



Southwark Council
Private Fostering
Annual Report
2023-2024

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I) Service Profile

Private Fostering arrangements within the London Borough of Southwark are held within the Safeguarding & Family Support Service. The aim of the service is to ensure that the needs and care arrangements of all children in Private Fostering arrangements within Southwark are adequately assessed and supported, in line with the requirements outlined in the 1989 Children Act, as well as the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, which came into force on 18 July 2005 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

There is a lead Service Manager overseeing our work in Private Fostering since January 2022. The Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker role has been in place since September 2022. A permanent Senior Social Worker has been in the role since February 2023 and she has led and been the named expert for Private Fostering in Southwark since then. In her role, she tracks all notifications around privately fostered children, completes all assessments carers and privately fostered children, ensuring that they receive the support they need, whilst also ensuring that plans are appropriately reviewed and consider the children's need for safety and permanency. The aim of this role is to also enhance the collaboration with the multi-agency and community network to raise awareness around Private Fostering within Southwark.

The Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker was directly line managed by the lead Service Manager in the Safeguarding and Family Support Service until August 2023, following which a Safeguarding and Family Support Team Manager has taken over direct line management from September 2023.

All new notifications around children in Private Fostering arrangements are sent to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) within Southwark Children's Services. These notifications are screened in MASH, checks completed and once the Private Fostering arrangement is confirmed, the case is progressed and allocated to the Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker to undertake the relevant assessments, complete required checks and maintain responsibility for the overview of children in privately fostered care arrangements.

II) National Minimum Standards

Southwark ensures that it is compliant with the statutory expectations and guidelines around private fostering. In this section, we will explore the notifications, sources of referrals, timeliness of visits, age, gender, ethnicity and country of origin. Within this information, we will also explore if there are any particular patterns to be identified to help us in our work with children in private fostered situations.

i) Notifications, incl. characteristics, source of referrals and timeliness of visits

The number of notifications around children privately fostered saw a slight decrease from 13 notifications in 2022/23 to 10 notifications in 2023/24. Whilst there has been ongoing work to help increase understanding and awareness about private fostering in the Southwark community, it is however acknowledged that this is an area of ongoing work and progress.

Activity Overview including Source of Referral

Table 1 below reflects the activity overview around the number of Private Fostering notifications received and number of privately fostered children over a 4-year period.

Activity Overview	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Notifications of Private Fostering Arrangements	8	9	13	10
Number of open children privately fostered as at 31st March 2024	5	8	13	11
Number of children's cases closed in year	15	6	5	12

In 2022/23, we received 10 new notifications of privately fostered children living in Southwark. The largest referral sources were schools (3 children) and other Local Authorities (3 children) across the UK, where the children had already been known

and assessed to have been in previous private fostering care arrangements. 1 child had moved to a new home in Southwark, whilst 2 children had moved or were due to move to the care of new private foster carers in the Southwark area.

2 referrals were from an internal source – social worker within the Local Authority already assessing and working with families, where a change in primary care arrangement had arisen. Of the remaining 2 referrals, 1 was from an individual family member and 1 from health services.

As noted in 2022/23, a majority of the referrals in 2023/24 also appear have come from schools and local authorities. We are hoping that with ongoing collaboration with partner agencies, there will be an increased awareness about professional and community responsibility to alert and notify the Local Authority about any Private Fostering care arrangements.

Table 2 shows the different routes of notification broken down quarterly, which reflects an increase in referrals following the first quarter of 2023/24.

Quarter	Notifications	Referral Source
Q1 (April- June)	2	1 individual (Family member); 1 internal - social worker within the Local Authority
Q2 (July - September)	3	1 school; 2 external – another Local Authority
Q3 (October - December)	1	1 health service
Q4 (January – March)	4	2 schools; 1 external – another Local Authority); 1 internal - social worker within the Local Authority

Duration between Notification received and child seen by a Social Worker

In 2023/24, 5 of the 10 children we were notified about were seen within 7 working days of the notification date, in line with Private Fostering Regulations 2005. There were 5 children who were seen beyond the required 7 working day period, and these were for multiple reasons detailed below and reflected in table 3 below.

One child (Child 6) was seen on day 13 of the notification. This was following notification issues between MASH and the Private Fostering team, which led to the social worker receiving a delayed notification. The child was however seen within 2 days of the delayed notification being received.

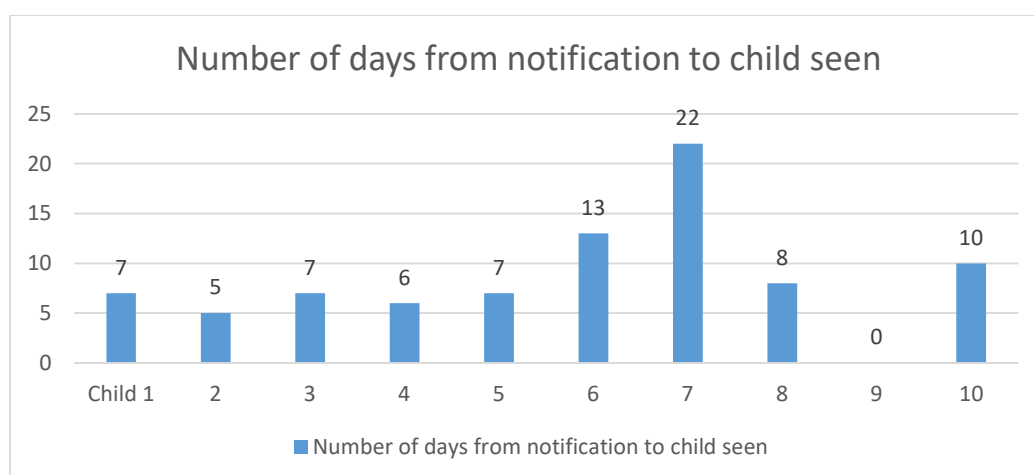
The second child (Child 7) was abroad with his parents at the time of early notification of the upcoming private fostering arrangement. The private foster carers had also just been assessed and approved as private foster carers for another child (Child 3), whose private fostering arrangement with them had just ended after he returned to his parents' care in Spain. Whilst checks and discussions with the child's parents and private foster carers commenced immediately following notification, the child (Child 7) was visited 2 days after he arrived in London and on day 22 of the notification.

