



ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

PRIVATE FOSTERING

Guidance

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St Helens Private Fostering Guidance

DEFINITION

A privately fostered child is a child under 16 (or 18 if Disabled) who is cared for by an adult who is not a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, step parent (including civil partnerships), sister or brother where the child is to be cared for in that person's home for 28 days or more.

A child who is looked after or placed in any residential home, hospital or school (where they are receiving full-time education) is excluded from the definition. In a private fostering arrangement, the parent retains parental responsibility. However, children under 16 who spend more than 2 weeks in residence during holiday time in a school, become privately fostered children for the purposes of the legislation during that holiday period.

Please Note: the local authority may exempt any person from giving written notice either for a specified period or indefinitely. This exemption may be revoked in writing at any time.

[Children Act 1989: private fostering - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

NOTIFICATION

The local authority should be notified in writing at least 6 weeks before an arrangement begins.

The parents, Private Foster Carers or any other professional who becomes aware of the plan, should notify the local authority. Where prior notification is not given, the local authority should be notified immediately this is identified.

Notification must include the following information:

- ◆ Name, gender, DOB, place of birth and address of the child
- ◆ Racial origin, culture, linguistic background and religion of the child
- ◆ Names and address of the person giving notice and any previous address within the last 5 years
- ◆ Name and address of the child's parents and any previous addresses within the last 5 years
- ◆ If different, the name and address of the person from whom the child was or is to be received
- ◆ Name and address of the Private Foster Carers and any previous addresses within the last 5 years.
- ◆ Name and address of any other person who is involved in making the arrangement
- ◆ Name and address of any siblings of the child, who are under 18, and the arrangements for their care.
- ◆ Purpose and likely duration of the arrangement
- ◆ The intended date when the child is to be placed with the Private Foster carers or the date that this began.

Where the notification is made by the Private Foster Carer or proposed Private Foster Carer, they must also provide

- ◆ Any offence they or any other member of the household has been convicted of
- ◆ Any disqualification or prohibition placed on them or any other member of the household
- ◆ Any actions taken or orders made in relation to the Private Foster Carers or any child who is or was a member of the same household.

The Private Foster carer must notify the local authority within 48 hours of **any** change in circumstances.

NB if the Private Foster Carers have moved to another local authority, the SW must notify the new authority of the name, address of the Private Foster carer, the name of the child and the name and address of the child’s parents and provide information regarding the Private Fostering Arrangement Assessment.

IMMEDIATE ACTION FOLLOWING NOTIFICATION

MASH will record the information received as a Contact and will complete appropriate screening. The contact will progress to a referral and recommend a Child and Family / Private Fostering Arrangement Assessment (PFAA) is completed.

Within **24 hours** of notification

	Action	Completion date
1	Notification is recorded as Contact	
2	Alert the Designated Manager for Private Fostering regarding new notification	
3	ICS check to establish whether there is any information known regarding the private foster carers which would cause concern for the child.	
4	Screening completed by MASH including multi-agency information and history of involvement	
5	Contact is progressed to referral and outcome is Private Fostering Arrangement	
6	Referral is sent to Duty to complete PFAA, or where the child is already open to Children’s Social Care, to the allocated social worker.	

The child will be allocated to a Social Worker within the Duty Service to complete the Child and Family / PFAA.

Within **1 week** the allocated social worker will:

