

Private Fostering - Everything you need to know

Private fostering is very different from the care of children provided by the Council through approved foster carers.

It happens when a child under 16 (under 18, if disabled) is cared for, for more than 28 days, by an adult who is not a relative, in a private arrangement between parent and carer. The child would not be one that is looked after by the local council.

Usually a birth parent chooses and arranges private foster placements, which can take many forms. These can include:

- children coming from abroad to access the education and health systems;
- children living with a friend's family after separation, divorce or arguments at home;
- teenagers living with the family of a boyfriend or girlfriend; or
- people who come to this country to study or work, but antisocial hours make it difficult for them to care for their own children.

WHAT ARE THE RULES FOR PRIVATE FOSTERING?

Privately fostered children are protected by the Children Act 1989 (Part IX) and associated regulations. The regulations are intended to help protect vulnerable children who are likely to be cared for long term in households other than their own.

The private foster carer must:

- tell their local council that they intend to foster a child at least six weeks in advance **or**, where an emergency placement is made, within 48 hours of the child's arrival;
- tell their local council when a child leaves their care, stating why and giving the name and address of the person into whose care the child has been moved.

The birth parents must:

- keep parental responsibility for the child;
- give the prospective carer as much information about the child as possible, for example health records, dietary preferences, religion, schooling, and ethnicity;
- tell the local council about the private fostering arrangement, if the prospective carer has not already done so.

The local council must:

- check on the suitability of private foster carers;
- make regular visits to the child to ensure the child is well cared for in a safe and suitable environment;
- ensure that advice is made available when needed to both the private foster carers and the birth parents;
- observe the overall standard of care.



A child can be removed from a private foster placement if there is reasonable cause to suspect that the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.

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WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

We know that local councils are often not told about private fostering arrangements, despite this being an offence under the Children Act 1989. Whilst the law says that private foster carers must tell their council, many do not do this or do not know that they have to. This is a cause for concern. Without the protection provided through the regulations, privately fostered children are a particularly vulnerable group.

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO CHANGE THIS?

The Government has published minimum standards for private fostering which aim to improve compliance with the private fostering duties and functions in the Children Act 1989 and 2004 and the regulations. Bromley Children and Young People Social Care Division is working to ensure that these standards are met. This work includes:

- Checking that our procedures for responding to the notification of private fostering arrangements are good enough;
- Awareness raising campaigns.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

We can only work to protect privately fostered children if we know about them. Ideally, notification should come from the carer or parent, but everyone can play an important role in and in getting key messages across to carers and parents who may be unaware of their responsibilities.

If you know that a child is being privately fostered, and you think that the Council does not know about it, please encourage the carer or parent of the child to tell the Council. Where you feel the arrangement has not and will not be notified to the Council, you should contact Social Services directly. You will not be breaking confidentiality, and may help to ensure the safety and protection of the child(ren) concerned.

Private foster carers can talk to the Council about help and support with looking after the child in their care. This may include financial help, local support networks for carers, or help with applying for state benefits such as Child Benefit.

TO NOTIFY THE COUNCIL OF A PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENT

To notify the Council of a private fostering arrangement you should contact the Referral & Assessment Teams at either Orpington or Penge. The teams will be able to offer advice if you have any questions about private fostering arrangements. A private fostering leaflet for members of the public is also available.

Referral & Assessment Team East

Tel: 020 8461 7379

The Walnuts, High Street, Orpington, BR6 0UN

Referral & Assessment Team West

Tel: 020 8461 7050

Yeoman House, 57-63 Croydon Rd, Penge, SE20 7TS

