



Southwark Council
Private Fostering
Annual Report
2021-2022

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Introduction

Purpose of report

1. This report is being provided under the requirements laid down in the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering which came into force on 18 July 2005.
2. Section 7.9 The local authority provides 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.
3. Section 7.10 The local authority reports annually to the chair of the Safeguarding Children Partnership on how it satisfies itself, that the welfare of privately fostered children in this area is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, including how it co-operates with other agencies in this connection.
4. This report gives an overview of the activities in relation to privately fostered children in the London Borough of Southwark from 1st April 2021 to March 31st, 2022. Further, it also outlines the activities which have been undertaken to promote local awareness of the notification requirement regarding children living in a private fostering arrangement.

Operational and Structural issues

5. Private Fostering arrangements within the London Borough of Southwark is held within the Safeguarding & Family Support Service. There has been a change in staffing, which has seen a change in the lead Service Manager. The Head of Service has been in post for 18 months and along with a lead Team Manager covered the overview during a period of three months where there was a gap without a lead Service Manager.
6. The Head of Service was notified of potential arrangements and continued to monitor all children who are privately fostered within Southwark by way of a private fostering panel, which reviews the children and their plans. As a result

of some of the staffing issues, the panel due to take place in February 2022, did not take place.

7. A review of Private Fostering services was completed and an improvement plan was put in place to ensure the continued development, awareness and enhancement of service delivery to all privately fostered children in the borough of Southwark.

Compliance to national standards

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 way in which they will be carried out.

8. There is a Statement of Purpose which details the overview of Private Fostering within Southwark. This document is continually reviewed to ensure that it reflects any changes and best practice. It was last updated in 2022.

9. The Statement of Purpose includes some of the following details:
 - The legal definition of a privately fostered child and a list of examples;
 - The local authority's duties and functions under the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Private Arrangement for Fostering) Regulations 2005, and how they will operate in relation to privately fostered children;
 - The name and contact details of the person within the local authority with expertise in private fostering whom social workers can contact for advice;
 - How awareness of the notification requirements will be promoted with other agencies and within the wider local community;
 - Details of how Southwark safeguards children in privately fostered situations

- The advice and support that is available to private foster carers (including prospective private foster carers), as well as privately fostered children

National Minimum Standard 2:

The local authority will:

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 have not been notified

10. The London Borough of Southwark ensures that Private Fostering is on the web page and offers links and documents which details information about Private Fostering. This includes the Statement of Purpose, as well as leaflets for Private Foster Carers or potential carers, families, children and professionals.
11. Within the Safeguarding and Family Support Service, a named Service Manager holds operational leadership, chairs a regular Private Fostering Panel, and works with a lead Team Manager as a Private Fostering Champions to ensure there is regular information provided to colleagues and partners as well as consultation on cases and private fostering regulations.
12. To ensure robust oversight and scrutiny the Private Fostering Panel is attended by a professional from the Quality Assurance Unit and this role has been recently covered by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). The panel has dedicated administrative support and frequency can be adjusted based on demand to agree assessments and reviews undertaken.
13. It is acknowledged that the number of notifications around children privately fostered has slightly decreased from 10 in 2019/2020 to 8 in 2020/2021. In

2021/2022, there were a total of 9 notifications, which is an increase on the previous year.

Activity Overview including Source of Referral

Table One below reflects the activity overview around the number of private fostering notifications received and number of privately fostered children. This reflects some variability since 2016 and notes that between 2016 to current, the highest number of notifications received were in 2016.

Activity Overview	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Notifications of Private Fostering Arrangements	4	3	10	8	9
Number of open children privately fostered as at 31st March	20	12	11	5	8
Number of children's cases closed in year	20	11	12	15	6

14. In 2021/2022, nine notifications were received into Southwark. Schools were the largest referral group accounting for 3 of the 9 referrals. Police made 2 referrals, 1 came from Health, another 2 from professionals; internal LA and external LA and 2 individuals, which refers to a family member or service user. This is a slight change from last year where all the notifications received were from professionals.
15. We can see that this year the referral source has also widened to include the Police and Health professionals, whereas in 20/21, the referral source was largely schools and local authorities.

