

THURROCK COUNCIL PRIVATE FOSTERING REPORT

This extended report contains details of the work undertaken by the Thurrock Council in respect of Private Fostering for a period covering 2018 to January 2019. This yearly report will be completed April to March going forward to bring our annual report in to line with the financial year and so our reporting is consistent with other service reports.

1. Private Fostering Definition

1.1 Private Fostering is a private arrangement between a parent and someone other than a close relative. It occurs when a child under the age of 16 (or under 18 if disabled) is cared for and provided with accommodation, by an adult who is not a relative* for 28 days or more. Private Foster Carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt, however a person who is a relative under the Children Act 1989 or a step-parent will not be a private foster carer.

**The Children Act 1989 defines 'relative' in relation to a child as a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt. They could be a full or half relation, and could be related by marriage. The term also includes a stepparent (a stepparent must be married to the child's parent) A previous or current partner of the mother or father would not qualify as a relative; neither would extended family such as great aunt/uncle or cousins" - Source DCSF 2005*

1.2 A child placed in Foster Care by the Local Authority under Sec 20 CA89 Voluntary Accommodation or via a Care Order Sec 31 CA 89, **is not** privately fostered.

1.3 The period for which the child is cared for and accommodated by the Private Foster Carer should be continuous, but that continuity is not broken by the occasional short break. (Replacement CA 1989 Guidance on Private Fostering 1.6.)

1.4 Examples of Private Fostering

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In most cases a birth parent selects and arranges private foster placements, which could take many forms. These can include;

- Children living with a friend's family after separation, divorce or arguments at home.
- Teenagers living with the family of a boyfriend or girlfriend
- Infants and young children whose parents are full-time students, or working unsocial hours, placed with agency-recruited host families.
- Children sent from abroad to improve their life chances, and placed with friends or distant relatives.
- Children who are estranged from their families who go to live, or are placed, with friends or distant relatives.

1.5 However, it is not uncommon for a teenager to leave the care of their parents and move in with a friend without the permission of their parents. If this continues for over 28 days it is considered as Private Fostering.

1.6A A child is not privately fostered if cared for by a parent, or a person with parental responsibility or a close relative such as a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of full blood or half blood or by affinity) or stepparent.

1.7 A stepparent must be married to the child's parent. A stepparent who is separated from the child's parent but not divorced is still legally the child's stepparent. However, if the step-parent divorce's the child's parent this arrangement would become a Private Fostering Arrangement, unless the stepparent has legally obtained Parental Responsibility (PR) for the child or been granted a Residence Order. If a stepparent is widowed then they will remain the legal stepparent for the child, but should seek PR for the child.

1.8 Regular private placements of under 28 days, made for reward, of children under the age of 8 years should be regarded as 'child minding'. Child Minding Regulations must be applied.

1.9 The regulations are clear that a child has to be cared for and accommodated by someone other than a close relative, to be Privately Fostered. If a child remains

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living at their home address and their parent/s arranges for a friend to care for their child/ren at the child's home whilst they are away for 28 days or more, it is not Private Fostering, due to basis that the child has to be accommodated. (The Replacement Children Act 1989 Guidance on Private Fostering 1.6)
However, if there are any concerns about the child's welfare or you feel the child is a Child in Need then a referral must be made to the MASH Team.

Private Fostering arrangements within Thurrock are currently assessed and monitored by a dedicated Private Fostering Senior Social Worker, who is located within the Fostering Assessment Team.

All Private Fostering notifications are referred to the Fostering Assessment team, via a personalised email: privatefostering@thurrock.gov.uk where an initial visit is completed within seven working days of the notification.

If after the initial visit it is felt that the arrangement is a Private Fostering arrangement and there are no child in need or child protection concerns' the Private Fostering Social Worker will complete a full Private Fostering Assessment.

If a child in need or child protection concern arises then a referral will be made to the relevant Team and the Private Fostering Social Worker will work jointly with the Child's allocated Social Worker.

