

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Report to Children's Services Scrutiny Board

Date: 14 March 2013

Subject: Response to Scrutiny Inquiry Report – Private Fostering

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

1.0 Purpose of this report

1.1 This report sets out the response of the director of children's services to the Recommendations of the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) inquiry into Private Fostering, published on the 17th of January 2013.

2 Background information

2.1 The Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) identified Private Fostering arrangements as an area for scrutiny at its programme planning meeting on the 20th of June 2012.

2.2 The Board was concerned that long term private foster care arrangements could be in place without the knowledge of the Local Authority; and that this could mean that some children and carers did not have access to adequate support. The Board was also concerned that unregulated arrangements could place children at risk exploitation.

2.3 The Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) inquiry on 23rd August 2012 gathered and evaluated a wide range of evidence including written reports and verbal evidence from external experts. The inquiry considered:

- Communication about private fostering arrangements
- Regulation of private foster carers

- Safeguarding vulnerable children and young people and made three recommendations to the Director of Children's Services to strengthen these arrangements.

2.4 The Director of Children's Services has welcomed the report and has accepted the recommendations of the Board that relates to Children's Services.

3 Main issues

3.1 This sections sets out the response of the Director of Social Services to these recommendations.

3.2 That the Director of Children's Services commissions and implements a more extensive Private Fostering communication, training and education plan aimed at statutory, voluntary and commissioned services who come into contact with children. This should aim to deliver the necessary skills required to identify a private fostering arrangement, provide knowledge about their statutory responsibilities and referral routes in order to report a private fostering arrangement. An update of progress is required by the Scrutiny Board at the July 2013 meeting.

3.3 Children's Services currently provides a range of training and information to ensure that all those working with children are able to identify and respond appropriately to private fostering arrangements. These arrangements have been recently reviewed and strengthened and the Director will provide an update report for the Board in July 2013.

3.4 That the Director of Children's Services investigates how the information regarding private fostering can be disseminated effectively to young people in Leeds. This information should also advise them who they can speak to if they need help and support. An update of progress is required by the Scrutiny Board at the July 2013 meeting.

3.5 It is important that information on private fostering is available and accessible to children who may be privately fostered. The Director of Children's Services will ensure that such information is available and provide an update report for the Board in July 2013.

3.6 That the Director of Children's Services strengthen networks and lines of communication with religious leaders and community representatives in order to raise awareness about private fostering and the statutory requirement to notify the Local Authority. An update of progress is required by the Scrutiny Board at the July 2013 meeting.

3.7 It is important that all communities within the city are aware of the legal requirements in relation to private fostering. The Director of Children's Services will work with religious leaders and community representatives in order to raise awareness and will provide an update on progress to the Board at their July 2013 meeting.

4 Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

4.1.1 The Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) consulted widely as part of their review.

4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

4.2.1 Equality and diversity screening was not required as a response to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) recommendations. These issues will be considered in the report to the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) at their meeting in July 2013.

4.3 Council policies and city priorities

4.3.1 There are no immediate implications for council policy and governance.

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 The recommendations will be resourced from within existing Children's Services staffing and budgets.

4.5 Legal implications, access to information and call in

4.5.1 None

4.6 Risk management

4.6.1 The risks associated with the recommendations are managed by the Looked After Children Programme Group which is chaired by the deputy director (safeguarding, specialist and targeted services)

5 Conclusions

5.1 The Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) inquiry into Private Fostering has identified some significant issues in relation to how the welfare of children in these arrangements can be safeguarded and promoted. The report recommendations will strengthen local arrangements.

6 Recommendations

6.1 Members are requested to approve the proposed responses as outlined in this report.

7 Background documents

7.1 Report of the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) inquiry into Private Fostering