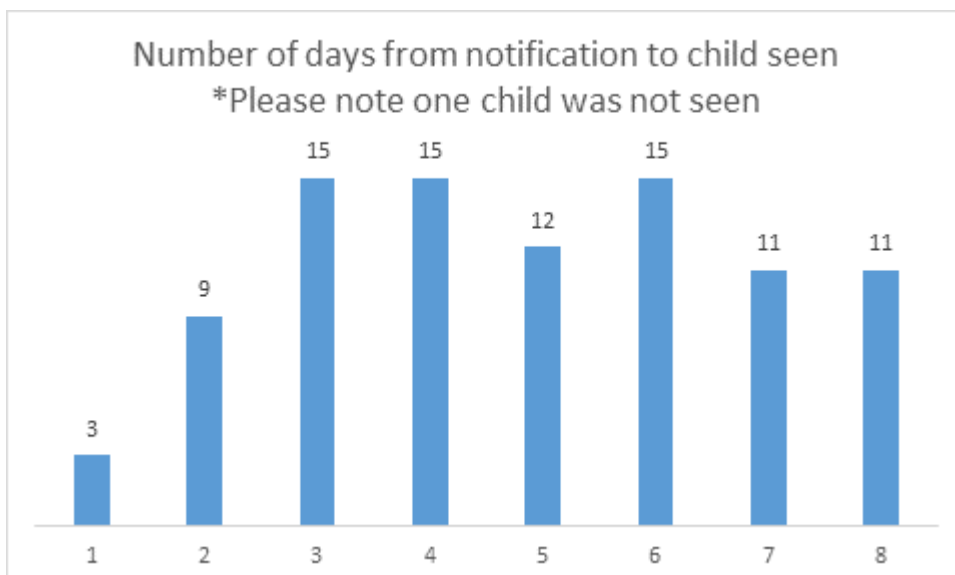
Table two shows the different routes of notification broken down quarterly, which reflects that schools are a primary source of referrals accounting for a third of the notifications received over the year.

Quarter	Notifications	Referral Source
Q1 (April- June)	1	School
Q2 (July - September)	2	School, Health – other, Hospice
Q3 (October - December)	4	2 Police, 1 individual (self), 1 external LA

Duration Between Notification received and Child seen by a Social Worker

16. In 2021/2022, our timeliness on visiting children following notification significantly decreased. In 2020/2021, we averaged 2 days from duration to child seen which put us well within the 7 day notification. However, in 2021/2022, all but 1 child was seen outside of the 7 day period and it is reported that 1 child was not seen. In the circumstance of the 1 child not seen, once the mother was contacted to discuss private fostering arrangements, she made arrangements for her child to return to her care and this was confirmed by the child’s school. As a result of that, the arrangements did not formalize.
17. The delays were in part due to checks and enquiries being made, which led to some delay. There will however be an emphasis to improve these timescales over the next year.

Table 4



Age at time of Notification

18. There is a slight change in the age group for 21/22 in comparison to 20/21. In 20/21, all of the children were 12+ in age, whilst this year, we have seen a more varied age group ranging from aged 3 to aged 15. This could be attributed to the referral source now including the police and health and could be an indication of more alertness around private fostering, with most services resuming pre pandemic modes of operation.

