

## Private Fostering Annual Report to LSCB

12<sup>th</sup> May 2015

Prepared by:

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### **Purpose of this report:**

This report is an annual report setting out the work undertaken by the London Borough of Croydon, in respect to its duties and responsibilities, towards Privately Fostered Children in the Borough.

This report provides an update on the progress made, since the publication of the last annual report to the CSCB in February 2014. It addresses the Local Authority's compliance with the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering and the effectiveness of the Local Authority's arrangements in respect to safeguarding and monitoring the welfare of privately fostered children living in the London Borough of Croydon.

### **1. Introduction/Background:**

- 1.1 Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010 sets out a policy and procedure function for the LSCB in relation to private fostering. The LSCB role includes its usual roles of co-ordination, monitoring and quality assurance, and a specific role with regard to raising awareness. The LSCB has a statutory duty to report annually on children who are Privately Fostered.
- 1.2 The Legal Reference that governs Private Fostering is set out below:
  - Children Act 1989, Part IX Schedule 7 and 8
  - Children Act Guidance and Regulations, Volume 8, Private Fostering.
  - The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005
  - The Disqualification for Caring for Children Regulations, Volume 6 Children with Disabilities
  - The Children Act Guidance and Regulations, Volume 5, Independent Schools.
  - Section 44 of the Children Act 2004
  - Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2002 (DOH)
- 1.3 The 'National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering' (NMS for PF) came into force on 18 July 2005 and were issued under section 7 of the Local Authority

Social Services Act 1970, which requires local authorities in their social services functions to act under the general guidance of the Secretary of State.

- 1.4 The NMS for PF specify a minimum standard for local authority practice in the fulfilment of Children Act duties and functions in relation to private fostering. They, along with the measures in section 44 of the Children Act 2004 and the 2005 regulations, are intended to better focus local authorities' attention on private fostering, in part by requiring them to take a more proactive approach to identifying arrangements in their area.
- 1.5 Under Standard 5 of the NMS for PF, local authorities are expected to effectively monitor the way in which it discharges its 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 Area Child Protection Committee (or its successor body, 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)
- 1.6 This document sets out an update of the progress made since the London Borough of Croydon's second Annual Report on Private Fostering to the Safeguarding report dated January 2014 and is based on the requirements set out in the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering.

## **2. Definition of Private Fostering Arrangements**

- 2.1 Private fostering is an arrangement made between the parent and the private foster carer, who then becomes responsible for caring for the child in such a way as to safeguard and promote his/her welfare. The Local Authority is not involved in the making of this arrangement.
- 2.2 A privately fostered child is a child under the age of 16 (18 if a disabled child) who is cared for and provided with accommodation by someone other than:
  - A parent
  - A person who is not a parent but has parental responsibility
  - A close relative
  - A Local AuthorityFor more than 28 days and where the care is intended to continue.
- 2.3 If a period of care is less than 27 days but further periods are planned which total more than 28 days, then the child is privately fostered.

- 2.4 A relative is defined as a grandparent, brother, sister uncle or aunt (whether of the full-blood or half-blood or by affinity, i.e. marriage or a stepparent). There is no stipulation as to the age of the relative.

### **3. Recommendations from Previous LSCB Report**

- 3.1 Further awareness raising sessions to be arranged with schools, community mental health services, health visiting services, housing, children's centres, probation services, faith groups and CSC Teams. These sessions are to be supplemented by regular reminder letters and leaflets being sent to these services to keep private fostering in the forefront of their mind.**

The Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker and the Private Fostering lead have undertaken a number of awareness raising sessions with internal and external partners over the last 14 months. These efforts have been seen to be successful with numbers rising from 6 in February 2014 to 27 at the time of writing; numbers have fluctuated within this timescale, raising as high as 38 in October 2014. (It is of note that the Monthly dashboard only records the month end figure of those arrangements confirmed to be private fostering following notification and not the number of open notifications and private fostering arrangements). This fluctuation is due to high numbers of overseas language students who tend to be approaching their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday at the commencement of their private fostering arrangement.

