



Department  
for Education

# **Notifications of private fostering arrangements in England**

**Government consultation**

**Launch date 14 August 2015**

**Respond by 15 September 2015**

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## Introduction

This consultation seeks views on the proposal of closing the annual data collection and publication of *Notifications of private fostering arrangements in England*. These releases can be found on the statistics collection page [Private Fostering](#).

## Who this is for

This consultation is relevant to local authorities, government officials, parliamentarians, academics, voluntary and community sector organisations and anyone with an interest in private fostering data.

## Issue date

The consultation was issued on 14 August 2015.

## Respond online

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit [www.education.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations) to submit your response.

## Other ways to respond

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may download a word document version of the form and email it or post it.

### By email

[cin.stats@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:cin.stats@education.gsi.gov.uk)

### By post

Anneka Nelson-Girtchen  
Department for Education  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
2 St Paul's Place  
125 Norfolk Street  
Sheffield  
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## Deadline

The consultation closes on 15 September 2015.

We encourage responses as early as possible to assist us in accelerating the process of considering replies.

## **Enquiries**

If your enquiry is related to the content of the consultation you can contact the team at [cin.stats@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:cin.stats@education.gsi.gov.uk)

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: [consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk) or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

## **Additional copies**

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from [GOV.UK DfE consultations](#).

## **The response**

The results of the consultation and the Department's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#) in Autumn 2015.

## About this consultation

Current records show that the annual return on private fostering (PF1) is little used by local authorities and has limited application nationally. We therefore intend to close this return and instead gather information on private fostering through the existing annual children in need (CIN) census which offers an alternative, more targeted avenue for data collection. In doing so, our intention is to continue to ensure that privately fostered children are given the protection and support they are entitled to through a better understanding of such children in harmful arrangements.

The requirements in [The Children \(Private Arrangements for Fostering\) Regulations 2005](#) remain, with local authority private fostering arrangements continuing to be inspected by Ofsted.

We would be interested in hearing the views of data users on this proposal and welcome any further suggestions on private fostering data collection more generally.

## Background

The figures in [Notifications of Private Fostering Arrangements in England](#) statistical first release (SFR) are taken from the PF1 statistical return. The PF1 return provides the Department for Education (DfE) with aggregate data from local authorities on the number of children reported to be cared for and accommodated in private fostering arrangements at 31 March, the number of reported new arrangements and the number of arrangements reported to have ceased during the year to 31 March. It also provides information on visits by the local authority carried out within timeframes required by The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 and the age and geographic region of birth of the children. The PF1 statistical return was introduced on 1 April 2004.

Whilst this data shows a range of information about children, it does not show which types of arrangement children may be in, nor whether the arrangement was found to be harmful – the local authority is required to visit the children every six weeks in the first year and every twelve in the second year of the arrangement irrespective of whether the arrangement is harmful or not.

Additionally, the figures reported in the SFR are believed to be an underestimate of the total number of children in private fostering arrangements - a long-running concern. This is because there is doubt over whether all carers currently report the existence of these arrangements to their local authority. There are some suggestions that the numbers of such children are far higher but an accurate current figure is not available. Learning more about notified harmful arrangements through the CIN census should help with supporting analysis of arrangements that are 'hidden' or non-notified and consequently addressing this problem.

The changes in the number of arrangements seen year on year has been attributed, by [Ofsted](#), to increased activity on the part of local authorities to encourage notifications rather than an increase in the number of arrangements. The changes seen nationally are also driven by local activity to encourage language schools to report arrangements. In certain local authorities the majority of reported private fostering arrangements relate to language school placements.

## Proposal

The department is most concerned with those private fostering arrangements where the child is deemed at risk of harm. We therefore propose to expand the list of additional factors identified at the end of assessment collected as part of the [children in need census](#) and will be reported in the statistical publication [Characteristics of children in need](#). The expanded list will further include under the private fostering tab:

- Privately fostered: Overseas children who intend to return
- Privately fostered: Overseas children who intend to stay
- Privately fostered: UK children in educational placements
- Privately fostered: UK children making alternative family arrangements
- Privately fostered: Other

These main categories of arrangements were identified by Ofsted in their report 'Private fostering: better information, better understanding'. To be included in the CIN census from 2016-17, a privately fostered child must have been referred to and assessed to be in need of services by children's social care in addition to receiving the required statutory visits because they are privately fostered. If a privately fostered child is only receiving the required statutory visits from social care, then the child is not included in the children in need census.

Identifying private fostering arrangements in the children in need census will provide more detailed child level information on:

- Date and source of referral
- Primary type of need
- Date episode of need ceased, along with reason for ceasing
- Any additional safeguarding interventions such as Section 47 enquiries, initial child protection conferences, and child protection plans
- Characteristics e.g. age, gender, ethnicity

This level of information will allow the department to identify those private fostering arrangements that are deemed most at risk of harm and could lead to improved targeting and detection of cases of concern.

## Consultation questions

Please address the following questions in your response:

- **Question 1:** Do you use the private fostering published statistics (PF1) and to what extent? Please give a brief overview of examples where the statistics have played a part in your work and particularly when helping target children most at risk.
- **Question 2:** How would your work be affected if the current private fostering statistical publication was to cease?
- **Question 3:** Do you agree the proposal outlined above will help with better identification of types of private fostering arrangements that are of most concern? Any other suggestions you may wish to make on this data collection?



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write to Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London, TW9 4DU

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