



Central Bedfordshire Council
and Bedford Borough Council
working together

Appendix **C**

Private Fostering

Annual Report

For the period
2012/2013

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FOREWORD

For the year 2012-2013, 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, 2012 to 31st March 2013, 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 Summer 2013.

SECTION 1 - CONTEXT

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 Summer 2012 concerning private fostering activity in Bedfordshire during 2011-12.
- 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 – AWARENESS RAISING DUTY

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.
- 2.02 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 2012, 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.

2.1 – AWARENESS RAISING 1ST APRIL 2012 – 31ST MARCH 2013

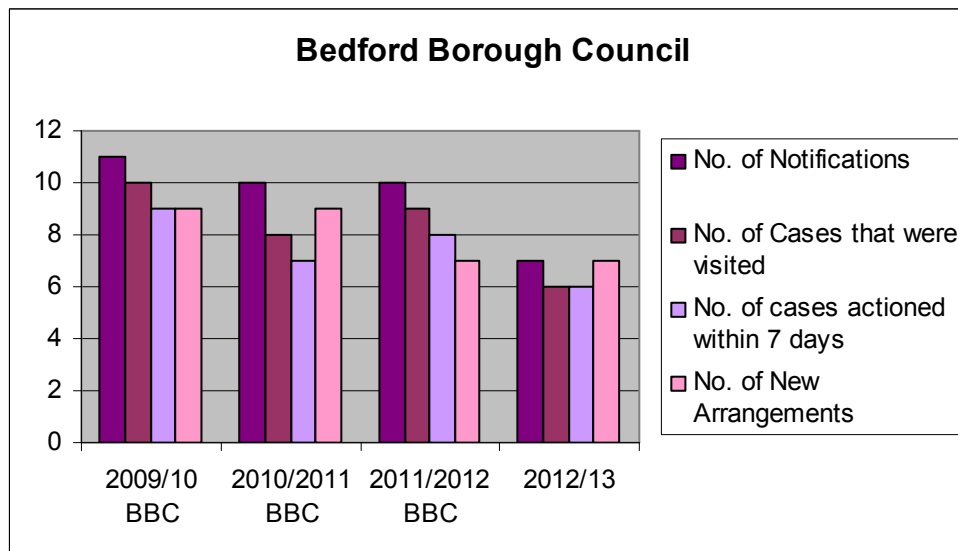
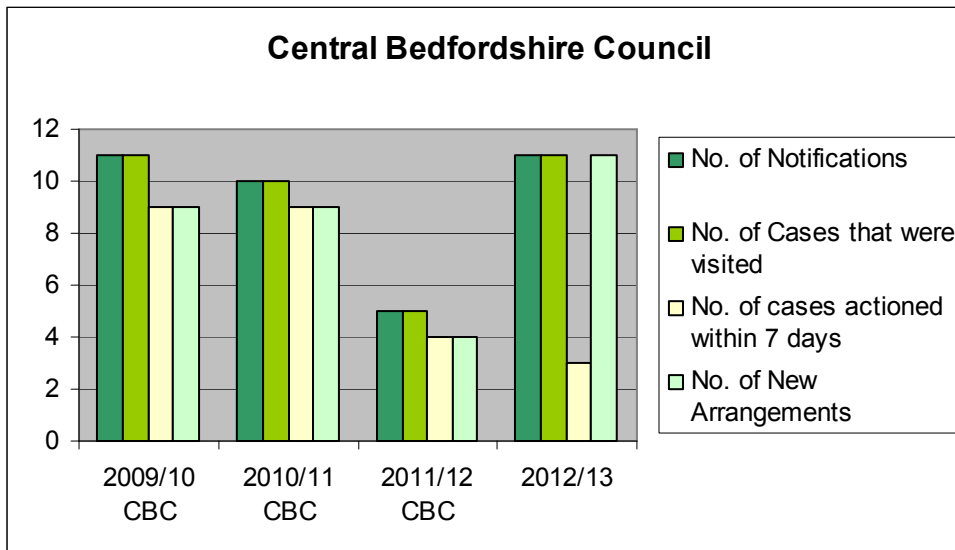
2.1.1 An annual plan is developed each year outlining activity to raise awareness amongst professionals and the local community

April 2012 – March 2012	Delivery of awareness-raising at 2-day safeguarding course run by LSCB. 16 courses in this period.
May 2011	Exhibition Stand – Canal Festival
July 2011	Exhibition Stand – Bedford Market
August 2011	Exhibition Stand – Bedford Market
January 2013	Reprinting and distribution of Private Fostering leaflet
February 2013	Private Fostering Campaign Week: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adverts in local newspaper, including in Punjabi and Polish • Press release • Editorials in both councils magazines • Articles in both councils' schools e-letters • Advert on both councils websites • Twitter and Facebook updates • Update in Members bulletin – Central Bedfordshire
March 2013	Advert in Bedford Hospital on location maps Distribution of posters and leaflets to GP surgeries, health centres, schools, council premises and faith organisations