The Private Fostering Regulations 2005 requires that children placed in private fostering arrangements are visited by a Private Fostering Officer no later than every 6 weeks (more if required) within the first year and no later than every 12 weeks (more if required) after the first year. Within Thurrock the Private Fostering Social Worker visits all children who have been in Private Fostering Arrangements for under a year every four weeks and every eight weeks after the first year. Only when the placement is extremely stable, will all visits after one year be moved to every ten - twelve weeks.

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Throughout the year of 2018/19 children in Private Fostering Arrangements were visited within the required timescales by the Private Fostering Social Worker and spoken to alone.

The Private Fostering Social Worker receives monthly supervision, from their Team Manager. The Private Fostering Social Worker is situated within the fostering service and is able to access direct support and guidance in between supervisions.

The Private Fostering Social Worker can also access further support via the Thurrock Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), and the Family Support Teams.

National Minimum Standard 1

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

All families are provided with a copy of this at the initial visit stage, setting out the LA duties.

The Statement clearly addresses the supporting criteria as set out in the standard one.

National Minimum Standard 2.1 Local Authorities have to promote awareness of Private Fostering and the notification requirements to ensure that those professionals who may come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in notification.

The local authority:

2.1 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;

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2.2 Responds effectively to notifications; And deals with situations where an arrangement comes to their attention, which has not been notified.

We received 47 Private Fostering notifications between April 17 and March 18 this is 22 more notifications than the year of April 2016 – 2017

April 2018 to January 2019 we received 21 Private Fostering Notifications

The Local Authority has a Duty to respond to all Private Fostering notifications in their area, by visiting the child and carer within 7 working days.

There were no child in need or child protection concerns identified at the initial visit.

From the 47 Private Fostering notifications, 17 were Private Fostering arrangements, 30 notifications were either living with close family member, aged 16 or returned to the care of a parent within 28 days of the Private Fostering notification.

Since 2017 Thurrock Social Care started to receive Private Fostering notifications via the Home Language School, where people care for a child from overseas for a period of 11 weeks, to provide them with an educational experience of living within a family in the UK. The Carer has to provide a number of hour's education per day and take the child on educational trips.

We presently have one Private Foster Carer in Thurrock providing this service. This carer has cared for two children at separated times for a period of 11 weeks. Both children were from the same orphanage in Russia. The Director of the Home Language School has been contacted by the Private Fostering SW to gain further information and the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) has been informed. The Director of Home Language contacted Thurrock in advanced to inform us of the second Home Language School placement. This is positive in the fact that the Director of Home Language School is now contacting Thurrock direct to report of any placements due to take place in Thurrock.

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From the 21 Private Fostering notifications received since April 2018, 7 were for girls, 9 were for boys and 5 were for a sibling group of (3 brothers) and (2 brothers)

From of the 21 Private Fostering notifications, 20 initial visits were completed within the 7 working days timescale. The one out of timescales was an open case with the Family Support Team, where Child in Need visits were being regularly completed and This case is now been joint worked by Private Fostering and the Family Support Team.

Out of the 21 Private Fostering notifications, 7 were Private Fostering cases (3 were living in Essex and a referral was made to Essex Social Care to complete a Private Fostering initial visit)

Under the national minimum standards 2.1 the LA has a Duty to raise awareness of Private Fostering within Thurrock. Please see below our Private Fostering Action Plan of work undertaken 2018/19.

Month	Date	Plan Advertising/promotion/social Media	Training delivered
April 18	18 th	Film of PF interview for social media update.	
	23 rd	Twitter post	
	26 th	PF Large Banner and stand at Blackshots leisure centre	
May 18	4 th	Council Twitter and Facebook post.	
	18 th	Leaflets, Banner and stand at Grays Market	
June 18	8 th	Gazette ½ page advert	
	8 th	Information on Council Insight	
	8 th	Meeting to discuss PF awareness with Eileen	

