

Overview report for Corporate Parenting Board

Private Fostering

30 March 2022

Purpose of this report

The local authority is required to prepare an annual report in relation to children identified as being privately fostered and in relation to its activity in relation to the private fostering standards.

The annual report has been through its approval process with its governance sitting under the South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership on 21 June 2021. A copy of that report is appended for Board's oversight.

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview to the Corporate Parenting Board to explain what private fostering is, and to provide an overview of activity in relation to provide fostering so far in the 21/22 year.

What is private fostering?

A privately fostered child is a child under 16 years of age (or 18 if disabled) who is cared for by an adult who is not a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, step parent by marriage, sister or brother where the child is to be cared for in that person's home for 28 days or more and has been arranged without the involvement of the local authority.

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 the child. The private foster carer becomes responsible for providing the day to day care of the child in a way which will promote and safeguard the child's welfare. Overarching responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the privately fostered child remains with the parent or other person with parental responsibility.

Children who are privately fostered are **not** looked after children but are supported under Section 17 as Children in Need.

The context

as of 29/12/21 Middlesbrough support

- 1446 children through Child In Need
- 420 children who have a child protection plan
- 513 children who we look after
- **4 children privately fostered!**

The challenge

All local authorities across England have challenges in relation to the reporting of private fostering arrangements within their areas and it is therefore likely that there are arrangements in place which are not recognised within communities or by professionals and are not therefore reported.

We have therefore focused on awareness raising activity across the area, in conjunction with Redcar. This includes:

- Social media awareness – Twitter, LinkedIn, Middlesbrough Children Matters, etc. on a regular basis.
- New poster campaign – schools briefed via Designated Safeguarding Lead forum and through the Safeguarding Information Officer
- Private Fostering Steering Group members have been sending the message out within their own organisations – police and health

What we need to do next

- Support to reach out across Middlesbrough's diverse communities – how can Members help?

B Short

29.12.21

Appendix 1 – Annual Private Fostering report



Safeguarding & Children's Care

Annual report on Private Fostering

for 2020/21

Report Prepared by Ben Short

Head of Safeguarding and Care Planning

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Definition of a Private Fostering Arrangement

A privately fostered child is a child under 16 years of age (or 18 if disabled) who is cared for by an adult who is not a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, step parent by marriage, sister or brother where the child is to be cared for in that person's home for 28 days or more and has been arranged without the involvement of the local authority.

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Regulatory Context

The 2005 regulations are made under the Children Act 1989. The National Minimum Standards are issued by the Secretary of State under section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, which requires local authorities in their social services functions to act under the general guidance of the Secretary of State. As such the National Minimum Standards do not have the full force of statute, but should be complied with unless local circumstances indicate exceptional reasons which justify a variation.

The National Minimum Standards apply to all local authorities. They are minimum standards, rather than 'best possible' practice. The standards are grouped under a series of key topics:

- Statement on private fostering
- Notification
- Safeguarding and promote welfare
- Advice and support
- Monitoring compliance

Each standard, or group of standards, is preceded by a statement of the outcome to be achieved by the local authority. The standards are intended to be qualitative although they are also designed to be measureable. It is intended that the standards will be used by local authorities and by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) to focus on securing positive outcomes for privately fostered children and young people and reducing any risks to their welfare and safety. In inspecting against these standards, CSCI follows a proportionate inspection methodology, which enables consistent judgments to be made across the country.

Impact on Local Authorities

Whilst it is a private arrangement between the parent(s) and carer(s), and is one made without the involvement of the Local Authority, Middlesbrough Safeguarding & Children's Care has a legal duty to ensure that any child or young person is safe and well looked after and does not come to any harm in a private fostering arrangement.

The National Minimum Standards specify a minimum standard for local authority practice in the fulfilment of Children Act duties and functions in relation to private fostering. They, along with the measures in section 44 of the Children Act 2004 and the 2005 regulations, are intended to better focus local authorities' attention on private fostering, in part by requiring them to take a more proactive approach to identifying arrangements in their area.

