

8th December 2022

Title of the Report Private Fostering

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: Cllr Stacie Elson

1. Aim

To provide an update to Scrutiny Committee in respect of Private Fostering. To provide assurances around how Walsall Safeguarding partnership has delivered its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and how the welfare of privately fostered children has been safeguarded and promoted during the last 12 months period. This report also outlines the activities which have been undertaken to promote awareness of the notification requirements regarding children who are privately fostered.

To support proposals for the ongoing implementation and development of Private Fostering both internally and across the wider partnership.

2. Recommendations

1. Note the progress made to date since the Ofsted recommendation was made in October 2021 and identify any further information required.
2. To support the safeguarding partnership in driving accountability across the wider partnership and community in raising awareness of children who reside in Private Fostering arrangements.

3. Report detail

The number of identified private fostering arrangements in Walsall remains extremely low and it is believed that this is due to non-identification rather than non-existence of such arrangements. Whilst children in Private Fostering arrangements may be being safely cared for by Private Foster Carer's, there is the need to be alert to children who are 'hidden' from the gaze of statutory services. These could include children who are being trafficked or the victims of modern day slavery. There may also be children in private fostering arrangements who are left in unsafe situations. The identification of such children requires an alertness across organisations and a commitments from the Safeguarding Partnership to support awareness raising and inter agency training required to enable appropriate notification to the Children's Services.

We currently have five children whom are subject to a private fostering arrangement in Walsall.

A Private Fostering toolkit has also been developed with the aim was to assist in identifying and assessing children whom are privately fostered for when children are identified as being subject to a Private Fostering arrangement. The toolkit has a number of documents to support the assessment and clearly outlines the responsibilities of Walsall Local Authority when a child is privately fostered. The documents and resources include power point presentation- briefing for all professionals on Private Fostering, processes to be followed when undertaking Visits and Assessments and best Practice Guidance, Coram BAAF Guidance- Completing good private fostering assessment and Private fostering leaflets for children and carers. A Private Fostering Annual report is also a requirement that has been complied with.

Throughout the year of 2022 the following activities were undertaken:

- Input and awareness raising to healthcare trust employees as part of their standard safeguarding training.
- Private foster awareness training was undertaken to all Walsall GP's
- Launch of Private Fostering Toolkit within Children Services
- Private Fostering is included within any induction programme for a new starter in Children Services
- A Private Fostering scenario has been included within the Right Help Right Time multiagency training
- BAAF awareness training video "somebody else's child : a film about private fostering" was published on safeguarding website for partners to access
- Presentation at the DSL workshop and Headteachers forum
- Presentation at each locality Time to Talk event
- Private Fostering was included in Children Services "weekly brief."
- Private Fostering was added as an agenda item to all DSL's during supervision

To strengthen the oversight of children who are subject to a private fostering arrangement we have developed a tracker in which all children are regularly reviewed at permanency panel and tracked. Positively audit activity has evidenced there is a recognition of what constitutes a private fostering arrangement when referred into MASH. There is evidence of robust safeguarding activity taking place. There is evidence that assessments are being completed jointly with the Fostering Service. DBS medicals and references are being obtained more timely although this could be further improved.

Evidence that the private fostering toolkit is having a positive impact. There is evidence of assessments paying attention to the cultural needs of families and identification of community resources that can support these needs. All children have safeguarding checks in place. There was no child who was left at risk in the private fostering arrangement and safeguarding action has been undertaken where there were issues emanating from the Private Fostering assessment.

4. *Financial information*

Privately fostered children do not receive a fostering allowance from the Local Authority. The guidance stipulates that financial sustenance for the carers is the responsibility of the parents. There may be a requirement to provide services under section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

5. *Reducing Inequalities*

The number of identified private fostering arrangements in Walsall remains extremely low and it is believed that this is due to non-identification rather than non-existence of such arrangements. Private Fostering remains an area of practice that brings challenges in both workforce understanding, awareness across partnerships and the wider Walsall community. There is emerging understanding of process around private fostering assessments and the roles and responsibilities of the children's social worker and the fostering social worker. There is evidence of robust safeguarding activity taking place and no child has been left at risk in a private fostered arrangement.

Children in private fostering situations can be invisible as has previously been stated. Whilst it is important that we act promptly and follow due process when a child has been identified, it is equally important to raise awareness and urge both the public and professionals to report signs of informal care arrangements for children who are being cared for by a person who is not their parents.

6. *Review*

There are two central issues which must remain the focus when reviewing private fostering. One is awareness raising throughout the partnership. The leaflets and redesign of posters is currently being undertaken and following this will be a media campaign. It is hoped that this will lead to increased referrals for children whom are privately fostered. Secondly, children services are now in a much improved position in respect of responsibilities and duties when a private fostering referral is made. The toolkit, tracker, audit activity and awareness raising has had a positive impact meaning that should demand increase children services has the capacity to ensure that appropriate safeguarding checks are undertaken and robust assessments undertaken by both childrens and fostering social workers.

Background papers

Private Fostering Annual Report

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