

PRIVATE FOSTERING

ANNUAL REPORT FOR YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2016

DEFINITION OF PRIVATE FOSTERING

A Private Fostering arrangement is one that is made privately (that is to say without the involvement of the local authority), for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled), by someone other than a parent or close relative, with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Private Foster Carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt, or they may be a friend of the family or other non-relative, such as the parents of the child's friend. A person who is a close relative of the child, as defined by the Children Act 1989 (a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether by full or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or step-parent) will **not** be a Private Foster Carer.

Examples of private fostering arrangements are:

- Children sent from abroad to stay with another family, usually to improve their English or for educational opportunities;
- Asylum seeking and refugee children;
- Teenagers who, having broken ties with their parents, are staying in short term arrangements with friends or other non-relatives;
- Children living with someone they know while their parent is unable to care for them (through safeguarding issues, illness, imprisonment, living overseas, etc)
- Children living with host families, arranged by language schools or other organisations;
- Children living with members of the extended family, eg, great aunt.
- Children who have been adopted in countries which are not signatories to the Hague Convention and who have yet to be adopted in the UK

LEGAL FRAMEWORK & RELEVANT STANDARDS

- Replacement Children Act 1989 Guidance Private Fostering
- Children Act 2004 (Section 44 amends Section 67 in the 1989 Act)
- The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005
- National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering (DfES:2005)

NOTIFICATIONS

It is a legal requirement that anyone directly involved in making a Private Fostering arrangement must notify the local authority. This means that the parents of the child, the Private Foster carers and anyone else involved in making the arrangement must tell the local authority at least 6 weeks before the arrangement is due to start, or within 48 hours if the arrangement is due to start sooner or has already started. The purpose of publicity in relation to Private Fostering has been to increase the rate of notifications but research has shown that any such publicity has had little impact on the overall rate of notifications, although publicity targeted at health and education professionals is useful. Good notification processes continue in respect of the local international school, language schools and White House Guardianships. Notification is still patchy within the wider community and host families have been slow to embrace their duty to notify the authority, either when a new private fostering arrangement starts or finishes, or when there are any changes in the family's circumstances, relying instead on notifications being made through their organisations. Although non-notification is an offence, there have been no prosecutions nationally for non-notification. On a positive note, Torbay Schools Admissions continue to be pro-active in identifying potential private fostering arrangements, although with the increase in the numbers of academies in Torbay, not all schools use this service.

For the year ending 31 March 2016, notifications were received in respect of **236** Private Fostering arrangements. Subsequently, several of these arrangements were cancelled, found not to be Private Fostering, or terminated within 28 days, leaving **197** actual new Private Fostering arrangements which started during the year and **9** proposed arrangements which started in April 2016. These figures represent a **3%** increase on 2014-15. There have been no private fostering notifications in respect of asylum seeking or refugee children.

The **236 notifications** can be broken down as follows:

- **17 for local young people**
- **89 from White House Guardianships**
- **37 from language schools** international students studying for short periods (4-8 weeks) at local language schools – mainly during the summer months;
- **92 from EF International Academy** international students studying long-term at a local independent school;
- **1 other young person** – referred via Schools Admissions but not private fostering as age 16

Referrals from the guardianship organisation reduced this year, with fewer international students wanting to come to this area to attend local state and

independent schools for periods of between 4 weeks and a year, or longer. Torbay schools which have taken these students are Torquay Academy, St Cuthbert Mayne School, The Spires College, Paignton Community and Sports Academy and Brixham College. Other guardianship students staying in Torbay attended schools in the neighbouring authority (Dartmouth Academy, Newton Abbot College, Trinity School). Notifications from the guardianship organisation are mainly received in advance, with appropriate paperwork completed and information regarding the young person provided to the host family. The organisation carries out thorough DBS checks on its host families and requires a high standard of care, with young people placed only in single rooms. Although some of these students have experienced problems, these have generally been dealt with promptly by the organisation with children moved to another host family, when appropriate.

