Are you looking after someone else’s child?

If so, you may be a private foster carer. This leaflet explains what private fostering is, and what parents and carers need to tell us.
What is private fostering?

Private fostering is an arrangement that is made privately – that is not involving the council. A private foster carer is someone other than a parent or close relative who takes on the day-to-day care of a child. The parent keeps overall responsibility for the welfare of the child. It is an arrangement that lasts for a period of 28 days or more in agreement with the child’s parent.

Private fostering applies to a child under the age of 16, or under 18 if disabled. Private foster carers may be from the extended family – such as a cousin, a great aunt, a friend or someone unknown to the child who is willing to privately foster. We do not consider close family to be private foster carers.

Those who have the following relationship to the child are not considered as private foster carers:
- Grandparent
- Brother or sister
- Aunt or uncle (whether of full blood or half blood by marriage)
- Step-parents.

Why are children privately fostered?

There are many situations where a private fostering arrangement may be made.

Some of the most common are:
- Children sent from abroad to stay with an extended family member, usually to study
- Teenagers who have moved out of their parents’ home and are staying with friends
- Those living with host families while studying (perhaps at language school)
- Children who need to be cared for away from home due to a parent’s ill health.

What must the council do?

Making alternative care arrangements in any of the examples given can be stressful for all concerned. Our aim is to make sure that private foster carers, parents and children get the help they need during what can be a difficult time.

We have specific duties to ensure private fostering arrangements are appropriate and working well for the child. These include:
- Checking the suitability of private foster carers
- Telling private foster carers, parents and children who to contact for advice and support
- Making regular visits to the child
- Monitoring the overall standard of care.

What should you do?

The law says private foster carers and parents have to tell their council about all private fostering arrangements. It is an offence not to tell us unless you have reasonable cause. If you are a private foster carer or a parent and you are proposing to make a private foster arrangement you must tell us at least six weeks before the arrangement starts. If it is an emergency arrangement you must tell us immediately. If a child is already living in a private fostering arrangement you must tell us immediately.

Enquiries about private fostering.

If you have any enquiries about private fostering arrangements you should contact us at:

**Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) Team**
Address: Children, Schools and Families Department, Merton Council, Civic Centre, London Road, Morden SM4 5DX
Email: childrensdayservice@merton.gov.uk
Telephone: 020 8545 4226 or 020 8545 4227