

Report



Merton Safeguarding Children Board

Date: December 2018

Subject: Annual Report on Private Fostering 2017/18

Lead: Paul Angeli Assistant Director

Contact: Joanne Forster Head of Safeguarding and Care Planning Service

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. That the MSCB receive, comment on and endorse the report.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report is being provided under the requirements laid down in the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering which came into force on 18 July 2005.
- 1.2. Section 7.9 The local authority provides 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.
- 1.3. Section 7.10 The local authority reports annually to the chair of the local Safeguarding Children Board on how it satisfies itself, that the welfare of privately fostered children in this area is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, including how it co-operates with other agencies in this connection.

The National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering Services 2005, (NMS 25.7) requirements set out in Section 7.9 are that the local authority provides 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. Locally, In addition to this reporting it has been agreed that a quarterly report will also be produced to ensure that there is a high level of scrutiny.

This report gives an overview of the activities in relation to Privately Fostered children in the London Borough of Merton from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018. Further it also outlines the activities which have been undertaken to promote local awareness of the notification requirement regarding children living in a Private Fostering arrangement.

2. OPERATIONAL AND STRUTURAL ISSUES

- 2.1 The responsibility for Private Fostering is located in the Vulnerable Children Team (VCT) transferred to the Safeguarding and Care Planning Service on 01/10/2017.
- 2.1 In 2017-18 The joint initial 7 day private fostering visit with MASH and First Response Teams continued to promote effective identification of private fostering to be determined at the earliest opportunity. This ensures that those children who require additional services to enhance the private fostering arrangements is addressed at the point of contact and referral.
- 2.3 The Private Fostering Working Group (PFWG) has met to consider progress endorse the Communication Plan 2016-18. The Private Fostering Annual Report and Audit 2016/17 recommendations were all completed and implemented. The publicity and information materials were reviewed and work is in the final stage of developing a new suite of information, publicity and printing of user friendly documents for use in practice.

The Private Fostering Social Worker has worked to increase awareness of private fostering initially targeting social care teams, arranging a series of other meetings with identified contacts and there is an extensive PF Communications Log detailing all awareness raising activity. Please refer to Appendix 1 Communications Plan.

OFSTED completed a positive interview with the Private Fostering Team. They gave feedback that it is a robust service in which children are safeguarded. The case sampling completed by the inspector was also positive.

- 2.4 There has been further implementation of the change to the Mosaic Recording System. This has included introduction of a specific private fostering workflow incorporating a viability assessment of the carer and a child and family assessment of the child (ren) being privately fostered..

3. WHAT IS PRIVATE FOSTERING

- 3.1 The regulations for Private Fostering were codified in the Children Act 2004. Following this the Children (Private Arrangement for Fostering) Regulations 2005 set out the duties of local authorities in their arrangements for private fostering and statutory National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering were published in 2005.

Private Fostering is defined by the Children (Private Arrangement for Fostering) Regulations 2005 as an arrangement made for the care of a child or young person under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative (close relatives are parents, step-parents, siblings, siblings of a parent and grandparents) for 28 days or more in the carer's home.

In a private fostering arrangement the parent retains parental responsibility for the child or young person.

Private Fostering arrangements are diverse; examples of arrangements which are private fostering include:

- Children and young people sent from abroad to stay with another family, usually to improve their educational opportunities;
- Teenagers who are staying in short term arrangements with friends or other non-relatives;
- Language students living with host families
- A single parent who has chronic health problems arranges for her 9 year old son to live with a friend on a permanent basis.
- A single parent working away from home for 2 months at a time arranges for his three children to live with an extended member of the family (Great Aunt to children).

In practice where it is unclear whether a care arrangement for a child or young person is or is not a private fostering arrangement a, case discussion is held with the Head of Service Safeguarding and Care Planning to ensure there is management oversight.

- 3.2 As previously reported from 2016, the Department for Education no longer publishes statistics on notifications of private fostering arrangements and closed the private fostering data collection for local authorities.

The Government proposed additional questions to be included in the Child in Need Census to identify private fostering arrangements posing the most risk to children and to gain fuller understanding of the kind of abuse perpetrated against children, whether there are any significant differences between the types of arrangements that children are in. This change in approach should help to inform appropriate targeted action leading to strengthened safeguarding and prioritisation of privately fostered children.

- 3.3 This is highlighted in the Government Guidance Document Child in Need Census Additional Guide on the factors identified at the end of assessment (2015) which states that 'privately fostered children remain a diverse and potentially vulnerable group and include both overseas and UK children'

Local Authorities are advised to distinguish between those children that are referred to and assessed to be in need of services and are also additionally receiving statutory visits because they are privately fostered by only recording these through the Census. Where a child is only receiving statutory visits from social care it should not be recorded.

- 3.4 The categories in use from 1 April 2016 for the Census are set out below:

The private fostering factor at assessment will be further categorised as the following (and the existing code 8A will cease to be used):

Privately fostered: Overseas children who intend to return	CODE B
Privately fostered: Overseas children who intend to stay	CODE C
Privately fostered: UK children in Educational placements	CODE D
Privately fostered: UK children making Alternative family arrangements	CODE E
Privately fostered: Other	CODE F

Please refer to Chart 2 in section 5 of this report for classifications of private fostering factors at assessment for the year 2017-18.

4. THE DESIGNATED MANAGER FOR PRIVATE FOSTERING

4.1 The Designated Manager for Private Fostering is a requirement of the National Minimum Standards. The role of the Designated Manager is defined as *'the person within the local authority with expertise in private fostering, whom social workers can contact for advice'*. The Designated Manager for Private Fostering is Liz Fajemisin, Team Manager. The Designated Manager and Head of Service work together to produce the annual report to the Director of Children's Social Care and the Merton Safeguarding Children Board.

4.2 The Private Fostering Social Worker maintains a link with the BAAF quarterly special interest group on private fostering. The post holder also provides consultation and training workshops as part of Workforce Induction Training for newly appointed staff and through the Safeguarding in Schools, the Designated Safeguarding Leads Forum.

