

Private Fostering Survey: Learning & Next Steps

August 2017

What is Private Fostering?

Private fostering is when a child under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled) is cared for by someone who is not their parent or a 'close relative'. This is a private arrangement made between a parent and carer, for 28 days or more. It is not the same as foster care, which is a formal arrangement, led by the Local Authority.

Situations involving private foster care can include:

- Teenagers living with the family of a boyfriend or girlfriend
- Children sent to this country for health care or education, by parents living overseas
- Children living with a friend's family as a result of separation, divorce or arguments at home
- Children at Boarding Schools who do not return to their parents during holidays.
- Children on holiday exchanges or living with host families for a variety of reasons
- Children brought from abroad with a view to adopt
- Children whose parents work unsocial hours
- Children whose parents are in prison
- Children whose parents are serving in the forces.



Why does the Local Authority need to know?

Privately fostered children are often made more vulnerable by their living circumstances. When the Local Authority is told about a private fostering arrangement they will undertake a number of checks to ensure the child is ok, and that the carer is properly supported.

What did we do?

Private fostering arrangements are under-reported by members of the public, and therefore it is important that professionals who come into contact with children and families are able to spot and report potential private fostering arrangements. To explore how confident professionals are about private fostering, the BSCB ran a multi-agency survey in July and August 2017. At the end of the survey there was signposting to further resources and information around private fostering for partners to use within their own organisation.

Key Findings

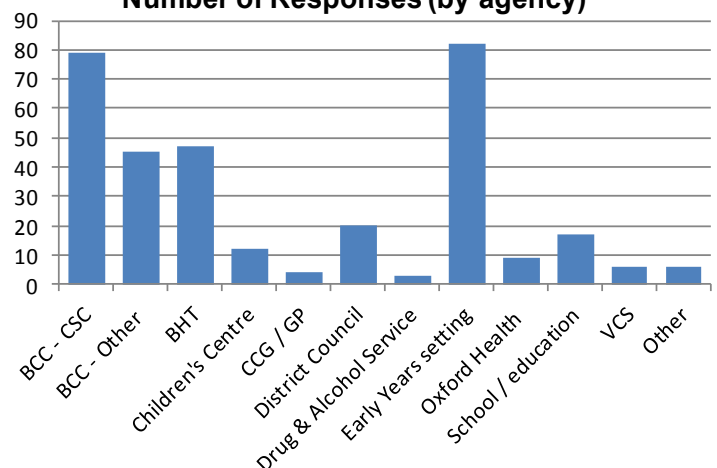
Agency Responses

The survey was publicised to members of the BSCB and its sub groups, with a request that they shared this on with staff in their own agency and encouraged as many colleagues as possible to respond. It was also promoted via the BSCB newsletter and website. **337 responses were received in total.**

Key

BCC = Buckinghamshire County Council
 CSC = Children's Social Care
 BHT = Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust
 CCG = Clinical Commissioning Group
 Early Years setting (includes childminders)
 VCS = Voluntary, Community or Faith sector

Number of Responses (by agency)

