**[Name of Local Authority]/FCO Statement of Understanding**

1. **In cases involving British children living abroad where the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) are seeking to secure a return to the UK because of child protection concerns**

*The FCO Child Protection Unit (CPU) will be provided with the referral contact details for all local authority children’s services departments.*

When it is assessed by the CPU that the best interests of a British child who has been living abroad is served by returning to the UK because of child protection concerns:

* The CPU will make a referral to the relevant local authority children’s services. This will usually be the area in which the child was last resident, except when the child is returning to family in the UK and this is a different area, in these circumstances the referral will be made to local authority where the family normally reside.
* If a child is returning to the UK unaccompanied without a family member in the UK to return to on arrival, the children’s services department in the local area where the child was last resident will make appropriate care arrangements prior to the child’s arrival.
* The CPU will ensure that the children’s services receives a referral containing all information available regarding why there are safeguarding concerns for the child / children, including any assessments and reports completed by in-country departments. This will support the assessment to be undertaken by local children’s services staff and ensure that a suitable plan is put in place for the child.
* Any information shared between the FCO and the local authority will be shared according to the requirements of the Data Protection Act.
1. **When a local authority’s children’s social care team has child protection concerns for a British child who has been taken to live abroad**

*All local authority Children’s Services will be provided with the referral contact details for the FCO Child Protection Unit. General contact details are as follows:*

*Please contact the CPU on childabduction@fco.gsi.gov.uk. This address is monitored Monday- Friday during office hours.*

*For emergency out of hours assistance please telephone 020 7008 1500 and request consular assistance.*

* The local authority will refer child protection concerns to the FCO CPU giving as much detail as is available about the child’s circumstances and last known whereabouts.
* The CPU will facilitate the introduction of UK Childrens Services to the relevant in-country authorities (where these exist). The British Embassy/Consular Officer for the area will register their interest to ensure they receive regular updates on any progress made by the relevant in-country authorities. Where deemed necessary for the protection of the child, the British Embassy/Consular Officer will provide assistance to the repatriation of the child back to the UK, and into the care of the children’s services department in the referring authority. The British Embassy/Consular Officer does not have a formal role in the safeguarding of any child and cannot take custody.
* If UK Childrens Services wish to travel to a different country, it is their responsibility to establish the legal basis for doing so. This may include whether they are qualified, insured and have an appropriate visa. They will need to make contact with the relevant authority in the other country to establish whether they are able to practice in that country.
1. **Useful links / key contacts etc.**

This agreement may include links to key legislation as well as key contact details and links to online forms or guidance (or other sources of useful information).