



Children's Services

Private Fostering

1. Executive Summary

It is recognised that private fostering is a private arrangement made by the choice of a parent to have their child looked after by someone who may be unrelated. A majority of private fostering arrangements are very positive and reflect the best interest of the child placed. However there have been a number of children in privately fostered arrangements who have suffered at the hands of their carers. A proper balance therefore needs to be maintained between the rights of parents to make private arrangements for the care of their children and local authority's statutory duties to safeguard privately fostered children/young people.

The Children Act 1989 placed a duty on local authorities in England and Wales to regulate children subject to private fostering arrangements but the response to this requirement was not effectively implemented until the inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié and the recommendations of the Every Child Matters: Change for Children agenda. The subsequent introduction of the Children Act 2004 and The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering Regulations) 2005 strengthened the responsibilities and duties of local authorities towards privately fostered children with a robust framework requiring every local authority to:-

- publicise the requirement for private fostering arrangements to be notified to the local authority within determined timescales
- satisfy themselves that the welfare of children who are privately fostered in their area is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted
- secure that such advice is given to those caring for them as appears to the local authority to be needed (C.A. 1989 S 67).

The aim of the policy is outlined below :-

- Private Fostering Team aims to promote and safeguard the welfare of all privately fostered children in accordance with the new statutory requirements contained in the Children Act 2004 and associated regulations.
- Private Fostering Team also ensures that children who are privately fostered are able to access information and support when required so that their welfare is safeguarded and promoted.
- Private Fostering Team has implemented a system of agreeing the suitability of private foster carers and private fostering arrangements in order to meet the requirements of the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005, s.44 of the Children Act 2004 and the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005.
- Private Fostering Team ensures that all privately fostered children/young people, their parents and private foster carers are aware of their legal rights and in the case of the parents of privately fostered children and private foster carers, their responsibilities under the law.
- Private Fostering Team provides advocacy and support to privately fostered children and their carers.
- Private Fostering Team is working towards achieving positive recognition for the private fostering process, to establish good co-operation and communication between all key agencies and professionals involved.

- Private Fostering Team is committed to improve the collaborative decision making process between the private foster carers, privately fostered children, their parents and all professionals.
- Private Fostering Team is committed to achieving safe management of risk whilst providing a responsive service to families which is sensitive to their needs.

2. Data Collection & Consultation

Data Collection

Social Services Management Information
CSCI Inspection report June 2006

Consultation

A very successful Private Fostering Conference took place in September 2006 where a large number of professionals from different voluntary and community organisations in Tower Hamlets and externally from other local authorities took part.

A number of workshops were facilitated on the day by the organisers to consult and share information on issues relating to privately fostered children and their carers.

During the CSCI inspection in June 2006, a selected number of privately fostered children and their carers were consulted and interviewed by the inspector about their experience of being privately fostered as well as their experience of working with the local authority. This also included the inspector meeting with multi-agency focus groups to ascertain the strength of the partnership relationships and effectiveness of working between Children's Social Care, Health, Education, Housing and the voluntary sector.

Private Fostering Team engages in regular consultation with all the partner agencies.

3. Key Findings

Disability

The current arrangements have not involved any disabled children or carers, however if a disabled child was to be privately fostered in the future the Private Fostering Panel would need to consider any resource implications for the department if the disability of the child was to impact upon the carers ability to safely care for him/her. This would be a legitimate concern if the private fostering arrangement involved the birth family living in another country and the carers receiving DSS benefits. Hence this is a potential barrier.

Race

The concept of private fostering is an unfamiliar one within the African and Asian communities where it is culturally acceptable for members of extended families and respectable adults within a village to take on the caring responsibilities of a child who may not have any blood ties. It is therefore not surprising that many private fostering arrangements remain hidden from the attention of Children's Social Care as it is considered by carers to be a custom and practice which should not have the intervention of statutory agencies.

There is a lack of public knowledge and awareness of the notification requirements amongst the BME communities compounded with a fear that the statutory agencies like that of Children's Social Care have direct links to the Home Office which could result in a child being sent back to her/his country of origin. This is a fundamental barrier to preventing people within the communities in notifying social workers in the Private Fostering Team of such arrangements.

