

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 SEPTEMBER 2014

PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS

Report from: Barbara Peacock, Director Children and Adults

Author: Phil Watson, Assistant Director Children's Social Care

Summary

The following report provides an update to Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the directorate's work in relation to private fostering, including our work with young people and with partners to appraise them of their roles and responsibilities in relation to young people who may be privately fostered.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 Private fostering is underpinned by the Children Act 1989.
- 1.2 Sections 66-70 defines private fostering and makes clear the duty of the Local Authority to safeguard the welfare of young people subject to these arrangements and give advice to carers as required.
- 1.3 Schedule 8 of the 1989 Act sets out the role of the Local Authority in more depth, updated by Schedule 8 of the 2004 children Act, making clear the duty to promote public awareness of private fostering.
- 1.4 The National Minimum Standards for private fostering were published in 2005.
- 1.5 The Department has a suite of policy documents covering private fostering which includes a Statement of Purpose.

2. Background

- 2.1 The definition of private fostering is when a child under the age of 16 (or under 18 if disabled) is cared for by someone who is not their parent or a 'close relative'. Close relatives are defined as step-parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles or aunts; and is a private arrangement made between a parent and a carer for 28 days or more.

- 2.2 Medway Council has a dedicated part time post located within the Fostering Service. This post assesses the suitability and safety of these placements and supports children and young people subject to these arrangements.
- 2.3 The post holder is an experienced and skilled practitioner with extensive experience of working in this field. This post reports directly to the Fostering Team Manager.
- 2.4 There is a duty on the part of parents and prospective carers entering into private fostering arrangements to notify their Local Authority. This is in order to safeguard and protect the child's welfare as well as ensuring that the child, carer and parent are receiving appropriate support and help.
- 2.5 Likewise there is an expectation of partner agencies e.g. schools, GPs etc to notify the Council given the potential vulnerability of privately fostered children, including those who may have been trafficked.
- 2.6 There are considerable peaks and troughs in the number of notifications received, assessments undertaken and young people supported in Medway.
- 2.7 This is notably due to the number of language schools located in the area. However, many of the young people in these establishments will return home after their course ends and so our input is time limited.

3. Advice and analysis

- 3.1 The private fostering service reports annually to the Medway Children's Safeguarding Board. No concerns were reported from the last annual report and the next report is due in late 2014.
- 3.2 Medway has a proactive and robust private fostering service.
- 3.3 Young people have the opportunity to provide feedback on the support and service provided, and this has been positive.
- 3.4 The service has engaged positively with colleagues across the wider Children's Social Care Service, corporately, and with a wide range of partner agencies to publicise and promote our joint safeguarding duties and responsibilities towards young people who are or may be Privately Fostered.
- 3.5 This has included awareness raising campaigns and updates to Medway Maritime Hospital children's ward staff, pre and nursery school managers, community health care staff including health visitors, school nurses and midwives, the Eastern European Community Council and the MESA day/African health centre.
- 3.6 We have agreed new transition pathways for those privately fostered young people once they reach the age of 16, and where assessed as requiring ongoing support towards adulthood these children will be supported up to the age of 18 either through the Children in Need or Early Help services.
- 3.7 There is now a new single point of access for referrals and notifications regarding private fostering through the Children's Advice and Duty Service

ensuring a standardised and responsive approach for assessment and allocation to a Social Worker.

- 3.8 The Head of Service for Looked After Children is now the designated Agency Decision Maker for the signing off of all private fostering assessments, ensuring they continue to be high quality and safeguard and protect children appropriately.
- 3.9 As of the 4 September 2014 there were 10 young people who were Privately Fostered in the authority and the team maintains a demographic profile of the cohort at any particular given time.
- 3.10 In July 2014 there was an internal review, and 6 of the then 8 open cases were audited in-depth. All showed evidence of visits in accordance with required timescales, and of monthly management oversight.
- 3.11 One case highlighted the potential for confusion in the interface between unaccompanied asylum seeking children and private fostering, which could lead to children being placed at risk. However, the case had been referred for an assessment and the young person and their carers had been seen and visited regularly.

4. Further Action

- 4.1 The private fostering publicity campaign for 2014/15 has been finalised. Already this year private fostering has been promoted at the Medway “Culture Festival” and the team have met with Adult Social Care services to ensure they are aware of the legislation and their role in safeguarding these children and young people.
- 4.2 Further promotional work has been undertaken through articles in Medway Matters and Let’s Talk departmental newsletter. The service is in discussion regarding placing articles in the NHS, schools and other public sector publications.
- 4.3 The private fostering section of the wider fostering website is being updated
- 4.4 The private fostering policies are being updated as part of our wider work with BAAF (British Association of Adoption and Fostering). The private fostering element will be completed by the end of October 2014.

5. Risk management

- 5.1 The Council is fully compliant with respect to its duties and responsibilities for privately fostered children.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 Private foster placements are placements with unpaid carers although they are eligible for financial assistance under section 17 of the Children Act.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 The legal framework and implications are set out in the body of this report. All recommendations are in line with existing legal responsibilities.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1. That the Committee notes the content of the report and provides any comment and feedback to the service.

Background documents

None

Lead officer contact

Phil Watson, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care

Email: phil.Watson@medway.gov.uk Tel: (01634) 331215