



Private Fostering

Annual Report

April 2020 – March 2021

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This annual report gives an overview of the activities in relation to privately fostered children in Dorset from 1st April 2020 to the 31st March 2021. This report details how Dorset Children Social Care has delivered its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and how the welfare of privately fostered children has been safeguarded and promoted during the last 12-month period.
- 1.2 Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Private Fostering Team are commissioned to carry out duties in relation to children who are fostered from overseas. Despite this arrangement they are children privately fostered in Dorset and will therefore be included within this report.
- 1.3 This report also outlines the activities which have been undertaken to promote awareness of the notification requirements regarding children who are privately fostered, and the actions Dorset propose to undertake in the next year.
- 1.4 Within the report there are two case studies of children who have been privately fostered. It was believed to be important to Dorset Children Social Care to highlight these within the annual report to bring the children's journey to the fore.

2. Legal Definition

- 2.1 The Children Act 1989 defines private fostering as occurring when a child under 16 (or under 18 if the child has a disability) is cared for, and provided with accommodation, for 28 days or more by someone other than a close relative, guardian or someone with parental responsibility. This might be a friend, a great aunt, a cousin or someone else known to the child or young person. A close relative is defined as being a grandparent, aunt, uncle, brother, or stepparent by marriage. The parent/s and the private foster carer would make this arrangement, not the local council.
- 2.2 Parents and carers have a legal duty to notify the local authority when entering a private fostering arrangement; local authorities are then required to carry out an assessment and to monitor the arrangement.
- 2.3 Partner agencies should notify the local authority and any professionals working with children, young people and their families from agencies including (but not limited to) schools or health services, if they become aware of or believe that a child is living in a private fostering arrangement.
- 2.4 There are many reasons why children and young people are privately fostered. Such examples include those listed below:
 - Children or young people who are sent to this country for education or health care by birth parents from overseas;
 - Ill health preventing birth parents from being able to look after their children;
 - Children or young people who are living with a friend/boyfriend/girlfriend's family as a result of parental separation, divorce or arguments at home;
 - Children or young people whose parents work or study long or antisocial hours;
 - Children or young people on school holiday exchanges that last more than 28 days;
 - Children or young people who are on sports or music sponsorships living away from their families.

CASE STUDY

Child N is 15 years old and lived with her mother until the relationship deteriorated following the mothers struggles with Covid – 19 and consequential anxiety. This placed a strain on their relationship which resulted in regular arguments and upset . Child N moved to the care of her second cousin with mothers consent. This became a private fostering arrangement. Since the move N has enjoyed being part of a warm, welcoming family who are encouraging her to rebuild her relationships with her mother and wider family. They are also supporting her with her education, emotional wellbeing, and physical health. The views of the carers was always that they wanted to keep Child N in the family and prevent her coming into care.

3. The Local Authority's Duties and Functions

3.1 The responsibilities of the local authority are outlined within the Private Fostering Regulations ('Regulations') and the Private Fostering National Minimum Standards (NMS) 2005.

3.2 Dorset Children Social Care is responsible for all privately fostered children who reside in their area and have commissioned BCP Council private fostering team to oversee the children who are privately fostered from overseas and who are attending language schools.

3.3 There is a duty placed on anyone involved in a private fostering arrangement to notify Dorset Children Social Care. Dorset needs to be satisfied that the welfare of privately fostered children, or children who are likely to be privately fostered, is being safeguarded and promoted.

3.4 Where the local authority is informed of a proposed or existing private fostering arrangement:

- Dorset Social Care will allocate to a social work to undertake an initial visit.
- The child's Social Worker will undertake an initial visit to the child within 7 working days of the date of notification;
- The social worker will then carry out an assessment of the suitability of the arrangements for the child;
- Visits during the assessment will be fortnightly;
- Following completion of the assessment and thereafter for the first-year visits are 6 weekly unless need of the child requests otherwise;
- Thereafter, the visits move to 12 weekly.

3.5 When completing assessments of, and meeting with, children, young people and their families, all agencies should ask questions about who lives in the household and who has parental responsibility this can help in identifying a private fostering arrangement. All the relevant checks should be undertaken such as medical, DBS and social care safeguarding checks.

