

Safeguarding children together
Bracknell Forest Local Safeguarding Children Board

LSCB FORUM REPORT

ANNUAL PRIVATE FOSTERING REPORT DATE: 13.05.2019

REPORT FROM: Peter Hodges, Head of Life Chances, Children's Social Care

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 01/04/18 - 31/03/19 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 2019/20.

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.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 Together these define the requirements placed on the local authority 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).
- 2.4 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)

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4. SUMMARY OF PROGRESS AGAINST IDENTIFIED TARGETS / PRIORITIES

The duties of the local authority 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.

- 4.1.1 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 both 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.
- 4.1.2 Where children are not previously known to Children's Social Care, an assessment is undertaken by the Assessment 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 with the child and the process of assessment is completed as already described. Completed assessments are presented to the Foster Panel for scrutiny before a senior manager gives final agreement to the 'suitability' of the arrangement.
- 4.1.3 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.
- 4.1.4 There are currently no ongoing private fostering arrangements within Bracknell Forest. However, there have been 3 children who have been privately fostered during 2018/19. The children in these arrangements are subject to a Child in Need (CIN) plan and during 2018/19 continued to receive visits in line with the Regulations. The assessment of the carers of one of these children was recently completed and has been presented to Foster Panel for quality assurance and oversight.
- 4.1.5 During the last 12 months, there have been 2 new notifications of private fostering arrangements. Both notifications came from the private foster carers. One child was already involved with Children's Social Care, and the other child was not previously known. When notified, both were assessed in line with good practice, to ensure the arrangements are thoroughly vetted and meet the criteria and arrangements for children are safe. One further potential notification did not become a private fostering arrangement.
- 4.1.6 During 2018/19 the number of notifications has remained low, and it is interesting to note that whilst in recent years a number of notifications have been made by Education teams, including the School Admissions team, Education Welfare and individual schools, this year's both came from the private foster carers. This seems to suggest that although the numbers are small, the ongoing publicity and information sharing has had the impact of disseminating knowledge about private fostering and the requirements to inform the Local Authority.
- 4.1.7 There are five independent boarding schools within Bracknell Forest. The Family Placement Team contacts the Head Teachers within each school each term. This

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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 is asked to return the form to Children's Social Care even if there are no arrangements in place. 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 2018/19.

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) leads in this area, with assistance from the Recruitment and Publicity Officer. A rolling programme is followed to distribute information in the form of leaflets, posters, the website and posts on social media including Facebook and Twitter. The Assistant Team Manager is available to attend team meetings across the directorate around Private Fostering. New workers in Children's Social Care are provided with leaflets as a part of their induction in their new role. The private fostering policy and procedure was updated in April 2018.

4.2.2 Publicity also took the form of ensuring that posters and leaflets are placed in GP surgeries, schools and Children's Centres, mail drops to various community groups which took place during Private Fostering Week activities in July as well as general fostering recruitment activity. The Bracknell Forest website has been updated during this year, and includes a new animated video guide on private fostering, which gives clear information to the wider community of what constitutes private fostering and what actions should be taken. The animation has been used at Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel and at the Designated Teaching Leads attended by schools in Bracknell Forest.

4.2.3 Prompt cards are available for professionals which sets out the requirements of the legislation along with contact details for Children's Social Care. They have 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.

4.2.4 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 is available and 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.

4.2.5 The publicity strategy is embedded within the service. It covers a further range of professionals such as School Nurses, Health Visitors, Nursery Managers, Designated Teachers forum, Education Welfare Officers, Children's centres and the

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Police. Leaflets have also been sent to Housing, Drug and Alcohol service, Child-minding services, Educational Psychology Service and Libraries.

- 4.2.6 Leaflets are available in Lithuanian, Polish and Nepalese for families. Other languages will also be provided if required.

5 QUALITY ASSURANCE WITHIN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

- 5.1 In order to quality assure the decision making, practice and record keeping within the Children's Social Care (CSC) teams, monthly file audits take place and these include private fostering cases. 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 the child's identified needs. One private fostering case was audited in April 2018 and graded Good.
- 5.2 A monthly review of the current private fostering cases by the Family Placement Team has confirmed that the children subject to private fostering arrangement are seen regularly, mostly within required timescales, their views are sought and recorded, and there is evidence of management oversight.

6. ACTION PLAN 2018/19

- 6.1 Below are the plans in relation to activity for the coming year to further promote Private Fostering and reassure the LSCB that all notifications are being completed.

Action	Who	When
Review the Bracknell Forest website pages and Private Fostering materials and ensure the Statement of Purpose 2019/20 is uploaded to the website	Family Placement Team ATM, Family Worker and Recruitment and Publicity Officer (RPO)	July 2019
Designated Family Worker to act as Private Fostering Champion and attend team meetings, offer training/consultation and work with the RPO on publicity	Family Placement Team (Family Worker)	June 2019
To continue to review the range and type of media advertising to promote awareness	Family Placement Team ATM and RPO	Review July 2019
Links with partner agencies, community faith groups, presentations with partner agencies to offer training and consultation	Family placement FW	July 2019

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Private Fostering Week (July 19) with targeted awareness campaign amongst professionals and the general public	RPO/ATM/FW	July 2019
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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 of 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.

Appendices

Statement of Purpose for private Fostering 2019/20

Contact for further information

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