Table 4

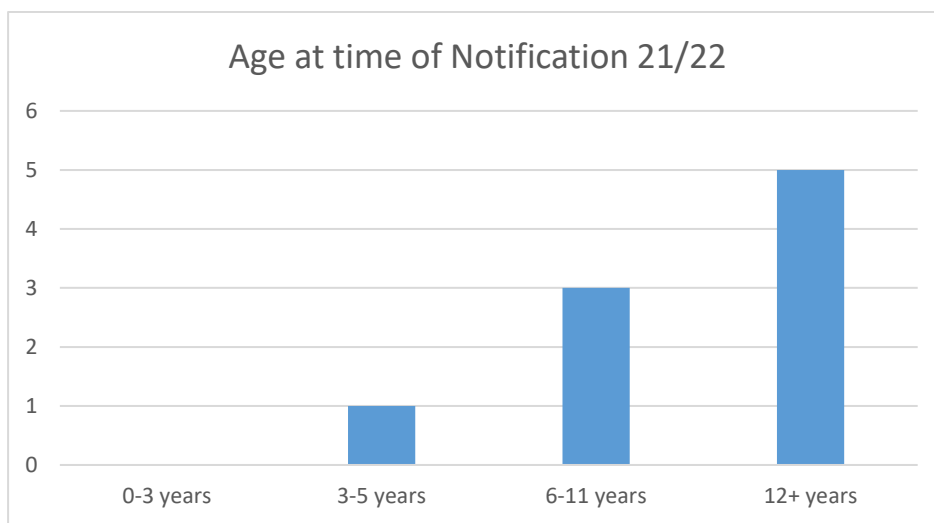
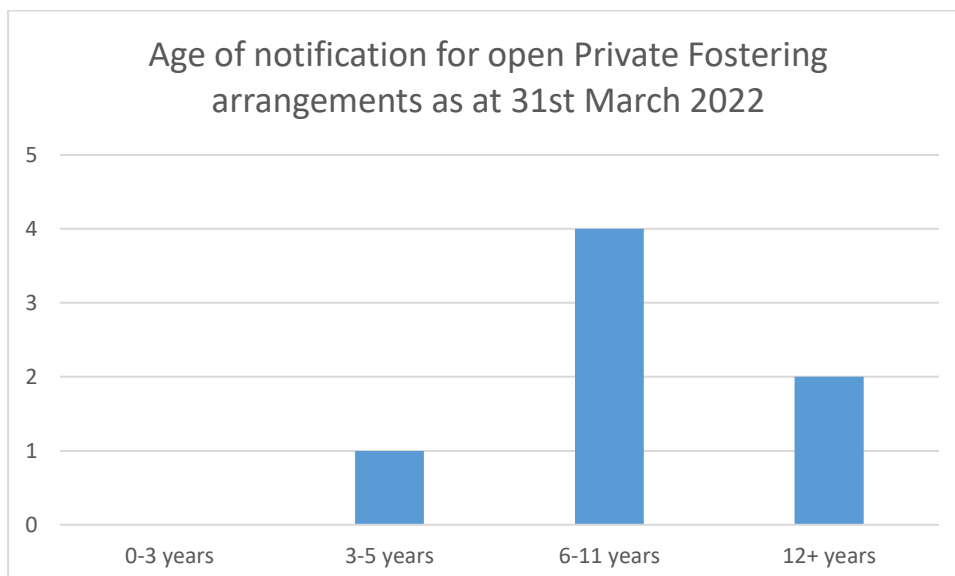


Table 5 reflects that there is one child in the 3-5 age group and 4 children between ages 6 and 11 and 2 children in the 12+ age group who are also subject to private fostering arrangements as of 31st March 2022

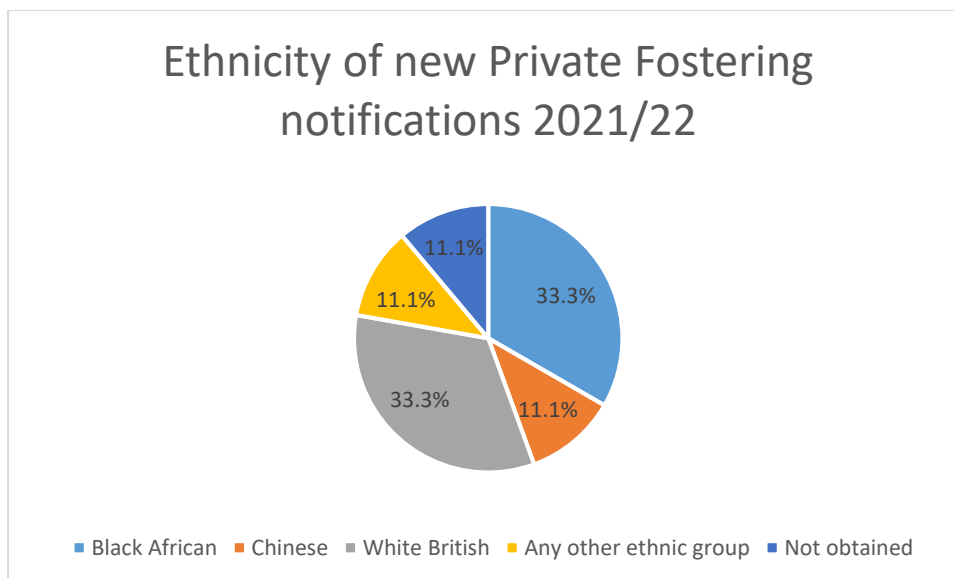


Identification of Ethnicity

19. Of the nine notifications received, the largest ethnic groups were Black African and White British children who each accounted for 33% of the group accounting for 66% of the total group. 11% of the group were Chinese children and a further 11% classified as any other ethnic group. Of note, is that there is 11% of the group whose ethnicity was not obtained, which could skew the data as reported.

