

# Private Fostering Annual Report

2020 - 2021

## **Introduction**

The Private Fostering Regulations apply when children or young people, aged under 16 years (18 if they have a disability) live with a person who is not a close relative for 28 days or more. The term 'close relative' has a specific definition within the legislation it includes grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts (whether of the full or half blood or by marriage) and step-parents. Children living with people who are not close relatives, such as a cousin, great aunt or family friend need to be assessed and reviewed under the Private Fostering Regulations to ensure the placement is able to safeguard and promote his/her welfare.

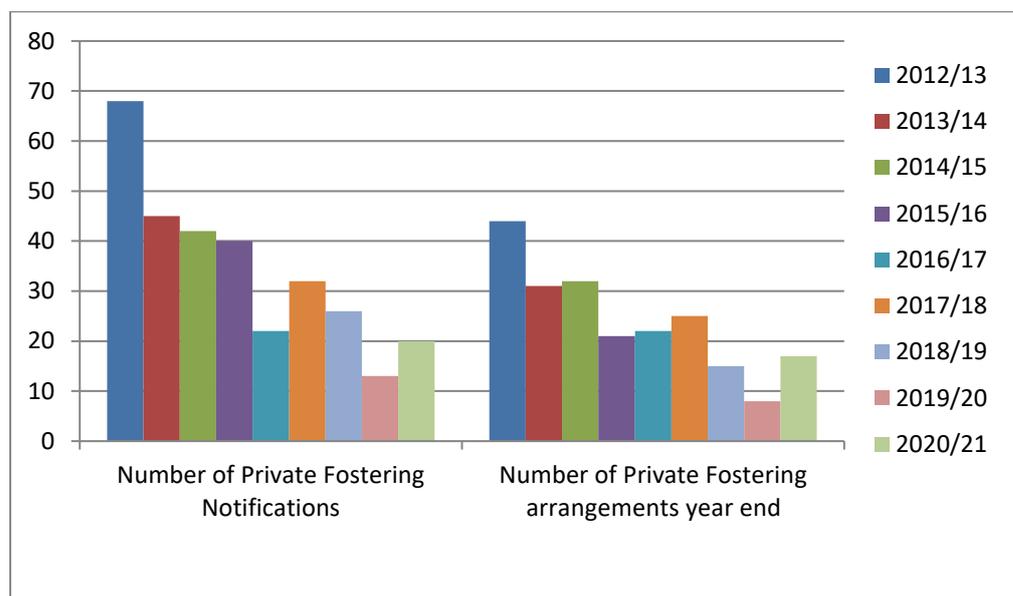
This annual report gives an overview of activities in relation to privately fostered children in Lincolnshire from April 2020 to end of March 2021. The report details how Lincolnshire County Council has complied with its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and includes how the welfare of privately fostered children has been safeguarded and promoted over the past 12 months. The report also outlines the activities which have been undertaken to promote awareness of the notification requirements regarding children who are living in private fostering arrangements.

Previous reports have been able to include a summary of the annual statistics provided by all local authorities as part of the Private Fostering Return (PF1 Return) concerning numbers of new notifications, arrangements and visiting patterns. This information is no longer centrally collated by the Government, and it is not possible to provide comparative data.

In Lincolnshire over the past year, we have continued to promote local understanding and awareness of private fostering and sought to improve how we meet the needs of the children and young people concerned.

This includes using audit to review our own performance and to identify where improvements need to be made.

## Data regarding Private Fostering arrangements in Lincolnshire



The chart above shows key data regarding private fostering within Lincolnshire over the past years. From the chart it can be seen that we experienced a peak in the level of notifications in 2012/13, but since then there has been an overall reduction in notifications. The number of ongoing private fostering arrangements has reduced further this year.

Focusing on 2020/2021 the following can be noted:

- There were 20 notifications to the Council spread throughout the County. This represents an increase on the previous year's figure of 13.
- Of the 20 notifications received, 100% of Private Fostering Arrangement Assessment Records were completed within the 7 day timescale.
- All the Regulation 7 visits were undertaken within the 7 day timescale.
- All the Regulation 8 visits continue to be tracked with reminders sent to individual workers to ensure these are recorded on Mosaic.

### Procedures

Following the Laming Report in 2003 into the death of Victoria Climbié (who was privately fostered by her Great Aunt at the time of her death), regulations relating to Private Fostering were amended and strengthened by Section 44 of the Children Act 2004. The following year two further documents were published; The National Minimum Standards (NMS) 2005 and The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulation 2005, which clearly set out the role of the Local Authority, the Parent and the Private Foster carer and related professionals.

