**Private Fostering Week 16th – 20th September 2019**

Cheshire East Council is asking people to let them know if they think a child in their community is being cared for by someone else who are not a direct relative, so they can be aware of the support and help available.

The call to action is part of Cheshire East’s Private Fostering Week (16 – 20 September), which aims to reduce the number of children in un-notified private fostering arrangements.

If a child aged 16 or under (or under 18 with disabilities) is cared for by someone other than a close family member (parent, step-parent, grandparent, sibling, aunt or uncle) for more than 28 days, then they are deemed to be in a private fostering arrangement. There are many circumstances where an unmarried partner becomes the carer for a child. A parent’s unmarried partner **is not** a step parent in this context. It is a common misunderstanding and parents/carers are often unaware of the legal requirements to notify the local authority of a private fostering arrangement.

Private foster care can be a very positive experience, but some children may be in a vulnerable position. Private fostering is arranged between parents and the private foster carer, and legally the parent and carer must notify the local authority so they can ensure the child is being properly cared for and can provide support where needed.

Children become privately fostered for many reasons. They can include teenagers living elsewhere because of a family breakdown, cultural exchange students, a child from overseas living with a host family while attending school, or overseas students at boarding school who stay with host families during the holidays, or any child whose parents have made a private arrangement for them to be cared for by somebody else.

Cheshire East Council is particularly asking people who work with children to be aware of private fostering arrangements among the children and families they work with, and to notify the council – although everybody has a part to play.

We all have a role to play in keeping our children safe and we are asking people to let us know if they hear about a child who is privately fostered. Some people may not realise they are in a private fostering arrangement, but if they are caring for someone else’s child for more than 28 days then they should inform Cheshire East Council.”

**To notify Cheshire East Council of a private fostering arrangement, Phone ChECS on 0300 123 5012 Callers will be directed to the appropriate team and relevant personnel more quickly via a range of automated options.**