An analysis of the young people coming to notice via language schools has shown that the average age of these language school students is 15 years six months that the time of notification; this appears to be in line with the average age of children undertaking GCSEs with children's admission into year 11 being based on their 15<sup>th</sup> birthday taking place before the end of August in the year of admission.

- 3.2 Issues relating to private fostering will begin to feature in CSC staff induction sessions and relevant CSCB training events.**

Private Fostering is featured in the CSC induction with reference to making contact with the private fostering worker if more information is required.

In addition, private fostering training sessions have been undertaken on a 1:1 basis with ASYEs and students joining Croydon Children's Services and with the Frontline Students who joined us in September 2014.

The Private Fostering Social Worker has undertaken awareness raising training at the GP forum on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2014 and with Place to Be on 3 October 2014.

A training session was undertaken by the Private Fostering Lead with Panel Members in March 2015.

**3.3 The Communications Strategy for the Private Fostering Team will be written and any changes implemented through the Private Fostering Team and Private Fostering Panel, taking into account any regional or national awareness raising campaigns.**

This document has been drafted and is awaiting finalisation.

**3.4 A Multi-agency Panel for Private Fostering to be established and set up as outlined in the draft Procedures annexed to this report.**

A multi-agency Panel was established in February 2015, meeting for the first time on the 19<sup>th</sup> March 2015. The panel met again on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2015 and thereafter will meet quarterly to review and quality assure the assessments being undertaken by the Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker and the decision making in respect to the suitability of arrangements.

The Panel is chaired by Gavin Swann, Head of Service, Quality Assurance and Safeguarding. Membership is set out in the table below:

Name	Job Role	Panel Role
Gavin Swann	Head of Service for QA and Safeguarding	Chairperson
Moira Keen	Service Delivery Manager for Locality 1 Care Planning and Strategic Lead for Private Fostering	Representative from Children's Social Care (Deputy Chairperson)
Georg Stahl	Barnados Advocate for Child trafficking Advocacy service	Independent Member
Sue Schofield	Service Manager NSPCC Croydon	Independent Member
Val Burrell-Walker	Fair Access Manager Primary and Secondary Education	Education Representative
Sylvia Ssengendo	Private Fostering Specialist Social Worker	
TBC		Legal Representative
TBC		Health Representative
Stephanie Harrison	Unit Coordinator Locality 1 Care Planning Unit 2	Panel Administrator

**3.5 The outcome of the Private Fostering Conference planned for 21<sup>st</sup> March 2014 to be evaluated and included in the next annual report. Partners represented in the LSCB are asked to highlight this event with their**

**colleagues and staff to encourage attendance. Consideration to be given to making this an annual event.**

A Private Fostering Conference for Children, Families and Learning staff and staff employed by agency partners took place on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2014. This conference was jointly run with British Association for Adoption and Fostering and the UKVI.

The Private Fostering Conference was attended staff in social care and across the partnership. It was a successful event which brought very positive feedback from attendees and has generated interest in the partnership for the private fostering social worker to deliver bespoke awareness raising sessions.

**Attended**

Slam	2
Social Care and Family Support	18
NHS	1
Education	9
Adult Service	1
Croydon College	1
Trafficking	1
Home Office	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>

A subsequent Private Fostering Conference took place on 12th March 2015; and was again attended by staff in social care and across the partnership. A breakdown of the agencies represented has not yet been made available however a broad range appeared to be represented. It is proposed that this conference will continue to be offered to partners on an annual basis.

**3.6 Links will be maintained with national and London-wide initiatives such as the BAAF Private Fostering Special Interest Group and the London Safeguarding Children Board.**

The lead for Private Fostering has links with the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) via membership in the Private Fostering Special Interest Group. Either the Private Fostering Lead or the Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker attends the quarterly Special Interest Group Meetings.

BAAF were also commissioned to assist in the joint presentation of the Private Fostering Conferences that took place on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2014 and 12<sup>th</sup> March 2015.

**3.7 The next annual report will be drafted in January 2015 and will include a full analysis of the management information and performance data from CRS as required in the PF1 return to the Department of Education.**

Due to other matter taking priority on the CSCB agenda, this report has been scheduled for the May 2015 Board. A breakdown and analysis of the PF1 return data is discussed below.