5. NATIONAL MINIMUM STANDARDS

5.1 COMPLIANCE TO NATIONAL 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 way in which they will be carried out.

The 'Statement of Purpose for Private Fostering for Merton Council' was last reviewed in March 2018. It has been refreshed and most recently approved by the Director for Children's Services, the Lead member for Children's Services and the designated lead for Private Fostering in March 2018. It can be found on the MSCB webpages:

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/health-social-care/children-family-health-social-care/lscb/lscbprof/privatefosteringregulations.htm>

The Statement of Purpose details the following:

- The legal definition of a privately fostered child and a list of examples;

- The local authority's duties and functions under the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Private Arrangement for Fostering) Regulations 2005, and how they will operate in relation to privately fostered children;
- The name of the person within the local authority with expertise in private fostering whom social workers can contact for advice;
- How awareness of the notification requirements will be promoted with other agencies and within the wider local community;
- How the local authority will determine the suitability of all aspects of a private fostering arrangement in accordance with the regulations;
- How the local authority will satisfy itself that the welfare of privately fostered children in their area is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted;
- The advice and support that will be available to private foster carers (including prospective private foster carers), parents and others with parental responsibility, and others concerned with the privately fostered child;
- The information and support that will be available to privately fostered children;
- The role of other agencies in assisting the local authority to carry out its duty under section 67(1) of the Children Act 1989, in particular through notifying the authority of an arrangement where they are not satisfied that the local authority have been, or will be, notified of that arrangement.

This document was made available on the London Borough of Merton Safeguarding Children Board website:

5.3 In addition a review of the Private Fostering Policy which offers detailed guidance on practice expectations in line with statutory requirements. This document is available on the Merton Children's Social Care Procedures website:

http://mertoncs.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_private_fost.html

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.

Over the period of April 2017 to March 2018, the Private Fostering Team and MSCB have continued to raise awareness within Merton about private fostering.

To promote greater awareness of private fostering amongst key internal and external contacts a Communications Plan for 2016-18 continues to be implemented and progressed. Marketing materials were revised and key agencies within social care and the wider community were targeted through attendance at team meetings, presentations at training events and professional forums

Leaflets have been reviewed and there have been briefings, workshops and consultations provided to staff across the partnership by the Private Fostering Social Worker. During Private Fostering week, a press release was signed by the Director and cabinet member for children followed by the local press raising awareness of

private fostering, articles published in local magazines and bulletins and a social media campaign. A particular focus for our awareness work was the Private Fostering Week of 2017. During the week the Private Fostering Social Worker had a stand in the Civic Centre Reception raising awareness of Private Fostering with employees across the council.

1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018, there were 8 new notifications of private fostering arrangements. Despite awareness building work this is still likely to be an under-representation of the number of privately fostered children and young people within Merton. The DfE Statistical First Release (2015) states that the numbers of children reported as being cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements are 'generally quite stable' and Merton's return is consistent with this.

Table 1 below sets out the number of children reported as being under private fostering arrangements at 31 March 2018.

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
London Borough Merton	5	9	15	11	12

Table 2 Key Performance Indicators 2013-2018

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
No of PF arrangements	13	17	15	11	12
No of new arrangements	9	9	6	6	8
1 st year visits in timescales	4	9	8	5	6
2 nd year visits in timescales	50%	37.5%	50%	75%	83%
No of arrangements ending	8	8	8	6	6
No of arrangements at 31 st March	8	9	7	5	6

Table 2 details of the number of private fostering arrangements, new and those ending over the past 5 years in Merton. The number of private fostering arrangements has remained consistently under 20 each year with similar rates of notifications. Charts A to C detail the proportion of visits carried out within timescales.