Table 6 below reflects the breakdown, which is further visualized in table 7 below.

Breakdown of Ethnicity (notification)	Proportion of children	No of Children
Black African	33.3%	3
Chinese	11.1%	1
White British	33.3%	3
Any other ethnic group	11.1%	1
Not obtained	11.1%	1

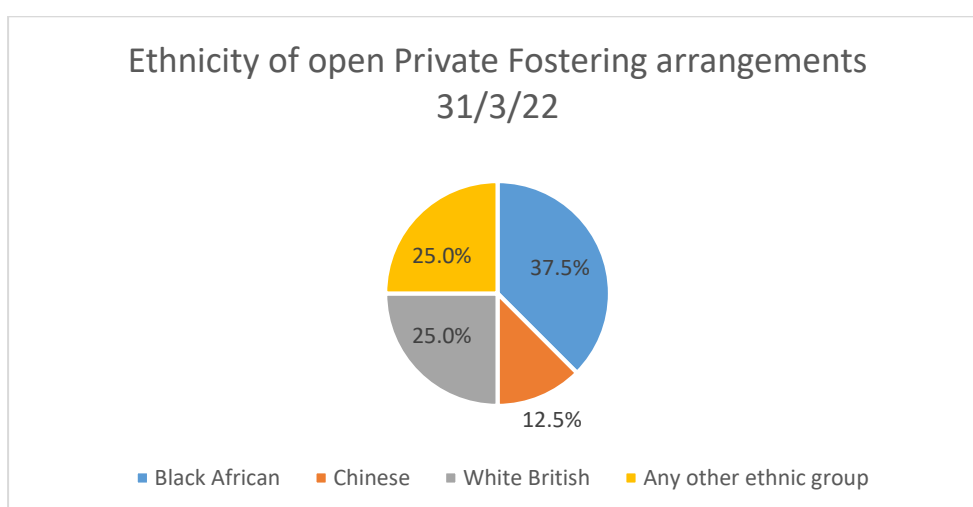


Breakdown of Ethnicity for open Privately Fostered Children as of 31st March 2022

20. At the end of the year (March 31 2022), there were eight children remaining subject to privately fostered arrangements, which was an increase on the previous year which closed with 5 children subject to private fostering arrangements. The breakdown of ethnicity remains similar with Black African children accounting for more of the cohort at 37.5%. However, there was an increase in the White British group, which accounted for 25% of the cohort and 1 Chinese child accounting for 12.5%. There is a further 25% which is identified as Any other Ethnic group. See table 8 below

Table 8

Breakdown of Ethnicity (open)	Proportion of children	No of Children
Black African	37.5%	3
Chinese	12.5%	1
White British	25.0%	2
Any other ethnic group	25.0%	2

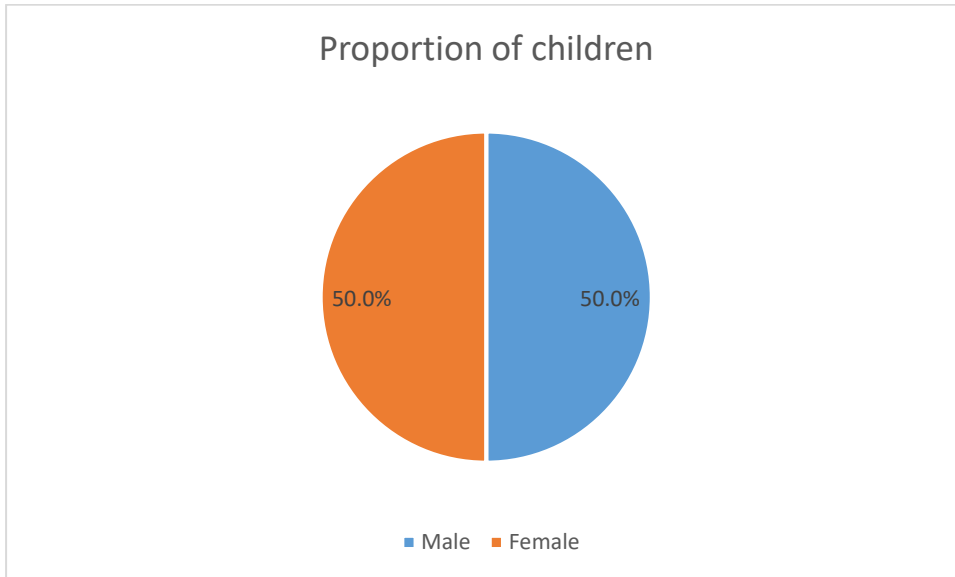


Gender of Children Privately Fostered as of 31st March 2022

21. The data did not reflect any significance in respect of gender. Four children identified as male and four children identified as female. Seen Table 9 below

