

# Bradford Children’s Social Care Annual Report on Private Fostering 2020/2021

<b>Annual Report Author</b>	Caroline Brain: Programme Lead Social Care Practice
<b>Contributions to the report</b>	Kirsty Askew: Head of Service Lawrence Bone: Deputy Manager - Bradford Safeguarding Partnership Business Team
<b>Responsible Deputy Director</b>	Irfan Alam; Deputy Director

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Bradford Safeguarding Partnership receives comments on and endorses this report.

## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This annual report sets out the work undertaken by the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, in respect of its duties and responsibilities, for children living in Private Fostering arrangements as set out in The Children Act 1989 (Schedule 8); the Children Act 2004 and National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005.
- 1.2 This report is being provided under the requirements laid down in the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering which came in to force in July 2005.

*Section 7.9 – The Local Authority provides that a report is written each year for consideration by the Director of Children’s Services which include an evaluation of the outcome of its work in relation to privately fostered children within its area.*

*Section 7.10 – The Local Authority reports annually to the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board about how it satisfies itself that the health of privately fostered children in its area is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, including how the Local Authority cooperates with other agencies in this connection.*

- 1.3 This report gives an overview of the activities that have taken place in relation to Privately Fostered children in the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council and outlines the activities planned for the forthcoming year to promote local awareness and identify children and young people in Private Fostering arrangements.

## **2 OPERATIONAL AND STRUCTURAL ISSUES**

- 2.1 The Ofsted inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services’ in Bradford, published on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2018, asked that the response to children privately fostered be improved. The Inspection noted that the assessment of needs and planning needed improvement.
- 2.2 Following the inspection, the Private Fostering Steering Group met in December 2018 and produced an action and development plan.
- 2.3 The Statement of Purpose was up-dated, procedures reviewed and information made available on Bradford’s website, including a video promoting awareness of Private Fostering. Unfortunately, the some of the contents of this video is inaccurate and therefore has been removed.
- 2.4 Throughout 2019 – March 2020, the restructure and re-design of Bradford’s Children’s Social Care senior leadership team took place, with all senior management vacancies being filled by permanent staff, bringing stability and consistency across Children’s Social Care.
- 2.5 One of the priorities identified by the new senior leadership team related to the statutory responsibility for actively promoting awareness, identifying and supporting children in Private Fostering arrangements.
- 2.6 In October 2020, a new Private Fostering Project Group (PFPG) was established, to re-establish the work and be responsible for implementing the outstanding actions within the December 2018 report. Following the completion of the work plan, this group will be stood down, although a recommendation will be made at the end of this report for the Bradford Safeguarding Partnership to consider including oversight of Private Fostering within one of the existing sub groups

- 2.7 The Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Review, Commissioning and Provider Services, will be responsible for ensuring that the authority meets the requirements set out in The Children Act 1989 (Part IX AND Schedule 8) as amended by the Children Act 2004 and National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005. The Assistant Director will be responsible for producing the Private Fostering Annual Report and overseeing the implementation of identified improvements and actions.
- 2.8 The Assistant Director will ensure that the link with the BAAF quarterly special interest group for Private Fostering continues, ensuring that any new developments and focus areas relating to Private Fostering is shared with the relevant stakeholders.
- 2.9 The Service Manager for the Integrated Front Door will be the Designated Manager for staff to contact for advice, as required within the National Minimum Standards to ensure that there is a tight grip on the identification and support available to children and young people in Private Fostering Arrangements.

### **3 What is Private Fostering**

- 3.1 Private Fostering is defined in the Children Act 1989 as an arrangement made for the care of a child or young person under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled) by someone other than a parent, person with parental responsibility or close relative (close relatives, step-parent, siblings, siblings of a parent and grandparents) for 28 days or more in their carer's home.
- 3.2 In a Private Fostering arrangement the parent retains parental responsibility for the child or young person.
- 3.3 Private Fostering arrangements are diverse; examples of arrangements which are Private Fostering include:
  - Children and young people sent from abroad to stay with another extended family, usually to improve their educational opportunities;
  - Teenagers who are staying in short term arrangements with friends or other non-relatives;
  - Children sent from abroad to stay with another family for 28 days or more.
  - Children on exchange visits living with host families for 28 days or more.
  - A single parent who has a chronic health problem arranges for a child/young person to live with a friend on a permanent basis.

### **4 National Minimum Standards (NMS)**

- 4.1 The NMS for Private Fostering are issued by the secretary of State for Education and Skills under section 7 of the Local Authority Services Act 1970. The standards are statutory guidance that should be complied with unless local circumstances indicate exceptional reasons which justify a variation. These are minimum standards, rather than "best possible" practice.
- 4.2 Observing the standards is an essential part, but only a part, of the local authority's overall responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of each privately fostered child.

- 4.3 The standards are grouped under a series of standards which local authorities will be inspected against
- Statement on private fostering
  - Notification
  - Safeguarding and promoting welfare
  - Advice and support
  - Monitoring compliance
- 4.4 For the purpose of this report, each standard will be preceded by a statement of outcome to be achieved for Private Fostering arrangements by Bradford Metropolitan District Council.