Chart A Initial First and Second Year Visits

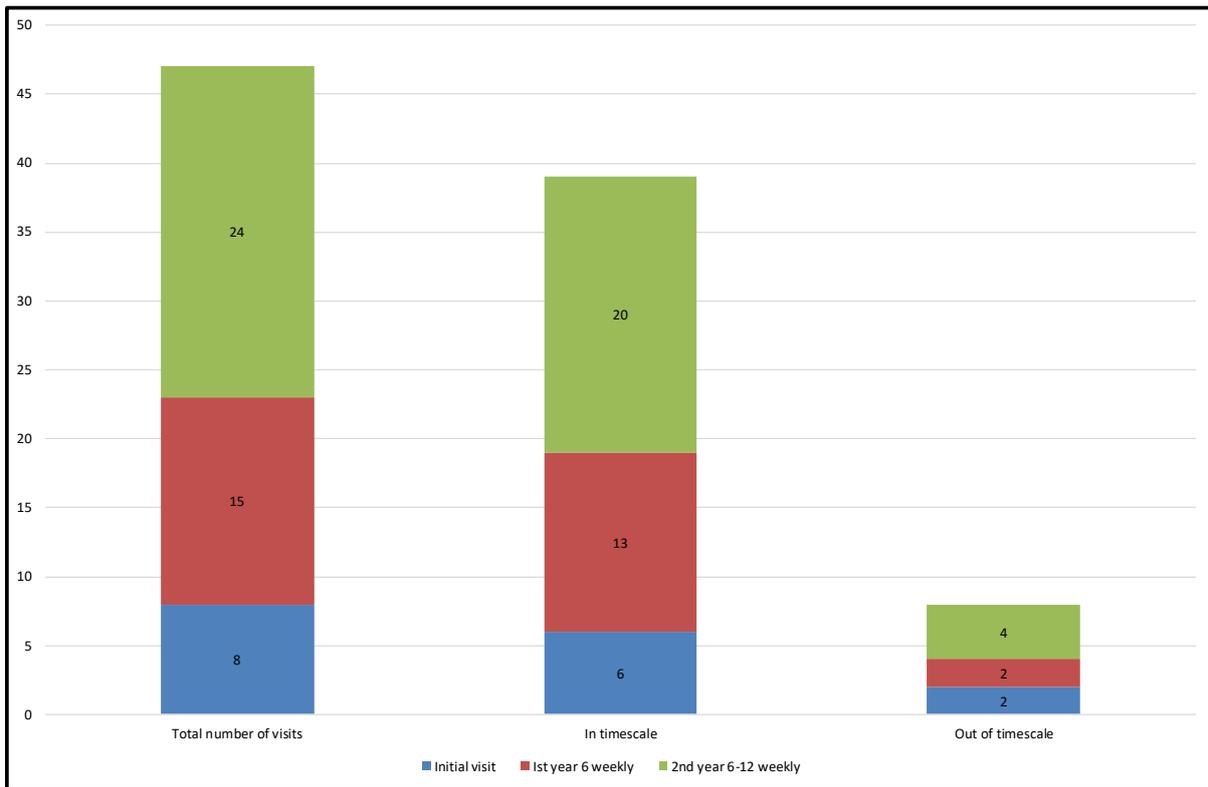


Chart B Initial First Year Visits

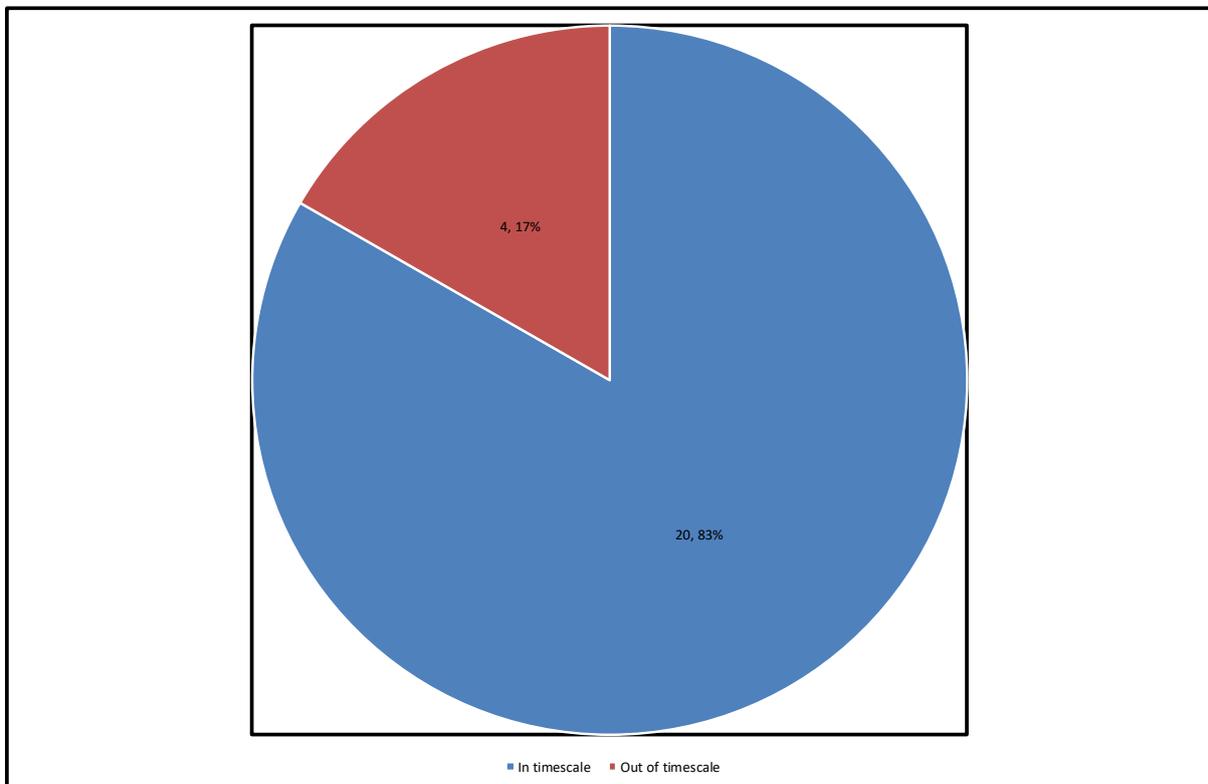
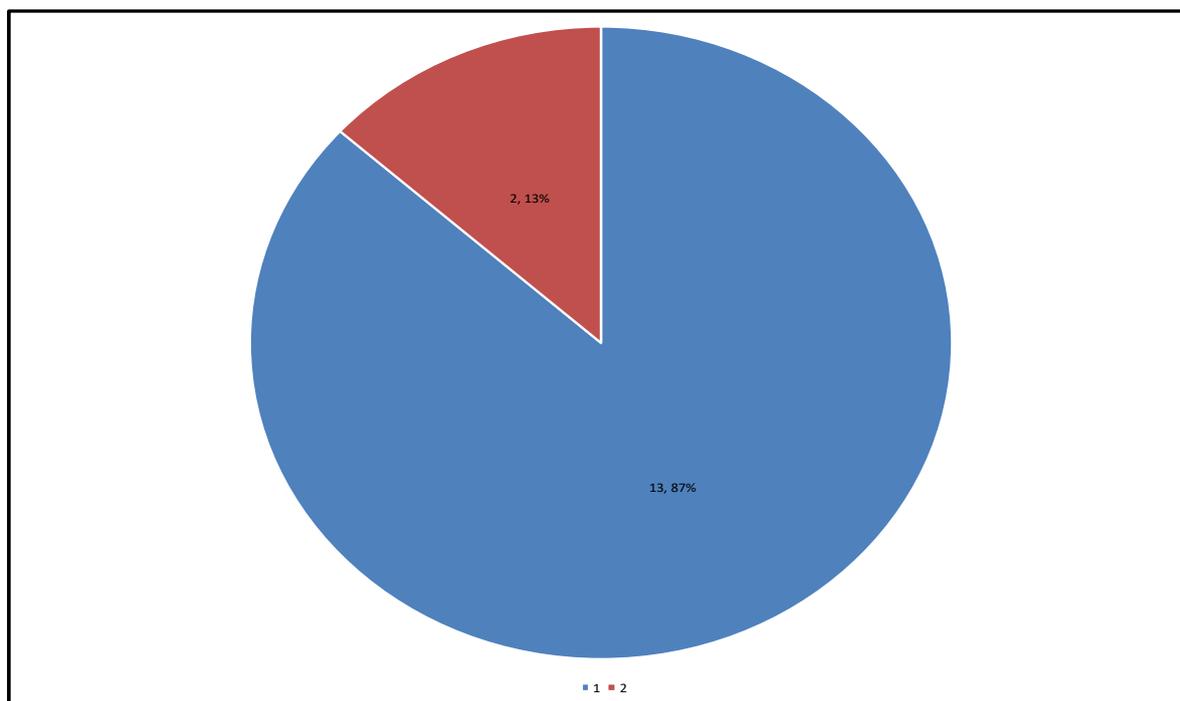


