



Private Fostering Arrangements

Practice Guidance



Children's Social Care

There are many different reasons why a child may be cared for by someone who is not their parent or a close relative. When these care arrangements extend for twenty-eight days or more, they become private fostering arrangements. In Coventry, we need to ensure that all children and young people are kept safe and do not miss out on essential welfare checks; and that private foster carers are receiving the support that they need. It is imperative that private fostering arrangements are not hidden, so that these placements can be regulated, ensuring that the child or young person are being properly looked after, are able to reach their full potential, and are protected from abuse or neglect.

Current arrangements for the regulation of private fostering originated following the death of Victoria Climbié in 2000. Victoria was privately fostered by her great aunt. This is not to say that all private fostering arrangements are unsuitable, but highlights the importance of their regulation.

This practice guidance is designed to aid practitioners in Coventry Children's Social Care in their understanding of private fostering arrangements, and what duty Coventry City Council has in relation to these arrangements.

This practice guidance should be read in conjunction with the Coventry City Council Children's Services Procedures Manual (Chapter - Private Fostering).

When is a child/ young person privately fostered?

A private fostering arrangement is when a child or young person, who is under sixteen (and under eighteen if they have a disability), is cared for by someone other than their parent or a close relative, for twenty-eight consecutive days or more, in agreement with the child/ young person's parent(s).

Close relatives are defined as:

- Step-parents
- Grandparents
- Brothers or sisters
- Uncles or aunts (whether of full-blood, half-blood or marriage/affinity).

Private foster carers are not approved as Local Authority foster carers. Families find private foster carers themselves, and it is their responsibility to find carers that are suitable.

What is required of the parents and carers?

Parents and carers have a duty to notify the Local Authority in writing, at least six weeks before any private fostering agreement begins. If no prior notification of a placement is given, parents and carers must notify the Local Authority of the placement immediately.

Parents and carers have a duty to inform the Local Authority within forty-eight hours of any changes in circumstances of the private fostering arrangement. For example, a change to any person in the household, or the intention to foster another child privately.

The local has a duty to make contact with those with parental responsibility and ensure that this is incorporated into the assessment and is recorded on protocol. Parents should have a copy of the assessment and subsequent Regulation 8 visits.

Your assessment needs to evidence that parents are in full agreement with the arrangement and are and will be exercising their parental responsibility for their child.

Coventry Children's Services

Children's Social Care are not involved in making private fostering arrangements, but are responsible for checking that the arrangements are suitable for the child or young person.

When the parents or carers have notified Children's Social Care, we have a duty to assess and support private fostering arrangements. For example, we need to undertake all relevant checks and enquiries to ensure that the private fostering arrangement meets the needs of the child/young person.

When Coventry Children's Social Care receive a notification of a private fostering arrangement, the following actions need to be undertaken by an allocated social worker within one week of the notification (a full list of procedures are included in the Coventry City Council Children's Services Procedures Manual) :

- Undertake an initial visit to the private foster carer(s) in the home where the child/ young person is to live , speaking to them and all members of the household
- Visit and speak to the child/ young person alone, ascertaining their wishes and feelings in relation to the private fostering arrangement (see Direct Work with Children and Young People Practice Guidance for more information)
- Speak to and visit, the child/ young person's parent(s)

- Explore whether the child/ young person's needs may be more appropriately be met at home with support for the child/ young person and parent(s)
- Ensure that the purpose and likely duration of the private fostering arrangement is understood and agreed by both the parent(s) and the private foster carer(s)
- Complete relevant checks of the private foster carer(s) and all members of the household, and frequent visitors over the age of 16. Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks should be made as well as checking Children's Services records.
- Notify the relevant health and education agencies of the child/ young person's placement

An assessment of the private foster carer(s) should include the following:

- The suitability of the private foster carer(s) and all members of the household
- The suitability of the accommodation

Critical questions to consider when undertaking a private fostering assessment:

- Are the prospective carers able to meet the individual and specific needs of the child/children?
- Does the prospective carer fully understand that they are going to be assessed as a private foster carer and the assessment will involve undergoing further checks and they may find this intrusive?
- Does the prospective carer have a connection to the child/children; what is their motivation to care for the child/children?

- Is the accommodation suitable and would the child/children's bedroom arrangements be appropriate?
- Would the age or the physical/mental health of the prospective carer impact on their suitability/ability to meet the child/children's needs? All prospective carers must be 18+ years.
- Who else is living in the property? Consider other children in the household – what's the potential impact? Consider other adults in the household – does their presence impact on suitability? Do any members of the household/Family pose a risk to child/children?
- Does the carer, or other household member have any criminal convictions? What is the nature of the conviction or history/frequency of convictions? How recent/historical are the convictions?
- Are the prospective carers being open and honest? Inform prospective carers that we are required to consider information held on Police and Local Authority Records (with their consent); and that sharing information openly at the outset of the assessment process will be a significant factor in our assessment of their suitability.
- Have there been any police call outs to the prospective carers household? Have there been any incidents of Domestic Violence or anti-social behaviour?
- Following appropriate consents, have we fully considered all available information on (LA/Police Records) – at an absolute minimum this must include all current and historical information on record relating to children's service involvement with the prospective carer's family (i.e. CP/CIN involvement with their own children), and current PNC/STORM checks. What does this information tell us about the household, and does it triangulate with the information provided by the prospective carer?

If the private fostering arrangement is assessed as not suitable, Children's Social Care has a number of powers, in addition to their existing powers, to take action to safeguard and promote the child/ young person's welfare.

In these circumstances action may need to be taken to secure the care and accommodation of the child/ young person. These actions can include stopping someone from privately fostering children/ young people, or setting limits to how they care for children/ young people.

Visits to the private foster placement

If a private fostering arrangement is assessed as suitable, and agreed by all parties, Children's Social Care have a duty to complete frequent visits, reports and records. Visits should be completed by a Social Worker as follows:

- Within one week of the private foster placement starting, or within one week of the notification if this was received later
- Every six weeks for the first twelve months of the private fostering arrangements
- At least every three months thereafter
- The visits must be recorded on Protocol as these are Regulation 8 visits

The purpose of these visits are to encourage the maintenance and improvement of the child or young person's care, and to check that the child/ young person's needs are being met within the placement. The child/ young person should be seen and spoken to alone.

The social worker must complete a report on each visit, and these will be reviewed by the social work manager.

If there are any concerns regarding the child/ young person's care the social should explore relevant options and should take advice from the respective team manager. The

parent(s)/ carer(s) of the child should be advised of what action should be taken.