

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Report to Children's Services Scrutiny Board

Date: 25th July 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 provides an update to the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) on the actions taken to strengthen local arrangements as a result of their 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 welcomed the report and accepted the recommendations of the Board that relates to Children's Services on the 14th March 2013.

2.5 This report provides an update to the Board on key actions.

3 Main issues

3.1 At the meeting of the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) on the 17th January 2013 the Board asked for an update on actions taken in relation to three key 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 The Private Fostering communications strategy 2013/14 has been completed jointly by the Service, Corporate Communications and with assistance from the LSCB Communications Team. A copy is attached with this report (Appendix 1). This is a comprehensive document drawing together aims and objectives, key messages, stakeholders and communication channels. The Strategy is supported by a detailed Marketing and Communications Plan as well as a detailed Communications Action Plan to address the scrutiny board enquiry and recommendations. (see attached Strategy for full details). The plan is a rolling programme of training and publicity events as well as rebranding all the publicity materials and more specific one off actions.

3.4 New leaflets and posters are being prepared, which will be made available to a wide range of organisations as well as on line, posted on the web page dedicated to Private Fostering. The Child Friendly City Leeds logo and "Somebody Else's Child" strap line are being used as key messages.

3.5 As under reporting continues to be a concern for the local authority the strengthened communications strategy identifies a wide range of key stakeholders who will be targeted and advice and training for these key groups will be provided. The development of a multi-agency approach to private fostering and improved communication with professional groups will facilitate improved recognition and reporting of private fostering arrangements.

3.6 It has recently been Private Fostering week and as part of this week, the service has used the Council's Insite carousel to publicise Private Fostering; a press release was sent out using an example of a successful private fostering placement

to illustrate what private fostering is. This involved the young person directly along with his carer. The story was posted on the Foster4Leeds Website face book and Twitter account, which in turn was picked up by BAAF and shared with all their followers. A question and answer forum was set up using the Twitter account and this in turn was tweeted to an estimated 30,000 followers.

- 3.7 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.**
- 3.8 The Private fostering worker has been working directly with one young person who is privately fostered in order to get ideas of how best to communicate with young people who are privately fostered. (see above for details). His story may be also be used by the Breeze website as well as the LSCB communications team in order to access a much wider network linked directly to young people. A meeting is being arranged with the Children's Voice and Influence team to develop further how we can best communicate directly with children who are privately fostered.
- 3.9 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.**
- 3.10 The Service has been working closely with the department's Consultation Involvement officer to ensure the new publicity leaflets on private fostering are circulated to a wide range of community organisations and faith groups. Community organisations have been identified who do not have links to the internet and the new publicity leaflets have been sent out to 90 such organisations and a further 100 organisations have received the leaflets electronically through the Leeds Community Forum. Work will continue in this area and follow up meetings and briefings will be offered by the service as part of the communications plan.
- 3.11 The Private fostering communication plan will be regularly monitored and with an additional member of staff to be recruited imminently to work on private fostering it is anticipated that Private Fostering will achieve much greater visibility in Leeds so that all children who are privately fostered in Leeds are brought to the attention of the Leeds Social Work Service.

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. This report provides an update to the Board on the actions taken to 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