



SPECIALIST CHILDREN'S SERVICES

**ANNUAL REPORT ON
PRIVATE FOSTERING**

JULY 2016- JULY 2017

Introduction

A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately (that is to say without the involvement of a local authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more.

Private foster carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt. However, a person who is a relative under the Children Act 1989 i.e. a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full or half blood or by marriage) or step-parent will not be a private foster carer.

A child who is residing in a residential home, hospital or school (where they are receiving full-time education) is excluded from the definition. In a private fostering arrangement, the parent retains Parental Responsibility.

However, children under 16 who spend more than 2 weeks in residence during holiday time in a school, become privately fostered children for the purposes of the legislation during that holiday period.

(Note: the local authority may exempt any person from giving written notice either for a specified period or indefinitely. This exemption may be revoked in writing at any time).

This report is being provided under the requirements laid down in the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering which came in to force in July 2005.

Section 7.9 – the Local Authority provides that a report is written each year for consideration by the Director of Children’s Services which include an evaluation of the outcome of its work in relation to privately fostered children within its area.

Section 7.10 – The Local Authority reports annually to the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board about how it satisfies itself that the health of privately fostered children in its area is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, including how the Local Authority cooperates with other agencies in this connection.

This report covers the period July 2016-July 2017.

Private Fostering Staffing Structure

Kent’s Private Fostering Service is located within Specialist Children’s Services (SCS).

The responsibility for the assessment of private fostering arrangements and support for privately fostered children has been managed in a variety of ways in Kent over the last decade.

Following the latest Ofsted inspection, an audit of all current private fostering arrangements was undertaken (the outcome of this will be discussed later in the report) and as a result, the allocation of privately fostered children moved in line with the allocation of all other children in need of a service with the discontinuation of the responsibility of nominated Area teams.

As a result, it is anticipated that children will experience fewer changes in social worker as their allocated social worker will now be completing the private fostering assessments.

Each area continues to have a Private Fostering Champion, whose role it is to raise awareness of private fostering within their area and offer support and advice to other local social workers working with privately fostered children. More recently, there has

been agreement that these Private Fostering Champion's will now be identified from senior practitioners with the appropriate experience, confidence and competence to promote private fostering both internally (to SCS colleagues) and externally (to partners) and to be able to challenge and support practice around private fostering.

Alongside this, there will be nominated Area Integrated Family Service Managers (IFSM's) who will be responsible for signing off all PFAAR's to assure the quality of assessment.

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 ways in which they will be carried out.

Private Fostering arrangements within Kent are set out in the statement of purpose, published on the Council's online procedures for children's services via Tri-X.

National Minimum Standard 2

The local authority:

2.1 promote awareness of the notification requirements and ensure that those professionals who may come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in notification;

2.2 responds effectively to notifications; and

2.3 deals with situations where an arrangement comes to their attention, which has not been notified

The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 sets out that anyone involved in making a private fostering arrangement (parent, carer or third party) must notify the appropriate local authority.

Parents, carers and professionals often fail to notify because they are unaware of the requirements and believe that this is a private family arrangement which does not concern anybody else. Awareness raising has been an integral part of the work undertaken by the Private Fostering Lead and the Private Fostering Champions.

Awareness raising activity throughout the year has included:

- KSCB "Need to know" multi agency training with 16 attendees from agencies including SCS, education and health
- Training provided to approximately 55 newly qualified staff within Specialist Children's Services and attendance at several team/district meetings
- Private Fostering County Workshops with attendance of approx. 30 social work staff

Private Fostering week (3-7 July 2017) was used to raise awareness in Kent, using the following methods:

- Information included in SCS Director ,Philip Segurola's monthly bulletin
- Press release
- Information on KNET

- Information sent and disseminated to its staff by Kent Police via “Spotlight” newsletter and plans for private fostering to be included in all new staff training
- Information included in the Early Help newsletter
- Information sent to all education settings in Kent (including early years)
- Information sent to Kent designated nurses and doctor for dissemination via email and GP bulletins
- Information sent to all language schools and independent schools in Kent – which resulted in a telephone conversation with a school
- Information disseminated to staff via Early Help colleagues, Troubled Families colleagues and others
- Information sent to all Kent childminders (via Pacey)

Liberi

The Management Information Unit (MIU) has continued to work closely with allocated social workers to ensure that Liberi is being used to appropriately record the private fostering assessments, visits and other activity. There has been ongoing support from MIU to encourage timely statutory visiting to children by the creation of private fostering trackers and inclusion of private fostering data on the Team Operational Dashboard (TOD).

