



Annual Report on Private Fostering 2014-15

1 Introduction

1.1 A private fostering arrangement is one made privately for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Private foster carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt. A private foster carer may be a friend of the family, the parent of a friend of the child, or someone previously unknown to the child's family who is willing to privately foster a child. However, a person who is a relative as defined by the Children Act 1989, i.e. a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full or half blood or by marriage) or a step-parent (i.e. by marriage to a parent) will not be a private foster carer. The period for which the child is cared for and accommodated by the private foster carer should be continuous, but if a child receives an occasional short break this is not considered to break that continuity.

1.2 The primary responsibility of the local authority is to safeguard and promote the welfare of these children and young people by:

- Meeting the duty to promote public awareness of the requirement to notify the local authority of private fostering arrangements and therefore to reduce the number of 'unknown' private fostering arrangements
- Responding to notifications and assessing the private fostering arrangements
- Meeting the duty to support private fostering arrangements

1.2 This responsibility is underpinned by the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005.

1.3 Under Standard 5 of the NMS, local authorities are expected to effectively monitor the way in which they discharge their duties and functions in relation to private fostering, including:

"The local authority provides a written report each year, for consideration by the Director of Children's Services, which includes an evaluation of the outcomes of its work in relation to privately fostered children within its area." (Supporting Criteria 7.9, NMS for PF)

"The local authority reports annually to the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board on how it satisfies itself that the welfare of privately fostered children in its area is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, including how it co-operates with other agencies in this connection." (Supporting Criteria 7.10, NMS for PF)

1.4 This document sets out the Brighton & Hove City Council's latest Annual Report on Private Fostering and presented to the Brighton & Hove LSCB Vulnerable Children and

CSE Strategy Group on 15th October 2015. It was considered by the Director of Children's Services (DCS) on 12th Nov 2015.

- 1.5 The report has been written by Tina James, Quality Assurance Programme Manager, based in the Safeguarding & Quality Assurance Unit, Children's, Health, Safeguarding & Care, Brighton & Hove City Council.

2 Planning on Private Fostering

- 2.1 Standard 1 of the National Minimum Standards requires that the local authority has a written statement or plan, which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out. The Council's 'Statement on Private Fostering' has been reviewed and updated and will be presented (with this Annual Report) to the Director of Children's Services.
- 2.2 The private fostering functions relating to responding to enquiries about new arrangements, assessing suitability and undertaking welfare visits are split between different teams in Children's Safeguarding & Offending. See 3.1 & 3.2 below.
- 2.3 The Quality Assurance Programme Manager, Children's Safeguarding & Offending, has lead responsibility for policy and development issues regarding private fostering.
- 2.4 The Quality Assurance Programme Manager maintains a link with the British Association of Adoption & Fostering's (BAAF) quarterly special interest group on private fostering. This enables local policy and practice to be developed in line with best practice from other authorities.

3 Notification Arrangements

- 3.1 The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) receives all enquiries and notifications about private fostering. All publicity states this service as the contact point: mash@brighton-hove.gcsx.gov.uk or 01273 290400.
- 3.2 Initial enquiries are screened by MASH and then passed to a MASH and Assessment Social Worker to undertake a single assessment to ascertain that this child is privately fostered. If the arrangement is confirmed as within the definition for private fostering then a suitability assessment will be carried out. On the basis that the local authority has no objection to the arrangement continuing, the casework responsibility will then transfer to the Child in Need Team to carry out the required ongoing welfare visits to see the child and provide support and advice to the private foster carers.
- 3.3 In 2014-15 a number of initiatives were undertaken to highlight the notification arrangements to existing and potential private foster carers, voluntary and statutory agencies, and members of the public as follows;
- Private Fostering materials have all been updated and re-printed to include the MASH contact details. The BHCC Private Fostering web page has also been refreshed

- Information about Private Fostering has been circulated via the Primary Care bulletin
- A Private Fostering briefing has been circulated to all Children's Service staff as part of the Social Work: Our Story
- Information about Private Fostering has been included in the School Governors Briefing
- Posters and leaflets about Private Fostering have been sent electronically to GPs via Brighton & Hove CCG
- Private fostering was included in Safeguarding training for GPs provided by the MASH
- The LSCB multi agency private fostering training has been refreshed and delivered to 55 Safeguarding Designated Persons (schools). Multi agency training has previously been cancelled due to low registration. In future, Private Fostering will be included in the LSCB training programme on 'Hidden Children' which should encourage more professionals to sign up.
- Information for parents about private fostering has been included in the BHCC School Admissions booklets; [Infant, Junior and Primary](#) and [Secondary School](#)
- The LSCB continues to raise awareness about Private Fostering with members of the public and professionals via social media and regular tweets.

