

Private Fostering

Bitesize Briefing

What is a Private Fostering Arrangement?

A private fostering arrangement is when a child or young person aged under 16 years (under 18 if the child is disabled), is living away from home for 28 days or more or is being cared for by an adult who is NOT their:

- Parent
- Grandparent
- Person with parental responsibility
- Stepparent (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's Social Care is not a privately fostered child. This also applies to care arrangements made by a Social Worker, directly or indirectly and is not MADE privately without the involvement of West Sussex Social Workers, i.e. By a parent or person with parental responsibility for the child or the child moving of their own accord to a private care arrangement.

Examples of Private Fostering Can be the result of and Include:

- Family breakdown and ill health in the family
- Children whose parents' study or work involves unsociable hours, which makes it difficult for them to use ordinary day care or after school resources. This must include overnight stays.
- Children sent from outside the UK for education (including boarding and language schools) or health opportunities
- 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 then 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.

What are West Sussex Children's Social Care required to do?

- Visit the family within 7 days of notification
- Carry out necessary checks such as DBS, health, safety, etc.
- Do an in-depth assessment on both the child and the Private Foster Carer called a Private Fostering Arrangement Assessment
- 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 benefit to the privately fostered child.

What Does the Fostering Team Do?

West Sussex 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, the Private Foster Carers and all members of the Private Foster Carer's household and to the child who will be/is privately fostered.

The Private Fostering Team will also support the parents and the 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, Children's Social Care 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 safety. 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 Can I Do as a Professional?

If you become aware of private fostering arrangements, please contact:

West Sussex Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) on 01403 229900 or email MASH@westsussex.gov.uk

If you want further information, please contact:

West Sussex Children's Social Care can be contacted to arrange a private fostering awareness and training seminars at Private.Fostering@westsussex.gov.uk