



# **Annual Report on Private Fostering to Croydon Safeguarding Children's Board**

**1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019**

**May 2019**

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## **1. Introduction/context/background**

This annual report sets out the work undertaken by the London Borough of Croydon, in respect of its duties and responsibilities, towards Children living in Private Fostering Arrangements as set out in The Children Act 1989 (Schedule 8); the Children Act 2004 and accompanying guidance, standards and regulations (2005).

It is a requirement of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering that an annual report is provided to the Director of Children's Services, evaluating the outcome of work with privately fostered children. An annual report is required by the Local Children's Safeguarding Board outlining arrangements for ensuring privately fostered children's welfare needs are safeguarded and promoted with co-operation from other agencies.

## **2. Definition of a PF Arrangement**

A PF arrangement is one that is made privately for the care of a child under the age of 16 (or under 18 if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Private foster carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or a great aunt. A private foster carer may be a friend of the family, the parent of a friend of the child, or someone previously unknown to the child's family who is willing to privately foster a child. However, a person who is a close relative under the Children Act 1989, i.e. a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, aunt or a step-parent will not be a private foster carer. The period for which the child is cared for and accommodated by the private foster carer should be continuous, but if a child receives an occasional short break this is not considered to break that continuity

Local authorities do not formally approve or register private foster carers. However, it is the duty of the local authority to satisfy themselves that the welfare of the children who are, or will be, privately fostered in their area is being, or will be, satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted. <sup>1</sup>

## **3. Governance and Accountability**

In the 2017/18 report, the Board was advised that Croydon Children's Social Care had recruited a dedicated Private Fostering Social worker to manage such arrangements. During 2018/19 the number of Private Fostering Social Workers has been increased to three who also hold responsibility for supporting families with no recourse to public funds. The manager of this team currently acts as a point of expertise for social workers in relation to Private Fostering advice.

The Private Fostering Panel has continued to meet on a monthly basis and oversees and Quality Assures Private Fostering assessments. The panel is chaired by a Quality Assurance Manager and the purpose of the panel is to confirm the acceptance of private fostering arrangements. In each case assessments are reviewed and recommendations made in relation to areas for ongoing support and assessments are deferred if appropriate.

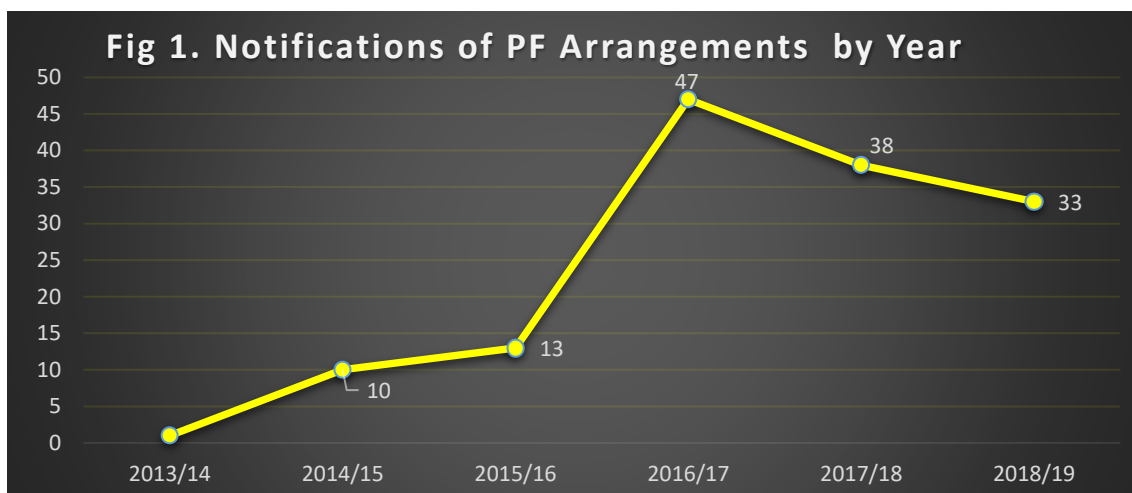
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<sup>1</sup> [Children \(Private Arrangements for Fostering\) Regulations 2005](#)