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	30 th	Augustin PF SW and recruitment officers. Large Banner and stand at the Gateway school Fete.	
July	2-6 th 3 rd 3 rd 3 rd 6 th 14/7/18 21/7/18	PF week, information on Council insight chief exec Blog via Eileen Augustin PF SW. Twitter and Facebook post Council Twitter Gazette article and case study Leaflet and stand at Lakeside Twitter and Facebook Large Banner and stand at Port Tilbury Open Day	10/7/18 PF Workshop information session to Family Support teams 1 and 2.
August	3 rd 6 th 7 th 17 th 28 th	Email to churches inviting them to attend PF training. Twitter, facebook, council post Large Banner & stand at Grays Shopping Centre . Drop in at Grays Library Twitter, facebook, council post	
Sept 18	20/9/18 27/9/18 27/9/18	Advert in Gazette promoting PF training event. Large PF Banner and stand at Grays Town Centre Info on insight to promote PF training.	PF Workshop information session to MASH & CFAT.
Oct 18	2 nd 19 th	Large PF Banner and stand at Grays Town Centre PF training focused at medical	

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	20 th 27 th	centres. Council facebook and Twitter Filming for PF advert for facebook and twitter.	
Nov 18	12 th Nov- Dec	Health Visitor training at NELET Large advert on the Give a gift Screen at Lake side	
Dec 18	Ongoing	Gazette ½ page advert Council facebook and twitter Leaflet at Lakeside shopping to raise awareness	
Jan 19	7 th 20 th	Council facebook and twitter Gazette ½ page, advertising training. Leaflet at Lakeside shopping to raise awareness	
Feb 19	4/2/19 4/2/19	Council Facebook and twitter POST. Private Fostering training to SWs, Health, education and nurseries. Com Rm 1 (10AM – 12)	
March 19		Council facebook and twitter Gazette ½ page advert.	

We fully understand the importance of Private Fostering awareness across Thurrock and dedicate a lot of time to this.

National Minimum Standard 3

The Local Authority determines effectively the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangements in accordance with regulations.

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Private Fostering initial visits are completed within seven working days from the date of notification. If the arrangement is Private Fostering then a full Private Fostering Assessment is completed within 42 working days in line with the Assessment Framework. In addition to the assessment, a Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) is obtained for everyone within the household aged 16 years and over, along with local authority checks.

The Private Fostering Social Worker makes a recommendation as to whether or not the Private Fostering Arrangement is satisfactory. This is then viewed and signed by the Team Manager.

Private Foster Carers are notified in writing of the outcome of the assessment. In cases where it is felt that the Private Fostering Arrangement is not satisfactory, the Private Fostering Carer may be requested to make some changes to meet requirements. Where this is not felt possible the parents of the child will be contacted and will be advised of the need to remove their child from the Private Foster Carer. All child protection concerns are referred to MASH.

National Minimum Standard 4

The Local Authority provides advice and support to private fostercarers and prospective private foster carers.

All Private Foster carers are initially given an information pack which includes; The Private Fostering Statement of Purpose and leaflets on; Private Fostering, Special Guardianship Orders, Thurrock family information service, and the complaint/improvement form. Within this pack is also a feedback form on the service they received from the Private Fostering Social Worker and contact details of the Private Fostering Team.

All Private Foster Carers are encouraged to attend the Skills to Foster Training. All private foster carers are provided with the annual training calendar, this is discussed

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within supervision with the Private Fostering Social Worker and carers are encouraged to attend training.

Supervision with Private Foster Carers is every four weeks within the first year, every eight – ten weeks in the second year and every ten – twelve weeks thereafter (more if requested) The Private Fostering Social Worker will provide the Private Fostering Carer with support and advice on;

- Private Fostering in general and the agreement between the carer/s and parent.
- The needs of the child and child development.
- Education
- Health.
- Housing.
- Benefits.
- Contact between the child and family.
- How to access community-based resources.
- Immigration advice

National Minimum Standard 5

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

The Private Fostering Social Worker strives to establish a good working relationship with all parents of children Privately Fostered, during the course of establishing the arrangements and throughout the Private Fostering arrangement. For parents living abroad this is often completed via phone and through emails. All parents are sent leaflets on Private Fostering and a letter from the Department explaining the role of the Private Fostering Social Worker and their contact details.

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.

