

Report for: Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Panel February 2024

Title: Private fostering September 2022 - 2023

Report authorised by : Ann Graham, Director, Children’s Services

Lead Officer: Keith Warren, Head of Service

Ward(s) affected: N/A

1. Describe the issue under consideration

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the private fostering notifications, assessments, and monitoring activity, and to provide a level of assurance that privately fostered children are being adequately safeguarded.

1.2 The report covers the activity between September 2022 and September 2023.

1.3 This report will set out the extent to which Haringey Children’s Social Care are compliant with meeting the statutory requirements for privately fostered children, both in terms of the standards for assessment of these arrangements, and the support being provided to the children and young people in these privately fostered arrangements.

1.4 This report will share current themes, trends and any significant information that has wider implications for safeguarding, across the partnership.

1.5 This report will outline the planned developments for 2023–2024 to further reinforce good practice in identifying, assessing, and monitoring private fostering arrangements within Haringey.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members to note contents of the report.

3. Reasons for decision

N/A

4. Background information

4.1 Following the Laming Report in (2003) regulations relating to Private Fostering were amended and strengthened by Section (44) of the Children Act (2004). The following year two further documents were published; The National Minimum Standards (NMS) (2005) and the (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulation

(2005), which clearly set out the role of the Local Authority, the Parent and the Private Foster carer and related professionals.

4.2 Under Standard (7.9) of the National Minimum Standards for private fostering, local authorities are expected to effectively monitor the way in which it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering, including to provide a written report each year, for consideration by the Director of Children’s Services, which includes an evaluation of the outcomes of its work in relation to privately fostered children within its area. (Supporting Criteria 7.9 NMS for Private Fostering). Section (7.10) the National Minimum Standards requires local authorities to report 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 are satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted including how the local authority cooperates with other agencies in this connection.

4.3 Legal framework and relevant standards

4.3.1 A privately fostered child is defined as ‘a child who is under the age of 16, or 18 if the child has a disability, and is placed for 28 consecutive days or more with an adult who is not a relative.’

4.3.2 A relative in this situation is either a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, or aunt. The term relative also extends to include step-parents.

4.3.3 Partners of the mother or father of a child (who are unmarried) would not qualify as a relative, neither would extended family members such as great aunts, great uncles or parents cousins.

4.3.4 Examples of private fostering arrangements are:

- Children sent from abroad to stay with another family, usually to improve their English or for educational opportunities.
- Adolescents who, having broken ties with their parents, are staying in short term arrangements with friends or other non-relatives.
- Children living with host families, arranged by language schools or other organisations.
- Children living with members of the extended family, e.g. great aunt.

4.3.5 The relevant legislative framework in relation to private fostering is outlined below:

- Children Act (1989) Guidance Private Fostering.
- Children Act 2004 (Section 44 amends Section 67 in the 1989 Act)
- The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations (2005).
- National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering.

4.3.6 In response to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, the UK government launched a scheme for families to put themselves forward to welcome Ukrainian families into their homes. Since July 2022, the Home Office has been processing visa applications for some children/young people to travel to the UK without a parent or legal guardian, and without a plan to join a parent or legal guardian already here, under the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

4.3.7 Where there is a Ukrainian child or young person living with a sponsor or family member in England and Wales without a parent or legal guardian, local authorities are required to assess and support arrangements as private fostering arrangements and UK government advice is to apply the private fostering framework to all children and young people travelling without a parent or legal guardian, regardless of the nature of the possible familial relationship.

4.4 Statutory Expectations

4.4.1 Children who are privately fostered are amongst the most vulnerable and the local authority must be notified of these arrangements. The local authority has a duty to assess the private fostering arrangements for the child when there is a notification received or the local authority becomes aware that a private fostering arrangement already exists.

4.4.2 Under Standard 7 of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, the local authority is expected to effectively monitor the way in which it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering, including providing a written report each year, for consideration by the Director of Children's Services, which includes an evaluation of the outcomes of its work in relation to privately fostered children within its area.

4.4.3 Local authorities are required to promote awareness of the requirement to notify and monitor compliance, and to appoint an officer for this purpose. Haringey Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) has a duty to raise awareness about private fostering issues in the community and across the partnership.

4.5 Promoting the Welfare of Privately Fostered Children

4.5.1 A qualified social worker will undertake an initial visit to the placement within 7 days of the private fostering notification. The social worker must carry out initial checks on all household members including the privately fostered child, notify all relevant agencies of the placement and ensure that necessary links are, or will be, established with other agencies. An assessment report should be completed following the outcome of this.

4.5.2 Having undertaken the initial visit, the social worker will arrange for checks to be completed including, health and school checks, carers suitability declaration, local authority checks for addresses within the last 5 years, health and safety checks on the accommodation, confirmed consent of the arrangement from the person who has legal parental responsibility, DBS checks on the private foster carer(s) and household 5 members over the age of 16 years old and also a reference to be obtained for the private foster carer(s). It may be necessary to undertake further visits to clarify matters.

