

Corporate Parenting Panel

Private Fostering Annual Report

16 August 2021

Introduction

This report outlines private fostering activity between April 2020 – March 2021 and includes the key findings of the private fostering team. It also includes an Action Plan for 2021 -2022.

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 The Strategic Director of the People Group, Nigel Minns notes the content of this report.
- 1.2 Team Leader Private Fostering to implement the Private Fostering Action Plan to address the issues raised and improve compliance with statutory guidance, regulations, national minimum standards, and good practice in private fostering.
- 1.3 The report to be shared with the private fostering multi-agency development group to further develop awareness, understanding and multi-agency commitment to privately fostered children.
- 1.4 Report to be presented at WSCB Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation subcommittee.

2.0 Definition of Private Fostering

- 2.1 A private fostering arrangement is one made privately for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Private foster carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt.
- 2.2 A private foster carer may be a friend of the family, the parent of a friend of the child, or someone previously unknown to the child's family who is willing to privately foster a child. However, a person who is a relative as defined by the Children Act 1989, i.e. a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full or half blood or by marriage) or a step-parent (i.e. by marriage to a parent) will not be a private foster carer.
- 2.3 This report covers Private Fostering activity between the 1st April 2020- 31st March 2021 and is provided under the requirements laid down in the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, which requires an annual report to be provided for consideration by the Director of Children's Services including an evaluation of the outcome of its work in relation to privately fostered children within its area.

3.0 Private Fostering Staffing Structure

- 3.1 Warwickshire's Private Fostering Service is located within the People Directorate, Corporate Parenting.
- 3.2 In Warwickshire, private fostering sits under the Connected Support Person Social Work Team within Fostering. The private fostering work is supported by one business support worker who maintains the private fostering statistical data.
- 3.3 In our previous structure, there was one dedicated Private fostering social worker. We took the opportunity to restructure when she moved to a secondment. Currently we have five connected support social workers completing assessments and supporting private foster families. This ensures that the team has more capacity to respond, have shared knowledge and expertise.
- 3.4 The Team Leader ensures all private fostering notifications are progressed, private fostering assessments are allocated, and families are supported across county. Family support workers in the team offer support with Regulation 8 visits when necessary and direct work with families.
- 3.5 In usual circumstances, the Team Leader or social workers would have regularly attended children's team meetings supporting workers to identify private fostering arrangements, sharing good practice within their area, and raising awareness with their local multi-agency partners. This direct promotion activity has reduced due to the pandemic, we have clear links on our Warwickshire Website to promote Private fostering and provide information about the process (<https://fostering.warwickshire.gov.uk/private-fostering>). We also operate a Connected Person duty system enabling individual staff and partner agencies to seek further advice if needed.

4.0 Assessments

- 4.1 Child and Family Statutory Assessments are completed to determine the need for a private fostering assessment and are carried out by the Connected person support social workers or by/ with children's social worker.
- 4.2 All children attending language schools within Warwickshire remain the responsibility of the nominated district team throughout their stay in England. The private fostering assessment and subsequent regulation 8 visits will be allocated to the private fostering social worker with support where possible.
- 4.3 For those children who are already known to Children's Services (as a child in need or a child with a child protection plan) when they are identified as a privately fostered child, they will continue to be supported by their allocated social worker with the fostering social worker completing the private fostering arrangement assessment only.

4.4 The registered fostering manager acts as the decision maker on the suitability of the arrangement. The dedicated fostering team leader has the responsibility of ensuring the minimal standards are met, annual audit and the completion of annual reviews are carried out in a timely manner. In addition, through service development they are responsible for ensuring that there is an awareness of private fostering across the locality.

5.0 National Minimum standards:

5.1 National Minimum Standard 1

5.1.1 The local authority has a written statement or plan, which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out.

Private Fostering arrangements within Warwickshire are set out in the statement of purpose, published on the Council's online procedures for children's services and available to the public on www.warwickshire.gov.uk/privatefostering.

5.2 National Minimum Standard 2 The local authority:

- **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**
- **Responds effectively to notifications**
- **Deals with situations where an arrangement comes to their attention, which has not been notified.**

5.2.1 The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 sets out that anyone involved in making a private fostering arrangement (parent, carer or third party) must notify the appropriate local authority.

5.2.2 Parents and carers often fail to notify because they are unaware of the requirements and believe that this is a private family arrangement. We use Private Fostering week to raise awareness in Warwickshire alongside regular advertising and information sharing:

- Private Fostering e-learning training continues to be available on WILMa
- Notification on Core Brief and Warwickshire County Council blogs
- On FIS website & Twitter
- Private Fostering training delivered from WSCB training for teachers with safeguarding responsibilities
- mms@warwickshire.gov.uk & newsteam@warwickshire.gov.uk. For school's post - poster and information awareness sent
- Posters and leaflets displayed at local community centres and libraries.

5.2.3 There is a need for continued communication and awareness raising to increase the County notifications of children in private fostering arrangements and to make a wider audience aware of what constitutes a Private Fostering arrangement.

