

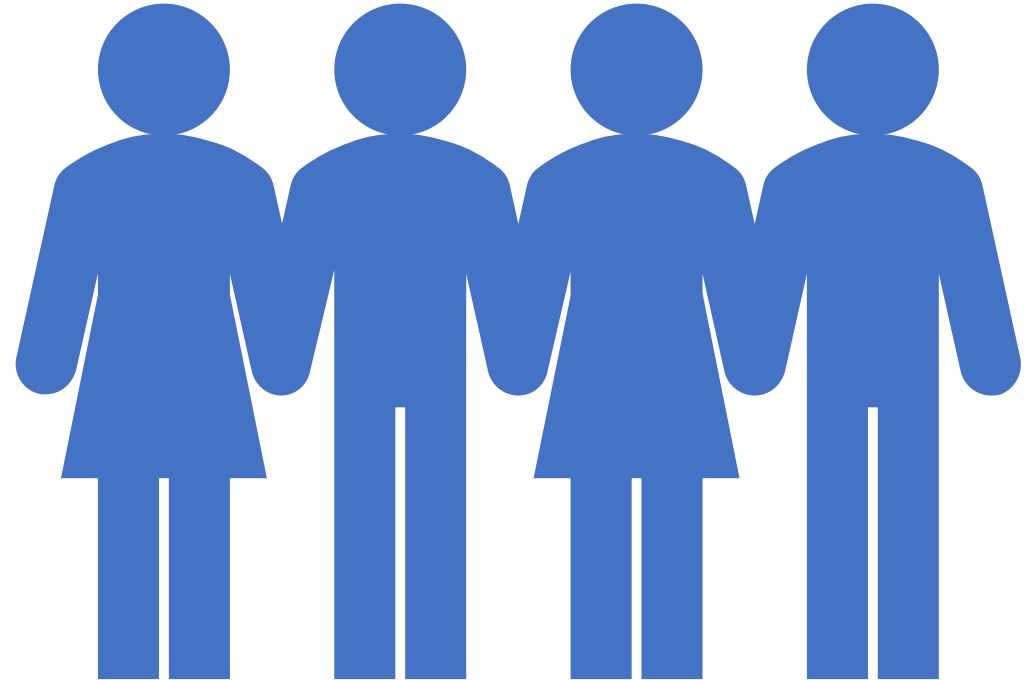
Children and Education Policy and
Accountability Committee

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Private Fostering



What is Private Fostering?

Private fostering (PF) is the term used when someone who is not a parent or a 'close relative' (e.g. great aunt, cousin, parent's friend or a neighbour) is looking after a child or young person under the age of 16 (under 18 if they are disabled) for 28 days or more in their own home.*

A relative is defined in the Children Act 1989 as a grandparent, uncle or aunt (whether by full-blood, half-blood or by marriage or civil partnership), sibling or step-parent.

The PF carer becomes the primary carer for the child and has authority over day-to-day decisions, but they do not have parental responsibility and the child is not looked after.

It is not a private fostering arrangement if the child is accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 and therefore looked after **or** in a kinship arrangement where a child is living with a family member (as defined above).

* It also covers children who stay at a boarding school for more than two weeks of the school holidays.

Common situations in which children are privately fostered

Children with parents or families overseas

Children with parents working or studying in the UK

Asylum seekers and refugees

Trafficked children

Local children living apart from their families

Adolescents and teenagers

Children attending language schools

Children at independent boarding schools who do not return home for holidays

Children brought in from abroad with a view to adoption



Legislation

- The Laming Report (Department of Health and Home Office 2003) into the death of Victoria Climbié, led to the publication of the government's Green Paper, Every Child Matters (H.M. Treasury 2003).
 - The 2004 Children Act (Section 44) introduced a tighter framework which requires every local authority to:
 - raise awareness,
 - to assess the suitability of private foster carers before children are cared for by them,
 - to appoint a private fostering officer to monitor compliance with the notification system,
 - to include private fostering amongst the areas to be addressed by the Local Children's Safeguarding Partnership (LSCP)
 - to introduce national minimum standards for private fostering and
 - to enhance the inspection regime.
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Legal Duties

