

Executive Report

CYP Scrutiny Commission: 19th September 2012

City Mayor and Executive Public Briefing -

4th September 2012

Decision to be announced on: tba

Annual Private Fostering Report 2011/12

Decision to be taken by: ??

Lead director: Rachel Dickinson

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report author: Rebecca Small, Service Manager, Duty & Assessment Service
Peter McEntee, Head of Service, Children's Fieldwork
Andy Smith, Director Children's Social Care and Safeguarding
- Author contact details: (35) 5032, (35) 5233, (29) 8306

1. Decision Summary:

Members to note the work undertaken in relation to children and young people subject to Private Fostering Arrangements.

2. Why it is needed:

This is a statutory requirement. The annual return for Private Fostering was submitted on 31 May 2012.

3. Options:

Significant work has been undertaken in the past year to address areas highlighted in the 2010-2011 annual return and to raise the profile and awareness of Private Fostering. Private Fostering is now on the agenda for 'safer education training', with 15 sessions taking place throughout the year, delivered to designated teachers responsible for safeguarding issues in schools. The purpose of this is to ensure that other agencies are aware of Private Fostering and to ensure that notifications are made to Children's Social Care when necessary.

Divisional procedures are currently being updated and will be implemented shortly to ensure that data collection is easier and informative. The performance in relation to visiting frequencies has improved in the past year however further improvements are necessary. Practice is considered to be good, with children and young people's needs considered appropriately. Visits are however often out of timescales by a small margin (up to 5 working days) either as a result of cancellations due to competing priorities or as a result of actual planned visits being out of time.

It is recommended that copies of the audits are provided to Team Managers in order for managers to see how their teams are performing. The purpose of this is to ensure that Team Managers are aware of the requirements in relation to statutory visits and to ensure this area is regularly discussed in supervision with workers. When this is discussed and the visiting frequency is recorded, it has been shown that visits are often undertaken in time. Team Managers would then be expected to report back to service managers regarding their own team's performance. This is in keeping with other aspects of performance management and recommendations following the Ofsted Inspection that key performance indicators should be team specific.

The launch of the new procedures will include an emphasis on meeting timescales wherever possible. Additionally, once implemented any overdue visit will also be highlighted on the workers desktop, also visible to the Manager. This will serve as a reminder to ensure that visits are planned in a timely manner.

It is proposed that the six monthly audits will continue. This will give an oversight to ensure that the procedures are being implemented and will ensure that any issues identified can be addressed in a timely manner.

4. Tell us how this issue has been externally scrutinised as well as internally?

LSCB Board
Private Fostering arrangements were also considered in the Ofsted inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children's Services completed in December 2011.

5. Financial, legal and other implications

5.1 Financial implications

There are no significant financial implications arising from this report.
Martin Judson, Head of Finance

5.2 Legal implications

There are no legal implications arising from this report
Kamal Adatia, City Barrister & Head of Standards

5.3 Other Implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

6. Background information and other papers:

7. Summary of appendices:

Appendix 1 – Background information

8. Is this a confidential report (If so, please indicated the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

Yes/No

9. Is this a "key decision"?

Yes

Appendix 1

1. Background information

The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 came into effect on 1 July 2005. These provide guidance as to the regulatory responsibilities of Local Authorities in responding to those children living in their area, subject to private fostering arrangements. There was some concern that such children were not being identified and therefore not appropriately safeguarded. Private fostering is where a child or young person under the age of 16 is cared for by anyone other than a family member or relative for more than 28 days.

In 2006 new policies and procedures were devised to meet the requirements of these regulations. These were implemented after a thorough consultation with partner agencies including representatives of both Leicestershire and Rutland County Councils.

Local Authorities are required to submit an annual private fostering return (PF1). This was introduced on 1 April 2004 and this is now the eight year of collection. The return is due on 31 May 2012.

Six monthly audits have been undertaken since October 2010. These have been undertaken with a view to determine if the Local Authority is meeting its statutory requirements, and to suggest solutions where areas of improvement are necessary. Such audits have also ensured that the Local Authority is very much aware of which children are subject to private fostering arrangements. Consequently, following the recent Ofsted Inspection, Leicester City Council's performance was assessed as good in relation to Private Fostering. Whilst this is positive, it is recognised that there is on-going work to be undertaken to improve performance. The procedures have been updated to address the issues highlighted in last year's report. These are about to be implemented.

Numbers of Private Fostering arrangements

The following table provides details of the information required by the Department of Education, included within it are the returns submitted in previous years for comparison.

