



Private Fostering

Annual Report

2024-2025





Introduction

Duties and functions in relation to Private Fostering are set out in The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005. Our duties are outlined in our Norfolk County Council, Statement of Purpose which is updated bi-annually and is on our website.

Standard 7 of the National Minimum Standards requires a written report to be completed each year, for consideration by Norfolk County Council's Director of Children's Services. This includes an evaluation of the outcomes of the Local Authority's work in relation to privately fostered children in Norfolk. This report provides that evaluation and includes an overview of the private fostering activity in Norfolk from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

The report sets out how Norfolk County Council Children's Services have complied with duties and functions regarding Private Fostering.

The report also outlines the activities which have been undertaken to promote awareness of the notification requirements regarding children who are living in Private Fostering Arrangements.

During the year April 2023 to March 2024, Norfolk County Council had 60 child referrals to the team for Private Fostering. This is the same number as the previous year. What also remains is that the largest proportion of the referrals were from children already known to Children's Services and not from overseas students coming to Norfolk to study English.

Background

Private Fostering refers to an arrangement involving children or young people, aged under 16 years (to 18 if they have a disability), living with a person who is not a close relative for 28 days or more.

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to assess the suitability of the arrangement and to ensure that the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded. The Duties and Functions of the Local Authority are based on the legislative framework of the 1989 Children Act, the Children Act 2004, and subsequent regulations - The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 and Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities Family and Friends Care 2011.

The aim is not to interfere with the arrangements that parents have made for their children unless there are safeguarding issues.



Describe Activity and Performance for 2023-2024 in relation to National Minimum Standards 1 to 7

National Minimum Standard 1

The Local Authority has a written statement which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be conducted.

Norfolk County Council has a Statement of Purpose on private fostering which is reviewed in April 2024 and is updated annually.

National Minimum Standard 2

The Local Authority promotes awareness of the notification requirements and ensures that those professionals who may meet privately fostered children understand their role in notification. Then responds effectively to notifications and deals with situations where an arrangement comes to their attention which has not been notified.

Information about private fostering is available in Schools, Colleges, Hospitals, Libraries, Norfolk Constabulary, and the Fire Service and through the Norfolk County Council website as well as the Norfolk Safeguarding Children Partnership website. The Norfolk Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP) is led by the three statutory partners - Children's Services, the Police, and Health - who work together with other local agencies including the voluntary sector to make sure that children are protected from harm and that their welfare is promoted.



Promotes Awareness

In Norfolk, suitable publicity material, leaflets and posters are available and have been circulated within the county. It is noteworthy that awareness raising has seen an increase in mainstream private fostering referrals over a two-year period.

The Norfolk Safeguarding Children Partnership must be satisfied that the welfare of privately fostered children in this area is safeguarded and promoted and that agencies are co-operating. To continue to raise the awareness of private fostering and the understanding of roles and responsibilities in relation to private fostering the service has a communication plan which is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure its effectiveness and it is widely distributed to members of the public and partner agencies.

A campaign of awareness takes place annually. In January 23, Norfolk County Council's Induction Training for all new employees now includes a session on private fostering and this takes place four times a year. There are also PF links included in our in-house, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking training.

In April 23, an email went to all Children's Services staff reminding them of PF statutory duties. We also contacted Directors of Primary Care to distribute information amongst GP surgeries in Norfolk and Waveney which included the Dental Safeguarding Manager, to be disseminated across Norfolk dental surgeries. We sent updated information to Designated Safeguarding Officers within Norfolk and Waveney Hospitals and Norwich City Football Club. A poster was put up in all Libraries and an information sheet was attached to the Norfolk Schools Homepage and Educate Norfolk which goes to all schools and Colleges in Norfolk. In June 23 Norfolk Constabulary also had training within MASH (Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub) and information renewed on their Intranet. We also had training sessions with front line teams and family support, early help teams and a slot in Social Work practice week.

In April 23, information was sent to Youth Justice and Hubs along with an update of internal procedures.

In April 24, a presentation of PF took place to NHS Safeguarding leads in Norfolk and a Webinar is due to be recorded on 26th June 24 to maintain a rolling programme.

Response to Notifications

In Norfolk, most notifications are received once the placement has been made and following a referral by the allocated team and a verbal consultation with the Private Fostering Managers. The current arrangements ensure that even if the formal computerised notifications are not timely, the response is, due to the consultation process. Children are seen within 7 working days. At the end of March 2024, the service received 60 notifications for the year. 7 of the notifications did not progress for varied reasons e.g. the young person immediately returned home. 43 of 53 were seen within the 7-working day timescale. 6 out of the 10 that missed the deadline were hosts who were away on holiday when the referrals were made during the Christmas and Easter period and whilst the child had not arrived from their country of origin.

Minimum Standard 3

Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare. The Local Authority effectively determines the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangement in accordance with the regulations.

