

*Private Fostering
Children's Overview and Scrutiny
Committee
January 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 making Private Fostering

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 **5** children that are privately fostered in Walsall.

Current examples of PF arrangements in Walsall :

- Living with great Aunt as father has criminal convictions that preclude him from caring for children
- Two children have experienced a family breakdown and living with friends of the family
- Young person is aged 15 is an expectant father with his 15 year old girlfriend and wants to live with the same household
- One child's mother is experiencing mental health difficulties and the child is now living with previous ex-partner to mother.

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- PF leaflets for children, parents and carers have been redesigned and are available on Walsall Partnerships website
- A PF awareness raising video is available on the partnership website
- A PF 7 minute briefing has been developed and is available on the partnership website
- Three safeguarding partnership implementation meetings have occurred with a focus on private fostering awareness.
- Private fostering has been included in all DSL/refresher training, PF leaflet has been emailed out to all educational establishments and across Early Years.
- Housing have confirmed the PF leaflets will be shared across all teams and added as an agenda item for team meetings.
- Private fostering is included within any induction programme for any new starter in Children Services
- A private fostering scenario is included within the Right Help Right Time multiagency training.
- PF has been added as an agenda item to Early Help, Health, Education Children Services briefings throughout the year.
- PF has also been added to Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Spotlight newsletter on 3 occasions throughout the year.
- We have celebrated PF awareness day on 8th November by ensuring that we have visibility on the internal Walsall intranet
- PF discussed in locality training events.

Main Impacts

- Between October 2022 and October 2023 there has been eighteen children that have been identified as living in a private fostering arrangement. This is an increase of 200% compared to previous reporting year.
- In total we received 14 MASH contacts whereby children were identified as potentially living within a private fostering arrangement, an increase of 75%.
- This data shows an increase in the number of referrals and children in private fostering arrangements when comparing to last year's annual report whereby we received only 8 referrals and had six children who were privately fostered. We know that referrals rates are nationally low, but this improvement indicates that private fostering awareness is improving recognition of private fostering across the local authority, partners and the wider public.
- Positively, audit activity has evidenced there is a recognition of what constitutes a private fostering arrangement when referred into MASH.
- There is evidence of robust safeguarding activity taking place. This has been evidenced across the year with 4 children becoming children in care and two children's permanency supported with their private foster carer obtaining a Child Arrangement Order.
- There is evidence that assessments are being completed jointly with the Fostering Service. DBS, medicals and references are being obtained timelier, although this could be further improved.
- Evidence that the private fostering toolkit is having a positive impact.
- There is evidence of assessments paying attention to the cultural needs of families and identification of community resources that can support these needs



Ongoing areas of improvement

Targeted communications through professionals:

- Quarterly safeguarding partnership implementation group meetings
- Twice annually re-distribute electronic version of PF toolkit for professionals who are in regular contact with children and families including details of who to contact to report a case of private fostering.
- Twice yearly, include information on Walsall Safeguarding Partnership website/newsletter reminding practitioners of their responsibility to report cases of private fostering arrangements to the MASH.
- Private fostering has been incorporated into the mandatory RHRT safeguarding training for all social workers, early help practitioners and staff through the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership
- Printed and electronic information to continue to be distributed through existing channels for professionals including GP safeguarding bulletins, CCG intranet/website and communications group, school safeguarding contacts, Head teacher forums, NHS Trust e-bulletin, School Health Nurse staff briefings, Schools e-bulletin, Voluntary Sector Council, Religious groups, Refugee and Migrant Centre, Police intranet/e-bulletins, West Midlands Fire Service.

- Each Locality has a Time to Talk Partnership event which occurs bimonthly, PF awareness to be included within this and revisited twice per year.
- Each Locality also has a Lead Early Help Participation Officer who can consistently raise the awareness of PF when meeting with the locality professionals.

Schools & childcare settings:

- PF to be discussed in DSL workshops and Head Teacher forums.
- Work with the School Admissions Team to identify where the adult making the application was not the parent or close family member.
- Revisit information about private fostering on schools e-bulletin with a reminder to school staff that they need to let us know of any private fostering arrangements they become aware of.

Online and social media:

- Undertake a Facebook and Twitter advertising campaign to raise awareness of private fostering and the need to make referrals to MASH.
- Private fostering continues to be a priority for 2023 and is an identified area for improvement following the last OFSTED inspection in October 2021. Arrangements are in place to evidence how we will continue to raise awareness. It is recognised that understanding private fostering is complex and therefore a collaborative approach is essential in developing relationships across each sector.