



What is 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 being a grandparent, aunt, uncle, brother, or stepparent by marriage. The parent/s and the private foster carer would make this arrangement, not the local council.

A private fostering arrangement is markedly different to situations where children and young people are placed with local authority approved foster carers or with 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:

- Children or young people who are sent to this country for education or health care by birth parents from overseas;
- Ill health preventing birth parents from being able to look after their children;
- 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.

It is important to note that privately fostered children are not looked after children

Parents and private foster carers should notify the local authority

The Parent/s (or those with Parental Responsibility) and the private foster carer have a duty to notify the local authority of the name and address of the private foster carer six weeks prior the start of the private fostering arrangement. If the arrangement is already in place, they must notify the local authority at once.

If the arrangement is made in an emergency and is intended to last more than 28 days, this information should be provided within 48 hours of the child being placed.



Photo by Elijah M. Henderson on Unsplash

Partner agencies should notify the local authority

Professionals working with children, young people and their families from agencies including (but not limited to) schools or health services, should notify the Dorset Social Care ChAD team if they become aware of or believe that a child is living in a private fostering arrangement.



Foreign language students

For children who are under the age of 16 and are attending a language school in Dorset notifications/referrals should come direct from the language school/guardianship company via the website notification form. These children are currently managed by BCP private fostering team but are overseen by Dorset Children's Services. Occasionally information about foreign language students comes to our attention via ChAD services – particularly in cases of new language schools where there is no established working relationship with the local authority. ChAD at this point will refer them to the BCP private fostering team.

The role of the local authority and arrangements in Dorset

The Children Act 1989 places a legal duty on local authorities to protect and promote the welfare of privately fostered children, to check that the arrangements for the child/ren are safe and that the child/ren are well cared for. Section 44 of the Children Act 2004 extended these duties to include children who are proposed to be, but not yet, privately fostered.

The duties are set out in the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. Where the local authority is informed of a proposed or existing private fostering arrangement:

- The child's Social Worker will undertake an initial visit to the child within **7 working days** of the date of notification;
- The social worker will then carry out an assessment of the suitability of the arrangements for the child;
- Visits during the assessment will be fortnightly;
- Following completion of the assessment and thereafter for the first-year visits are **6 weekly** unless need of the child requests otherwise;
- Thereafter, the visits move to **12 weekly**.

When completing assessments of, and meeting with, children, young people and their families, all agencies should ask questions about who lives in the household and who has parental responsibility — this can help in identifying a private fostering arrangement. All the relevant checks should be undertaken such as medical, DBS and social care safeguarding checks.

Who are the key contacts and where can more information be found?

Contacts for notifications from parents, private foster carers or other members of the public:

Tel. 01305 228 866