



Out of Hours Procedure

Fostering Services

This procedure ensures that staff and foster parents are informed of the service provided by the Out of Hours (OOH) team, the process to access the team and the roles and responsibilities for managing incidents and events that take place outside of the 'normal' office hours. The objective of this service is to ensure all children, foster parents and staff are 'safe' and have access to a service provided by experienced staff who can support and advise them when incidents happen that cause concern to ensure correct procedures are followed and that safeguarding is paramount.

As part of Polaris community, the term foster parent is preferred but it is recognised that foster carer is also used in legislation and within the community.

This procedure forms part of the Polaris Community Quality Management System in line with ISO-9001:2015 standards and applies to all Fostering Services.

Procedure Owner:	QA & Safeguarding Team
Approved by:	Operations Board
Date approved:	January 2021 – Reviewed March 2025
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Version No:	02
Associated Policy and supporting documents:	Monitoring and Notifiable Event Recording and Reporting Procedure
	Supporting and Supervising Foster Parents Procedure
	Suite of Safeguarding Procedures
	Children Missing Or Away without Authorisation Procedure
	Escalation & Crisis Communication Procedure

All Polaris Community companies are detailed in the current legal structure.

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Please click on the logo for your agency to jump directly to the agency 'Out of Hours' Procedure and contact details:





