



Bracknell Forest Local Safeguarding Children Board

BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL REPORT TO LSCB

ANNUAL PRIVATE FOSTERING REPORT 2015-16

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the LSCB of the Private Fostering activity undertaken by Children's Social Care's (CSC) between 01/04/15 - 31/03/16 and includes the raising awareness actions with the public and professionals who have contact with children in the community. It should be read in conjunction with the Private Fostering Statement of Purpose 2016/17.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 For LSCB to note the actions and progress of Children's Social Care in implementing the existing legislation relevant to private fostering set out in Part 9 of, and Schedule 8 to, the Children Act 1989, and regulations made under Part 9 of that Act: The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

The regulations require local authorities to satisfy themselves of the suitability of a proposed arrangement or otherwise exercise their powers to prohibit, or to impose requirements on, the arrangement before the child is privately fostered, where advance notice of the arrangement is given, thereby providing additional safeguards for privately fostered children.

Together these define the requirements placed on the LA in respect of private fostering, including any arrangements where a pupil remains cared for within a boarding school for longer than two weeks during the holidays (to be treated as a Private Fostering arrangement).

- 2.2 For the LSCB to assist Children's Social Care in the task of raising awareness, ensuring that partner agencies are aware of their responsibilities towards privately fostered children in the community, particularly during Private Fostering week.

3. DEFINITION OF A PRIVATELY FOSTERED CHILD

- 3.1 A privately fostered child is defined as one under the age of 16 (18 if disabled) who is cared for by someone other than a parent or close relative as defined in section 105 of the Children Act 1989. Close relatives are defined as step-parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles or aunts (whether of full blood, half blood or marriage / affinity). Private foster carers may be from an extended family, for example, a cousin or great uncle. They may be a friend of the family, another non-relative, or someone

unknown who has advertised to offer to privately foster a child. Privately fostered children include children sent from abroad to stay with another family. A child is not privately fostered if the person caring for him or her has done so for fewer than 28 days and does not intend to do so for longer than that, or the child returns home regularly whilst being cared for by other people. (DfE)

4. SUMMARY OF PROGRESS AGAINST IDENTIFIED TARGETS / PRIORITIES

The duties of the LA have two components:

4.1 To assess the suitability of any private fostering arrangements and to provide ongoing monitoring and support to children who are privately fostered.

4.1.2 There is a clear process within Children's Social Care in respect of the assessment and management of private fostering arrangements. The process which follows the legal requirements (for assessment and meeting with the child and carers within defined timescales) is well embedded within the Children's and Family Placement Teams. As a result, notifications of new or potential private fostering arrangements are responded to in a timely manner and children, parents and carers are given clear information.

Where children are not previously known to Children's Social Care, an assessment is undertaken by the Duty Team social worker for the child and a social worker from Family Placement Team to assess the suitability of the carers. Where the child is known to Children's Social Care, the allocated social worker will continue to work that child and the process of assessment is completed as already described. Completed assessments are presented to Foster Panel for scrutiny before a senior manager gives final agreement to the 'suitability' of the arrangement.

Children are visited within the first seven days of notification of the arrangement whether this is a proposed or current arrangement where the child is already living with the carer. Following this, visits are at a minimum of six weekly intervals in the first year, and intervals of not more than 12 weeks in subsequent years. Carers can have ongoing support from the Family Placement Team if this is required.

4.1.3 There are currently two ongoing private fostering arrangements within Bracknell Forest. The number has been as high as five (July and August 2016) but three of these children are no longer the subject of private fostering arrangements due to now being over 16 years old or returning to the care of parents. The children in these arrangements are subject to a Child in Need (CIN) plan and during 2015/16 continue to receive visits in line with the regulations. Support has been further provided to the private foster carer of one of the families. Some one-to-one sessions to support parenting strategies has been offered by a Family Placement Team social worker.

During the last 12 months, there have been three new notifications of a private fostering arrangement. These are from different sources (UK boarder agency, court and the carer themselves) which indicates that the message around notifications is being heard. When notified we have always assessed these situations. It is deemed good practice to always ensure arrangements are thoroughly vetted to ensure they meet the criteria and arrangements for children are safe.