Children's Services continue to ensure that privately fostered children's welfare is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted by qualified social work staff undertaking the assessments and supporting the suitable arrangements and private foster carers. The Team Managers (job share) review all private fostering assessments. Regulation 8 says visits must take place (as a minimum) every 6 weeks and this happens, or every 12 weeks after an Annual Review of the arrangements.

The regulations state that all assessments take place within 42 working days. We know that 34 of the 53 notifications were completed within this timescale and this leaves a significant shortfall. Our records show there were a number of hosts away on holiday during the assessment period deadlines. Many PF arrangements are complex arrangements within the community and carry an element of risk including PF carers who do not fully engage in the process of checks and references. Another required additional work with the Home Office around exploitation, trafficking concerns and involved our People from Abroad Team.

In Norfolk, all private foster carers are DBS checked and any young person in the home aged 16 or over. All are assessed in accordance with the National Minimum Standards.

Advice has been shared with the Language Schools that three months' notice is required for notice of a placement (if known), to allow for checks and references, and completion of the assessment but this needs to be linked to the availability of hosts.



When completing the Private Fostering Assessment, the child is seen alone as part of the assessment, and they are asked about their wishes and feelings. These are considered where possible. Also, as part of the assessment the social worker contacts the parents wherever possible to seek their view with regards to the arrangement and to explain what they need to do.

Specialist legal advice as needed is available to the team via Coram BAAF and has proved helpful in offering advice and guidance around more complex, private fostering arrangements.

In accordance with Section 69 Children Act 1989. Children's Services have the power to prohibit a person from privately fostering where that person is considered not suitable, where the accommodation is not suitable, where the child's welfare would be harmed, where someone has been convicted for offences against children or where the care of the child is unsatisfactory. There have been no incidents of prohibition or disqualification during the last year. Any concerns where carers are not suitable are fed back to the allocated teams and alternative arrangements are sought.

Monitoring visits are completed under private fostering regulations (Reg 8 visits). The protocol is that any concerns can be referred to front line services. Children continue to be safeguarded and their welfare promoted as we work closely with our frontline colleagues as children move in and out of Private Fostering eligibility. We also work with Safety at Home panels for the most complex PF cases.

National Minimum Standard 4

The Local Authority provides such advice and support to private foster carers and prospective private foster carers as appear to the Authority to be needed.

The Fostering Recruitment Team are responsible for the carer's assessments. Norfolk County Council's website includes local services that the carers may access. As part of the regular visits to the children the social workers will discuss the current situation with those carers who are looking after the children to ensure that any questions or concerns that they have are addressed.

We work closely with universal services and colleagues in family support s.17, and we have managed to tap into a variety of internal and community resources.

National Minimum Standard 5

The Local Authority provides such advice and information to the parents of children who are privately fostered within their area as appears to the authority to be needed.

The child's social worker provides parents with information regarding the legal and regulatory functions of the Local Authority during their work with those parents to ensure that they are aware of these and what they may expect from the Local Authority. This information relates to the names, address and contact details of the child's social worker and information on the complaint's procedure.

The Private Fostering Assessment often contains confidential information about the carer so only the sections labelled Analysis and Decision Making are shared with the parents and the child where appropriate. This section deems the arrangement suitable or not suitable and the reasons why.

Norfolk County Council through the audit and monitoring of the case work for children who are in private fostering arrangements, takes every opportunity and checks that plans for children to go home to birth families is considered, along with ongoing monitoring of the suitability of the private fostering arrangements.

National Minimum Standard 6

Children who are privately fostered can 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.

All children who are privately fostered in Norfolk have an allocated, qualified social worker who provides advice and support to the child. Private foster children who are privately fostered can access information and support when required. Privately fostered children are helped to take part in decisions about their lives.

National Minimum Standard 7

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.

Private fostering issues and cases are discussed in weekly Group Supervisions within the fostering recruitment team, consisting of the Team Managers and the team.

Private Fostering cases are on the Audit list for monthly audits by the Fostering Managers within the Norfolk Fostering Service. Any findings are fed back to the Manager for action and any themes are collated centrally. The activities of the Private Fostering Service are reported to the Director of Children's Services.

Private Fostering in Norfolk 2023-2024

From 01/04/2023 to 31/03/2024, there were sixty new referrals for Private Fostering.

Sixty-five percent of the referrals were children already known to Children's Services. All external Private Fostering Notifications are initially processed via Norfolk's Children's Advice and Duty Service (CADS) who then re-assign to the Fostering Recruitment Team.

Internal consultations with teams, demonstrated that they needed further support to understand what is a Private Fostering arrangement? Internal consultations also discussed where there might be a need for legal stability for a child, along with a main carer that could exercise Parental Responsibility on a day-to-day basis.

