

Private Fostering

Do you look after someone else's child for more than 28 days at a time (continuously or not)? If so, you are privately fostering.

If you are, or someone is privately fostering your child, you must let us know.

A 'Privately Fostered' child is a child under the age of 16 (18 if disabled) who is cared for and accommodated by someone other than a parent or close relative* for more than 28 days.

*Close Relatives are Step Parents, Grandparents, Brothers/Sisters or Aunts/Uncles.

There are a variety of reasons why a parent may be unable to care for their own child on a short or long term basis and a private fostering arrangement can be a positive response from friends and the local community to a family in need of support. However, any child separated from their parents is potentially vulnerable and we all have responsibilities to ensure the alternative care they receive meets their welfare and safety needs.

Legal background

The Victoria Climbié Enquiry recommended that the Government take further steps to strengthen Private Fostering arrangements and it clearly made a case that private fostering is a safeguarding issue. The Government responded with several new policies and guidance to this effect, but most notably: The Children Act 2004 (s44), Children (Private arrangements for fostering) Regulations 2005, Every Child Matters as well as National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering.

Although Local Authorities are charged with several duties, all partner agencies, parents and private foster parents have duties to ensure that privately fostered children are protected and that they are compliant with legislation.

It is a legal requirement for people who make arrangements for a child to be privately fostered to notify the local authority of their intentions at least 6 weeks in advance, or in emergency cases, immediately after the child becomes Privately Fostered.

The Parents and the private foster carers are responsible for notifying the local authority.

Private foster carers should also notify the local authority of any changes in their own circumstances whilst they are caring for the child or young person. Private foster carers also need to let the local authority know when a child or young person leaves their care, giving the name and address of the person who will be providing for the care of the child going forward.

Once the Local Authority is notified

There is a legal duty for the local authority to make sure all private fostering arrangements are safe for the child or young person, but they can only do this if they are aware of the arrangement. Once informed of the arrangement they will undertake an assessment to check the suitability of private foster carers, to make regular visits to the child or young person and to ensure advice, help and support is available when needed.

To notify us of a private fostering arrangement please contact the Hillingdon Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) on:

Tel: 01895 556 633

Email: lbhmash@hillington.gov.uk