

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CHILDRENS SERVICES AND LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 21ST January 2010

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDRENS SERVICES

PRIVATE FOSTERING

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on Private Fostering activity within the Local Authority since the Ofsted Inspection in July 2008. This report outlines for members the actions which have been implemented in response to the findings and recommendations of the Ofsted inspection.

1. Background

- 1.1 Private Fostering was included in the Children and Adoption Act 2004 as an outcome from the inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié. The Act introduced a voluntary notification scheme, where any person who intended to become a private foster carer (or who subsequently became one) should notify the local authority so that appropriate checks and an assessment could be undertaken to ensure the child's welfare. The local authority should then monitor that arrangement and take action to safeguard the child when necessary. The local authority also has the power to bar unsuitable people from being private foster carers, prosecute for failure to notify an arrangement and make requirements of a carer and parent as part of a private fostering arrangement. Minimum standards for private fostering were introduced in 2005.
- 1.2 A child is privately fostered when a parent or person with parental responsibility makes arrangements for their child to live with someone who is not a close relative and the arrangement is to last for longer than 28 days.
- 1.3 As part of the minimum standards, an annual report should be presented to the Director of Children's Services and the Local Children's Safeguarding Board.

2 Private Fostering in Wirral

- 2.1 The Private Fostering policy and procedure for Private Fostering was reviewed and re-issued in May 2008. The process by which the Children and Young People's Department continues to execute their responsibilities outlined in the Private Fostering Regulations 2008 remain as outlined within the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report of 11th November 2008.
- 2.2 Notifications of Private Fostering arrangements, although increasing annually, remain low, this is a national trend which is being monitored by BAAF (British Association Adoption and Fostering). As a result of extensive training and awareness raising within Children's Social Care we are receiving more enquiries as to whether a case meets the criteria for Private Fostering.
- 2.3 There are currently 4 children in a Private Fostering arrangement. During the Summer 2009, the Department also assessed and approved 30 Private Fostering arrangements in relation to children visiting from Belarus. Within the last twelve

months there has also been a further 3 arrangements approved, however, these young people have now returned home.

3 Standards of Assessment and Process

- 3.1 Of the 37 arrangements reported this year, 31 were completed within the required 35 day timescale. The remaining assessments were significantly outside of the required timescales. Recognising Private Fostering arrangements and responding within timescale is an important safeguarding activity. Complying with Private Fostering Assessment timescales has been an issue within some social work teams, and this is being addressed through work with Team Managers, and through the training referred to below.
- 3.2 The current process of tracking Private Fostering notifications and ensuring that assessments are completed is that once notification is sent by the Central Advice and Duty Team to a District Social Work Team an email is also sent to the Private Fostering Officer in order to arrange a joint visit. Following completion of the assessment the social worker then forwards the assessment to the Designated District Manager through ICS (Integrated Children's System) for approval. All Private Fostering case files are audited by the designated District Manager and Strategic Service Manager, Children and Families.

4 Actions

- 4.1 In response to the Ofsted inspection in July 2008 an action plan was compiled and has now been fully implemented. Below illustrates how these actions have been met and processes to evidence continued improvement in this area.
- 4.2 A multi-agency training session has been developed and implemented by the Private Fostering Officer. The session is delivered on a bi-monthly basis. Feedback from attendees has been extremely positive, the sessions have highlighted the need for continued awareness raising and a bespoke training programme for social work staff. A specific training session for social work staff has been developed to incorporate the use of ICS (Integrated Children System) within the Private Fostering Assessment. This training session is also a compulsory component of the core training for all new members of social work staff.
- 4.3 Awareness raising continues to be a priority action; during January 2009 we worked very closely with BAAF (British Association Adoption and Fostering) in deliver their national awareness raising campaign. "Somebody else's Child". To celebrate the success of the campaign and an acknowledgement of our work we were invited to attend an event at the House of Lords in Westminster with one of our Wirral families. Our part in the awareness raising campaign from a Wirral perspective ranged from having surgeries in the Pyramids Shopping Centre, Arrowe Park Hospital and broadcasting a radio clip on Private Fostering. We continue to take advantage of local events to raise awareness about Private Fostering. We have been invited by BAAF to join this years campaign to target schools and all education staff.
- 4.4 The accountability framework for approving, auditing and reviewing all Private Fostering work is fully implemented within ICS. Quarterly data is reported on Private Fostering activity to the Local Safeguarding Board. Annual reports are submitted on Private Fostering to the Local Safeguarding Board and the Director of Children's Services.

- 4.5 Information leaflets have been produced and circulated throughout Wirral which describe what Private Fostering means to both children and adults.
- 4.6 The Private Fostering Officer continues to meet with all social work Team Managers and Area Teams/Area Team Leaders quarterly to discuss any matters regarding Private Fostering.

5. Financial and Staffing Implications

There are no additional staffing requirements.

6 Equal Opportunities / Equality Impact Assessment

The provision of this service will ensure that Privately Fostered Children are not disadvantaged in any way due to their circumstances.

7 Human Rights Implications

Privately Fostered children are a vulnerable group, and the provision of this service will ensure that their human rights are safeguarded.

8 Local Agenda 21 Implications

None

9 Community Safety Implications

None

10 Planning Implications

None

11 Local Member Support Implications

Children who are privately fostered may live in all wards across Wirral.

12 Background Papers

- Private Fostering Policy May 2008
- Ofsted Inspection Report July 2008
- The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005
- National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005
- The Children Act 2004

13 Recommendations

It is recommended that members note the findings of the OFSTED inspection and the work undertaken to meet the requirements identified. Members are in particular asked to note the governance arrangements now in place through the Local Safeguarding Children's Board, the strengthening of policy and procedural requirements, and the ongoing dissemination and public awareness raising activity across the Children's Trust.

Howard Cooper
Director of Children and Young People's Department