**3.8 The London Borough of Croydon's 'Statement of Purpose for Private Fostering', 'Procedures for Private Fostering' and 'Panel Procedures' to be finalised and published by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 and thereafter to be reviewed and updated annually.**

These documents were approved for publication in April 2014. They are in the process of being reviewed and updated currently.

**4. Planning on Private Fostering:**

4.1 The London Borough of Croydon established a designated Private Fostering Panel in November 2011. The Panel met every 2 months to review the social work being undertaken with all Privately Fostered Arrangements, up until September 2013, at which point the terms of the Panel were redrafted and plans put in place to develop a Multi-agency Panel. The new Panel Arrangements (ratified by DMT in March 2014) consists of a multi-agency panel established in February 2015 that will meet quarterly to review and quality assure the assessments and decisions being undertaken in respect to privately fostered children in the borough. The Locality One Children in Need Service Delivery Manager currently agrees the suitability of all new Private Fostering Arrangements.

4.2 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 Statement of Purpose for the London Borough of Croydon was first drafted in August 2011 and updated in August 2012. It was reviewed and updated again in late 2013 and approved for publication early 2014; it is currently being reviewed and updated for 2015.

4.3 The Locality One Children in Need Service Delivery Manager is the Locality Authority's lead for Private Fostering. The Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker or the Private Fostering Lead attends the British Association of Adoption & Fostering's quarterly Special Interest Group on Private Fostering. This enables local policy and practice to be developed in line with best practice from other authorities.

**5. Notification and Monitoring Arrangements**

5.1 All notifications of private fostering arrangements are currently processed through the MASH and then allocated directly to the Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker. All publicity states that MASH is the contact point for private fostering

notifications. Once the specialist private fostering social worker receives the notification from MASH, an initial visit is undertaken to the arrangement. The timescales in which the initial visit needs to be undertaken is 7 days.

- 5.2 Following completion of this visit, should it be determined that the care arrangement is such that the child is considered to be privately fostered a Private Fostering Arrangement Assessment Record (PFAAR) is required to be completed and a decision made as to the suitability of the arrangement within 42 days of receipt of notification. Where the statutory checks on the private foster carer, such as the DBS, Local Authority and Health information are not returned within the 10 day timeframe, a decision on the suitability is made 'pending the outcome of these checks being satisfactory. This is accepted practice in respect to Private Fostering and is the model followed in the Local Authorities that are performance leaders in this area of practice.
- 5.3 All private fostering arrangements are monitored via statutory Regulation 8 visits. These visits take place 6 weekly in the first year and 12 weekly in subsequent years.
- 5.4 It is proposed in the future, following the establishment of the quarterly Private Fostering Panel that all on-going arrangements will be reviewed and quality assured at the first available panel date following completion of the Private Fostering Assessment. A stretch target in this area is for all on-going private fostering cases will be subject to an Annual Review, in the form of an updated Private Fostering Assessment which reassesses the child / young person's needs and the on-going suitability of the arrangement, and a subsequent presentation to panel. There are currently resource implications to this stretch target that will need to be considered carefully to explore the feasibility of this for Croydon.
- 5.5 As part of the monitoring of arrangements, the Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker will liaise regularly with partner agencies involved with individual children and young people, especially, health, education and UK Border Agency to ensure the well being of the children and young people is safeguarded.
- 5.6 Since the establishment of the post in March 2014, the Private Fostering Social Worker has implemented a number of initiatives to highlight and promote the notification arrangements to staff within Children's Social Care, the Council and partner agencies. The new CRS system has also brought the Private Fostering workflow in line with the statutory reporting requirements in terms of Initial Visits, completion of the PFAAR and Regulation 8 visits.
- 5.8 The first annual Private Fostering Conference for Children's Services staff and partners was undertaken, jointly with BAAF and the UKVI on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2014 in order to further promote awareness of Private Fostering. The second Annual Conference took place on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2015, jointly with BAAF, UKVI and Barnardos.