Children who have come from abroad where English is their second language, are particularly vulnerable as they have to adjust to an unfamiliar social environment, to new carers/families, deal with separation and loss which is exacerbated further by the little or no contact with their birth families back in their country of origin. Such children are therefore open to abuse. Access to resources such as a culturally and linguistically appropriate CAMHS input is limited and is

therefore a barrier to privately fostered children having their emotional, psychological and behavioural needs being met.

The public-private debate, i.e. what distinguishes a private fostering arrangement from that of public fostering arrangements continues to be a general source of confusion for all communities and to an extent professionals working with adults and children which again is a further barrier preventing people coming forward to seek advice or notify local authorities.

The Private Fostering Team and the Development Officer will undertake public awareness events with BME communities to alleviate their fears in relation to the statutory requirements around notifications. The Private Fostering Team will also explore the possibilities of existing services being utilised to meet the needs of privately fostered children.

Gender

From the information available, many of the private fostering arrangements have women as the main carers for the young person and the onus is on the carers to apply for DSS. benefits as appropriate. The Private Fostering Team will continue to advise carers of their entitlement.

Sexual Orientation

Sexuality or sexual orientation has not to date featured in the private fostering arrangements agreed. A child or carer's sexuality or sexual orientation will not be a barrier to an arrangement being agreed.

Age

The relevant legislation pertaining to private fostering clearly identifies the age of 16 (18 if disabled) as being the age where the duties and responsibilities of the local authority to a privately fostered child is terminated. For some vulnerable children/young people who may have lived away from their birth families for a significant period of their childhood and require services after 16, it would be expected that the carers access services within the community and where appropriate the Private Fostering will support the carers .

Religion

Within the present private fostering arrangements, there is representation from Christianity, Islam and Buddhism with Islam being the predominant religion of the private foster carers and the privately fostered children. It is not anticipated that religion is alone a key factor in barriers to participation but should be seen in conjunction with the information already provided under Race.

4. Conclusions & Recommendations

Areas requiring further attention

- Work with children 16+ when PF status has ended.
- Acknowledging that the authority has no corporate policy on the collation of data in sexuality of service users.
- Expanding support services for children and families privately fostered, for example CAMHS.
- Provision of additional resources for the Private Fostering Team to build on existing work and develop the service as notifications continue to increase and additional issues/areas of need are identified.
- Continuation of awareness raising events both in the community and with professionals working with children and adults.

Summary of recommendations for improvement.

- Meeting the requirements of the legislation and TH protocol in relation to timescales for the completion of initial visits and core assessments.
- Improve the quality of interpreting provided to families and children privately fostered where English is their second language.

- Develop strategies to improve notifications from professionals and the public across all the diverse communities in Tower Hamlets.

Action Plan

Recommendation	Key activity	Progress milestones
Provide information, guidance and support for 16+ young people	To enhance the independent living skills of children before the private fostering agreement terminates at the age of 16/18 if disabled. To link them up with relevant voluntary and community agencies in order to minimise their isolation and lack of support.	December 2007
Improve interpreting service and social workers to ensure that they provide interpreters to children and their carers whose first language is not English.	Monitor and provide feedback to corporate interpreting service by the social workers. Interpreters to receive relevant training to work with Private fostering team.	September 2007
Female privately fostered children to access the service	The three Development Officers (Bangladeshi, Somali and African) to work closely with the respective communities to raise awareness and to encourage the community to notify the local authority of any private fostering arrangements involving a female child.	June-December 2007
Relevant training for the Private Fostering team social workers in relation to dealing with religious and disability issues. Public awareness event to improve notifications from professionals and the public of private fostering arrangements	Private Fostering Team to work with the Learning and Development team to identify the relevant training. Review individual training needs in individual PDR's. Review of the communications strategy to target all the communities in Tower hamlets but particularly those which have had an under-representation of notifications, i.e. Somali, Chinese and Vietnamese, African, Pakistani, African-Caribbean and White/European.	September 2007 May 2007 June – December 2007