



To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Date: 11 January 2018

Subject: Private Fostering

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To provide an update on current private fostering activity in Coventry and compliance with national standards in response to the Ofsted recommendation to "Review the authority's arrangements for privately fostered children and ensure that those arrangements and associated practice comply with statutory guidance".

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board are recommended to:
1. Consider the content of the briefing note
 2. Identify any further recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

3 Information/Background

- 3.1 Private Fostering is when a child under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled) is cared for by someone who is not their parent or a 'close relative'. This is a private arrangement made between a parent and a carer, for 28 days or more.
- 3.2 During March 2017 Ofsted undertook an inspection of Coventry Children's Services and published their report in June 2017. One of the recommendations was to "Review the authority's arrangements for privately fostered children and ensure that those arrangements and associated practice comply with statutory guidance". Since that time an officer task and finish group has been established to implement the recommendation and improve practice.
- 3.3 There are 7 national standards for private fostering and progress has been made against each of them since the inspection.
- 3.4 Standard 1 – *The local authority has a written statement which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out.*
- 3.5 There is a Coventry Family and Friends Care policy within which is a statement of the duties and functions in relation to private fostering and provides information which is helpful to anyone who is caring for someone else's child in a variety of circumstances. There is also a procedure which guides practice and those who are working with children and families. These form part of the Children's Services Procedures Manual, available to all staff and plans are in place to have them included onto the LSCB Website.

- 3.6 *Standard 2 – The local authority promotes awareness of the notifications requirements and ensures that those professionals who may come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in notifications. Responds effectively to notifications and any private fostering arrangement that comes to their attention.*
- 3.7 A communications plan has been devised and will be implemented in January and throughout the year using workshops and leaflet and poster distribution to improve the notifications and understanding of roles and responsibilities of parents, carers and professionals. (Appendix 1) Schools have a particular role to play as children will often come to their attention in the first instance. A letter has gone out to all schools reminding them of their responsibilities and once the revised leaflet is finalised this too will be distributed to schools for onward distribution for parents/carers
- 3.8 Coventry has a poster and leaflet that outlines the responsibility of professionals. The leaflet has very recently been refreshed and now also includes information to parents and carers of their responsibility to notify the local authority if they are intending to make private fostering arrangements.
- 3.9 The Initial Contact Team (tel.02476788555) is the contact number for all those who wish to notify Children’s Services of a private fostering arrangement and this number is widely publicised and has remained unchanged throughout the recent changes within Children’s Services. When a notification comes through the case is triaged including the sharing of multiagency information and is allocated to the relevant area team and a private fostering assessment is undertaken.
- 3.10 *Standard 3 – The local authority determines effectively the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangement in accordance with regulations*
- 3.11 Coventry uses an assessment tool for private fostering arrangements which reflects the regulatory requirements. This includes questions regarding the carers, police checks, the parents and the circumstances of the arrangements, the child and their needs and the carer’s ability to meet them. As part of the response to the Ofsted recommendation a designated lead manager for private fostering has been identified. His key responsibility is to quality assure the assessment before it is signed off. Any potential carer or arrangements which are not suitable will also be brought to the attention of the lead manager.
- 3.12 *Standard 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.*
- 3.13 During the assessment of the private fostering arrangements there is a requirement to ensure that advice is offered to the carers about their responsibility but also the type of help and support they might expect. This will vary from support and resources being identified through a Child in Need plan (where this threshold has been met), to just the statutory visiting requirements which is a visit to child and carer every six weeks. Information for carers is an area which will be improved with the revised leaflet and a clearer focus on the carers and their needs in assessments. The planned workshop presentations and training over the next few months will focus on the importance of the needs and capacity of the carers as well as the needs of the child. This will include highlighting the Family hubs as a place where carers can go to receive advice as well as the fostering training events, should they wish to attend.
- 3.14 *Standard 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.*
- 3.15 In undertaking the assessment of the private fostering arrangements the social worker speaks with the parents of the child to understand why the arrangements are being made and their suitability. It is the local authority’s duty to promote and safeguard children and so far as it is consistent with this duty, provide services and support to families so that they can look after their own children. As part of this any particular issues which may be

hindering parents from providing care for their children themselves should be addressed. This is an area for improvement and needs to be more clearly demonstrated in the assessment.

- 3.16 Standard 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.*
- 3.17 The child and their welfare remains the key focus of the assessment in the private fostering arrangements. The assessment covers all aspects of their needs including health, education and contact with their parents and siblings. There is a requirement to visit children with their carers every 6 weeks as a minimum during the first year. The children are seen alone as part of this so that they get an opportunity to speak privately with the social worker about any worries or concerns they may have. These visits take place and are reported on every 4 weeks which is necessary if the child is also subject to a Child in Need plan.
- 3.18 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.*
- 3.19 There is now a system in place for monitoring and reporting on private fostering arrangements. The lead manager for private fostering now has responsibility for ensuring that the assessments are of a good quality and adequately consider the carers needs and abilities to safeguard the welfare of the children they are looking after. The private fostering cases are subject to management oversight in line with performance management processes as with other children's cases and a record is kept about the notifications received. A further audit of arrangements is taking place in March 2018. The Local Safeguarding Children Board will receive update reports every 6 months and there is a requirement to produce an annual report on the discharge of private fostering functions which is due in April 2018.
- 3.20 There are currently 13 Children who are privately fostered in Coventry although this is likely to be an under representation of the actual number of such arrangements in the city. This under representation is a national issue as local authorities struggle to persuade families and communities to notify them of arrangements, as often these can be regarded as wholly private family matters and often the requirement to notify the local authority is not understood.
- 3.21 The children's ages range from 1 year to 15 years, but the majority are older children. 6 are girls and 7 are boys so gender is not a determinant.
- 3.22 The ethnicity of the children is diverse, with children from white and black minority ethnic backgrounds.
- 3.23 The children's circumstances broadly divide into two types; family breakdown or bereavement where the private foster carers tend to be extended family members and children who are foreign nationals but are in the UK to have better education and opportunities.

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