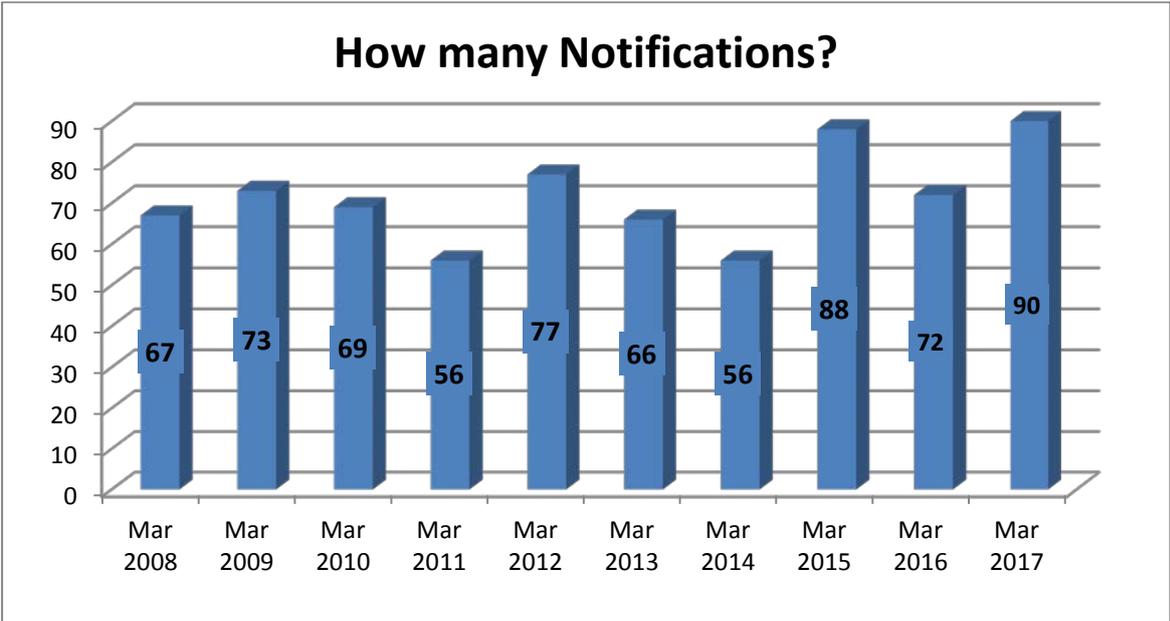
Additionally MIU have continued to contact team managers on a weekly basis to remind them that private fostering ‘Regulation 8’ visits are due.

Ongoing training on how to input private fostering information has been provided as Regulation 8 visits need to be inputted on the system differently to child protection and child in care statutory visits. Additional boxes need to be ticked to ensure that data is counted and collated correctly by MIU.

