



Private Fostering Annual Report



1st April 2023 – 31st March 2024

Report Written by:	
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Introduction

This report outlines private fostering activity between April 2023 – March 2024 and includes the key findings of the private fostering team. This also includes an Action Plan for 2024 - 2025.

The Private Fostering leaflets have been attached below:

- [Private Fostering Guide for parents](#)
- [Private Fostering Guide for children and young people](#)
- [Private Fostering Guide for children and young people living with a host family](#)
- [Private Fostering Guide information for private foster carers](#)
- [Private Fostering Guide information for professionals](#)

Recommendations

1. The Strategic Director for Children and Young People, Nigel Minns & Director of Children and Families, John Coleman to note the content of this report.
2. Private Fostering Team Managers 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.
3. The report to be shared with other groups to further develop awareness, understanding and multi-agency commitment to privately fostered children.
4. Report to be presented at Warwickshire Safeguarding Partnership Group or Partnership Executive Board.

Definition of Private Fostering

A private fostering arrangement is one made privately for the care of a child under the age of 16 or under 18, if disabled or subject to the Unaccompanied Minors Homes for Ukraine Scheme. The young person must be cared for 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 or host.

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 stepparent (i.e., by marriage to a parent) will not be a private foster carer.

This report covers private fostering activity between the 1st of April 2023 - 31st March 2024 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.



Private Fostering Staffing Structure

Warwickshire's Private Fostering Team is located within the People Directorate, Corporate Parenting and sits under the Fostering and Alternative Support Carers Team.

In Warwickshire, private fostering sits under the Connected Person Supervision and Support Team within Fostering. The private fostering work is supported by one business support worker who maintains the private fostering statistical data.

The Team Manager ensures all private fostering notifications are progressed, i.e., private fostering assessments are allocated, and families are supported countywide. Family support workers offer support with Regulation 8 visits when necessary and carry out direct work with families.

Assessments

Child and Family Statutory Assessments are completed to determine the need for a private fostering assessment and are carried out by the Child's social worker or the Private Fostering social worker.

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.

For those children who are already known to Children's Social Care (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 - the Private Fostering Social Worker will complete the private fostering assessment only and subsequent annual reviews.

The Registered Fostering Manager acts as the decision maker on the suitability of the arrangement. The dedicated Fostering Team Manager 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.

National Minimum 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 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 [Private Fostering Statement of Purpose](#) and Private Fostering Policy.

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.**

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.

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:

During March 2023 - April 2024, the Team Manager and Private Fostering Social Workers used a variety of internal and external avenues to raise awareness about Private Fostering as follows:

- Delivering private fostering presentations and training to the children's teams.
- Offer training to newly qualified social workers.
- Promoted Private Fostering Awareness Week in John's Blog.
- Delivered interactive presentation at the Head Teacher Breaching
- Offered a consultation service.
- Updated 5 leaflets and designed 1 poster on Private Fostering Arrangements

