



CSCCP

CROYDON SAFEGUARDING
CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP

Private Fostering Annual Report

2023-24

July 2024

1. Introduction

- 1.1.** This annual report sets out the work undertaken by the London Borough of Croydon in respect of its duties and responsibilities towards children living in Private Fostering arrangements as set out in the Children Act 1989 (Schedule 8), the children Act 2004 and National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005.
- 1.2.** This report is being provided under the requirements laid down in the National Minimum standards for Private Fostering which came into force in July 2005.
 - Section 7.9 - The Local Authority provides that a report is written each year for consideration by the Director of Children Services which includes an evaluation of the outcome of its work in relation to privately fostered children within its area.
 - Section 7.10 - The Local Authority reports annually to the chair of the Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership about how the Local Authority cooperates with other agencies in this connection.
- 1.3.** This report gives an overview of the activities in relation to privately fostered children in the London Borough of Croydon from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024. It also outlines the activities which have been undertaken to promote local awareness of the notification requirement from other agencies of children who are living in a Private Fostering arrangement.

2. Definition of a Private Fostering Arrangement

- 2.1.** A definition of a Private Fostering arrangement is one that is made privately for the care of a child under the age of 16 (or 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. Private foster carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt. 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 a child. However, a person who is a close relative under the Children Act 1989, i.e. a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, and aunt or step-parent by marriage will not be a private foster carer. The period for which the child is cared for and accommodated by the private foster carers should be continuous, but if the child receives an occasional short break this is not considered to break that continuity.
- 2.2.** In a Private Fostering arrangement, the parent retains parental responsibility for the child or young person.
- 2.3.** Private Fostering arrangements are diverse; examples of arrangements of Private Fostering include:
- Children and young people sent from abroad to stay with another family, usually to improve their education opportunity;
 - Teenagers who are staying in short-term arrangements with friends or other non- relatives;
 - Language students living with host families;
 - A parent who has chronic health problems who arranges for her child live with a friend for a period over 28 days;
 - A parent working away for more than 28 days at a time, who arranges for his children to live with an extended member of the family, even if they return to live with the parent for the period they return.
- 2.4.** Local Authorities do not formally approve or register private foster carers. However, it is the duty of the local Authority to satisfy themselves that the welfare of the children who are, or will be, privately fostered in the area is being, or will be, satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted. *Children (private arrangement for fostering) Regulations 2005*

3. Governance and Accountability

- 3.1.** The lead for Private Fostering is based within Specialist Services and specifically based within the Fostering Team.
- 3.2.** The Private Fostering statement of purpose has been updated in June 2024 and a social worker dedicated to Private Fostering was appointed in November 2021.

- 3.3. All children who are privately fostered will have a support plan. These plans will be reviewed every 3 months with the network of professionals working with the privately fostered child.
- 3.4. The Private Fostering (Regulating and Monitoring) Panel has continued to meet on an 8-weekly basis (minimum) to consider any new arrangements and review any existing Private Fostering arrangements. This panel also provides further quality assurance to Private Fostering assessments and CiN plans if appropriate. The Panel is currently chaired by the Service Manager for Fostering. In each case, assessments are reviewed, and recommendations made in relation to areas of ongoing support as necessary.

4. National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering (2005):

- 4.1. **National Minimum Standard 1.** 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.
- 4.2. Private Fostering arrangements within Croydon are set out within the Statement of Purpose which is published on the council's online procedures. This document is made available on the [London Borough of Croydon's Website](#)
- 4.3. The Private Fostering Arrangement Assessment and its associated support plan is quality assured by the Team Manager of the Post Order Support Team.
- 4.4. **National Minimum Standard 2.** 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 arrangements comes to their attention, which has not been notified.
- 4.5. The Children (Private Arrangement for Fostering) Regulations 2005 sets out that anyone involved in making a Private Fostering arrangement (parent, carer or third party) must notify the appropriate local authority of this arrangement. Parents and carers often fail to notify because they are unaware of the requirements and believe that it is a private family arrangement which does not concern anyone else. This year we have had a number of notifications directly from Private Foster carers; they care for children who are international students and are familiar with the notification requirement.
- 4.6. During 2023 – 2024 we used a variety of internal and external avenues to raise awareness regarding Private Fostering that has built upon previous years of promoting awareness. This included:
 - Management of Private Fostering was moved to post order support team,
 - Creation of a dedicated web page for Private fostering,
 - Developing and delivering Private Fostering workshops for Croydon CSC staff

- Developing and delivering Private Fostering workshops for Croydon Education staff
- Publication of the Private Fostering Statement of Purpose

4.7. National Minimum Standard 3. The Local Authority determines effectively the suitability of all aspects of the Private Fostering arrangements in accordance with regulations.

