



# Private Fostering Audit: Summary for Practitioners & Managers

July 2018

## Background

The Local Safeguarding Children Board Quality Assurance (QA) sub-group is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the work carried out by Board partners to safeguard and promote the welfare of children; and to make recommendations about ways this can be improved. It does this through an annual programme of case file audits.

In March 2018 the QA Subgroup completed an audit of six Private Fostering cases. This summary provides a briefing on the findings of that audit.

## What is Private Fostering?

Private fostering is an informal arrangement to look after and give a home to someone else's child who is under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled) and where the carer is not a close relative of the child and the arrangement lasts for more than 28 days. Some examples of privately fostered children may include:

- children living apart from their family 'on the edge of care';
- children attending language schools who are placed with host families; and
- adolescents temporarily estranged from their parents.

It is law that private fostering arrangements are notified to local authorities. Once the local authority has been notified, they have carry out checks on the suitability of the carer and home; make regular visits to ensure the child continues to be safe; make sure advice and support are available to the carer; and say whether or not they find the arrangement acceptable.

All professionals working with children have a responsibility to safeguard privately fostered children. **If you become aware of a private fostering arrangement, and you are not confident that it has been notified to the local authority, you should contact SPoA.**

If you are aware that a child is being privately fostered, you should encourage the private foster carer to contact SPoA. Many people won't be

aware that their informal arrangement is even known as private fostering.

Through identification, assessment and monitoring of private fostering arrangements, practitioners can support carers, and the children they are caring for, to ensure:

- The child is safe and well cared for
- The carers have a clear agreement about delegation of parental responsibility particularly around areas such as health and schooling – which can then be shared with professionals
- The child gets appropriate health care & schooling
- The child understand why they are where they are
- The child has regular and good quality contact with parents, family & siblings
- There is an agreed plan for long term stable care of the child

## **Method**

Six cases with multi-agency involvement were selected using Children's Services data. Details of cases were gathered including family background, relationships, referral date, assessments and other key information

At the audit meeting auditors shared and discussed the information held on each child and agreed strengths, areas for improvement, recommendations, immediate actions required, and agreed an overall grade for each case.

## **Strengths in Multi-Agency Practice**

In the cases audited, there was evidence of:

- ✓ The children were all seen and their views were gathered.
- ✓ The private fostering arrangement was reported and recorded quickly in four relevant cases.
- ✓ The Regulation 8 visits were completed within agreed timescales for five cases. In the sixth case, of a language student, auditors felt that the visits were proportionate as the child was in almost daily contact with their family.
- ✓ In one case there was clear evidence & recognition of domestic abuse in the family and direct work to support the mother which would in turn assist the children to return home. This child's lived experience had significantly improved.
- ✓ Good multi agency collaboration and targeted work. Risks to the child were identified and quickly removed with a good safety plan

in place in one of two relevant welfare cases. Professionals in different agencies were adapting support to maintain engagement with the second (an almost 16yr old child) to prevent the situation escalating.

- ✓ Good work to determine that the home was suitable, that the child was happy at school and good management oversight.

### **Improvements in individual cases**

There was evidence of good multi-agency work, safeguarding and care planning in all of the Private Fostering cases. Three cases were graded Good and three cases were graded Requires Improvement (one language school student and two welfare private fostering placements). The cases were graded Requires Improvement because auditors found evidence of specific gaps in individual cases, including: a lack of evidence of a review of the assessment and child's plan; delay in securing the DBS checks on the carers, a lack of information sharing about the child's private fostering status and a reliance upon google translate to communicate with a language student child at the first visit.

### **Learning Identified**

- There needs to be greater clarity locally around the requirement for social workers to complete a home visit for non-welfare private fostering arrangements, ie for placements by language schools.
- If agencies and other health services wish the School Health Service to act upon information regarding a child then they need to complete a referral form. This should clearly set out what input is required from School Health.

### **Recommendations for improvement**

- ✓ Social Workers are reminded that negative private fostering assessments should be escalated to Heads of Service when the child remains in a placement deemed unsuitable.
- ✓ Review and update the practice guidance on private fostering in the light of the increase in language school students in private fostering arrangements. This needs to specifically address expectations of social workers completing an assessment for a child in a language school.
- ✓ East Sussex Local Safeguarding Children's Board, (LSCB), to provide East Sussex language schools with clear guidance on what the LSCB expects from them regarding their safeguarding children responsibilities.

## Learning for Practice

The LSCB invite you to discuss some of the issues raised in this case audit in your team meetings or during group supervision. We encourage your responses to be included in your team minutes and forwarded to the safeguarding lead within your organisation.

### Points for discussion:

#### Applying learning

- ✓ What have you/your team learnt from this audit?
- ✓ How might you/your team apply that learning?

#### Identifying private fostering

- ✓ How would you clarify the relationship between the adult caring for the child and the child? What questions would you ask?
- ✓ Who does this information need to be shared with? What multi-agency partners need to know?

## Private Fostering Resources

**If you think a child is privately fostered, and are not confident that it has been notified to the Local Authority please contact:**

SPoA (Mon-Friday 8.30am-5pm)

**Phone:** 01323 464222

**Email:** [0-19.SPOA@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:0-19.SPOA@eastsussex.gov.uk) or

[0-19.SPOA@eastsussex.qcsx.gov.uk](mailto:0-19.SPOA@eastsussex.qcsx.gov.uk)



### LSCB Multi-Agency Training:

The LSCB offers training for professionals on 'hidden children'. This includes safeguarding risks and recognition of children who are privately fostered, missing education and educated at home. Details of future courses can be found on the East Sussex Learning Portal:

[www.eastsussexlearningportal.org.uk](http://www.eastsussexlearningportal.org.uk)

### Pan Sussex Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures

Details of child protection and safeguarding procedures in relation to children living away from home can be found at:

<https://sussexchildprotection.procedures.org.uk/tklx/children-in-specific-circumstances/children-living-away-from-home-private-fostering>