Table 1

	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12
The number of new notifications during the year	15	36	25	37	17	24	11
Number of new private fostering arrangements that began during the year	17	36	25	37	15	24	11
Number of notifications of private fostering arrangements that ended during the year	11	26	26	13	18	20	16
At 31 st March – the number of private fostering arrangements	9	19	18	14	11	15	9

It is evident that the numbers have fluctuated over the years, the same is true for the year 2011-2012. There were 25 Private Fostering arrangements in total throughout the whole year, 11 new notifications and 14 existing arrangements from the previous year. Whilst the number of new notifications is considerably lower the number is accurate given the level of scrutiny of private fostering arrangements. All 25 cases were audited to determine visiting frequency and the effectiveness of service delivery.

Visiting frequency

The table below provides details of the frequency of visits undertaken following notification. The Department of Education requires the annual return (PF1) to include an audit of the effectiveness and quality of the service provided. An audit of the case files of those children subject to private fostering arrangements has been undertaken and the information (comparable to previous years) is detailed below.

Table 2

	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12
Number of initial visits during the year	17	36	35	37	17	24	11
Number of visits made within 7 days of the beginning of the arrangement	3	31	23	32	15	14 (58.3%)	7 (63.6%)
% of visits made less than 6 weekly to arrangements starting within the year	N/A	100%	100%	100%	100%	58.3%	79.6%
% of visits made less than 12 weekly to arrangements starting before	N/A	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	91.6%

The table shows that there has been some improvement on the performance in the previous year specifically in relation to initial visits and the 6 weekly visits (for those arrangements in the first year). However, the previous audit undertaken in October 2011 indicates that performance was stronger in the first half of the year. Initial visiting frequency at that time was 85.7% and 6 weekly visits were 87.5 %.

In relation to 12 weekly visits, for those private fostering arrangements in their second year, performance has deteriorated in comparison to last year's figures. During the first half of the year this frequency was 88.23% and so has improved since that time. There is no particular pattern or circumstance that can be attributed to these figures rising or falling.

Audits of these cases files have demonstrated that children have been visited, and whilst this may not always be within the specified timescale, it is evident. Of the 25 cases that were audited, one did not require visits to be undertaken as the arrangement ended shortly after the last visit (which took place within the previous year). Of the remaining 24 cases, 9 had all visits undertaken within timescales. (These visits were often undertaken more frequently than the 6 weekly required timescale). 7 cases had all visits bar one undertaken within the required frequency, 4 had all visits bar 2 undertaken in time, 3 cases had all but 3 visits out of timescale and 1 case had no visits undertaken on time. In this latter case the visits were often out of time by approximately 1 week.

The audits demonstrated that all aspects of the children and young people's needs were considered. Children and Young People's views were sought, birth parents were contacted and their views sought, and other agencies were consulted throughout. Safeguarding issues were addressed and S47 investigations were commenced as appropriate. There was one case that was of concern which was also highlighted in last year's audit. Remedial action was not immediately undertaken and the poor performance continued. However, this case was reallocated and the new team manager has now addressed all the issues of concern.

It therefore appears that the practice is far more positive than the statistics initially suggest. Looking at the visiting frequency in detail it would appear that there is considerable potential to improve to ensure the data supports what is effectively good practice. It is considered that the planning of visits could be managed better and smarter. This requires all practitioners to understand the relevance of the timescales. Whilst the majority of practitioners appear to be aware of the statutory requirements, visits are sometimes booked late and any cancellation then impacts significantly upon the timescales. There will inevitably be cases where timescales cannot be met given other competing priorities (and this was sometimes the case for cancelled visits), however, had these visits been planned better, when rearranged, visits would not have gone out of the required time. Greater significance needs to be given to the frequency of visits to children subject to private fostering arrangements.

Breakdown by age and birth

Finally, the Department of Education requires the information provided in the annual return to be specified according to a breakdown of age and place of birth. This includes all private fostering arrangements that began on or after 1 April 2011 and includes those where the arrangement ended before 31 March 2012. These details are as follows;

Table 3

Age at 31 March 2012	All Children	UK	Asia	Black Caribbean	Black African
Under 1 year	0	0	0	0	0
1-4 years	4	0	4	0	0
5-9 years	2	1	0	1	0
10-15 years	14	7	2	2	3
16 years and over	5	3	1	1	0
All children	25	11	7	4	3

Whilst the majority of children and young people subject to private fostering arrangements continue to be those in the older age groups 10-16 years, and from White/British backgrounds, this is not in the same numbers as indicated in previous years. This is considered to be indicative of the changing demography of Leicester City's population. There are larger numbers of younger children subject to Private Fostering arrangements, however the audits demonstrate that consideration has been given to the most appropriate arrangement for such children, and alternatives have been discussed.