The third child (Child 8) had dual Child in Need (CIN) plan at the point of the notification to the private fostering team. There was a brief overlap in social work team and the child was seen by the previous team on day 8 of the notification and 7 days following the handover Child in Need meeting.

The private fostering arrangement for the fourth child (Child 9) with her prospective private foster carers in Southwark did not commence. This was following decision made by the child's parents for her to remain with them in another country until after her 16th birthday. Prior to this, the social worker made several attempts to contact the parents who were based abroad and the prospective private foster carers in Southwark. An unannounced home visit was eventually completed to the carers' address, following which they agreed a home visit on day 13 of the notification.

With the fifth child (Child 10), there were initial issues in case progression from MASH to the Private Fostering team, leading to a delayed notification to the private fostering team. Following the receipt of this notification, the social worker in the private fostering team experienced issues with both the private foster carer and the child's mother declining consent to home visits, as well as a lack of clarity about the child's exact living arrangements whilst her mother remained abroad. Child 10 was eventually seen at school on day 10 of the notification.

Table 3



The above is an area that needs close monitoring and improvement, particularly to ensure that notifications from MASH are progressed in a timely way and to the correct worker/team, as well as to ensure that MASH screening is robust, so that the private fostering arrangements are confirmed, and details of prospective private foster carers and parents are accurately obtained at the point of notification/referral.

There is ongoing effort to build links and offer advice, support and training to MASH colleagues other partner agencies, to ensure we are consistently meeting the expectations of the national minimum standards and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005, linked to timeliness of initial visits for all our children in private fostering arrangements.

Age at time of Notification

Of the 10 new notifications we received in 2023/24, 8 children were in the 12+ age range, 1 in the 6-11year age range and 1 child in the 3–5-year age range. 3 of the notifications in the 12+ age group were of 15y olds who were nearing their 16th birthdays within an 8-to-12-week time frame.

Table 4

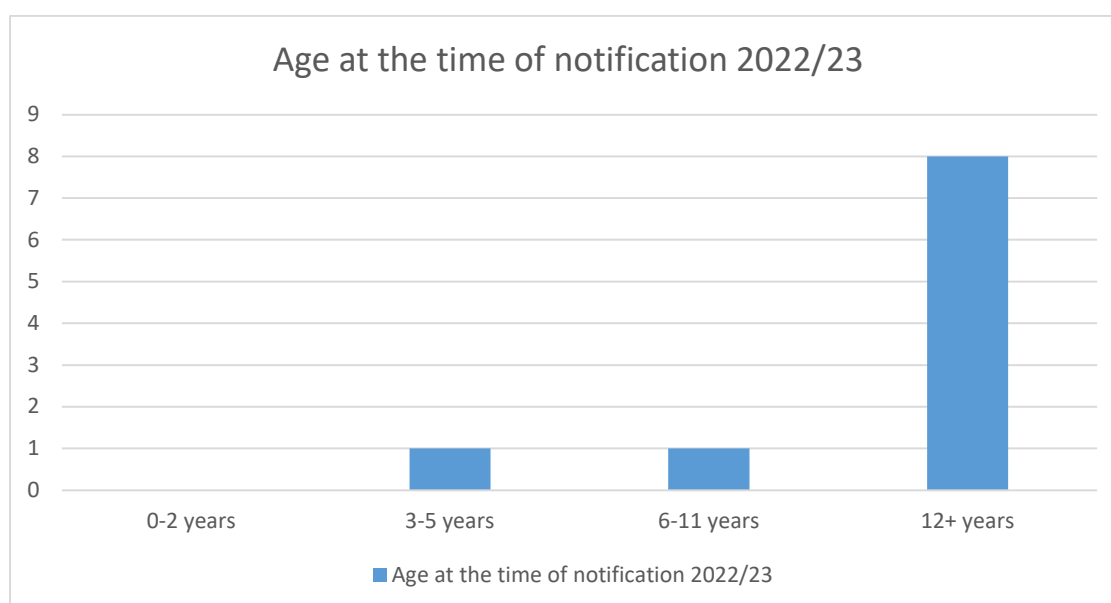
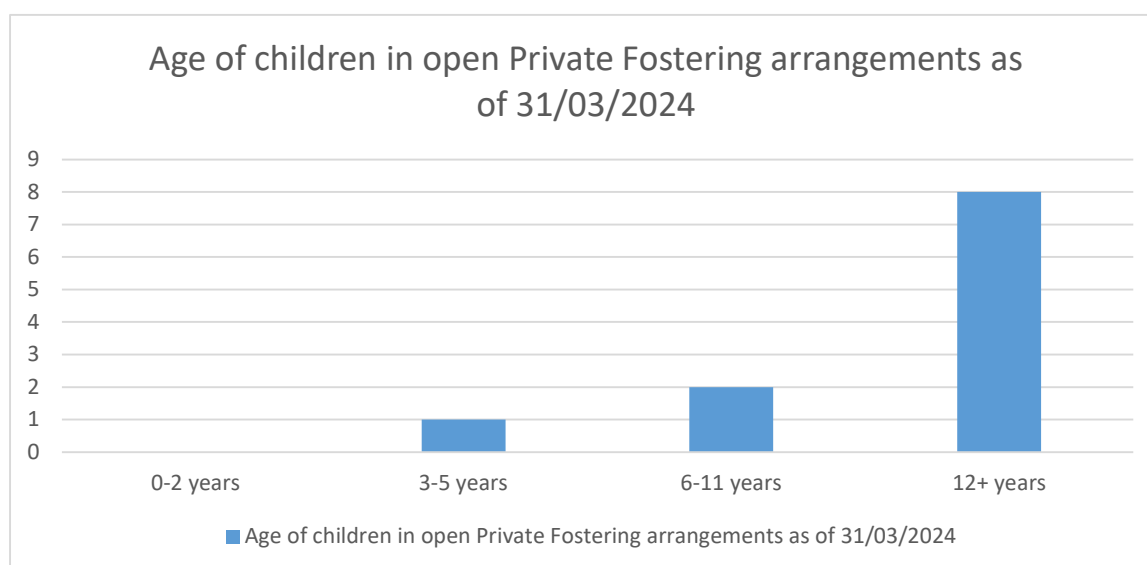


Table 5



There were eleven open privately fostered children as of 31st March 2024 as reflected in the chart above. Of these, 8 children were in the 12+ age group, 2 in the 6-11y age group and the youngest child being 5y old.