New Notifications

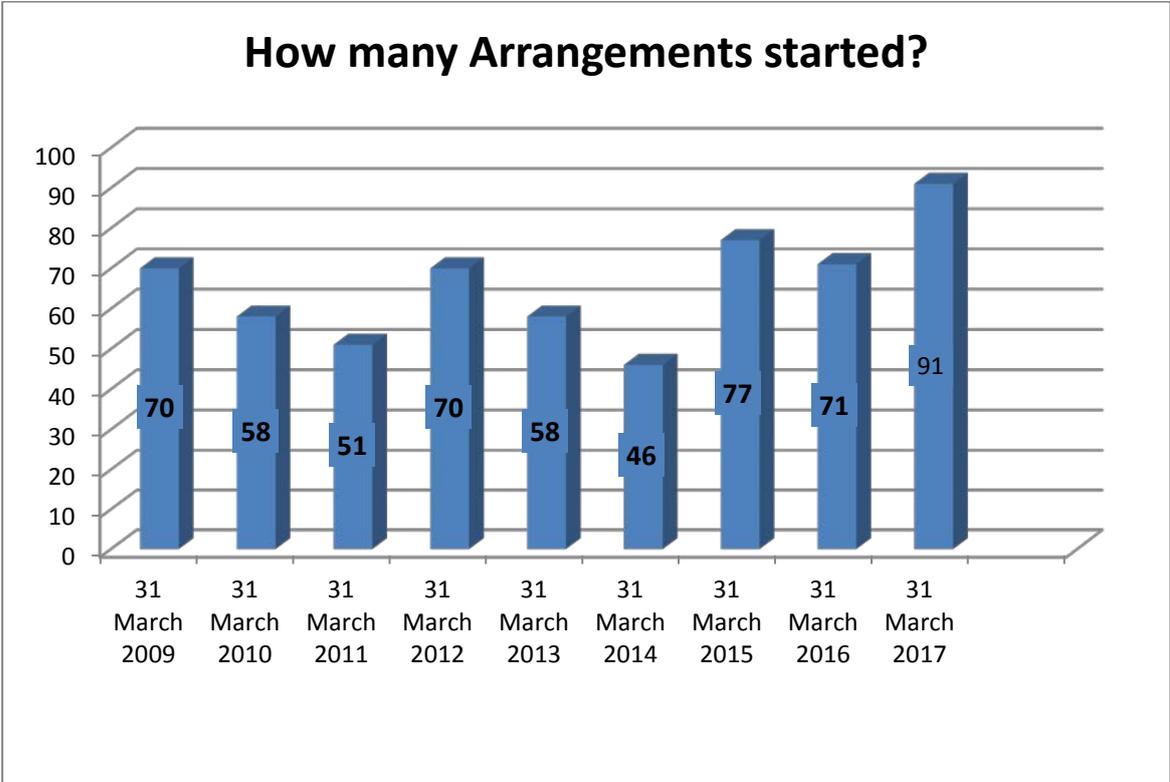
In the year 2016/17, there were 90 new private fostering notifications.

This figure is 25% higher than 2015/16.



Progression to arrangement

91 new private fostering arrangements began in 2016/17.



Notifications which progress to a private fostering arrangement may not necessarily fall into the same year due to a combination of late notifications (i.e. carer/parent not informing the local authority in time), or due to early notifications (i.e. language

school students where the notification may be made some months before the young person arrives).

Referrals Source Type	Number
1A - Individual - Family member/relative/carer	10
1B - Individual - Acquaintance (including neighbours and child minders)	2
1D – Individual other (including strangers, MP’s)	1
2A - Schools	26
2B - Education Services	10
3D- Health services – other primary health services	1
4 – Housing (LA housing or housing association)	1
5A - LA services - Social care e.g. adults social care	2
5B - LA services - Other internal (department other than social care in LA e.g. youth offending (excluding housing))	5
5C - LA services - External e.g. from another LAs adult social care	4
6 - Police	4
7 - Other legal agency - Including courts, probation, immigration, CAFCASS, prison	4
8 - Other - Including children's centres, independent agency providers, voluntary organisations	5
10 - Unknown	16
Grand Total	91

There are 16 ‘unknowns’ as the referral for the child was made before the notification and therefore could not be reliably used as the source. These children were likely to be open cases well before they became privately fostered.

Country of Birth:

Of the Private Fostering notifications made in 2016/17, 40 involved children that were born in the UK (44%) and 37 involved children visiting from Europe (41%).

The following table identifies the overall distribution.

Place of Birth	Total number of children (16/17 figures)
UK	40
Europe (excl. UK)	37
Africa	3
Asia	6
Middle East	2
Unknown	1
Other	2

Age when Private Fostering Arrangement Assessment was completed.

In Kent, 8 of our privately fostered children were aged under 10, with the majority continuing to be children aged over 10.

Age at PFAR Date (when PF Assessment completed)	Number
0	1
3	1
4	1
5	1
6	1
7	3
11	2
12	3
13	4
14	12
15	55
16	4
17	1
(blank)	2
Grand Total	91

Four private fostering arrangement assessments were completed following the child turning 16 and this was due to their arrangement starting near to their 16th birthday. These children were in placement for 28 days or longer but turned 16 before the 42 day assessment was completed. One male child (17) was assessed as a potentially privately fostered young person due to his additional needs.

Ongoing visiting requirements

Privately fostered children must be visited at a frequency of a minimum of 6 weekly in the first year of placement, and 12 weekly in second and subsequent years. These visits are completed to observe the overall standard of care, ensure that the child is developing appropriately, ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child (seeing them alone) to ensure that the child's health, education and contact needs are being met and to support rehabilitation home in appropriate circumstances.

Of the private fostering arrangements that had commenced between March 2016 and March 2017 visiting performance stood at 83.9%. This is a decrease from last year's performance which was 87%.