4.1.4 During 2015/16 the number of notifications showed an increase on the previous year (zero in 2014/15). It is useful to note that over the last three years a number of notifications have been made by Education teams, including the School Admissions, Education Welfare and individual schools.

This seems to evidence that the ongoing publicity and information sharing has had the impact of disseminating knowledge about private fostering and the requirements to inform the Local Authority.

- 4.1.5 There are six independent boarding schools within Bracknell Forest. The Family Placement Team contacts the Child Protection Designated Teachers within each school every term. This ensures that schools are routinely informed about the requirement to notify the Local Authority about any private fostering requirements; where a pupil remains cared for within a boarding school for longer than two weeks during the holidays. Each school is sent a form to provide information about such pupils and are asked to return the form to Children's Social Care even if there are no arrangements in place. The form has also been reviewed again this year to specifically highlight the issues of pupils boarding. This approach has been successful and ensures that no children are overlooked. There have been no notifications from the boarding schools of private fostering arrangements in 2015/16.

4.2 To raise public and professional awareness of private fostering and the requirement for parents and carers to notify the LA of any such arrangements or intended arrangements.

- 4.2.1 The responsibility for arranging publicity and raising awareness about private fostering sits within the Family Placement Team. Currently an Assistant Team Manager (ATM) and a Family Worker lead in this area and follow a rolling programme to meet with professionals and community groups and to distribute information in the form of leaflets, posters, pens, mugs etc and via the website. The ATM attends each social work team meeting within Children's Social Care at least once per year where a quiz or discussion is used to improve knowledge. Education Welfare Team meetings, Adult Mental Health Team, School Admissions Team, Family Intervention Project, Life Chances Team, Advisors and the Foster Panel.

New workers in Children's Social Care are provided with prompt cards and leaflets as a part of their induction in their new role. This work is carefully tracked and monitored to ensure that there are regular updates. Alongside this the private fostering policy and procedures document which was reviewed in August 2014. The manager meets with the policy officer to ensure procedures and policies are updated.

Publicity also takes the form of ensuring that posters and leaflets are updated and placed in GP surgeries and Children's Centres, mail drops to various community groups once per year and advertising in the newspaper three times per year.

- 4.2.2 In addition to the above, prompt cards are in place for professionals which sets out the requirements of the legislation along with contact details for Children's Social Care. This is shared with professional colleagues and, over the past six years, has been given to professionals when the manager from family placement meets with them. It has also been sent to all GPs in the area by their LSCB representative. A second prompt card for social workers details what is required when they visit a child in a private fostering arrangement. The private fostering cue cards for social workers have been reprinted and reflect current practice guidelines. The cards are laminated and in A5 size for ease of use and durability.

There are also four A5 leaflets for professionals, parents, carers and children/young people, which are used to support their understanding of roles and responsibilities.

There are information packs for parents, carers and young people (where deemed appropriate), with the relevant notification forms and information booklets. A specific document for private foster carers to detail the information required and consent to seek relevant checks has been developed. A revised medical reference form is also in place. This supports the prompt delivery of information to families from the Duty Team to ensure all relevant information is provided and collected.

- 4.2.3 The publicity strategy is embedded within the service and work well. It covers a further range of professionals where visits to agencies such as School Nurses, Health Visitors, Nursery Managers, Designated Teachers Forum, Education Welfare Officers and Children's Centres. A letter outlining the purpose of Private Fostering is sent to the police. This year we have developed the strategy further with visits to teams or leaflet mail-drops to Housing, Drug and Alcohol Service, Childminding Services, Educational Psychology Service and Libraries.
- 4.2.4 Information sharing with particular groups of professionals who have considerable contact with the public but who have not seemed previously to be linked with notifications, in particular the Police and workers within Health and Education. We have also liaised with a worker from Early Years who works with families whose first language is not English. As a result we are developing information sheets about private fostering to promote understanding for families in the three key languages identified; Lithuanian, Polish and Nepalese. Other languages identified e.g. Gurdu, Cantonese, Spanish and Hindu will also be provided with this service if required.