Chart C Second Year Visits

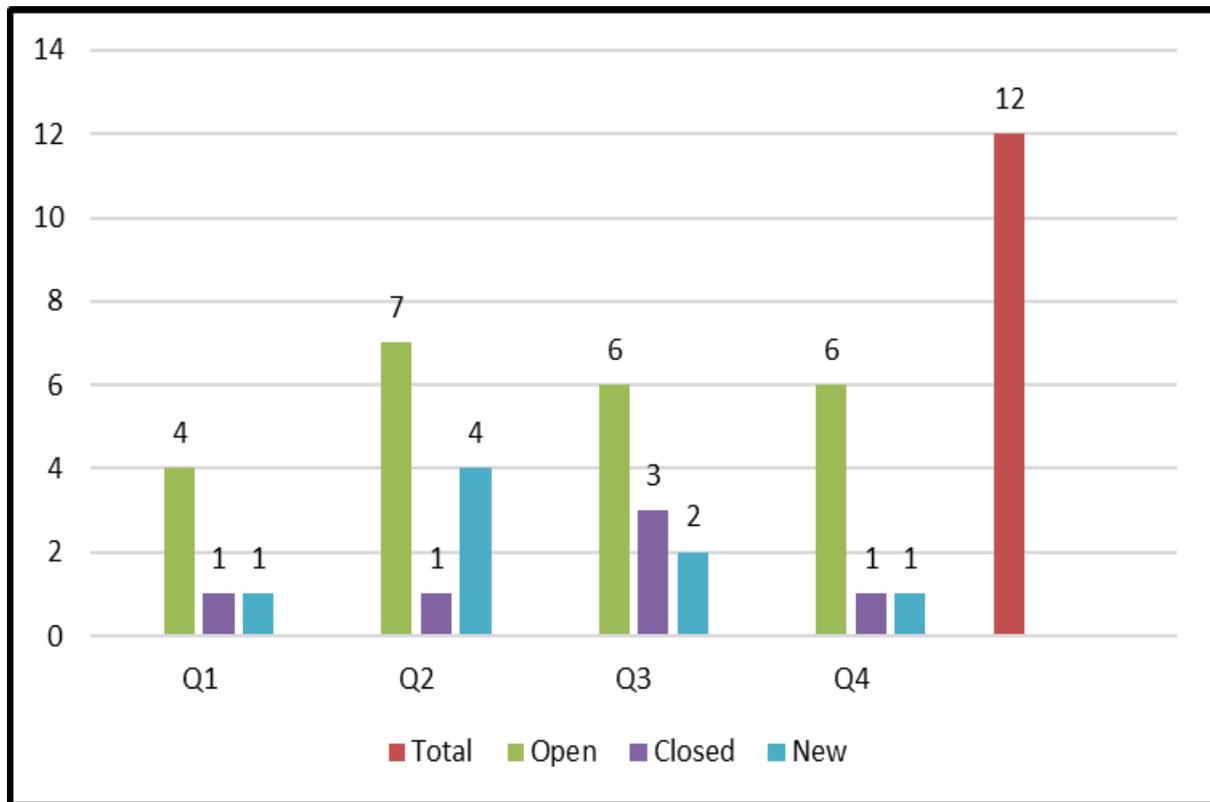


Profile Private Fostering Cohort (PFA) 2017-18

The Ofsted Thematic report noted that they identified that best practice by a local authority should include identification and analysis of referral 'routes' and reasons for Private Fostering.

As shown in Chart 1, there were 12 private fostering arrangements in the year 2017-18. Of the total, 8 were new notifications received and 4 were existing private fostering arrangements. All notifications were confirmed as private fostering arrangements and over the same period 6 closed. In Quarters 2 July-September and 3 October – December had the highest rates of activity. Between 1st April 2018 and 30th September 2017 there were 5 notifications of private fostering. These notifications were received from Border Force, School Admissions, a local Children's Centre and one directly from the Private Foster Carers. In each of the five cases, the child was visited and spoken to alone within 7 working days and the child was provided with information about Private Fostering in the form of a leaflet.

Chart 1 Private Fostering Cohort 2017-18



Between 1st October 2018 and 31st March 2018 there were 3 notifications of private fostering. These notifications were received from a Headteacher, the Home Office and one directly from the Private Foster Carers. The notification from the Headteacher was received as a direct result of a presentation given by the Private Fostering Social Worker at the Designated Safeguarding Leads Forum as part of the awareness raising campaign.

In two of the three cases, the child was visited and spoken to alone within 7 working days and the child was provided with information about Private Fostering in the form of a leaflet. In the third case the child was visited 11 days after notification due to the unavailability of the Private Foster Carer. By the end of this period there 4 arrangements ended leaving a total of 6 open private fostering cases.

As mentioned earlier in this report Chart 2 shows the categories of private fostering factors were revised from April 2016. As illustrated in Chart 3 the largest group of children and young people were categorised as Privately fostered: Overseas children who intend to stay representing, 75%, while 17% were Privately fostered: Overseas children who intend to return and 8% Privately fostered: UK children making alternative family arrangements

