



Central Bedfordshire Council
and Bedford Borough Council

working together

Private Fostering

Annual Report

For the period
2011/2012

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FOREWORD

For the year 2011-2012, Central Bedfordshire continued to host the Private Fostering Service as a shared service on behalf of both unitary authorities. This report describes the activity of Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council's Private Fostering Service during the period 1st April, 2011 to 31st March, 2012, noting its achievements, clarifying the remit and focus of its work and identifying recommendations for the development of the service.

This annual report is part of the governance of the Private Fostering Provision required by Regulations.

It will be presented to the Directors of Children's Services in Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council. The Local Safeguarding Children's Boards in each authority will also consider this report in July 2012.

SECTION 1

1.0 - DEFINITION OF PRIVATE FOSTERING

- 1.01** The Children Act 1989 (section 66) defines private fostering as occurring when a child under 16 (or under 18 if disabled) is cared for and provided with accommodation, for 28 days or more by somebody other than a close relative, legal guardian or someone with parental responsibility. Close relatives are defined in the Act as step parents, siblings, brothers or sisters of the parents and grandparents. A private fostering arrangement is one which is made privately, that is to say without the involvement of the Local Authority.
- 1.02** Private foster carers maybe within the extended family such as cousins or Great Grandparents, or they may be a friend of the family or other non relative such as the parents if a boyfriend or girlfriend of the child in question.
- 1.03** For the purposes of the Act, parent includes unmarried or putative father. Relative means as above stated, whether by full, half-blood or by affinity or step-parent. Affinity refers to the relationship resulting from marriage, between the husband and the blood relations of the wife and also between the wife and the blood relations of the husband.
- 1.04** Examples of private fostering arrangements are;
- Children sent from abroad to stay with another family, usually to improve their English or for other educational purposes.
 - Asylum seeking and refugee children placed with an adult known to them, their family or their community;
 - Teenagers who, having problematic relationships with their parents, are staying in short term arrangements with friends or other non relatives;
 - Children living with host families arranged by language schools or other organisations;
 - Local children living apart from their families;
 - Young people who have wanted to remain in this country to continue their education but whose parents have returned to their country of origin;
 - Young children whose birth families are struggling to cope and turn to a friend or distant relative to care for the child.

1.1 - BACKGROUND

- 1.1.1** The Private Fostering service, in line with the Adoption and Fostering service, is hosted in Central Bedfordshire Council but provides to both Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council under a Service Level Agreement.
- 1.1.2** Both Councils' Local Safeguarding Children's Boards received an annual report in Autumn 2011 concerning private fostering activity in Bedfordshire during 2010-11.
- 1.1.3** The private fostering provision was inspected by Ofsted in each council in January/February 2012 as part of the Safeguarding and Looked After Children inspections. No concerns or actions were identified by the inspectors in respect of private fostering.

SECTION 2

2.0 – AWARENESS RAISING

- 2.0.1** The Council has continued to raise the awareness of private fostering within Children's Services, with fellow professionals, in partner agencies and within the community by a wide ranging and ongoing advertising and publicity programme. There has been a dedicated private fostering coordinator since 2010 initially covered by a locum worker and since March 2011 by a permanent worker.
- 2.0.2** The private fostering co-ordinator in conjunction with the Adoption & Fostering Service Recruitment Co-ordinator has continued to lead on the promotion of private fostering. Awareness raising activities have included;
- Adverts in local papers and radio advertising took place.
 - Articles have been placed in "Primary Times" a publication distributed to families of school age children.
 - Presentation of the annual report to each council's Local Safeguarding board in Autumn 2011, for dissemination to all partner agencies, including the Police, Probation and Ambulance Service, Councils including Housing, Early Years Services, Youth Services, and Voluntary Organisations.
 - Update of Private fostering information on both Councils' websites.
 - LSCB training.
 - Information on both Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils' employees' wage slips
 - Information on "What to do when receiving a call or personal enquiry about private fostering" sent to all Customer First Points of Contact including reception staff and child care teams duty desks.
- 2.0.3** Attendance at the quarterly BAAF Private Fostering Special Interest Group has continued throughout the year to ensure we develop best practice alongside our colleagues in neighbouring authorities.