fostering
therapeutically
SINCE 1987

fosterplus
more than fostering

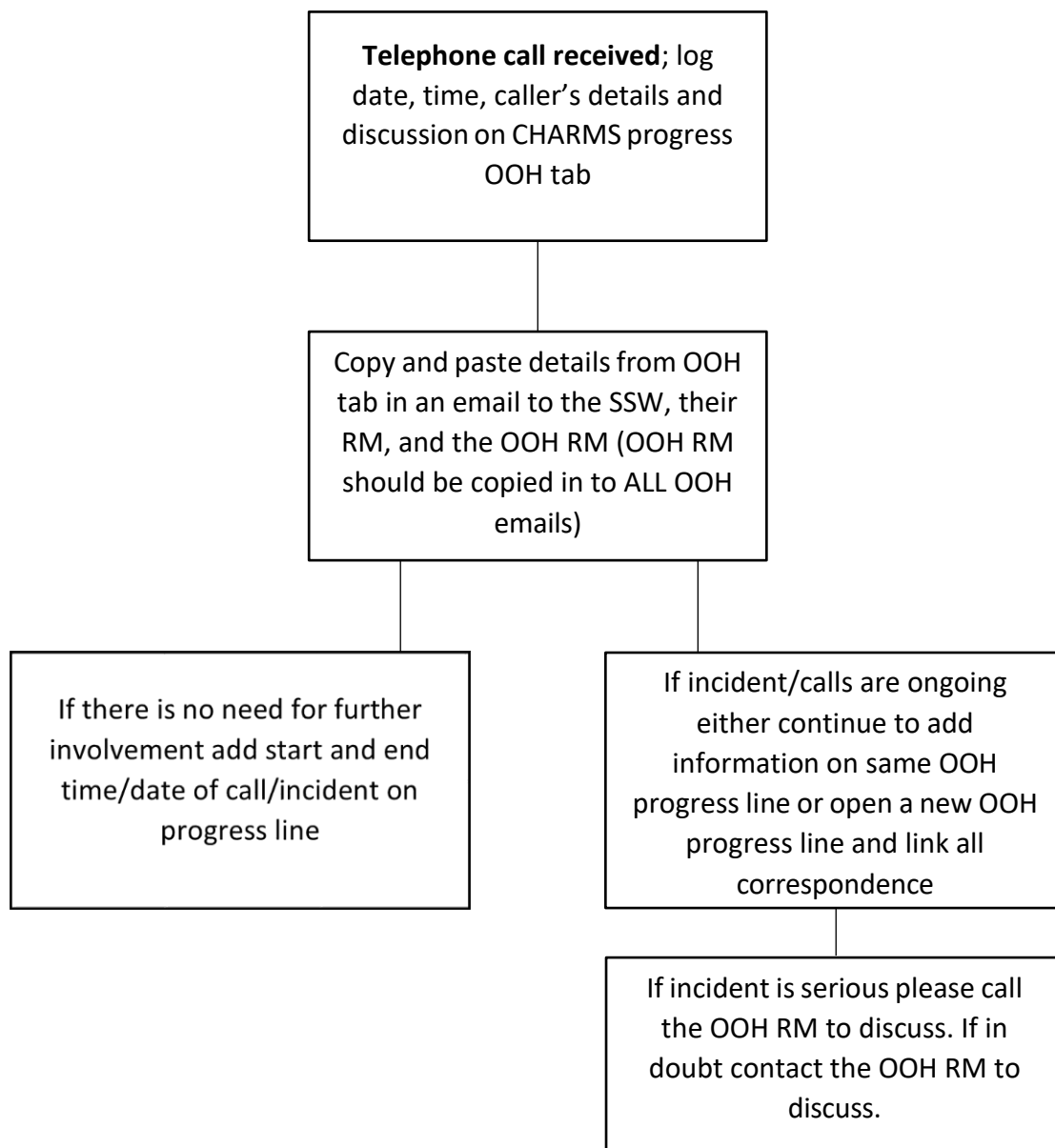


Out of Hours Procedure

ISP, Fosterplus, Orange Grove and Clifford House

OOH Central Contact: F+: 03303 34743 F+ Scotland: 0333 220 5041 ISP: 0808 175 0276 OG North: 03303 334740 OG South: 03303 334741 CCH: 03303 335102.

Flowchart:



Procedure

The On-Call service is available to all ISP, Orange Grove, Fosterplus and Clifford House agency foster parents and staff.

It consists of a telephone advice and follow-up service from experienced staff at various levels who provide 24/7 cover for all out-of-hours emergencies, to give support and practical assistance. The service is staffed by:

- On-Call worker, usually a Supervising Social Worker (SSW) with access to a Manager who has authority to make significant decisions in a crisis, and who will respond to all matters referred to them.
- The Manager will either be the service Registered Manager, (R.M) or an On-Call Manager. Their contact details will be made available to the On-Call worker.

Staff are allocated to these positions via a rota, which is drawn up, by either Regional Administrators, or the Registered or Team Manager.

In order to maintain a 24-hour system of organisation, this procedure sets out the process for accessing support. On-Call out of normal working hours (evenings, weekends, nights and bank holidays), or in the event of a major incident, and/or when the support worker is not available. The On-Call worker will be contactable at all times via the On-Call telephone number.

Responsibilities

The On-Call worker will be on call from home and able to respond immediately to issues referred to them and will seek guidance from a Manager if required.

The On-Call role is primarily one of making decisions and facilitating in difficult circumstances. It is the responsibility of the On-Call worker to:

- Provide advice, management, guidance and support to foster parents and staff when contacted for assistance;
- Follow all the agency policies and procedures by reporting any relevant incident to the On-Call Registered Manager;
- Be the first contact if a major incident occurs;
- Ensure that all decisions and actions are recorded and entered onto the relevant case record on CHARMS.

Emergencies

In the case of a genuine emergency, such as where a child, foster parent or member of staff is in danger and those involved are unable to take steps to protect the person or the home, or where someone requires emergency medical assistance, the necessary emergency services should be contacted before the On-Call service.

Serious Events

The On-Call service must be contacted if any of the following events occurs:

- Death of or serious injury to a child or member of staff, including attendance at the Accident and Emergency department;
- A serious accident in the home irrespective of whether there are children currently placed;
- An allegation of abuse or a child protection enquiry;
- A child requires emergency professional medical intervention (i.e. not routine or scheduled appointments);
- Any incident of self-harm, attempted suicide or a child expressing suicidal thoughts;
- Any serious alcohol/drug misuse;
- An allegation that a young person has committed a serious offence or requires an appropriate adult interview (see Appropriate Adult Guidance);
- Suspected or actual sexual exploitation of a child;
- A child is reported as missing or absent from the placement;
- Any incident necessitating the Police calling at the foster home;
- A child is behaving/has behaved in an explosive and angry manner and which is proving/has proved difficult to manage;
- Any incidents of physical intervention and / or restraint of a child by a foster parent or member of staff;
- Suspicion that a young person, foster parent or family member has a serious infectious disease;
- Fire, flood, gas leak or similar;
- A foster parent or member of staff being taken seriously ill;
- Any other emergency/unforeseen serious incident/event in the life of the foster family which affects or could affect capacity or suitability to continue with a placement/to continue fostering;
- A foster parent or member of staff acting in breach of their contractual obligations, or where there is alleged misconduct.