3.6 Additional duties of Dorset are as follows:

- Continued development within Children's Social Care around private fostering and what constitutes these arrangements to ensure best practice;
- Building knowledge and raise public and professional awareness with regards to what constitutes a private fostering arrangement and the duty to notify Dorset Children's Social Care.

3.7 For children who are under the age of 16 and are attending a language school in Dorset notifications/referrals should come direct from the language school/guardianship company via the website notification form.

3.8 Occasionally information about foreign language students comes to our attention via Children's Advice and Duty Service (ChAD) particularly in cases of new language schools where there is no established working relationship with the local authority. ChAD at this point will refer them to the BCP private fostering team. BCP private fostering service continue to raise awareness of the private fostering arrangements and their requirements. They advise Dorset Council of any concerns arising of establishments where Dorset young people are affiliated with. Such establishments include Language schools, residential and Private Fostering Households.

4. Private fostering arrangements

4.1 There were 4 children privately fostered as at the 31st March 2021, which is the same figure as the year before. Of the 4 children between the period of 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021, 2 referrals were received by the carers themselves, 1 from a third sector, 1 from a GP surgery. In addition there were 13 children and young people attending Language schools that were staying in private fostering arrangements between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021.

4.2 At the end of March 2021 there were 4 children in private fostering arrangements supported within the Locality teams and a further 4 children who remained privately fostered from overseas managed by BCP Council private fostering team.

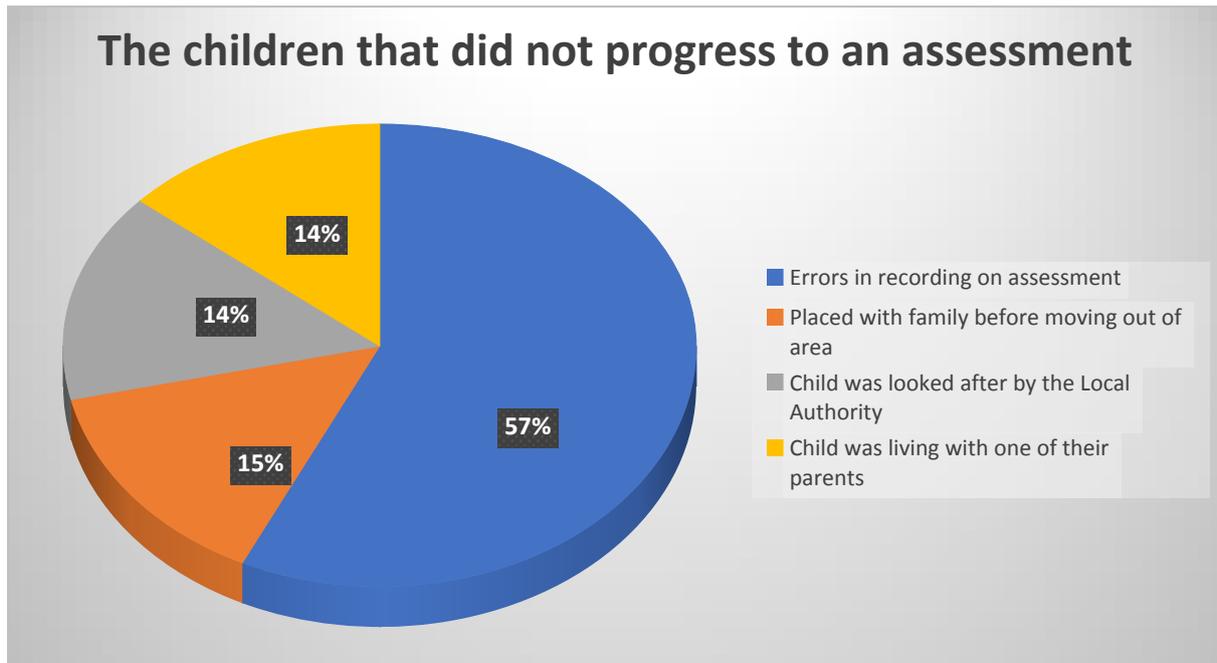
4.3 Dorset Children Social Care is aware of the small number of children in its conurbation which are privately fostered. Dorset Children Social Care and have been working hard to raise awareness in order to ensure that children who are privately fostered are adequately identified and referrals are increased.