SECTION 3 - PERFORMANCE

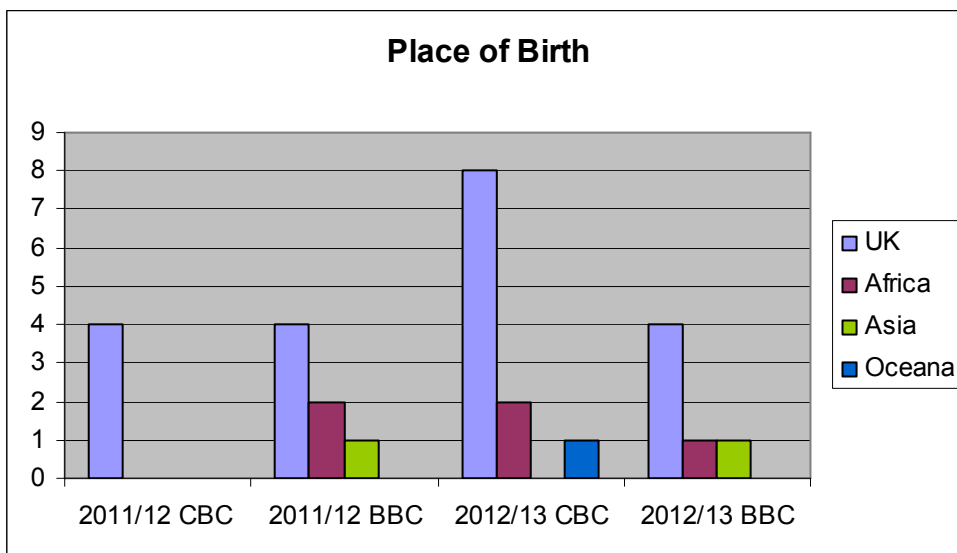
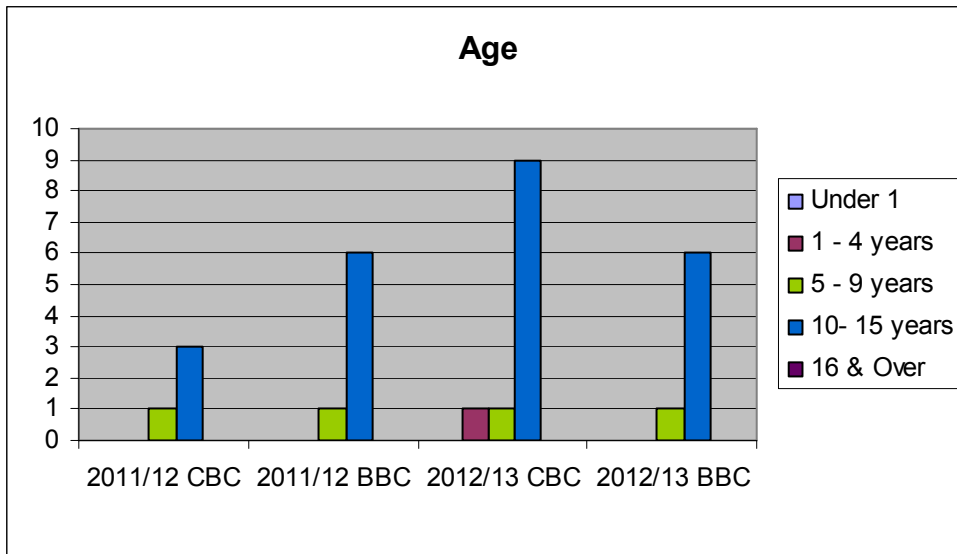
3.0 – STATISTICS

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 Levels of activity across the councils increased overall with more notifications and new arrangements than in 2011-12. However activity in the Bedford Borough Council area declined and activity in Central Bedfordshire increased from the previous year. There is no identifiable reason why this should be the case. Overall numbers remain small, but in line with statistical neighbours.

3.0.3 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.

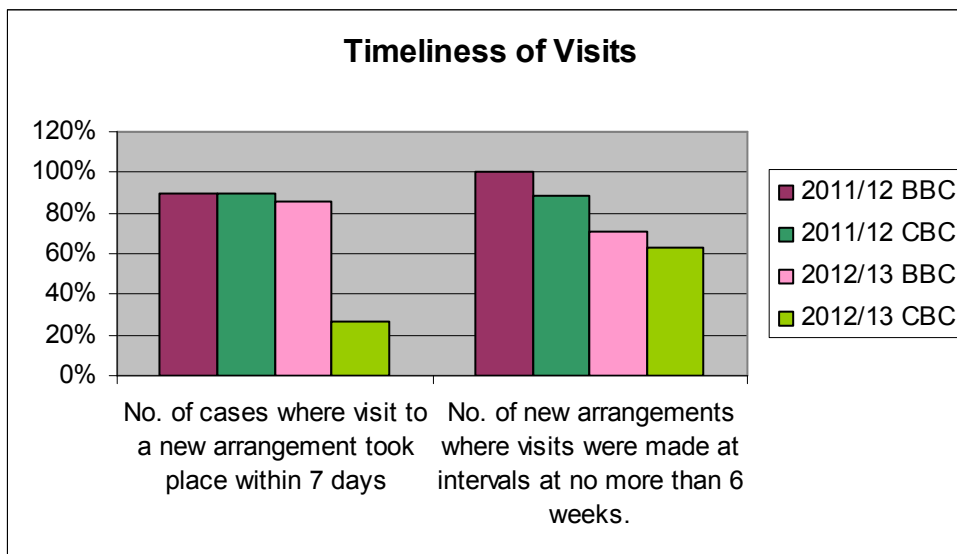


3.1 – MEETING TIMESCALES

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.

