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# Commissioning Permanent Fostering Placements from External Providers: An Exploration of Current Policy and Practice

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## Abstract

Local authorities across England and Wales have been purchasing fostering placements from the independent sector for their children in care since before the start of the New Labour era in the mid 1990s. Significant developments have occurred since then with a clear policy steer towards public sector commissioning of all children's, including fostering, services from private and voluntary organisations. This article explores, with reference to a recent study, how policy directives from central government have impacted upon the practice of six local authorities and six independent fostering agencies in respect of the commissioning and provision of long-term and permanent fostering placements and related services. It examines the experiences and views of key commissioners and providers in these agencies and sets these alongside each other. In so doing, a number of themes are apparent and, from these, a new policy direction may be emerging. At a time of imminent public finance constraints and an emerging political consensus, the requirement for local authorities to outsource fostering services from the non-governmental sector looks increasingly likely.

**Keywords:** [Commissioning](#), [independent fostering providers](#), [permanent fostering](#)

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