Table 9

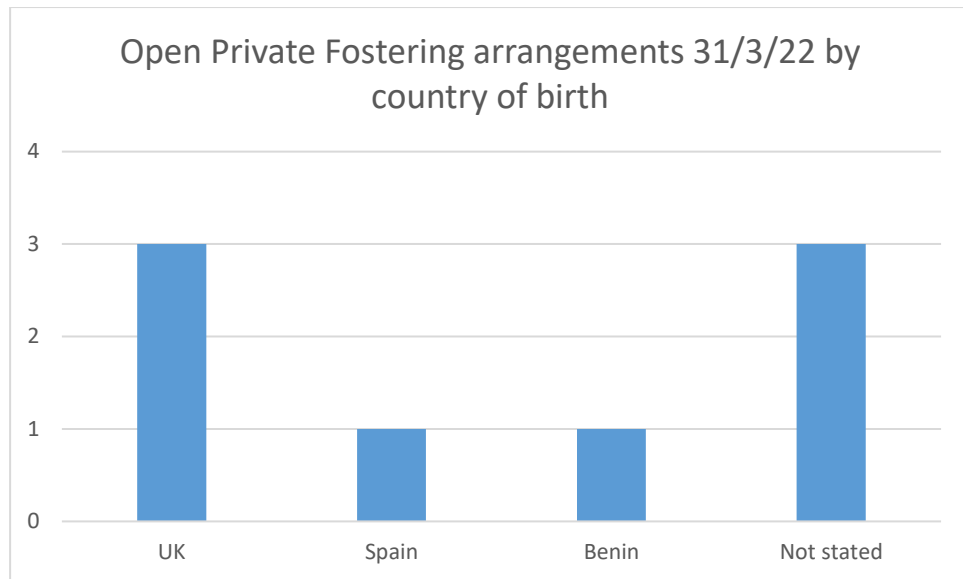
Breakdown of gender (open)	Proportion of children	No of Children
Male	50.0%	4
Female	50.0%	4



Country of Origin of Private Fostering Notifications

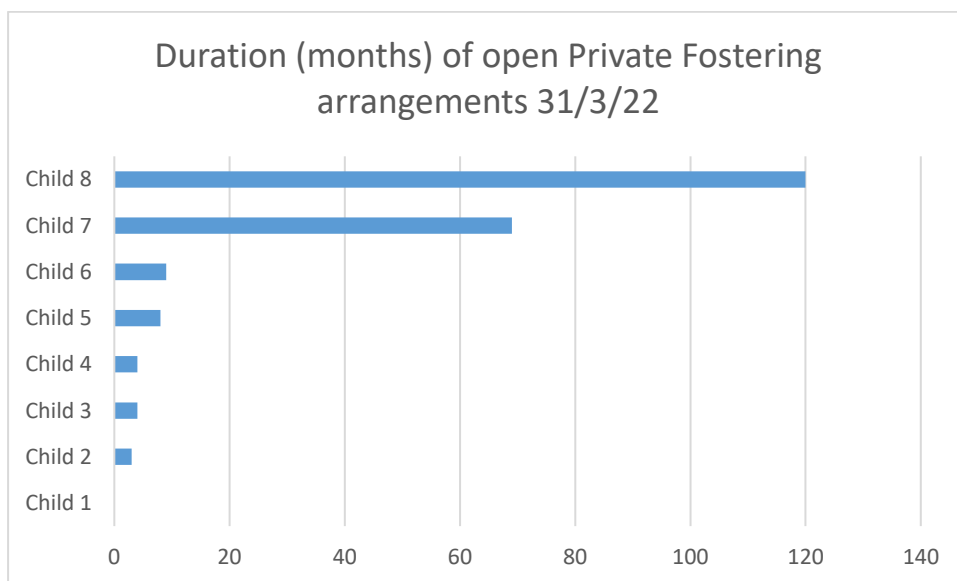
22. Of the nine notifications received, three children were from the United Kingdom, one from Spain and one was from Benin. Unfortunately, there were three children whose country of origin was not recorded and which could skew the data.