4.8. An assessment of the Private Fostering arrangement is undertaken by the Private Fostering social worker, which is subsequently quality assured by the team manager in Fostering.

4.9. All of the Private Fostering arrangements are assessed using the Assessment Framework and therefore include the expectations within the national minimum standards:

- The ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child about the proposed/ actual Private Fostering arrangement;
- The child's physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural development is appropriate and satisfactory;
- The child's needs arising from his/her religious persuasion; racial origin and cultural and linguistic background are being met;
- The child's education needs;
- The standard of care provided for each privately fostered child;
- The physical and emotional health of children;
- Disclosure and Barring Service checks (DBS), Health and local authority checks are completed on all carers; in addition, any member of the household over the age of 18 years old is subjected to a DBS and Local Authority check.

4.10. The assessment includes the carer's understanding and their motivation in providing support for the child, the purpose and the duration of the arrangement. Assessing suitability includes undertaking risk assessments where potential risks have been identified. Support with encouraging parents and carers to complete a Private Fostering arrangement agreement is also provided. Financial arrangements between the carers and parents and also considered during this assessment. Contact is also included as a responsibility of the private foster carer.

4.11. National Minimum standards 4-5-6 The Local Authority provides such advice and support to private foster carers and prospective private foster carers, as appears to the authority to be needed.

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.

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.

- 4.12. Private foster carers are provided with information and advice regarding children's developmental needs. The Private Fostering Social Worker assists and advises all private foster carers with general parenting skills and provides advice/support on an ongoing basis.
- 4.13. In the vast majority of cases, the parents with parental responsibility are seen by the child's social workers or if they are not within the UK they are spoken to within the assessment to establish the agreed arrangement. When arrangements involve children from overseas, discussions are generally held over the telephone, or if possible, via MS Teams.
- 4.14. Experience has shown that children in Private Fostering arrangements do generally understand the arrangements and their rights within it. Children and Young People's views and wishes are incorporated into the assessment report and direct work with them is a part of the ongoing assessment. Children are also seen at school on occasion to provide a different context to the Private Fostering environment to discuss their needs, wishes and feelings.
- 4.15. A new leaflet has been designed and is provided to children who are subject to Private Fostering arrangements. This is now given to all children who are privately fostered, and the Private Fostering Social Worker will advocate on their behalf if necessary on issues such as legal status, placement, contact and education.
- 4.16. **National Minimum Standard 7: 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.**
- 4.17. Each Private Fostering arrangement is assessed using the Private Fostering Arrangement Assessment Record and this is signed off by a team manager or service manager.
- 4.18. The number of Private Fostering cases and compliance with statutory functions is monitored through the 8 weekly Private Fostering panels (Regulating and Monitoring Meetings). In addition to compliance with Private Fostering regulations i.e. initial visit within a week of notification, the meetings ensure that all children are progressing well and thriving in relation to their expected outcomes.
- 4.19. Annual reviews and reviews undertaken where there is a change in circumstances are completed by the Private Fostering social worker. They are quality assured and presented at the Private Fostering panel. Private Fostering arrangements are agreed by the panel and signed off by the Fostering Service Manager. This is followed up in writing by a letter confirming the arrangement.

5. Summary of Progress since April 2023

Recommendations of Ofsted 2020:

- 5.1. Since Ofsted's visit to Croydon there have been many changes with senior leadership, and the council is experiencing significant financial challenges. Nevertheless, the recommendations of Ofsted have been considered and actions have been addressed.

