



Lewisham

# Are you looking after someone else's child?

A guide to private fostering





## What is private fostering?

Private fostering describes the situation when a child lives with a person who is not a close family relative for 28 days or longer.

The Children Act (1989) defines a 'relative' as a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, aunt or step-parent. A child is a young person aged 16 years or younger, or if the young person has a disability, 18 years or younger.

Private fostering arrangements can arise for a variety of reasons, such as:

- The child is living with a family friend due to problems at the child's family home, for example their parents are going through a separation or divorce.
- The child has been sent to this country by their parents to further their education and is being cared for by someone else while they are attending school.
- The child is not getting along with someone who is living at their family home, and can no longer live there.

## **What does the law say?**

The law states that both the child's parents and the intended private foster carers should notify the social services department of their local authority (in the London borough of Lewisham, this would be the Directorate for Children & Young People, Children's Social Care).

This must be done at least six weeks before the child moves to the private foster carer's home. If the move is not planned, the local authority should be informed within 48 hours of the child moving out of their family home.

The law also places a duty on the local authority to carry out an assessment of the private fostering arrangement and to regularly review the home whilst the placement continues. In Lewisham, social workers from the Lewisham Councils' Children's Social Care division carry out this work.

Responsibility for the placement continues to be that of the child's birth parents or those with parental responsibility..

## **What will Children's Social Care do?**

Upon notification of the private fostering arrangement, a social worker will carry out an initial assessment, usually within seven days working days. The social worker will want to talk to the private foster carers, the child's parents or legal guardian, and the child. They will want to ensure that the child's parents/guardian have given the private foster carers as much information as possible about the child, particularly the child's health needs, dietary requirements, hobbies, religious practices and cultural background, and they will require proof that the child has been registered with a local doctor. The social worker will need to see the home that the child will be living in, including their sleeping arrangements.

If the child's new living situation is deemed to be suitable, the social worker will continue to visit the child's accommodation every six weeks during the first year of the placement, and then at least once every three months thereafter. During each visit, the child will have a chance to speak to the social worker on their own.

### **Will I get any help?**

The social worker is also there to offer help and advice and may be able to arrange for specialist help if required. It should be noted that the financial terms should be discussed between the child's parents or legal guardians and the private foster carers. Those adults with parental responsibility for the child remain financially responsible for him or her.

Private foster carers may be able to claim Child Benefit, and possibly Income Support or Job Seeker's Allowance. Further information can be sought from their local benefits agency.

