoing advice, support and assistance to the carer, parent or others with Parental Responsibility, where necessary;
- Supervise the ongoing placement and conduct an ongoing evaluation of its suitability for the specific child;
- Ensure that proper arrangements are made between interested parties as to the child's care in all-important aspects;
- Monitor the carer's compliance with any requirements that have been made;
- Consider what other action should be taken or services provided to promote the child's welfare;
- In the event of any concerns, take action in accordance with the department's wider policies and procedures;

Responsibilities of the Private Fostering Social Worker

The primary responsibilities are to:

- Provide the above if there is no Childrens Social Worker involvement.
- Conduct an assessment of the suitability of the private foster carers and other members of the household;
- Conduct an assessment of the suitability of the accommodation and the wider environment;

Carry out all necessary checks i.e. **DBS's** for private foster carers and all members of the household who are over 16 years of age; medicals checks in respect of the private foster carers;

- Liaise closely with the child's social worker if involved about the suitability of the placement and the extent to which the placement is meeting or is likely to meet the child's needs and promote his/her welfare;
- Ensure all necessary paperwork i.e. assessment and agreement forms are completed and signed by the private foster carers and parents (if appropriate);
- Make a recommendation as to the suitability of the private arrangement in all aspects required by regulations;
- To provide additional advice, support and assistance to the carer where necessary;
- To carry out the annual review of the private foster carer and the arrangements;
- To provide advice and information on private fostering.

3. THE LEGAL DEFINITION OF A PRIVATELY FOSTERED CHILD

In the definition provided by the Children Act 1989, a privately fostered child means:

A child, under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled) who is cared for, or proposed to be cared for, and provided with accommodation by someone other than:

- A parent of his/hers;

- A person who is not a parent of his/hers but who has Parental Responsibility for him/her;
- A close relative of his/hers, i.e. a close relative **is** an aunt/uncle/stepparent/grandparent/sibling but **not** a cousin or great aunt/uncle;
- And she/he has been cared for and accommodated by that person; for 28 days or more; or the period of actual private fostering is less than 28 days but the private foster carer intends to privately foster him/her for a period of 28 days or more.

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 than 28 days.

A child who is **Looked After** by a Local Authority or placed in any residential home, hospital or school is excluded from the definition.

There is a wide variety of reasons why parents seek private foster care for their children. These may include:

- Children living apart from their families due to parental or family problems;
- Teenagers living with a friend, or friend's parent/carers, where relationships at home have broken down; or
- To complete a stage of education because of a family move;
- Children whose parents are working abroad or in another part of the country or serving in the armed forces;
- Children whose parents come into the country to study or work and find it difficult to care for their own children;
- Children sent to the UK for educational purposes, including those attending language schools, foreign exchanges or sport academies who stay with host families;
- Children attending residential schools who stay with a teacher, or a friend's parents during the long school holidays;
- Separated migrant young people who are living with friends, relatives or strangers.

4. THE LOCAL AUTHORITY'S DUTIES AND FUNCTIONS UNDER THE CHILDREN ACT 1989 AND CHILDREN (PRIVATE ARRANGEMENTS FOR FOSTERING) REGULATIONS 2005

The duties of the Local Authority 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 a number of 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 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 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;
- 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.

All privately fostered children (with the exclusion of host families / children from out of Borough) will have a statutory assessment completed following notification of the private fostering arrangement, in order to assess their needs and to ascertain whether they require any additional services to be provided.

The Local Authority's private fostering social worker based in the Fostering Service will assess the suitability of the private foster carer and their household within 42 days of notification. They will also be responsible for monitoring the arrangement and for providing the necessary support to the placement. The child's social worker if involved will be responsible for carrying out Regulation 8 visits and for monitoring the arrangements and providing support to the child and their carers in conjunction with the private fostering social worker.

Assessments as to the suitability of the arrangement are signed off by the Fostering Service Manager. Local Authorities have the power to impose requirements on private foster arrangements or to prohibit them altogether. The parents and carers will be advised of this in writing and advised of the appeals process.