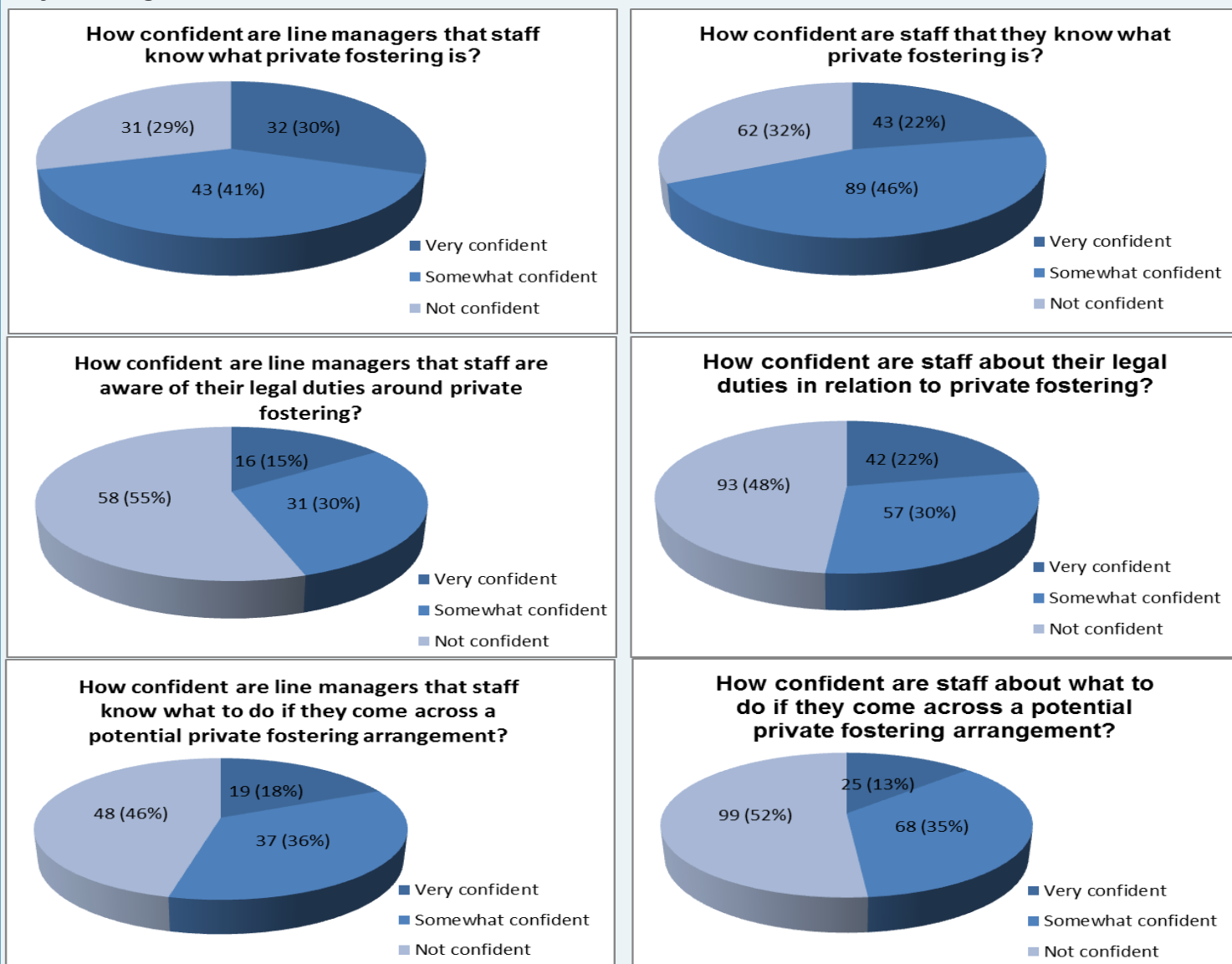


Levels of Awareness and Confidence

We asked respondents whether they had line management responsibilities for staff who worked directly with children and families. This allowed us to ask line managers how confident they were about levels of knowledge and awareness amongst their staff, and compare this with levels of self-reported knowledge from respondents who were not line managers.

Overall, results suggested line managers had a broadly accurate understanding of the level of knowledge of staff within their organisation.

Key messages:



Results suggested there was some variation in levels of knowledge across different agencies, although the overall pattern of responses across individual agencies was in line with the graphs above—with the highest levels of confidence around knowing what private fostering is, and the lowest around knowing how to respond. The BSCB will share collated responses back with individual organisations where there were sufficient responses for this to be helpful.

Results suggest that across all partners there is scope to improve knowledge and awareness of private fostering.

- Only 22% of staff reported that they were very confident they understand what private fostering is. Some of the free text answers given by respondents indicated that there remains a level of confusion between private fostering and formal foster care arrangements.
- Only 22% of staff reported that they were very confident about their legal duties in relation to private fostering
- Only 13% were very confident they knew what to do if they came across a potential private fostering arrangement.

Awareness Raising Activity

We asked all respondents whether they were aware of any activity having taken place within their agency to raise awareness of private fostering. The majority of respondents (86%) said they were not aware of any such activity.

“We used to have a poster, but its out of date” (free text response)

“The private fostering lead has visited team units and advised them of the process to refer” (free text response)

Respondents who said there had been awareness raising activity were asked to describe what this was. The word cloud below provides a summary of responses given (the larger the word, the more times it was mentioned). It was evident from responses that Children’s Social Care had put on a specific private fostering workshop, and this accounted for the majority of people that mentioned this.

Responses suggest there is scope for further single agency awareness raising, and the BSCB has made resources available to support this (see links at the end of this document).

“The staff have attended the private fostering workshop as part of the Getting to Good programme” (free text response)