Identification of Ethnicity

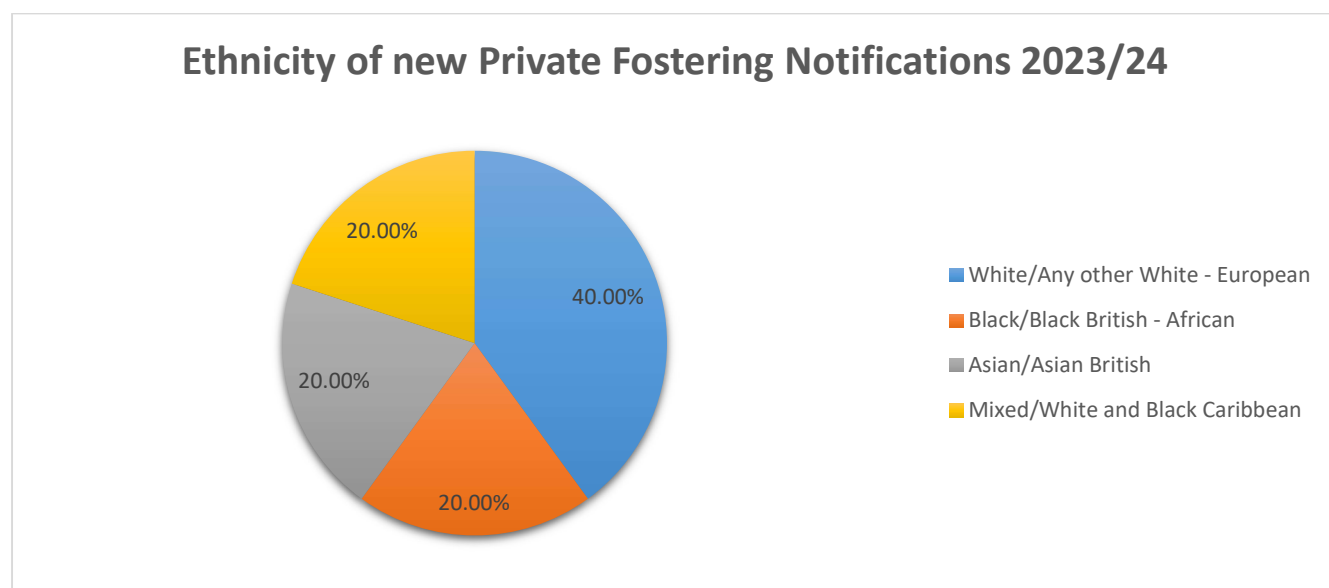
In 2023/24, we saw a varied mix of ethnicity amongst the 10 new private fostering notifications we received. The largest representation in the last year is from White/Any other White background with 4 children (European – 1 Polish, 1 Romanian, 2 Spanish), 2 children were of Black/Black British (African) background (Senegalese and Ivorian),

2 children were of Asian/Asian British background (Afghan and Pakistani), and finally 2 children of Mixed -White and Black Caribbean background. This is a shift from the cohort of new private fostering notifications between 2022/23, where 10 of the 13 children - 76.92% - were from Black/Black British – African backgrounds.

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

Breakdown of Ethnicity	No of Children
White/Any other White - European	4
Black/Black British - African	2
Asian/Asian British	2
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	2

Table 7



Breakdown of Ethnicity for open Privately Fostered Children as of 31st March 2024

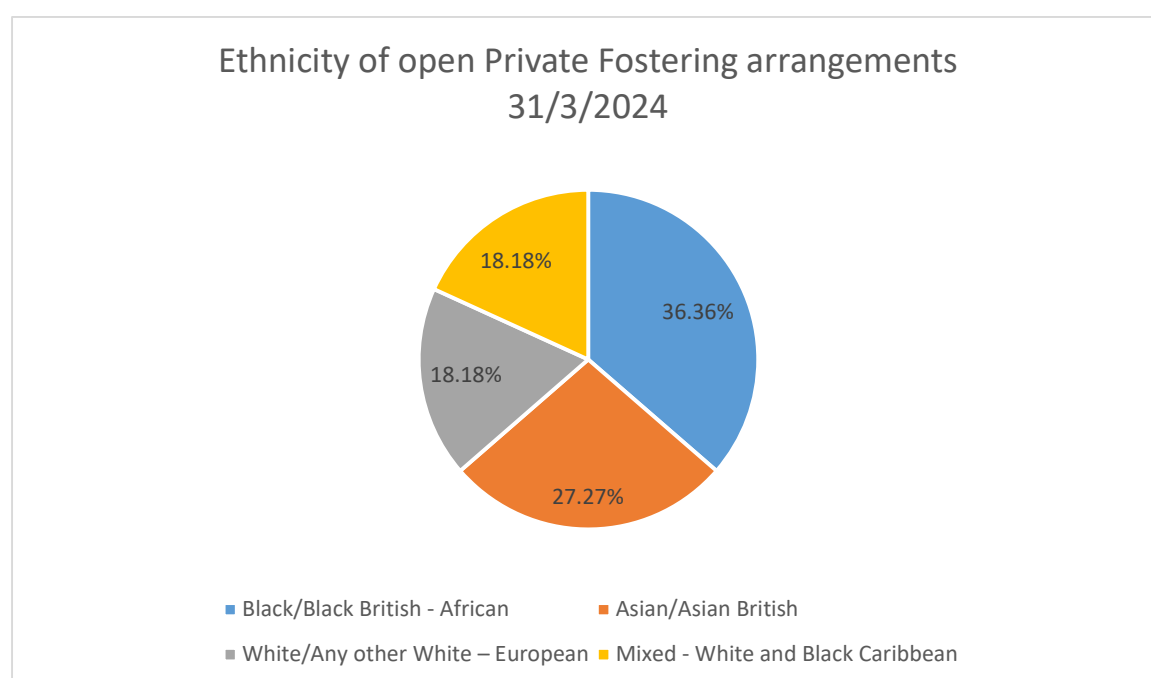
At the end of the year (31 March 2024), there were eleven children in private fostering arrangements. The breakdown of ethnicity of the eleven children was equally varied – 4 children from Black/Black British - African background (Ivorian, Nigerian, Ghanaian and Beninese) accounting for majority of the cohort; 3 children from Asian/Asian British