4. QUALITY ASSURANCE WITHIN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

- 4.1 In order to quality assure the decision making, practice and record keeping within the Children's Social Care (CSC) teams, an audit of private fostering arrangements was completed in October 2014. The overall aim of such an audit is to improve the outcomes for children and young people, through monitoring and evaluating the quality of service delivery in relation to private fostering arrangements.
- 4.2 The sample was all those cases as being privately fostered in March 2014. The tool used was designed to capture information that gives scope for objective analysis of the quality of practice, processes and management oversight. The audit identified that in all cases the child and the child's bedroom was seen and that the carer(s) were seen, interviewed and their views were recorded. In all cases, visits were carried out within seven days of Children's Social Care being notified of the private fostering arrangement and ongoing social work visits to the child had taken place within timescales. There was evidence of management oversight in 100% of cases.
- 4.3 The audit highlighted that in many areas work with private fostering is of a good or required standard. An action plan was formulated including amendments to the audit tool to ensure that any future audits focus on specific areas.
- 4.4 Moving forward it had been agreed that an overview of any new private fostering arrangements will be read by the Head of Service for LAC within 42 days and prior to these being presented to the Foster Panel. Therefore management overview can be clearly recorded at each stage.

6. ACTIONS DURING 2015/16

6.1 Children's Social Care is always seeking ways to improve, be proactive regarding reviewing of all aspects of the private fostering process regularly. During 2015/16 the Family Placement Team have reviewed and amended the following:

1. Increased the number of agencies we visit to promote private fostering
2. Reviewed the cue cards for social workers and professionals
3. Reviewed the letter that is sent to boarding schools
4. Reviewed the private fostering policy and procedures
5. Developed links with the Early Years to enable information to be translated and shared for families whose first language is not English and develop awareness re private fostering.
6. Reviewed the current web pages and changed the location of the private fostering information
7. Updated the annual Private Fostering Statement of Purpose for 2016/17.

7. ACTION PLAN 2016/17

7.1 There are plans to continue this review and updating process in 2015/16 by:

Action	Who	When	Comment
To review the Bracknell Forest website pages re Private Fostering and to include Private Fostering notification forms that parents and carers can use. Ensure Statement of Purpose 2016/17 uploaded.	Family Placement Team ATM/TM Comms Team	September 2016	
To continue to develop links with Early Years and ensure information is translated and produced in the appropriate language.	Family Placement Team ATM/TM	By end of December 2016	Leaflets have been translated into Russian and Spanish as needed
Review the Private Fostering Audit tool.	Family Placement Team ATM/TM Quality Assurance Officer	By end of September 2016	
To continue to review the range and type of media advertising to promote awareness.	Family Placement Team ATM/TM	1 x per year 3 x per year	Posters, Flyers, pull up banners, mail drops Newspaper
Review the electronic recording system to provide a more streamlined system which continues to support Private Fostering arrangements.	Family Placement Team ATM/TM IT Department	By end of December 2016	New Mosaic recording system being introduced in Spring 2016
Quality assure new private fostering arrangements by Head of Service within 42 days of notification.	Family Placement Team ATM/TM/ HoS	From April 1st 2016	

Links with partner agencies, community faith group's presentations with partner agencies to provide training.	Family placement ATM/ FW	December 2016	
Continue information sessions to professionals who have face to face contact with children and families within the council and partner agencies.	Family placement ATM/ FW	December 2016	
Celebrate the private fostering week between in July 2016 with targeted awareness campaign amongst professionals and the general public.	Publicity Officer /ATM	July 2016	

8. CHALLENGES OR RISKS

8.1 There is a need to ensure that private fostering is 'kept in mind' by public and professionals alike. In a busy and fast paced world, this very small but potentially very vulnerable group of children need to remain the focus of our work. There is a need for all agencies to be aware of the definition of private fostering and that the LSCB support the raising awareness of the responsibilities for privately fostered children and young people. This will enable social workers to assess the needs of the children and the suitability of the arrangements and therefore safeguard these children.

9. CONSULTATIONS

None for this report.

Background Papers (if any)

None

Appendices (if any)

Statement of Purpose for Private Fostering 2016/17 is available at:

www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/private-fostering-service-statement-of-purpose-2016-to-2017.pdf or on www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/privatefostering

Contact for further information

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