The Team Manager's role includes consultations with internal teams and external partners regarding private fostering. Consultations with internal teams have taken place over the year and some did not proceed to a Private Fostering Notification as, following consultation, they do not meet the private fostering criteria. Where possible we will work with the young people, their workers, and parents to try and return the children home. For 14 children this occurred.

Over the past 2 years we have seen an increasing number of children subject to private fostering arrangements that have endured for over a year and have become subject to an Annual Review of arrangements. We currently have fifteen children that could remain in arrangements until they are 16 years old, whom we regularly visit and monitor. Five of those have been stable in their arrangements for over a year.





Private Fostering Activity

Number of Private Fostering Notifications per month.

Month	No. of referrals
April 2023	3
May 2023	5
June 2023	7
July 2023	11
August 2023	2
September 2023	5
October 2023	2
November 2023	4
December 2023	6
January 2024	4
February 2024	7
March 2024	4

During the year, 12 of the 14 language students returned to their country of origin. The other 2 are going home in July 24. There were an additional number of ceases for the reasons listed below.

Currently 15 children remain in longer term private fostering arrangements in May 24. They are seen every 6 or 12 weeks and this may continue until they are 16 years.



Private Fostering arrangements that Ceased in the year.

Reasons Ceased	Number
Returned home	14
Arrangements not Suitable	8
Moved out of area	2
Left placement	4
Reached 16 years	4
Became looked after	2

Analysis of Referral data

From 01/04/2023 to 31/3/2024 there were a total of 60 Notifications of new Private Fostering arrangements. These are broken down into six categories and show the number raised in each category. We know that 53 progressed. The 7 that were ceased stopped because within days of the referral, 2 PF carers did not accept the arrangement and returned the child home, 3 teenagers returned home of their own accord, 1 moved out of the area and 1 became looked after.

There was one notification made for a disabled young person living in a private fostering arrangement at aged 16. Every effort is made to support the Carers and the young person to access additional services.

Source of Notifications	Number of arrangements
Children’s Family Help Teams	39
Language Schools	14
Norfolk Schools	1
Carer	1
Police	2
CADS	3

For the second year in Norfolk’s records, 65% of referrals were children already known to Children’s Services and not language school students.

Private Fostering Activity, Ethnicity of children

Out of the sixty notifications received between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024, 44 were described as White/British and 2 described as Black/Afro-Caribbean.

Fourteen were young people coming to the UK to study English. The young people were from Thailand, China, Japan, France, Germany, and Austria.

The Private Fostering Assessment considers children’s identity, religious, cultural and language needs and young people are supported to maintain contact with their families. This is usually by way of social media and messaging applications e.g., Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp and audio, visual telephone calls and via Xbox.

Interpreters are used when required. Contact is always made with a parent within the statutory 7 -day timescale and again interpreters are used where necessary, via Language line and more recently translating facilities on One Drive. All parents are contacted to include written translations where needed and are given a copy of the Analysis section of the Private Fostering Assessment stating if the arrangements are suitable or unsuitable.



Complaints and Representations

There have been no complaints or representations during this period. Norfolk County Council ensures that all parties have access to Norfolk County Council's Compliments and Complaints Leaflet or an electronic link, upon request.

Audits

From April 2023 to March 2024, the Fostering Team managers audit Private Fostering cases every month. Overall, the rating was Good.

There is sometimes still confusion regarding referral dates and notifications, but this does not affect the work that takes place. The team can act knowing it is on its way, as a consultation has already taken place.

Conclusion

There is a much higher number of private fostering notifications for children who are already known to our services. This has endured for the second year. Awareness raising is a rolling programme and our pro-active service has resulted in the number of private fostering arrangements made known to and supported by the service, increasing in recent years.

Most private fostering arrangements notified or referred to the service have been in relation to young people who have been estranged from their parents and consequently, are living away from home.

Ongoing consultations with colleagues have had an impact and diverted inappropriate referrals.

We have developed working links with the local language schools and there have been notifications from these schools and linked organisations within the last year.

Planning - Continued priorities and work ongoing for 2024 to 2025.

- Maintaining a mechanism for comparing Norfolk Private Fostering activity and processes with neighbouring Local Authorities to promote private fostering good practice for ourselves and for the Eastern region through the East Anglian Private Fostering Practice Network.
- Accountability to be addressed through increased quality assurance and monthly case auditing. Ongoing auditing of cases will drive up quality of practice.
- Awareness raising of Private Fostering needs to be ongoing within the wider service and partner organisations.
- More joined up work between Fostering and Adoption and Private Fostering to link to our main communications, promotions, and marketing outlets.
- Further work is required around improving timescales of responses and engagement of families.
- The British Association for Adoption and Fostering (CORAM BAAF) continues to facilitate a special interest group for Private Fostering. A Private Fostering Assessment worker attends this special interest group twice a year.



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