background (Chinese, Afghan and Pakistani); 2 children from White/Any other White – European background (Polish and Romanian); and finally, 2 children from Mixed - White and Black Caribbean background. See table 8 below:

Table 8

Breakdown of Ethnicity (open)	No of Children
Black/Black British - African	4
Asian/Asian British	3
White/Any other White – European	2
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	2

Table 9



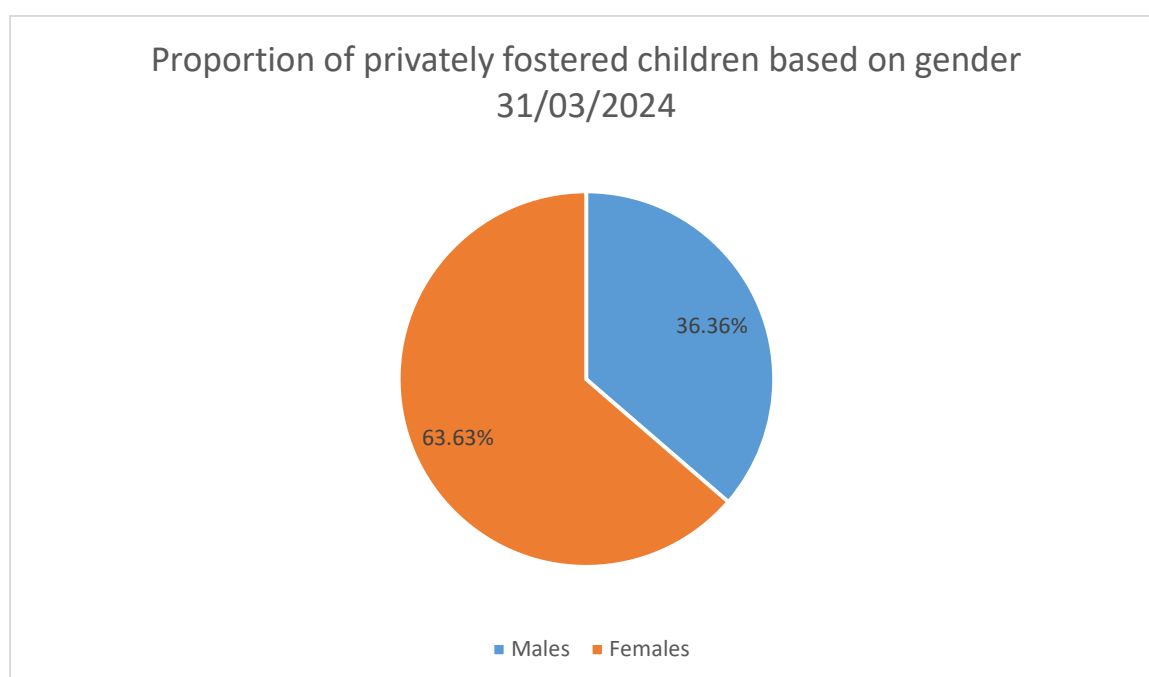
Gender of Children Privately Fostered as of 31st March 2024

Of the eleven privately fostered children, 7 were females (63.63%) and 4 were males (36.36%).

Table 10

Breakdown of gender (open)	No of Children
Male	4
Female	7

Table 11



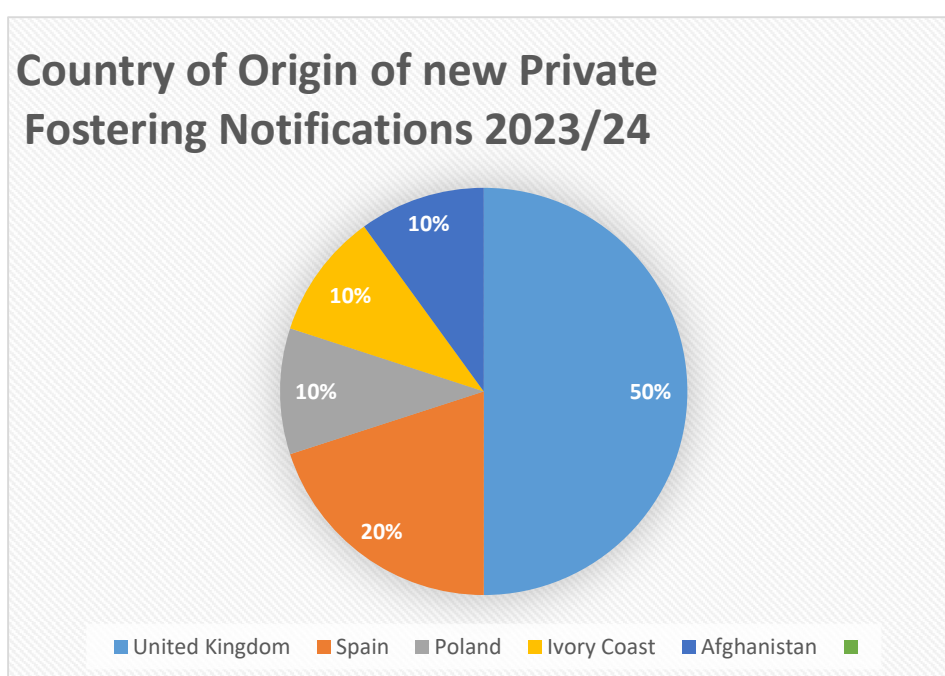
Country of Origin of Private Fostering Notifications

Of the 10 new notifications received in the last year (2023/24), 5 children were from the United Kingdom, 2 children were from Spain, 1 from Poland, 1 from the Ivory Coast and 1 from Afghanistan.

