

A Guide to Private Fostering

Warrington Safeguarding Partnership – October 2020





What is Private Fostering?

Private fostering is an arrangement whereby a child under the age of 16 (or 18 if the child has a disability) is placed for 28 consecutive days or more in the care of someone who is not the child's parent(s).

Private foster carers can be from the extended family, e.g. a cousin or a great aunt, **but not a relative** as defined under the [Children Act 1989, section 105](#):

- *'A relative under the Children Act 1989 is defined as a 'grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or step-parent'.*

The private foster carer becomes responsible for the day to day care of the child whilst the parent retains **parental responsibility**.

Why is Private Fostering important?

- Children Services have to duty assess all children in private fostering arrangement to make sure placements are suitable and children are safe and well cared for.
- **Victoria Climbié** was in a private fostering arrangement – she was brought to the UK by her great aunt. The inquiry into her death highlighted how partner agencies sadly failed to protect her and ensure the arrangement was appropriately monitored.
- Local authorities across the country are concerned the number of private fostering arrangements are under reported due to lack of public and professional awareness. There are concerns children living in these arrangement maybe left vulnerable or at risk.





What might be considered a private fostering arrangement?

- Teenagers who have become estranged from their parents and are living with friends or wider family (but not close relatives).
- Children sent to the UK for education or health care by parents who live over-seas.
- Children attending a language school in the UK.
- Children from living with host families i.e. to study, play football etc.
- Children living with friends of wider family as a parent is in prison or temporarily working out of the U.K.
- Children who are living temporarily with friends or wider family if a parent is ill or in hospital.
- Children who have been abandoned and left in someone else's care.

In the context of your agency's work can you think of any other situations or circumstances where children might be living in a private fostering arrangement?



Notification requirements

- The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 states anyone entering into a private fostering arrangement needs to notify the Local Authority.
- Any person who intends to start a private fostering arrangement must notify the Local Authority at least **six weeks** before the arrangement is due to begin.
- Across the country there is a lack of awareness of private fostering, and therefore most parents / private foster carers are not aware they need to formally notify the local authority of these arrangements.
- Children's Services are often reliant on professionals notifying them when they become aware of a possible private fostering arrangement.

Any professional that thinks a child might be living in a private fostering arrangement must notify the Local Authority immediately and inform the parent and private foster carer of their intention to do so via:

Email: childreferral@warrington.gov.uk or call Warrington Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) on 01925 443400.



Responsibilities of the Local Authority

- Local Authorities are responsible for the assessment of all private fostering arrangements in their area. A private fostering assessment will be completed within **45 working days** of notification.
- This will involve interviewing all members of the household, DBS checks and references, as well as an assessment of the suitability of the accommodation and private foster carers parenting capacity.
- **Within 7 days the Local Authority should:**
 - Visit the home where the private fostering arrangement is due to / or is already taking place.
 - Visit and speak with proposed carers and members of the household.
 - Visit and speak with the child alone.
 - Contact the parents to ascertain the purpose and likely duration of the proposed arrangement & encourage them to draw up a written agreement with the private foster carer.
 - Notify the all relevant health agencies of the private fostering arrangement.



Monitoring and review of Private Fostering arrangements

- The Head of Service - Children in Need, has oversight for all children in private fostering arrangements – all Private Fostering arrangements are reviewed and approved by the Head of Service.
- Privately fostered children are considered Children in Need and allocated a social worker who will visit six weekly and Children in Need meetings will take place to review the child progress.
- If there are any safeguarding concerns about a child in a private fostering placement, consideration will be given to whether child protection procedures need to be considered and a recommendation could be made for a child to be made subject to a child protection plan.
- Private fostering should not be considered as a long term permanency plan for most children. As part of the ongoing review of all private fostering arrangements the long term permanency plan will also be considered. Where appropriate privately fostered children will be discussed at Children's Social Care legal gateway panel, to consider if there maybe more appropriate long term plans that should be considered for the child.



Raising Awareness of Private Fostering



- It is a legal requirement for local authorities to promote public awareness of private fostering.
- However, it continues to be concerning that 91% of the UK adult population do not know what Private Fostering is according to the research commissioned by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (CORAMBAAF (2015)).
- The local authority has a range of posters and leaflets on private fostering and we encourage these to be displayed in public areas, noticeboards etc.

Copies of these materials can be obtained through Warrington Safeguarding Partnership at:
safeguardingpartnerships@warrington.gov.uk



Private Fostering – A summary

- Most professionals and members of the public still don't understand what private fostering arrangements are, it is important we raise awareness of these both with professionals and in the wider community.
- Make sure you and staff in your agency / team understand what a private fostering arrangement is, and understand their duties to notify the local authority of any arrangements they are aware of.
- If you work in a setting with the general public – help us raise awareness of private fostering by displaying our posters and leaflets.
- If you have any questions or are unsure if a child is living a private fostering arrangement please ring and speak to our MASH on **01925 443400**.



Any further questions or queries about Private Fostering?

- If you are unsure if a child is living in a private fostering arrangement and need further advice, please contact Warrington Children's Social Care

Email: childreferral@warrington.gov.uk or call 01925 443400.

- For general questions/queries about private fostering you can contact:

safeguardingpartnerships@warrington.gov.uk

Dean.Lawrence@warrington.gov.uk



For further information on private fostering:

- corambaaf.org.uk/fostering-adoption/kinship-care-and-private-fostering/private-fostering
- childlawadvice.org.uk/information-pages/private-fostering/
- *You can also watch this short film about private fostering by clicking on the attached link here*
[youtube.com/watch?v=vQDVzHXdISA&feature=emb_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQDVzHXdISA&feature=emb_logo)