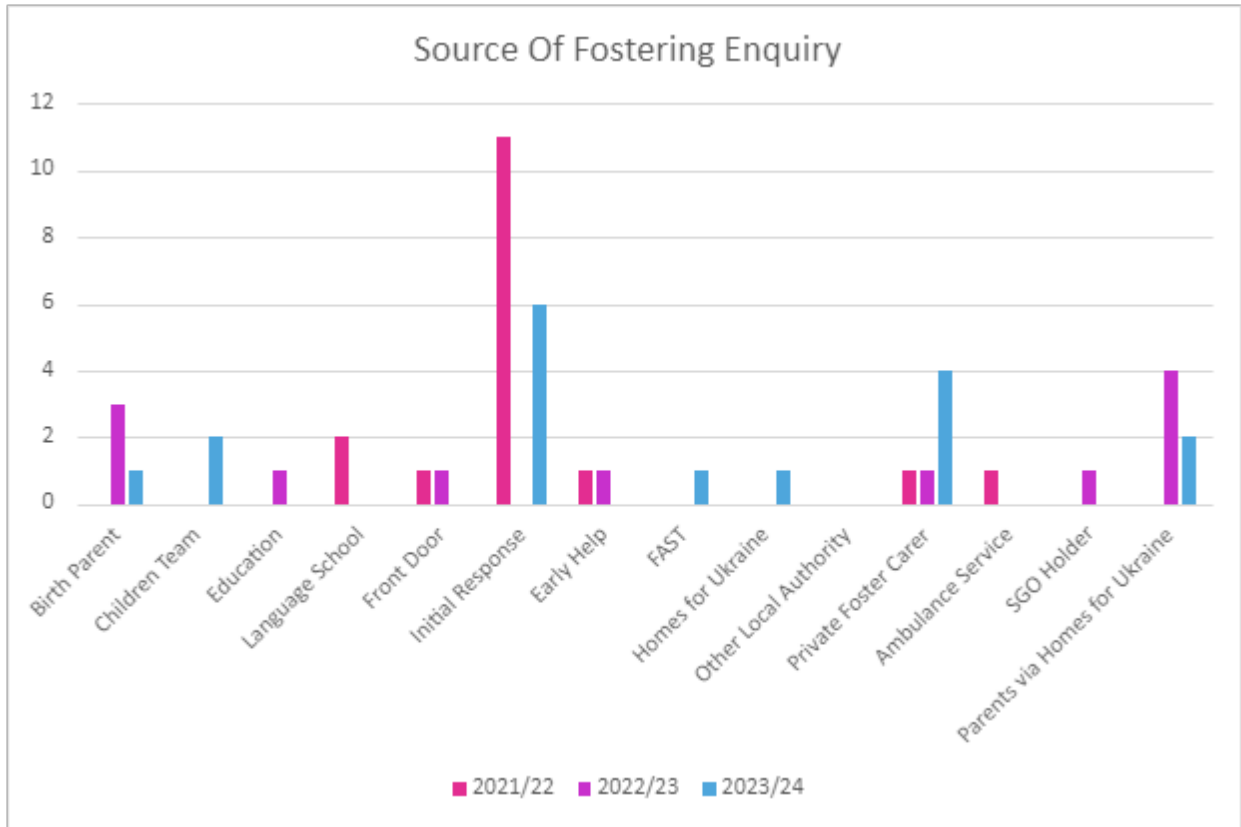
We also operate a duty system which enables individual staff and partner agencies to seek further advice when needed, and establish clear links to Warwickshire's website, which actively promotes Private fostering and provides information about the process:

- Private Fostering e-learning mandatory training continues to be available on The Learning Hub
- Notification on Core Brief and Warwickshire County Council blogs.
- On FIS website & Twitter.
- Posters and leaflets displayed at local community centres and libraries.

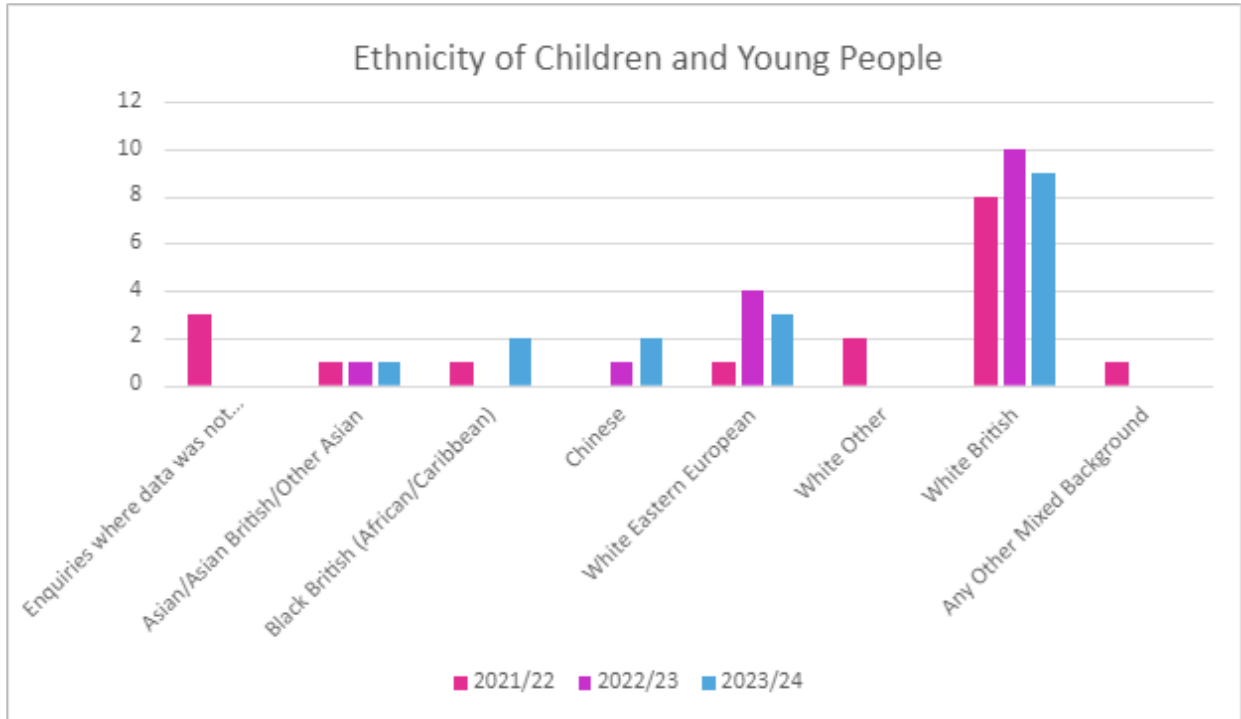
There is a continued need for communication and awareness raising of what constitutes a Private Fostering arrangement.