Country of origin (open)	No of Children	Proportion of children
UK	3	37.5%
Spain	1	12.5%
Benin	1	12.5%
Not stated	3	37.5%



Number and Duration of Open Private Fostering Cases at March 2022

23. There were eight children continuing to be privately fostered as of 31st March 2022. Of the eight children, the longest duration of being privately fostered was 120 months with the shortest duration being 0 months indicating that the referral was received in March 2022. The child who is being privately fostered at 120 has both her parents in Nigeria. A Special Guardianship Assessment has been completed, however, there has been some delays in progressing the application to secure permanence for the child. The Service Manager will be reviewing this matter with a view to help to progress this matter.



Number of Private Fostering arrangements Ceased

24. There were 6 children who ceased to be in a private fostering arrangement. In one situation, the mother was in hospital due to her health needs and notified the local authority as her stay was approaching 28 days, which means her child would have been in a private fostering arrangement. However, her circumstances changed and therefore, this did not progress to a private fostering assessment. There were two children who became aged 16, which resulted in the arrangement ending.
25. There are a further two children whose files upon closer review, have indicated that they may still be subject to private fostering arrangements. In one child, where the PF arrangement is listed below as ending due to appropriate arrangements in place, it appears that the assessing social worker may have mistaken the carer's actions around addressing the child's immigration status as that which also addressed the aspect of parental responsibility thus ending the assessment and closing the case.
26. In respect of the other child, a Child & Family assessment was completed which highlighted the need for a Private Fostering assessment. However, there is no evidence that the matter progressed under the private fostering regulations.
27. Whilst it is not ideal that both cases closed without full support under the regulations, steps are being taken to ensure that the right support and advice will be offered to these families. This has also highlighted that there is a need for further training and support around the private fostering process in Southwark, which will be addressed later in the report.

Reasons for Closing	Number
Assessment confirmed did not meet PF arrangement	1
Reached age of 16	2
Appropriate arrangements in place	1
No Safeguarding concerns	1
Child returned to mothers care	
TOTAL	6

National Minimum Standard 3:

The local authority determines effectively the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangement in accordance with the regulations.

28. All the Private Fostering arrangements were assessed using the Assessment Framework which has therefore included and covered the expectations within the National Minimum Standards including:
- The ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child about the proposed/actual private fostering arrangement.
 - That the child's physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural development is appropriate and satisfactory.
 - The child's needs arising from his religious persuasion; racial origin and cultural and linguistic background are being met.
 - That consideration has been given and necessary steps taken to make arrangements for the child's education.
29. Upon completion of assessments, allocated social worker would attend the Private Fostering Panel which would review and track the arrangements with a focus on ensuring that the child was safeguarded and having their needs adequately met. During this process, the panel would ensure that children are being seen regularly and their progress is being tracked. Where appropriate, there would be discussions around how to progress plans for these children to achieve permanence, particularly where arrangements were ongoing for a period of time or in exceptional cases where a parent may have died.
30. Where appropriate, children are seen on their own and engaged in direct work activities to explore their wishes and feelings and ensure that they are feel safeguarded in the placement.

31. Disclosure and Barring Service checks (DBS) and local authority checks are completed on all carers; in addition, any member of the household over the age of 16 years is subjected to a DBS and local authority check.

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.

32. 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. They are given information on services and support available including support from Children's Centres and available parenting courses via Family Early Help.
33. As part of their ongoing work, the social workers provide support on an individual 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 is offered where required and this includes supporting with letters to charities for support.
34. There is also information and leaflets available on Southwark's web page, which carers and prospective carers can access at any time.

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.

35. Where it has been possible all parents are met with and spoken to during the course of establishing the arrangements. If they do not live in the UK, they are phoned, e-mailed, and asked to provide documentation via e-mail. The first visit will ensure that any ongoing issues which might prevent the need for a private fostering arrangement to be made or where there is a clear safeguarding concern can be addressed at an early stage. A leaflet for parents of children who are privately fostered has been designed and where possible this has been given to all parents. Contact details for social workers are provided to all parents where they have been located.