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

The duties related to notification and assessment process are outlined in the Swindon Borough Council private fostering procedures which are accessible to staff and members of the public via the Swindon Borough Council website.

If the arrangements are deemed as suitable, the child's social worker will continue to visit the placement in line with Regulation 8 of the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. Every privately fostered child will be visited at least 6 weekly in the first year of their placement and at least 12 weekly thereafter. The child's social worker and/or the private fostering 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 person with parental responsibility for the child. Both the child's social worker and private fostering social worker will ensure that privately fostered children are seen alone at each visit, unless it is considered inappropriate, and 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 assessment will be reviewed.

The Local Authority has a duty to monitor compliance with the duties with regards to services and support to private fostering arrangement. The Fostering Team will take the lead on this. The Director of Children's Services and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board will also receive reports on private fostering in their area.

5. ADDITIONAL DUTIES UNDER THE CHILDREN ACT 2004 AND THE CHILDREN (PRIVATE ARRANGEMENTS FOR FOSTERING) REGULATIONS 2005

Under the Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 Local Authorities are required to raise public awareness in their area of the requirements regarding notification of private fostering arrangements.

Notifications must be given to the Local Authority when there is a proposal to privately foster a child or when a child is already being privately fostered. This will enable the Local Authority to make such enquiries, to determine whether the welfare of privately fostered children is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted. This is achieved through assessment and monitoring of arrangements within statutory timescales.

These measures, along with the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005, focus Local Authorities' attention on private fostering and require them to take a more proactive approach with partnership agencies and other professionals in identifying arrangements in their area. Local Authorities are expected to improve notification rates and compliance with the existing legislative framework for private fostering and, therefore, to address the key problems identified with the former scheme. It is intended that these additional measures will improve the arrangements for safeguarding children and young people in private fostering arrangements.

6. TRAINING OF STAFF

Training on private fostering will be provided within Swindon Borough Council's training programme and staff induction programme. The training is open to all staff in the Children and Families Service and partner agencies.

This training will include information on the notification requirements, the assessment processes of the suitability of private fostering arrangements and support available to private fostering arrangements. The aim of these courses is to raise awareness and increase knowledge and understanding of private fostering.

Information about private fostering will continue to be circulated to relevant professionals within the Children and Families Service and partnership agencies such as health and education. The Fostering Service will provide additional, specific training to staff across the Borough and its partners if there is a request to provide this.

Staff who are directly involved with the assessment of private fostering arrangements and in providing support and information to carers and children will have access to relevant training and development opportunities as required. (as identified in supervision and appraisal; as required by service developments and in the case of changes to policy, legislation and practice in this area).

7. HOW AWARENESS OF PRIVATE FOSTERING AND THE NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS WILL BE PROMOTED

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

At regular interviews, the Local Authority is taking action to raise and maintain public awareness of the need for private fostering arrangements to be formally notified to the Authority. These efforts are aimed at raising the awareness of parents, prospective and actual private foster carers, professionals within the Children and Families Service, within in all relevant partner agencies and members of the public. The Local Authority has sought and will continue to seek to raise awareness as follows:

- Publicity materials will contain 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 web page for private fostering on the Swindon Borough Council's website **www.Swindon.gov.uk** which includes information on private fostering, notification process, Swindon Borough Council's Statement of Purpose and other useful links;
- Publicity posters will be displayed and publicity materials will be distributed at key access points, e.g. schools, libraries, GP Surgeries, Health centres, Children Centres, voluntary/community sector organisations and council offices. The information leaflets will contain the contact number for private fostering enquires;
- Publicity material will be made accessible, available in different languages;
- Placing advertisements in the local media;
- Including reference to private fostering requirements in relevant departmental publications
- Private fostering presentations / training are provided regularly to all staff within the Children and Families Service and partner agencies

- Private fostering presentations / training with partner agencies, community faith groups, private and voluntary agencies are also undertaken to ensure that private fostering remains on the agenda;
- Targeted private fostering campaigns including presentations, social media, and attending community events etc;
- Taking any other action which may be required to promote professional awareness of private fostering requirements across the Children and Families Service and within partner agencies.