2.1 – ADVERTISING 1ST APRIL 2011 – 31ST MARCH 2012

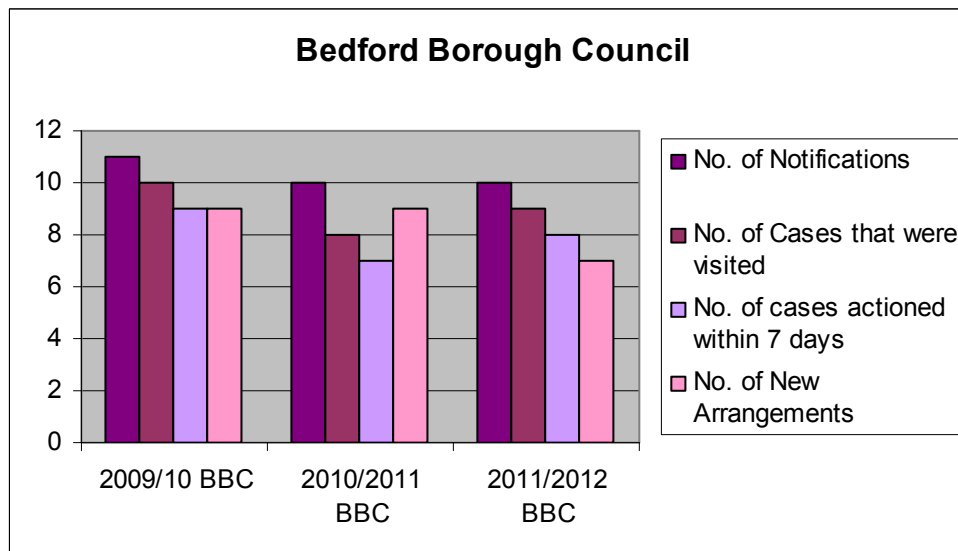
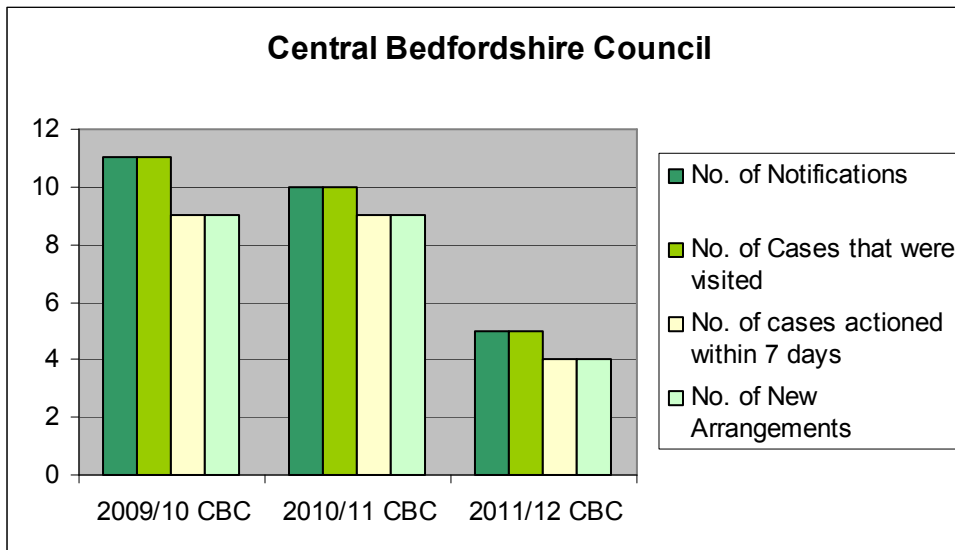
2.1.1 An annual plan is developed each year outlining activity to raise awareness amongst professionals and the local community

April 2011	Mailshot to local schools, state and private sector
	Advert in local newspaper
May 2011	Exhibition Stand – Young Farmers Annual Event
	Presentation LSCB - Great Denham
June 2011	Presentation LSCB – Dunstable Fire Station
July 2011	Exhibition Stand – Bedford Market
	Posters
	Presentation LSCB – Dunstable Fire Station
August 2011	Exhibition Stand – Bedford Market
	Advert in local papers
Sept 2011	Presentation LSCB – Great Denham
Nov 2011	Advert in local newspaper
March 2012	Advert in local newspaper
	Distribution of posters to GPs, parish councils, organised groups

