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To: Children's Champions Board

Date: 23rd September 2009

Subject: Private Fostering – Annual Report

Summary: This report provides a brief overview of the Private Fostering Annual Report for 2008 - 2009

Classification: Unrestricted

Recommendation: Members are requested to note the continued improvement in performance of the Private Fostering service.

1. Introduction

The Private fostering Annual Report is produced to meet the requirements set out under Regulation 12 of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering. Regulation 12 requires local authorities to provide a written report each year, for consideration by the Director of Children's Services and the chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. The report was presented to KSCB on 7th September 2009.

The Annual Report provides an evaluation of the outcomes of the local authority's work in relation to privately fostered children in Kent. It provides information on how the needs of privately fostered children are actively promoted and understood in order to ensure their welfare is promoted and safeguarded.

2. Overview of Report Findings

The local authority has continued to make good progress in developing a quality service for children privately fostered building on the work carried out in 2007-08 in respect of safeguarding issues, for example carers checks and more robust assessments of private foster carers capacity to meet children's needs.

An objective of the development work being undertaken is to increase the numbers of privately fostered children known to the local authority and during 2007 – 08, there has been an increase of 12% in the overall number of private fostering arrangements that remained open to the Directorate in April 2009 in comparison with 2008. There has also been an increase of 24% in the number of referrals being made to the Directorate, with a total of 72 new referrals identifying private fostering arrangements being received. This compares favourably with the national figure for new referrals during 2008-09, which was an increase of 15%.

The first national awareness raising campaign for children privately fostered was undertaken by BAAF during January 2009 and a number of publicity activities were planned in Kent to coincide with this. The Private Fostering WebPages on K-net were refreshed at this time and show increased activity with larger numbers of visitors to the site during 2009. Ongoing awareness raising also appears to have resulted in continued improvements in terms of

internal Children's Social services referrals for private fostering arrangements. As with previous years, there has been less success in improving the referral rate from other agencies (outside of Children's Social Services), such as Health, Education or the Police and work is being undertaken to address this issue.

The updated Private Fostering legislation introduced in 2005 does not place a statutory duty on other professionals outside of the local authority, such as teachers, Health Visitors, and GPs, to report private fostering arrangements. However, there is a clear expectation that professionals recognise and understand the vulnerability of this group of children and will bring them to the attention of the local authority if they believe that the arrangement has not (or will not) been formally notified.

A third social worker was appointed to the service for Mid Kent in January 2009 which has helped to generate more referrals. In addition awareness raising work with the large number of Language Schools in East Kent has also resulted in increased referral activity from this sector.

3. Ofsted Inspection

The planned Ofsted inspection in Kent took place in July 2008 for a period of three days. The resulting report rated the service in Kent as "Good", the highest possible evaluation, and considered that all aspects of the service inspected were strong. Nationally Ofsted has expressed concern about the high numbers of local authorities inspected not meeting a satisfactory standard with 25% being judged as inadequate.

4. Publicity campaign

In order to continue to meet the requirements set out by the Private Fostering Regulations, there needs to be ongoing publicity campaigns. There is already a Kent Communications Strategy for Private Fostering, which was developed in 2007. This Plan has been regularly reviewed and a new Action Plan is being developed for 2009-10. The Plan will take account of the second National Awareness raising campaign for private fostering, being led by BAAF in February 2010.

5. Recommendations

CCB is asked:

- a) To **NOTE** the continued improvements in the service for privately fostered children and the Ofsted inspection evaluation of the service as 'good'

Sarah Hammond
Policy and Performance Officer
September 2009