Snap shot of current arrangements

On the 31st March 2017, there were a total of 29 private fostering cases open across the County.

Reporting Year	Number of Placements as at 31 st March
2006 / 07	37
2007 / 08	37
2008 / 09	43
2009 / 10	36

2010/11	36
2011/12	35
2012/13	28
2013/14	21
2014/15	25
2015/16	32
2016/17	29

National Minimum Standard 3

The Local Authority determines effectively the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangements in accordance with regulations.

Until January 2017, one Private Fostering case file was audited monthly.

A fuller audit was undertaken following the Ofsted inspection in March 2017. The inspection raised some queries and worries about the quality of private fostering assessment and so an audit of those children who were in private fostering arrangements was completed to identify themes and areas for learning.

Twenty five privately fostered children were audited. These children were made up of 14 x 15 year olds, 3 x 14 year olds, 3 x 13 year olds, 1 x 12 year old, 2 x 7 year olds, 1 x 8 year old and 1 baby aged 6 months.

What's Working Well

Even when children's circumstances have additional complexities, private fostering arrangements were found to be being identified promptly both at initial referral stage and when children are already known to the department.

Private fostering arrangement assessments and statutory visits were being completed within timescales in the vast majority of cases. There was good evidence of children's views being sought and of direct work being undertaken to ascertain their wishes and feelings. Children were being seen alone both in placement and at neutral venues and interpreters have been used when necessary.

The idea of permanency was being discussed with families and children and plans made to ensure that carers are being given information/support to apply for appropriate orders.

Supervision was held regularly and in the main was reflective, with focus on actions.

Three of the twenty five cases were considered as being 'good' within the audit. Two of these cases were from The Weald and one from Ramsgate. These assessments clearly identified the reasons for the private fostering arrangement, had the majority of expected agency checks completed which were analysed within the body of the assessment, showed good evidence of communication with the parent, child and carer, showed awareness of the vulnerability of the children and identified how specific needs might be met by the private foster carer.

These assessments were child focused and considered the child's circumstances holistically, not just within the private fostering arrangement.

What we are Worried About

The quality of the PFAAR's was varied, with some assessments failing to appropriately consider the accommodation and the proposed private foster carer's capacity to care. These assessments lacked acknowledgement that the children at the centre were part of a potentially vulnerable group and were not at the same level of quality expected within other assessments social workers undertake ie: Child and Family Assessments.

The lesser detail and exploration that seemed to be accepted within private fostering assessment may possibly be linked to a view that as this is a 'private arrangement', the Local Authority's ability to challenge shortfalls is limited. Whether or not this is the case, there was evidence that where a child is privately fostered, a different/higher threshold is sometimes being applied when considering action around identified concerns. There was a sense from these poorer assessments that the potential risk posed to privately fostered children was not considered equitable to that posed to the Child In Need population and some safeguarding concerns were not acted on robustly enough.

The hypothesis that private fostering children may not be being considered as equal on the agenda to other children receiving services from SCS, is also supported by the lack of reflection at times within supervision and the fact that team managers (rather than Assistant Directors) had signed off assessments.

The understanding of the private fostering regulations and legislation appears to be inconsistent and this may have led to the appropriate agency checks and referencing not being completed during assessments. In addition, the lack of understanding of the regulations may have led to the importance of parental involvement and consent in assessments being lost.

Additional thoughts/Complicating factors

Converse to expected audit findings, when proposed private fostering arrangements were assessed by social workers who were not experienced in the process, their assessments tended to show more attention to detail and they appeared to apply the same level of rigour and analysis to the PFAAR as they would to a Child and Family Assessment (perhaps as a result of needing to consider more closely the procedures and guidance available).

Those social workers who were more confident and experienced with the private fostering process appeared to have a better day to day grasp of the regulatory expectations etc, but did not always apply the standard of assessment and risk identification that would be expected to ensure a good understanding of the child's needs and whether these would be met by the proposed placement.

Plan

1. The Private Fostering Minimum Standards state "In order to assess the capacity of a proposed or actual private foster carer to look after a child, the suitability of household members and whether the privately fostered child or any child already residing in the household has any behavioural or other difficulties which could prejudice the welfare of other children, an assessment should be undertaken using the dimension headings of the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (2000) as a guide. The purpose of this assessment is two-fold – to assess the capacity of the proposed or actual private foster carer to look after the child and to assess whether the child is a child in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989".

