

APPENDIX 1

Private Fostering

Annual Report

**For the period
2014/2015**

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INTRODUCTION

For the most part of 2014-2015, Central Bedfordshire Council Fostering Service managed private fostering, however in mid February 2015 the responsibility for managing Private Fostering transferred to the Family Support Service. This report highlights the activity undertaken in relation to Private Fostering between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015.

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

The private fostering provision was inspected by Ofsted 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 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 may be 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 of 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 stated above, 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;
 - 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.

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 via a wide ranging and ongoing advertising and publicity programme.

2.0.2 Examples of awareness raising activities included:

- Adverts in local papers;
- Update of Private fostering information on the Councils' website;
- LSCB training;
- Information on Central Bedfordshire 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 Between 1st April 2014 – Sep - 2015 the following awareness raising activities took place:

- September 2014 - CBC Hub and Early Help Service visited – Posters and leaflets provided
- October 2014 - All lower, middle and upper schools were sent information on Private Fostering. Posters sent and invitations to schools to attend team meetings and raise awareness
- November 2014 - Doctors Surgeries, Health Visitors within the CBC area were sent information on Private Fostering, invitations included to attend their team meetings.
- May 2015 - Letters to locality schools in BFST area, updating them on how to refer/seek advice re private fostering and informing them we are able to attend a team meeting to share information.
- June 2015 - Information about private fostering shared at BFST locality meet and greet. Attended by a variety of professionals from private and LA sectors.
- Sept 2015 - Letters sent to locality schools and health services updating them with private fostering information.

SECTION 3 - PERFORMANCE

3.0 – STATISTICS

3.0.1 Each year Central Bedfordshire Council has to submit data 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 Between 1st April 2014 – 31st March 2015 6 notifications were received (compared to 12 in 2013/14):

5 of these notifications were responded to within 7 days (83.3%).

6 of these notifications were assessed as being a new private fostering arrangement.

- 3.0.3 Levels of activity across the council decreased in 2013/14, there is no identifiable reason why this should be the case.
- 3.0.4 The total number of private fostering arrangements as at the end of March 2015 was 3.
- 3.0.5 The council also has to monitor the age and place of birth in respect of children in private fostering arrangements. Out of the 6 private fostering arrangements, 4 children were aged between 10-15 and 2 children were aged between 1-4. In terms of place of birth 4 children were born in the U.K., 1 child was born in Europe and 1 was born in Asia.

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 Statutory visits were within timescales for 3 arrangements, however, for 1 sibling group of 4 visits were not completed within the required timescale as for one of the visits undertaken no one was in and, therefore, the children were not seen, this meant the overall percentage of visits was 42.9%.
- 3.1.3 Records are kept for the reasons that private fostering arrangements end. In 2014-15 10 arrangements ended, the reasons for these ends were:
- 1 young person went home to parent.
 - 1 young person became looked after
 - 2 young people moved out of the area
 - 1 young person reached 16
 - 1 young person became subject to a Child Arrangement Order
 - 4 young people became subject to Special Guardianship Orders

3.2 – SUITABILITY OF ARRANGEMENTS

- 3.2.1. 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 Corporate Parenting Service, with appropriate discussion or decision making from the Assistant Director in complex cases. The Head of Corporate Parenting Service was responsible for this until mid February. At this point responsibility transferred to the Family Support Service and therefore the Head of Service for Family Support took over responsibility for this area of work.

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 leaflet 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 legal age at which a child is deemed to be no longer privately fostered is 16 (18 if disabled). For some young people it may not be possible for them to remain in private foster care beyond the age of 16. It is the role of the private fostering coordinator to sign post the young people in private foster care who are approaching their 16th birthday to universal services with regard to accommodation, advice and guidance.

SECTION 5 – SUMMARY & DEVELOPMENTS

- 5.1 For the most of this year Private Fostering was managed with in the Fostering Service, however in mid February 2015 responsibility for this area of work transferred to the Family Support Service.
- 5.2 The number of notifications has been low this year. Awareness- raising activities and advertising campaigns have continued, but not at the same level as previous years when CBC operated a joint Fostering Service with Bedford Borough Council which covered Private Fostering. National Campaigns have stopped as have campaigns through BAAF because of lack of funding. This may have had an influence on the low number of notifications received. There is therefore more pressure on Local Authorities to intensify their own campaigns of raising awareness.
- 5.3 The client database in Central Bedfordshire is 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 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.

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

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