

*Private Fostering
Children's Overview and Scrutiny
Committee
November 2024*



Walsall Council

PROUD OF OUR PAST OUR PRESENT AND FOR OUR FUTURE

Purpose



- To support proposals for the ongoing implementation and development of Private Fostering both internally and across the wider partnership.
- To consider how Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee can support in raising awareness of Private Fostering



What is Private Fostering?

7 Minute Briefing: Private Fostering




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What to do

- If you know or suspect a child or young person is being Privately Fostered, you should notify the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. You should inform the parent and/or carer about Private Fostering and inform that a referral is being made. Phone: 0300 555 2866 ([option 2](#))

For more information please scan the QR code.



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Notification

- Parents and carers have a legal requirement to notify the Local Authority of a proposed Private Fostering Arrangement 6 weeks prior to the arrangement being in place, or, if in an emergency, as soon as possible.
- Parents are responsible for providing the carer with all the information needed to care for the child/young person.

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Examples of children who may become privately fostered

- A child or young person sent (for educational or medical purposes) from another country to live with someone who is not their parent, carer with parental responsibility or close relative whilst their parents remain abroad.
- A child or young person living with a family friend as a result of their parents breaking up, family fall out or a parent in hospital or in custody. holistic perspective of what is happening.

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Legal requirement

- Private Fostering is only legitimate if the parent has made the arrangement with the carer and the Local Authority is notified and in agreement. By law, parents/carers must notify the Local Authority of any Private Fostering Arrangement.
- The Local Authority will check that the child/ young person are kept safe, well cared for (in appropriate accommodation) and happy.

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What is Private Fostering?

- Private Fostering is a term used when someone who is not a parent, carer with parental responsibility or a 'close relative' (a close relative includes grandparent, aunt, uncle, sibling or 1st cousin) is looking after a child or young person under 16 (18 if the young person has a disability) for 28 days or more in their own home.
- Private Fostering also covers children or young people who stay at a residential school for more than two weeks during the school holidays.

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Background

- Since the Children Act 2004, it has been a legal responsibility for a Local Authority to know about children and young people who are Privately Fostered. Children's Services have a duty to assess and monitor arrangements to make sure the child or young person is safe, and their needs are being met.

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Why does it matter?

- Private foster carers carry out a vital role in the welfare of children, and they are always offered support and guidance to carry out their roles – but it can only be offered if the arrangement is known. Many private fostering arrangements can remain hidden, which could put children at risk of abuse. For example, Victoria Climbié was a child brought into the UK by a distant relative, who went on to abuse and neglect Victoria and cause her death - this was an unreported Private Fostering Arrangement.

To find out more, read the Inquiry by Lord

Private Fostering

'A private fostering arrangement is essentially one that is made privately (that is to say without the involvement of the Authority) for the care of a child or young person 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 The period for which the child is cared for or accommodated by the private foster carer should be continuous, but that continuity is not broken by the occasional short breaks'

(National Minimum Standard for Private Fostering DFES 2005)

Many children who are privately fostered are not known to services, agencies or people working with them.

- Privately fostered children are much more vulnerable because of their 'invisibility' and because services do not always record and report information about them.
- Under new regulations, identifying, recording and reporting children who may be privately fostered is everyone's responsibility – the responsibility falls on all those people or agencies who come into contact with children and young people in their work.

Privately fostered children are often made more vulnerable by their living circumstances and by their status not being identified and reported to the Local Authority.

It is estimated that about 10,000 children in England are privately fostered.

It is likely that more than 50% of private foster arrangements are not notified to Local Authorities.

We currently have **8** children that are privately fostered in Walsall.

Current examples of PF arrangements in Walsall :

- Two children have experienced a family breakdown and living with friends of the family
- Parents have poor health and are staying with family friends
- Parent deceased, a will was completed which consented for the child to live with their cousin
- Moved to live in the UK with elder boyfriend and his parents

[#privatefostering](#) [#awarness](#)

Throughout the year of 2024 the following activities were undertaken...

PF Awareness and Resources

A PF awareness raising video is available and A PF 7 minute briefing PF leaflets for children, parents and carers are available on Walsall Partnerships website.

PF leaflets and posters are visible in all family hubs across the locality and have been distributed to a number of agencies that are linked to the local community and through HAF.

PF leaflets and posters are available on the website.

Training and Awareness

The partnership officers continue to raise awareness with the early help partnership throughout their menu of training opportunities including; ACTION training where we raise awareness of Early help, Supporting families lead professional training – for professionals who want to understand how to support families at level 3 early help and Outcome star training.

Private fostering has been included in all DSL/refresher training, PF leaflet has been emailed out to all educational establishments and across Early Years.

Private fostering is included within any induction programme for a new starter in Children Services.

A private fostering scenario is included within the Right Help Right Time multiagency training.

Communication and Visibility

1. PF has been added as an agenda item to Early Help, Health, Education Children Services briefings throughout the year.
2. PF has also been added to Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Spotlight newsletter on two occasions throughout the year.
3. We have celebrated PF awareness day on 8th November 2023 by ensuring that we have visibility on the internal Walsall website and are due to celebrate PF awareness day on 6th November 2024.
4. On 15th February 2024 Councillor Stacie Elson, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services Walsall Council released a press release- Are you caring for somebody else's child? Walsall Council is here to help | Walsall Council.
5. Attendance at GP training event.

Private fostering is defined as:

"When a child or young person under 16 years old (or 18 if they have a disability) is cared for by someone who is not a parent, close relative, guardian or person with parental responsibility for 28 days or more without the consent involvement of Walsall Council."

An arrangement is likely to be private fostering if the child lives with:

- Cousin
- Friend or neighbour
- Host family
- Great aunt/uncle
- Great grandparent
- A divorced step-parent
- Independent boarding school (if the child remains for more than two weeks during the holidays)
- Cultural use of aunt or uncle who are no blood relation

Close relatives are defined as:

- Brothers and sisters
- Aunts and uncles
- Grandparents
- Step-parents

It is not private fostering if the arrangement has been made by Walsall Council or if the person looking after the child is an approved foster carer. Some of the common reasons why private fostering takes place are:

- A child's parents are overseas
- A child lives with their best friend's parents because they have had an argument with their own parents
- A young person is living with the family of their boyfriend/girlfriend
- Children are on a cultural exchange which last for more than 27 days
- A family friend takes on a child as the parents are experiencing a difficult period in their life
- Children are in the country for health or education opportunities
- Children are at boarding school
- Refugee children or unaccompanied asylum seekers



Main Impacts

There have been 16 children that have been living in a private fostering arrangement. When compared to 2021 we only had 6- an increase of 166%.

There has been a significant increase in the number of private fostering contacts and arrangements over the past three years, indicating improved awareness and reporting.

Revised protocols ensure timely assessments by locality and fostering social workers, with ongoing monitoring via the locality Group manager. Private fostering arrangements are tracked and audited regularly to ensure compliance with regulations and to identify areas for improvement.

Throughout the year various initiatives, including leaflets, videos, training sessions, and newsletters, have been implemented to raise awareness about private fostering among professionals and the public.

Ongoing areas of improvement

- **Future Actions:** Plans include ongoing targeted communications, regular training, and collaboration with various sectors to continue raising awareness and improving the identification of private fostering arrangements.
- Further press release to be undertaken in time for Private Fostering Awareness day on 6th November 2024.

#privatefostering #awarness