4.5.3 If the arrangements are assessed as suitable, the social worker should confirm this in a letter to the private foster carer and parents. If the arrangements are unsuitable, it will be necessary to consult a senior manager, who may in turn seek legal advice, with a view to considering initiating prohibiting procedures and to review alternative plans for the child.

4.6 Monitoring, Support & Advice

4.6.1 Following the initial visit, the social worker is to complete further visits: at least every 6 weeks in the first year then, at intervals of no more than 12 weeks in subsequent years, if this reduction is assessed as a safe and appropriate to do so.

4.6.2 The social worker should assess during these visits whether the private foster carers are promoting the cultural and ethnic needs of the privately fostered child. The child's overall development and emotional wellbeing should be considered, as should any educational and health issues. After each visit, the Social Worker should prepare a report.

4.6.3 The Social Worker also provides support and advice to the carer and child. This may include liaising with agencies on behalf of child/carer including health, education, and the UK Border agency, assisting them to access services, providing advice and support for example when there is a risk of breakdown of the arrangement, referrals to relevant agencies for additional support, for example CAMHS and/or other specialist services.

4.7 The End of a Private Fostering Arrangement

4.7.1 Where notification is received that the private foster placement has ended, the social worker should ascertain the name and address of the person now caring for the child and his or her relationship with the child.

4.7.2 The social worker should notify the health and education agencies (as well as the new local authority where necessary) of the end of the placement in writing.

4.8 Private Fostering Service in Haringey

4.8.1 Private fostering arrangements in Haringey are assessed by front line social workers who determine these arrangements in conjunction with their Team Managers and Service Managers, parents and the multi-agency networks around the child. Following the OFSTED 2023 Inspection, ([insert link here](#)) the Assistant Director for Safeguarding initiated through the Principal Social a support surgery for practitioners to review cases open to safeguarding where the children were not living with their biological birth parents. To date over 20 surgeries have been held and supported both the practitioners and the carers to better understand pathways to permanency for children and young people. This included identifying potential Private Fostering arrangements.

4.8.2 Haringey Children's Services has a dedicated specialist private fostering senior social worker, who regularly reviews the private fostering arrangements at the point that they are deemed to be residing in a private fostering arrangement.

4.8.3 The private fostering senior social worker will monitor and provide advice and support to the privately fostered children and carers for the first year of the arrangement through statutory visits every 6 weeks. Following the first year of a child being placed in a private fostering arrangement, the visiting frequency will reduce to 12 weekly statutory visits in line with the child's needs.

4.8.4 The Private Fostering Social Worker is based in the Fostering, Adoption and Special Guardianship Team in Children’s Social Care. Children’s Cases are overseen by the Team Manager and the Service Manager for Fostering, Adoption and Permanence. Private fostering arrangement assessments are authorised by the relevant Team Manager and or Service Manager.

4.8.5 This service is the lead on providing specialist advice and support regarding private fostering across Children’s Services and to external agencies.

4.8.6 The Private Fostering Senior Social Worker attends training and briefings on private fostering policy and practice. In addition, the PFSW attends the Coram BAAF Private Fostering Special Interest Group.

4.8.7 The Private Fostering Social Worker also attends meetings with other local authorities, to share information and improve policy and practice.

4.9 Private Fostering Notifications 2022-2023

4.9.1 From the period 01/09/2022 to 31/09/2023 Children’s Social Care received 8 notifications of new private fostering arrangements in Haringey, which was a significant decrease compared with previous years.

4.9.2 In the table below, you will note assessments with Private Fostering as a factor continue at a rate in line with the national average. The graph also illustrates that there have been fewer private fostering assessments.

Table 1: Total Number of Private Fostering Arrangements from 2020-2023

	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
8B - Privately fostered: Overseas child who intend to return	6	1	0
8C - Privately fostered: Overseas child who intend to stay	1	3	1
8D - Privately fostered: UK child in educational placements	1	0	2
8E - Privately fostered: UK child making alternative arrangement	2	10	4
8F - Privately fostered: Other	2	1	1
Total number of Children Privately Fostered Per Annum	12	15	8

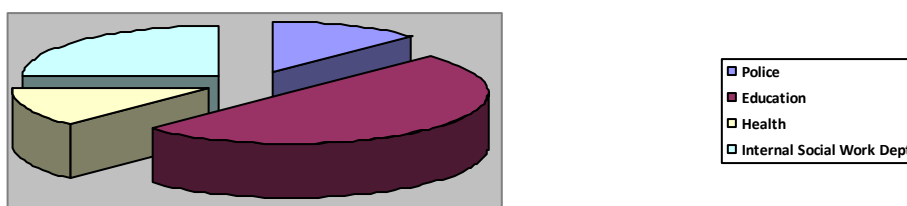
4.9.3 The decrease in the number of private fostering arrangements falls in line with the national statistics which was impacted by the Covid19 pandemic. Some families were more reluctant to agree these arrangements due to concerns about health. These decline was evidenced in the national benching forums, the North London Private Fostering Forum, and CORAM BAAF.