	Action	Comments / Completed

1	Visit the Private Foster Carers in the home where the child is to live and speak to them and all members of the household	
2	Complete DBS check forms for all adult members of the household over the age of 16 years and adult frequent visitors to the home.	
3	Record case note to indicate the DBS check forms have been completed and the date they are submitted to Disclosure and Barring Service	
4	Obtain names and contact details of personal referees and make arrangements for written reference and visit the people identified to check references. NB the written references must be uploaded to the PF documents tab	
5	Visit and speak to the child alone, unless it is deemed inappropriate to do so. If the child is not spoken to alone, the reason should be clearly recorded within the case note and the TM alerted.	
6	Visit and speak to the parents, if possible	
7	Identify the purpose and likely duration of the Private Fostering Arrangement is understood by and agreed between the parents and Private Foster Carers.	
8	Ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child regarding the arrangements	
9	Check the suitability of the accommodation	
10	Check the capacity of the Private Foster Carers to look after the child	
11	Check the suitability of any other member of the household	
12	Ensure that the parents are involved in planning for the child	
13	Explore whether the child's needs may be more appropriately met by providing services to the child and parents at home.	
14	Encourage the parents and Private Foster Carers to draw up a written agreement as to their respective expectations and responsibilities in relation to the arrangements, including financial arrangements and the child's family time arrangements with their parents and other significant family members.	
15	Explore the child's development in all aspects is satisfactory, that the standard of care to be given or being given to the child is appropriate and that the child's needs arising from their religions persuasion, racial origin, culture and linguistic background are or will be met	
16	Explore the financial arrangements in place to support the Private Foster carers care of the child	
17	Explore the family time arrangements proposed or in place for the child with parents, siblings and extended family members, and if already placed whether these are working.	
18	Notify the relevant health and education agencies or any other agency involved with the child of the new arrangements	
19	Ensure that any necessary links are or will be established with other agencies for example because of the child's disabilities and / or special needs.	

20	Enter the child and the carer's details on the electronic database	
21	Update the genogram for the child	

ICS check must be undertaken immediately notification is received within MASH to establish whether the private foster carers and their family are known to the local authority and whether there is anything which identify possible risks for the child.

DBS checks must be completed in respect of the private foster carers and all members of the household and frequent visitors over the age of 16 years, which will include checks regarding any previous addresses (last 5 years).

NB Case note **must** be added to ICS records regarding the date the DBS form is completed and submitted to Disclosure and Barring Service and the date the check outcome is received. DBS check must be recorded in PF episode.

Social Worker to obtain written references and arrange a visit to the personal referees to discuss the references. References to be uploaded to the documents section of the PF episode and record visits in case notes.

Agreement document / Placement Information Record

INITIAL VISIT TO PRIVATE FOSTER CARERS

Initial visit checklist

	Action	Completed
1	Provide leaflet information to the Private Foster Carers	
2	Explain the assessment process	
3	Obtain the written consent of the Private Foster Carer and all members of the household over 16 to checks being made with the Disclosure and Barring Service and explain other checks to be undertaken	
4	Obtain the names and contact details of 2 personal referees	
5	Establish the Private Foster Carer's childcare experience, access to support and views and intentions regarding behaviour management of the child	
6	Explore or establish plans for family time between the child and their parents, any siblings or extended family members.	
7	Explore or establish the Private Foster Carer's understanding of the child's culture and give advice in relation to resources and facilities which could assist in meeting the child's racial, cultural, religious and linguistic needs, including the use of an interpreter if necessary	
8	Advise the Private Foster Carer of the need for notification to Children's Social Care in the event of any change in circumstances and preparation of the child before any further move, and for continuity of information being passed to the next carer	

9	Advise the Private Foster Carer in relation to recording the child's development specifically in relation to:	
10	Maintaining the child's medical history	
11	Keeping a file of school reports	
12	Noting dates of family time with the parents and significant others	
13	Maintaining a financial record	
14	Noting dates of contact with Children's Social Care	
15	Keeping a photograph album	
	Where the child is already placed	
16	Ensure that the parents have fully informed the Private Foster Carer of the child's medical history and any need for ongoing monitoring, appointments, medication and has handed the child's personal health records to the Private Foster Carer	
17	Encourage the parents and Private Foster Carers to draw up a written agreement as to their respective expectations and responsibilities in relation to the arrangements, including financial arrangements and the child's family time arrangements with their parents and other significant family members.	
18	Ensure the child is registered with a GP, dentist, optician local to the Private Foster Carer's home	
19	Ensure that a school place has been arranged for the child, if of school age	
20	Ensure that the parents provides written consent to cover any necessary medical treatment to the Private Foster Carer and that a copy of this is given to the GP, Dentist and Optician and retained on the child's file.	
21	Advise the Private Foster Carer to arrange a medical examination of the child with the GP as soon as practicable after the start of the placement.	
	NB if any person refuses to co-operate with completing the necessary checks, the Social Worker should advise the Private Foster Carers that they cannot be recommended as suitable and advise the Parents of the reason why alternative arrangements will need to be made for the child. Case discussion to be held with the Designated HoS for Private Fostering.	

NB the work completed within the first week including the initial visit to the Private Foster Carer must be recorded within Case Notes in ICS and the checklists either uploaded or referenced within the records. The Designated HoS for Private Fostering must be alerted to the Case Note.