Allegations against staff or foster parents

The On-Call worker must be contacted if a young person makes an allegation of abuse against a foster parent or member of staff. In such situations, the primary responsibility is to ensure the safety of the child or young person in the home, and arrangements for doing this will need to be discussed with the On-Call service on every such occasion. The On-Call worker should contact the on call Registered Manager to discuss what action should be taken in the event of an allegation.

Recording of on-call activity

The On-Call worker is responsible for recording on CHARMS all communication and action that has taken place out of hours and ensuring that the SSW and RM are made aware of any events that have occurred.

In the event of a serious incident that has required contact with the manager covering out-of-hours, the manager will make a decision as to whether a notification to Ofsted/Care Inspectorate is needed. If the manager covering out-of-hours is not the relevant RM, they will have the authority to make the notification to Ofsted/Care Inspectorate on the RM's behalf. They will notify the relevant RM immediately of this action. This is to ensure best practice in notifying Ofsted/Care Inspectorate without delay.

The Responsible Individual and the Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Team must be notified as soon as possible of any notification to Ofsted/Care Inspectorate.

Business Continuity Management

The Out of Hours Duty rota will be maintained at all times. In the event of that a member of staff from the Out of Hours team is unable to take Out of Hours calls, the Out of Hours team alongside a manager will make alternative and suitable arrangements.