#### 4. Performance Data

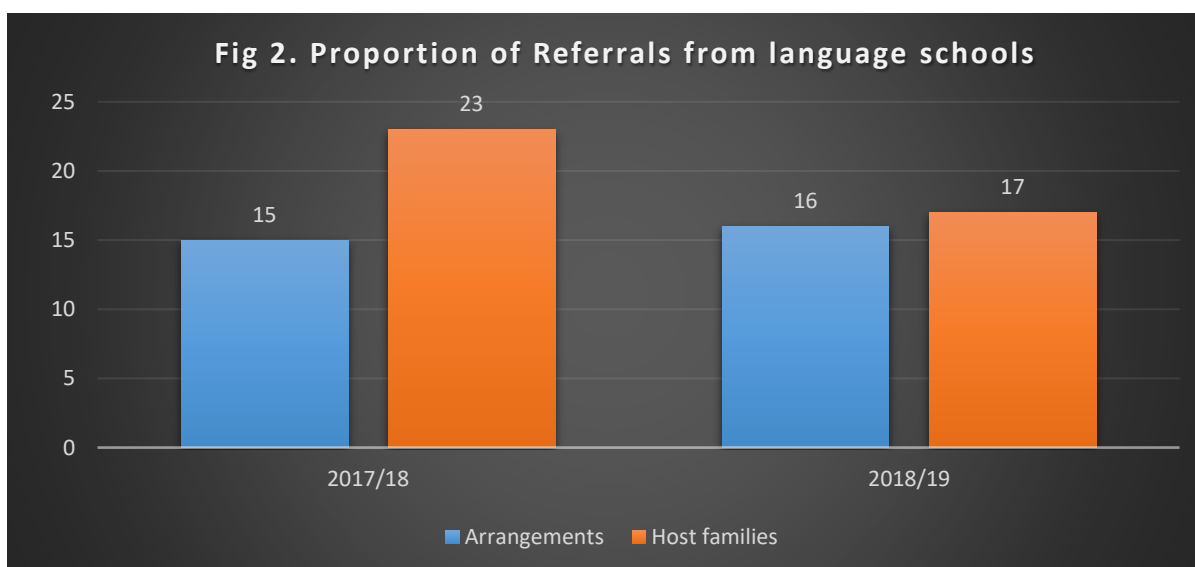
##### a. Referrals / Notifications.

Figure one shows the number of notifications to the local Authority over the last six years. During 2018/19 there was a continued decline in the number of notifications received during the year. This is explained in part by a change in recording practice within the Single Point of Contact (SPOC), whereby only notifications that are found to meet the private fostering criteria are now counted.



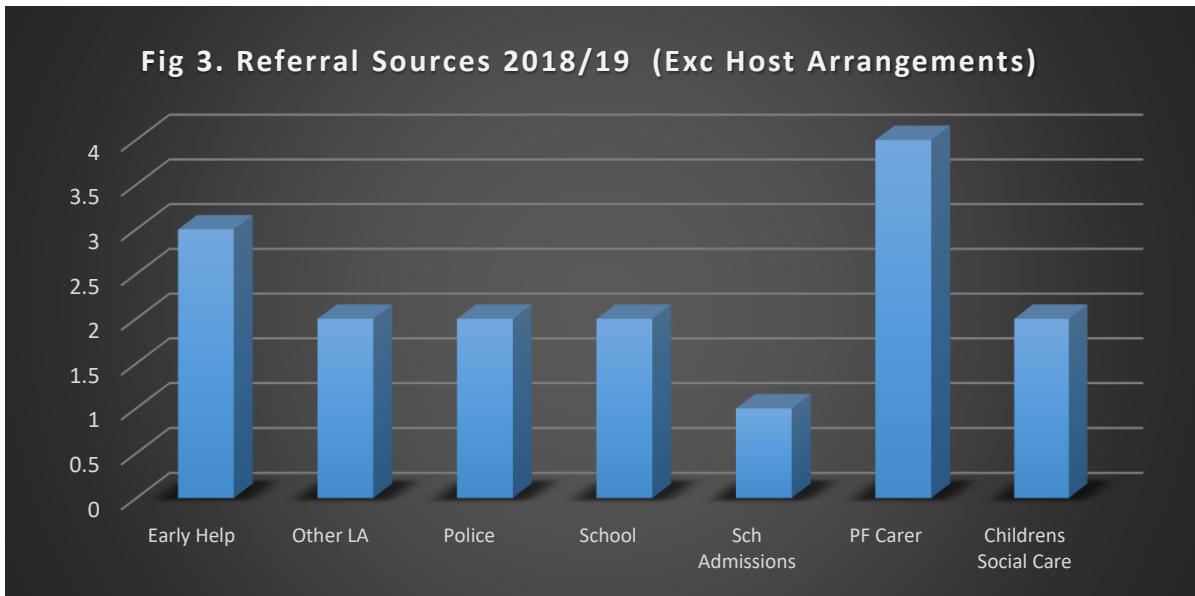
In previous years notifications of 'host family' arrangements for local language schools has increased the number of Private Fostering arrangements.