The Private Fostering Arrangement Assessment Record form will be reviewed, bringing it in line with Signs of Safety and introducing 'help text' to aid the social worker to consider whether the child may be a Child In Need and to direct a clearer focus on the needs of the child being placed/carers ability to meet those needs. The 'help text' would be used to increase the emphasis on the need for parental consent and consultation, would encourage greater consideration as to why the arrangement is necessary, the likely length of placement, greater exploration of carer qualities and motivation to foster privately and consideration of risk and/or support etc.

The changes within the PFAAR will take into account the new Kent Fostering Assessment and Risk tool to bring some aspects it in line with the new assessment expectations of Kent foster carers.

2. Private Fostering Arrangement Assessments to be allocated in a similar way to all other children referred/notified to SCS – there is no evidence to suggest that having a 'pool' of private fostering assessors improves the quality of assessment and in fact conversely, the audit has indicated that the opposite may be the case. By allocating private fostering work in the same way as all other cases, we would minimise the amount of changes of social worker children experience and private fostering would become a county responsibility with all social workers having an opportunity to increase their knowledge and skills base. At present, when nominated teams are overstretched (often in August when language students arrive in to the UK) assessments are already being passed out to other districts.
3. Private Fostering Champion role to remain with a reviewed description of their expected responsibilities within their Area. Private Fostering Champion to be identified from senior practitioners with the appropriate experience, confidence and competence to promote private fostering both internally (to SCS colleagues) and externally (to partners) and to be able to challenge and support practice around private fostering.
4. Private Fostering County Meetings to continue tri-monthly with inclusion of a greater focus on quality assurance by regular Area case mappings of cases.
5. Existing guidance to be further enhanced to focus more carefully on the potential vulnerability of privately fostered children, expectations around quality and expected content of PFAAR's, as well as to explicitly signpost support from PF Champions.
6. For private fostering arrangement assessments to be updated as part of the annual review process – further investigation as to whether this is compatible with Liberi would be necessary.
7. An online training package to be considered to support ongoing workshops on private fostering, in order to support social workers and their Managers who will be supervising these cases.

8. Consideration to be given to private fostering cases being audited in the monthly online auditing process in line with other children receiving a social work service.
9. Responsibility for PFAAR sign off (agreeing the appropriateness of the placement) will be held by an Area named Integrated Family Services Manager (IFSM). The responsibility for all other decision making including when to prosecute for non-notification of private fostering arrangements, imposing requirements, exemption on the limit of children allowed in a private fostering placement, approving a disqualified private foster carer, prohibiting a private foster carer and cancelling any prohibitions will be held by the relevant Area Assistant Director.

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 social workers in the team assist and advise all Private Foster Carers with general parenting skills and provide advice on an ongoing basis about issues such as benefit entitlement etc.

As part of their work, the team offers support on a case by case basis to the private foster carers and to the children privately fostered. Support and assistance with practical support for carers around benefits and housing has been offered in several cases.

In 2016, letters were also sent out to private foster carers to gain their views about a potential focus group and were asked to comment on what they felt could be the purpose of said group, how they felt this group should be run and whether they would like to attend in their capacity as a private foster carer. We did not receive any feedback.

All Private Foster Carers and children and young people, where appropriate, are provided with the contact details for the social workers in the team and the Out of Hours service.

Private Foster Carers are given advice and support to consider the securing of young people's permanence by way of an Order.

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.

Parental Responsibility is one of the key underpinning concepts of the Children Act 1989. Because parents have the legal responsibility for their children they should be enabled to participate in all decisions made in relation to a private fostering arrangement.

The recent audit informed us that at times, social workers had not been robust enough in their attempts to communicate with the privately fostered children's

parents (adults who hold PR). There was however some creative social work practice in some cases where over seas parents were spoken to via Skype etc.

The importance of making and maintaining contact with privately fostered children remains a priority.

A leaflet for parents of children who are privately fostered is being updated but is still available for all parents.

Contact details for social workers have been provided to all parents where possible.

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.

Experience has shown that children in private fostering arrangements do generally understand the arrangement and their rights within it and in the large majority of the recently audited cases, there was clear evidence of direct work with the privately fostered children, their wishes and feelings were clearly recorded and considered and interpreters were used when necessary. The social workers in the team consult individually with them about their views and ensure that their private foster carers listen to their needs and wishes. Children and young people's views and wishes are incorporated into the assessment report and the recent audit evidences good recording of children's views.

Children are often seen at school to provide a different context to the private fostering environment to discuss their needs, wishes and feelings.