Table 12

Country of origin (open)	No of Children
United Kingdom	5
Spain	2
Poland	1
Ivory Coast	1
Afghanistan	1

Table 13

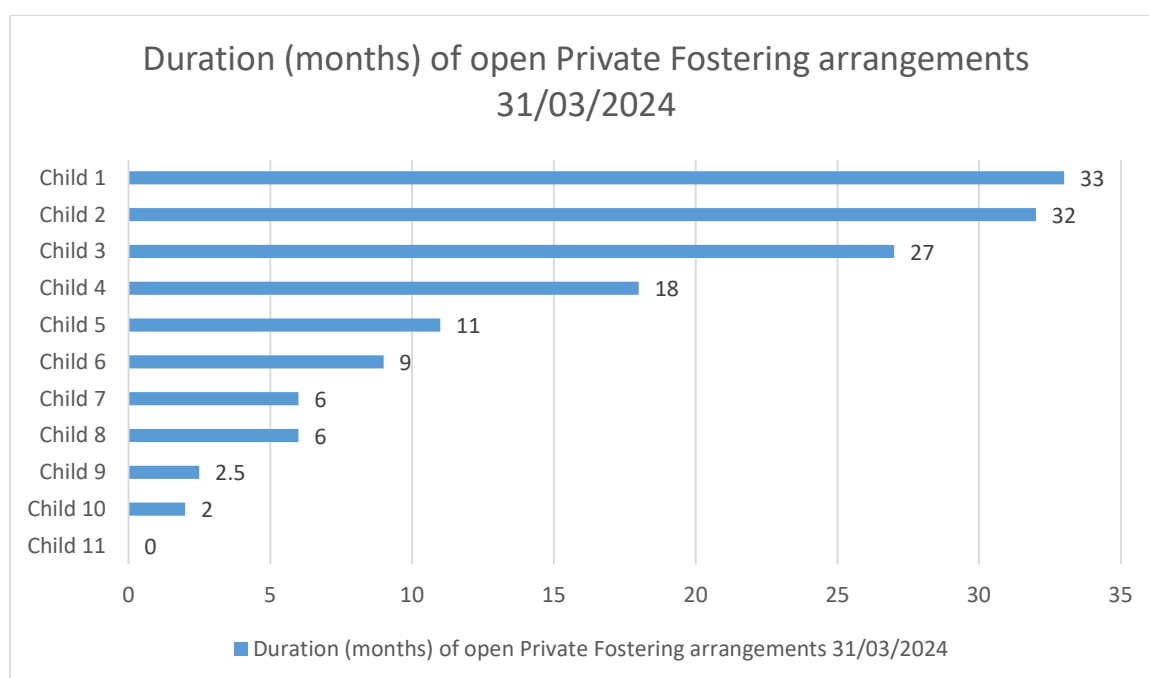


Number and Duration of Open Private Fostering Cases at March 2024

There were eleven children in private fostering care arrangements as of 31st March 2024. Of the eleven children, the longest duration was 33 months, and at the time the child's private foster carer was considering an application for a Special Guardianship Order with consent from the child's father. The second longest duration was 32 months - the private foster carer was at the time being assessed as a Special Guardian for the child, which has since concluded positively.

The table below illustrates the duration of each private fostering arrangement, as of 31.03.2024.

Table 14



Number of Private Fostering arrangements Ceased

Private fostering arrangements of 12 children ceased over the last year 2023/24 for a number of varied reasons detailed below.

Table 15

Reasons for Closing	Number
Child reached age of 16	4
Child returned home to parent	2
End of educational programme	3
Assessment confirmed did not meet PF arrangement	1
Child moved out of borough	1
Carer granted SGO for child	1
TOTAL	12

ii) DBS numbers and timeliness

Disclosure and Barring Service checks (DBS) are completed on all carers; in addition, any member of the household over the age of 16 years. Local Authority checks are

also completed on all members of the household. DBS checks outcomes where received are kept on files.

Of the eleven children in private fostering arrangements on 31 March 2024, the carers of 6 of the children had clear and updated DBS checks. The carer of one child had outstanding DBS checks at the time (at stage 4), having applied in August 2023. We however had access to PNC checks, which had been completed as part of previous CP conference processes for the same child. Another carer also had outstanding DBS checks, which were submitted soon after the notification. However, preliminary PNC checks completed by MASH police at the point of notification did not highlight any immediate safeguarding concerns. One carer could not have DBS checks progressed due to their limited time in the country at the time of the request being submitted but had also had preliminary PNC checks completed. DBS checks for the final two carers had not yet been requested at the time, as the assessments had just been commenced.

There has been no prohibition or disqualifications of carers in 202/24. The numbers of privately fostered children in each household is recorded.

The system set in place as of December 2022 for administrative support with DBS applications of private foster carers and household members' remains in place. The progress/updates on DBS checks continues to be tracked in the Private Fostering Panel held every 8 weeks to ensure that checks remain in date. While systems to process DBS checks have been formalised since December 2022, we're still seeing delays in DBS checks being completed, as well as reluctance in some carers providing documents necessary to progress these checks. This is therefore an area of ongoing work and improvement. Since September 2023, as part of screening all new private fostering notifications, MASH police have been supporting with preliminary PNC checks, which help in ensuring that any immediate safeguarding concerns/risks are highlighted, before full DBS checks are completed.