Under Standard 7 of the National Minimum Standards for private fostering, local authorities are expected to effectively monitor the way in which it discharges its

duties and functions in relation to private fostering, including to provide a written report each year, for consideration by the Director of Children's Services, which includes an evaluation of the outcomes of its work in relation to privately fostered children within its area. (Supporting Criteria 7.9 NMS for Private Fostering). Private fostering arrangements continue to be a focus of the OFSTED Local Authority Inspections.

### **Organisational and Structural Aspects**

Lincolnshire County Council Children's Services continues to be committed to maintaining high standards in relation to private fostering service provision and ensuring that this service is continually reviewed.

There is a designated post, the Agency Panel Advisor, who has the lead for private fostering and their role is to monitor the compliance with the National Minimum standards on a monthly basis and to ensure that performance in the area remains high.

The monthly reporting figures that are seen by Social Care Team Managers and Practice Supervisors allow them to maintain their overview of how each team is performing in relation to private fostering.

Daily recording of work undertaken in relation to Private Fostering is recorded on Mosaic.

The specialist fostering service dedicated to kinship/connected person assessments continues to have responsibility for undertaking the assessment of the private foster carer's suitability. There continues to be regular communication between the Practice Supervisor in this team and the Agency Panel Advisor.

### **Background information**

Any parent proposing to have their child cared for by someone other than a close relative for more than 28 days, or a carer who is proposing to look after someone else's child who is not a close relative, should notify Children's Services at least 6 weeks before the arrangement is due to begin.

This is known as a "Proposed Arrangement". In these circumstances the Customer Service Centre should be contacted, and the referral will be passed on to the relevant locality Family Assessment and Support Team (FAST). However, the more usual presenting situation is one whereby the Customer Service Centre is notified of an arrangement when the child is already with the prospective private foster carer.

According to current agreed private fostering processes, the Customer Service Centre sends the received notifications directly to the Family Assessment and Support Team (FAST) within one working day to avoid any unnecessary delay and

this type of notification bypasses the usual screening process aligned to other social care requests.

FAST undertakes the management of the referral of privately fostered children and their timescale for completing the Private Fostering Assessment of Arrangement (PFAAR) is within 7 working days of referral (notification) and they liaise with the Kinship team for the completion of the assessment of the carer's suitability.

Within each FAST team, there are a small number of Social Workers that tend to be allocated any new private fostering cases and they receive support and advice from their Practice Supervisor.

At this point the Social Worker is required to visit and see the child, the carer and also the parents or those with Parental Responsibility.

Visits to see and speak with privately fostered children/young people are carried out in accordance with statutory timescales and recorded on Mosaic. The visits should include seeing the child, their bedroom and speaking with them alone. This is to ensure that the child's voice is heard and if any actions are needed to promote their welfare.

The assessment of the arrangement (PFAAR) is authorised by the Team Manager of the child's social worker. The decision about the overall suitability of the arrangement is completed by the Team Manager of the social worker to the child, in consultation with the Team Manager of the Fostering Service.

It is the responsibility of the Team Manager of the child's social worker to notify in writing the Parent or others with Parental Responsibility, Private Foster carers and relevant agencies that the child/young person is living in or will live in a Private Fostering Arrangement.

The Practice Supervisors in the Children in Care (CIC) Teams are also notified of the child/young person that is in a private fostering arrangement.

Once the private fostering arrangement has been confirmed, at the point of the second Regulation 8 private fostering visit, the FAST social worker will undertake a joint visit with a worker from the CIC team. On completion of the visit, the overall management will transfer to the CIC Team in order to provide the child/young person with a consistent response for the duration of the arrangement.

Each private fostering arrangement is annually reviewed by the Team Manager in line with the statutory requirements and as such, the cases are open to scrutiny in respect of care planning and intervention.

The Head of Service – Regulated is the named person within the local authority with expertise in private fostering whom social workers and managers can contact for advice.

Decisions regarding requirements, disqualification and prohibition should be referred to the Head of Service for Safeguarding.

### **Activity and Performance 2020-2021 in relation to National Minimum Standards**

#### **National Minimum Standard 1**

**The local authority has a written statement or plan, which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out.**

Lincolnshire Council has a statement of purpose on private fostering which will be reviewed in 2021 for the period 2021-2022.

Information about private fostering is available in schools, through the Lincolnshire County Council website as well as the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership (LSCP).

