

LSCP factsheet: Private Fostering Arrangements (PFAs)

What is a Private Fostering Arrangement (PFA)?

When a child under the age of 16 (or under 18 if they have a disability) is cared for by someone who is not their parent or a close relative for 28 days or more. This is a private arrangement between the child's parent and the carer, this means it is not arranged by the local authority and these children are not looked after.

What do you mean by parent or close relative?

'Parent' includes people who are not parents but have parental responsibility (e.g. adoptive parents). A close relative is defined as a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (including both 'full-blood', i.e. brothers/sisters of the child's parent or 'half-blood by affinity', i.e. people who are married to a brother/sister of a child's parent) or a stepparent.¹

Who is a private foster carer?

Private foster carers are people who are not a parent or close relative who look after a child for 28 days or more. For example, cousins, great-aunts, great-uncles, distant relatives, family friends or host families. **Please note** - sometimes children refer to adults as an 'Aunt' or 'Uncle' when they are not full- or half-blood relations. You must clarify the type of relationship in these situations, as these people might be private foster carers.

Can you give me some examples of PFAs?

- A child living with a friend's family for 28 days or more whilst their parent is abroad;
- A child living with a family friend for 28 days or more due to family breakdown;
- A child travelling to the UK to live with a host family for their education, where they will be staying for 28 days or more.

Why do I need to know if a child is in a PFA?

There are legal duties to know who these children are and to ensure they are safe and well cared for. It is important that you can recognise when a child is in a PFA so that you can notify the Local Authority of this information.

Who needs to notify the Local Authority?

- Parents should notify the Local Authority at least 6 weeks in advance of the PFA starting or within 48 hours if the arrangement is made in an emergency.²
- Private Foster Carers should notify the Local Authority at least 6 weeks in advance of the PFA starting or within 48 hours if the arrangement is made in an emergency.
- Involved workers should notify the Local Authority as soon as they become aware a PFA might start or has started.

¹ [S109 Children Act 1989](#)

² 'When in an emergency' refers to a range of situations, for example, a parent being unexpectedly being admitted to hospital for medical treatment. It is appreciated that it may not always be known whether the arrangement will last for 28 days or more and in these situations the notification should be made as soon as the arrangement appears likely to exceed 28 days.

How can I notify the Local Authority?

Complete a [referral](#) to Lambeth Children's Social Care providing detail of the PFA.

What will the Local Authority do when they receive a PFA notification?

Once the arrangement is confirmed by Lambeth Children's Social Care³, a social worker from the Private Fostering Team will be allocated to undertake a *Private Fostering Arrangement Assessment Record (PFAAR)*. These assess the suitability of the arrangement, including statutory checks on the private foster carer (for example, DBS, Local Authority and Health information). Biological parents are also contacted. Children are seen alone and at home, and the first visit to the child must be within 7 days of allocation to the Private Fostering Social Worker. These assessments must be completed within 42 days of the PFA being confirmed by Lambeth Children's Social Care.

What happens after the assessment?

Every privately fostered child has an allocated social worker, and they will be seen every 6 weeks during the first year of the arrangement (and every 3 months thereafter). The specialist social worker provides ongoing advice and support to privately fostered children, private foster carers and biological parents.

What happens if safeguarding concerns are identified?

If safeguarding concerns arise during the PFAAR or ongoing visits, the child's case will be transferred to the Child Assessment Team for a Child & Family Assessment and statutory intervention if needed.

What about confidentiality and data protection?

If you know or suspect a child is in a private fostering arrangement, you have a legal duty to inform the local authority. You do not need the consent of either the biological parent or private foster carer to do this.

Further reading:

- [Lambeth Children's Services Private Fostering Procedure](#)
- [The Children \(Private Arrangements for Fostering\) Regulations 2005](#)

³ This is normally done by the Integrated Referral Hub (IRH) but sometimes where it unclear a Child Assessment Team (CAT) might need to undertake a Child & Family Assessment to confirm the arrangement.