



Leicester
City Council

**WARDS AFFECTED
ALL**

**FORWARD TIMETABLE OF CONSULTATION AND MEETINGS:
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
CABINET**

**6TH NOVEMBER 2008
17TH NOVEMBER 2008**

Annual Report on Private Fostering

Report of the Interim Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update cabinet on the work of the Children and Young People's Department with children who are privately fostered.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The report highlights the numbers of private fostering arrangements that are notified to the local authority and the response made to these statutory notifications.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That the OSMB and Cabinet acknowledge the contents of the report and its conclusions.
- 3.2 That the OSMB and Cabinet support further publicity within the coming year to continue to raise public awareness and awareness in schools of the need to notify all new, or proposed private fostering arrangements.

4. Report

4.1 Background

- 4.1.1 The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005, Guidance and Minimum Standards 2005 came into force in May 2006. The new regulations were intended to improve the performance of local authorities in responding to the needs of children who are fostered privately and to ensure that they are properly safeguarded.
- 4.1.2 There was a presumption that nationally there were far more children being cared for in private fostering situations than were being notified to the authorities. It was also considered that for many of these children they had little or no contact with their parents or others with parental responsibility and therefore were at risk of being poorly safeguarded.

4.1.3 In 2006 representatives of Leicester City, Leicestershire and Rutland County Councils and partner agencies met to revise the publicity strategy concerning the then new private fostering regulations. Key information was also posted on the LSCB website. In August 2006 updated procedures were launched within the Leicester City Children and Young People's Service. Ofsted undertook a limited inspection of those procedures in the City in September of that year. Recommendations made by Ofsted were subsequently implemented. Between 2005/6 and 2006/7 there was a doubling of activity across the board in relation to private fostering and this was reported to the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Local Safeguarding Children Board Core Business Group, in July 2007. It was recommended that a similar approach to awareness raising and responses be continued for the following year, given that there was clear evidence of a significant improvement in performance in relation to private fostering during the preceding year.

4.2.1 Notifications

4.2.2 The Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) require a return to be made at the end of May each year, detailing activity concerning private fostering in the preceding year up to 31st March. The following tables draw on information submitted this year.

4.2.3 A key factor giving rise to the new regulations that came into force two years ago was to increase the number of notifications made to local authorities concerning children living in, or about to live in private fostering arrangements.

Table One

	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8
Number of new notifications during the year.	15	36	23(2 [*])
Number of new private fostering arrangements that began during the year	17	36	23(2 [*])
Number of notifications of private fostering arrangements ending in the year.	11	26	26
At 31 st March – the number of private fostering arrangements.	9	19	18

* Figures in brackets relate to two placements that should have been included in the DCSF return for 2006/7.

4.2.4 Last year there was a doubling of notifications over the previous year, which is probably explained by the public and professionals becoming more aware of the requirements and may have involved an element of 'catching up' with previously un-notified placements. Therefore the lower figures this year, whilst showing an increase over two years ago, are probably more reflective of the actual level of activity in a typical year.

4.2.5 What remains significant is the number of arrangements ending during the year. Following an increase in the number of private fostering arrangements after 2005/6, the number overall seems to have remained steady. Much of the activity therefore relates to new arrangements commencing, which subsequently end shortly after; very few arrangements last long enough to be considered by fostering panel. Therefore the majority of the private fostering arrangements in existence as at 31st March appear to be stable having been in place for some time.

4.3.1 Visiting

4.3.2 Another key element within the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005, is the need for a consistent response to the visiting of children in such arrangements to ensure that they are suitable to the needs of the child.

Table Two

	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8
Number of initial visits made during the year.	17	36	23(2*)
Number of initial visits made within 7 days of the beginning of the arrangement.	3 ^a	31	21(2*)
% of visits made less than 6 weekly to arrangements starting within the year.	N/A	100%	100%
% of visits made less than 12 weekly to arrangements starting before the year.	N/A	100%	100%

4.3.3 The number of initial visits matches the number of new private fostering arrangements being notified, however in two cases the initial visit occurred outside the 7-day requirement. Without specific information on those particular cases, this is likely to have been due to delays either in being notified of the arrangement, or difficulty in being able to arrange the visit itself. There is clearly a high level of compliance with the visiting requirements; this

^a This figure is low because many notifications were received some time after the arrangement commenced. The higher figures in subsequent years are suggestive of higher compliance with the need to make timely notifications.

suggests that privately fostered children within Leicester City are adequately safeguarded through these contacts and likely to have their needs assessed and met.