See also 'Emergency Referrals OOH's Service Procedure/Process on page 16

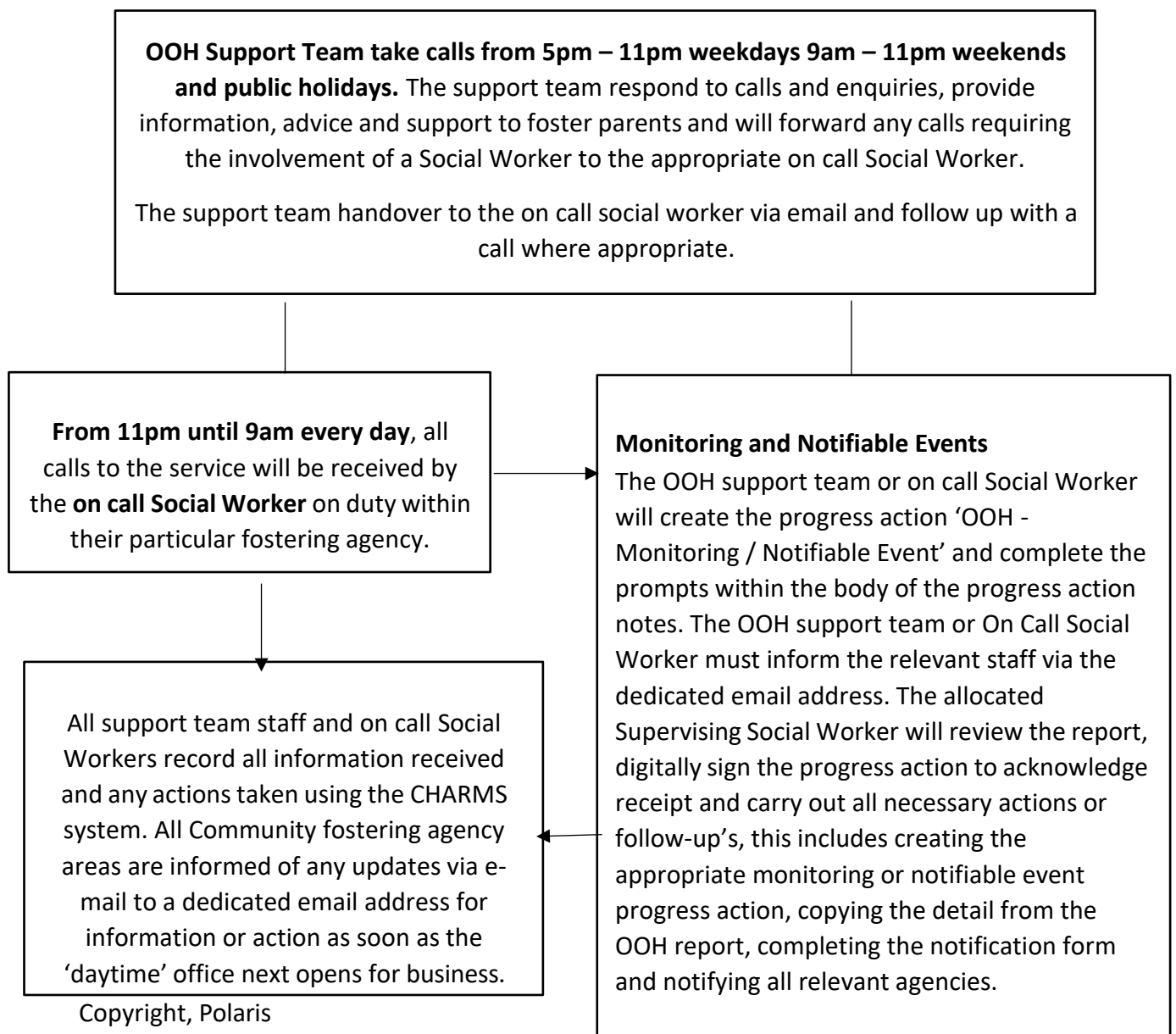


Out of Hours Procedure

FCA, FCA Scotland, Fostering People and ACS

To contact OOH please call your regional office number which will connect to the correct support regardless of time or day.

Flowchart:



Procedure

The Out of Hours service is available to all agency foster parents and staff.

It consists of a telephone advice and follow-up service from experienced staff at various levels who provide 24/7 cover for all out of hours (OOH) emergencies, to give support and practical assistance.

The dedicated OOH service provides cover for FCA, FCA Scotland, Fostering People and ACS fostering services. The services provided are in line and compliant with the requirements of all the Fostering Service Regulations and National Minimum Standards where the agency is providing a fostering service. Foster Parents are able to contact the OOH service for support and advice in situations that cannot wait until the next working day. The OOH service's role is primarily to deal with emergencies that may arise, but they will respond appropriately to all calls received.

The OOH service relies on effective information provided to it; such information is of course subject to change and the service is therefore reliant on colleagues in the Community to keep them updated in order to make informed decisions

Emergencies

In the case of a genuine emergency, such as where a child, foster parent or member of staff is in danger and those involved are unable to take steps to protect the person or the home, or where someone requires emergency medical assistance, the necessary emergency services should be contacted before the On-Call service.

Serious Events

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- Any serious alcohol/drug misuse;
- An allegation that a young person has committed a serious offence or requires an appropriate adult interview (see Appropriate Adult Guidance);
- Suspected or actual sexual exploitation of a child;

- Any incident necessitating the Police calling at the foster home;
- A child is behaving/has behaved in an explosive and angry manner and which is proving/has proved difficult to manage;
- Any incidents of physical intervention and / or restraint of a child by a foster parent or member of staff;
- A child is reported as missing or absent from the placement;
- Suspicion that a young person, foster parent or family member has a serious infectious disease;
- Fire, flood, gas leak or similar;
- A foster parent or member of staff being taken seriously ill;
- Any other emergency/unforeseen serious incident/event in the life of the foster family which affects or could affect capacity or suitability to continue with a placement/to continue fostering;
- A foster parent or member of staff acting in breach of their contractual obligations, or where there is alleged misconduct.

OOH Service Structure and Operational Procedures

The OOH service is operational during the following:

- Every weekday from 1700 until 0900 the following morning
- Every Saturday and Sunday (24 hours)
- All public holidays (24 hours) when an office in a fostering agency area is closed.