SECTION 3

3.0 – STATISTICS

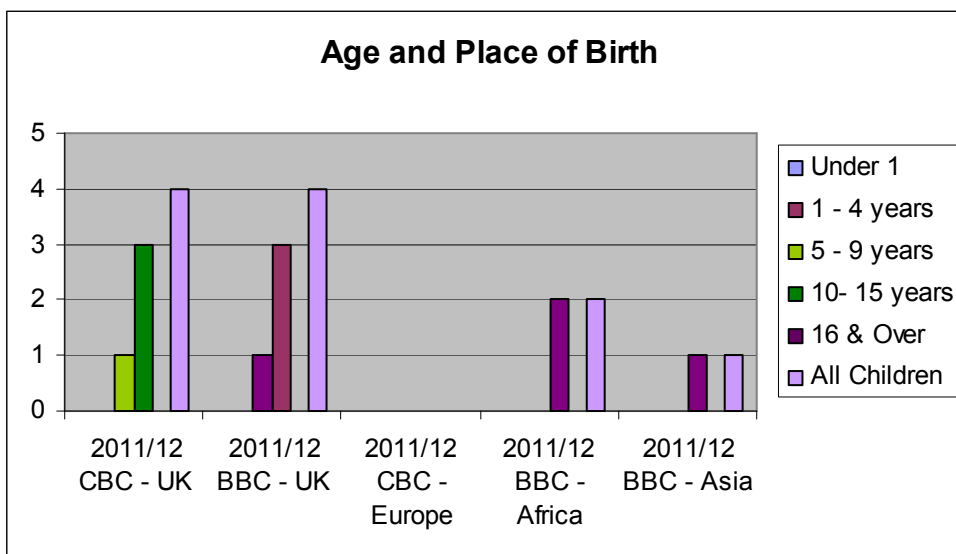
3.0.1 Each council has to submit data annually on the number of notifications received, how many of these notifications were responded to within 7 days, and how many of these cases were assessed as being a new private fostering arrangement.



3.0.2 Activity in the Bedford Borough Council area remained consistent in 2011-12 with similar levels of activity to previous years.

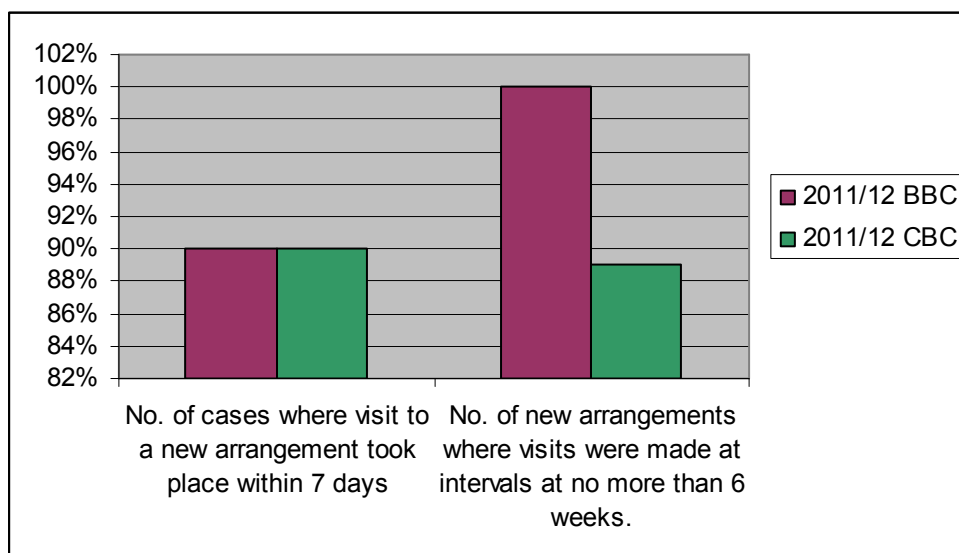
3.0.3 In Central Bedfordshire Council activity by way of notifications and ongoing cases decreased from the previous 12 months. There is no identifiable reason why this should be the case.