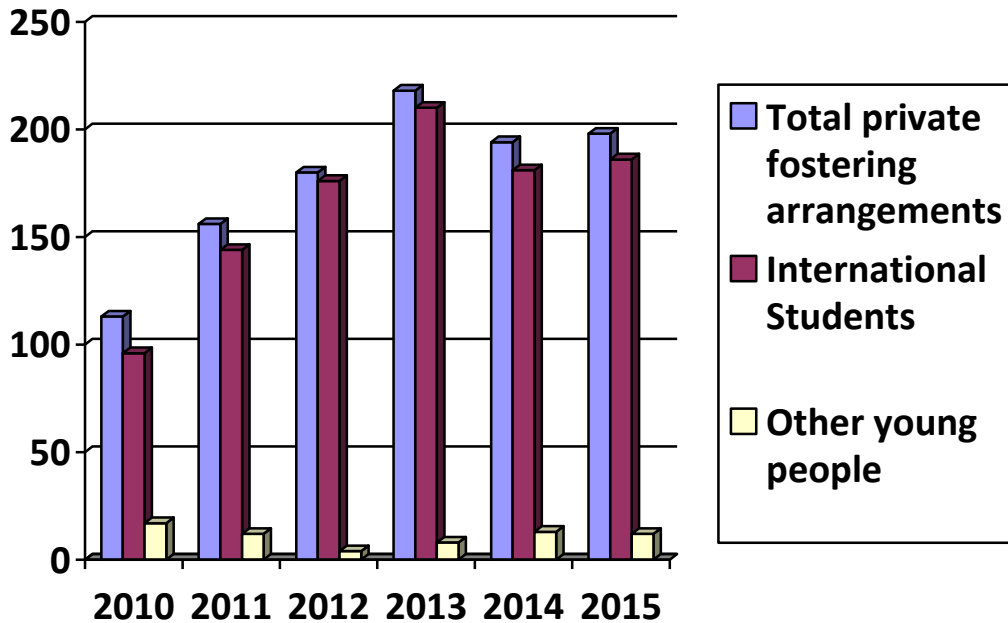
Referrals from language schools in respect of short-term arrangements increased considerably this year. Typically, most of these students stayed for periods of between four and six weeks. This increase is largely due to under-reporting in previous years.

Notifications from a local international school increased this year. Students attending this school arrive throughout the year, with peak arrival times being September, January, April and June. Arrivals are often subject to delays associated with granting of visas. As well as providing study courses for IGCSE, 'A' levels and International Baccalaureate (IB), the school offers an English preparation course. Many of the students only return home at Christmas and during the summer vacation, although some remain in England over Christmas.

Although notifications from this school are generally received promptly, there are still several instances of late or short notice notifications, with little information provided about the young people. The school have identified host families who now take only under 16's and provide these families with appropriate safeguarding training. The school have been very accommodating, allowing staff from the local authority to visit the young people at school and have co-operated with staff in regard to requests for information. They also carry out DBS checks on all their host families and members of the household age 18 and over prior to placing a student, in line with recent guidance from DfE (Keeping Children Safe in Education – April 2014). They also have a programme of unannounced visits to their host families and have been very receptive to advice and guidance from the local authority.

PF1 RETURN TO CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

The following chart shows the numbers of notifications over the last six years. It demonstrates that overall numbers were higher this year but the number of notifications in relation to local young people was broadly the same.



Overleaf is a table, showing the information previously provided to the DfE on the annual PF1 return with comparisons to the previous four years. In 2015, the DfE decided that they would no longer require local authorities to report separately on Private Fostering and only those children deemed Children In Need (CIN) will show on the annual CIN Census.

PF1 Annual Return to DfE – comparison figures

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Number of notifications of new private fostering arrangements received during the year:	187	204	254	214	236
No. of cases where action was taken in accordance with requirements of Regulation 4(1) of Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 for carrying out visits:	142	174	228	179	197
Of these, the number of cases where this action was taken within 7 working days of receipt of notification of the private fostering arrangements:	57	72	149	51	102
Number of new private fostering arrangements that began during year:	156	180	216	192	198
The number of private fostering arrangements that began ON or AFTER 1st April where visits were made at intervals of not more than 6 weeks:	48	102	151	132	159
The number of private fostering arrangements that began BEFORE 1st April that were continuing on 1st April:	19	37	42	74	58
The number of private fostering arrangements that began BEFORE 1st April that were continuing on 1st April where scheduled visits in the survey year were completed in the required timescale:	12	8	31	70	54
Number of private fostering arrangements that ended during year:	111	175	187	208	215
Number of children under private fostering arrangements at 31 March:	50	42	74	58	41

COMPLETION OF INITIAL VISITS, ASSESSMENTS AND REGULATION 8 VISITS WITHIN TIMESCALES

This year, all but one young person who was privately fostered were visited. Of the 198 new and proposed private fostering arrangements, 197 were visited and 102 (52%) of these visits were within the statutory requirement of 7 days from notification, which represents a significant improvement on the previous year (26%). The one young person who was not seen was a local young person who was nearly 16 and the team had received notification by a social worker close to the young person's birthday.