The OOH service is provided by a team of Support and Advice Co-ordinators (experienced non-social work staff), as well as a pool of “on call” Social Workers. Each fostering agency will have an on call Social Worker from 1700 to 0900 every weekday, and all day every Saturday, Sunday and public holiday. Staff providing these services are homebased during these hours.

From 1700 until 2300 every weekday, and 0900 until 2300 every Saturday, Sunday and public holiday, calls to the service will initially be received and dealt with by the support team. The support team responds to calls and enquiries, provides information, advice and support to foster parents and will forward any calls requiring the involvement of a Social Worker to the appropriate on call Social Worker.

From 2300 until 0900 every day, all calls to the service will be received initially by the on call Social Worker on duty within their particular fostering agency area. On call Social Workers will be required to record their time worked, in the format agreed within their fostering agency.

OOH Service Contact

The OOH Support Team is not available before commencement of shift other than by email; a message may however be left on the OOH duty number specific to the relevant fostering agency, which will be answered as soon as the shift begins. Fostering agencies requesting a call back must make themselves available. At the beginning of a shift, the OOH support team will access emails and information received from colleagues and foster parents. They will check the service answering machine or call minder service for messages.

The OOH Support team are contactable via telephone between the hours of 1700 and 2300 on a weekday, and between 0900 and 2300 on a weekend or public holiday. Calling the regional office closest to you will get you through to the correct OOH support that is operational at that time.

If the line is busy, a call minder service will intervene for the caller to leave their message and contact details and the support team will respond as quickly as possible. At 2245 each night, the central team will start their handover process, to ensure that all on call Social Workers have all necessary available information from 2300, from when they will directly receive calls.

Each fostering agency area will ensure that their regional phone line is diverted appropriately so it goes to either OOH Support Team or the Regional Duty SW.

Handover Process

There will be a handover from the Support team to the on call Social Workers each day at 2300 hours. On a weekend and public holiday, the on call Social Workers will hand over to the central team at 0900. The process will be as follows:

Support Team handover to On Call Social Workers

Throughout their shift, the support team 'Support and Advice Co-Ordinator' must take note of any incident that they think will be an ongoing issue. The Co-Ordinator must maintain draft emails, for the appropriate on call Social Worker(s) with details of the issue(s). All emails must then be sent by 2245 to ensure a smooth handover to the on call Social Workers. Please note, that if there are no issues to handover, an email stating as such should still be sent.

Email notification to include:

- Child's name
- Foster parent(s) name
- Fostering agency operating area

- Fostering agency
- Brief outline of issue (e.g. missing, medical, etc.)
- Any action on which the central team is waiting – e.g. update with police incident number, foster parent update.

The Coordinator must contact the on call Social Worker directly, if further information needs to be discussed to handover effectively.

These notifications are in addition to the email notifications that go to the generic emails for the fostering agency's areas.

On Call Social Workers

It is very important that rotas for the on call Social Workers are kept up to date by fostering agency areas and that their most recent rota is sent to the central team as soon as it is changed. The on call Social Worker will need to be able to receive phone calls from 2300. The on call Social Worker will check their email for notifications from the central team of any ongoing situations.

Weekends and Public Holidays Only. As above, and:

- At 0900, the on call Social Workers will send over an email notification to the support team of any ongoing situations. This will include any of the notifications that the support team sent to the on call Social Worker the night before that remain ongoing.
- All staff members will ensure that any recordings are on CHARMS at the time of handover. The central team cannot create a monitoring or notifiable event or input information on behalf of any on call Social Worker
- Predictable events that may be anticipated to occur 'out of hours' (e.g. a particular child's known propensity to going missing, placements known to be at imminent risk of disruption or crisis), will be routinely notified to the OOH service by day-time staff, together with any specific contingency actions as may be recommended
- All support team staff and on call Social Workers must record all information received and any actions taken using the CHARMS system (or specific mechanisms provided by any operating area not on the CHARMS system). All Community fostering agency areas are informed of any updates via e-mail to a dedicated email address for information or action as soon as the 'daytime' office next opens for business.