4.4 Between the period 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021 there were 15 children who were identified as potentially relating to private fostering from child and family assessments. Of those 15 children eight progressed to a private fostering assessment, two of these children were from overseas who were from private boarding schools and were referred to BCP as part of our commissioning arrangements. At the time those 2 children could not return to their home country due to Covid restrictions so remained with their host families awaiting their return to their school. This has now happened.

4.5 In terms of the 7 children that did not progress to an assessment, the reasons were as follows:

- 4 were errors in recording on the assessment and were not private fostering;
- 1 child was placed with family before moving out of area
- 1 child was a looked after child;
- 1 child related to arrangements where the child was living with one of their parents.

The children that did not progress to an assessment



4.6 Once Dorset Children Social Care identified those as potentially relating to private fostering, a social worker should visit the child within 7 working days to assess their welfare and whether the circumstances do constitute a private fostering arrangement. Of the 15 children, 60% of visits took place within timescale, therefore 40% took place outside of the timescale. These figures albeit based on a small number of children represent an improving picture from last year when only 31% of initial visits to potential privately fostered children were on time. Dorset Children Social Care continue to prioritise the timeliness of visits to ensure that children's needs are assessed expeditiously.

4.7 Of the 13 children privately fostered from overseas managed by BCP all the children were seen within 7 working days of notification.

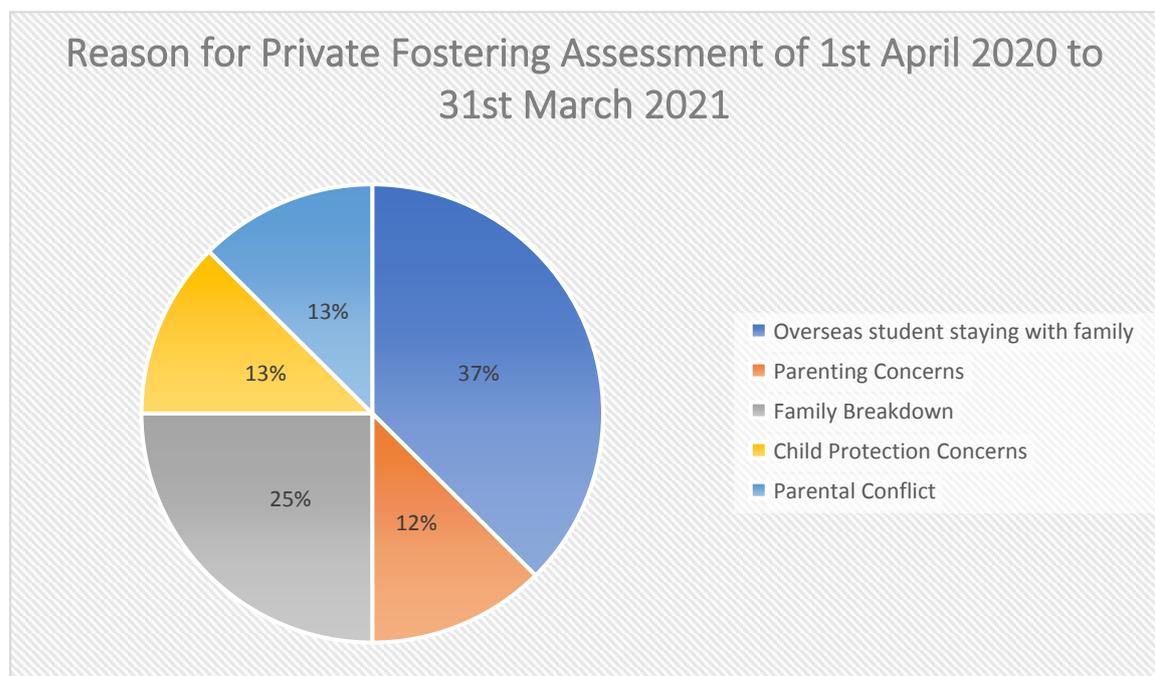
4.8 When considering all the privately fostered children managed by Dorset and BCP a vital area that was scrutinised was the voice of the child. Within all the records the voice of the child was prevalent this was recorded in the assessments and visits to them. The parent's views were also recorded. Within the children who were privately fostered from overseas there were 2 children where attempts had been made to gain their parents views however, without success.