"Senior managers have developed effective processes for the oversight of children living in Private Fostering arrangements. The recently developed statement of purpose provides clear pathways and guidance, and a new Private Fostering panel has improved management oversight, with a focus on children's lived experiences. Managers are taking action to improve record-keeping, and a Private Fostering worker has recently been appointed to ensure more timely visits to children. However, developments still need to be embedded to ensure that assessments record the child's wishes and feelings regarding the arrangements, and include safety planning and risk assessments" (Paragraph 13)

What Ofsted highlighted needs to improve?

"The quality of written plans for children in need, children in care and care leavers"

- 5.2. The Private Fostering panel has continued to operate, initially being chaired by the Head of Children Looked After (delegated to the Service Manager for Fostering). This continues to take place a minimum of every 8 weeks and reviews all Private Fostering arrangements within the council.
- 5.3. There are Private Fostering leaflets that have been produced specifically for children who are privately fostered and for those adults who privately foster children within Croydon. These are also available on the Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership website.
- 5.4. All children who are privately fostered are reviewed at the Private Fostering panel every eight weeks.

Recommendations from 22/23 report:

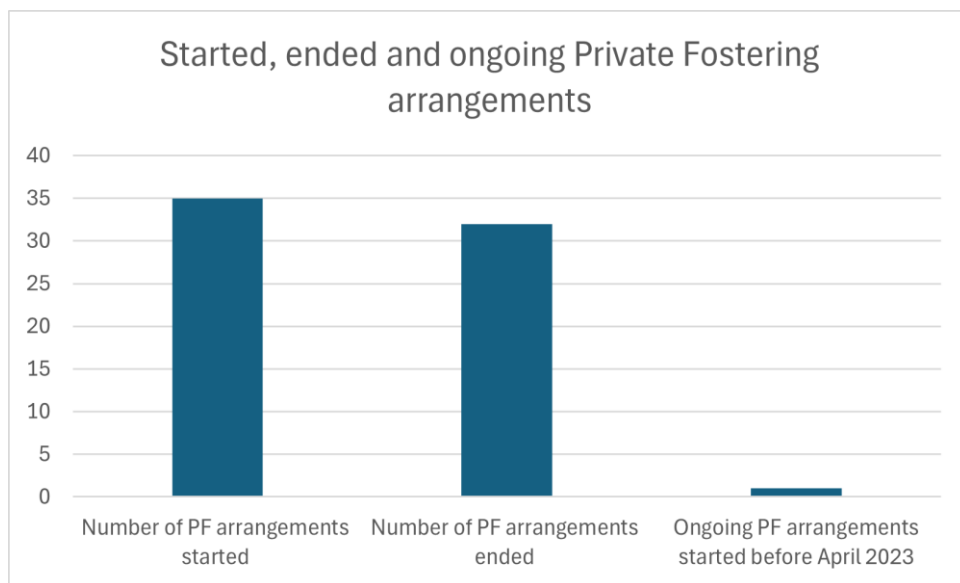
- 5.5. This report highlights the ongoing concern that the number of PF arrangements does not reflect the size and demographics of the borough. The urgency continues for all agencies to robustly ensure that their staff are aware of the Private Fostering Regulations and their responsibility to notifying the local authority of any such arrangements.
- 5.6. Over the next 12 months Social Care is to focus on all children who are privately fostered, ensuring that the initial visit is completed within 7 days of the local authority being notified of the arrangement.
- 5.7. Systems and procedures within children's social care to be strengthened, including addressing capacity issues across the system to ensure that notifications are progressed in a timely way.

- 5.8. The Regulation and Monitoring Panel Meetings to be more robustly represented by the multi-agency network.
- 5.9. Review the work around raising awareness (social care), to ascertain impact and what improvements need to be made.
- 5.10. All agencies to act on their responsibility to raise awareness of Private Fostering and ensure that they notify the local authority of these arrangements. The leaflets can be shared via the CSCP website.