Swindon is keen to continually enhance and sustain its private fostering public and professional awareness raising strategies. We aim to achieve this by; fully evaluating our private fostering service on a yearly basis through the annual report. We will also canvas understanding about private fostering from within the Children and Families Service and partner agencies as part of analysing progress of our awareness raising activities and use this to help inform further action planning.

The Fostering Service will work with and provide information on promoting understanding and awareness of private fostering to Elected Members, the Lead Member for children and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board to help raise the profile of private fostering. The aim is to enable an informed corporate parenting response through awareness; providing support for the Authority's private fostering service and assistance in disseminating the important message of notification and understanding of private fostering to other professionals and the general public.

8. ASSESSMENT OF THE SUITABILITY OF PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS

Swindon Borough Council has a duty to assess the suitability of all potential or actual private fostering arrangements that come to the Local Authority's attention or that they have been notified of.

The Local Authority will undertake such checks and enquiries to ensure that the carers identified by the parents as private foster carers are able to discharge the responsibilities of private foster carers to a satisfactory standard.

Where the Local Authority is notified of a private fostering arrangement, an assessment will be undertaken, which will include:

- Visiting the premises where it is proposed that the child will be cared for and accommodated;
- Visiting and speaking to the proposed private foster carer and to all members of their household;
- Visiting and speaking to the child, alone unless it is considered it inappropriate;
- Speaking to and, if it is practicable to do so, visiting every parent of or person with Parental Responsibility for the child

The assessment will ascertain that the private foster carer/s, and their household and premises, provide an environment in which the child's welfare will be safeguarded and promoted and to determine:

- The carer's capacity to look after the child and the suitability of his household;
- The suitability of the premises in which the child will be, or is being, privately fostered;
- Whether it would be prejudicial to the welfare of the child to be, or continue to be, accommodated by the carer in those premises;
- That the arrangements or proposed arrangements are likely to provide a safe and stable environment for the child.

Assessments of private fostering arrangements will include ensuring that the child or young person's physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural development is satisfactory and needs arising from relationship with their family including contact, his/her religious, ethnic, cultural and linguistic background are being met. The assessments will include evidence that the accommodation as well as the parenting capacity of the private foster carers are suitable and meet the needs of the child.

Private foster carers will be given advice on the child or young person's individual needs in order to enhance their ability to care for the child. In completing the private fostering assessments, consideration will be given to ensuring that each child is healthy, safe, able to enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being.

On completion of the private fostering assessment, the assessment will be quality assured and signed off by the Fostering Assistant Team Manager. The Fostering

Service Manager will then review the assessment and make one of the following recommendations:

1. Agreement that the arrangement is suitable (subject to DBS checks);
2. Defer;
3. Impose Requirements, conditions;
4. Prohibit the arrangement;
5. Disqualification.

The arrangements for determining the suitability of private fostering arrangements are detailed fully in **Swindon Borough Councils Private Fostering Procedures**.

9. ENSURING THE WELFARE OF PRIVATELY FOSTERED CHILDREN ARE SAFEGUARDED AND PROMOTED

*It shall be the duty of every local authority to satisfy themselves that the welfare of children who are privately fostered within 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. **Section 67 (1) Children Act 1989***

In considering the welfare of the children privately fostered within Swindon, regard has been given to Section 1 (3) a-f Children Act 1989 and the following values and principles have been devised to inform good practice:

- The welfare of the child is considered as paramount;
- Parents and guardians primary responsibility for their child is recognised and respected;
- Children have a right to be treated with dignity and respect;
- Children should be valued as individuals with regard to race, culture, language, religion, gender and disability;
- Children have a right for their physical and emotional needs to be met;
- Children have a right to a safe, child-centred environment;

- Children need opportunities for independence and exploration within safe boundaries;
- Children have a right to continuous and consistent care;
- Due consideration should be given to the wishes and feelings of children and parents/guardians;
- Partnerships between parents/guardians, care givers and Local Authority are valued.