Local Procedures

Middlesbrough Children's Services hold their local policy and procedures on TriX and can be located at https://www.proceduresonline.com/middlesbrough/cs/p_private_fost.html#

The public facing page for information about what do when a private fostering arrangement is identified, is at <https://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/children-families-and-safeguarding/fostering-and-adoption/private-fostering>

A joint private fostering awareness campaign is being progressed as requested by STSCP and the proposal will be submitted alongside this report.

Middlesbrough's Private Fostering Arrangement Overview

Data recorded in the PF1 Statutory Report on L Liquid Logic 20/21 is detailed in the table below.

	17 / 18	18/19	19/20	20/21
Number of new notifications	3	6	6	4
Number of new Private Fostering arrangements that started in the year	3	6	6	4
Number of arrangements ending in the year	2	2	7	3
Number of Private Fostering arrangements still in place at the end of march each year	2	6	5	6

The number of private fostering arrangements within Middlesbrough remains low and this remains a significant area for development. A joint STSCP awareness raising campaign will be presented alongside this paper, to raise both community and partner awareness of private fostering.

During the reporting year 20/21 4 new notifications for private fostering were received with an average age of 12 ½.

At the end of the year, 6 private fostering arrangements continued to be in place consisting of 5 biologically female and 1 male young person, as follows:

Child	ID	Start Date	Date of birth	Biologically assigned gender/ sex
1	476449	31/10/2019	1-10-05	F
2	492199	01/04/2019	6-4-06	M
3	596310	23/03/2021	16-10-08	F
4	598885	12/09/2017	5-11-05	F
5	676619	23/11/2020	3-2-14	F
6	834105	23/02/2021	19-11-05	F

476449

A private fostering arrangement for a 15 year old female child which has been in place for 18 months at the time of writing the report. This is a very settled placement which is regularly reviewed and where the young person is seen by her social worker regularly.

492199

15 year old male child who is living with friends of the family following have frequent fall outs at home. He is very settled where lives and has regular family time with his mother and siblings. The carer is considering a Child Arrangements Order.

596310

This is a 12 year old female child who is living with a cousin following the passing of her grandmother with whom she had lived under a Child Arrangements Order. The care received is described as excellent and responsive to her needs. This is a new arrangement made in March 2021.

598885

15 year old female child who is living with family friends and has done so for a very long time, reportedly since she was a toddler but formally under a private fostering arrangement in Middlesbrough for over 3 years. She turns 16 this year and it may have been possible to have secured a Child Arrangement Order before this point.

676619

A 7 year old female child who is living with close family friends following the death of her mother late last year. There are ongoing discussions about the potential support

to apply for a private law order for such a young child. The arrangement is supported by the child's father and through a positive assessment.

834105

15 year old child identifying as male lived with family friends. This follows a family discussion that he would live with family. The assessment is ongoing at this time but appears to be positive and will be further reviewed at gateway once the assessment is finalised and if approved by the Head of Service.

Persons disqualified from private fostering

No prohibitions have been issued during the 20/21 year.

National Minimum Standards Middlesbrough Compliance

The strategic lead for Private Fostering sits with the Head of Safeguarding Care planning.

This section of the report will consider the local authority's compliance with the minimum standards during the course of 20/21 and will provide a summary of the work that has been undertaken in relation to each minimum standard.

Standard 1 – Statement on Private Fostering

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.

The statement of purpose is available on the council internet page here <https://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/children-families-and-safeguarding/fostering-and-adoption/private-fostering>

The policy and procedure is up to date and sufficiently detailed to enable its application into social work responses. This is supported by the Children's Services procedures manual which remains relevant and linked above.

The low level reporting of Private Fostering in Middlesbrough is a challenge and further work across the partnership has been identified to ensure that the community and professionals understand private fostering and respond to it appropriately.

Standard 2 - Notification

The local authority;

- **promotes awareness of the notification requirements and ensures that those professionals who may come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in notification;**
- **responds effectively to notifications; and**
- **deals with situations where an arrangement comes to their attention, which has not been notified**

As detailed in standard 1, there have been a number of strategies to promote awareness of notification requirements. Significant work to raise awareness of private fostering in the community and across the partnership has been agreed, and a proposed plan will be submitted alongside this report. It has been identified that this will be a STSCP shared approach.