- Birth parents, private foster carers and persons who are arranging for a child to be privately fostered are **required by law** to notify the local authority's Children's Services department of the arrangement.
 - If you know someone in a personal or professional capacity who is privately fostering or is about to, you should encourage them to notify Children's Services and if they are not able to do so then you should take responsibility for notifying them.
 - Local authorities are then required to carry out an assessment, and to monitor the arrangement. A social worker will visit the home to speak to the carer and the child to ensure the child is safe, carry out background checks and make sure support is being provided.
 - If the child is not yet in the arrangement this is called a Regulation 4 visit
 - If the child is already in the arrangement this is called a Regulation 7 visit
 - Support for private foster carers may include:
 - advice on benefits and possible funding for some essential items
 - parenting support and advice
 - help in bringing families in crisis back together
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Best Practice



STAFF MUST HAVE DETAILED TRAINING ON PRIVATE FOSTERING AND CLEAR GUIDANCE ON PROCEDURES AND PATHWAY FOR REFERRALS



A SPECIALIST, KNOWLEDGEABLE NAMED WORKER



RAISING, AND MAINTAINING, HIGH LEVELS OF STAFF AWARENESS OF PRIVATE FOSTERING SO THAT THEY ARE EQUIPPED TO IDENTIFY AND NOTIFY



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH GROUPS OF PRACTITIONERS LIKELY TO COME IN CONTACT WITH THESE CHILDREN E.G. LANGUAGE SCHOOLS, CHURCHES AND SCHOOLS

Challenges

- The **duty to notify** local authorities that a child has been privately fostered **is not well understood**, partly through ignorance or reluctance on the part of carers or parents to bring such arrangements to the attention of the authorities.
- **Agencies are unclear** as to whether they have a legal obligation to notify local authorities of PF arrangements and some *'perceive no advantage in referring families'*.
- **Lack of awareness or confusion** as to what constitutes a private fostering arrangement. Often confused with kinship placements or cared for children.
- **Concerns about confidentiality.** It was reported that some professionals regarded notifying the local authority of an actual or potential private fostering arrangement as a breach of parent confidentiality in instances where they had no child protection concerns.
- The unlikelihood of those trafficking or abusing children to notify.

Local context

There are a small number of children identified as in Private Fostering (PF) arrangements in Hammersmith & Fulham.

We are currently supporting 4 children in PF arrangements with another due to start a planned arrangement later this month.

We started 2023/24 with two PF arrangements. We received six referrals in YTD, one of which did not progress and two have subsequently closed.

We have a designated PF social worker located in one of the assessment teams who is allocated from point of contact to undertake an initial visit within 7 working days.

A PF assessment is triggered once the child has been in placement for 28 days. The arrangement continues to be monitored.



How we are supporting and raising awareness



Social workers at H&F have access to clear policies on our Tri.X page - [Private Fostering \(proceduresonline.com\)](#) including a [local protocol](#) and there are also further resources available on our [CYPs resource page](#) and app



There is a link with information on both the H&F website - [Private fostering | London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham \(lbhf.gov.uk\)](#) & the LSCP website under *Hot Topic Issues* - [Hot Topic Issues - Hammersmith and Fulham's LSCP \(hflscp.co.uk\)](#) available to the public and practitioners from other agencies



Private Fostering leaflets and posters (translated into multiple languages) have been distributed by the PF social worker to local services such as GP and health centres



Training on Private Fostering is included as part of the induction for all social workers in our Initial Consultation and Advice team (ICAT) and will be rolled out across other teams (delivered by the PF social worker)



The safeguarding in education manager provides regular training to schools and is available for ad hoc consultation and advice. The designated PF social worker has also presented at DSL networking forums.

Continuous Improvement



The PF social worker will regularly re-distribute leaflets to health centres, schools and other community centres to raise awareness



Private fostering information will be included in the LBHF internal newsletter every 6 months, School zone, GP forum newsletter, A&E newsletter and Director for SPCHN



Discussions are taking place with the Mosaic team to help create a more robust system to monitor and record activity around PF arrangements



We will utilise Children, Health, Education and Social Care(CHESC) and the Health and Well-Being (HWBB) boards, together with the new relationship with the Integrated Children's Board (ICB) to continuously promote private fostering.



We will explore whether changes can be made to school admission forms at point of entry to support with better identification of PF arrangements. This requires a Pan London approach.

How can members of CEPAC further support the promotion of Private Fostering through their work and contacts in the borough?