NB the visit code should be R8 PF visit and not CIN visit – this will ensure that the visit is populated into the PF Icon record section.

PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENT ASSESSMENT (PFAA)

The Child and Family Assessment / PFAA are currently two separate documents within ICS.

NB Where the notification is received which confirms that a child has been or will be living with individual who are not close relatives the PFAA must be started immediately.

The plan within St Helens is to combine the Child and Family Assessment with the PFAA to enable these two assessments to be completed together however, at this time the assessments are separate and should be completed simultaneously.

The assessment will consider the following:

- The suitability of the private foster carer and all members of the household;
- The suitability of the accommodation.

The information received within 24 hours, initial checks, history and initial visit must be incorporated into the assessment. Child and Family Assessment guidance must be followed when completing the PFAA and consideration of parenting capacity guidance in respect of the child's birth parent / person with PR and the private foster carers should also be included.

NB the PFAA should be updated annually or where any significant changes occur

PFAA checklist

	Action	Completed
1	Include all checks and outcome of checks undertaken	
2	Include history of involvement with child and any involvement with private foster carers and their family including extended family	
3	Include the information obtained within the initial visit	
4	Include references of private foster carers	
5	Child's needs should be detailed in respect of health and education and reference made to multi-agency information obtained.	
6	Child's identify must include any disability, additional needs, ethnicity, religion, gender or cultural issues	
7	Family time arrangements to be clearly outlined within the PFAA	
8	Each section of the PFAA requires analysis of the private foster carers capacity to meet the child's individual needs. This needs to evidence discussion in respect of all issues and evidence how they are able to meet the child's needs.	
9	Guidance re Child and Family Assessments and Parenting Capacity Assessments should be utilized within the PFAA	
10	The analysis must consider all information collated within the PFAA to consider the suitability of the private foster carer and all members of the household to meet the child's needs and the suitability of the accommodation.	

11	The assessment and analysis must include permanence and contingency planning for the child. Private Foster Placements should not be seen as a permanence plan in their own right. Consideration must be given to how the arrangement will be formalized or arrangements for the child to return home and the support plan required.	
12	The assessment should consider whether any requirements should be imposed – (see Section 7, Imposing Requirements on Private Foster Carers, Section 8, Limit on Number of Children).	
13	NB if at any stage within the assessment, information is obtained which suggests that a child already placed may be a child in need, the manager may authorize services under a child in need plan and / or an assessment to be carried out alongside the assessment of the private foster carers.	
14	NB if any information is identified during the course of the PFAA e.g. from DBS or other checks, which may preclude the person from being a private foster carer, the social worker must prepare a report to the Designated Manager for Private Fostering. Immediate consideration should be given to the arrangements for the child and if necessary, child protection procedures should be followed. See Section 9, Prohibition and Disqualification	
15	NB If any person involved refuses to cooperate with the making of necessary checks, the social worker must notify the private foster carers that they cannot be recommended as suitable and advise the parents of the reason why alternative arrangements have to be made for the child.	
16	NB where alternative arrangements are required for the child and the parents refuse or cannot be found, the social worker should consider what alternative action is required and consider Child Protection Procedures and legal advice.	
	The completed PFAA must be approved by the manager, with comments added and then reassigned to the Designated Manager for Private Fostering for authorisation.	

In the event that the parents decline to make alternative arrangements or where the parents cannot be found, the social worker should consider whether any action may be required by the local authority to secure the child's safety under [St. Helens Child Protection Procedures](#) and legal advice should be sought as necessary.

DECISION MAKING RE PF ARRANGEMENTS

Following the assessment (PFAA) being completed and approved written notice of the decision must be sent to the private foster carer and the parents / persons with parental responsibility, including any requirements, exemptions or prohibitions imposed (see Section 7, Imposing Requirements on Private Foster Carers, Section 8, Limit on Number of Children and Section 9, Prohibition and Disqualification.)

	Action	Completed
1	Completed approved PFAA to be sent to the Designated Manager for Private Fostering to review and authorise	
2	Written notification of the decision to be sent to the private foster carer and parent / person with parental responsibility by social worker	

6. Financial Support for Private Foster Carers

Private fostering arrangements are supported financially by the parent(s) or other persons with PR.