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.

36. The social workers consult individually with children and young people 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 subsequent annual review of a successful private fostering arrangement.
37. Social workers undertake school visits to discuss children's progress. The child will also be met at school in a different context other than the private fostering environment to discuss their needs, wishes and feelings. On occasions where there has been the need for additional support to be offered to the privately fostered child, their Social Worker will undertake direct work with them in the community and may support referrals to specialist services such as CAMHS.

38. A leaflet on private fostering arrangements has been designed and is given to all children who are privately fostered. A children's pack is provided to privately fostered children and young people. The social workers will advocate on behalf of privately fostered children with issues such as legal status etc.

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.

39. Each Private Fostering arrangement is assessed using the private fostering assessment framework and this is signed off by a Team Manager within the Assessment and Intervention Service. The assessment is then presented for formal agreement at the Private Fostering Panel to formally authorise and agree the arrangement ensuring robust scrutiny.
40. DBS checks outcomes are kept on files. There has been no prohibition or disqualifications of carer's in 2021/2022. The numbers of privately fostered children in each household is recorded.
41. The Private Fostering Steering Group did not meet in 2021/2022 due to staffing changes and the impact of Covid 19. However, there will be an aim to ensure that this is revived and robustly and regularly occurring by the second quarter in 2022. In spite of this, there is liaison with the multi-agency network in our private fostering work and we can see that a majority of referrals have been from professionals, which has included schools, police and health.
42. Systems are in place to record the number of privately fostered children coming to the attention of the borough. There are also systems to monitor activity around the responses and to look at the quality of practice for this group of

children recognizing their increased vulnerability. In terms of compliance with visits in timescale this is monitored monthly to ensure managers have oversight and ensure children are seen line with requirements.

AUDIT AND LEARNING

43. Southwark have robust programme of audit and learning across all areas of Children's Services set out in the Quality Assurance framework.
44. Children who are privately fostered are included in the audit selection across different themes over the year. The main finding that came out of one audit around Private Fostering was the delay in securing permanence and ensuring an updated chronology and genogram were on the file. Dip sampling is also undertaken of case files for children who are privately fostered.
45. In March 2022, the Head of Service attended the Southwark Safeguarding Children's Partnership (SSCP) Quality and Effectiveness subgroup to give a presentation on Private Fostering with the aim of re-engaging the multi-agency network as well as opening the invitation for new members to re-develop the Steering Group. This was positive and drew interest from colleagues in the Police and Health. In this forum, we also discussed collaborating on a joint training program around Private Fostering which can be delivered across the multi-agency and wider council. An Improvement Plan was also drawn up with a view to ensure increasing multi- agency and community knowledge of Private Fostering. This improvement plan is underway, though the timescales for some actions have been re-adjusted. The annual report for 2022/2023 will be able to provide more detail around the impact of this.

Analysis and Conclusion

46. Private Fostering in Southwark has many strengths. The children who come to our notification are usually seen within 7 working days, which is within the

statutory timeframes, though it is acknowledged that there has been some delay this year.

47. Southwark's practice framework includes Systemic, Restorative and Relationship Based social work and this is reflected in the direct work that social workers are undertaking with children who are privately fostered. There is sensitivity in approach and an aim to ensure they understand the young person's view and that their voice is heard.
48. Additionally, where children have additional needs and may need extra support, there is consideration of these needs and we can see social workers making referrals to CAMHS or the in house clinical service and with concerns around extra familiar harm, seeking consultation from the Extra Familiar Harm team.
49. The Private Fostering Panel is useful in reviewing the children who are privately fostered in ensuring that they are seen regularly and that processes such as DBS checks are completed. The panel has a good understanding of Private Fostering and has worked well.
50. The panel could however be enhanced further, particularly around mobilizing a shift to get permanence planning at the forefront in considering privately fostered children. Whilst this is considered, there is room for more robust challenge to ensure that where children's parents are outside of the UK, that there could be alternate arrangements to secure their permanence in a timely way in the UK.
51. It is observed that most of the referrals are coming from schools, internal/external local authorities, and police or health services. It is however noted that this year, we had two notifications from family members. We are hoping that with closer collaboration with agencies, this will spread further awareness of Private Fostering within professional networks and communities and will enable Family and Community members to identify if they are

supporting a private fostering arrangement or is familiar with any to encourage families to seek appropriate support.