[Warwickshire Private Fostering Internet Page](#)

This direct promotion activity has increased since the pandemic and is ongoing. 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.

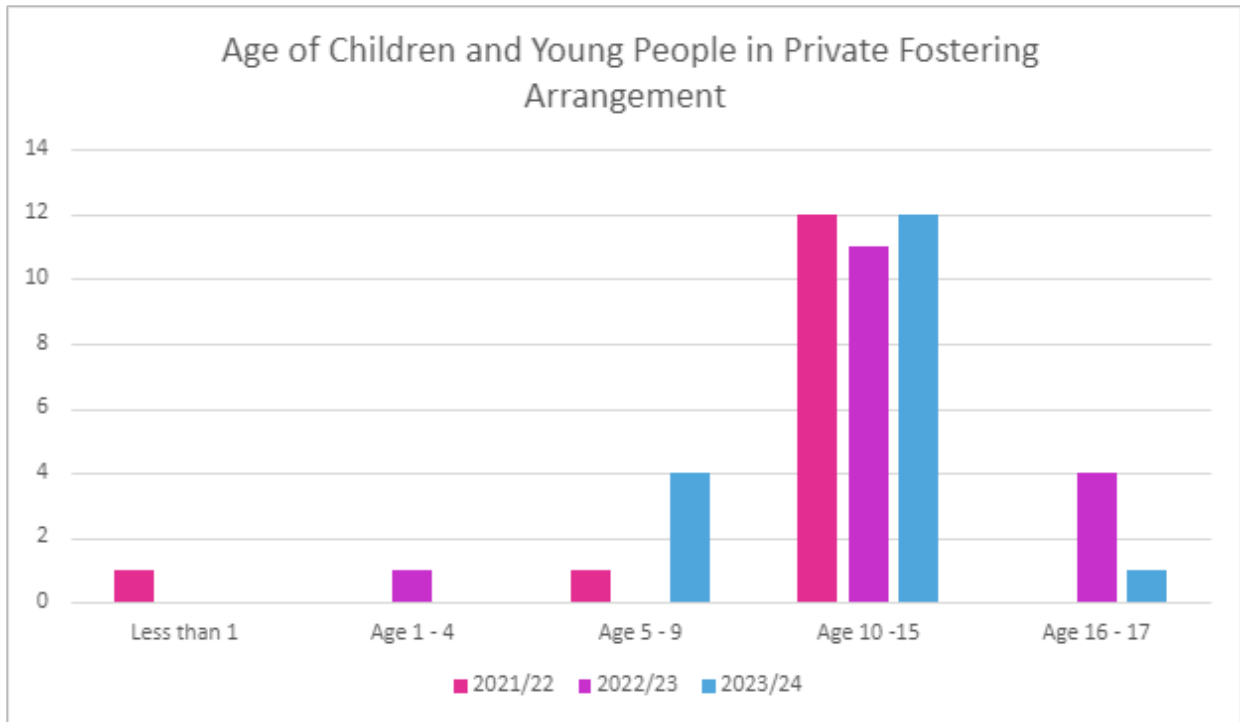
Table 1: Source of Private Fostering Enquiry


