



**PRIVATE FOSTERING**  
**ANNUAL REPORT**

**1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2016 – 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2017**

<b>1.</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Overview of year 2016/2017</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Private Fostering Activity</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Communication strategy</b>	<b>6</b>

## **1.0 Introduction**

Private fostering continues to be an area that is vastly under reported. Whilst the legislation advises that parents should contact the local authority prior to the placement of their child in a private fostering arrangement research undertaken by Community Care advises us that this seldom happens.

We are also aware that whilst private fostering spans most age groups it more commonly occurs for young people between the age of 13-16 years old. In research undertaken in 2015 the reasons for being privately fostered were identified as follows:

- 25% said they became privately fostered because their parents were on holiday;
- 17% said they were privately fostered because their parents had long term health problems;
- another 17% said their parents were working away from home;
- 10% said their parents were living somewhere else;
- 9% said they'd had a row with their mum and dad;
- and 5% said their parents were in prison.
- A further 34% cited 'other' as the reason they became privately fostered. (BAAF)

The reasons for becoming privately fostered differ from the author's view that many private fostering arrangements are likely due to family conflict; however the research above indicates that this is not the case and therefore the private fostering group will be targeting areas that had not been considered previously.

## **2.0 Overview of the Year 2016/17**

2.1 The Private Fostering Regulations came into force on the 1st July 2005 and were intended to strengthen and enhance the Children Act 1989 notification scheme. Also published were new minimum standards for Private Fostering. These minimum standards are intended to focus local authorities' attention on Private Fostering by requiring them to take a more proactive approach to identifying arrangements in their area.

2.2 In light of the research identified focus this year has been on developing arrangements for identifying children whose parent has received a custodial sentence. In order to do this Halton Safeguarding Children Board was asked to write to local prisons to enquire about how they identify offenders whose children may be living in a private fostering arrangement. The HSCB Chair undertook this action and having had discussion with our Pan Cheshire colleagues agreed to do this on behalf of all four areas. In addition Cheshire & Greater Manchester Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) also agreed to undertake a piece of work to consider how they could improve notification and reporting pathways.

2.3 CRC have developed a process to support identification at the earliest opportunity during the assessment stage undertaken by the custody team (within the first 8 days of custody). CRC will look to explore with individuals where and who

children are staying with whilst they are in custody. They will check to see if it meets the 'private fostering criteria' and action taken with the case manager from there, if necessary. This will be in place in all Merseyside, Cheshire and Greater Manchester prisons. However, this will not cover those from Cheshire who are serving sentences elsewhere.

2.4 The target for awareness raising in the forthcoming year will be focused on local solicitors who are in an ideal position to provide early notification to Children's Social Care where a custodial sentence is expected or takes place.

2.5 Additional targeting of hospitals will take place in order to ensure systems are in place to identify children whose parents are being sectioned due to mental health concerns and those who experience long term hospital stays due to ill health.

2.6 Private Fostering is included as a subject and explained in the HSCB Safe Parenting Handbook that has been distributed to a wide cross section of parent and carers in Halton. It has also been included in the HSCB training. In addition the SCiE Team discuss private fostering at the network meetings and it is included in basic safeguarding training and safeguarding refresher training for schools. Private fostering is also touched upon in the CSE basic awareness training and a case study used in LADO training.

2.7 Briefing sessions were delivered to the multi-agency workforce in order to raise awareness and positive attendance was received from services who work with Adults. However the briefings experienced low attendance as a whole and as a result a more targeted approach will be taken with agencies in the forthcoming year. Briefing sessions around Private Fostering will take place three times a year on a rolling programme.

2.8 Schools continue to include an intake question on their enrolment forms regarding who has Parental Responsibility for the child and where the child is living in order to identify private fostering at the start of the school intake year.

### 3.0 Private Fostering Activity 2016-2017

	2016/17
Notifications received during the report year	3 (8 abandoned)
Private Fostering Arrangements starting during the reporting year	3
Arrangements open during the year	9
Average age of those children & young people with Private Fostering arrangements during the year	11.5yrs
Private Fostering arrangements ending during the reporting year	7 (four families)
Number open at end of reporting year 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2017	2 (two families)

The data above shows that there are currently 2 ongoing Private Fostering arrangements in Halton. There were 9 assessments open throughout the 12 month period, of these 2 have continued. 3 Private Fostering arrangements were ended

because the carers sought legal orders and were successful in obtaining Child Arrangement orders. 3 arrangements ceased as the children's carer married their father and one young person left Halton and returned to his mother's care in another Authority.

Within Halton many of the notifications around Private Fostering are as a result of parental separation where the parents were not married and the child chooses to live with the parent who is not biologically related. Private Fostering is enacted but often ends as the carer is granted a formal order of care by the court.

#### 4.0 Recommendations

- Target Information at local solicitors
- Target information at Police
- Continue with briefing sessions to the multi-agency partnership
- Target awareness raising at hospitals

#### 5.0 Private Fostering Communication Strategy for the HSCB

Action	By Whom	By When	Progress
Utilise the information gathered by IRMs and Private Fostering Group and target agencies who were aware of living arrangements for privately fostered children but who did not notify Children's Social Care	Group	As information becomes available	Ongoing
Tweets on LSCB Twitter account	Dawn Lewis	Ongoing	completed
Disseminate literature in training sessions	Dawn Lewis	All training events	Completed
Send updates via HSCB newsletter	Dawn Lewis	Ongoing	Completed
Included in the Safeguarding Children Induction Booklet (which needs updating).	Dawn Lewis	July 2015	Completed
HSCB intend to test out impact of communication via frontline visits to staff in 2016.	HSCB Team	2016	Completed
Promote at community events	All	Ongoing	Completed