6. Performance Data:

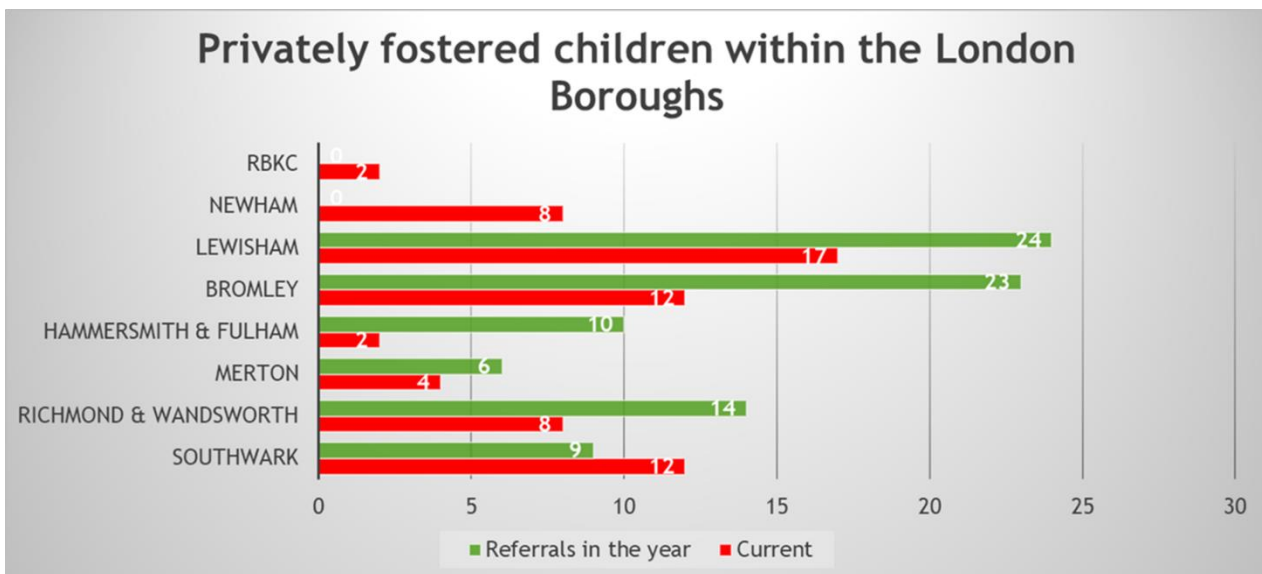
Number of Notifications from April 2023 – March 2024

- 6.1. The number of notifications to the local authority over the last 5 years have continued to be erratic. The number of notifications within year 2023/2024 has decrease slightly on the previous year from 37 to 35 . Private Fostering assessments can only be completed when the local authority has been notified of such arrangements.
- 6.2. In year 2022/2023, 33 notifications were of international students. In year 2023/2024 this number decreased to 30. Of this number, 80% (24) were from Spain.