In comparison to 2022/23, there has been an increase (29%) in the number of private fostering enquiries. The largest source during 2023/24 came from Initial Response. The previous year the highest source was from the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. This would suggest a reduction of children seeking assistance from the UK. There has been an increase in referrals coming from carers which would indicate the promotion of awareness is working. However, there is a noted decrease from parents.

Table 2: Ethnicity of child in a private fostering arrangement


Of all the children currently in a private fostering arrangement in Warwickshire, 53 % are identified as white British, followed by 18% identified as white/eastern European. It is noted that we have an increase in the number of black British (African/Caribbean). This suggests a more diverse ethnic group across private fostering arrangement in 2023/2024.

In the year 2023/2024 there were 17 new private fostering notifications resulting in 10 children/young people living in private fostering homes, two of which were a sibling group of two. This is an increase of 3 private fostering arrangements.

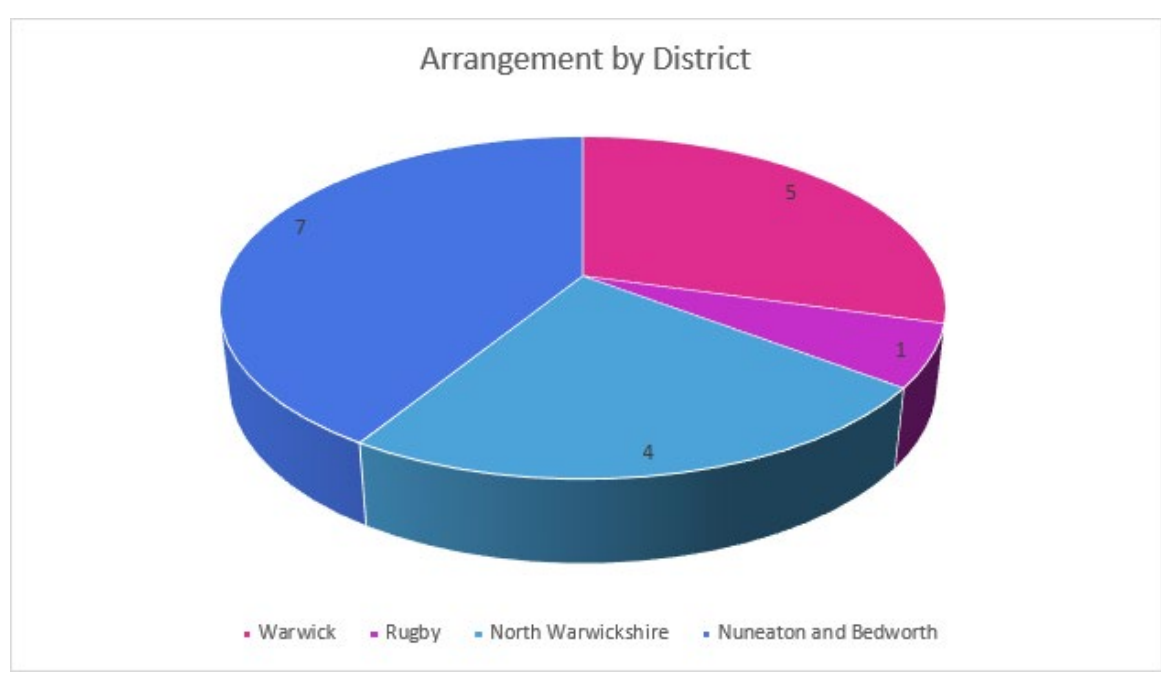
Table 3: Age of child

The majority of children (71%) assessed in private fostering arrangements were aged 10-15 years. This is consistent with the majority age range from previous years.

In line with supporting permanency for the children within this arrangement, of the 17 private fostering arrangements that were open during 2023/24, unfortunately none have progressed to a child arrangement order or SGO. The previous year there were no children reunited with parents, however this year 5 children have been returned to the care of parents.