4 Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare

- 4.1 The private fostering procedures were last reviewed and confirmed in October 2012 and are contained within the BHCC Children's Service Procedure Manual. Procedures for working with language schools have also been produced and a Private Fostering Handbook for social workers has been developed. The procedures will be reviewed again in October 2015.
- 4.2 The Quality Assurance Programme Manager, Children's Safeguarding and Offending, provides advice regarding issues relating to private fostering (e.g. whether the child's circumstances meet the definition of private fostering).
- 4.3 The assessment of the child, the carer and the accommodation is undertaken under the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families with accompanying DBS and other statutory checks and additional questions, taken from BAAF Form F2, to verify the suitability of the carer and their household. Any concerns over the suitability of the arrangement or carer are taken up the management line to the Head of Safeguarding (Children's Safeguarding & Offending).

5 Advice and Support

- 5.1 Ideally, if notification is received in advance, a worker will visit the prospective carer, child and parents before a private arrangement is made. In these cases advice and support will be given to ensure the prospective arrangement is appropriate or whether any support or referral to another agency would reduce the necessity for the child to be privately fostered. In all cases consideration will be given to ensure that arrangement is in the child’s best interests.
- 5.2 On each visit thereafter, the social worker will ensure that the child’s needs are being met and that the arrangement is and continues to be satisfactory. This includes giving advice, guidance and support as necessary to all parties and which is provided in different languages and formats as appropriate. Specific attention is paid to address the child’s religious, racial, cultural and linguistic needs as appropriate. If the arrangement proves unsatisfactory the parents will be advised and supported to make alternative arrangements
- 5.3 Where appropriate the allocated social worker will give advice on legal status solutions to safeguard and promote a child’s welfare for example recommending that a Residence Order is applied for.
- 5.4 Support and assistance is also provided to carers around benefits and housing. Occasionally, financial assistance is given to the carer to cover essential items to keep the child in the arrangement e.g. a bed for the child or school uniform but this is usually a one off payment.
- 5.5 Access to the Youth Advocacy Service (YAP) is offered to the child/young person where appropriate and where the child is deemed to be in need. Also, regular feedback is sought from children and young people living in private fostering arrangements (a summary of the findings is presented in 6.10).

6 Monitoring Compliance with Duties and Functions

- 6.1 The number of privately fostered children is constantly changing as new arrangements are referred and children move on - sometimes back to their parents - or when they reach 16 years (or 18 years if disabled).
- 6.2 Private Fostering activity has increased in 2015-15.

| <i>Private Fostering Arrangements during the year</i> | | | |
|---|---------|---------|---------|
| 2011-12 | 2012-13 | 2013-14 | 2014-15 |
| 4 | 17 | 34 | 45 |

- 6.3 At the start of the year (1st April 2014) there were 19 children living in private fostering arrangements. During the year, 26 new notifications were received and they were all confirmed as being private fostering within the definition.

- 6.4 All new notifications received an initial visit, with 88% taking place within 7 working days. *This is better than the England average for 2014/15 is 80%.*
- 6.5 Again, we saw an increase in the percentage of cases where visits to children were carried out within the timescales required by Regulation 8 of the Private Fostering legislation (which is at least 6 weekly in the first year). Visits were on time for 41 out of 45 cases which is 91%. *This is better than the England average of 67%*
- 6.6 In 2014-15 of the 26 new private fostering arrangements, 24 children are aged 10 to 16, one child is aged 5-9 and one child is under 5. Two children were born in the UK, and twenty four children were born overseas.
- 6.7 The new and proposed PF arrangements in 2014-15 can be grouped as follows;
 - *Children born overseas and living with distant relatives in Brighton & Hove*
 - Children born in Brighton & Hove who are living with family friends
 - Adolescents living with their friend’s family due to family breakdown
 - Young people from Europe studying at BHCC Secondary Schools and living with a host family, organised by their parents
 - Young people under 16 yrs studying at a language school or International College and living with a host family for more than 28 days
- 6.8 Twenty nine arrangements ended during the year, leaving a total of 16 children in Private Fostering arrangements at 31 March 2015.