3.0.4 The councils also have to monitor the age and place of birth in respect of children in private fostering arrangements. The majority of children are white British and aged over 10 years at the time the private fostering arrangement commences.



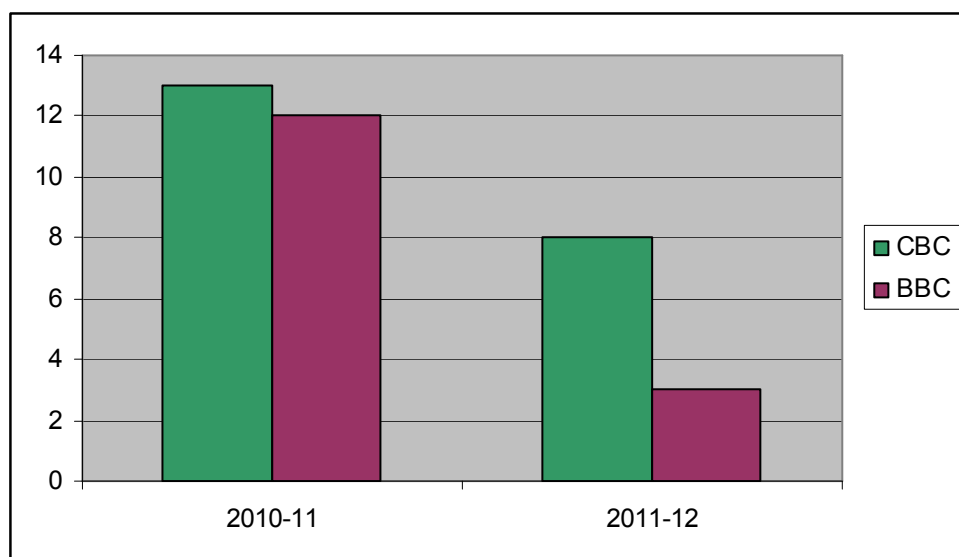
3.1 – MEETING TIMESCALES

- 3.1.1 The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 outline statutory timescales for visiting new arrangements and subsequent visits. Following notification of a new or proposed arrangement, the council must visit within 7 working days. In regard to ongoing arrangements the council must visit a privately fostered child at least every six weeks in the first year of the private fostering arrangement, and at least every 12 weeks in the second or subsequent year.
- 3.1.2 Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils have been committed to meeting the timescales set down in the Regulations for assessment of arrangements and visiting of children in private fostering arrangements. A tracking sheet is used by managers to ensure ongoing improvement in adherence to timescales. The recruitment of a dedicated worker for private fostering during 2010 improved the timeliness of some assessments and visits, and performance is better than in our comparator authorities.
- 3.1.3 In one case in each council the first visit was attempted but not achieved within 7 working days because of difficulty in contacting the family or finding them at home within the timescale.



3.1.4 Records are kept for the reasons that private fostering arrangements end. In 2011-12 the reasons were.

- 3 young people became 16
- 3 young people returned to care of their parents.
- 2 young people became looked after.
- 2 young person moved out of the area
- 1 arrangement was the responsibility of a neighbouring council and was transferred



3.2 – SUITABILITY OF ARRANGEMENTS

3.1. All new private fostering arrangements have to be assessed and a report compiled as to the suitability to meet the needs of the child. The decision on suitability usually rests with the Head of Adoption and Fostering, with appropriate discussion or decision making from the Assistant Director in complex cases. There were no concerns about the suitability of arrangements during 2011 – 12.

SECTION 4 - SUPPORT TO YOUNG PEOPLE

4.0 – ADVOCACY SUPPORT

- 4.0.2** Upon visiting a child or young person in a private fostering arrangement for the first time the social worker gives the child a child friendly pack which explains about private fostering and gives information for the many services provided for young people across the appropriate council area and the contact details of NYAS should they need independent advocacy.