## **5 Compliance and action taken on Standards in Bradford**

### **5.1 Statement on Private Fostering (standard 1)**

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 can be carried out.

- 5.1 A Private Fostering Position Statement was circulated to Children Social Care staff in October 2020, outlining the local authorities' duties and intentions.
- 5.2 An up-dated Statement of Purpose for Private Fostering has been produced and was launched on the 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021 on Bradford Council website and Bradford Safeguarding Partnership website.

### **6.2 Notification (standard 2)**

The local authority promotes awareness of the notification requirements and ensures that those professionals who may come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in notification; responds effectively to notifications; and deals with situations where an arrangement comes to their attention, which has not been notified.

- 6.1 Information has been up-dated and is available on Bradford Council's Website, explaining what the duty of notification is; along with a 90 second video outlining requirements and entitlements:

<https://www.bradford.gov.uk/children-young-people-and-families/private-fostering/private-fostering/>

- 6.2 Working Together to Safeguard Children – The Bradford Safeguarding Partnership, promotes awareness of the duty to inform the local authority of a child or young person being placed within Private Fostering Arrangements which can be accessed:

[https://westyorkscb.proceduresonline.com/p\\_childrn\\_away.html?zoom\\_highlight=private+fostering#](https://westyorkscb.proceduresonline.com/p_childrn_away.html?zoom_highlight=private+fostering#)

Information on website was reviewed and updated January 2021.

6.3 New literature has been developed to promote awareness and outline roles and responsibility including;

- Guidance leaflet for professionals, families and carers, with an easy to follow process, questions & answer section and what to do next.
- Promotional materials to be used across social media sites which will be launched 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021.
- New Video explaining what a Private Fostering Arrangement is and promoting support available.
- Ongoing advert on Bradford Schools Online and safeguarding publications to promote awareness of the notification requirements
- 7-minute Guide that will be launched by the Director of Children's Services on the 26<sup>th</sup> February 2021 and an agenda item for discussion at Children's Social Care team meetings week commencing 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

6.4 A marketing campaign to raise awareness with professionals on Private Fostering Arrangements was launched on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021 which will include raising awareness within schools, religious settings and with health professionals.

6.5 Targeted work will take place from March 2021 with schools, GP's & religious settings, through linking in with existing networks, to ensure that they are clear on the process for referral and understand their responsibilities.

## **7 Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare (standard 3)**

The local authority determines effectively the suitability of all aspects of the Private Fostering arrangements in accordance with the regulations.

7.1 A review of the end to end process for referral and assessment through Children's Social Care has been undertaken, with new and regulatory assessment forms and guidance notes for CSC staff and partnership agency staff being produced. This has been temporarily introduced to staff in a paper word document, due to the updates currently being undertaken on Bradford's ICT system.

7.2 The process is as follows;

**Private Fostering Process Map**

**Referral into IFD**

Identified as Private Fostering  
 Child under 16 (18 if with a disability) living with or planning to live with someone for 28 days or more who is NOT their parent, legal carer or close relative (grandparent, aunt, uncle, sibling or 1st cousin)

Child under 16  
 (under 18 with disability that does not meet CCHDT Criteria)

Child under 18 with a Disability that meets  
 the CCHDT Criteria

**Transfer straight to C & F Team**

**Transfer straight to Transition  
 Team**

Trigger the Private Fostering Arrangement on LCS

Issue Private Fostering Information and Checks Pack to the Private Foster Carer

Notify Designated Manager of the Private Fostering Arrangement Case

**On return of signed forms and consent, undertake Private Fostering Checks**

- Children's Social Care
- CAFCASS
- OFSTED
- Child Minding Service
- DBS
- References

Complete Private Fostering Agreement Assessment, recording all visits during the Assessment process

Designated Manager to approve Private Fostering Arrangement and send Ratifying Letter to Carer and attach on LCS

Team Manager Approves Private Fostering Agreement Assessment on LCS

Visit the child/young person and carer 4 weekly and process Private Fostering Regulation 8 Statutory Visits on LCS  
 all to be signed off by Team Manager

Discuss Care Planning / Permanency Planning within Supervision and record on the child's file

**Social Worker and Team Manager to ensure all the below are completed and updated regularly**

- Up to date Case Summary
- Demographics
- Involvements
- Chronology
- Genogram
- Supervision Record
- Management discussion on file
- Assessment's
- Finance