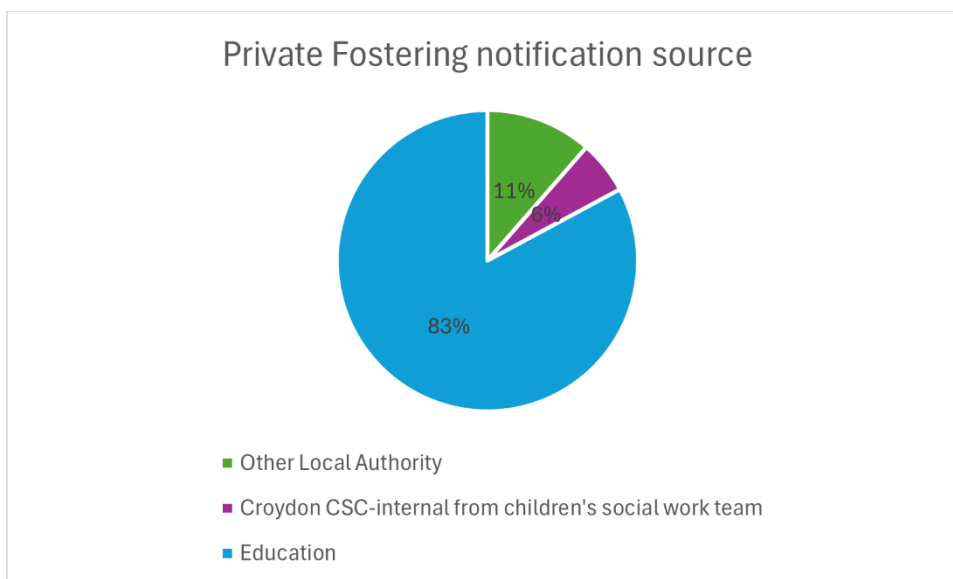


- 6.3. As the above chart illustrates, there have been 35 new Private Fostering arrangements started, 32 arrangements ended and one ongoing Private Fostering arrangement which started before April 2023.
- 6.4. Like previous years in Croydon the majority of the Private fostering notifications received continue to be in relation to international students. However, we have seen a slight increase in the number of “mainstream” Private Fostering notifications in relation to children that reside in the UK from 10% (4) in 2022/2023 to 17% (6) in the in the year 2023/2024.

- 6.5. Through information received from Southwark Local Authority who undertook a benchmarking exercise with neighbouring local authorities in London, Croydon's notifications and private fostering has continued to be one of the highest in London.
- 6.6. However, there are several reasons as to why this maybe, such as; the demographic of our families and/or the proximity to Croydon LA being closely located to private/independent schools for the international students. Nevertheless, given the size of the borough we would expect to have received a higher number of notifications, which highlights the need for the Local Authority to continue to focus on promoting awareness of private fostering.