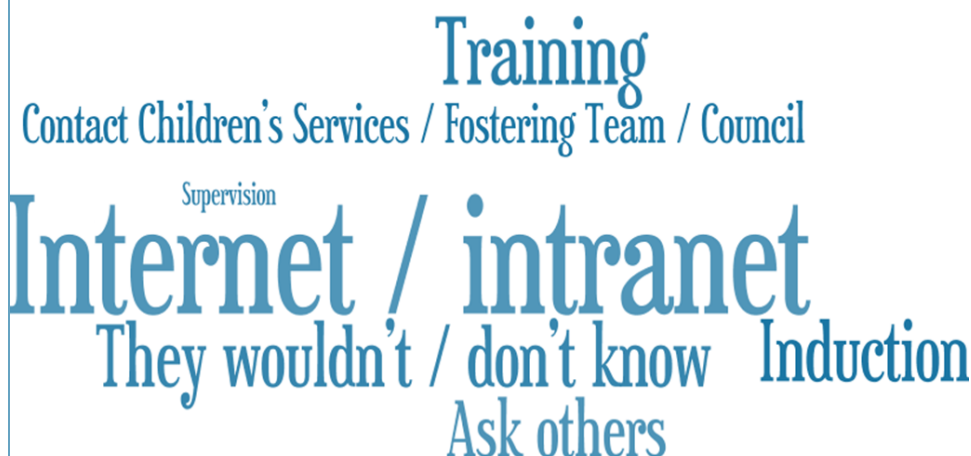
“Included in training sessions for GPs” (free text response)



New Staff Members

We asked respondents how new members of staff would find out about private fostering. The word cloud below summarises the free text answers that were given. The majority of responses indicated that information on private fostering is not provided to new staff as a matter of course, but rather they would need to seek out information when they needed it. As a result of undertaking the survey, one line manager indicated they had now added private fostering onto their induction checklist. However, overall responses highlight that there are further opportunities for other teams/ organisations to do the same.

Responses also highlight the importance of ensuring staff are easily able to find information if they undertake any kind of web search or other research when they do need to know about private fostering. Updated information for professionals and separate information for the public has recently been added to the BSCB website. Both this, and the Buckinghamshire County Council information for the public on private fostering appear prominently in search engine results, but do appear after paid adverts for private foster care agencies. Individual agencies could assist by ensuring links to relevant information are available from their own intranet / internal child protection or safeguarding policies, and indeed one respondent indicated that they would make this addition as a result of undertaking the survey.



“It will be added to our safe-guarding policy ” (free text response)

“Added to new staff induction checklist” (free text response)

Additional Support

We asked what additional support respondents would find helpful around private fostering. The most popular responses are listed below, along with the BSCB response and any suggested next steps.

1 Leaflet and / or poster for staff

Leaflets on private fostering are available for parents, carers and children (see www.bucks-lscb.org.uk/professionals/private-fostering/) The Local Authority will now explore a separate briefing paper / leaflet for professionals.

2 Short briefing or training session

The BSCB will work with the Local Authority to run 3 multi-agency lunchtime / twilight session around private fostering in February and March 2018.

3 Information session with- in single agency (e.g. at team meeting)

A short PowerPoint presentation is already available on the BSCB website that individual agencies can use to raise awareness with their own staff – for example as part of team meetings or training. This can be downloaded at: www.bucks-lscb.org.uk/professionals/private-fostering/

Alternatively, the Private Fostering Lead at Buckinghamshire County Council can be contacted to discuss training / awareness raising: firststeps@buckscc.gov.uk

4 Inclusion in existing training

A PowerPoint presentation is available on the BSCB website for use by individual agencies. Partners are encouraged to think about whether there are opportunities for this to be included as part of existing training arrangements. The presentation can be downloaded at: www.bucks-lscb.org.uk/professionals/private-fostering/

Private fostering is covered in both of the basic BSCB multi-agency courses (Working Together and Everyone's Responsibility).

5 Guidance or procedure

In September 2017 the BSCB will be launching a new and updated online procedures manual. This will include clearer reference to private fostering.

6 Regular reminders via newsletters / email

The BSCB newsletter has carried two articles on private fostering since June 2016, and we will continue to use the newsletter for updates. Professionals are encouraged to sign up for the newsletter by contacting cgorley@buckscc.gov.uk. Mangers are encouraged to circulate the newsletter within their agency. Back issues can be viewed on our website at: www.bucks-lscb.org.uk/about-the-bscb/bscb-newsletters/

Partners are encouraged to think about whether internal newsletters could also be used for updates on private fostering. The Local Authority Communications Team will produce a short briefing that partners can adapt for such use.

7 Clear information on website

The BSCB provides information for professionals on private fostering at: www.bucks-lscb.org.uk/professionals/private-fostering/ Partners are encouraged to link to this page from their own intranet / internal guidance.

The BSCB would be happy to receive any specific feedback on how information on this page could be improved (please send to cgorley@buckscc.gov.uk).

8 Case study examples

Case study examples illustrating how reporting can help the child and potential signs to look out for will be included as part of the leaflet for professionals.

9 A named contact

For further information of advice in relation to private fostering, or to discuss training and awareness raising, please contact firststeps@buckscc.gov.uk.

