

Private Fostering Annual Report to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board

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Purpose of Report

This annual report sets out the work undertaken by the London Borough of Lambeth, in respect of its duties and responsibilities, towards Children living in Private Fostering Arrangements within the Borough.

It will provide an update on the progress made, since the publication of the last annual report to the Lambeth Safeguarding Children's Board (CSCB) in May 2015.

The report will also seek to address 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 children living in private fostering arrangements in the London Borough of Lambeth.

1. Introduction/Background:

- 1.1 Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010 sets out a policy and procedure function for the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (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 was 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 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).

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 Authority

- For 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 step-parent). There is no stipulation as to the age of the relative.

3. **Lambeth update**

In May 2015 Lambeth's Children's Social Care was judged by Ofsted to be inadequate and since then we have been on a rapid and exciting improvement journey. We have embarked on a process of change right across our children and family services. These changes aim to put social work practice right at the heart of everything we do.

We are focused on practice that builds relationships, enables and supports change for families, and promotes children's wellbeing and development. We believe we can achieve this by working with families and children openly and collaboratively.

Our commitment to relationship-based social work extends to how we work with partners and providers, where we build effective professional working relationships that enable families to change and thrive.

Promoting and enabling the best life outcomes for children is what our 'Children at the heart of practice' framework is all about.

Lambeth's 'Children at the heart of practice' sets out the vision and values that guide social work practice in Lambeth. Our framework is designed to be flexible so that it can work in a place as diverse as Lambeth where every family is different and what might be right for one family or child may not be right for another. It has been developed to support social workers to use their professional judgement and to

spend their time undertaking relationship-based social work with children and families that truly transforms lives.

This ethos and value base extends to our involvement with private fostering. Previous to the changes Private fostering cases were held within our family support and child protection team however in light of the re structure we have moved the service into a separate team that works with families that have no recourse to public funds and 16 and 17 year old homeless young people. It was agreed that this was the appropriate position within the organisation to hold private fostering so a focus and specialised service can be developed. This move will give a dedication and focus to private fostering and the clear link to our child assessment service will ensure safeguarding is a priority. There has been concern that numbers are low and have dropped from 2015-2016 the new dedicated specialist team will allow an emphasis which has not been previously applied.

4. **Performance Data**

Assessed cases by Gender

Total number of Private Fostering Assessments Completed		
	2015/16	2016/17
Male	7	1
Female	7	5
Total	14	7

Assessed Cases by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Sub- Ethnicity	2015/16	2016/17
Black or Black British	Caribbean	4	2

Completed Cases

Year	Reason for arrangement ending					
	Returned back home	Became Looked After	Adopted	Residence Order	Moved Abroad	Total
2015/16	5	1	2			8
2016/17	1	1		1	2	5

5. Notification and Monitoring Arrangements

- 5.1 All notifications of private fostering arrangements continue to be processed through Lambeth's first response Team and are then allocated directly to a Social Worker in the specialist team if the arrangement can be confirmed. If more information is required a single assessment will be completed within the CAT service to establish facts and then the case will be passed to the private fostering social worker team. All publicity states that FRT is the contact point for private fostering notifications, the team manager of FRT will be the key link person. Once the Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker team receives the notification from FRT, an initial visit will be undertaken to the household within the 7 day timescale.
- 5.2 Following the 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) will require completion 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 will be 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 As part of the monitoring of arrangements, the Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker team will liaise regularly with partner agencies involved with individual children and young people, especially, health, education and the UK Border Agency to ensure the well being of the children and young people is safeguarded.

6. Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare

- 6.1 Case responsibility for privately fostered children is delegated to a Social Worker based within a joint social services/housing multi-agency team co-located in Blue Star House. This social worker will undertake private fostering suitability assessments and subsequent welfare visits; however if the private fostering arrangement is not confirmed then a single assessment is completed by the CAT teams then referred to the specialist team if a private fostering arrangement is then confirmed.
- 6.2 The operational Manager of the Corporate no recourse to Public Funds Team has the responsibility of sign off on all decisions about the overall suitability of private fostering arrangements.
- 6.3 Should any safeguarding issues arise during the assessment process or ongoing visits then the case would transfer to the CAT service for a single family assessment and statutory intervention if so required. This

will be done jointly between the social workers to ensure consistency for families.

7. Advice and Support

- 7.1 The Specialist Private Fostering allocated 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 Specialist 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 Where a privately fostered child is identified they are then defined as a child in need, services may be provided consistent with the local policy for accessing these services.

8. Analysis of Information/Data

- 8.1 The London Borough of Lambeth continues to make good progress in ensuring that its current arrangements for Private Fostering are meeting the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering.
- 8.2 Whilst there remain some operational challenges with respect to awareness raising, the team manager has a renewed focus to engage partner agencies in a collaborative commitment to improving and embedding the Communications Strategy.

- 8.3 In recent months, the service has moved to the Corporate No recourse to Public Funds Team from the FSCP service which resulted in variable delivery of services; however with the agreement of the service moving into the NRPF team the service becomes part of the substantive staffing structure, this will bring a stronger commitment to service delivery in this area.

9. Recommendations / Action Plan up until March 2018

- 9.1 On-going awareness raising sessions to be extended to include community mental health services, housing, health visiting, children's centres, probation services, and faith and community groups. This will be arranged via the LSCB.
- 9.2 Issues relating to private fostering will continue to feature in CSC staff induction sessions and relevant CSCB training events.
- 9.3 Links will be maintained with national and London-wide initiatives such as CORAM BAAF Private Fostering Special Interest Group and the London Safeguarding Children Board.

10. Resource Implications Arising from Recommendations

- 10.1 The Private Fostering Arrangements in the London Borough of Lambeth need to continue to improve practice and build expertise in this area by providing a programme of intensive awareness raising. This will have clear resource implications in terms of social work time, and resource which if numbers expand will need to be considered in the wider resource allocation across the services.

11. Actions

- 11.1 Private fostering in Lambeth has been moved from FSCP into one of our specialist teams within CSC alongside NRPF and 16/17 homeless team. This report sets out actions for the team in taking private fostering forward.
- 11.2 The annual private fostering report will be made available on Lambeth's LSCB website along with information leaflets and guidance for professional's community members and young people.
- 11.3 Issues relating to private fostering to continue to feature in CSC staff induction sessions and relevant CSCB training events.
- 11.4 The Communications plan for Private Fostering is to be finalised and reviewed and updated annually, taking into account any regional or national awareness raising campaigns. We intend to make full use of internal communication channels established with all partner organisations. This will be completed by the new team manager in September 2017.
- 11.5 Lambeth has set up a Private fostering audit group that will meet every 6 months to audit a sample of private fostering cases to consider whether appropriate thresholds are being adhered to and to ensure good quality assessments are taking place. The assistant director for QA will chair these audit groups. Results will feed into the annual report for the LSCB from 2018.

12. Conclusion

There have been historical concerns about the under-reporting of private fostering arrangements. The figures reported in the SFR are believed to be an underestimate of the total number of children in private fostering arrangements. The DSCF (2010) research also cited the following as some reasons why private fostering arrangements are failed to be reported: (i) lack of awareness or confusion as to what constitutes a private fostering arrangement, (ii) concerns about confidentiality, (iii) agencies not aware of their responsibility to notify and (iv) insufficient awareness among parties involved in private fostering arrangements.

The objective of the developments proposed is two-fold: to increase the notification rates of private fostering arrangements in order to strengthen our ability to fulfil our safeguarding duties towards privately fostered children and to ensure that we deliver consistent quality services consistent with best practice.

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