Monitoring Events and Notifiable Events

The OOH team or on call Social Worker will add a progress action 'OOH - Monitoring / Notifiable Event' and complete the prompts within the body of the progress action notes. Fostering agencies will not routinely be contacted in respect of these incidents, unless there are reasons for doing so. The OOH team has no input into decisions about what constitutes a monitoring or notifiable event – this is a decision taken by the relevant fostering agency.

Upon completion, the OOH team or on call Social Worker must inform the relevant staff via the dedicated email address. The allocated Supervising Social Worker will review the content of the report, digitally sign the progress action to acknowledge receipt and carry out all necessary actions or follow-up's, this includes creating the appropriate monitoring or notifiable event progress action, copying the detail from the OOH record, completing the notification form and notifying all relevant agencies. The CHARMS IT system generates appropriate forms specific to the fostering agency's area and should be completed as necessary. Please note that reporting procedures and requirements differ across the Community. Please refer to local procedures for guidance.

Note: for Monitoring Events which occur out of hours, and which may require subsequent notification to any statutory authority (Local Authority, Trust, HSE, OFSTED, CSSIW, Care Inspectorate, HIQA etc.), the responsibility for completing the Notifiable Events proforma and dispatching rests with the relevant fostering agency ensuring timescales for completion are met. The OOH service, whether it be the central team or regional or on call Social Worker, will supply the details received or action taken, using the above process as standard and discuss with their manager

Recording

The OOH service has access to the CHARMS system to record all contacts. All support team staff and on call Social Workers must record all information received and any actions taken using the CHARMS system, ensuring that all updates and progress items are clearly indicated as occurring out of hours by checking the 'Duty' tick box, or using the Progress Item 'Contact Log –OOH/EDT'.

The start and finish time of all actions must also be recorded. All Community fostering agencies are informed of any updates via e-mail to a dedicated email address for information or action as soon as the 'day-time' office next opens for business. Recordings will include observations about the foster parent where it is felt their practice or response may have impacted on the child. These observations will inform future reviews. Monthly performance reports will be produced detailing calls received, and actions taken.

All recordings made by the OOH service will be made in line with the Polaris Community Data Protection Policy. All recordings or conversations will be carried out confidentially within each staff member's home setting.

A record of all calls to the Support Team is made on the work log. This is for information only and may be referred to later in the event of a query from the Community.

Allegations against staff or foster parents

The Out of Hours team member must contact the on call social worker for the agency if a child or young person makes an allegation of abuse against a foster parent or member of staff. In such situations, the primary responsibility is to ensure the safety of the child or young person in the home, and arrangements for doing this will need to be discussed with the Out of Hours team on every such occasion. The On call social worker should contact the Registered Manager or On-Call Manager to discuss what action should be taken in the event of an allegation.

Business Continuity Management

In the event of the OOH support team invoking its Business Continuity Action Plan (BCAP), a message will be sent to advise any callers that they will need to contact their specific on call line for their specific fostering agency area. Each fostering agency should follow its own BCAP in the event of an emergency.

See also 'Emergency Referrals OOH's Service Procedure/Process on page 16

Emergency Referrals OOH's Service Out-of-Hours Fostering (All Fostering Services)

This procedure ensures that staff and foster parents are informed of the service provided by the Emergency Referrals Out of Hours (OOHs) team, the process to access the team and the roles and responsibilities for a child being placed in an emergency outside of the 'normal' Office hours. The objective of this service is to help the Local Authority match and place a child / young person in an emergency with an approved foster parent out of hours.

This Emergency Referrals Service comprises of experienced Referral Managers and Referral Officers who work with the Duty Local Authority Social Work teams to assist with finding a place of safety for children. It is overseen by the Head of Referrals, a qualified Social Worker. The service covers all of the Fostering Agencies within the Polaris Community and works with the approved foster families with vacancies to take children / young people on an Out of Hours basis from 5pm – 9am and all day on weekends and Bank / Public Holidays.

Children and Young People Requiring Placements During Out of Hours (OOHs)

The Local Authorities (LA) / Trusts make contact daily, seeking foster homes for children aged 0 to 18. These can be Police Protected, solo children or sibling groups, babies, children, and young people. Sanctuary seeking young people also need foster homes.