4.9.4 The table below illustrates the breakdown of the referrals received for private fostering. Four referrals were received from our education partners, one was received from Police, one from Health Services and two from internal social work departments.

4.9.5 The demography of the children aged between 11 months to 14 years of age. With the highest age range being between 9-14 years of age.

4.9.6 In terms of the ethnicities of the cohort of children these included 3 children of White British heritage, 1 child of Jamaican Heritage, 1 child of Spanish Heritage, and 2 children of Turkish heritage.

Table 2 | Sources of Notifications



4.10 Outcome of Notifications

4.10.1 Notifications are carefully assessed to ensure they meet the criteria of private fostering and that they meet the children's needs. In addition, as part of the assessment where any 'child protection' or child in need' concerns arise, the Assessment Service is notified.

4.10.2 From 15 notifications in this period, 8 children were assessed to be private fostering arrangements. Five of these children returned to the care of parent/s, two are currently being assessed, and one child has progressed to a private fostering arrangement.

4.11 Monitoring, Support & Advice 2022-203

4.11.1 Throughout 2022/23 the 6 weekly and 12 weekly statutory visits monitor and support arrangements. Out of the 8 arrangements subject to 6 weekly statutory visits, 92% of the required visits were undertaken, 85% were seen 6 weekly. For the eight pre-existing arrangements requiring 12 weekly visits, 100% were undertaken, 86% were seen within timescale. The majority of statutory visits were undertaken within timescale.

4.11.2 Visits out of time do not indicate children are left unseen and not monitored. Privately fostered children are regularly seen, frequent agency checks are undertaken with the professional network and any emerging safeguarding concerns are immediately escalated and investigated where appropriate. The Private Fostering Social Worker also checks with the carer prior to the children leaving to go abroad for school holidays.

4.11.3 During each visit the child is always seen and spoken to alone (unless the child is too young or requests to have another person present), to check they are safe and remain happy in the arrangement. Specific attention is paid to address the child's religious, racial, cultural, and linguistic needs as appropriate and direct work tools to aid communication and encourage participation are used. Some visits are undertaken outside of the home, away from the carers, in a neutral environment; so children have the opportunity share their views or any worries they may have about their experience.

4.11.4 In the 'mainstream' arrangements, the private foster carers characteristically required assistance from the PFSW in accessing services such as registering the children with local GP's and making school applications.

4.11.5 To further strengthen our oversight of private fostering arrangements, annual reviews have been reintroduced. The intention is to ensure the child's voice is being heard, encourage more child focused analysis, establish the permanent plan for the child and family and guarantee all necessary safety checks are renewed. It also provides an opportunity for the carer to reflect on the year and to identify needs, concerns, and strengths within the arrangement.

4.15 Promoting Private Fostering Awareness across Haringey 2022-23

4.15.1 The service has been working with partners to raise awareness of private fostering and in the process of delivering a programme of events to raise awareness. This includes:

- Schools Designated Safeguarding Leads
- Police Response teams, the Community Safety partnership
- GP forum
- Private and Voluntary child care providers
- Faith Fora – attended an evening event at a large Mosque
- Community events such as library events, film screenings, job fairs, children's centres and our family hub
- Developing links with the Haredi community in Haringey

4.15.2 Communications are also being sent out and include private fostering flyers for schools, GP newsletters and the Haringey Fostering newsletter. In addition private fostering champions are being identified across various partnerships.

4.15.3 Frontline practitioners continue to be supported to apply Private Fostering pathways and understand regulations. The service has also introduced a panel that meets weekly where practitioners can come to discuss and seek advice about children who are not living with birth parents. The panel has been in place since July 2023 and two cases have been identified through the panel and are being assessed.

4.15.4 Our lead social worker is also visiting all frontline teams to help teams to gain better insight into the regulation and what constitutes a private fostering arrangement.

4.15.5 to the service secured a worker in the Multi Agency Hub who has specific links into this community and who is able to highlight issues associated with private fostering and to give advice and support and to determine if arrangements are needing to be assessed.

4.15.6 Briefing sessions have been held with HSCP with members from health, education and community organizations in attendance to raise awareness around private fostering.

4.15.7 Periodic awareness raising via the HSCP Newsletter, which goes out regularly across the partnership to facilitate the PFSW, providing briefings and disseminating information across Health, Education, Early years, and community organisations/faith groups.

4.15.8 Additionally, there has been a strategic group devised to focus on the issue of private fostering led by the Assistant Directors in Children's Services and in partnership with Council Members in an attempt to raise the profile of private fostering in Haringey.

5. Contribution to strategic outcomes

N/A

6. Use of Appendices

None

7. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

None