5.9 A Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker post was established as a supernumerary post within the structure in early 2014 and an experienced social worker was seconded to this role in March 2014. Unfortunately, this worker was successful in an application for a Unit Manager within the wider CIN Service and therefore a new locum Social Worker was appointed to the role in October 2014. The establishment of this post has been extremely successful in both promoting awareness of Private Fostering both internally and externally as well as standardising and embedding practice in regards to Private Fostering.

## **6. Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare**

6.1 Case responsibility for Private Fostering children is held by the Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker based within Locality One Children in Need Service. This social worker undertakes all suitability assessments and subsequent welfare visits; this work is undertaken under the direction of the Private Fostering Lead. Having a dedicated social worker for Private Fostering ensures consistency in regards to the service provided and enables the development of expertise in this specialist area.

6.2 The Private Fostering Lead has the responsibility to sign off all decisions about the overall suitability of private fostering arrangements.

6.3 The London Borough of Croydon's policies and procedures on private fostering were reviewed and updated in April 2014 and are currently being reviewed again for the 2015 – 2016 year. These are primarily used by children's social care staff, but are also available on Share-point and the Council website for reference by all Social Care staff, partner agencies and the wider community.

## **7. Advice and Support**

7.1 The Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker is responsible for ensuring that private foster carers, parents and children receive appropriate advice and support. On occasions this support will need to be provided in different formats where English is not the first language via translation and interpretation services and this will be accessed on a case by case basis.

7.2 Where appropriate the Private Fostering Social Worker will give advice to carers and parents on legal status solutions to safeguard and promote a child's welfare (e.g. recommending a Child Arrangement or Special Guardianship Order is applied for).

7.3 The local policy cites that where a privately fostered child is identified as a child in need, services may be provided consistent with the local policy for accessing these services.



## 8. Monitoring Compliance with Duties and Functions

- 8.1 Given the size of the child population in the borough, its location close to the Home Office, the number of English Language schools in the borough and also the mobility of families, the London Borough of Croydon does not have high levels of children privately fostered. Whilst it is recognised that private fostering arrangements are under-reported in Croydon with this figure falling below expected levels, this figure has improved markedly since my last report in February 2014 when there were only 6 private fostering arrangements known to the Local Authority; the lowest levels since local arrangements for private fostering were established in 2009.

Following the appointment of a Specialist Private Fostering social worker in early March 2014 (at which time there were 9 arrangements open), who has a strong focus on awareness raising, there has been a steady rise in the number of arrangements known to the Local Authority. Information obtained from the monthly dashboard report gives numbers of private fostering arrangements as set out in the table below:

Month	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
No. of PFA	20	25	27	27	23	23	28	29	23	27	25	24

- 8.2 Numbers have fluctuated following an initial sharp rise in April 2014, but have remained in the mid – high 20s. The fluctuation is believed to be as a result of the high numbers (about 30%) of foreign language students living in private fostering arrangements with ‘host families’ whilst studying in the UK. These students routinely return home for the school holiday periods and are usually approaching their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday at the commencement of their private fostering arrangement. A measure of the number of notifications received would give a clearer picture of the business of this part of the service.
- 8.4 The Private Fostering Social Worker aims to carry out all monitoring visits at no more than five weekly intervals in the first year and at ten weekly intervals in each subsequent year to ensure that the statutory timescales for Regulation 8 visits are met.
- 8.5 Since my last report action has been required in order to safeguard two privately fostered children known to the Local Authority; in one case, pertaining to a new-born child, legal action was taken in order to ensure that the Local Authority was able to ensure stability and exercise parental responsibility for the child in the absence of the parents.

8.6 At the Panel on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2015, the Panel agreed to the Prohibition and disqualification of one Private Foster Carer; the child in that arrangement had been moved to a more appropriate arrangement prior to prohibition being agreed following proactive action by the social worker.

## **9. Private Fostering Return (PF1) 2013 – 2014**

9.1 Data collected for the PF1 return in May 2014 shows that over the course of the 2013 – 2014 year, Croydon Children’s Services received 6 notifications in respect to children living in private fostering arrangements and undertook 7 new private fostering visits / assessment; this anomaly is as a result one child moving to new arrangement within the year.