III) Management Discussion and Analysis

Over the last year, there has been continued activity and work within the department to enhance the awareness and understanding of private fostering with agencies and communities Southwark. These are discussed in further details below.

i. Effectiveness of the Private Fostering Panel

The current lead Service Manager holds operational leadership, chairs the Private Fostering Panel and works closely with the Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker and the new lead Team Manager (from September 2023). Together the Private Fostering team works closely with all service leads to ensure there is regular information provided to colleagues and partners, as well as offer training and consultation on cases in line with the expectations of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering and the Private Fostering Regulations

The Private Fostering Panels are held every 8 weeks and the aim of the panel is to review and track the arrangement with a focus on ensuring that the child is being safeguarded, having their needs adequately met and also that the carers have had their DBS checks approved. During this process, the panel also ensures that children are being seen regularly and their progress is being tracked. Where appropriate, discussions around how to progress plans for these children to achieve permanence are also held.

There have been 7 panels held between April 2023 and March 2024. To ensure robust oversight and scrutiny the Private Fostering Panel membership was extended to colleagues in MASH, Special Guardianship (SG) Team and the Clinical Service in September 2022, in addition to the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU.) Due to staff changes, we've had representation from MASH between July 2023 to February 2024 and representation from the QAU has been reinstated since March 2024. The panel has however had regular attendance by colleagues from the SG team. This has helped ensure that we are getting things right from the point of notification and also actively considering permanency plans for children in private fostering arrangements, alongside their parents/carers and advising them of options available to them via a Special Guardianship Order or a Child Arrangements Order etc.

ii. Improved ways of working (e.g. IT developments)

Mosaic documents around private fostering, particularly the Private Fostering Assessment document, Child and Family Assessment document and the Private Fostering Panel workflow have been reviewed closely with colleagues from the Performance and Systems team to capture and record all relevant and important information about the child's journey and their lived experiences in the private fostering arrangement. This includes ensuring that the documents are able to capture and enable tracking of clear dates including details of if and when parental consent was obtained, when the last DBS was obtained/checked, tracking around permanence planning and tracking around ending of private fostering arrangements.

As of December 2023, all private fostering data is available and accessible on Power BI. This has helped to manage and keep track of key performance indicators in relation to our children in private fostering arrangements.

The Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker has been an active role since September 2022 and all Private Fostering and Child and Family assessments are directly allocated to the worker, as soon as the private fostering arrangement is confirmed, and the case is screened at MASH. The lead Service Manager had direct oversight of these assessments until September 2023 and since then this is being overseen by the lead Team Manager. Once the assessments are completed the Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker also presents the case at the next Private Fostering Panel. If the Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker is on annual leave, there is a contingency in place for MASH to liaise with the lead Team Manager and the Service Manager to ensure that these notifications are picked up and addressed in a timely manner.

iii. Audit and learning findings

Southwark have robust programme of audit and learning across all areas of Children's Services set out in the Quality Assurance framework. Children who are privately fostered are included in the audit selection across different themes over the year.

In January 2024, there was a focussed audit of all ten children in private fostering arrangements at the time. Of the 10 audits – 1 was graded as outstanding, 7 were graded as good and 2 as requiring improvement.

The January 2024 audits noted the following:

What's working well?

- ***Visits** are happening regularly, they are largely within timescales and children are being seen, they are being seen alone and their wishes views and feelings are being sought.*
- *Assessments do capture information about children's various needs and on the whole these present as being well considered and met.*
- ***DBS checks** are available most of the time, when they are not available it is because there is a delay in the system, and this is generally understood and followed up.*
- *The records generally reflect evidence of DBS checks being seen.*
- *MASH are completing PNC checks on private foster carers identified at the referral stage and this has been ongoing since September 2023.*
- *Management oversight is strong, it is regular and is supported by Private Fostering Panel which reviews all children who are privately fostered.*
- *The allocation of all children privately fostered to one social worker presents as working well. She knows the children and young people well, is familiar with and understands their circumstances, and is clear on expectations in respect of providing support and meeting statutory requirements in respect of them.*
- *Additional supports and resources are identified and sourced as needed – i.e. bereavement support for one child, ESL support, grant applications and good liaison with other services as required.*
- *There is evidence of good consideration of permanency for all of the children. One SGO assessment is nearly complete, and another being proposed. There is good contingency consideration with planning to support alternative plans for one young person.*

What do we need to improve?

- *Timeliness of visits could be improved for some children. Whilst the majority of visits are happening within timescales there were two occasions identified when the periods between visits were slightly longer than the 6 weekly expectations.*

- *Dialogue with parents could be improved – particularly in respect of parents who live outside of the UK. Practice could be stronger in doing everything possible to ensure that both parents are spoken with. This is important in assuring us that they are in agreement with current arrangements – and to support in permanency planning.*
- *Accessing information about immigration remains very difficult due to limited access to home office information and long delays in responses. This significantly complicates planning and providing support significantly for some children who have complex immigration issues.*

iv) Awareness raising and engagement

The Private Fostering Steering Group was set up to maintain an overview of Southwark's compliance with the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering and issues arising for Children's Social Care. The steering group was relaunched in September 2022 after a hiatus and meets on a quarterly basis. This is chaired by the Head of Service for Safeguarding and Family Support.

The steering group has been key in enabling and enhancing partnership working across the multi-agency network in Southwark, with a focus on increasing the understanding and awareness of rights and duties for professionals and families in the community about Private Fostering. This enabled to improve and strengthen links with colleagues in education and housing and enabled platforms to allow us to increase awareness about Private Fostering across the partnership.

The London Borough of Southwark ensures that information about Private Fostering is accessible and available on the council's web page and offers links and documents which detailed information. This includes the Statement of Purpose, Private Fostering Annual Report, as well as leaflets for Private Foster Carers or potential carers, families, children and professionals.

The new Private Fostering leaflets were finalised in the last quarter of 2022/23 and there has been have been available for circulation. As of 31.3.2024, the leaflets were being designed and awaiting formal approval by the Southwark Communications team to ensure consistency.

Over the last year 2023/24, there has been a lot of ongoing streams of work to enhance awareness and communication about Private Fostering amongst agencies across the borough. This has involved presentations at service meetings within the Safeguarding and Family Support Service, presentations at the monthly Children's Services Induction meeting, as well as the Learning Network meetings hosted by the Southwark Safeguarding Children Partnership.

The Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker has also been networking and offer of training to colleagues across the partnership. Over the last year (2023/24), she has hosted 3 training sessions with housing colleagues and 1 with DSLs, alongside regular offer of 1:1 consultations. There is also an offer of support, advice and consultation for social workers and colleagues across the borough from the Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker and these have been used effectively. A brief article on Private Fostering was also printed in the summer 2023 edition of the Southwark Life newsletter.

The Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker in her role continues to foster positive and supportive relationships with children, young people and families, with the view to understand their experiences, educate them, whilst also advocating and supporting them to ensure that all children in private fostering arrangements are safe, happy, achieving and developing well. Where appropriate, all efforts are made to ensure that children are seen on their own both at home and at school and to engage them in direct work activities to explore their wishes and feelings and ensure that they are feel safeguarded in their placements. Private foster carers are provided with information and advice regarding children's developmental needs and the social worker assists and advises all private foster carers with general parenting skills, as well as 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. As part of their ongoing work, the social worker also provides support on an individual case-by-case basis, as well as practical assistance for carers around benefits and housing where required, including letters of support to Housing, Home Office etc.

Where it has been possible, all parents are met 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 around their identification 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.

Feedback obtained from some of the private foster carers as part of the January 2024 audit highlighted the following:

- *Overall feedback about communication and support were extremely positive.*
- *All four carers spoken to describe the social worker as very responsive, supportive and helpful.*
- *One described her as a “God send” and another said she was “excellent, supportive, helpful.....and cannot fault her”*
- *Comments indicated that the carers experienced the social worker as knowledgeable and felt able to seek advice and support from her.*
- *Most of the carers spoken to understood the social worker role and reason for involvement. Only one did not present as fully understanding this.*
- *Overall comments suggested they felt helped; i.e. examples given were helping getting a child into school, using interpreters to ensure communication was clear, giving advice and guidance around issues around contact / finances with birth parents.*

An area of ongoing focus is around securing permanency care plans for all children in private fostering arrangements in conjunction with their parents and carers. The social worker therefore works closely with colleagues in the Special Guardianship team for advice and support for carers about permanency options available to them. Where parents and carers agree for private foster carers to continue to care for their child/ren beyond 16 years, we also consider one off support for carers to seek legal advice about the options available to them. In the last year, we've had 3 carers progressed to Special Guardianship Assessments, one of which has been granted.

v) Effectiveness multi-agency working (including steering group)

The relaunch of the Private Fostering Steering Group in September 2022 has provided an impetus in enhancing and building relationships across the multi-agency network

to ensure that there is a joint approach and duty in recognising, responding and supporting children and young people in private fostering care arrangements. Through discussions at the steering group meetings, the Head of Service and lead Service Manager were invited to attend the Southwark Safeguarding Children's Partnership (SSCP) in March 2023 to share our work about and with children in private fostering arrangements. This garnered interest from colleagues and as an outcome, we attended the Learning Network subgroup in September 2023 to present to the partnership and canvass support around Private Fostering.

Arrangements were made to create a space to meet and obtain the views and voices of children and young people in private fostering arrangement (7 children at the time) in August 2023. This was done in conjunction with the Children's Rights Officers. Unfortunately, despite all effort to encourage attendance and participation, including sharing of flyers with the carers about the event, the event was not taken up. The children were also offered opportunities to attend all other summer activities arranged for children across Southwark, but again for various reasons, including family's own summer holiday plans, the offer of activities were not taken up. On reflection, it was felt that 1:1 sessions with the children alongside the Children's Rights Officers might be a better way to accessing and engaging participation with this cohort of children. This is an area of ongoing work, as we're keen to develop a space and opportunity of feedback from children being privately fostered, outside those obtained via the Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker. This is to help us develop and improve our way of work and service delivery.

A key gap in our private fostering work has been in relation to progressing our links with colleagues in the UK Border Agency and Home Office. A large proportion of our children/young people being privately fostered do not have confirmed immigration statuses in the UK. It is often a challenge to obtain information and/or documents about their immigration history, as well as their options in the UK. Following the lead Service manager's preliminary discussions with the NRPF team, we're hoping to have funding considered for access to the NRPF Connect service, to enable us to complete checks and access appropriate information pertaining to the children's immigration status in the UK.

IV) Discussion of key plans for 2024/25

OFSTED in their inspection visit in September 2022, highlighted that safeguarding arrangements for privately fostered children were not sufficiently robust and needed to improve. They reported “Intervention and oversight of provision for children who are the subject of private fostering arrangements are not sufficiently robust. Children are not visited at a frequency consistent with the legal framework. Leaders are not ensuring that statutory processes, such as Disclosure and Barring Service checks, are completed quickly enough. This means the authority cannot assure itself that the safeguarding and welfare needs of these vulnerable children are being met. Leaders took immediate action to address this shortfall.”

There have been robust efforts to ensure that the areas noted above by OFSTED have improved and progressed with pace and this is evidenced in this annual report for 2023 – 2024 and in the summary below on the outcomes achieved in the improvement plan for 2023/2024. This has included audit and learning activities, oversight via supervision, enhancing Private Fostering Panels and ongoing efforts across the multi-agency steering group to ensure awareness generation and a joint approach to responding and supporting all children in private fostering arrangements. The appointment of the Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker has hugely aided in streamlining and improving practice areas identified in OFSTED’s review and the subsequent audit activity. There has been a concerted effort to review and follow up on the DBS checks of all carers, whilst also ensuring that this information is readily accessible on the children’s files.

An audit of all children in private fostering arrangements was completed in January 2024 by the Quality Assurance Unit. The January 2024 audit summarised:

‘The information gathered during this audit indicates that in the vast majority of areas there is good work happening, there are examples of some excellent practice and the issues highlighted in the September 2022 Ofsted Inspection have been addressed and are improved.’

The Private Fostering Panel now includes colleagues from other services including the MASH, QAU and the Special Guardianship team. This is to ensure that Private

Fostering arrangements are being identified at the referral stage. The re-design of the panel should also improve the tracking and timeliness of permanence of children in long term private fostering arrangements, as well as providing a further oversight of safeguarding arrangements for children in these arrangements.