4.9 Once it is confirmed that the child is living within a private fostering arrangement, a social worker from the locality team will undertake an assessment. These should be completed within 42 days. Of the 8 assessments initiated between 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021 50% were completed within the 42 days. Again, this represents an improvement from last year when none of the reports were completed on time. Dorset Children Social Care are striving to build knowledge and practice around this area in general and in relation to timeliness of the private fostering assessment.

4.10 BCP undertook 17 Part A assessment for children privately fostered from overseas 15 (88%) assessments were completed within the 42 days. The two assessments that were not completed within timescales were review assessments of known carers with no concerns identified. There were 13 Part B assessments completed of language students living in private fostering

arrangements in Dorset of which 77% (10) of these were completed in timescale. The three assessments that were not in timescale were signed off by management one or two days late. There were more Part A assessments than Part B assessments due to changes in private fostering arrangements prior to the child arriving. This was mainly as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.11



4.12 The above chart provides an overview of the key reasons why out of the 8 assessments undertaken by Dorset children were being referred for an assessment between 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021. 37% of children were of overseas student staying with non-immediate / host family. 25% of such arrangements were because of family breakdown. 13% of arrangements where concerns related to parental conflict and child protection concerns and 12% on parenting concerns.

4.13 Of the 4 privately fostered children Regulation 8 visits are completed by a social worker within the locality teams. These visits should take place every 6 weeks or every 12 weeks where the arrangement is assessed as well established and the child is settled. There were 24 Regulation 8 visits undertaken during the year. Of the 4 children 2 children had their visit within the 6-weekly pattern, the other 2 were out of timescales, it is worth noting 1 of these children was all within time save for a visit last year that was two days late. There is evidence of children being seen alone when visited and their views being sought. The child’s health and development needs are kept under review and support is provided to secure more permanent arrangements. All these children are subject to a Child in Need Plan.

4.14 The majority of children in private fostering arrangements continue to be between the age of 10- 15 years. Of the children who are privately fostered as at 31st March 2020, 50% were male and 50% female. They are from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds.

- 4.15 Of the 13 privately fostered children from overseas, Regulation 8 visits were all completed on time. These visits were taking place within the 6 weekly timescales. BCP visiting pattern is 4 weekly. It was evidenced that overall, these children were having their needs met. They were being cared for by carers who were already known to BCP private fostering team. The children were visited regularly alone, and their wishes and feelings were heard, and they were reporting that they were happy. There were some issues within one placement, and it was addressed quickly with actions identified.

CASE STUDY

Child S is a 15-year-old girl who arrived in England in August 2020 to attend school to expand her learning and improve her English. Child S was due to attend a private boarding school and, in the holidays, stay with a host family. Due to the Covid – 19 pandemic she was unable to attend her school so stayed with her host family. Consequently, it became a private fostering arrangement.

Within this time Child S has received good care, her views of the family were “they are very kind and respectful to me”. The carers ensured that she continued to access education virtually and improve her English. Child S views on her education was “I prefer to be home learning as it means I have more free time.”

Child S has continued to have contact with her family daily and this has been supported by the carers.

Child S has now returned to school full time and will return to visiting her host family in the holidays.