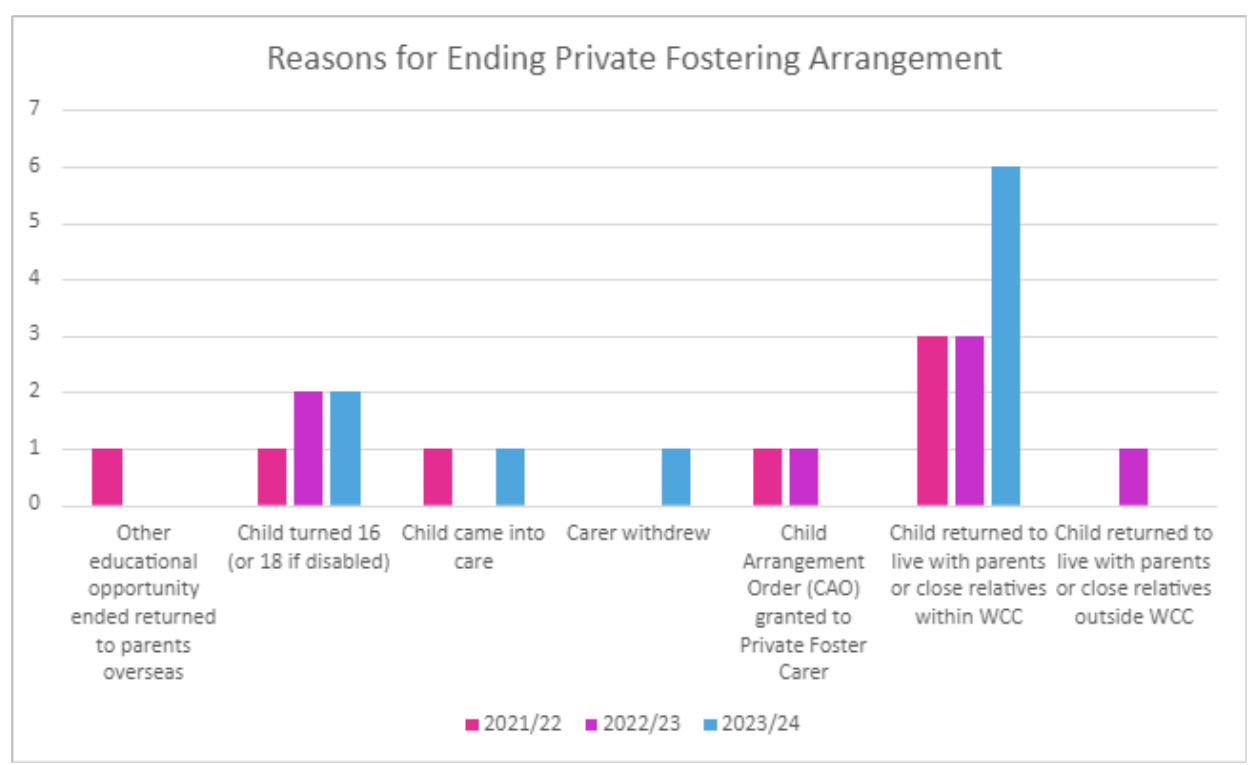


Table 4: New Private fostering assessments have been identified



There have been significant changes in private fostering arrangements in locations from last year. 2023-2024 shows there were 0 in Stratford, an increase of 2 in Warwick, a decrease of 3 in Kenilworth and an increase of 6 in Nuneaton and Bedworth. This data tells us we need to concentrate our efforts on the Stratford area in awareness raising.

Table 5: Reasons for ending of Private Fostering



In 2023/24, 10 private fostering arrangements were ended, this is 30% higher than last year. 7 children remain in ongoing arrangements.



Activity undertaken during 2023-2024

All private fostering carers that were recommended for approval were approved by the Fostering and Alternative Carers Support Team Service Manager.

Ongoing visiting requirements

Young people who are privately fostered under the Homes for Ukraine scheme are required to be visited within 24 hours from arrival to the UK, all other young people must be visited within 7 days of notification. 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.