The PEROS (Polaris Emergency Referrals OOHs Service) will always consider any / all preferences of Foster Parents who are available for OOHs placements.

OOHs and Children or Young People with Complex Needs

During OOHs, the PEROS team do not place children or young people with complex, challenging behaviours. We will not match children and young people who require pre-placement planning and additional support; examples of these are:

- Gang affiliated,
- Children who go missing from home,
- Criminal behaviours / remanded,
- Harmful sexual behaviours,
- Known child sexual exploitation.
- Parent & child arrangements where risks need managing.
- Children and young people with disabilities where pre-placement planning is needed.

Most referrals received in emergency OOHs are children and young people who may be unknown to the Local Authority and are still living with their birth family. The PEROS team additionally receive children who are on the periphery of care and those who require a foster placement move due to the breakdown of an existing foster placement or, existing care arrangement.

Some examples of these are:

- Birth families are in hospital with no other family members or friends to care for the child/ren.
- Birth parents have been reported as being under the influence of alcohol/drugs.
- Children have refused to return home due to allegation/abuse/neglect.
- Sudden death of birth parents.
- Where children have been made subject to a Police Protection Order (PPO).

The Polaris Emergency Referrals OOH Service process

Polaris have a designated, enthusiastic, and experienced team of Referral Managers and Officers who receive calls from Local Authorities between 5pm and 9am, seven days a week, including weekends and public holidays.

1. A call is received from the Local Authority / Trust requesting an emergency placement for a child/ren.
2. The Local Authority shares all available information with the PEROS Referrals Officer / Manager via telephone call.
3. PEROS Referrals Officer / Manager will explore the foster families with have on the OOH's vacancy list and will then explore the potential match with available Foster families. If at the initial stage of receiving the Referral information the Referrals Officer /Manager is unsure they will speak to the Head of Referrals for further matching to be considered before contacting the foster family.
4. Any approved foster family who is on the Referrals OOH's Vacancy List and is available to work OOHs would have had prior discussions with their Supervising Social Worker and Registered Manager. If there are other CiC (Children in Care) placed in the foster family home placing alongside permission in principle would have been sought by the foster families Supervising social Worker prior to the family being placed on the Emergency Referrals OOH's Vacancy List.
5. If the PEROS Referrals Officer / Manager identifies the Foster Parent as a suitable match, then contact will be made to share the information about the child / young person.
6. If the Foster Parent is in agreement with the match and wishes to proceed, the PEROS Referrals Officer / Manager will advise the Head of Referrals for approval and the Agency's Fostering Duty Team to advise them a match has been made.
7. The PEROS Referrals Officer / Manager will then email the Local Authority / Trust with an agreement that includes any provisions of the placement match. Fostering arrangement

conditions will also be included, stating that the fostering arrangement will last from a minimum of three and a maximum of five nights.

8. The Local Authority / Trust Duty Social Worker or the Police, and sometimes both, will bring the child or young person to the placement.
9. The PEROS Referrals Officer / Manager will share all information with the Fostering Agency Supervising Social Worker / Fostering Advisors and Registered Manager via email.
10. Once a child / young person is in placement with the foster family the PEROS Referrals Officer / Referrals Manager will place the child/ren onto CHARMS and will upload any paperwork and email correspondence received. The next working day the relevant Agency's Referrals Team will complete all the Start of Placement paperwork and add the child/ren to Access.

Matching During OOHs

Matching Foster Parents with the right foster child or young person is always taken seriously and a top priority. The ultimate decision lies with the Foster Parent when it comes to approving or declining a match OOHs.

It is common to receive limited information when Local Authority Referral Forms are not available outside of Office hours. The experienced PEROS team work to identify risks, gather relevant information and discuss the match, using professional curiosity to actively explore any gaps in the matching, asking Local Authorities / Trusts relevant questions and communicating that with the foster family.

How long do OOHs placements last?

The placement is for a minimum of three and a maximum of five nights, giving the Social Work Teams time to consider the match in more detail. They can then decide, where all parties agree, that this is a suitable short-term match or that the child/ren or young person needs to move on. If the placement is an appropriate and safe match, some children and young people placed during an emergency OOHs end up remaining with that foster family short-term.