The chart below (Fig 2) demonstrates that the numbers of "Host" family arrangements are declining. This in part can be explained by one of the Language schools changing its business model and moving from such arrangements to establishing a boarding school model and therefore monitored through Independent Schools Agency regulation.



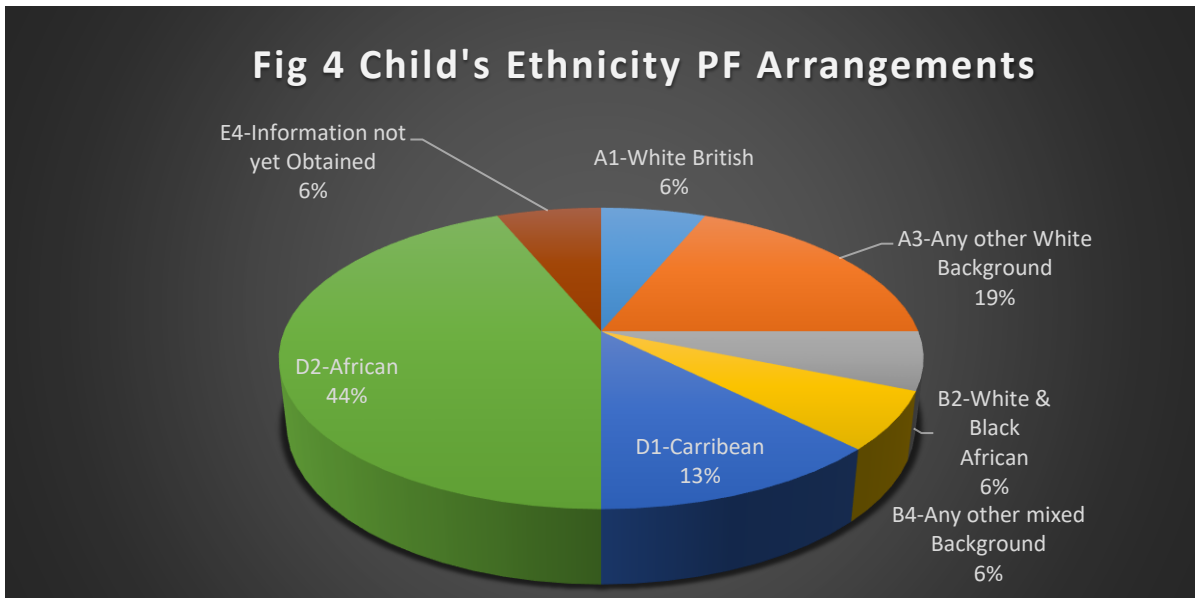
##### b. Referral Sources

Excluding the 17 referrals from language schools during 2018/19 there were 16 private fostering notifications received as outlined in Fig.3. During 2018/19 awareness raising of Private Fostering took place with school admissions services and identified one Private Fostering arrangement.

