

Private fostering

Private fostering is when a child or young person under 16 (or under 18 if disabled) is living with someone who is not a close relative for 28 days or more. This might be a friend, a great aunt, a cousin or someone else known to the child or young person. A close relative is defined as a grandparent, aunt, uncle, brother or step-parent by marriage. This type of arrangement is completely different to fostering arrangements where children and young people are placed with local authority approved foster carers, or via friends and family (kinship care) foster carers.

Many private fostering arrangements remain unknown to the local authority and this is a cause for concern as privately fostered children and young people, without the safeguards provided by law, are a particularly vulnerable group.

It is an offence not to tell the local authority about a private fostering arrangement. There are many reasons why children and young people are privately fostered. Such examples include those listed below.

- Parental ill health
- Children or young people who are sent to this country for education or health care by birth parents from overseas.
- Children or young people who are living with a friend/boyfriend/girlfriend's family as a result of parental separation, divorce or arguments at home.
- Children or young people whose parents work or study long or antisocial hours.
- Children or young people on school holiday exchanges that last more than 28 days.
- Children or young people who are on sports or music sponsorships living away from their families.
- A parent or an agency, such as a college or sports academy, would normally make such an arrangement.

What are the council's responsibilities?

To keep children and young people safe and support families, the Council need to assess the suitability of the private foster carer and to make regular checks of private fostering arrangements. This is because the local authority has a legal duty to safeguard the wellbeing of children

and young people (The Children's Act 1989, Private Arrangements for Fostering Regulations 2005).

The child's social worker will visit the child or young person at the placement where the child or young person will be seen and spoken with alone. If the care of the child / young person or the accommodation is unsuitable, the local authority can prevent or stop a child or young person being privately fostered. The local authority can also make sure the private foster carer rectifies a problem, for example, by fitting smoke alarms or fire guards in the home.

They can also give advice and support to private foster carers and parents involved in the private fostering arrangement.

What are the responsibilities of parents and private foster carers?

When a child or young person is privately fostered, the child or young person's parents retain parental and financial responsibility.

The law states that anyone directly involved in arranging the placement must notify the local authority about the arrangement.

Private foster carers are responsible for carrying out any duties agreed with the parents and must allow a representative of the local authority to visit the child or young person and the premises where the child or young person is being privately fostered, to make sure the child or young person is safe and well cared for. During these visits the child or young person will be seen and spoken with alone unless it is deemed inappropriate to do so.

Parents are expected to be fully involved in planning for the future of their child or young person and it is advisable that a written agreement is drawn up between the parent and the carer outlining the essential aspects of the arrangement.

What does it mean for the child?

Children and young people who are privately fostered have the same rights to protection and access to services as children or young people living at home with their family. Notifying the local authority ensures that they can:

- Assess the private foster carer and carry out safeguarding checks.
- Monitor the arrangement to ensure the child or young person's needs are met.
- Listen to the child or young person's wishes and feelings.
- Provide support services where appropriate.

It is your duty to notify the local authority if you are aware of, or involved in a private fostering arrangement.

To make a notification or for further information, please call the Front door service on 0345 2000 101 or you can e-mail:

childrenandadultscontactcentre@northynteside.gcsx.gov.uk