The Local Authority can consider financial support to sustain an otherwise satisfactory placement. This may relate to a one-off payment to support purchase of essential equipment or ongoing financial assistance. Any such requests should be discussed with the manager and sent to the Designated Manager for Private Fostering for consideration / approval on the request for financial assistance within ICS. A financial assessment must be completed with the private foster carers before financial assistance is provided. The request for financial assistance should explain what support is required, how much and for how long as well as why the parents are not supporting the child.

NB where ongoing financial support is provided it would not be at any rate higher than the child element of the fostering allowance and the financial assessment must be reviewed at least annually.

The team manager will confirm the amount of the financial support in writing to the carers, once the financial assessment is complete and approval has been given by the Designated Manager for Private Fostering.

The payments should be part of a Child in Need Plan. See [Child in Need Plans and Reviews Procedure](#).

7. Imposing Requirements on Private Foster Carers

The assessment may identify the need to recommend requirements on the private foster carers, for example:

- ◆ restricting the approval to an individual child or limit the number, age, gender of children who may be cared for privately,
- ◆ standard of accommodation
- ◆ health and safety matters
- ◆ equipment
- ◆ timescales to take the necessary action

A requirement may be varied, removed or added at any time. Requirements imposed or removed / varied must be specified in writing and the reasons for the requirement provided. The letter should also be sent to the parent by the allocated social worker.

The private foster carer must be advised of their right to appeal against the requirement to the Magistrates' Court.

8. Limit on Number of Children

The maximum number of children privately fostered in any one household must not exceed 3 unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Any application for exemption from this limit must be made to the Designated Manager for Private Fostering. The application must contain the following information:

1. The number, names and ages of the children;
2. The proposed arrangements for the care and accommodation of the children;
3. The intended and likely relationship between the children and the private foster carers;
4. The proposed length of the placement;
5. Whether the welfare of the children in the placement will be safeguarded and promoted.

Exemptions will only be granted in relation to named children and will cease when the named children leave the placement.

Where an exemption is granted, this will be confirmed in writing to the private foster carers by the allocated social worker.

9. Prohibition and Disqualification

A decision can be made to prohibit the proposed private foster carer from fostering on the basis that they are not suitable and/or the premises are unsuitable.

The fact that a private Foster Carer is a disqualified person (foster carer) is a good reason upon which to seek a prohibition.

Where the social worker considers that it would be appropriate to approve a private foster carer despite the fact that they or a person in the household is disqualified, a written report must be presented to the Designated Manager for Private Fostering for consideration.

Where a decision is made to prohibit a private foster carer from caring for a child, reasons for the decision must be recorded. Written notice of the decision, together with the reasons, must be sent by hand or recorded delivery post to the private foster carer and to the parent by the social worker responsible for the assessment. The private foster carer will also be advised of the right to appeal against the decision to the Magistrates' Court.

Discussion should also take place with the parent as to the making of alternative arrangements for the child.

10. Non-compliance with Requirements

Where requirements which have been imposed are not complied with, the social worker must consider whether support should be provided to ensure compliance and/or consider whether to report further to the Designated Manager for Private Fostering, recommending that the private foster

carer be prohibited from caring for the child, in which case the procedure for prohibitions as set out above must be followed.

11. Visits to the Private Foster Carers Home - Frequency, Purpose and Records

1. Frequency

Where the notification is received prior to the child being placed, visits by a social worker must be made to the child and the private foster carer at the home within 1 week of placement.

Where the notification is received after the child has been placed, the visit must be made on the date the notification is received,

Visits should be at a maximum of 6 weekly in the first year by the allocated social worker, however St Helens good practice guidance requires visits to be no more than 4 weekly.

If the placement is over 1 year, then visits must be at least every 12 weeks however this should be agreed at a CIN review and with the IRO with oversight for the PF arrangements and Management Oversight recorded in case notes.

The need to visit more frequently will be decided by the social worker and their manager depending on the circumstances and the need to visit unannounced and/or to choose times when all members of the household are likely to be present should also be considered.

Additional visits should be arranged at the request of the child or the private foster carer.

The child must be seen alone by the social worker on each visit unless this is not appropriate having regard to the young age of the child or if the child does not wish to see the social worker alone.

The child's bedroom should be seen on some visits.