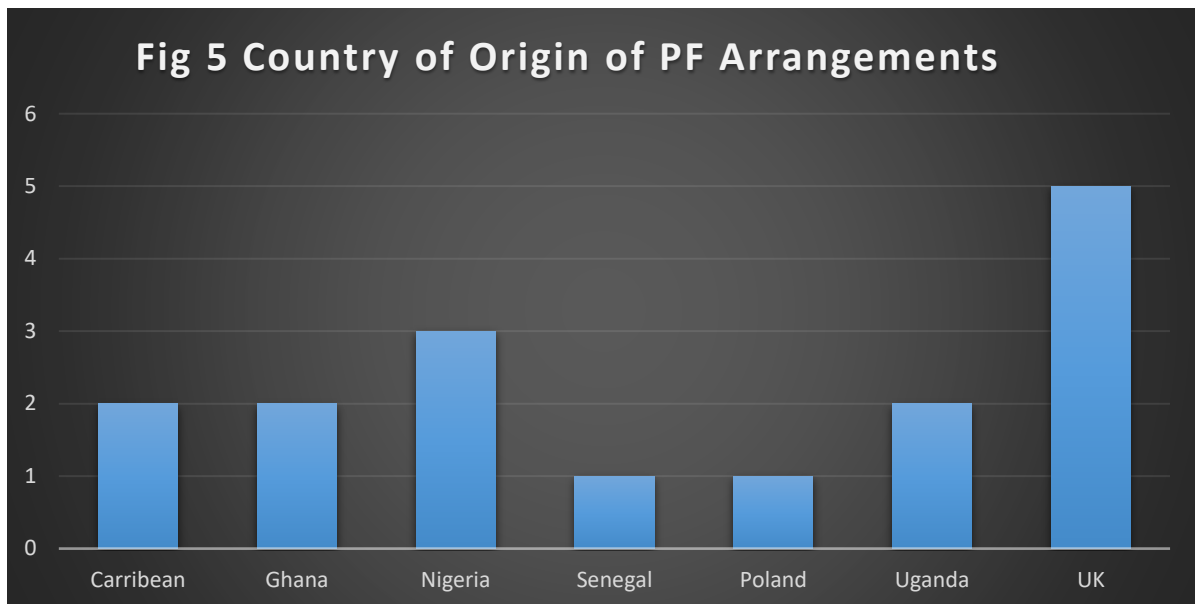


### Ethnicity of Children in PF Arrangements

Fig 4 shows the ethnicity of children as defined by Department of Education. This demonstrates a significant proportion of children are identified as African in origin.



Following feedback from the Safeguarding Children's Board following last year's report, information has also been collected this year relating to the country of origin for children subject to private fostering arrangements. Fig 5 shows the countries of origin and illustrates that 30% currently originate from the UK.



#### c. Assessments

As part of the Safeguarding and Looked After children’s Inspection in the summer of 2017 the report stated that:

*“Inspectors found that social workers lack a consistent understanding of what constitutes a private fostering arrangement. Several cases were seen where an assessment should have been completed to ensure that children were appropriately cared for, which means that some children live in circumstances where the suitability and commitment of carers are unknown.”*

The PF Regulations require that decisions about the suitability of private fostering arrangements should be completed within 42 days of a notification being received. And that all arrangements should be visited within 7 days of being notified. Host families, who have already been assessed by their host organisation do not always understand the need for further assessment and this can provide barriers to achieving the decision within 42 days.

During 2018/19 achievement of visiting within seven days of notification was at 30%, and decision upon the suitability within 42 days was at 33%

The timeliness of the first visit remains important in terms of initial risk assessments as clearly it is the first contact with arrangements and clearly needs to be improved. The panel has focused upon quality of assessments and a greater oversight of performance is required if decisions are to be made in a timely way.