Chart 2 Private Fostering Cohort 2017-18 Factor Number Categorised at Assessment

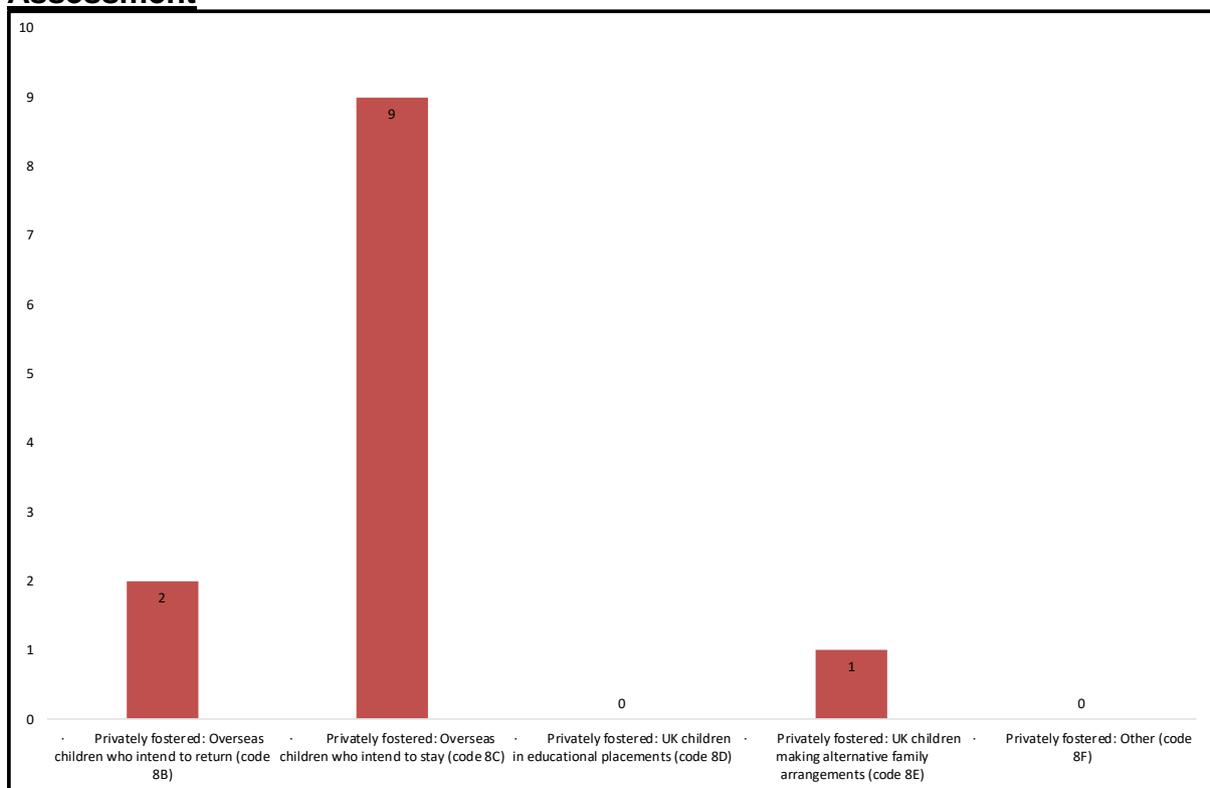
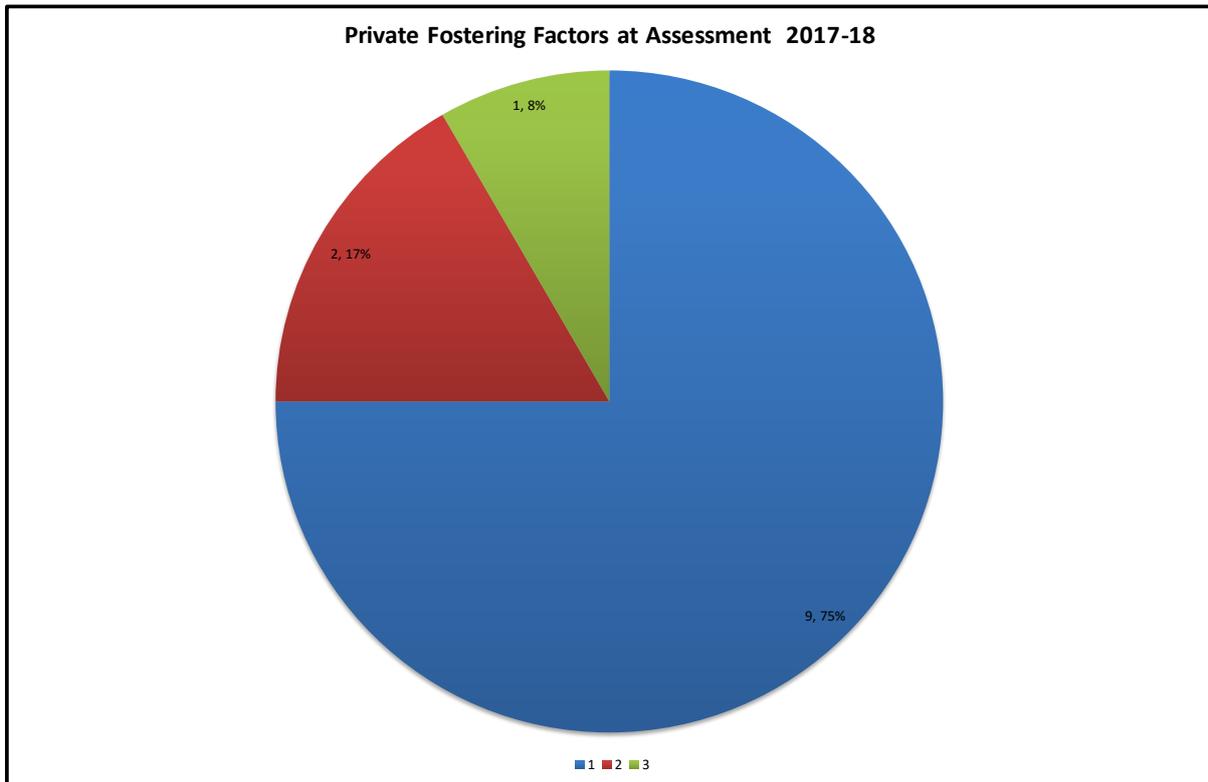
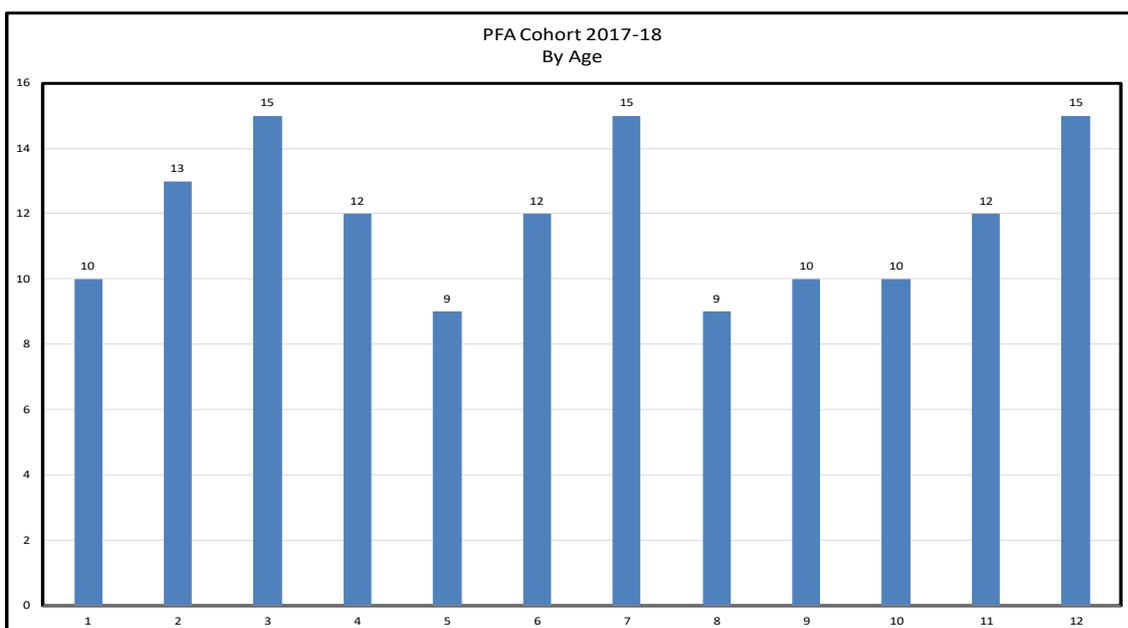