A leaflet for children who are subject to private fostering arrangements is given to all children who are privately fostered, and the child's social worker will advocate on their behalf if necessary on issues such as legal status, placement, contact and education. This is currently being updated and a leaflet for younger privately fostered children is also being designed by the private fostering County Champions.

Contact details for social workers are always provided to children.

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.

The audit has identified that Private Fostering arrangements have tended to be signed off by team managers. However it has been agreed that these will now be signed off by a nominated Area IFSM. It is anticipated that this improved level of oversight will ensure that placements are appropriate.

As already described, a recommendation from the audit was for ongoing auditing of private fostering cases to be bought in line with other children receiving a social work service.

Ongoing workshops and need to know sessions will continue to support practice with regard to privately fostered children and agreement to the design of an online training package will mean that allocated social works will have access to training at the point it is needed.

Update of Recommendations made in 2016/17

See attached plan

Recommendations 2016/17

Based on the data and analysis presented in this report, recommendations are made for the annual plan 2017/18. See attached.

The Corporate Director of Social Care, Health and Wellbeing and Kent Safeguarding Children Board are asked to note the annual report and plan.

Sophie Baker

Practice Development Officer – Private Fostering County Lead

Safeguarding Unit - 08.08.2017



Update of Private Fostering Annual Plan
March 2016-17

Objective:	Fulfil the Communication and Engagement Action Plan					
Action/Task and Priority:	Audience Focus	Lead	Timescale	Resources	Measure of Success	Achieved
Ongoing implementation of Communication and Engagement Action Plan	All partners	Safeguarding Unit	Ongoing		Increase of notifications	Achieved – notifications have increased and Private Fostering Week 2017 was used to raise awareness

Objective:	Embed Area Operational Arrangements Regarding Private Fostering					
Action/Task and Priority:	Audience Focus	Lead	Timescale	Resources	Measure of Success	Achieved
Embedding private fostering practices. Continued improvement of timescales for visiting	SCS	Safeguarding Unit (Sophie Baker)	By March 17	Area PFAAR workshops Use of County Meetings to share outcome of audit and action plans from team managers	Increased improvement in timescales for visiting. Improved quality of PFAAR – inclusive of agencies views of placement (not just blanket agency checks), detail of proposed carers	Not achieved – timescales for visiting have lowered Not achieved - The recent audit tells us that there are some worries about the quality of the Private Fostering

					including their experiences of being parented, how their culture, ethnicity etc might impact on the care they provide for the young person etc Evidence that referees are being sourced and visited/communicated with	Arrangement Assessment Records Not achieved - The recent audit tells us that references are not always being sought
Evidence that KSCB leaflets are being given to children, parents, proposed carers etc	SCS	Allocated social workers	Ongoing		Evidence that leaflets are being shared will be identified in audit	Achieved – There is evidence within case files that KSCB leaflets are being shared with children, carers and families
Continue to offer training to social workers in using Liberi system in order to accurately evidence private fostering work	SCS	Liberi implementation team – champions to share knowledge with their own teams to ensure accurate Liberi use	Sessions to be delivered when necessary (ie: new PF champions employed etc)		Increased improvement in timescales for visiting.	Achieved – there have been two workshops within the County that have included training around how to use Liberi. In addition, MIU Shakeelah Chaudry is available for consultation via

						the telephone.
SCS attendance at County and Practice Meetings with ongoing support from health and education representatives	SCS/MIU/health/education representative	All staff	On-going		Staff receiving consistent and clear messages, consistent Private Fostering across the county. Improved notification rate and understanding within agency partners.	Achieved – our health and education colleagues have continued to support awareness raising
Objective:	Practice monitoring					
Action/Task and Priority:	Audience Focus	Lead	Timescale	Resources	Measure of Success	Achieved
Ongoing MIU support to identify visits and assessments that are soon due	SCS	MIU	Ongoing	TOD Tracker Weekly emails from MIU		Achieved
Monthly auditing to continue to consider assessment quality, visiting, management oversight etc	SCS	Safeguarding Unit	Ongoing until March 17		Improved quality of social work practice. Improved safeguarding	Partially achieved – monthly auditing continued until January 2017 and full audit of all open PF cases was completed in March/April 2017.

The Director of Specialist Children’s Services and Kent Safeguarding Children Board are asked to note the annual report and plan.

Sophie Baker
Practice Development Officer – Private Fostering County Lead - 08.08.2017