

## Private Fostering Practice Guide

### What is a Private Fostering Arrangement?

The law states that if a child under the age of 16 (18 if they have a disability) goes to live with someone who is not a close relative, and where this lasts or is planned to last for 28 days or more this is known as 'private fostering'. This is a private agreement between a parent and the private foster carer who may be from the extended family such as a cousin or great aunt, a friend of the family, the parent of a friend of the child or someone previously unknown to the child's family.

It is **not** private fostering when a child is living with a close relative such as a parent, grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether blood related or through marriage) or step parent

Some children may be living with adults who are not classified as close relatives, but will not be privately fostered children. These include children who are subject to court orders such as Special Guardianship, Child Arrangement, or Care Orders.

- [The Children \(Private Arrangements for Fostering\) Regulation 2005](#) sets out the role of the local authority, the parent and private foster carer and related professionals.
- See **Appendix 1 Process Map** for the private fostering pathway on LCS.
- See also [National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2017](#)

In Bradford, the designated manager will be the Service Manager in the Integrated Front Door.

### Examples of Private Fostering include:

- Children whose parents are unable to care for them due to illness, abuse, separation or imprisonment but who are not living with a 'close relative'.
- Children/young people living with their boyfriend or girlfriend's family.
- Single parents who are hospitalised for four weeks or more and who arrange care for their child with people who are not classified as close relatives.
- Children and young people at boarding schools who do not return home during the holidays and stay with a host family in the UK.
- Children who are not living with close relatives due to parental – adolescent conflict.
- Children who arrive in the UK seeking asylum with adults who are not close relatives.
- Children or young people who come to the UK from abroad without their parents for medical or educational purposes.

## Legal Responsibilities

Notification regarding any private fostering arrangements should be made 6 weeks prior to the arrangement commencing or asap if the arrangement was an emergency.

Parents have a legal duty to inform Children's Social Care if their child is to be cared for by someone who is not a close relative for more than 28 days. During Private Fostering arrangements, a parent or a person with parental responsibility continues to retain their parental responsibility.

Notifications are also welcome from private foster carers themselves or professionals.

Local authorities have a responsibility to ensure that children who are privately fostered are safe and that all their needs can be met by their carers.

## Preliminary Checks

When a notification is received, the child and prospective carers should be visited within 5 working days.

It is essential that the child is spoken to alongside all the members of the household.

The Social Worker needs to:

- Understand why the child has moved to live with the prospective carers and what has caused the change in the child's circumstances.
- Clarify how long the arrangement is likely to be in place and the arrangements in place for returning to parents or previous carers.
- Check that the parents or previous carers are continuing to exercise their parental responsibility; if there is any concern regarding this, it needs to be raised with the team manager.
- Ensure that the Private Foster carer has all the relevant medical information for the child and request that the child is seen by GP and that the child is registered with all relevant universal services.
- Check that the child has an educational placement.
- Check that consent has been provided by the parent.
- Speak to the child to understand their wishes, feelings and how things have been and their experiences. It will be important to know whether the child understands what is happening and why they think they are living with someone else. The social worker should talk to them about what happens about school / college, spending time with the friends, family, and important people, including their parents or previous carer.
- Speak to the carers to ascertain their perspective of what is happening and whether they are able to meet the needs of the child. It will be important to speak to the carers about who else lives in the home and visits the home regularly as checks will need to be undertaken; they will also be part of the assessment.
- Check the accommodation to make sure the home meets the needs of the child and those who are living there.

Checks are essential to ensure that the arrangements for the child are safe and meet their needs and written consent is required from the private foster carer and all household members for checks to be made and information shared with partner agencies, including Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks for everyone over 16.

**If the private foster carer refuses to consent to checks, the private foster placement cannot go ahead.**

All reasonable steps should be taken to obtain parents' views and wishes. The onus is on the parent or person with parental responsibility to provide the social worker with relevant documentation that proves their connection with the child. Where a parent is living abroad and is unable to give informed consent, legal advice should be obtained as to whether the arrangements can continue as private fostering.

if there are to be more than 3 children to be privately fostered in one household, agreement is required from the Designated Private Fostering Manager.

The social worker should discuss the findings of the visit with their Team Manager who will decide whether the child is deemed to be Privately Fostered and the preliminary arrangements are satisfactory. If it is agreed, a Private Fostering Assessment will need to be completed in full and the Designated Manager – Private Fostering should be advised.

If the carer refuses to submit to the assessment or any other concerns are identified for the welfare of the child following the initial visit, then relevant safeguarding procedures should be considered (Child Protection or Child in Need or legal advice sought as required).

### **The Private Fostering Assessment**

The assessment will ascertain whether prospective carers and parents have made appropriate arrangements to meet the needs of the child.

All checks will need to be completed. See the **Private Fostering Checks Pack** (list of details in appendix 2) for full details.

The assessment should consider:

1. The suitability of the private foster carer and all family members: this should include evidence of their ability to parent competently ensuring that the health and well-being needs of the child are being met. The child should feel part of the family and should be fully integrated in the community. The child's identity is promoted and they are supported within education. The child is able to maintain links with people who are important to them.
2. The property should be able to accommodate the child. There should be no health and safety concerns, the property should feel like a home and the child is able to have their own space and the availability to complete homework.
3. The child's wishes and feelings should be explored. This should include discussions around what life is like with their Private Foster carer, exploration of where they see their future and what is positive as well as challenging. Explore what changes could be made to make their life better.