4.1 – SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE POST 16

- 4.1.1** The Leaving and After Care Teams in each council provide a service to all young people who are approaching their 16th birthday and beyond, and have been within the care system. This service is accessible for all young people in private fostering arrangements where they need accommodation or advice and guidance to make a successful transition to adulthood. This is important in private fostering as the legal age at which a child is no longer deemed to be privately fostered is 16 (18 if disabled) and for many young people their placement may end at 16 leaving them with little or no support.
- 4.1.2** A Supportive Lodging Scheme has been developed so that young people who have been in private fostering situations may be eligible for appropriate accommodation locally with carers who can offer them transitional support to help them learn to live independently.

SECTION 5 – NATIONAL MINIMUM STANDARDS

5.0 – EVALUATION AGAINST NATIONAL MINIMUM STANDARDS

5.1 STANDARD 1 – Statement on Private Fostering

- A Statement of Purpose has been completed setting out the duties and functions in relation to private fostering. This document was reviewed and updated during 2011.

5.2 STANDARD 2 - Notification

As detailed in Section 2 of this report awareness raising has continued across both councils in 2011 – 12.

- A manager from the Adoption and Fostering Services attends both Councils' weekly resource panels, thus ensuring that any private fostering arrangements which come to light and have not been notified are then referred to the Fostering duty team.
- The Family Group Meeting Service continues to be used effectively by proposed and actual private foster carers, parents of privately fostered children and privately fostered children and young people.

5.3 STANDARD 3 – Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare

- The service provides a specific private fostering coordinator post to oversee the private fostering service in conjunction with the fostering manager.
- Assessment social workers in the fostering service have also undertaken assessments of private fostering arrangements to ensure the skills are circulated within the service and to enable assessments to be completed within timescales when the private fostering coordinator is not available.
- All workers have received monthly supervision and all private fostering arrangements are monitored through this process.
- The Head of Service Fostering and Adoption has responsibility for determining the suitability of private fostering arrangements.

5.5 STANDARD 4 – Advice and Support

- The co-ordinator for private fostering ensures that private foster carers receive appropriate advice and support by providing them with an information pack, timely visits and access to a named worker.
- Information Packs are produced for private foster carers which have detailed written information about private fostering including the BAAF information booklet on private fostering, welfare benefits and information and contact details for other useful organisations. This pack was updated during 2011.

5.6 STANDARD 5 – Advice and Support - Parents .

- Parents are notified in writing when a private fostering arrangement is endorsed.
- The assessing social worker, where possible, visits the parent or person with parental responsibility to discuss and explain the assessment and services available and to obtain their wishes and feelings.
- An Information Pack is produced for parents or those with parental responsibility which has detailed written information about private fostering, and contact details for other useful organisations. This was reviewed in 2010.

5.7 STANDARD 6 – Advice and Support - Children .

- An Information Pack on private fostering is given to all privately fostered children. This was updated during 2011.
- Some children continue to be supported by social workers from the Family Support teams where their needs or circumstances are particularly complex.

5.8 STANDARD 7 – Monitoring Compliance with Duties and Functions in relation to Private Fostering .

- Both Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire Councils continued to have robust performance monitoring and reporting systems in relation to private fostering activity.
- PF1 reports were completed by both councils and submitted to the DfE as required.
- An annual report is provided to the Director of Children's Services in each authority.

SECTION 6 – SUMMARY & DEVELOPMENTS

- 6.1** The service continues to have a dedicated Private Fostering Coordinator which has enabled development and progression of the service, alongside the development of expertise in this practice area.
- 6.2** Whilst the number of notifications has increased since 2006 when the requirement was first enacted, levels remain below those of comparator authorities. Awareness- raising activities and advertising campaigns continue and there is a good level of awareness amongst local professionals. Neither council has any of the features that may impact on private fostering numbers, such as language schools, boarding schools, transient or migrant populations.
- 6.3** Central Bedfordshire has continued on behalf of the two Councils to proactively promote private fostering awareness raising and to work with the children and young people in these situations to ensure they are safe, well cared for and reach their full potential to become positive citizens.
- 6.4** In March 2012 following the annual review of the Shared Service Level Agreement it was decided to end the shared service arrangement as of 31 January 2013. Key staff in both councils will be meeting regularly during 2012 to plan the arrangements for delivery of private fostering duties for February 2013 and beyond.

This information can be made available in
Large print and in other languages if required

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