National Minimum Standard 3

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

A monthly report is sent to the Private Fostering Team Manager from the business analysis unit which details both new and ended private fostering arrangements in Warwickshire that have been captured in the MOSAIC case record. This is checked for accuracy by the Team Manager. An Annual Report is completed from this information.

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.

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 carrying out regulated visits to provide consistency and offer additional support as needed. Family Support Workers can complete regulation 8 visits, when necessary.

Feedback is sought from foster carers, children, and parents when possible and at the point of annual review. There was no feedback in 2023-2024. Private Fostering Social Workers do however continue to encourage feedback from the private fostering carers, children, and parents during, and at the end of the arrangement.

All private foster carers, 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.

We continue to provide Private Foster Carers with advice and support to consider the securing of young people's permanence by way of a court order where appropriate. During 2023/24, it is positive to see that permanence has been achieved by return to



parents or close relative (for 5 children).

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.

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, teams, email or through consultation with the Homes for Ukraine Team.

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. We encourage private foster carers to share school reports with parents and vice versa when parents receive reports.

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.

There has been an increased focus on the 'voice of the child' within the private fostering arrangement, which is also incorporated into the assessment report. The Private Fostering Social Workers enquire directly with children and young people about their views and ensure that their private foster carers listen to their needs and wishes.

The child or young person is provided with information regarding advocacy. Within our service we have a contract with Barnardo's for up to 5 privately fostered children/young people to access the independent advocacy worker.

Leaflets/information packs are provided to children and young people as appropriate during the initial visit to help them better understand the arrangements and their rights within it. These include the contact details for their Private Fostering Social Worker and family support worker as well as other key information.

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, family time and education.

All children in the private fostering arrangement are seen on their own as part of the assessment and the ongoing regulation 8 visits.

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.

A monthly report is sent to the managers of all privately fostered children so that this can be monitored appropriately, and we have live data to draw trends from.

Each Private Fostering arrangement is assessed using the 'Private Fostering Assessment Report' and is quality assured by the Team Manager and recommendation is made. Private Fostering arrangements are approved if appropriate by the Fostering Service Manager on the electronic case file (Mosaic).

Private Fostering has been added onto the agenda at Through Care Panel to monitor existing or new cases, ensuring case progression.

Workers are provided with regular supervision and there is management oversight of young people and carers.

Ofsted

In November 2021, Private Fostering was part of the Children's Inspection and in January OFSTED awarded Warwickshire Children and Families a rating of GOOD. We are awaiting another inspection imminently.

Analysis

In 2023/2024, some of the key findings are;

Over 76% of children and young people in private fostering arrangements were aged 10+ years, this is an ongoing trend. We have had a 30% increase in privately fostered children. 53% were identified as white British, this shows a 7% increase in other ethnicities. The lack of private fostering arrangements in Stratford suggest we need to be proactive in awareness raising in this area.

Information gathered at enquiry and the initial visit suggests that many arrangements are due to family conflict and breakdown. The source of private fostering notifications primarily come from Initial Response and from Private Foster Carers themselves which suggests they are identified early on.


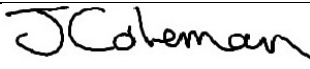
In line with supporting permanency for the children and young people within this arrangement, 29% returned to live with parents or close relatives within Warwickshire. No private foster carers felt in a position to be supported by Warwickshire to obtain a child arrangement order. One child was taken into care by Warwickshire for safeguarding reasons. The remaining carers, children and young people continued to receive support from the Private Fostering Team and in some cases by the wider children's services.



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 2024/2025

Action	Target Date	Responsibility
Further distribution of Private Fostering posters to be displayed in education, health and community resources.	November 2025	Team Manager and Family Support Workers
Introduce champions from the Fostering Team (5) to be responsible for specific areas in the new Families First Pathway. Therefore, the teams will have identified workers for advice and support regarding arrangements.	Ongoing from January 2025	Team Manager, Private Fostering Social Worker.
Private fostering arrangements to be included in the Warwickshire Children and Families case file audit programme (bespoke).	September 2024-December 2024	Team Manager/Quality and Impact Team.

Report Endorsed by:		Signature	Date
Nigel Minns	Executive Director for Children & Young People		8.10.2024
John Coleman	Director of Children and Families		01.10.2024