Chart 3 Private Fostering Cohort 2017-18 Percentages of Categories at assessment



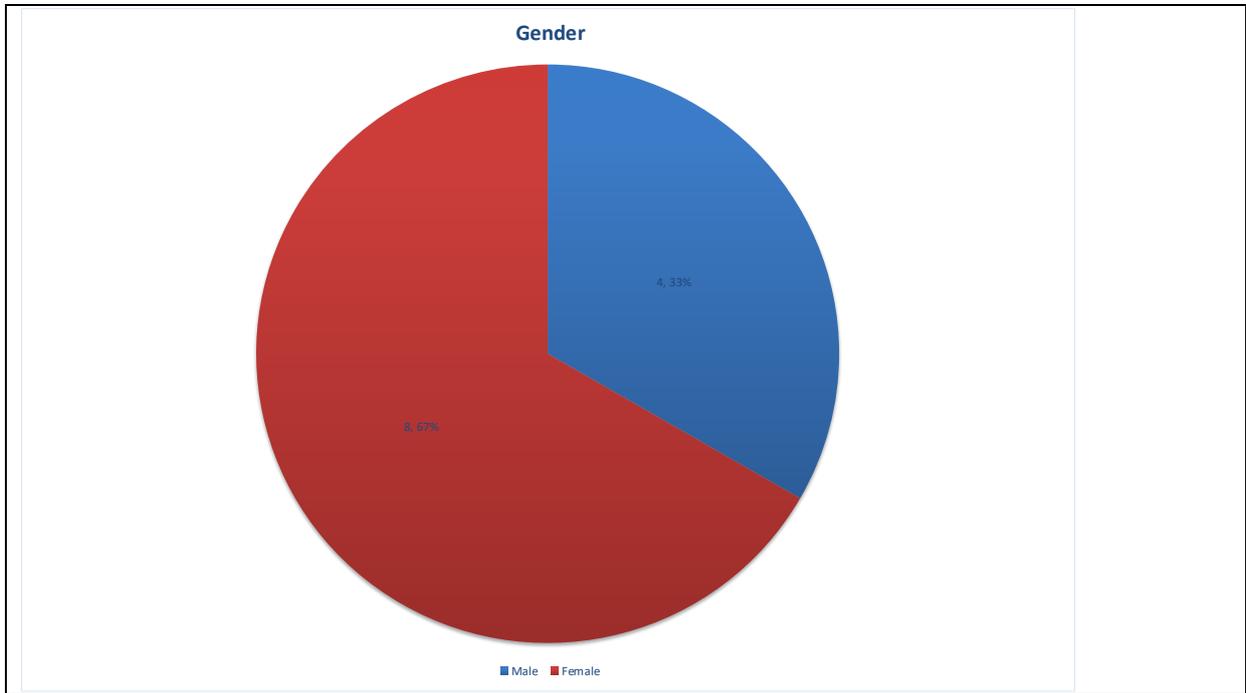
Accordingly a profile of the 12 children by Age, Gender and Ethnicity residing in a private fostering arrangement in Merton within the reporting period show that the age of children ranged from 9 to 15 years representing 58% aged between 10 and 15 and 42% under the age of 10 as indicated in Chart 4.

Chart 4 Age PFA Cohort 2017-18



The age profile indicates a higher proportion of female children representing 67% (8) children and 33 %(4) male as shown in Chart 5.

Chart 5 Gender PFA Cohort 2017-18



The ethnicity of the Cohort is varied as illustrated in Chart 6 and the routes of referral by place of birth in Chart 7