Some assessments continue to take longer than 42 days to complete from the date of notification, due largely to delays in receipt of DBS and other checks (GP checks, references, information from other local authorities). During this year, the authority made the decision to accept DBS checks carried out for host families by organisations themselves. This has considerably reduced the cost to the authority and has resulted in speedier completion of many assessments. DBS checks in relation to private fostering arrangements for local young people are free of charge to the authority. The previously introduced annual review process for private foster carers has worked well, resulting in a reduction in the need to re-assess existing host families.

Guidance from DfE provided clarification regarding the requirement to visit privately fostered young people 'at least every 6 weeks' in the first year. If any one visit is delayed for whatever reason, it is counted as all that child's visits being 'out of time'. There may be legitimate reasons why a visit to a young person was delayed, such as the child being unwell, going on a school trip, visiting parents during school holidays, etc. During the year all of the young people received regular visits although not all of these visits were within timescales. Visits are frequently arranged for every 5 weeks as legislation requires visits 'at least every 6 weeks'. By setting visits a week earlier than required, this allows for absences and gives the ability to still visit within timescales. This year, **80%** of young people in new private fostering arrangements and **93%** of those in pre-existing arrangements were visited within timescales, representing a significant improvement on the previous year (68.75%). Most of the international students were visited at school, because of the very high numbers.

Of interest is the snapshot figure relating to the numbers of young people in private fostering arrangements as at 31 March 2016. This year, **41** young people remained in private fostering arrangements and once again, this low number was accounted for by Easter being earlier this year and several students going home just before the end of March.

DIVERSITY

Approximately 94% of all privately fostered young people in Torbay were from overseas and most came to this country in order to study and improve their English. Young people came mainly from countries in Europe and Asia, with a small number coming from Africa, the Middle East and North and South America. Most of the host families recruited by the various schools and organisations are white British. The children know in advance that they are coming to stay with British families and most appear to welcome this as part of the experience of coming to this country. Some of the students have commented about the positive aspects of learning about another culture but others have struggled, especially those whose English is poor or where their cultural experience has been very different from that of their host family. While some organisations have been good at matching young people with their host families, with both parties being given information including photographs about the other in advance, others provide little information other than names, ages and country of origin. Communication in advance of the student arriving in this country has been encouraged by some organisations but is not an industry standard. During this year, there have been no reported incidents of racist abuse in relation to privately fostered young people.

Ofsted INSPECTION

Ofsted inspected the authority in October and November 2015 and their report was published in January 2016. The following is their comment in relation to private fostering.

'Arrangements to identify and monitor children in private fostering placements are not sufficiently robust. Despite an increase in capacity to respond to private fostering arrangements, the local authority is still not ensuring that the high number of children who travel from abroad to attend language courses receive initial visits within timescales or that their welfare is sufficiently protected. During 2014–15, only a quarter of children received initial visits within timescales.'

During the year, all-but- one children were seen, with **52%** being seen within timescales, representing a considerable improvement on the previous year (26%). Also improved is the number of statutory visits completed within timescales (80% as against 68.75% in the previous year).

RAISING AWARENESS – 'SOMEBODY ELSE'S CHILD – EVERYBODY'S RESPONSIBILITY'

In July 2015, the local authority ran a campaign of awareness-raising about private fostering. The authority's Communications Team were pro-active in ensuring information about private fostering was included in a variety of media,

including the use of social media and daily news bulletins to Torbay Council staff. Information was sent to schools, health (GP surgeries, hospital, etc), the Probation Service, and the Police. Presentations were made to groups, including social work teams, the Early Help Panel and social work staff at Rowcroft Hospice, as well as meetings with staff from two local language schools, one of which had previously not taken under 16's.

