

Private Fostering in the new BCP Council

From the **1st April 2019**, the new BPC Council will be formed, covering Bournemouth Poole and Christchurch. All private fostering arrangements within the area will be managed by the existing **Private Fostering Team** that is currently based within Bournemouth.

What is private fostering?

Private fostering is when a **child under the age of 16** (under 18 if disabled) is cared for by someone who is not their parent or a 'close relative'. This is a private arrangement made between a parent and a carer, **for 28 days or more**. Close relatives are defined as step-parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles or aunts (whether of full blood or half-blood).

Some examples of private fostering include children sent by their parents from abroad to stay with another family or at university residences via language schools or agents, usually to improve their English or for educational opportunities; teenagers who, having broken ties with their parents, are staying in short term arrangements with friends or other non-relatives; children living with members of the extended family, e.g., great aunt or great grandparents.

These children are not 'looked after' by the local authority but they are potentially vulnerable. It is feared that some of these 'invisible' children could be at risk of abuse or the victims of trafficking. Victoria Climbé, was brought to the UK in April 1999 from the Ivory Coast, via France, by Therese-Marie Kouao, her great-aunt. Therese-Marie Kouao offered Victoria's parents the chance of a good education for their daughter. She had been brought into the UK in a private foster agreement. On 25 February 2000 Victoria died after experiencing significant physical abuse.

The Local Authority has a duty to safeguard the wellbeing of all children in its area, as laid out by The Children's Act 1989. This means that the council needs to know of any situation where someone, other than a relative, cares for children, where the arrangement is intended to last for 28 days or more. If you are aware of a private fostering arrangement, it is your responsibility to ensure that the local authority is notified of the arrangement taking place.

By law, the council must be informed about any private fostering situations in Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch because private fostering arrangements that remain hidden can leave some children vulnerable. The law requires that you tell us at least six weeks before the arrangement begins that you intend to privately foster a child, unless the arrangement is made in an emergency in which case the notification must be made within 48 hours.

How can I refer? – changes you need to know

In the new local authority there will be some changes to referral processes that will affect all children who are intending on, or already living in a private fostering arrangement in the areas of Christchurch or Poole, where the local authority is not already aware of the arrangement.

Language students who will be coming into the area through a language school or guardianship company and meet the private fostering threshold will need to be notified to the local authority via the website (currently this is via www.bournemouth.gov.uk/privatefostering). Language schools and guardianship companies will need to ensure that they complete DBS checks for all persons aged 16 and older living in the household where the private fostering arrangement is due to take place, prior to the child arriving.

For all other types of private fostering arrangements i.e. local children or children that have come to stay in the area where their parents have independently made the arrangement, a referral must be made via the MASH service, which will then be passed on to the Private Fostering Team.

Contact details

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact the Private Fostering Team on 01202 454932, or by sending an email to private.fostering@bcpcouncil.gov.uk .