4.4.1 Country of Origin

4.4.2 Table three represents a condensed version of the table required by the DCSF detailing the country of birth of all notified privately fostered children during the year. The table excludes reference to regions from where no privately fostered children are recorded to have been born. To avoid the table becoming too complicated figures from the previous two years' returns are not indicated, but are referred to in the narrative below:

Table Three

Age at 31 st March	All Children	UK	Africa
Under 1years	-	-	-
1-4 years	-	-	-
5-9	4	4	-
10-15	19	18	1
16 and over	2	1	1
All Children	25	23	2

4.4.3 There are some very significant changes from previous years. After having three children in the 1-4 year category last year, the age profile has reverted to a more predictable pattern whereby the majority of private fostering arrangements relate to teenagers. Historically, in Leicester, the majority of private fostering arrangements have been associated with UK born (predominantly white) young people. There continues to be a reduction in non-UK born children who are privately fostered.

4.4.4 The government is interested in the birthplace of privately fostered children, since this goes some way to indicate the reason why children may be so placed; often the children of foreign students are fostered privately, or foreign students attending language schools may be privately fostered. This is not a feature of private fostering in Leicester, where the predominant reason for such arrangements is family relationship breakdown.

4.5.1 Conclusion

4.5.2 It is now just over two years since the implementation of the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005, Guidance and Minimum Standards 2005 came into force. Changes were made to the way information and publicity was made available at the same time. The City procedures were revised and updated and implemented just under two years ago. The above changes have now settled in and this is the second full year of reporting since the changes in regulations.

4.5.3 There has been a reduction since last year in the overall number of notifications, although the number of private fostering arrangements remains

stable. There continues to be, relative to the actual number of continuing arrangements, a high number of notifications of new private fostering arrangements and those that end within the year.

- 4.5.4 No specific publicity campaign has been run in the city within the last year to raise public awareness of the requirement to notify the local authority of private fostering arrangements. Despite this, the numbers of new notifications remains higher than before the new regulations came into force and awareness amongst professionals may have contributed to holding up these figures. The DCSF return suggests that privately fostered children are initially visited promptly and thereafter at regular intervals in accordance with the regulations.
- 4.5.5 It may be timely to initiate further public publicity within the next year, since it is important to ensure that the levels of notifications do not fall. Having said that, there is little to suggest that the number of notifications is too low, but of course it is difficult to assess how many 'un-notified' private fostering arrangements persist.
- 4.5.6 School staff in particular are well placed to know when children may have moved to live in a private fostering arrangement across all communities. It is proposed to use the schools 'Extranet' to raise awareness and distribute guidance booklets along with the Safeguarding Procedures.

5. FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Financial Implications

- 5.1.1 There are no material financial implications arising directly from this report. - Colin Sharpe, Head of Finance and Efficiency CYPS, ext. 29 7750

5.2 Legal Implications

- 5.2.1 When a local authority (LA) receives notification of a private fostering arrangement, under section 67 'Children Act 1989' (the Act) it has a duty to satisfy itself as to the welfare of children who are, or in respect of whom it is proposed they be privately fostered in that authority's area. The 'Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005' (the regulations) set out what the LA must do to discharge that duty, and the Act and regulations also set out the statutory notification scheme for those who enter into a private fostering arrangement or propose to do so.
- 5.2.2 The DCSF requires LA's to submit an annual return providing statistics as to the number of children under private fostering arrangements as a way of collecting information about such children. This report focusses on the authority's work and initiatives towards compliance with its statutory duties. "

Cathy Healy, team leader, Community Services Law x 6712

6. Other Implications

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	Paragraph Within Supporting information	References
Equal Opportunities	N		
Policy	Y	4.1.3	
Sustainable and Environmental	N		
Crime and Disorder	N		
Human Rights Act	N		
Elderly/People on Low Income	N		

7. Background Papers – Local Government Act 1972

8. Report Author

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Key Decision	Yes
Reason	Is significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising more than one ward
Appeared in Forward Plan	Yes
Executive or Council Decision	Executive (Cabinet)