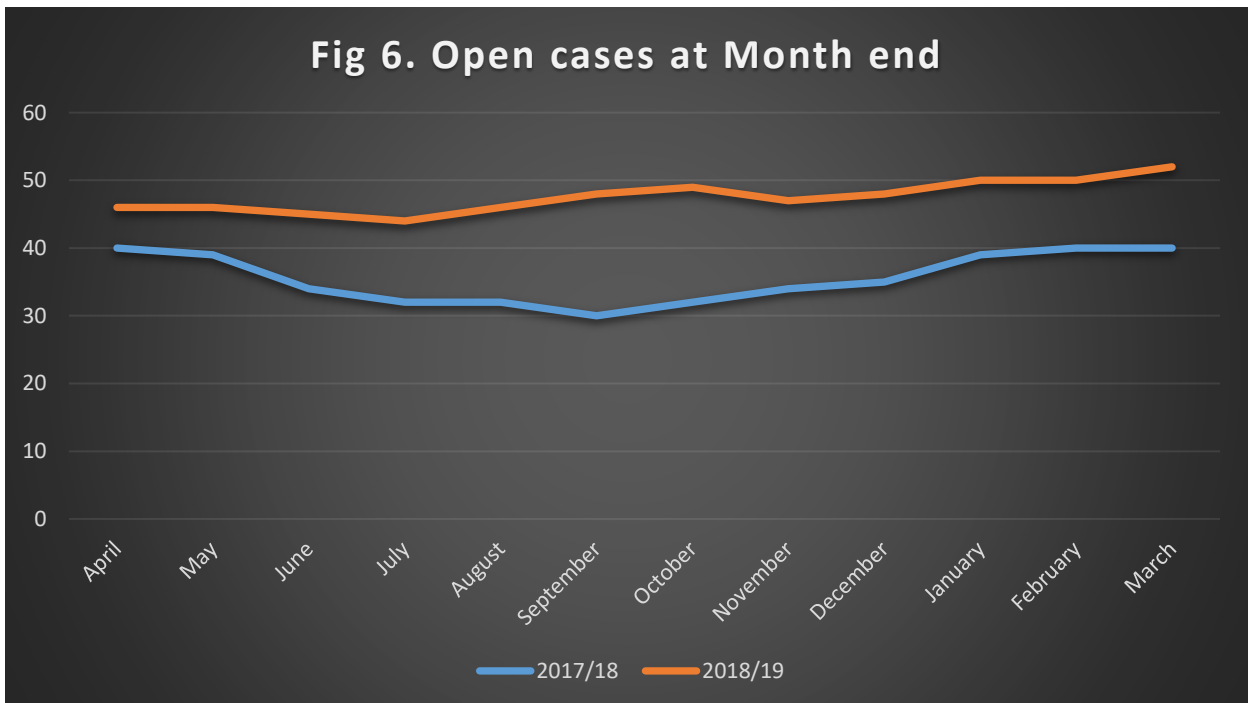
## Panel Oversight

The PF panel meets on a monthly basis and is attended by representatives from Health, Education and Children’s Social care. Assessments are received for consideration and Panel makes determinations on the suitability of arrangements.

During the course of the last year, covered by this report, the Panel has considered 20 new cases/assessments. Of these assessments 4 have been deferred for further information, and a further 5 have approved arrangements with additional requirements for action by the allocated worker. Where there are additional requirements the case is reviewed at a 3 or 6 month period to ensure the actions have been achieved and to review outcomes.

## Active Monitoring of Private Fostering Arrangements

Where Private Fostering arrangements are agreed by panel the PF Regulations <sup>2</sup>require that the family are visited and supported 6 weekly in the first year and thereafter 3 monthly. Fig 6 indicates the numbers of cases open at the end of each month throughout the year and shows an increase from 2017/18.



## 7. Themes in cases

During the course of this year, Panel has identified some common themes which permeate through a number of the cases.

### Permanence

Excluding Host arrangements with language Schools, there are a number of cases where arrangements are presented to the PF Panel, where issues exist which relate to permanence. Often children are placed in circumstances where parents are overseas or not in regular contact with the Private Foster carers. This can result in circumstances where decisions regarding the future arrangements for these children are unclear.

<sup>2</sup> Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005

## Parental Responsibility

There are cases where parents have passed away and Parental Responsibility of the surviving parent is disputed. Private Foster carers are reticent to formalise arrangements through court and therefore a re-assessment of the situation is required.

## Immigration Status

Of the 52 current active cases within the PF team, 9 currently have issues relating to the immigration status of the young person. In some cases parents are no longer able to enter the UK and therefore their ability to exercise PR effectively is questionable.

