



**PRIVATE
FOSTERING**

**“IS A CHILD BEING LOOKED
AFTER BY SOMEBODY THAT IS
NOT THEIR CLOSE RELATIVE?”**

Information for professionals



Have you notified West Sussex County Council Integrated Front Door regarding a child or children that may be in a private fostering arrangement? This is a legal duty (Section 70, Children Act 1989).

Professionals in the education, health and social care fields may and often come across children who are privately fostered in West Sussex. Professionals have a shared responsibility to work together to ensure that all privately fostered children are well cared for and are safeguarded from harm.

Good partnership working can help to ensure that outcomes for privately fostered children are improved. As West Sussex Children Social Care, our promise to you is that we will work together with you to support and safeguard children being cared for by Private Foster Carers in West Sussex and ensure that they are supported, safe and meet their potential.

This leaflet looks at what you should do if you come across a private fostering arrangement.

WHAT IS PRIVATE FOSTERING?

A private fostering arrangement is when a child or young person under 16 years (under 18 if the child is disabled), is living away from home for 28 days or more and is being cared for by an adult who is not one of the following.

- Parent
- Grandparent
- Person with parental responsibility
- Step-parent (by marriage or civil partnership)
- Aunt
- Uncle
- Sister
- Brother

Private fostering is normally an arrangement which is agreed between the child's parents/ person with parental responsibility and Private Foster Carers.

A child looked after by West Sussex Children Social Care is not a privately fostered child. This also applies to children who are living with carers where a social worker has made the arrangements for their care, directly or indirectly with the parent or person with parental responsibility, or a child moving of their own accord to a private foster care arrangement.



EXAMPLES OF PRIVATE FOSTERING

Examples of private fostering can be the result of and include the following.

- Familial breakdown and ill health in the family.
- Children whose parents' study or work involves unsociable hours, which make it difficult for them to use ordinary day care or after school care resources. This must include overnight stays.
- Children sent from outside the UK for education (including boarding and language schools) or health care.
- Cultural exchange students.
- Children living with a friend's family as a result of arguments at home, parental separation, divorce, etc.
- Teenagers living with the family of a boyfriend or girlfriend.
- Some refugee children.
- Any child whose parents or persons with parental responsibility for them have made a private arrangement for them to be looked after by someone else.
- Any child who is looked after by someone else that is not a close relative on a private basis without the parents being involved.

THE PRIVATE FOSTERING LEGAL DUTY

Privately fostered children are safeguarded by the Children Act 1989 (Part IX), National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005 and Children (private arrangements for fostering) 2005. Studies show that councils are not notified in some cases and if they are it is nearly always after a private fostering arrangement has started.

You have a legal duty to notify your council of a private fostering arrangement. In order to raise the profile of these children the law was reinforced by the introduction of private fostering regulations in July 2005.

West Sussex Children Social Care are required to:

- visit the family within 7 days of the notification;
- carry out necessary checks such as a DBS, health, safety, etc;
- do an in-depth assessment on both the child and the Private Foster Carer called a Private Fostering Arrangement Assessment; and
- visit the family every 6 weeks in the first year and every 12 weeks thereafter to monitor suitability of the private fostering arrangement and its suitability to the privately fostered child. We may decide that more frequent visiting is required, depending on the needs of the child.

WHAT DOES THE PRIVATE FOSTERING TEAM DO?

West Sussex County Council has legal duties towards privately fostered children. These duties are discharged through the Private Fostering Team. Social workers in the team will make a series of home visits, which usually include talking to the parents, legal carers, the Private Foster Carers and all members of the Private Foster Carers' household and to the child who will be or is privately fostered.

The Private Fostering Team will also support the parents and Private Foster Carers to work together for the benefit of the child.

If the Private Fostering Team considers a private fostering arrangement to be unsuitable, and the child cannot be returned to his or her parents, West Sussex County Council must decide what action to take to safeguard the child's welfare.

This might include offering a range of support services to the Private Foster Carers or in some circumstances accommodating the child to ensure his or her wellbeing. The Private Fostering Team is not responsible for the day-to-day care of privately fostered children or for any (financial) disputes and arrangements between the parents and Private Foster Carers.

WHAT ARE PRIVATE FOSTER CARERS RESPONSIBLE FOR?

Advising West Sussex County Council's Private Fostering Team (or their local council) of their intention to privately foster a child at least 6 weeks in advance or, where a child is received in an emergency, not more than 48 hours thereafter.

- To make sure they have received as much information about the child as possible.
- To provide the child with adequate care, fulfilling their needs.
- To enable social workers to fulfil their duties under the relevant legislation and regulations.
- To notify West Sussex Council's Private Fostering Team within 48 hours when a child leaves their care and to provide the name and address of the person into whose care the child has been moved. A private foster carer can only look after three children who are not siblings but can care for more than three if they are all brother(s) and sister(s).

HOW WE SUPPORT PARENTS AND PERSONS WITH PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

- We will provide an allocated social worker who meets or speaks with the private foster carer to discuss the needs of the child.
- We will offer support with meeting the child's education and health needs and planning for the future.
- We can signpost to a range of local services and offer support in accessing these.
- We will arrange one to one meetings with privately fostered children in order to support them.
- We can offer advice and guidance to all parties involved in the arrangement about childcare and other related topics.
- We will ensure everyone involved in the private fostering arrangement is kept informed and is working together on behalf of the child.



ROLES OF PROFESSIONALS INVOLVED

Private Foster Carers are legally required to notify their local authority, but many do not know they have to. This means that the local authority is unable to check whether the child is being properly cared for.

It is vital that West Sussex County Council's Private Fostering Team is aware of such arrangements so that they can safeguard and promote the welfare of potentially vulnerable children.

Ideally, the notification should come from the Private Foster Carers and parents or persons with parental responsibility, but education, health and social care professionals can also play an important role by either explaining to Private Foster Carers and parents/ persons with parental responsibility their duty to notify the Private Fostering Team or make a referral on behalf of the family.

If you become aware of private fostering arrangements or if you want further information, please contact us at:

West Sussex County Council
Integrated Front Door,
Phone: 01403 229900
Email: WSchildrenservices@westsussex.gov.uk