#### **National Minimum Standard 2**

**The local authority:**

- **promotes awareness of the notification requirements and ensures that those professionals who may come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in notification**
- **responds effectively to notifications**
- **and deals with situations where an arrangement comes to their attention, which has not been notified**

#### **Awareness Raising**

The national private fostering week took place week commencing 13<sup>th</sup> July 2020. The private fostering leaflet was distributed to approximately 360 schools & 6 colleges in Lincolnshire as well as other relevant professionals. The LSCP also endorsed the leaflet and distributed it through their own partnership links including twitter feeds.

The website is more informative and user friendly and during Private Fostering week the Council had a social media presence to highlight this issue. Internally awareness was highlighted via a segment in Int Comms.

The Safeguarding Children Partnership has to be satisfied that the welfare of privately fostered children in this area is safeguarded and promoted and that agencies are co-operating. The multi-agency Education sub-group has the private

foster care agenda as a standing item and continues to look at promoting private fostering with partner agencies.

In order to continue to raise the awareness of private fostering and the understanding of roles and responsibilities in relation to private fostering;

- Information about private fostering has been provided through the training program, with all staff dealing with private fostering having appropriate on line training. Private fostering training also forms part of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment training provided to social workers.
- The service has a communication plan which is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure its effectiveness and wide distribution to members of the public and partner agencies.
- Posters have been placed in local public buildings, including the following, hospitals, GP surgeries, dentists, libraries, Leisure Centre's, Places of Worship and Children's Centre's advising on the requirements of reporting private fostering situations.
- Information on the Lincolnshire County Council website and the NHS staff Intranet
- The school admissions forms have a section dedicated to private fostering to assist school staff in identifying private fostering arrangements

Lincolnshire is committed to continually evaluate the effectiveness of its activities to ensure that they contribute to a positive change of behaviour in relation to private fostering.

### **Response to Notifications**

In Lincolnshire, the majority of notifications are received once the placement has been made and following a referral by the carer to Customer Service Centre. The current arrangements ensure there is an assured and timely response to all notifications/ referrals. At the end of March 2021, the service received 20 notifications for the year; of these, all had their initial visit completed within the 7 calendar day timescale.

### **National Minimum Standard 3**

#### **Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare**

**The local authority determines effectively the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangement in accordance with the regulations.**

The safeguarding of children who are privately fostered is a responsibility which impacts upon all parts of the local authority, health, district councils and the voluntary and private sectors, and as such the LSCP are proactive in monitoring the multi-agency approach in relation to private fostering.

Private fostering is a standing item on the LSCP agenda; this is a positive step in ensuring that professionals and organisations working with children and families are made aware about private fostering and the need to ensure that Children's Services know about such arrangements to promote the welfare of the child.

Children's Services continue to ensure that privately fostered children/young people's welfare is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted by qualified social work staff undertaking the assessments and support of the arrangement and private foster carers.

The Agency Panel Advisor undertakes monthly monitoring of the work of the social workers and their supervisors; this monitoring identifies any areas where there may be a need for further discussions for example concerns regarding Parental Responsibility and the clear exercise of it, matters pertaining to permanency planning particularly for younger children. If required, action will be taken on individual cases to ensure compliance with agreed policy and procedure.

The Agency Panel Advisor is supported in her role by a dedicated Business Support Worker who collates the relevant data relating to private fostering and also sends out reminders regarding the timescales for visits.

When completing the PFAAR the child is seen alone as part of the assessment and their wishes and feelings ascertained and taken into account together with the child's needs.

Also, as part of the assessment the FAST social worker makes contact with the parents wherever possible to seek their view with regards to the arrangement and to explain how Parental Responsibility will need to be exercised.

In Lincolnshire all private foster carers are DBS checked and are assessed in accordance with the National Minimum Standards. The PFAAR and the carer's assessment form the completed suitability of the arrangement.

In accordance with Section 69 Children Act 1989, Children's Services have the power to prohibit a person from privately fostering where that person is considered not suitable, where the accommodation is not suitable, where the child's welfare would be harmed, where someone has been convicted for offences against children or where the care of the child is unsatisfactory.

There have been no incidents of prohibition or disqualification during the last year, therefore no legal action was taken.

Each private fostering arrangement is annually reviewed by the Agency Panel Advisor in line with the statutory requirements and as such, the cases are open to scrutiny in respect of care planning and intervention.

#### **National Minimum Standard 4**

**The local authority provides such advice and support to private foster carers and prospective private foster carers as appear to the authority to be needed.**

The dedicated Kinship team who are responsible for the carer's assessment, has ensured that private foster carers have access to the similar support as local authority foster carers. Carers are also encouraged to attend training events or to access the E-Learning programme available.