POST-16 SUPPORT

During the year, one young person (other than international students) remained in a private fostering arrangement post-16. This young person was referred to the Integrated Youth Support Service and was offered ongoing advice and assistance as a qualifying young person under the Leaving Care Act. The young person chose to decline all support and the referral was subsequently closed.

EVALUATION OF OUTCOMES

STAYING SAFE

- Private Foster carers and members of household assessed
- Comprehensive health and safety assessment of property
- Smoke detectors required in all private foster carers' homes
- Private foster carers' details passed to Fire Service for free fire home safety visits to vulnerable families and leaflets available for host families (this service is now considerably reduced following budget restrictions in the Fire Service)
- Privately Fostered young people have named worker
- Young people receive regular statutory visits in line with national minimum standards (at least every 6 weeks in first year, at least every 12 weeks in subsequent years)
- Private Foster carers have access to support and information
- Effective Prohibition process established (no prohibitions issued during the year)

PROMOTING GOOD HEALTH

- Privately Fostered young people registered with GP
- Private foster carers asked to ensure that young people receive regular dental and optical checks
- Signposting to information regarding sexual health, mental health, drugs and alcohol, smoking, counselling service, if appropriate
- Young person's health reviewed at every visit
- Carers encouraged to promote healthy diet and lifestyle choices
- Positive contact encouraged to promote emotional wellbeing

PROMOTING EDUCATION

- Regular liaison with schools (many statutory visits undertaken at schools)
- School attendance and attainment monitored at each statutory visit
- Young people encouraged to attend out of school activities
- Private Foster carers encouraged to support young people's education – attending parents' evenings, etc.

SUMMARY

In summarising the last year for the Private Fostering service, there are a number of issues:

- This year has seen an increase in the numbers of private fostering notifications within Torbay. It is a requirement that the local authority responds to all notifications within 7 days and that assessments are completed within 42 days or when the DBS checks are returned, if sooner. Practically, when high numbers of notifications are received from various organisations within a short timeframe, it has not always been possible to take action on all cases within timescales, eg, over 50 notifications were received from a guardianship organisation during the last two weeks of July, for students due to arrive at the end of August.
- Changes to the way DBS checks are notified means that the local authority is dependent upon applicants informing the authority when their DBS check is returned and a further visit is often needed in order to have sight of the check (previously the local authority received notification when a DBS was issued).
- Priority has been given to local young people, private arrangements for individual international students and to students placed with previously unknown host families. Further priority has been given to the younger students (some as young as 11).
- As in previous years summer school students at language schools, most of whom were here for stays of 4-6 weeks, were visited once only at the school.
- Good liaison has been maintained with organisations, who generally report concerns promptly regarding young people.
- The service is currently staffed by one part-time worker, supported by other social workers within the Fostering Service, with a 'whole-team approach' during busy periods. There is also a fostering social worker with specific responsibility for local privately fostered young people. The lead worker is about to retire and plans are afoot for changes within the team.
- The Fostering Service has welcomed social work students into the team, all of whom have been given the opportunity to work with privately fostered young people and their carers.

THE COMING YEAR

It is anticipated that numbers of new private fostering arrangements will remain broadly similar to recent years with no reports of any significant increases or decreases in numbers. Notifications from language schools are uncertain but likely to remain largely confined to the summer months. One local language school has recently decided to expand their business in order to accommodate under 16's, an area in which they have not previously been involved. Referrals in respect of other young people, including local youngsters and international students here through private arrangements, are likely to remain relatively low and this mirrors the national picture, where very few local authorities have seen high numbers other than for international students. Local young people continue to remain a priority, as they are frequently vulnerable with parents either unavailable or unwilling to engage and we are aware that there may be under-reporting because people are unaware of the notification requirements. These same young people are frequently on the periphery of care and in fact, it is not uncommon for such young people to become accommodated. In Torbay, **two** local young people were subsequently accommodated this year. Assessments in relation to these young people are frequently complex and involve assessments of risk. Priority was given to raising awareness amongst health, education, probation service, police and social care professionals in order to ensure there is proper reporting of all private fostering arrangements.

Priority is also being given to ensuring notifications are responded to and assessments completed within timescales. We are also concentrating on ensuring our processes are further streamlined and our service continues to meet the Private Fostering Regulations.

Mary Tayler
Private Fostering Development Worker

11 April 2016