5. Action planned in respect of private fostering in 2021 – 2022:

- 5.1 Whilst progress has been made over the last year in increasing oversight of private fostering arrangements and promoting awareness we also are aware that we need to further strengthen our work with this vulnerable group of children. We have therefore identified the following actions which will be undertaken at pace.
- 5.2 Continue to build awareness of private fostering and work with key partners through the Pan Dorset Safeguarding Children’s Partnership (PDSCP) to ensure knowledge across all agencies and organisations with regards to identifying and notifying Dorset Children Social Care of children who are believed to be ‘privately fostered’ are increased.
- Since March 2021 there has been a real drive to build knowledge to ensure that professionals within Children Social Care are as well-informed and equipped to identify this as soon as a referral is received to ensure intervention and assessment can start promptly. A private fostering factsheet (attached) has been devised and been disseminated to staff within Children Social Care, this includes ChAD, locality teams, Early Help;
 - The private fostering factsheet has been circulated to Social Care, Education and Health Services to promote awareness in the community and with other agencies, this has been distributed by being added to the Pan Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership (PDSCP) resource page, to NEXUS for school staff and attached to the PDSCP newsletter. It has also been attached to the internal weekly word out for Social Care staff and for wider networks;
 - The Safeguarding and Standards Advisor Quality Assurance and Partnership Team have been delivering twilight sessions to the Deputy Safeguarding Leads (DSL’s) in schools to provide information and develop knowledge in schools. This will also continue and close

liaison with Dorset Social Care will take place if required. The team will raise any concerns if any arise;

- Dorset Social Care continue to work closely with the PDSCP around any other ways to promote private fostering;
- Reviewing and updating its Communication Strategy to ensure that all mediums are utilised to raise awareness of private fostering across the children's and adults' workforce and communities, targeting such information where necessary;
- BCP will continue with their robust raising awareness plan to include the language schools. BCP have established relationships with the local language schools and promote early notification of arrangements. Dorset Social Care will work with BCP around this and ensure that information is continually shared.

5.3 Continued work around building knowledge across children's social care workforce and communities, this includes training and through information sharing:

- Continue to share the private fostering factsheet (attached) with Children Social Care staff, this includes ChAD, locality teams, Early Help, and wider partners on a 12 weekly basis this will be through the weekly word outs.
- Awareness sessions around private fostering within our reflective workshops have been delivered and will continue to be carried out, a small clip on private fostering that has been received from the PDSCP website will also be shared in the upcoming months on private fostering to all workers.
- Closer worker with Dorset Adult Social Care around privately fostering and identification of private fostering arrangements.

5.4 Ensure there is sufficient focus on identification and notification of private fostering arrangements, conducting initial visits to children reported as being private fostered and that assessments of such arrangements take place within relevant timescales this will be done through training:

- Team managers to continue to monitor visits and assessments to ensure they are on time. This will be scrutinised through the data reports; Private fostering to be added to current management dashboards for children in need to increase visibility and oversight.
- Audits will be completed on all private fostering children every 6 months to evaluate practice and ensure that concerns are identified sooner so improvements can be made;
- Continued work with professionals around the voice of the child and their parents ensuring that this is fundamental in the planning and decision making. This will be considered within the audit process to ensure that workers are gathering this information;
- Reviewing arrangements to ensure that children living within a private fostering arrangement are properly monitored via Regulation 8 visits and where necessary a Child in Need Plan;
- Regular training to consider Private Fostering and ensure any updates in legislation and procedures are incorporated, as a compulsory element to the training, ensuring new staff are provided with this training and current staff receive refresher training.

5.5 The current contract for privately fostered children attending language schools is managed by BCP this is due for renewal in 2022 and will need to be reviewed.

- Within this period Dorset Social Care and BCP will regularly meet (every 8 weeks) to review the children in their service and ensure oversight and scrutiny.

- BCP to provide monthly data on all notifications of private fostering arrangements and arrangements that have ended. These will be added as a record to Dorset Children's Mosaic to ensure the young person's status in a private fostering arrangement is reflected and understood.
- All Dorset children managed by BCP are to be audited every 6 months these audits are to be shared with Dorset Children Social Care.
- Dorset Children Social Care to consider the arrangements for the privately fostered children from overseas are managed next year.
- The impact of Covid 19 on the number of children that have been privately fostered in Dorset in the last year and how this may change moving forward needs to be understood within this commissioning and planning.

5.6 Ensure that the Private Fostering Annual Report is duly presented to the Corporate Parenting Board and Safeguarding Children's Partnership in July 2021.