The Private Fostering Steering Group has helped to review awareness across the multi-agency network thus far. The purpose, effectiveness and ongoing frequency of the Private Fostering Steering Group will be reviewed in the first half of 2024/2025.

As part of our ongoing work to create awareness and understanding of our joint duties and responsibilities to safeguard children in private fostering care arrangements, the Private Fostering team will continue to liaise and offer training and consultation to colleagues within and beyond the department. We're hoping to have the updated and Private Fostering leaflets approved by the Southwark Communications team ready for circulation shortly (July 2024.)

In addition to the above, there are plans for the following to be achieved by the second quarter of 2024/25:

- Facilitate and hold a one-off Private Fostering raising awareness day
- Develop a post 16+ Information Pack for PF children

The team is eager to progress the journey of private fostering in Southwark, enhancing our service delivery to children in privately fostered arrangements and enhancing the multi-agency networks to strengthen collaborative work in this area. The plan for continuous improvement in 2024/2025 is set out below.

REFERENCES

[Statistical First Release Notifications of Private Fostering arrangements in England: year ending 31 March 2015](#)

[Southwark published information about Private Fostering](#)

Private Fostering Improvement Plan 2023 – 2024

No.	What	How	Why	Who	When	What Will Success Look Like	Update
1.	Improve performance management arrangements	Develop further clear statement of Private Fostering Practice Standards	Clear statement of good practice expectations provides clarity on our minimum and expected standards to hold practitioners and managers to account for delivery	Head of Service Safeguarding and Lead Service Manager for Private Fostering	December 2023	Delivery around private fostering will not only be enhanced by the specialist private fostering social workers but will also enable other workers to identify private fostering arrangements in existing families they are supporting	Achieved.
		More collaborative working with MASH to agree on rag ratings in thinking of consistently improving the timeliness of	Operational managers and practitioners require efficient and effective tools to proactively track the completion of activity	Performance and Systems/Quality Assurance	September 2023	Clear line of sight to enable performance to be tracked ensuring that we are adhering to the practice standards	Achieved and work is ongoing.

		<p>notifications and visits of private fostering arrangements</p> <p>Implementation of Private Fostering in Power BI data reporting system to enhance tracking and timeliness of our work.</p>				and statutory guidelines	Achieved.
2.	Improve professional understanding of Private Fostering regulations	Development of a joint Training offer for both for internal Local Authority staff members, as well as joined up multi-disciplinary training.	<p>Ongoing awareness generation campaign alongside Southwark's Communications team.</p> <p>Ongoing discussion with the Southwark Communications team to bring Private Fostering into social media spaces</p> <p>Private Fostering Campaign Planner for</p>	<p>Head of Service Safeguarding</p> <p>Lead Service Manager for PF</p> <p>Specialist PF SW</p>	Ongoing	Enhanced multi agency working with children in private fostering arrangements	Achieved and work is ongoing.

		<p>Establish process that works for the police and social care that enables quick safeguarding checks on adults in family homes where PF notification is received</p> <p>Bi-annual audit and learning activity focusing on Private Fostering arrangements,</p> <p>Ongoing outreach work with Designated</p>	<p>2023/24 to be implemented</p> <p>Discussion between senior leaders in Southwark and the police to confirm a joint protocol/understanding around expectations of safeguarding checks</p>	Audit and Learning Partners		<p>Improved service delivery for privately fostered children, ensuring their needs are reviewed including that of their immigration status</p>	<p>Achieved.</p> <p>Achieved and work is ongoing.</p>
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		<p>Safeguarding Leads in Schools, Housing and Health Services</p> <p>Improve links and liaison with the Home Office for checks on children in Private Fostering care arrangements.</p>					<p>Achieved and work is ongoing.</p> <p>Ongoing.</p>
3.	Ensure sufficient resources are in place to deliver high quality practice for privately fostered children	Review the structure in place around DBS checks to ensure that it is working efficiently and to ensure contingency plans are in place that support these checks outside of named staff members, to	<p>Enhanced safeguarding for children within private fostering arrangements</p> <p>Ensure that children in PF placements, particularly long term placements are given opportunities for permanence where possible</p>	<p>Assistant Director for Safeguarding</p> <p>Head of Service for Safeguarding</p> <p>Lead Service Manager for Safeguarding</p>	<p>September 2023</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	Efficient system in place to enable consistent and timely DBS checks for carers	Achieved.

		<p>enable a enhanced system delivery.</p> <p>Liaison with the Fostering Service to explore the development of forum for Private Foster carers where they can access support and advice and discussions around options for permanence of the children in their care or a joining of Private Foster carers to forums for support for them as above.</p> <p>Continue to garner the membership to the Private Fostering Panel to</p>				<p>Children in long term arrangements could achieve permanence with their private foster carers by way of SGOs or other alternatives</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p>
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		<p>include a clinician and member from QAU, which could further help to strengthen the scrutiny and practice of children in PF arrangements.</p> <p>Continue to garner membership to the PF Steering Group to build networks and relationships.</p>						
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Private Fostering Improvement Plan 2024 – 2025 in line with Service Plan for the Safeguarding and Family Support Service						
Key Performance Indicator	What do we want to achieve? (Source)	What needs to be delivered (actions)	By Who?	By When?	Update on progress made	Rag Rating
Private Fostering	Ensure we are fully compliant with the Private Fostering Regulations	Continue to raise awareness of private fostering in the community	SM/PFSW	Ongoing		Green
		Hold a one-off PF raising awareness day	HoS/SM/PFSW	August 2024		Amber
		Develop a post 16+ Information Pack for PF children	SM/TM/PFSW	August 2024		Amber
		Establish bi-annual audit				
		PF Panel to take place every 8 weeks	HoS/SM/QAPD	July 2024		Green

		Quarterly PF Steering Group	SM/TM/PFSW/other reps	03.05.2024		Green
			HoS/SM	July 2024		Green

Key to RAG Rating

Blue	Task completed
Green	No delays or issues anticipated
Amber	Some minor delays, issues highlighted but appear resolvable
Red	Major delays or significant issues which mean delivery is at risk