**Record any changes to the Private Fostering Arrangement as they are reported**

Child/young person moved back home  
 End Private Fostering Arrangement

Child/young person moved elsewhere  
 Start New Private Fostering Arrangement

Agree Permanency Plan, Care Planning Process (if required)  
 or child turns 16

**Transfer to appropriate Team**

**CIC if Child Becomes Looked After**

**16 plus if support to independence**

**Close or step down to Early Help or other services when deemed  
 appropriate**

## Review and assessment of current Private Fostering Arrangement Cases

- 7.3 Over the past 12 months, there has been five children identified that are in Private Fostering arrangements. Given the authorities demographics, it is highly unlikely that this is a true reflection of the situation. The launch and other interventions that have been put in place detailed in the action tracker, may assist in identifying an increased number of children.
- 7.4 In November 2020, a request was made to the Quality Assurance Service, to undertake an audit on the five children identified to ensure that their needs were being met.
- 7.5 All children were considered to be safe and placed appropriately with pockets of good practice in all case files.
- 7.6 The audit report includes the following recommendations to strengthen practice:
- To support practice being aligned with statutory requirements. It would be useful to have current accessible Private Fostering practice guide which reflects the purpose of Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.
  - Accessible templates linked to LCS pathways such as letters, agreements would also support next steps and provide consistency.
  - Having accessible documents which explain Private Fostering and provision being available to all potential private foster carers/ parents and children would support keeping significant people informed.
  - A transfer-in policy is required that includes specific documents from the referring authority in relation to a child, e.g. assessments, chronology and plans. Section 24 -28 of Working Together to Safeguard Children (July 2018) notes that effective sharing of information between practitioners and local organisations and agencies is essential for early identification of need, assessment and service provision to keep children safe.

## 8 Advice & Support (standards 4 -6)

NMS 4 The local authority provides such advice and support to private foster carers and prospective private foster carers as appears to the authority to be needed.

NMS 5 The local authority provides advice and support to the parents of children who are privately fostered within their area as appears to the authority to be needed.

NMS 6 Children who are privately fostered are able to access information and support when required so that their welfare is safeguarded and promoted. Privately fostered children are enabled to participate in decisions about their lives.

- 8.1 Following a review of information materials available, new publications have been developed and were launched on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021 and include;
- Information leaflet for Carers, providing advice and details on how to access support.
  - Guidance leaflet for young people which explains what a Private Fostering arrangement is and how to access support.

- Promotional materials to be used across social media sites to raise awareness to young people on Private Fostering

## 9 Monitoring Compliance with Duties and functions (standard 7)

The local authority has in place and implements effectively a system for monitoring the way in which it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. It improves practice where this is indicated as necessary by the monitoring system.

- 9.1 All children currently registered as being in a Private Fostering Arrangement have been assessed with no safeguarding concerns identified, however, not all visits comply with Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) regulations 2005 and Bradford's procedures in relation to privately fostered children.

Issues identified included;

- *lack of written consent from proposed private foster carers was seen on 2 of the 5 cases*
  - *visits not being undertaken within 'one week' of notification and speaking to all household members found on all 5 cases.*
    - *1 case has evidence recordings that a virtual visit was undertaken 12 working days after referral from another Local Authority*
    - *2 cases (siblings) have evidence of a visit taking place 3 weeks after referral but this was due to lack of engagement from the Private Foster Carer, there is evidence of attempts to contact on the case file both by phone and by letter*
    - *1 case does not have evidence of a visit taking place within 1 week of referral as the case was already open to CSC and the family were not open about when the child went to live with their Private Foster Carer*
    - *1 case has evidence recordings that a visit took place 8 working days after the referral*
  - *subsequent statutory visits not being undertaken and/or recorded on file found on 4 out of the 5 cases*
  - *relevant safeguarding checks such as DBS do not appear to be consistently available on file, 4 of the 5 cases did not have clear recordings that checks had been requested and/or of any outcomes of these checks*
  - *disconnect between statutory guidance and practice. For example, Bradford's procedures indicate that a report on the assessment should be presented to the designated manager (private fostering), however this has not been taking place*
- 9.2 The new referral and assessment process for Private Fostering was launched on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021 includes Practice Guidance and updated procedures for staff to ensure they are clear on their requirements, timelines and responsibilities.
- 9.3 Updated documentation required to process applicants through the checks process to become a Private Foster Carer has also been produced, including DBS checks and gaining written consent from proposed Foster Carers.

- 9.4 An updated Private Fostering Checks and Information Pack for Carers has been produced and circulated, which includes an Application Form, Consent Forms and Information Leaflets for children, families & carers.
- 9.5 The Private Fostering policy and procedures have been reviewed and up-dated and are available electronically on TriX for staff to access and the Bradford Partnership for Safeguarding Children website.
- 9.6 The Assistant Director will provide the Bradford Partnership for Safeguarding Children Performance, Monitoring, Audit & Evaluation (PMAE) subgroup, with a quarterly update on Private Fostering cases with referral start date, number of Private Fostering arrangements closing, assessments completed within timelines and the number of visits completed within timelines.
- 9.7 An annual audit will be undertaken by the Quality Assurance & Audit Service, to ensure that Bradford is compliant in its duties and functions as outlined within the national Minimum Standards.

## **10 Recommendations**

- 10.1 The identified PMAE Subgroup develops and implements an Action Plan which incorporates:
- Raise awareness within schools to identify Children & Young People that are in Private Fostering arrangement.
  - Raise awareness within religious setting to identify Children & Young People that are in Private Fostering arrangements
  - Develop effective process for colleagues within health/GP services to refer Children & Young People who are in Private Fostering arrangements to Children's Social Care service.
  - Develop calendar of events to raise awareness, utilising social media and existing organised activities.