5.2.4 The updated Action plan is appended to this report which identifies the ongoing awareness raising planned with consideration for managing this area in the future.

Table 1: Source of Private Fostering Enquiry

Source of Private Fostering Enquiry	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021
Birth Parent	0	1
Children team	7	4
Education	1	4
Language school	5	0
Member of the public	0	0
MASH	1	2
Initial Response	0	5
Early Help	0	4
Other Local Authority	1	1
Private foster carer	0	0
Police	1	0
Legal Services	1	0
Total	17	21

In comparison to 2019-2020, there has been an increase in the number of private fostering enquiries, with a significant increase in enquires from Initial Response and Early Help. This may be due the publicising Private Fostering on the intranet sites and from educating colleagues. There has been a decrease of enquiries from language schools as expected during the pandemic.

Table 2: Ethnicity of child

Ethnicity of child	Number of children 2019-2020	Number of children 2020-2021
White British	7	10
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups/any other mixed background	1	0
White Other	1	1
White Eastern European	1	0
Black British (Caribbean)	0	1
Total	10	12

In the year 2020/21, there were 21 new private fostering notifications resulting in 12 placements. Last year there were 17 enquiries resulting in 10 placements. We have seen a slight increase of 2 additional young people.

Table 3: Age of child

Age of child	Number of children	Number of children
	2019-2020	2020-2021
Less than 1	0	1
1-4	0	0
5-9	1	1
10-15	9	10
16-18 (children with disabilities)	0	0
Total	10	12

Most of the children assessed in private fostering arrangements were aged 10-15 years. This is consistent with previous years. The private arrangement carers of the younger children are both seeking permanent orders through adoption and a Child Arrangement Order.

Table 4: Length of time a child has been in an arrangement prior to the new notification

Length of time a child has been in an arrangement prior to the new notification.	Number of children	Number of children
	2019-2020	2020-2021
Notification prior to placement	1	0
Less than or equal to 7 calendar days	0	1
More than 7 calendar days, but less than 3 months	5	5
3 months but less than 6 months	2	3
6 months or more	2	3

The length children are in a private arrangement prior to WCC being notified has increased as seen in the table above. This increase may be partly due to the pandemic but also demonstrates the need for more awareness raising.

Table 5: New Private fostering assessments have been identified.

Area	Number of children	Number of children
	2019-2020	2020-2021
Rugby	2	1
Nuneaton & Bedworth	3	5
Kenilworth	2	0
Warwick	0	1
Stratford	2	4
North Warwickshire	1	1

Table 6: Reasons for ending of Private Fostering

Reason for ending	No. of children	No. of children
	2019-2020	2020-2021
Child returned to live with parents or close relatives within Warwickshire	7	4
Child returned to live with parents or close relatives outside of Warwickshire area	1	2
Child Arrangement Order (CAO) granted to private foster carer	1	0
Special Guardianship Order (SGO) granted to private foster carer	1	0
Child came into care	1	1
Child turned 16 (or 18 if disabled)	8	3
Other educational opportunity ended returned to parents overseas	8	1
Noncompliance	1	0
Total ended	28	11

In 2020-21, 11 private fostering arrangements were ended; this is much lower in comparison to last year when 28 ended. The main reduction compared to 2019-2020 has been when a child turned 16 and when overseas educational opportunities ended; the pandemic reduced the number of overseas educational arrangements and many students were not able to travel.

Activity undertaken during 2020 - 2021:

All private fostering carers that were recommended for approval were approved by the Fostering Operations Manager.

Ongoing visiting requirements

Privately fostered children must be visited at a frequency of a minimum of 6 weekly in the first year of placement, and 12 weekly in second and subsequent years. These visits are completed to observe the overall standard of care, ensure that the child is developing appropriately, ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child (seeing them alone) to ensure that the child's health, education and contact needs are being met and to support rehabilitation home in appropriate circumstances.

Table 7: Number of Private fostering families open on the 31st March.

Reporting Year	Number of Placements as at 31 March
2016/17	7
2017/18	6
2018/19	27
2019/2020	7
2020/2021	6

5.3 National Minimum Standard 3

5.3.1 The Local Authority effectively determines the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangements in accordance with regulations.

5.3.2 A weekly report is sent to the Private Fostering Team Manager from the business analysis unit which details new and ended private fostering arrangements in Warwickshire that have been captured in the MOSAIC case record. This is checked for accuracy. An Annual report is completed. Covid-19 restrictions have significantly affected the ability to carry out face to face visits. We have maintained safe distancing measures and risk assessments prior to visiting. In place of direct visits, virtual contact has been made and we have been able to meet the needs and satisfy requirements of NMS 3. Direct visits have increased in line with government guidance.

5.4 National Minimum Standard 4

5.4.1 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.

5.4.2 Prospective private foster carers are provided with an information pack which details advice and support services regarding children's needs and details of support services and training. The private fostering social worker supports and advises carers on an ongoing basis with general parenting skills, and issues pertinent to the child's circumstances. Additional visits are made as requested to support carers. Social workers are now carrying out regulated visits to provide consistency and offer additional support as needed. Family Support Workers can complete regulation 8 visits when necessary, but their time is increasingly being used to provide direct work with families, for example, therapeutic parenting advice such as PACE and NVR.