9.2 All initial visits were carried out within statutory timescales of 7 days following notification. Of these 7 arrangements (6 children), statutory visits were undertaken in timescales for 5 of the children (or 83%).

9.3 The PF1 data shows that 9 private fostering arrangements were recorded as having been open as at the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013, and that of these 8 (or 89%) were visited within timescales.

9.4 As of the 31<sup>st</sup> May 2014 Croydon 14 children living in private fostering arrangements, all bar two of these were in respect to children aged 10 – 15 years; the remaining 2 children were both aged 9 years.

## **10. Analysis of Information/Data:**

10.1 The information above would indicate that the London Borough of Croydon is making good progress in ensuring that its current arrangements for Private Fostering are meeting the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering.

10.2 Whilst there remain some challenges with respect to timescales around Initial Visits and assessment following unexpected swells in numbers, out-stripping capacity of the Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker, as with periods when this worker is on leave, initial visits on new notifications are scheduled on duty to ensure that they are undertaken within the 7 day statutory timescale.

10.3 Plans to make use of the Frontline Student Social Workers within the service to assist with surges in referral numbers have been implemented and it is felt that this will provide an adequate buffer in the coming year. It is however expected that numbers of notifications and identified private fostering arrangements will continue to grow which may present further resourcing challenges in the future.

10.4 Overall, with clear procedures and policies in place, the establishment of a dedicated specialist social worker and improved awareness raising and notification numbers, the Local Authority will have a good narrative/story to tell in

respect to private fostering in the next OFSTED inspection. If the focus on raising awareness and increasing the numbers of notifications continues the service will be well on its way towards 'getting to good' in the not too distant future.

**11. Recommendations / Action Plan up until March 2015:**

- 11.1 That the supernumerary Specialist Post for Private Fostering remain in the structure for at least the 2015 - 2016 financial year. The current workload for this post is manageable, with the support of the Frontline Student Social Workers within the CIN Service, however it is possible that if notifications increase at the current rate that this situation will change and consideration will need to be given at that time to an expansion of this role.
- 11.2 On-going awareness raising sessions to be arranged with schools, community mental health services, health visiting services, housing, children's centres, probation services, faith groups and CSC Teams. These sessions are to be supplemented by regular reminder letters and leaflets being sent to these services to keep private fostering in the forefront of their mind.
- 11.3 Issues relating to private fostering to continue to feature in CSC staff induction sessions and relevant CSCB training events.
- 11.4 Links to be maintained with national and London-wide initiatives such as the BAAF Private Fostering Special Interest Group and the London Safeguarding Children Board.
- 11.5 The Communications Strategy for the Private Fostering to be finalised and reviewed and updated annually, taking into account any regional or national awareness raising campaigns.
- 11.6 The London Borough of Croydon's 'Statement of Purpose for Private Fostering', 'Procedures for Private Fostering' and 'Panel Procedures' to continue to be reviewed and updated annually.
- 11.7 The Private Fostering Panel provide a report on their findings in respect to the quality of assessments of private fostering arrangements and decisions around suitability in time for the next annual report to the Board in 2016 to provide greater clarity as to the robustness of safeguarding in this area.
- 11.8 The Private Fostering Conference to be established as an annual event within the multi-agency training calendar.
- 11.9 The next annual report for LSCB will be presented to the CSCB at the first available opportunity from January 2016 and to include a full analysis of the management information and performance data from CRS as required in the PF1 return to the Department of Education.

**12. Resource Implications Arising from Recommendations:**

- 12.1 The Private Fostering Arrangements in the London Borough of Croydon need to continue to improve practice, build expertise in this area and provide a programme of intensive awareness raising. This will have clear resource implications in terms of social work time, the time of the members of the Private Fostering Panel and the on-going production and printing of updated brochures, leaflets, posters and other published materials.

**13 Conclusions:**

- 13.1 It is recommended that the CSCB accept the recommendations and action plans for the 2015 - 2016.