Chart 6: Ethnicity of referrals 2017-18

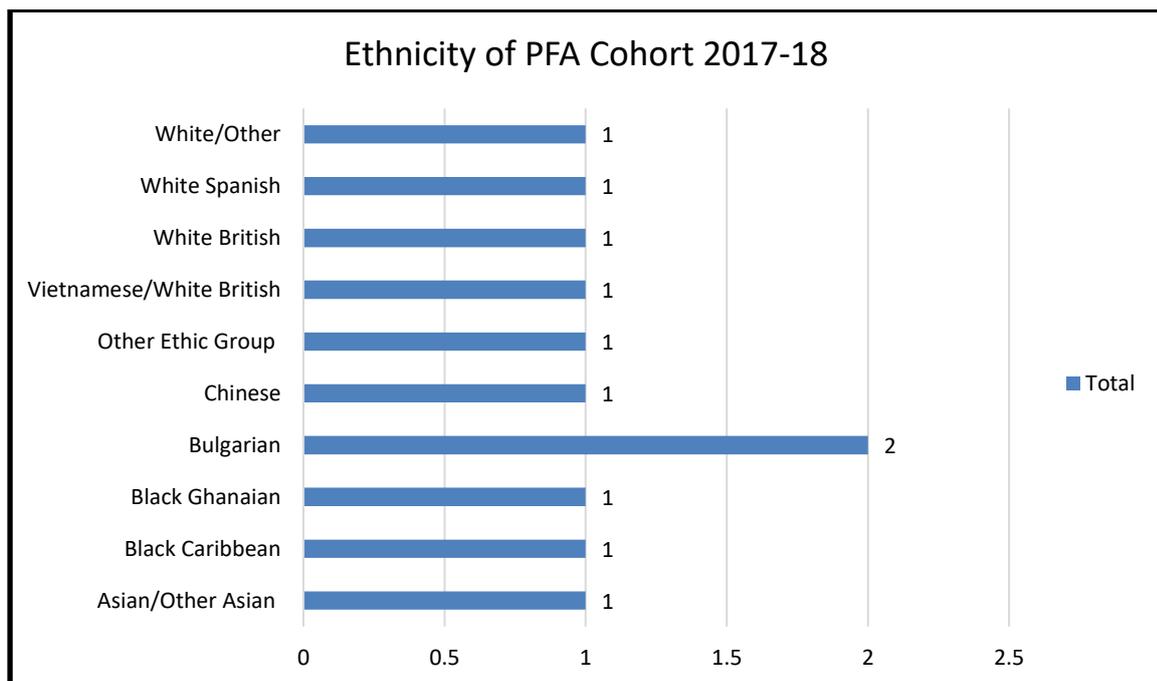
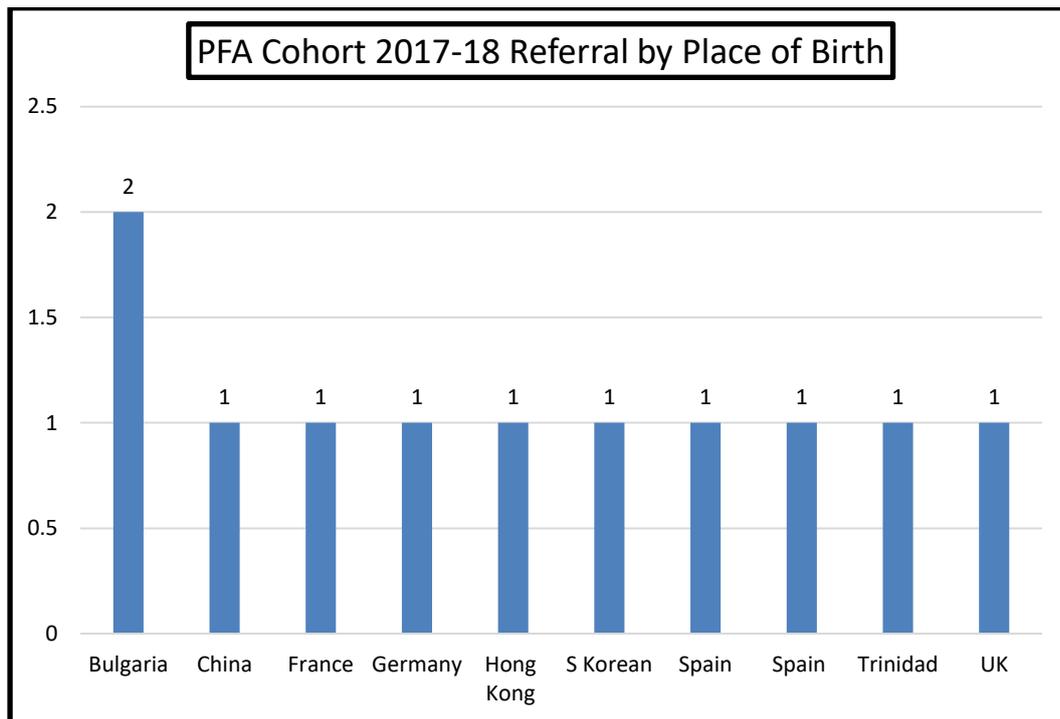


Chart 7 Place of Birth of referrals 2017-18



5.3 National Minimum Standard 3: The local authority determines effectively the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangement in accordance with the regulations

In the year 2017/18 it has been possible to contact parents in all of the private fostering arrangements, with the exception of one parent who after an initial contact failed to respond directly to attempts to engage in the assessment, however there has been some contact through the Carer and young person with a clear legal documentation giving authority to the carer in place for this arrangement. There has also been another instance when it has not been possible to establish contact with birth parents. In this instance the authorities in the children’s country of origin have made attempts to locate the parents and have confirmed that the Power of Attorney documents held by the Private Foster Carers were signed by the birth parents and endorsed by appropriate authorities in that country. In all cases endeavours are made to contact the parents (if living abroad contact will be by telephone, if domiciled in the UK then the expectation is that a visit will take place).

All of the Private Fostering arrangements were assessed using the Assessment Framework. All assessments have therefore included and covered the expectations within the National Minimum Standards:

- The ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child about the proposed/actual private fostering arrangement.
- That the child’s physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural development is appropriate and satisfactory

- The child's needs arising from his religious persuasion; racial origin and cultural and linguistic background are being met.
- That consideration has been given and necessary steps taken to make arrangements for the child's education.
- The standard of care provided for each privately fostered child
- The project ensures that all children and young people who are registered with the GP and all children and young people are registered with a dentist.

Where age appropriate the children are seen alone by their Social Worker and their views are obtained. Where children have been considered to be at risk or in need of intervention those cases are considered in line with S17 and S47 Children Act 1989.

Disclosure and Barring Service checks (DBS), Health assessments and local authority checks are completed on all carers; in addition any member of the household over the age of 18 years is subjected to a DBS and local authority check.

A letter of introduction is sent to all existing and new carers and young people with clear contact details for the private fostering social worker. They are also provided with the private fostering service duty telephone number and the number for Merton Emergency Duty Team for outside office hours

5.4 National Minimum Standard 4: The local authority provides such advice and support to private foster carers and prospective private foster carers as appears to the authority to be needed.

Private Foster Carers are provided with information and advice regarding children's developmental needs. The private fostering social worker will assist and advise all Private Foster Carers with general parenting skills, and provide advice on an on-going basis. As part of this, the team offers support on an individual case by case basis to the private foster carers and to the children privately fostered. Children and young people are visited frequently to ensure that they are safe and appropriately cared for. The child will be seen alone on each visit unless this is not appropriate (having regard to the young age of the child or if this against the wishes of the child). Where required a privately fostered child or young person could be referred to the commissioned advocacy service for advice and support.

The Private Fostering Social Worker has sought feedback directly from children, young people and their carers at regular intervals and or at the close of arrangements. This remains an area for improvement and development to increase the return rate of feedback forms. As part of the assessment process and on-going case work the private fostering service ensures that children are actively encouraged and involved in positive activities. All children and young people and carers are supported to access a range of community resources that are relevant and appropriate to their needs. Examples of support services in the year 2017/18 include ESOL Language Home Tuition, Community Legal practice, Welfare Benefits and Housing. Where appropriate carers are offered parenting training or signposted to local parenting programmes.

There has been no change to the offer for private foster carers to take up the training courses that are available to foster carers. Carers are made aware of local training opportunities available through the Merton Safeguarding Children Board including basic child protection E-Learning. Further work is required to develop a wider range of information and support opportunities specifically targeted at Private Foster Carers informed by a training need analysis involving carers to ensure it is relevant and appropriate. This may include exploring online forum or a group options that provide activities to facilitate networking and mutual support for carers. As the number of Carers in Merton is relatively small the social worker will continue to provide support on an individual case by case basis to the private foster carers and to the children privately fostered.