The website and information pack includes local services that the carer may access including children's centres. As part of the regular visits to the children the social workers will discuss the current situation with those carers who are looking after the children to ensure that any questions or concerns that they have are addressed.

#### **National Minimum Standard 5**

**The local authority provides such advice and information to the parents of children who are privately fostered within their area as appears to the authority to be needed.**

The children's social worker provides parents with information regarding the legal and regulatory functions of the local authority during their work with those parents to ensure that they are aware of these and what they may expect from the local authority. This information relates to the name address and contact details of the child's social worker and information on the complaints.

Lincolnshire County Council through the monitoring of the case work for children who are in private fostering arrangements, ensures that plans for rehabilitation to birth families is considered, along with ongoing monitoring of the suitability of those private fostering arrangements

#### **National Minimum Standard 6**

**Children who are privately fostered are able to access information and support when required so that their welfare is safeguarded and promoted. Privately fostered children are enabled to participate in decisions about their lives.**

All children who are privately fostered in Lincolnshire have an allocated qualified social worker who provides advice and support to the child, private foster carer, and their parent(s) and/or any other person with Parental Responsibility. The level of contact that each private foster carer is determined through the Private Foster Carers Assessment and the Regulation 8 visits.

At the initial and subsequent visits, an information leaflet about private fostering along with a complaints leaflet and information about Total Voice advocacy service are provided to the child/ young person, their carers and family.

There is a requirement for a visit to be made to the carer and child within seven working days when the notification is received, and subsequent visits are to take place every six weeks in the first year and every three months thereafter.

In Lincolnshire we acknowledge the importance of completing the visits in required timescales, to ensure that the children are well cared for in a safe environment, also to identify the help and support available that may assist the private foster carer.

Regular audits are carried out on a range of casework within the authority and these have identified evidence within the assessment and Reg 8 visits, that children are seen alone; that they receive good social work support on an individual basis and are consulted about their views.

In order to ensure that our performance is maintained or improved where possible, the service proactively manages the schedule of visits with advance notice of scheduled dates for visits being forwarded to the allocated Social Worker and their Team Manager. The importance of private fostering continues to be highlighted to all FAST and CIC teams. This will be achieved through varying formats and to consist of:

- One minute briefing to be sent to all staff as part of National Private Fostering Week
- Liaison with Team Managers when a practice issue is raised and provide clear advice regarding the task that needs to be completed.

All children privately fostered in Lincolnshire were encouraged to maintain contact with their birth family and, where possible, their parents. Their religious and cultural requirements were met within the placement and through contact with the family.

### **National Minimum Standard 7**

**The local authority has in place and implements effectively a system for monitoring the way in which it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. It improves practice where this is indicated as necessary by the monitoring system.**

Issues in regards to private fostering recording and completion of private fostering assessments and timescales are regularly discussed in Team Managers' meetings.

The activities of the Private Fostering Service are reported to Director of Children's Services and lead member for Children's Services.

The annual report relating to private fostering is shared with LSCP and this is also an agenda item to ensure that partner agencies are mindful of their own responsibilities in relation to private fostering.

Lincolnshire continues to review and develop a comprehensive service for privately fostered children and all those involved in private fostering, to ensure that the authority complies with relevant legislation and meets the National Minimum Standards in relation to private fostering.

### Complaints and Representations

There have been no complaints or representations during this period; however, Lincolnshire County Council ensures that robust reviews of the services for children in privately fostered arrangements are safe and secure

### Developments for the next twelve months for private fostering in Lincolnshire include:

- Public awareness will continue to be raised through on-going publicity campaign particularly during the private fostering week in October 2021.
- Work with LSCP and partner agencies to ensure that private fostering remains an agenda item for professionals. This will include the promotion of e-learning and participation in the education subgroup.
- Audit of private fostering.

### Overview of the Demographics of Children Privately Fostered 2020-2021

Age		Ethnicity		Gender	
0 - 5	3			Male	6
6	0	White any other White background	1	Female	14
7	2	White British	17		
8	0	Other Ethnic Groups / Any other ethnic group	1		
9	0	Asian/Asian British / Chinese	1		
10	1				
11	0				
12	0				
13	5				
14	1				
15	8				
16	0				
17	0				

Lincolnshire County Council remain committed and are pro-active in ensuring that children and young people are provided with permanency and accordingly ensure that the legal status of children remains appropriate to meet their long-term needs.

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