The private foster carer is responsible for providing the day-to-day care of the child in a way which will promote and safeguard their welfare. Responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the privately fostered child remains with the parent or other person with parental responsibility.

However, it is the duty of Local Authorities to satisfy itself that the welfare of children who are, or will be, privately fostered within their area is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted.

Swindon Borough Council will ensure that privately fostered children and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted by staff adhering to the Regulations on private fostering as outlined below:

Where the Local Authority receives notice that a child is being privately fostered, it will make such enquiries and visits to ensure that the child's welfare is being appropriately safeguarded and promoted. This will be done within the statutory timescales.

This will involve completing an assessment of the private fostering arrangements (as set out in the Private Fostering procedures), together with an assessment of the child's needs. All private foster carers and their household will have an Enhanced DBS checks undertaken on them and relevant checks to ensure suitability to care for a privately fostered child.

Swindon will ensure that all private fostered children in its area are visited within the first seven days of notification as part of the Assessment and spoken to alone (if appropriate). Privately fostered children will be visited at least once every six weeks in the first year of their placement and at least every twelve weeks in the second and subsequent years. This is the minimum requirement however the frequency of visits be determined by the needs and circumstances of the particular case. Additional visits will be made 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.

The child will be seen alone at each visit, unless the social worker considers it inappropriate, and, where the child's preferred language is not English, with an interpreter, who is independent of the child's parents and the private foster carer.

A continuous part of the placement monitoring will be to check that the home meets the child's needs and that they are safeguarded and protected.

Written reports will be completed following these visits. In accordance with the Regulations written records will include conclusions drawn on the arrangement, whether the arrangement continues to be suitable, 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.

All privately fostered children will be provided with the contact details of the private fostering social worker and their own social worker if applicable whom they can contact for support, information or advice or should they have any concerns, worries or questions. Children will also be provided with details of advocacy services, the complaints procedures and organisations that they can contact should they wish to talk to someone independently.

Carers and parents will also have the contact details of the private fostering social worker and named social worker for the child if applicable whom they can contact should they require support, information, advice or have any concerns, worries or questions.

Carers will be provided with the support, information and advice necessary to enable them to be able to take appropriate care of the child they are caring for. Carers will be advised of training available and helped to access this.

Parents will be provided with support, information and advice to enable them to be able to take care of their own children. Where this is not an option for a period of time, parents will be provided with guidance and support on how to make sure that the private fostering arrangement meets the needs of their child and keeps them safe and protected. Support and services will also be made available for parents with regards to contact as the Local Authority has a duty to promote contact where children are living away from their parents or family of origin. The Local Authority will provide support around reunification if required.

Where the care of a privately fostered child is unsatisfactory and this cannot be addressed satisfactorily, Swindon Borough Council will, unless they consider that it would not be in the best interests of the child, take such steps as are reasonably practicable to secure that the care and accommodation of the child is undertaken by:

- A parent;
- A person who has Parental Responsibility;
- A relative.

If any concerns are raised about the child suggest that s/he may be at risk, Child Protection Procedures will be followed. Swindon Borough Council Legal Services will be consulted in determining action when necessary.

The Fostering Assistant Team Manager / Team Manager will carry out internal file audits on a regular basis and report back the findings to the Service Manager. Independent oversight and scrutiny of support and services will be provided by the Director of the Children and Families Service to whom an annual report is submitted and the Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Board to whom an annual report will be presented. Included in the report will be detail on how the Local Authority satisfies itself that the welfare of privately fostered children in their area are satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted.