5.5 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

There have been no notifications from parents prior to placement of their children with the private foster carer. Where it has been possible all parents are met and spoken to during the course of establishing the private fostering arrangements (if living abroad contact has been by telephone, Skype, email or letter) if domiciled in the UK then contact has been via a home visit. Documents have been translated into the relevant community language where this has been required.

The regulations require the local authority to explore and discuss the duration and plan for rehabilitation. Where this is relevant this has happened. When rehabilitation becomes a possibility the local authority will successfully support this. Further work has continued to consider where relevant parents financially supporting the private foster carer. There have been no examples of any financial arrangements being in place. A leaflet for parents of children who are privately fostered has been designed and where possible this has been given to all parents. Contact details for the private fostering social worker have been provided to all parents where this has proved possible.

5.6 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.

The private fostering social worker consults with all children and young people individually about their views and ensures that their private foster carers understand their needs and wishes. Children and young people's views and wishes are incorporated into the assessment and visit reports.

As part of the on-going involvement the private fostering social worker maintains termly contact with education provision to discuss children's overall progress in school. Information received during these meetings is fed back to the private foster carer. If required the Social Worker will undertake direct work with the child or young person in the community. A leaflet for children who are subject to private fostering arrangements has been designed and is given to all children who are privately fostered.

Children and young people who are privately fostered in Merton also have access to the Advocacy Service and information relating to this service is contained in the information leaflet.

All assessments undertaken with Privately Fostered children take their views and wishes into account. There is an emphasis on embedding the views and wishes of children and young people throughout the arrangement. The PF visit format includes a focus on the voice of the child, seeing children and young people alone as well as with their Carer. All assessments undertaken with Privately Fostered children take their views and wishes into account. Various methods of direct work have been used to achieve this.

The private fostering social worker has been working to develop strategies to promote meaningful consultation and participation with all children and young people individually about their views and ensure that their private foster carers understand their needs and wishes. This has included revising the Children and young People's feedback form to make it more user-friendly. All children and young people have been asked to give feedback about the service they have received from the social worker when their placement comes to an end.

The importance of paying due attention to reflecting the voice of children and the contribution of other professionals to deliver a multi-agency response to children and families is current focus of practice. A review of each private fostering arrangement has been undertaken in collaboration with schools improving on previous practice of receiving verbal and written updates. This approach aims to strengthen communication by providing an opportunity for discussion of progress, achievement and any concerns.

Children and young people who are privately fostered in Merton are given an information leaflet which explains how to make a complaint if they are dissatisfied with any aspect of the service provided to them. In addition children and young people also have access to the Advocacy Service.

The contact details for the private fostering social worker have been provided to all children where appropriate and to all parents. A key priority for the service will be to ensure that children and young people access information, advice and support in their own right and this involves ensuring they this is explained as part of the initial contact and as part of ongoing visits and reviews.

The Private Social Worker is reviewing examples of good practice and developing a plan for implementation. Work is also underway to obtain feedback from the current cohort of children and young people. All children and young people have been contacted to obtain their views.

The Private Fostering Social Worker has participated in a wide range of training and learning opportunities. As part of this development Children who are privately fostered, those at risk of trafficking and those presenting as unaccompanied minors will feature in planned training programmes for staff and partner agencies.

5.7 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.

All new Private Fostering arrangements were assessed in accordance with the National Minimum Standards as detailed in bi annual reports for 2017/18. Each Private Fostering arrangement is assessed using the assessment framework and this is signed off by the Team Manager. No private fostering carers were prohibited in the year 2017-18.

A clear procedural document about the management of prohibitions is in place, and was reviewed in 2015 as part of the overall review of Children's Social Care procedures. A strategic group of managers within CSC and with key partners meets quarterly to monitor the implementation of the regulation (this is a sub group of the Merton MSCB).

Disclosure and Barring Service checks (DBS), Health Assessments and Local Authority screening checks were completed on all carers; in addition any member of the household over the age of 18 years is subjected to a DBS and local authority check. In addition references have been taken up for prospective carers.

By the end of Quarter 4 all open cases had suitability checks either in progress or had been completed. All children and young people who are therefore residing in a private fostering arrangement in the year 2017/8 have been subject to a child and family assessment. As part of this process the health, education and social needs of children are explored fully. The needs of the carer are also considered to ensure the private fostering arrangement continues to be appropriate.

The private fostering procedures are available electronically as part of the online procedures manual. This includes a section relating to the management of prohibitions and disqualifications. The PFWG will meet on a termly basis to monitor implementation of the regulations and standards, discuss and highlight areas for development and or improvement. This was previously a sub group of the Merton LSCB. The membership has been reviewed to reflect a broad range of interests.

By the end of 2017-18 a total of 6 Private Fostering Arrangements ended. There are plans to build on the current systems in place to record the number of privately fostered children coming to the attention of the borough. There are also systems to monitor activity around the responses. This will be enhanced by reporting functions available through Mosaic to record and monitor performance directly from the case file recording system.

The expectation under this section of the NMS is for a sample audit of files to take place. A sample of case files were audited in 2017-18 as part of the Quality Assurance Thematic Audit programme. Under this standard any lessons learned concerns raised or changing trends are expected to be provided to the Director of Children's Services and the Safeguarding Board.

An audit of casework undertaken in Autumn 2018 highlighted improvements in the timeliness of first year and second year visits with 6 out of a possible 8 first year initial visits completed within timescales, with 2 being out due to carers being unable to secure time off from work commitments. There has been an improvement in second year visits improved to 87% within 6-12 week timescales. It has been possible to initiate contact with 7 parents of the new arrangements and all suitability checks and references were requested and or completed.

There is evidence of supervision on the files and satisfactory management oversight resulting in all appropriate checks and references requested and or in place on all cases. The case records reflect the work undertaken in this area. This could be enhanced further by reflecting use of the practice model, particularly drawing on the Signs of Safety approach and ensuring that this is reflected more explicitly in supervision.

Further work to ensure that service user feedback is collected routinely to increase the rate of return is highlighted as a priority for action. It is important to continue to drive improvement and ensure that systems are in place to support the social worker and team manager develop practice to a high standard.

Appendices

Communication Plan 2016-18

Private Fostering Plan 2017-18