## 8. Outcomes for Children subject to PF Arrangements

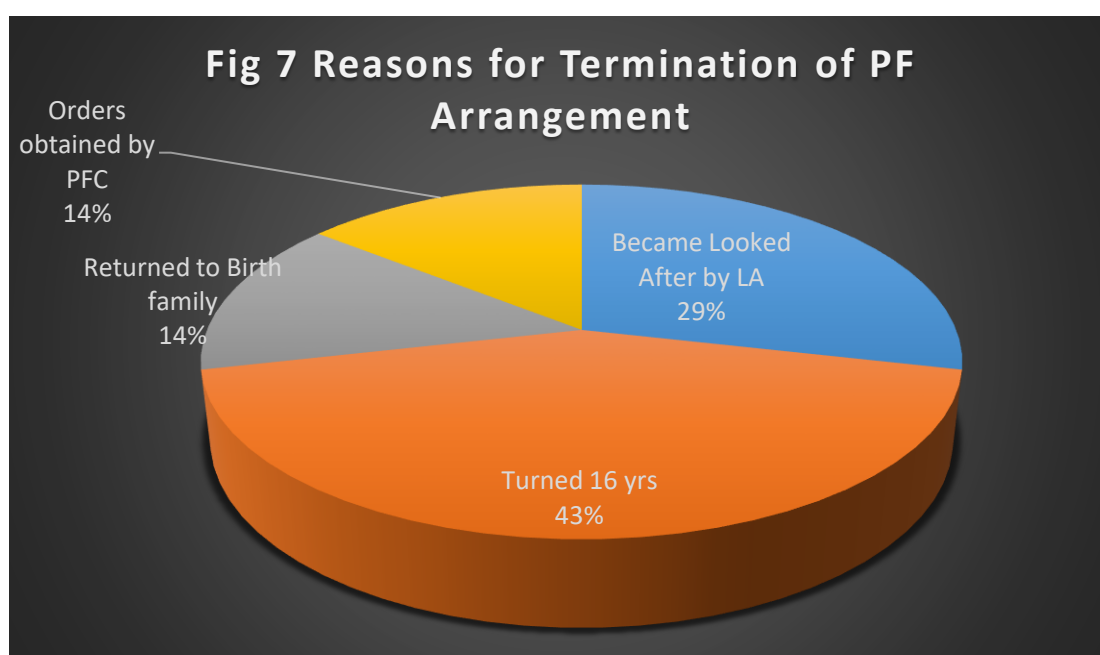


Fig 7 illustrates outcomes for those children who cease to be privately fostered. Whilst the numbers are relatively small, it is noteworthy that 43% reach 16 years of age and are no longer monitored within the PF team. Of these around half remain in the placement. Moreover, a similar proportion are either formalised by orders being made to the PF carer or to the local Authority. This represents a significant rise in interventions to secure stability and permanence of children on previous years.

## 9. The voice of the Child

At the initial visit all young people are seen by the assessing social worker and their views canvassed. In addition, during a fuller assessment of the arrangement, the views of children are recorded in the assessment report. This report forms the basis of the information considered by the Private Fostering Panel and allows the panel to review the impact upon the child's journey and their views are acknowledged.

## **10. Service Developments**

### **a. Publicity and awareness Raising**

A review has taken place of the current literature and has identified the need to further change leaflets and information for carers, partner agencies and particularly to create information for children and young people. These leaflets have now been printed and the Safeguarding Board's website updated.

Quick Reference Guides for busy practitioners including General practitioners and Schools have been developed, to support front line notifications.

There has been continued liaison with the various Language Schools and each school has been contacted and arrangements for improved communication are in development

The PF Team have attended team and service meetings and presented information regarding the definition of a Private Fostering arrangement and this has resulted in referrals being received from these teams.

The team have also attended and presented at the Primary Head Teacher's breakfast meetings, School Designated Safeguarding leads forum, Met with School Admissions, and Teams from the Council's Gateway and Housing Departments to advertise Private Fostering and make colleagues aware of the importance and role of the team.

The Team also hosted the Regional Private Fostering Network meeting, attended by colleagues from around south London working the PF field and were able to share information and obtain information from other local Authorities as to successful initiatives as well as benchmarking themes and experiences.

## **11. Areas for developments**

- **Recording systems**

Development of the Recording of Private Fostering arrangements within the Children's Recording System has taken place during 2018/19 and is now being implemented.

- **Assessment Timescales.**

As mentioned above, the majority of assessments remain outside the desired 42 days timescales and this is clearly a challenge for 2019/20. Whilst the initial contact with families is improving this is an area which needs to be addressed and improved.

### **Numbers of Notifications**

Discussions with other Local authorities have led to comparison data being available during 2019. This will allow the service to better review and compare the notification data and levels of Private Fostering Arrangements within Croydon. There will continue to be a need to ensure Private Fostering remains in Partner agencies minds and further methods of publicity to partners as well as to the wider communities in Croydon is planned.



## **12. Conclusion.**

The Private Fostering Service continues to develop and grow within Croydon and is providing a social work service to a group of potentially vulnerable children within the Borough. Numbers of notifications have remained steady while the number of active cases has risen. The Resources made available to the service has increased in line with this.

Achieving a timely response to notifications needs to further improve and it is recommended that a management review is undertaken to improve performance.

**Steve Hall**  
**Safeguarding & Quality Assurance manager**  
**Private Fostering panel Chair.**

Addendum 16/7/19 :

Following the recommendation of the annual report a management review took place in June 2019. The review audited 24 cases and recommended that assessments of Private Fostering arrangements are improved to ensure that the where issues, such as those identified within the annual report, are identified a full assessment of the child's circumstances is undertaken and their status as a Child in Need or Looked After Child is fully considered.

The review recommended strengthening the panel arrangements for privately fostered children and raising awareness of practice requirements, to ensure that children's arrangements are regularly reviewed and the quality of assessments receives greater scrutiny.

**Shaun Hanks**  
**Head of Service**  
**Quality Assurance & Safeguarding**