Swindon Borough Council will also ensure that information regarding private fostering is available for members of the public and for professionals working with children, so that there is a clear awareness of these arrangements and associated procedures.

10. THE ROLE OF OTHER AGENCIES IN SAFEGUARDING AND PROMOTING THE WELFARE OF PRIVATELY FOSTERED CHILDREN, INCLUDING ENCOURAGING NOTIFICATION

It is important that all those who might come into contact with a privately fostered child are aware of the need for such arrangements to be notified to the Local Authority. In particular 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.

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.

Awareness raising/briefing workshops will be provided for professionals and voluntary agencies that have regular contact with children, young people and carers to ensure that they are clear about their role and responsibilities in relation to private fostering arrangements. Additional training will be provided to key professionals as required to provide an appropriate understanding of the policy and procedures, which can be disseminated to their agencies.

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

Any agency interested in finding out about private fostering is welcome to contact the Private Fostering Social Worker to request information, leaflets and/or posters. This can be done via the Private Fostering email – **privatefostering@swindon.gov.uk**

11. ADVICE, SUPPORT AND INFORMATION AVAILABLE FOR CARERS OF PRIVATELY FOSTERED CHILDREN (INCLUDING PROSPECTIVE CARERS), TO PARENTS OR THOSE WITH PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY;

Swindon's ongoing contact with children and young people in private fostering arrangements will also include a responsibility to provide appropriate advice and guidance and to identify any individual support requirements with the private foster carer.

Private foster carers and parents will be given the contact details of the private fostering social worker to whom they can go to for any advice and support. In addition, they will be given the contact details of the child's social worker whom they can contact about the child, for advice and support or if they have any significant worries about the care of the child or would like to request a visit to the child.

Swindon Borough Council has produced literature, which is available to parents and carers including information leaflets and briefings on:

- Notification process;
- Private fostering arrangements; legal information, assessment process, support and services including arrangements for children in need, promoting contact with parents and family and useful organisations and contacts on a range of topics;
- Family and Friends Care Policy;
- Support and advice on finance for private foster carers;
- Support, Information and advice to parents on private fostering arrangements;
- Complaints procedure.

Where appropriate, parents and carers are informed and referred to external organisations for additional advice and support.

Training will be made available to private foster carers as appropriate. The Private Fostering social worker will consider the training needs of private foster carers as part of the supervision of the Private Fostering arrangement. The private fostering social worker will advise them of any relevant training courses that would assist them in carrying out their functions as private foster carers and facilitate their attendance. All Private Foster carers are provided with access to Learn For you, the Council's e-learning system once the assessment has commenced.

Information is also available through Swindon Borough Council's website.

Information and support will also be provided by the private fostering social worker through their contact with parents, private foster carers and professionals as requested or required.

12. INFORMATION AND SUPPORT FOR PRIVATELY FOSTERED CHILDREN

Children will have access to their own social worker for advice, information, help and support. The child will also be made aware, if of sufficient age and understanding, how they can contact their social worker if they have any worries about their care; if they would like the social worker to visit them to check on anything that is concerning

them about their care or there are other matters about which they want to talk about. A guide to private fostering for children is also available.

Privately fostered children will also be provided with information, using methods or formats appropriate to their age and level of understanding, including:

- About their private foster care and the carer's responsibilities;
- The meaning of their privately fostered status, and their right to be safeguarded;
- Their right to speak openly about their experience and to inform the social worker where they are unhappy about any aspect of the care they receive and how that information will be treated;
- What support is available to them and how to access that support when they need it;
- Advocacy services;
- Complaints procedure;
- Leaving care arrangements if they are "a person qualifying for advice and assistance" under Section 24 of the Children Act 1989 (i.e. privately fostered at any time while aged 16 or 17. The social worker will advise the young person prior to their 16th birthday that 'Post 16' support and advice is available.

If a child has an allocated Social Worker within the Local Authority, then additional services and support will be put in place.

In addition, they will be given the contact details of the private fostering social worker who will also be visiting them while they are privately fostered.