| Reason why the Arrangement Ended: | Number |
|---|---------------|
| <i>(Using data fields proposed by Ofsted, Jan 14)</i> | |
| Overseas child returned voluntarily to country of origin | 9 |
| Overseas child returned to country of origin via Home Office intervention | 0 |
| UK born returned to parents | 2 |
| Became ‘looked after child’ | 0 |
| Educational/sporting/vocational opportunity ended | 0 |
| Child turned 16 (or 18 if disabled) | 12 |
| Moved to another private fosterer | 2 |
| Other | 4 |
| Total | 29 |

Note: ‘Other’: This relates to 4 young people who moved from the host family to the residential part of the college

7. Ofsted Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and Review of the effectiveness of the LSCB

The Ofsted Inspection took place during 14 April – 8 May 2015. As part of the inspection, a report on children known to the local authority who are currently being privately fostered was submitted, and a sample of cases open to Private Fostering were examined by Inspectors. In addition the Deputy Lead Inspector met with the Private Fostering Monitor and the MASH Team Manager to discuss the cases, performance and other activity.

The findings were positive overall and are published in the Ofsted report, June 2015 as follows;

Effective work identifies children living in private fostering arrangements. They and their carers are assessed by social workers to ensure arrangements are safe and needs are identified. This is mainly due to increased awareness of local language schools that arrange for children from abroad to live with local host families under private fostering arrangements. Appropriate support to privately fostered children is in place in almost all cases, although not all children are visited as regularly as they should be.

Note: 88% of initial visits to children in 2014-15 took place within 7 working days which is better than the England average of 80% for the same period. In addition, statutory visits to children were on time in 91% of cases. This is better than the England average of 67%.

8 Feedback from Children who are living in Private Fostering Arrangements

All children living in private fostering arrangements are provided with an information pack which includes a feedback questionnaire. The findings from the feedback we have received from young people during this period as follows;

- 9/10 young people are happy living with their carer*
- All young people feel safe with the people they live with
- All young people have someone to speak to if they have any concerns
- All young people feel that they are able to celebrate their religion and cultural festivals/events that are important to them
- All young people know how to make a complaint
- All young people know how to contact their social worker

*In one case, the young person was not happy living with the host family and subsequently arrangements have been made for him to live with another host family.

9 Future Plans for 2014-15

- 9.1 The BHCC Private Fostering procedures will be reviewed and updated in October 2015.
- 9.2 The LSCB will continue to raise awareness with professionals and the community using social media, newsletters, posters and flyers.
- 9.3 The LSCB multi agency private fostering training will be delivered as part of a new LSCB training on 'Hidden Children' to be delivered in the 2015-16 Programme.
- 9.4 Under the new Social Work Model of Practice which commences in October 2015, all private fostering notifications will be passed to the MASH for initial screening and to create a record on Carefirst. The Practice Manager with a lead for Private Fostering will oversee the initial screening event and agree the outcome. Where the outcome is private fostering, the case will be allocated to a POD so that a single assessment, and statutory checks/visits can be made and support for the child, parent and private foster carer can be provided. The designated lead for Private Fostering (social worker) will provide advice and support to social workers holding private fostering cases as required.
- 9.5 Children's Social Work will continue to seek feedback from children and young people who are living in Private Fostering arrangements. The findings will be used to further develop the service we provide.
- 9.6 Brighton & Hove LSCB will include Private Fostering as an area for compliance in the S11 audit¹
- 9.7 A thematic audit of Private Fostering cases will be undertaken in Quarter 1, 2016-17.
- 9.8 Links will be maintained with national and regional initiatives such as the BAAF Private Fostering Special Interest Group. **Note:** From 31 July 2015 BAAF amalgamated with Coram, Children's charity. The Private Fostering Group will continue to meet once a quarter and will be facilitated by the CoramBAAF Adoption & Fostering Academy.
- 9.9 The next annual report will be drafted in Summer 2016 following the submission of the PF1 Return 2015-16.

September 2015

¹ s.11 of the Children Act 2004 places duties on a range of organizations and individuals to ensure their functions – and any services that they contract out to others – are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Enquiries and referrals regarding possible private fostering cases in Brighton & Hove should be made to:

Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH),
Unit 14 Woodingdean Business Park
Hunns Mere Way
Brighton
BN2 6AH
Telephone: 01273 290400
Email: mash@brighton-hove.gcsx.gov.uk

Enquiries about the general arrangements for private fostering or consultation or requests for information about private fostering should be directed to the Private Fostering Monitor for Brighton & Hove City Council:

Tina James, Quality Assurance Programme Manager
Safeguarding & Quality Assurance Unit
Moulsecoomb Hub North Building
Hodshrove Lane, Moulsecoomb, BN2 4SE

Telephone: 01273 291209
Email: Tina.James@brighton-hove.gcsx.gov.uk