Information recorded within the PF1 annual report to the Government (available on LCS) identified that the Local Authority received 4 new notifications in 20/21

In all cases action was taken in accordance with requirements of the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 for carrying out visits.

Standard 3 – Safeguarding & Promoting Welfare

The local authority determines the suitability of all aspects of the Private Fostering arrangement in accordance with regulations

Upon receipt of a notification, whether in accordance with regulation 3, 5 or 6, for the purposes of discharging its duty under section 67(1) of the Act (welfare of privately fostered

children) the local authority must make arrangements to visit the proposed arrangement within 7 working days to:

- visit the premises where it is proposed that the child will be cared for and accommodated;
- visit and speak to the proposed private foster carer and to all members of the household;
- visit and speak with the child alone, unless the visiting worker considers it inappropriate;
- speak to and, if it is practicable to do so, visit every parent or person with parental responsibility for the child and
- establish such matters listed in Schedule 2/3 as appear to the officer to be relevant.

A written report, in the form of a Private Fostering Assessment, is then undertaken and presented to the responsible Head of service for consideration/ratification.

Within the first year of the private fostering arrangements visits must be made at intervals of not more than six weeks; and in any second or subsequent year, at intervals of not more than 12 weeks. The frequency of such visits will be monitored and reviewed via regular performance meetings.

Any private fostering arrangements that continue over a year in duration are reviewed within Middlesbrough's Gateway panel in order to ensure continued that the arrangement continues to meet the child or young persons needs.

All children identified as being privately fostered have an Independent Reviewing Officer to support the review of the arrangements.

Standard 4 – Advice & Support (also applies to 5 and 6)

The local authority provides advice and support to private foster carers and prospective private foster carers as appears to the authority is needed.

Private fostering arrangements will be reviewed on an annual basis via Head of Service, with the social worker completing an updated assessment for consideration.

All privately fostered children have an allocated social worker and are treated as Children in Need. The only difference being that they are visited in accordance with Private Fostering requirements.

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.

The child's social worker remains responsible for ensuring that the child's parent(s) are consulted and their views sought throughout the assessment process. Parent(s) are also provided with an informative leaflet, detailing private fostering arrangements and what this entails from a legislative and service delivery perspective.

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.

Within the first year of the private fostering arrangement the child's social worker must visit at intervals of not more than six weeks; and in any second or subsequent year, at intervals of not more than 12 weeks.

All children party to private fostering arrangements remain subject to a Child in Need Plan, which clearly identifies the needs of the child, how such needs are to be met and specifies services to be provided.

Information packs were designed in consultation with children and young people who were privately fostered, to incorporate information and advice they felt would assist others subject to the same arrangements and that would help them understand the support and services available to them.

Standard 7 – Monitoring Compliance with Duties and Functions in relation to Private Fostering

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.

Private Fostering arrangements within Middlesbrough in 20/21 are presented to the Head of service for ratification. An annual review of arrangements takes place through the local authority legal gateway who receive an updating report from the social worker who also presents the case to panel.

Visits to children in private fostering arrangements are monitored regularly through performance meetings to ensure that visits are completed within timescales; where a concern is highlighted this is immediately addressed with the responsible team manager and action taken if required.

Developments for 20/21

The action plan focuses on the following areas:-

- Ensure that there is a targeted awareness raising and training in private fostering and that this is regularly re-communicated to the workforce and the community. This is an action carried forward by agreement at STSCP. A joint campaign will take place between Middlesbrough and R&C
 - Through the Safeguarding Partnership – by Head of Service
 - By July 21

- Hold the annual review of private fostering arrangements
 - Head of Service, Team Manager and social work teams
 - This has taken place and a further review will take place in 6 months for newly made private fostering arrangements
 - October 21

- Hold the private fostering steering group in a ¼ basis going forward
 - Head of Service with representatives across the partnership

- Consider the introduction of a private fostering worker in the fostering service. Carried forward from previous year due to review of fostering service by Partners in Practice.
 - Head of Future for Families
 - By end of financial year.

April 21