If a child is assessed as being a Child in Need by the Local Authority, then additional services and support will be put in place.

13. ARRANGEMENTS FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATING THE QUALITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SWINDON BOROUGH COUNCIL PRIVATE FOSTERING SERVICE.

The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 require Local Authorities to monitor the way in which they discharge their functions under Part 9 of the Children Act.

The Local Authority monitors compliance and evaluates of effectiveness in improving practice in relation to private fostering via a number of means including:

- Performance data;
- Data collated on the Private Fostering Management Spread sheet;
- Tracking the progress and outcome for all privately fostered children;
- Audit findings;
- Consultation/ surveys with children, young people and their carers.

Line Management and Auditing

As well as managerial oversight through supervision and signing off reports, the Fostering Assistant Team Manager will be expected to monitor compliance through carrying out audits of a sample of cases once every three months. These will then be moderated by the Fostering Team Manager.

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 and findings will be incorporated into the annual report on Private Fostering which is presented to the Director of Children's Services and to the Swindon Borough Safeguarding Partnership Board.

Matters to be covered in the Annual Report on Private Fostering

The annual report will provide an overview of private fostering activity in the local area, the actions taken by the Local Authority and set out the extent to which local agencies are cooperating in respect of private fostering matters by having particular

regard to the extent to which the Local Authority and other agencies have taken action to:

- Promote staff awareness of the requirements of the Private Fostering Regulations;
- Promote public awareness of the requirements of the Private Fostering Regulations;
- Identify whether service users may be acting as private foster carers;
- Identify whether children using their services are placed with private foster carers;
- Provide private foster carers or prospective private foster carers with advice, guidance and support;
- Promote access to relevant training by private foster carers;
- Notify the Local Authority of the placement or proposed placement of any children with private foster carers;
- Notify other Local Authorities of the placement or proposed placement of any Swindon children with private foster carers in another area;
- Extent to which the requirements of the Regulations are being met in Swindon and what additional action is required by the Local Authority and agencies.

Consultation / Feedback from Children, Parents, Carers and Professionals

The service will carry out periodic surveys to capture the views and experiences of children, parents, carers and professionals as part of the programme of service improvement and development.

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.

14. COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS OR COMMENTS

Swindon Borough Council recognise the importance of feedback and welcomes complaints, compliments and comments as a valuable form of feedback about its services and performance.

Complaints leaflets are provided to private foster carers, to privately fostered children and young people and to their parents. Adults and children are encouraged to discuss any concerns about the service with their social worker and/or the team manager.

When a private foster child or a private foster carer has a query or is not satisfied with the service they are receiving, every attempt will be made to resolve the problem. However, should the matter become a formal complaint, the complaints procedure would be followed. In such cases the complainant is advised to contact the Complaints Section if they wish and to put their complaint in writing. The member of staff dealing with the issue will provide the complainant with an information leaflet on the complaint process.

All privately fostered children will be provided information as to how to gain support from Advocacy Services about how to make a complaint and how to obtain access to an independent person who can help them with the complaint process.

All children, birth parents and private foster carers will be informed of their right to complain to Ofsted.

Making a Complaint

Complaints, or indeed general comments or compliments, about the service can be lodged in a variety of different ways – these processes can be accessed via the internet using **www.swindon.gov.uk**.

15. REGULATION AND INSPECTION

The Office for the Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) has the responsibility to regularly inspect and regulate private fostering services to ensure that we achieve the aims and objectives as set out in the Statement of Purpose. All inspection reports regarding private fostering can be located at **Ofsted Gov website**.

Ofsted can be contacted directly by telephone 08456 404045.



By email at mailto: **enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk**.

Or in writing to:

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

16. FURTHER INFORMATION AND ADVICE ON PRIVATE FOSTERING

Advice and information about private fostering can be obtained from Swindon Borough Council's Fostering Service on **privatefostering@swindon.gov.uk**