Making a Referral

We asked respondents whether they had any experience of making a referral in relation to a potential private fostering arrangement, and if so whether this was positive. Only 4% of respondents (12 people) indicated that could remember ever having reported a potential private fostering arrangement, and a number of these indicated that this referral was some time ago or in another local authority. Only 3 comments were made in relation to recent referrals (see below).

“Very helpful advice from Assistant Team Manager / Team Manager in Fostering Team” (free text response)

“A young person in a family I was working with was going to be looked after by someone in order for him to complete his exams. I reported it to Social Care but was told I didn't need to” (free text response)

“I completed a MARF following calling First Response because I was concerned that Mother had not consented to the arrangements following talking with her.” (free text response)

Research Findings

Current arrangements for the regulation of private fostering originate from concern following the death of Victoria Climbié in 2000. Victoria was privately fostered by her great aunt. Arrangements 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 national minimum standards for local authorities were published in 2005. Despite this legal framework, there is concern that private fostering is significantly under-reported and local authorities have made slow progress in increasing the number of reported private fostering arrangements.

Research has identified that the reporting of private fostering arrangements rarely comes from parents and carers or the general public. This underlines the importance of professionals being alert to potential private fostering arrangements and knowing how to respond:

Research conducted on behalf of DfE and published in 2010 concluded that:

- The majority of notifications are made by professionals who notice a child is not living with his/her parents
 - Parents and carers rarely notify local authorities as required by law
 - Most notifications by parents, children or carers occur when problems emerge.
- (No simple answers, Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010, p 20)

In 2014, Ofsted published a report following a review of Private Fostering Arrangements in 12 Local Authorities. This suggested that that the DfE findings still held true, and that: *“There is very little evidence from authority annual reports or inspection that general campaigns of ‘awareness-raising’ have any impact outside of professional circles.”*

Case Studies

‘Young male Portugal – dad in prison – came to visit godmother in this country & stayed. Placement discovered because of involvement of team re HIV of godmother.’

‘Notified by MOTHER who wanted child back after 3 years – suggests publicity was not working – especially as child is dual heritage British/African and ethnicity of carers is white British; different surname. Notification came from mum who came in to the team to say that she wanted her son back. She had handed him over to her friend when he was two. He was now 5 and she wanted him returned. This was the first alert the service had to the situation – although child at school, they were not aware either of the situation.’

DJK aged 15 and placed with JS. DJK is Swiss and was placed for 5 months & 6 days. He came to England to improve his English by attending High school. This was accomplished and he maintained constant contact with mother, father & sister by phone & Facebook.’

(Examples cited in *Private fostering: better information, better understanding*, Ofsted, 2014. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/private-fostering-better-understanding-of-local-authority-arrangements)

Recommendations

Recommendations for the BSCB

- BSCB to work with the Local Authority to run 3 multi-agency lunchtime / twilight sessions on private fostering in February and March 2018.
- BSCB to consider repeat survey in 12-18 months time to explore increase in knowledge and awareness.
- BSCB to continue to use the Board newsletter to share information around private fostering.

“Shared during two staff meetings. Minuted and minutes circulated.” (free text response)

“Inclusion into a number of training packages delivered to staff and those with a particular responsibility for safeguarding in schools/ colleges”. (free text response)

Recommendations for single agencies

- Partners to make use of the resources available on the BSCB website to raise awareness with staff, for example through meetings, training, newsletters.
- Partners to contact the Local Authority Private Fostering Lead for any additional support in relation to training and awareness raising.
- Partners to consider options for referencing private fostering as part of induction or wider safeguarding training for staff.

Recommendations for the Local Authority

- Private Fostering Lead and Communications Team to work together to produce a leaflet for professionals.
- Private Fostering Lead to work with the BSCB to deliver lunchtime / twilight awareness raising sessions.
- Private Fostering Lead to continue to keep the BSCB updated on awareness raising work, both for professionals and the wider community.

“I encourage all staff to attend a Private Fostering Workshop so they are aware of their duties” (free text response)

“We have had children at the setting who have been privately fostered.” (free text response)

“Included in monthly safeguarding update. Included in safeguarding training. Included on safeguarding intranet. (free text response)

“45 minute session dedicated in a Team Meeting 6 months ago.” (free text response)

Further Information

Information

- **Power Point presentation** on private fostering (you can download and use this to raise awareness with professionals in your organisation): www.bucks-lscb.org.uk/professionals/private-fostering/
- The **Somebody Else's Child** website contains useful information for professionals working with children and young people including a short video guide to private fostering: www.privatefostering.org.uk/profs
- **Leaflets** to provide information for Parents, Carers and Children & Young People are available on the BSCB website: www.bucks-lscb.org.uk/professionals/private-fostering/

Contact Details

- Buckinghamshire County Council Private Fostering Lead:

Signposting Parents and Carers

- Further information is available for parents and Carers on the Buckinghamshire County Council website:

