

PRIVATE FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT 2015-2016

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(Private Fostering)

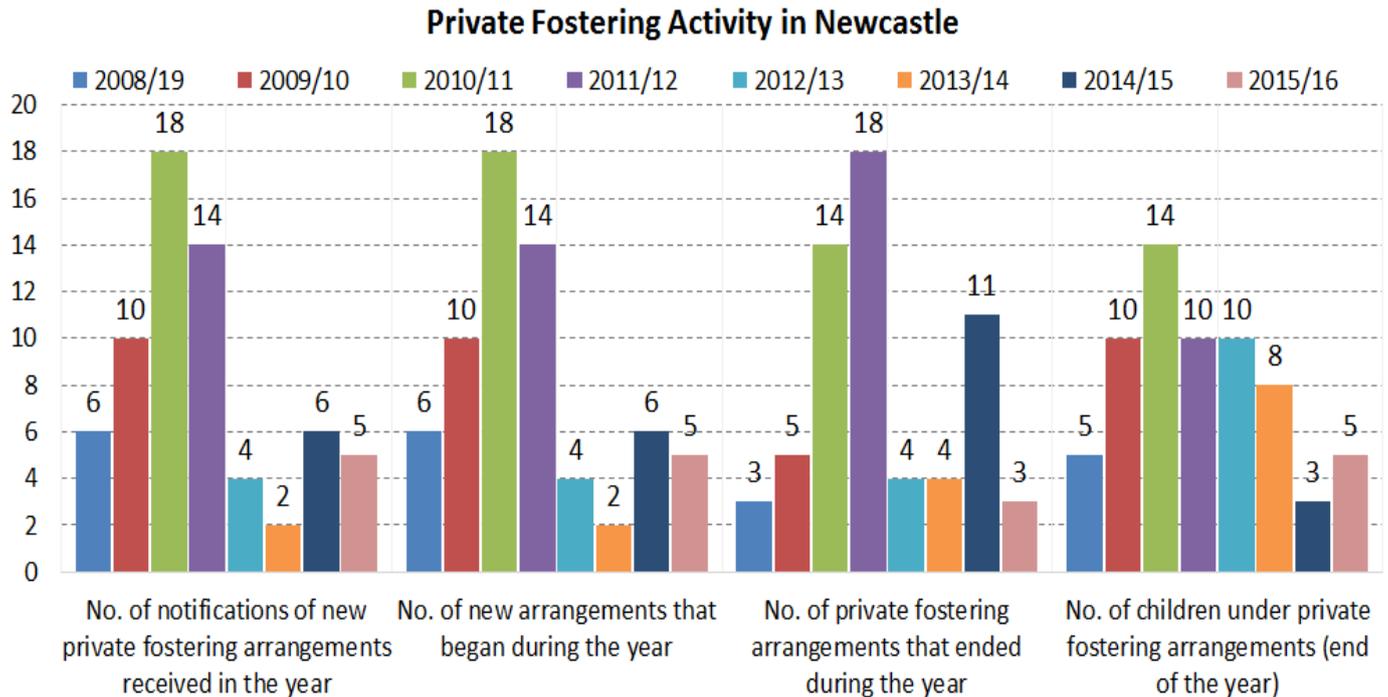
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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Private Fostering Regulations apply when children or young people, aged under 16 years (18 if they have a disability) live with a person who is not a close relative for 28 days or more. The term 'close relative' has a specific definition within the legislation, it includes grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts (whether of the full or half blood or by marriage) and step-parents. Children living with people who are not close relatives, such as a cousin, great aunt or family friend need to be assessed and reviewed under the Private Fostering Regulations to ensure the placement is able to safeguard and promote his/her welfare.
- 1.2 This annual report gives an overview of activities in relation to privately fostered children in Newcastle from April 2015 to end of March 2016. The report details how Newcastle City Council has complied with its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and includes how the welfare of privately fostered children has been safeguarded and promoted over the past 12 months. The report also outlines the activities which have been undertaken to promote awareness of the notification requirements regarding children who are living in private fostering arrangements.
- 1.3 Previous reports have been able to include a summary of the annual statistics provided by all local authorities as part of the Private Fostering Return (PF1 Return) concerning numbers of new notifications, arrangements and visiting patterns. This information is no longer centrally collated by the Government and it is not possible to provide comparative data. Nonetheless, nationally private fostering remains an important part of arrangements for safeguarding children.
- 1.4 In Newcastle, the CSSU has, over the past year, continued to promote local understanding and awareness of private fostering and sought to improve how we meet the needs of the children and young people concerned. This includes using audit to review our own performance and to identify where improvements need to be made.
- 1.4 The NSCB plays a vital role in helping protect children who are privately fostered, exercising leadership and raising awareness of the requirements and issues around private fostering. Information relating to private fostering arrangements in Newcastle is reported to the NSCB through the Standards and Effectiveness Management Group (SEMG).

2.0 Data - Private Fostering Arrangements in Newcastle



2.1 The chart above provides summary figures showing key private fostering notification activity in Newcastle over the last 8 years. In 2015/16 activity remained lower than the highs recorded in 2010/11 and 2011/12, however in line with activity recorded over the last couple years reflected in the chart. Specifically in 2015/16:

- 5 new notifications of a Private Fostering arrangements were received, 1 fewer the previous year
- 5 new arrangements started, 1 fewer the previous year
- 3 arrangements ended in 2015/16, a significant reduction from 11 in the previous year been
- At the end of 2015/16, 5 young people were in a Private Fostering Arrangement, an increase from 3 at the end of the previous year

2.2 Of the three private fostering arrangements that ceased:

- 2 were long-term cases which had been open for 4 years in one case and over a year for another
- Both young people in these cases ceased their PF arrangement by virtue of turning 16 years of age
- The remaining case had been received in the current year and ceased in the current year, through returning home to live with parents or a close relative

3.0 Procedures

3.1 A Statement of Purpose has been in place in Newcastle since August 2008. The aim of the Statement of Purpose is to ensure awareness of Newcastle City Council's duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out. The document aims to provide a clear guide in relation to private fostering for professionals, wider agencies and members of the public. The Statement of Purpose was reviewed in March 2014 and no further amendments have been required since then. It is reviewed through the Newcastle Safeguarding Children Board (NSCB) and is available on the NSCB website¹, the statement of purpose should to be read in conjunction with the procedures for private fostering (see 3.2 below).

3.2 Practice procedures were updated in 2013/2014 to better address the needs of disabled children and young people and those aged '16 plus' as privately fostered children are identified within section 24 (2) Children Act 1989, as qualifying for advice and assistance until they reach 21 years of age. The revised private fostering procedures are available as online resources and can be accessed at the links below.

NSCB website interagency Private Fostering procedures available at:

http://newcastlescb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_pri_foster.html

Children's Social Care online procedures available at:

http://newcastlechildcare.proceduresonline.com/pdfs/priv_fost.pdf

3.3 The Independent Reviewing Officer (Private Fostering) has provided a range of documents and templates to enable practitioners to complete the assessment process and undertake monitoring and reviewing tasks. These templates include Notifications (PF1), Private Fostering Agreement (PF2), Consent to Medical Treatment (PF3) and References (PF4). Accompanying guidance was also provided in the form of a checklist which assist staff to ensure they are clear as to the actions they need to undertake on a PF case and the timescales involved.

3.4 A range of private fostering documentation is available on Carefirst, including Private Fostering Assessment Record, Regulation 8 visit template and Social Worker and the Chairs (IRO) report for Private Fostering Reviews. These tools available in Carefirst have assisted in the assessment process and review and monitoring of cases.

3.5 A new classification for private fostering was added to Carefirst to enable CSSU and Children's Social Care to identify children who are in private fostering arrangements more systematically. This classification has been used to inform the Ofsted Annex A dataset requirements for the new inspections of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, and reviews of Local Safeguarding Children Board.

¹ Available at: <http://www.nscb.org.uk/staff-and-volunteers/procedures/private-fostering-statement-purpose>

3.6 The Independent Reviewing Officer (Private Fostering) continues to attend the Northern Private Fostering Special Interest Group facilitated by Coram/ BAAF, to remain up to date on developments and share information and practice in this field.

4.0 Promoting awareness of Notification Requirements

- 4.1 Given the often informal nature of private fostering arrangements it is crucial that promoting awareness and understanding continues to be prioritised within the Private Fostering Action Plan.
- 4.2 Information continues to be displayed on plasma screens throughout the Newcastle City Council Customer Services Centres to raise public awareness and notification requirements of Private Fostering. There are also information leaflets available across public sector venues such as GP waiting rooms and children's centres.
- 4.3 The Independent Reviewing Officer (Private Fostering) is identified within guidance and publicity material as being available to provide advice and can be contacted for casework discussions to determine whether an arrangement meets the criteria for private fostering.
- 4.4 The plan for 2016/17 will include a particular focus on improving awareness amongst those professionals who may have regular contact with children, for example, schools and health professionals. The Independent Reviewing Officer (Private Fostering) will be attending the Schools Safeguarding forum and the Social Work Teams.

Customer Services Centres Slides

Private Fostering

Private Fostering is where parents make arrangements for their child to live with somebody else (not a close relative) for 28 days or more

You are legally required to let Childrens Social Care know Either if your child is being Privately fostered, or if you are privately fostering somebody else's child.



Private Fostering

Childrens Social Care have a duty to make sure that the health and wellbeing of privately fostered children is safeguarded.

What you need to do:

If you are making (or have made) arrangements for your child to be privately fostered, or you are currently caring for somebody else's child you need to contact our:

Initial Response Service on 0191 277 2500



5.0 Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children who are being privately fostered

- 5.1 Private fostering arrangements in Newcastle must be agreed by the Community Arrangements Panel. This ensures there is senior management oversight of the arrangements to quality assure the assessments undertaken and any plans in place for the children.
- 5.2 All children known to be living in a private fostering arrangement in Newcastle are supported and monitored by an allocated social worker within Children's Social Care. The allocated social worker has dual responsibility for ensuring the privately fostered child is safeguarded and adequately protected and for supporting carers to help them meet the needs of the privately fostered child. The social worker is also responsible for offering advice, support and information to parents.
- 5.3 The allocated social worker should visit the child in accordance with statutory requirements and complete the Private Fostering Arrangement Record (Visit under Regulation 8) after each visit. The child should be seen alone during each visit and if this does not happen the social worker must record the reasons for this. It is expected that these recordings are accessible on the CareFirst system.
- 5.4 All privately fostered children are reviewed by an Independent Reviewing Officer. The first review is held within three months of the arrangement being agreed and then at intervals of six months for the duration of the arrangement. The continued suitability of the arrangement is addressed at each review with the aim of ensuring that the welfare of children who are being privately fostered is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted.
- 5.5 Private Fostering arrangements can last until the child / young person is 16, or 18 if they are disabled. This means that the child / young person could remain living with their carers for a significant part of their childhood and into their adult lives. In cases where the private fostering arrangement appears to be a permanence plan, legal advice is obtained and parents and carers are also advised to seek their own legal advice in order to determine whether a legal order such as a Child Arrangement Order or a Special Guardianship Order may be more appropriate in terms of affording a child or young person long term security and stability.

Private Fostering Reviews Performance 2015/16

- A total of 5 Private Fostering Reviews were held in 2015/16
- These were held for 3 individual children and young people
- 100% of these reviews were completed within the required timescales

- 5.6 Each child in a private fostering arrangement is provided with a copy of the BAAF Children's Guide by the Independent Reviewing Officer (Private Fostering) to help them to understand what private fostering means.
- 5.7 Privately fostered children are encouraged to participate in their reviews and are given the opportunity to complete a Viewpoint questionnaire beforehand. Viewpoint is a computer assisted interviewing process which allows the child to present their views in respect of their private fostering arrangement and care planning. It is structured to reflect the age and cognitive ability of the child. Each question is scored to give a statistical profile of the child's experience and how effectively they are being supported to achieve positive outcomes. The child's answers to the questions are provided to the Independent Reviewing Officer for discussion (dependent on the information shared by the child) with the child and others both outside of and within the review. The Independent Reviewing Officer must ensure that the child's views are used to inform the child's plan. The questionnaires and process used in Newcastle have been shared with the national BAAF Private Fostering special interest group as an example of good practice.

What has Viewpoint Told Us 2014-2016

- Across the last two years 7 individual children and young people in private fostering arrangements, aged between 7 and 16 have completed a Viewpoint Questionnaire
- Each child has completed at least one or more Viewpoints for their private fostering reviews across the periods
- Although the numbers who complete the questionnaires are small, they tell us that children living in private fostering arrangements were generally positive about their experiences

Of note:

- **Children said they understood why they were living in their private fostering arrangement** – 6 said they “*definitely knew*” and 1 “*thought they knew*” why they were living in their arrangement. Younger young people were less certain why they were living in their PF arrangement
- **Children said they were happy where they were living** – All 7 consistently said they were ‘*completely*’ or ‘*just about*’ happy where they were living
- **Children said they felt safe where they are living** – All 7 consistently said they felt ‘*completely*’ or ‘*just about*’ safe where they were living
- **Children said they were happy with their education** – All 6 of those who were eligible stated they attended school every day, and none of them said there was anything at school that they worried about
- **Children generally said they didn't have any worries about their health** – 6

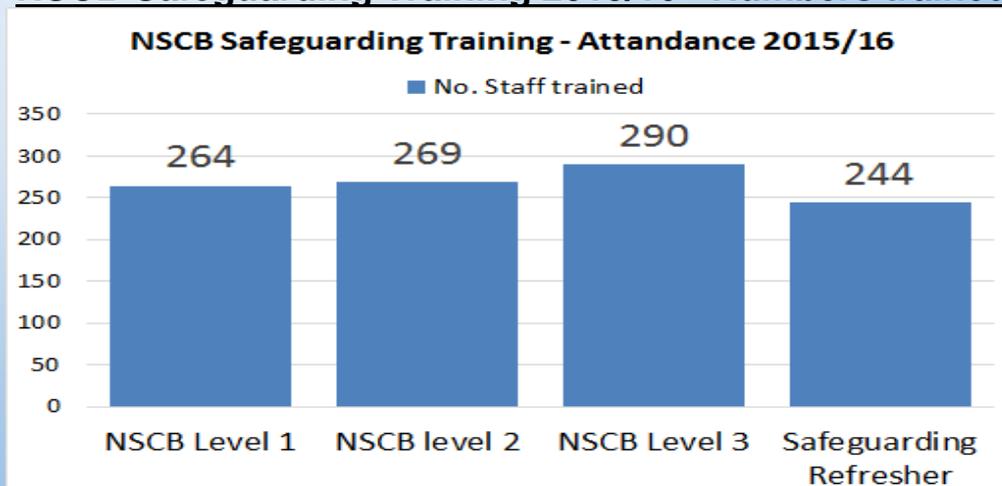
- 5.7 The Children's Safeguarding Standards Unit is committed to promoting independent advocacy for children and young people. Newcastle City Council has a contract with the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) which provides an independent and confidential

advocacy service. The Unit has a responsibility for ensuring that children and young people who are subject to private fostering arrangements are aware of advocacy support and how to access it. It is an important part of the Independent Reviewing Officer (Private Fostering) role to ensure this information is available and understood by the children and young people concerned.

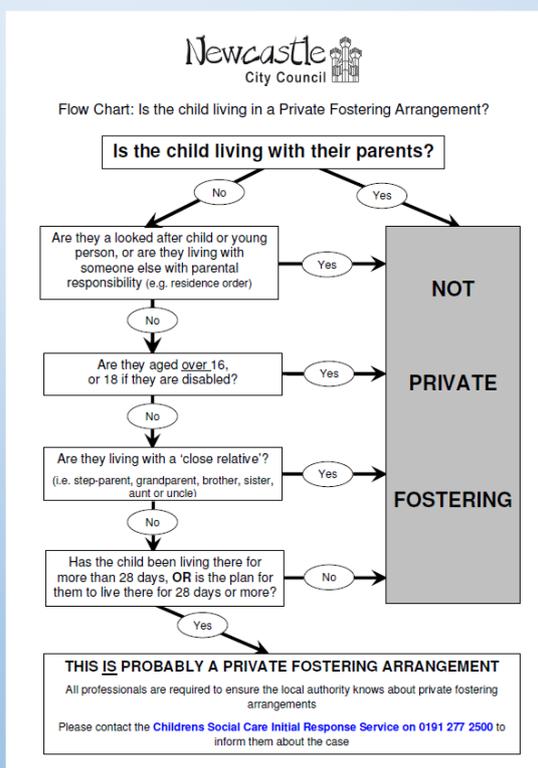
6.0 Training

- 6.1 The Independent Reviewing Officer (Private Fostering) is a member of the BAAF Northern Region's Special Interest Group on Private Fostering. The group is a valuable source of information and training. The group also provides a forum whereby questions on this area of practice can be posed via e-mail inviting responses from colleagues throughout the country. This provides a further point of training and support both for the Newcastle IRO (Private Fostering) and staff across the directorate.
- 6.2 Private fostering has been embedded in induction training and also in wider Newcastle Safeguarding Children Board training programmes for a number of years. As part of the NSCB training programme private fostering is introduced at level 1, when the course talks about the learning gained from the tragic death of Victoria Climbié. There is further training and evaluation of progress made through levels 2 and 3 of the NSCB programme.
- 6.3 Attendance figures for 2015/16 for each of the relevant NSCB Training courses are provided in the chart below. NSCB training is reviewed in line with any changes in legislation, guidance or learning from audits and reviews. Maggie Wedgewood, NSCB Training and Development Officer, and the Independent Reviewing Officer (Private Fostering) will review this periodically to confirm the continued suitability of the material.

NSCB Safeguarding Training 2015/16 - Numbers trained



NSCB Safeguarding Training Level 1/3 - Example PF resources



Private Fostering Arrangements

What are they?

Private Fostering is where parents make arrangements for their child under 16 (under 18 if disabled) to live with someone else who is not a close relative for 28 days or more. A close relative could be grandparents, an aunt or an uncle.

What should parents do?

Parents and private foster carers are legally required to let the local authority know about a proposed placement before it takes place or if the placement has already been made. The Local Authority has a duty to make sure that privately fostered children are well cared for and safeguarded from harm.

What should professionals do?

Professionals who come into contact with the child such as teachers, health visitors and religious leaders are also required to ensure the Local Authority knows about the arrangement by making a referral. You do this by calling the:

Initial Response Service 0191 277 2500

You can find out more about Private Fostering at:

www.newcastle.gov.uk/core.nsf/a/fosteringprivatefostering

- 6.4 The Independent Reviewing Officer (Private Fostering) is available to give briefings to social workers and their manager's when required and remains the named person for social workers and other professionals to contact for advice relating to private fostering. Specific training can be delivered upon request to staff groups.
- 6.5 Private foster carers are able to access the training curriculum available to foster carers provided by Newcastle City Council and this can be provided on a 1-1 basis. Access to this is included in each review of a private fostering arrangement.
- 7.0 How well is Newcastle City Council meeting the legislative requirements for Private Fostering?**
- 7.1 Procedures and practice guidance for private fostering have been developed to ensure that the Local Authority complies with relevant legislation and meets the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering. These procedures are comprehensive and provide clear direction as to the action required to safeguarding this vulnerable group.
- 7.2 In October 2015 the Service Manager, CSSU, undertook an audit of all private fostering arrangements in place over the previous 12 months. The audit aimed to establish the extent to which local procedures were being adhered to and to evaluate the efficacy of arrangements in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children concerned.

- 7.3 The audit looked at 10 cases, of which 2 were open and approved private fostering arrangements, 3 were awaiting approval and 5 cases had closed as the private fostering arrangement was no longer in place or deemed necessary.
- 7.4 The two open cases were found to be in good order. There was clear evidence that the necessary procedures had been adhered to, meaning there was a clear record of the assessment and approval process and the action taken to review and monitor the safety and wellbeing of the children concerned.
- 7.5 The five closed cases no longer met the requirements for private fostering as three of the young people had turned 16, one had left the country and another had become looked after. However, in these cases and the three waiting approvals, there was evidence of delay in the assessment and approval process and it was evident that in the majority of these cases there had been some confusion as to whether the children were originally in a private fostering arrangement or whether they continued to be so throughout the assessment period. It was evident that there was a need for the relevant social workers and team managers to seek guidance from the Independent Reviewing Officer (Private Fostering) to clarify action required.
- 7.6 The learning from the audit indicated that the procedures when followed work well and can lead to robust assessment, approval and support for privately fostered children. The Community Arrangements Panel approval process works well. However, oversight from CAP applies only to those cases that come to it for approval. Cases that are under assessment remain outside CAP's oversight. Similarly, until cases are approved there is no independent oversight by CSSU. This suggests that there is a need to tighten line management oversight of the cases and for there to be more communication with CSSU to discuss the cases and actions required. The audit concluded that it would be beneficial for there to be identified 'private fostering leads' within each social work service to support the build-up of knowledge and expertise. The report also concluded that private fostering arrangements must be audited at least annually to ensure learning is being implemented and to reduce the possibility of drift and delay with the process.
- 7.7 The audit reinforced the need for there to be further efforts to raise awareness and understanding of private fostering and for improvements to be made to the CSSU monitoring form, to ensure there was a clear record of cases and their progress through the procedure. The learning from the audit is reflected in the Private Fostering Action Plan for 2016/17.

8.0 Equality and Diversity

9.0 Case Study

- 9.1 Children become the subject of Private Fostering arrangement for a variety of reasons, and the outcomes of such arrangements (which are by definition, private arrangements and not brokered or instigated by the local authority) vary depending on the long term interests of the children concerned.

Case Study

Background:

The IRO (Private Fostering) was notified of a case brought to the Community Arrangements Panel. A 14 year old young man from another Country travelled to Newcastle for private schooling. He was chaperoned here by an 'agent', who was commissioned by his parents to establish him in school and with accommodation. The agent had advertised within the community for a family to support the child whilst at school. He was moving between potential private fostering placements, who were described as aunts and uncles and later identified as family friends. These potential private fostering placements were located across authorities and the fact that the young person travelled to his country of origin between school terms (thus breaking the length of the placement) complicated matters further.

Support Offered (so far)

The IRO (Private Fostering) contacted the designated teacher at the school, to advise of the young person's circumstances, share information and guidance in respect of private fostering and seek further information both in respect of the young person and the agent placing the young person (one of the concerns being a potential safeguarding issue and to explore whether there were other young people being placed by agents).

The IRO (Private Fostering) contacted the agent, sought information and provided advice on private fostering arrangements to ensure all duties and expectations were understood.

The IRO discussed the case with the allocated social worker. The young person has been visited and his carers will be assessed.

Outcome

The school staff are much more aware of the issues and are alert to potential private foster care arrangements. The school have agreed to make contact with the IRO (Private Fostering) if an agent is placing a child in their school in future.

The IRO (Private Fostering) has learned of another means by which a child or young person might become subject to these arrangements.

10.0 Actions for 2016/2017

- 10.1 The numbers of private fostering notifications remain low and therefore the following actions will be undertaken in 2016/17 to attempt to increase awareness and numbers of new notifications:
1. Re-establish the Private Fostering Focus Group who will undertake actions to promote multi-agency awareness of Private Fostering. The Private Fostering Focus Group will be tasked with reviewing the current information available for Private Fostering to ensure its fit for purpose and freely available.
 2. Attempt to increase the number of new notifications through improved identification of PF arrangements through targeting of services for example, schools, GPs, Health Visitors.
 3. Continue to gather and report on the views of parents and carers, children and young people in relation to their private fostering arrangement to establish if the children feel safe and parents and carers feel supported – this will be achieved through the use of Viewpoint information gathered as part of the review process for children and young people, and consideration will be given to an annual survey of parents and carers to gather their views.
 4. Ensure children and young people, parents and carers are provided with information to enable them to locate Newcastle's policies and procedures in relation to Private Fostering.
 5. Increase awareness of Private Fostering within the BME community, building on the work already undertaken with members of the BME Safeguarding Initiative to ensure awareness of PF and the notification requirements continue to be highlighted within the BME community.
 6. The Independent Reviewing Officer (Private Fostering) will visit the social work teams to review their understanding of local procedures and how they may be improved. This will include the evaluating the impact of the private fostering leads within each social work area and how communication between the social work teams and CSSU can be improved during the assessment period.
 7. The Independent Reviewing Officer (Private Fostering) will complete an audit of private fostering arrangements at least on an annual basis.

11.0 Conclusion

- 11.1 Newcastle continues to recognise the importance of private fostering and to prioritise the needs of children identified as being in a private fostering arrangement. Comprehensive procedures and guidance are in place and specialist support is available to practitioners through the IRO (Private Fostering). Independent review processes are in place to ensure children in PF arrangements are safeguarded and progressing well. Viewpoint has been used consistently to gather the young people's views. Significant numbers of multi-agency and single agency staff have received NSCB training which has included information and tools to identify Private Fostering cases.

- 11.2 However, it is clear from audit and review work undertaken over the year that there are areas for improvement. The number of identified private fostering arrangements remains low and this appears to reflect the limited levels of knowledge and understanding about private fostering amongst local communities and professional groups. Audit has identified the potential for drift and delay in the assessment and pre-approval stages of the process.
- 11.3 A key step in addressing both of these issues has been the identification of private fostering leads in the social work teams. However, it is now necessary to review the impact of this change to ensure it has helped Newcastle achieve its objectives around private fostering.
- 11.4 But improving identification and support for privately fostered children requires a multi-agency response. It will require the re-establishment of the Private Fostering Focus Group in order to support the development of accessible and effective information and guidance across the community and relevant organisations. It will also be necessary for the IRO (Private Fostering) to reach out to key organisations and bodies to ensure all parties understand their roles and responsibilities for private fostering. Finally, CSSU must ensure that its oversight of private fostering is strengthened, through regular audit and improved monitoring, particularly in the assessment stage of the process.