

Private Fostering Annual Report

April 2014

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Private fostering is concerned with situations in which individuals are caring for children and young people by private arrangement, where the children and young people are not in the care of the local authority
- 1.2 Warrington's Private Fostering Statement of Purpose, which is updated annually, outlines the detail of what private fostering is, and the Local Authorities responsibilities. This Annual Report should therefore be read in conjunction with the Statement of Purpose for 2014.
- 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.
- 1.3 This responsibility is underpinned by the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005.
- 1.4 Inspection and research has improved knowledge since 2005 and highlighted key issues which contribute to best practice.
 - There is clear and effective leadership of the development of private fostering arrangements to promote notifications of arrangements being made.
 - Compliance with the regulations and national minimum standards is regularly reviewed to sustain improvements, in conjunction with the Local Safeguarding Children Board.
 - Communication and awareness-raising initiatives are monitored and reviewed regularly and approaches adapted accordingly.
 - Arrangements for notification and support take account of the differing contexts and needs of privately fostered children and young people.
- 1.5 Warrington Council's Private Fostering Service was last inspected by OFSTED in 2007 and was deemed to be "good". Subsequent inspections of safeguarding have taken place including the pilot inspection of multi-agency safeguarding undertaken by OFSTED in 2013, which made a judgement of "good" although it did not specifically comment on Private Fostering itself.
- 1.6 This report provides an evaluation of private fostering practice in Warrington in 2013-14, summarises developments in relation to

improving service delivery and identifies learning to be incorporated into the development plan for 2014-15.

2. Service delivery

- 2.1 The responsibility for private fostering arrangements and coordination of the service for children who are privately fostered is within the Children in Need division of Targeted services, Families and Well Being Directorate.

This division is led by the Service Manager for Children in Need and comprises four social work teams:-

- Duty and Assessment, who undertake work on all new contact, referral and assessments of children referred to targeted services.
- Three children in need teams.
- Children with Additional Needs Team

- 2.2 The service manager for children in need is the senior manager responsible for monitoring compliance with all duties and functions in relation to private fostering.

3. Compliance with duties and functions

- 3.1 The Local Authority reviews and analyses each year all private fostering arrangements. This is done to ensure that children and young people are adequately safeguarded, and also provides the opportunity to analyse the number and nature of these arrangements.

- 3.2 There were six notifications of Private fostering arrangements open during the period April 2013 – March 2014. A summary of each arrangement is provided below:-

Arrangement One: LT Aged 14

Private fostering started 01/02/2013 Ended 18.11.2013

L has had a long history of involvement from children's services dating back to 2009.

In February 2013 L had gone to stay with her great grandmother following an argument with her Mother and her Mother's partner. L has a history of flitting between family members and it was unclear how long Layla would continue to reside with her great grandmother. The placement continued for some time but following concerns about Layla going missing from home and some child protection concerns a Police Protection Order was obtained on 18.11.13 and subsequently L was made subject to an Interim Care Order on 20.11.13

Arrangement Two: JH Aged 10

Private fostering started 24.07.12 – on going

J mother has used amphetamines for a significant period of time, and this drug use has impacted on her ability to parent J appropriately. There have been ongoing issues of neglect and J's mother has also struggled to manage his behaviour. The family decided at a family meeting in July 2012 that Joshua should go and live with his great Aunt J before he went to live with his Aunt; he had been living with his grandparents for around a month. J, great aunt, has stated that it was a decision by the family, including Joshua's mother L that Joshua would be best placed living with his great aunt, Julie, long term. Although she is a close relative and had an ongoing familial relationship with Joshua, as a great aunt she does not come under the scope of "relative" as defined in The Children Act, and therefore this family arrangement had to be defined as Private Fostering.

Arrangement Three: CR Aged 10

Private fostering started 04.09.2013

There is a significant history of the family's involvement with services with a common feature being violence or aggression within the mother's relationships. Mother was served with an eviction notice due to rent arrears and breach of tenancy effective from 19/08/13. the family therefore became homeless and there were concerns that the children had been separated and left by their mother, the girls were living with their father in the Halifax area and C living with a family friend (there was concern that no one was exercising parental responsibility over him).

Assessments were completed and the children became subject to CP plans and a Private Fostering assessment was completed in respect of C.

Arrangement Four: WL Aged 13

Private fostering start date 08.02.2013

There is a long standing history of involvement with this family and WDD is the subject of a CP plan due to concerns at home including DV. He is being cared for currently in a PF arrangement with mothers' ex-partner of five years. W has maintained contact with him since the separation and has a good relationship with him. In February 2013 Mother fled domestic violence with her current partner and moved to a refuge with her 2 youngest children. WDD requested the current placement which geographically also supported his educational placement better and Mother agreed to this. This placement has continued and the court is being asked to grant a Residence Order in respect of W to enable his carer to have parental responsibility.

Arrangement Five: ME Aged 14

Private fostering started in current placement 02.02.2013 - Still Private fostering case.

ME is a 13 year old foreign exchange student from Japan. He came to England in August 2012 to go to school here. ME and his family are Japanese citizens, ME's parents were reported to have supported ME's desire to travel to England to continue his secondary education; and accompanied him to England, before returning to Japan.

Arrangements were made by his parents through a company in Manchester and ME was placed in the Trafford area. The company placing did not appear to be aware of the Private Fostering Regulations or the need to inform the LA. Trafford were originally supervising the placement as the child was in their area. ME was unhappy in his placement and moved to stay with a school friend at the current placement 2 Feb 2013. This placement is in Warrington and Trafford asked Warrington to take over responsibility for the supervision of the case. It is not clear what if any checks were completed by the agency or parents in relation to this move. This issue has been picked up by the safeguarding unit in Warrington with both the Company (language agency – foreign exchange students) and Local Authority they are based within (Manchester) being contacted to pursue this. The Private Fostering arrangement remains successful and stable and is meeting his needs.

Arrangement Six: CS Aged 12

Private fostering started 09.03.2013 – Ended 02.07.2013

Following an incident of domestic violence perpetrated by C's father against his wife A arrangements were made within the family for C to stay with an extended family member and her husband. This was agreed due to C having significant contact with their daughter and not having any other family members to care for him. A had stated she would not be able to care for Callum on her own. C's father had stated that he understands that he needs to complete work to ensure that future violence and inappropriate behaviour does not reoccur. Until a time when it is appropriate for C to return to his care he would like C to remain with living in the Private Fostering arrangement.

3.2 Safeguarding and promoting welfare.

The six notifications which have been received since April 2013 have been independently audited as part of the quality assurance programme in Targeted Services.

These audits were able to confirm that all children were subject to appropriate plans, via child in need or child protection processes.

What can be seen from these arrangements is that in all but one case, the private fostering arrangement was part of a wider plan, with social

work involvement, where the social worker identified the need for a private fostering arrangement.
There have been no notifications from partner agencies or from the wider public themselves.

3.3 Advice and support.

In all cases, there was evidence within case recording of children's private foster carer's clearly involved in planning and present at meetings with advice and practical support being provided, mainly around finance and behaviour management.

3.4 Monitoring compliance.

Private fostering files are audited at a minimum of annually, and reports with recommendations are sent to the Service Manager for Children in Need to ensure implementation of recommendations, and to ensure continuous improvement in this area of practice.

The audit tool has been reviewed to include monitoring of quality of practice as well as compliance with procedures by setting practice standards based on national minimum standards and Ofsted feedback from inspections.

The Conference and Review unit maintain a register of all private fostering arrangements in Warrington.

This annual report, with the reviewed Statement of Purpose will be presented to the Executive Director for Children and Young People's Services and Warrington's Local Safeguarding Children's Board.

4. Publicity, awareness raising and training

4.1 Awareness raising

Historically, local authorities have sought to increase the number of private notifications via "awareness raising" campaigns, in the form of leaflets, posters and adverts aimed at the general public.

During 2012-13, Warrington Safeguarding Children Board funded such a campaign, which resulted in little if any increase in private fostering notifications.

This is a picture that is repeated nationally, with notifications still not reaching expected levels.

This issue is further addressed in section 5 of this report.

4.2 Training

Multi Agency training is delivered as part of the WSCB training programme.

The multi agency Private Fostering training ' Somebody Else's Child' was delivered on three occasions during 2014-15:

1st Feb 2013 : 10 attendees

9th set 2013 : 11 attendees

3rd Feb 2014 : cancelled as only 4 booked to attend

The course is next due to run on 9th September 2014 and there are currently 5 attendees with places booked. .

Warrington continues to have detailed and thorough information about Private Fostering available via the website, with dedicated web pages of information and links to other sites.

5 Private Fostering Statement of Purpose

- 5.1 The Private Fostering Statement of Purpose has been reviewed and is attached. It outlines how Warrington meets its responsibilities in relation to Private Fostering and how it intends to develop these in the future.

The Statement of Purpose is presented with this Annual Report to the Executive Director (CYPS) and the Warrington Safeguarding Children Board.

6 Evaluation and Learning

- 6.1 The regular review of practice in Warrington has highlighted that most private fostering arrangements notified to the local authority are in respect of children who are already known to social work professionals and that very few members of other agencies, or members of the public, have made a notification of an arrangement.

