



Safeguarding & Children's Care

Annual report on Private Fostering
for 2024/25

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October 2025

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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.

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.

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 23/24 is detailed in the table below.

	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25
Number of new notifications	4	3	3	3	8
Number of new Private Fostering arrangements that started in the year	4	3	3	3	7
Number of arrangements ending in the year	3	7	4	4	3
Number of Private Fostering arrangements still in place at the end of march each year	6	1	1	0	4

The number of private fostering arrangements within Middlesbrough fairly low, though an increase is noted, potentially due to the work undertaken to raise awareness.t. We will continue with awareness raising across the partnership in the coming year in order to assure ourselves we are notified of as many arrangements as possible and the arrangements are appropriately assessed, and supported.

During the reporting year 24/25 8 notifications for private fostering were received with an average age of.

At the end of the year, 4 private fostering arrangements continued to be in place. Below is an overview of the children's circumstances to give the board insight into how Private Fostering can support certain circumstances/

A male aged 13 at the time he entered a private fostering arrangement (now 14). K had lived with his father for a significant period safeguarding concerns necessitated a return to his mothers care. K struggled to adjust to living there with his siblings as he had not lived with them for some time, He went to stay with his cousin and her partner with his mother's

agreement. This became a private fostering agreement, he stayed there for around about six months, supported as a CIN before returning to live with his mother.

A male aged 10 remains subject to a private fostering arrangement. He has lived with his father since 2020 after his father was concerned about D's mothers lifestyle and substance use. D's father is in the British Army and the fostering arrangement came into effect when his father was on active service abroad. D is cared for by his maternal great aunt under a private fostering arrangement. When D's father returned it has evolved that D spends his time between his fathers and his Aunts, mostly as at his Aunts he is closer to school and his father is working full time. This arrangement works well and has meant D remains in the care of his birth family.

A female, was 13 when she entered in a private fostering arrangement (now 14). K has primarily lived with her mother, however this relationship has been difficult and K has not always felt safe. Over time she has more and more gravitated to her mother's friends home. She has built a close relationship with the family and the adults worked together and agreed that they should formalise the arrangement under private fostering, though K saw her mother and siblings every day. This arrangement ended and K returned to her mothers care after four months.

A female is 7 years old. A lived with her grandmother under an SGO, however over time expressed she wanted to live with her mat half sibling, who lives with her father, A's step father and his partner. This arrangement continues and is working well.

Persons disqualified from private fostering

No prohibitions have been issued during the 24/25 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 23/24 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 8 notification in the year 24/25

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 24/25 are presented to the Head of service for ratification. An annual review of arrangements takes place through the review process.

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 24/25

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 25
- 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 25
- Align Private Fostering Offer into overall Kinship Care service, to allow more tailored support for carers.

October 2025