2. Purpose

The purpose of and matters to be discussed at the first visit after the child's placement are set out in Section 4, Initial Visit to Private Foster Carers.

The overall purpose of all visits is to encourage the maintenance and improvement of childcare standards and check that the child's needs are met within the foster placement and in particular:

1. To observe the overall standard of care including visiting the child's bedroom;
2. To ensure that the child is developing satisfactorily and that their needs arising from religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background are being met;
3. To speak to and ascertain the wishes of the child;
4. To review the purpose and likely duration of the placement and ensure that arrangements with the parents are working.

The parent and the private foster carer should be encouraged to plan the ending of the placement and prepare the child for the change;

5. To check that any requirements imposed are being met and check whether they need to be changed or cancelled;
6. To ensure that the arrangements for the child's education are satisfactory;
7. To advise or arrange advice for the private foster carer as necessary, for example in relation to the maintaining of the child's links with their cultural heritage or in relation to appropriate travel arrangements for the child visiting family abroad;
8. To check that the financial arrangements for the care of the child are working;
9. To ensure that the child remains registered with a GP and dentist and that any necessary health care has been provided to take account of any special health needs;
10. To ensure that the child has access to services as required as a result of any disabilities;
11. To enquire as to the contact arrangements for the child with the parents and siblings;
12. To encourage the private foster carer to keep a record of the child's development, including accidents, illnesses, immunisations, school reports, achievements and any contact with parents or significant others.

3. Reports on Visits

A record of every visit must be made by the social worker. The report must state whether the child was seen and if so, whether the child was seen alone. If the child was not seen, the reasons must be recorded. The record must comment on the child's welfare and how the placement is progressing including any views expressed by the private foster carer and the child. It must also contain a recommendation about the continued suitability of the fostering arrangement and whether any action should be taken and/or requirements on the private foster carer.

The record must be reviewed by the manager.

4. Unsatisfactory care

Where there are concerns about the child's care, the parents should be advised and consideration should be given to invoking the [St. Helens Child Protection Procedures](#).

12. Review of Private Foster Carers

The suitability of the private foster carer should be reviewed annually by the social worker and reported to the [Designated Manager \(Private Fostering\)](#).

An IRO will maintain oversight of all Private Foster Care Arrangements and will provide an annual report regarding themes and issues for consideration by the Designated HoS for Private Fostering and the Strategic Group to incorporate into the action plan

13. Local Authority Foster Carers who Privately Foster

Where local authority foster carers notify their intention to privately foster a child, the above procedure should be followed.

In these circumstances, a supervising social worker will normally carry out the assessment.

The foster carers should be advised of the differences between their two roles.

Consideration will need to be given to the implications for any Looked After Child already placed with the foster carer and contact should be made by the supervising social worker involved with the social workers for such children.

Consideration should also be given to the future placement of any looked after children particularly having regard to the usual fostering limit of three children.

14. After the Private Fostering Arrangement Ends

Parents have a duty to notify the local authority of the ending of the placement including the name and address of the person into whose care the child has moved.

Unless a young person has a disability, private fostering ends at 16. Children's Services will review the young person's circumstances and future plans as they approach 16. Where a young person remains with the private foster carers after the age of 16, but requires continuing support, they should be assisted as a Child In Need. Where the young person moves to independent living, support can be provided to them as they will fall within the definition of Qualifying Young People. (Note that the [DfE Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations - Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers](#) acknowledges that some 'Qualifying children' will be as vulnerable and have similar support needs as those who are Eligible, Relevant or Former Relevant).

Support may include advice, befriending and discretionary financial assistance where the young person has no other means. It will be provided at the request of the young person on the basis of assessment of need and can continue up to the age of 25 or beyond if the young person is in higher education, up to the end of the course. Note that in these circumstances, it is possible also for the local authority to also provide vacation holiday accommodation.

Any request by the young person should be made to the local authority in which they are resident or where the education and training is being provided.

See [Leaving Care and Transition Procedure](#).

Where notification is that the placement has ended, the social worker should ascertain the name and address of the person now caring for the child and their relationship with the child.

Parents also have a duty to notify the local authority in writing of the ending of the placement including the name and address of the person into whose care the child has moved.

Any agency that becomes aware of a private fostering arrangement must immediately notify the local authority in writing of the arrangement and must inform the parent and private foster carer of their intention to do so.