



Information Sheet – Private Fostering

What is private fostering?

A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately (without the involvement of a local authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16 years (18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative*, in their own home, with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more.

*Close family relative is defined as a 'grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt' and includes half-siblings and step-parents; it does not include great-aunts or uncles, great grandparents or cousins.

Why are children in private foster care?

Most frequently, young people are in private foster care for the following reasons:

- children from other countries sent to live in the UK with extended family
- host families for language schools
- parental ill-health
- where parents who have moved away, but the child stays behind (e.g. to stay at the same school to finish exams)
- teenagers estranged from their families.

The Ofsted report into Private Fostering also refers to these reasons:

- children brought from outside the UK with a view to adoption
- children at independent boarding schools who do not return home for holidays and are placed with host families
- trafficked children.

The Duty to Refer to the Local Authority

Each party involved in the private fostering arrangement has a legal duty to inform the relevant local authority at least six weeks before the arrangement is due to start. Not to do so is a criminal offence.

Once the notification has been made to the authority, children's services have a duty to visit and speak to the child, the parent and the foster carer and everyone in the foster carers household. Children's services will then undertake a range of suitability checks including DBS checks on everyone in the household over the age of 16.





Other professionals, for example GPs surgeries and schools, also have a responsibility to report to the local authority where they are aware or suspect that a child is subject to a private fostering arrangement (see 'Replacement Children Act 1989 Guidance on Private Fostering 2005 paragraph 2.6).

Are children in private foster care defined as 'Children Looked After'?

No. The term 'Children Looked After' means children who are looked after by the local authority or a not-for-profit trust, such as us. Privately fostered children are outside the care of the local authority or a trust.

Schools should not therefore code children in private foster care as 'CLA' (also referred to in some local authorities as LAC – Looked After Children – although at SCST we prefer to put children first and not use the acronym LAC).

How do local authorities monitor the welfare of children in private fostering?

The local authority must visit each privately fostered child at least every six weeks in the first year of the arrangement; and at least every twelve weeks in the second and subsequent year. In some areas schools are visited as part of this process to discuss the child with teachers.

The private foster carer has a duty to inform the local authority of any substantive changes to the arrangement or within the household.

Should schools be told about a private fostering arrangement?

There is no duty for schools to be given information about a child who is privately fostered by the family, carer or the local authority. There is, however, a duty on schools to inform children's services where they become aware of such an arrangement.

Who should you contact?

For information and queries about private fostering please contact:

SCST First Contact – 01753 875362

Email: Child.Protection@slough.gcsx.gov.uk