5.4.3 Feedback is sought from foster carers, children, and parents. A generic feedback form was used however there was very little response, so a new feedback form was devised, and this is being used currently. In annual reviews feedback is captured. All Private Foster Carers and children and young people, where appropriate, are provided with the contact details for the social workers in the team and the Out of Hours service.

5.4.4 We continue to give Private Arrangement Foster Carers advice and support to consider the securing of young people's permanence by way of an Order where appropriate and it has been positive to see that permanence has been reached by return to parents and court order.

5.5 National Minimum Standard 5

5.5.1 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.

Where it has been possible all parents are met with and spoken to whilst establishing the arrangements. When arrangements involve children from overseas discussions are generally held over the telephone or via email.

If children already have a social worker, the initial visit to assess the private fostering arrangement will be completed jointly by the case holding social worker and the fostering social worker. This is to ensure that children have a consistent staff member supporting them and 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.

Contact details for social workers have been provided to all parents where possible.

5.6 National Minimum Standard 6

5.6.1 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.

Experience has shown that children in private fostering arrangements do generally understand the arrangement and their rights within it. The social workers in the team consult individually with them 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.

Ongoing, regulation 8 visits also consider the child's needs and views. The private fostering social worker or family support worker will advocate on their behalf if necessary, on issues such as legal status, placement, contact and education.

An information pack for children who are subject to private fostering arrangements is given to all children where this is appropriate.

Contact details for social workers are always provided to children.

5.7 National Minimum Standard 7

5.7.1 The Local Authority has in place and effectively implements 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.

Each Private Fostering arrangement is assessed using the Private Fostering Arrangement Assessment Record and this is signed off by a Team Leader. Private Fostering arrangements are approved by Fostering Operations Manager using Mosaic.

6.0 Update on Recommendations made for 2019/2020

6.1 The action plan has been worked upon throughout 2020/2021. However, there are areas that have not been completed partly due to the pandemic and these will form part of the 2021/2022's plan as seen below:

Action Plan 2019/2020 – update:

Actions 2019/2020	Update
Information packs to be reviewed	Have been reviewed and updated
Promote private fostering arrangements.	The Team Leader had attended 5 headteachers virtual forums to raise awareness of Private Fostering.
Promote feedback from private fostering cases – to include feedback at the time of annual review.	Feedback is currently being captured through reviews.
Consideration is being given as to whether the training tool for Private Fostering now in WiLma (transferred to Your HR) should be part of the mandatory corporate training for employees.	The Fostering Service this is embedded. Private fostering training is now available via e-learning and is virtual making it more accessible.
Principle Practitioner to be identified for Private Fostering work to ensure awareness increases.	The role of the principle practitioner has changed, and they do not currently have capacity to take a lead in this area.
Warwickshire's private fostering lies within the Fostering Service.	Discussions have started in the Senior Leadership Team to consider where Private Fostering is best placed.
Auditing of Private Fostering Assessments to ensure the quality of assessments.	Each assessment is quality assured by the Team leader and the Fostering Operations Manager signs them off.

7.0 OFSTED update

7.1 In March 2020, OFSTED started an inspection and private fostering was inspected during that period. Unfortunately, this inspection was halted due to Covid-19. Informal feedback from that time was satisfactory with robust systems in place.

8.0 Conclusion

8.1 The majority of Warwickshire's privately fostered children is within the age range of 10-15yrs and White British, although we have seen to children from younger age groups. Many arrangements are due to family conflict and breakdown, there has been two cases where the parent has died. The two younger children are in the process of securing permanent homes with their private foster carers. All other cases are managed and supported by the connected support team. They are placed throughout the three areas of Warwickshire, North, South and East. Sources of referral come from a variety of areas in particular initial response, early help, and this year we have seen an increase of enquiries from education.

8.2 Private fostering notifications have showed a significant increase of notifications, this resulted in 2 more placements compared to last year. There has been a significant decrease in the number of private fostering arrangements placements ending: 11 ended this year compared to 28 in 2020-2021. The decrease in numbers could be attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic as we have not had the numbers of international students and had no notifications last year.

8.3 PF1 annual data returns continue to be gathered for the CIN census. Warwickshire private fostering team does meet all 7 national minimum standards to a satisfactory level.

Action Plan 2021/2022

1	Private Fostering Training to become mandatory throughout Children's services induction.
2	Promote awareness including in Private Fostering Awareness week, with ongoing awareness raising through posters and leaflets. A rolling monthly rota has been devised to ensure staff attend Children's Team meetings across the district to promote Private fostering. Private Fostering remains on the fostering and early help website. The Team leader or staff can be invited to attend the virtual headteachers forums in the future.
3	Warwickshire's private fostering lies within the Fostering Service; however, most local authorities hold this within the Early Help provision. Discussions have started in the Senior Leadership Team to consider where Private Fostering is best placed and need to be progressed.

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