4. If there are other children living in the household, it is important to explore what the impact is for both the child that is Privately Fostered as well as for the children who live in the household. Do the dynamics work and is everyone happy with the arrangements?
5. It will also be necessary to speak to the parents or the previous carer about what family time they have with the child and how they are involved in the arrangements and decisions that are being made, including any financial support.
6. The assessment needs to ascertain whether there is any additional support required for the child. If there are concerns around financial support, then discussions can take place with managers around completing a financial assessment. This would be undertaken through Child in Need Procedures.
7. To make sure that the placement is supported by everyone involved, contact should be made with health, education and any other identified services.

See **Appendix 1 Private fostering process map** for full details.

## Outcomes

There are three possible outcomes for a Private Fostering assessment:

1. The Private Foster carer is approved.
2. The assessment identifies information that prohibits the carer from being approved as a Private Foster Carer but it is considered that overall they are meeting the needs of the child. In these instances, there should be clear analysis around the management of risk and whether it is in the best interests for the child to remain living with the Private Foster Carer. This may involve agreed restrictions being placed on the Private Foster Carer. Discussions should be held with the Head of Service prior to recommendations being made to the Designated Manager Private Fostering.
3. The Private Foster Carer is not considered suitable to care for the child. The Private Foster Carer should be advised of the right to appeal against the decision in the Magistrates' Court. Discussion should immediately take place with the parent to identify alternative arrangements for the child and safeguarding procedures should be followed if required.

Once the decision has been agreed by the Team Manager it must be ratified by the Designated Manager Private Fostering, who will notify the carer.

The allocated social worker will need to inform the following people:

- The child
- The parents or person with parental responsibility
- Universal services e.g. school, GP, HV etc.

A child who is privately fostered may also require a Child in Need plan to support their carer to ensure their needs are fully met.

## **Post Assessment**

Once a Private Fostering Arrangement is agreed the social worker will continue to visit the child no less than four weekly. These visits should be recorded and should detail the child's views and the impact on them of living in a Private Fostering household.

The visits should also capture the overview of how the Private Foster carer is meeting the needs of the child. This should include education, health, family time, identity, finances, and that any relevant services are being accessed to meet the needs of the child.

Discussions should also take place regarding the length of the placement to ensure that this is the right arrangement for the child and that a transition plan is in place if returning to parents or previous carers; it maybe that further discussions are needed with the team manager if the placement continues long term.

Changes in the household should be assessed for their impact on the child. New assessments/checks are required if new members join. The suitability of the property should also be checked.

All agreements in place between the Private Foster Carer and the parent should be being adhered to. The views of the parent should be sought.

All home visits, observations and communication with the child, private foster carer/s and those with parental responsibility will assist in determining the ongoing suitability of the private fostering arrangement.

## **Reviews**

A review of Private Foster Carers will need to be undertaken once every year. The meeting needs to be chaired by the team manager and will review the arrangements as well as any plan in place to support the placement. This will require updating relevant checks, information and assessment.

Given Private Fostering Agreements are made by the person with parental responsibility, they should also be integral to the review process.

The meeting should also include the private foster carers and the child, if age appropriate.

The review should consider the length of the placement and whether any other arrangements are required to secure the caring arrangements for the child.

# Appendix 1 Process Map

Private Fostering Process Map			
Referral into IFD			
Identified as Private Fostering Child under 16 (18 if with a disability) living with or planning to live with someone for 28 days or more who is NOT their parent, legal carer or close relative (grandparent, aunt, uncle, sibling or 1st cousin)			
Child under 16 (under 18 with disability that does not meet CCHDT Criteria)		Child under 18 with a Disability that meets the CCHDT Criteria	
Transfer to C & F Team		Transfer to CCHDT or Transition Team	
Trigger the Private Fostering Arrangement on LCS			
Issue Private Fostering Information and Checks Pack to the Private Foster Carer			
Notify Designated Manager of the Private Fostering Arrangement Case			
On return of signed forms and consent, undertake Private Fostering Checks			
Children's Social Care			
CAFCASS			
OFSTED			
Child Minding Service			
DBS			
References			
Complete Private Fostering Agreement Assessment, recording all visits during the Assessment process			
Designated Manager to approve Private Fostering Arrangement and send Ratifying Letter to Carer and attach on LCS			
Team Manager Approves Private Fostering Agreement Assessment on LCS			
Visit the child/young person and carer 4 weekly and process Private Fostering Regulation 8 Statutory Visits on LCS all to be signed off by Team Manager			
Discuss Care Planning / Permanency Planning within Supervision and record on the child's file			
Social Worker and Team Manager to ensure all the below are completed and updated regularly			
Up to date Case Summary			
Demographics			
Involvements			
Chronology			
Genogram			
Supervision Record			
Management discussion on file			
Assessment's			
Finance			
Record any changes to the Private Fostering Arrangement as they are reported			
Child/young person moved back home End Private Fostering Arrangement		Child/young person moved elsewhere Start New Private Fostering Arrangement	
		Agree Permanency Plan, Care Planning Process (if required) or child turns 16	
		Transfer to appropriate Team	
		CIC if Child Becomes Looked After	
		16 plus if support to independence	
Close or step down to Early Help or other services when deemed appropriate			

## **Appendix Two Private Fostering Checks Pack**

PF1 – Private Fostering Checks Front Sheet

PF2 – Private Fostering Application, includes consent for checks

PF3 – Guidance for Parents and Carers Leaflet

PF4 – Consent for Cafcass Checks

PF5 – Checks Letter Template

PF6 - Request for References

PF7 – Letter Template regarding Outcome of Assessment

PF8 – Guidance for Young People Leaflet

All the above information including a LCS guide is available on Tri-x.

[https://bradfordchildcare.proceduresonline.com/local\\_resources.html#](https://bradfordchildcare.proceduresonline.com/local_resources.html#)