

Committee(s)	Dated:
Safeguarding Sub Committee	27/09/2017
Subject: Private Fostering Report for 2016 to 2017	Public
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
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Summary

There have been no private fostering arrangements identified in the City of London for 2016 to 2017. Therefore, this report will inform Members about how the City of London has met the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering by raising awareness of private fostering arrangements with professionals and residents in the City of London. The report also identifies the potential barriers to raising awareness within the community, whereby residents associate "private fostering" arrangements as being akin to being a local authority foster carer.

Members will be informed about the recommendations for 2017 to 2018 in raising awareness within the community, and the different approaches that will be used to engage with residents. Where possible, we will collaborate with other organisations and agencies to ensure maximum coverage across the City of London. For professionals, there will awareness-raising sessions during the year through the staff induction programme.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report

Main Report

Background

1. Definition of Private Fostering Arrangements

A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately (that is to say without the involvement of the local authority), for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled), by someone other than a parent or close relative, with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Private foster carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great-aunt, or they may be a friend of the family or other non-relative, such as the parents of the child's friend. A person who is a close relative of the child, as defined by the Children Act 1989 (a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt – whether by full- or half-blood or by marriage or civil partnership – or step-parent), is not a private foster carer.

Examples of private fostering arrangements are:

- children sent from abroad to stay with another family, usually to improve their English or for educational opportunities
- asylum-seeking and refugee children
- teenagers who, having broken ties with their parents, have short-term arrangements to stay with friends or other non-relatives
- children living with host families, arranged by language schools or other organisations
- children living with members of the extended family, e.g. a great-aunt.

The primary responsibility of the local authority is to safeguard and promote the welfare of these children and young people by:

- meeting the duty to promote public awareness of the requirement to notify the local authority of private fostering arrangements and, therefore, to reduce the number of 'unknown' private fostering arrangements
- responding to notifications and assessing the private fostering arrangements
- meeting the duty to support private fostering arrangements.

This responsibility is underpinned by the Replacement Children Act 1989 Guidance on Private Fostering; Children Act 2004 (Section 44 amends Section 67 in the 1989 Act); the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005.

2. Current Position

Over the past 12 months, there have been no private fostering arrangements identified in the City; it is highly unlikely given the demographics of the City that this is a true reflection of the situation. The City of London is ensuring that it is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, and this is an area that has been identified by the City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Board (CHSCB) as a priority. The attached annual Private Fostering Report will be going to the City Executive Board of the CHSCB.

In 2016 to 2017, there was a considerable amount of activity in raising awareness of private fostering arrangements. A key area of development was the introduction of the private fostering app. Launched in July 2016, it was promoted through the following methods:

- Partnership events, where briefings were given to partner agencies as part of a wider conference event.
- Articles about private fostering in magazines going out to residents across the City of London.
- Awareness-raising with the police, schools, early years settings and general practitioners in the City through the distribution of posters and leaflets.
- Training events for City of London Corporation staff and partner agencies which included private fostering training.
- Partnership events at which leaflets were distributed to professionals and residents in the City.

Any contacts or referrals about private fostering are directed to the Children and Families team and information on private fostering is captured as part of the performance data set.

In 2016, the City of London was subject to the Ofsted “single inspection framework” of local authorities’ children’s services. This inspection acknowledged the low number of private fostering arrangements. However, it judged completed assessments as being thorough and timely in providing ongoing support.

3. Conclusion

As evidenced in this report there have been no private fostering arrangements identified in the City over the past 12 months. However, given the demographics of the City of London, it is likely that there are unreported private fostering arrangements. Although there have been attempts to engage the community through residents’ meetings and publications, it has proved difficult to raise the profile of private fostering in the community. Therefore, the communication strategy for 2017 to 2018 will focus on areas where residents are likely to visit, such as schools and libraries.

Parents’ and carers’ initial response when informed about private fostering arrangements is to believe it is synonymous with becoming a foster carer for the local authority. This perception often prevents them from reading any further about these arrangements, as they consider them to be irrelevant. Therefore, it is important that they receive the information as a whole rather than just as a headline, as this often leads to disengagement from the message being given. This will be taken into consideration in the awareness-raising sessions for the community in 2017 to 2018.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Private Fostering Report

Background Papers

Private Fostering leaflet for Professionals, Parents and Carers and Children and Young People

www.chscb.org.uk

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