- 6.2 This has continued to raise concern that publicity and awareness raising, has not been effective in impacting upon partner agencies or the wider community. As a result there is concern that vulnerable children may be living in such arrangements without coming to the attention of the local authority and therefore potentially remain vulnerable if their welfare is not safeguarded.

- 6.3 A recent report published by OFSTED in January 2014, ("Private Fostering: better information, better understanding") addressed the issues of concern previously highlighted by inspections of local authority private fostering arrangements.

OFTSED had undertaken inspection of 12 local authorities in respect of their private fostering arrangements between 2009 and 2013.

In addition they considered the statistical information available.

6.4 The report highlighted a range of concerns including the apparent “under reporting” of private fostering arrangements; the lack of impact of “awareness raising” campaigns; inappropriate performance measures; the lack of useful information collated by the DfE in relation to private fostering, and the poor quality of annual reports.

6.3 As a result of this further analysis the report made three key recommendations.

- **Improve data collection**

OFSTED make a number of recommendations regarding this area, which relate to the way in which data is collected via the DfE in their statistical returns. For example suggesting that the collection of data in respect of how notifications were made, and how long children were living there before there were referred. It is also suggested that the number of self referring cases are collated as a key indicator of effectiveness. Perhaps most importantly it is also suggested that schools be required to clarify the numbers of children not living with their parents as part of the admissions process and annual returns.

- **Improving arrangements for self - evaluation of private fostering services.**

It is suggested that Private Fostering Annual Reports be “re branded” as self - evaluation and be published in full on LSCB and local authority websites.

- **Better targeting of “raising awareness work” by local authorities**

The report suggests that there is “very little evidence ...that general campaigns ...have any impact outside of professional circles”. Those local authorities who have had some impact have specifically targeted school admissions and GP surgeries. As a result , OFSTED suggest that in order to identify the actual numbers of children living in private fostering arrangements practice should move from “awareness raising “ to placing the emphasis on key points of contact such as school enrolment and GP’s surgeries, to verify that children are in fact living with their parents.

They also suggests regular contact with language colleges to clarify who is on role and where they are living, and being proactive in reviewing these arrangements at regular intervals

6.4 These suggested areas for development mirror those issues raised within this and previous reports in Warrington and reflect a national picture.

It is therefore recommended that these recommendations form the basis of the development plan for Private Fostering in Warrington during 2014 - 15.

7 Recommendations for Development

7.1 It is recommended that there are three main strands to the development plan for 2014-15.

7.2 Data Collection

Private Fostering is an indicator for the WSCB performance scorecard. It is suggested that instead of simply considering the number of Private Fostering Arrangements, the scorecard consider ;

- How notifications were made – identifying the source- for example , school/ GP/ social worker
- The reason for the placement
- Proportion of self referring cases

This information would already be available and could be collated for the year 2014-15 on a quarterly basis.

WSCB may also want to consider whether it should introduce a way of monitoring school admissions and GP registration by asking schools to develop a mechanism to clarify the numbers of children not living with parents via the admission process, and GP's via the registration process. This could be put into future data collections for 2015 - 16, following a period of developing revised procedures as suggested as 7.3.

7.3 Self evaluation

The Annual report in Warrington already has some strong aspects of a self - evaluation document, in that it considers the impact on individual children and outcomes from audit activity. This could be further strengthened for the report in 2015, with a revised format being produced and entitled a “Self - evaluation of Private Fostering Arrangements”. The additional data collected as described above would also provide a more robust analysis of private fostering practice across partner agencies, with comparisons about referral rates being available.

7.4 Targeted Awareness raising

It is recommended, that the good practice identified within the Ofsted report is implemented in Warrington. This includes;

- The school admissions process is updated to include a question identifying any children not living with their parents,

and information and requirement for notification of private fostering

- The registration process with GP's includes direct questions about who children live with and whether this is a private fostering arrangement
- Specific training is offered to those who deal with these processes, admissions staff, school administrative staff, GP administrative staff, practice managers in surgeries.

7.4 In order to implement these measure key professional need to be identified and to form a small task and finish group to put the required systems in place. These would need to include representation from

- Admissions service
- Schools
- GP practice
- CCG

A project plan and timescales can be agreed with the WSCB and reported on at a future date. If these systems can be put in place during 2014-15, the data can become part of the performance information gathered by the WSCB during 2015-16.

7.5 If these recommendations are implemented s suggested during the coming year, it will ensure that further work is targeted at protecting the most vulnerable of this group of children , in addition to ensuring that potential requirements from DfE and Ofsted can continue to be met in the future.



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**Families and Well Being Directorate
May 2014**