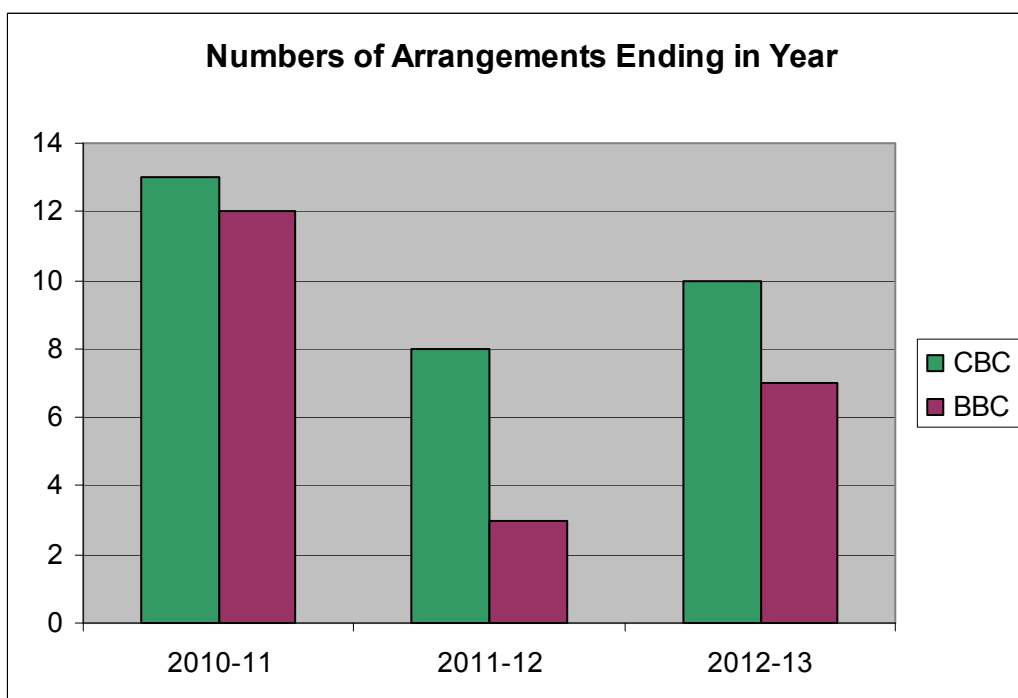
3.1.2 Timeliness of visits has remained a challenge this year with performance falling in some areas. Initial visits within 7 days have been of particular concern and there have been a number of factors which have impacted on performance. In some cases there has been difficulty in contacting the family or finding them at home within the timescale. However the short notice but protracted sickness of a key member of staff, coupled with temporary

slippage attributed to difficulties experienced following the introduction of a new data system has also impacted.



3.1.4 Records are kept for the reasons that private fostering arrangements end. In 2012-13 the reasons were.

- 3 young people became 16
- 9 young people returned to care of their parents.
- 2 young people became looked after.
- 2 young person moved out of the area
- 1 young person moved to another relative



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. In two cases there were some concerns about the arrangements could meet the needs of the children involved. This was resolved by the young people moving to more suitable homes without need to take formal action in respect of the private fostering arrangements.

SECTION 4 - SUPPORT TO YOUNG PEOPLE

4.0 – ADVOCACY SUPPORT

- 4.0.1 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 – SUMMARY & DEVELOPMENTS

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 The number of notifications has gradually increased since 2006 when the requirement was first enacted and levels are now broadly similar to 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.
- 5.3 Action has been taken to address the issues which led to the poor performance in respect of timeliness of visits. The new client database in Central Bedfordshire has now been configured to enable referrals to be made easily and to give management information to support timely allocation of work. There are also contingency plans in place if the lead worker is absent for any unplanned reason.
- 5.4 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.
- 5.5 In March 2012 following the annual review of the Shared Service Level Agreement it was decided to end the Shared Service Arrangement. This decision was subsequently reviewed in detail in Autumn 2012 with the decision being made for the disaggregation of the service to be effective from 1 January 2014. A project board comprising staff in both councils has been established to plan the arrangements for January 2014 and beyond. This planning process will involve consultation with key stakeholders and staff to ensure that an effective private fostering service that meets the needs of children can be maintained and developed.

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

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