Review of the Private Fostering Improvement 2020/2021

52. There will be the creation of a Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker role, which will be trialed on an 18 month period. The holder of this post will be a direct lead and named expert for Private Fostering, completing all assessments on notifications around privately fostered children and then continuing to review their plans and enable early permanence where appropriate. This person will also work with the multi-agency and community to raise awareness around Private Fostering within Southwark.

Update: In spite of the advert being out, the role was not recruited to. Therefore, the position has had to be re-advertised with the aim of successfully recruiting against it.

53. The private fostering expert will deliver training and drop in sessions at least 6 times per year to provide induction, advice and support about private fostering to strengthen the existing knowledge within the Children's Services workforce.

Update: This has been delayed due to difficulties in recruiting to the post of a Specialist Private Fostering worker. This will be a priority within 6 months of that person coming into post once recruited. Additionally, there will be collaboration with SSCP to enable multi-agency training across different networks.

54. A Multi-agency Private Fostering Group, which has been in place for the last 6 years. There will be refresh of this group including a focus on strengthening practice and impact with clearly set out terms of reference for the group and the importance of representation from agencies across the Safeguarding Partnership. This group will be chaired by the Head of Service for Safeguarding and Family Support and will meet termly with three meetings each year.

Update: Attendance at the Southwark Safeguarding Childrens Partnership (SSCP) garnered interest from colleagues in Health and the Police. Further work is being completed to get representations from wider agencies including Housing and a community group with the aim of having the first meeting by the Second Quarter of 2022.

55. A focused meeting with COMMS will be convened to look at how the partnership can increase awareness in the community of private fostering to increase the numbers of notifications of these arrangements including the requirement to notify the Local Authority when making such an arrangement and how they can do this. The outcome of this will be renewed communications strategy for private fostering awareness.

Update: There has been some developments in updating the brochures for Children, Parents and Professionals around what a Private Fostering Arrangement is. This will be re-distributed on the council website once finalised. This work is ongoing.

56. A piece of work will be undertaken during 2021/2022 to consult with and hear the voices of young people who are currently privately fostered and to then look at how their feedback could impact the development of the Service. This will be undertaken by the Specialist Private Fostering social worker with support from the Quality Assurance Service.

Update: This has been delayed due to the difficulties in appointing a Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker. This will be prioritised in 2022 once the PF worker is in post.

57. Implement a clear standard is that following a private fostering notification a child will be seen within 7 working days and when undertaking a Private Fostering Assessment a child impact chronology and genogram will be

completed and on file and this should be then updated when significant events occur and at least 6-monthly.

Update: The Practice Standards were updated in January 2022, which incorporates the expectations around working with Private Fostering arrangements.

2022/2023 IMPROVEMENT PLAN

58. Mosaic documents around Private Fostering, particularly the Private Fostering Panel workflow needs to be updated to enable tracking of clear dates including details of when parental consent was obtained, when the last DBS was obtained/checked, tracking around permanence planning and tracking around ending of private fostering arrangements.
59. Private Fostering Assessment template to be updated to enable clear recording of the country of origin before the document can be completed.
60. Whilst the Practice Standards outlines clear expectations about what needs to happen when a private fostering assessment is allocated, expectations could be made clearer in respect of frequency by which assessments are to be updated. Further training is also needed around responsibility of the SW when undertaking a Private Fostering assessment, including timeliness of visits to the child, ensuring relevant information including parental consent and country and origin are clearly recorded. This should also include outcomes of these assessments and the criteria that should be considered when confirming that a private fostering arrangement is/has ended.
61. Private Fostering Steering Group to meet in 2022 to re-establish the network and community engagement and this will review collaboration with COMMS.

62. Collaboration with the SSCP in respect of discussions around agreeing and delivering joint training around Private Fostering to the multi-agency network.

63. The role of Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker to be appointed to. This person will assist in leading on the above actions as well as fulfill previous actions of meeting with the cohort of privately fostered children to hear their voices and ensure this is incorporated into enhancing the service delivery for this group of children.

REFERENCES

1. Statistical First Release Notifications of private fostering arrangements in England: year ending 31 March 2015
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/440401/SFR22-2015_Text.pdf

2. Southwark published information about Private Fostering -
<https://www.southwark.gov.uk/childcare-and-parenting/fostering/private-fostering>