During the monitoring visits, the Social Worker will see the child alone. This time is used to ascertain the child's wishes and feelings about the arrangement and the care they are receiving. The child/young person's wishes and feelings also form part of the private fostering assessment.

All children in private fostering arrangements are given a leaflet about private fostering which includes the contact details of their Social Worker. They are also given a Children's Guide for Private Fostering, this fully explains Private Fostering and provides a range of telephone numbers that the child can contact for support or advice.

The Private Fostering Social Worker fully explores with the child their understanding of the Private Fostering Arrangement and their view on this which is included within the assessment and monitored throughout the placement. The Private Fostering Social Worker will make a referral to other agencies where it is felt that extra support is required and support the child/young person through this.

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.

The Private Fostering Social Worker receives supervision on a monthly basis; the session is used to examine all the private fostering arrangements, to ensure that Duties are carried out in accordance with the Standards and that any support needed is explored and offered as practically possible.

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Monthly returns are compiled to establish whether duties are carried out in accordance with the Standards, and to ascertain whether the advertising and promotional activities have been effective.

All duties that are discharged in relation to private fostering are routinely recorded. Apart from promoting best practice, this enables a range of accurate management reports to be obtained.

We presently have 5 children privately fostered. This includes;

- 1 young female aged 15 of black African origin, living with her cousin.
- 1 young female aged 14 of black African origin living with her great aunt.
- 1 young male (Transgender) aged 15 of white British origin living with step-father (never married to his mother) both biological parents deceased. This case is joint worked between PF and Family Support Team.
- 1 young female aged 12, of black African origin, living with Step-grandmother who has recently separated from biological grandfather. Case worked jointly with Family Support Team.
- 1 young female aged 15 of black African/Irish origin living with her second cousin.

6 Private Fostering Placements have ended since April 18;

- 1 male aged 12 of black Caribbean Origin, carer was granted a Special Guardianship Order.
- 1 female aged 14 of white British Origin, father moved in with PF carer.
- 1 Young female of black African origin became 16 on the 13/5/18 and therefore no longer PF.
- 1 young male aged 14 of white British ethnicity moved to Newham. A referral was sent to Newham notifying them of the Private Fostering Arrangement.
- 1 young male aged 15 of Russian origin, returned home after 11 weeks home language visit to UK.
- 1 female aged 12 of black African origin returned to care of parents

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Notifications increased within April 17 – March 18 from 25 to 47 notifications reflecting the continuous work around Private Fostering Awareness, especially with Education, Health and Social Care.

Our notifications continue to predominately come from Education and Social Care, which is generally the first port of call re; children being registered at a school or Child Protection concerns raised to social care.

Private Fostering still need to link more into faith groups, which continues to be a struggle. This year within the service we will be working directly with faith groups.

Our Private Fostering Arrangements within Thurrock come from a diverse group including the indigenous population predominantly white British Teenagers living away from parents, due to difficulties within the family home.

We have found that Private Foster Carers for oversea arrangements tend to struggle with Social Care involvement. This is generally due to them caring for a close friend or family member's child to gain a better education and struggling to understand why Social Care needs to be involved, when there are no concerns about the child and their educational reports are good. Whilst this is often the case, Private Foster Carers are continually informed of the need for regular social care involvement. Private Foster Carers are informed that all children separated from their parents and close family members are vulnerable and will continued to be visited regularly.

Private Fostering cases that include white British teenagers living with a friend or distant family member, tend to be open cases to Family Support Teams and are worked jointly with Private Fostering. Private Foster Carers caring for white British teenagers generally want social care support. This is mainly due to the circumstances around why the young person feels unable to live with their parent/s and the negative effects this has upon the young person and their education.

The Private Fostering Social Worker continues to work closely with the UK boarder Agency regarding the immigration status for children placed in Private Fostering Arrangements from overseas.

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At the time of writing this report we have 5 children in Private Fostering Arrangements. All children and carers are visited within the statutory timescales. The Placement Assessment Team continues to ensure that all Private Fostering Arrangements with Thurrock are carefully monitored and supervised.

Julia Sutton

Team Manager

Fostering Assessment Team