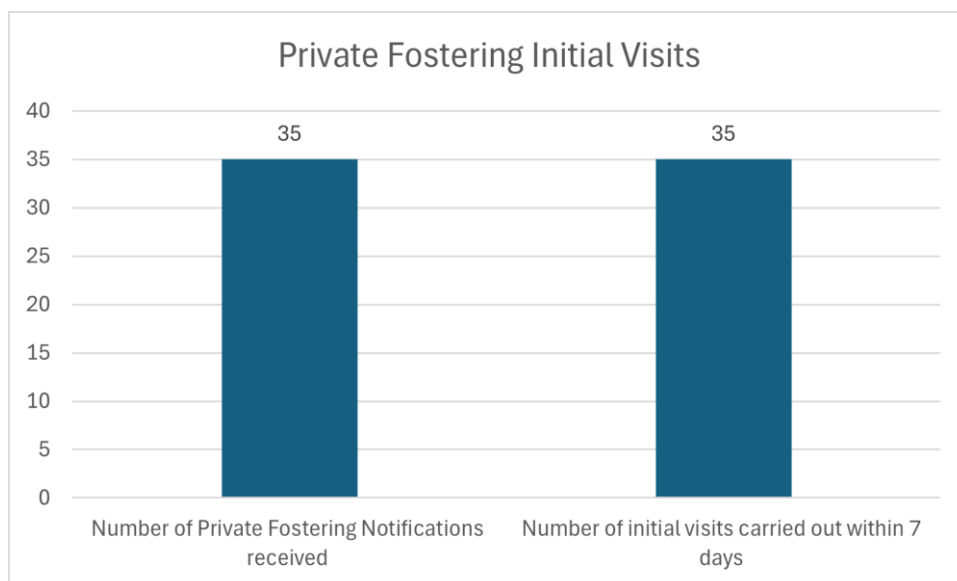


Referral Sources of the 35 Notifications that were received in 2023/ 2024

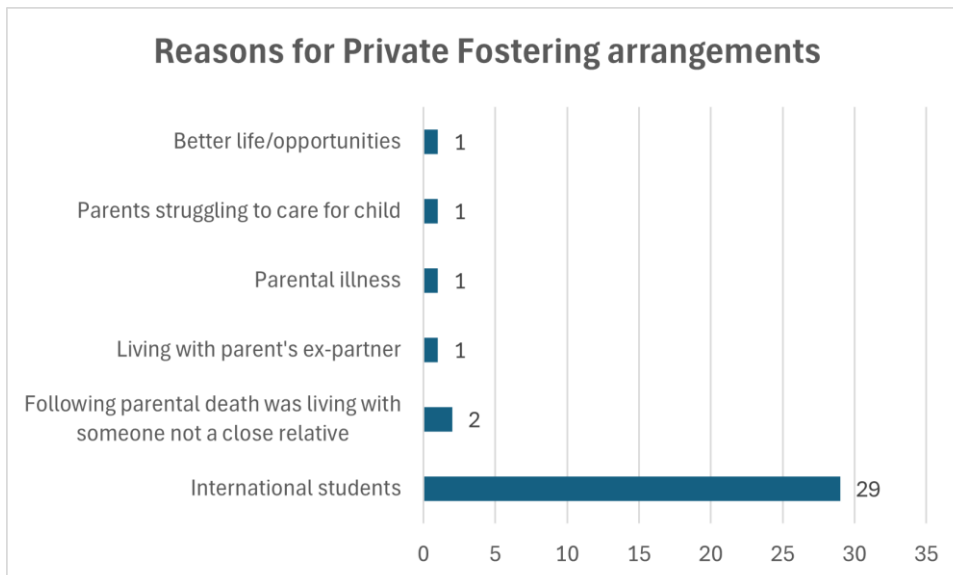


- 6.7. Out of the 35 notifications, 29 were from education, 4 were from other Local Authorities and 2 were internal from within Croydon Children’s Social Care. It is positive that the children's social work teams in Croydon have been able to identify changes in circumstances and identify Private Fostering arrangements.
- 6.8. During the reporting period there have been no self-referrals from private foster carers. Croydon are committed to promoting awareness of Private Fostering and it is hoped that through these efforts the overall number of notifications including self-referrals from private foster carers will increase.
- 6.9. Notifications from other agencies continues to be an area that needs to be further addressed within Croydon. The majority of referrals have been from Education which involve international students. All of the notifications from education are in relation to international students; whilst this is good it would be expected that at least some of the education notifications would have come from schools, in relation to those children that reside in the UK.
- 6.10. All referrals to Private Fostering come to the team via the front door, however the sources of the referrals indicate that there is much more to be done to ensure that private fostering arrangements are being identified and notified in Croydon to enable the Private Fostering team to assess and support the arrangements.

Initial Visits completed within 7 days

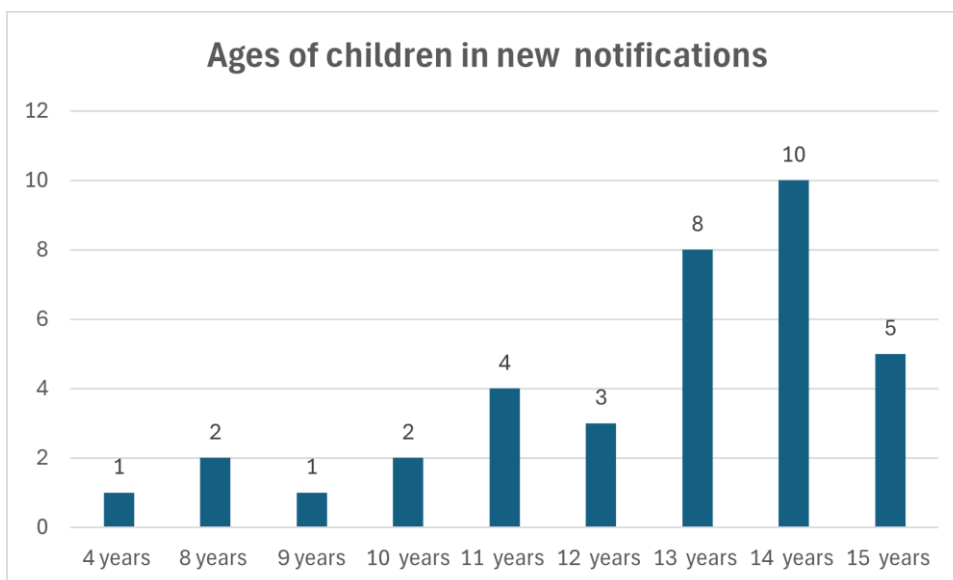


- 6.11. During the reporting period 2023/2024 all initial visits were undertaken within the first 7 days.



6.12. The chart above illustrates the reasons why children were placed in new private fostering arrangements. As previously highlighted the biggest single reason relates to international students. As with previous years, there is a continuing trend of international students who are staying with host families whilst studying at private/independent schools.

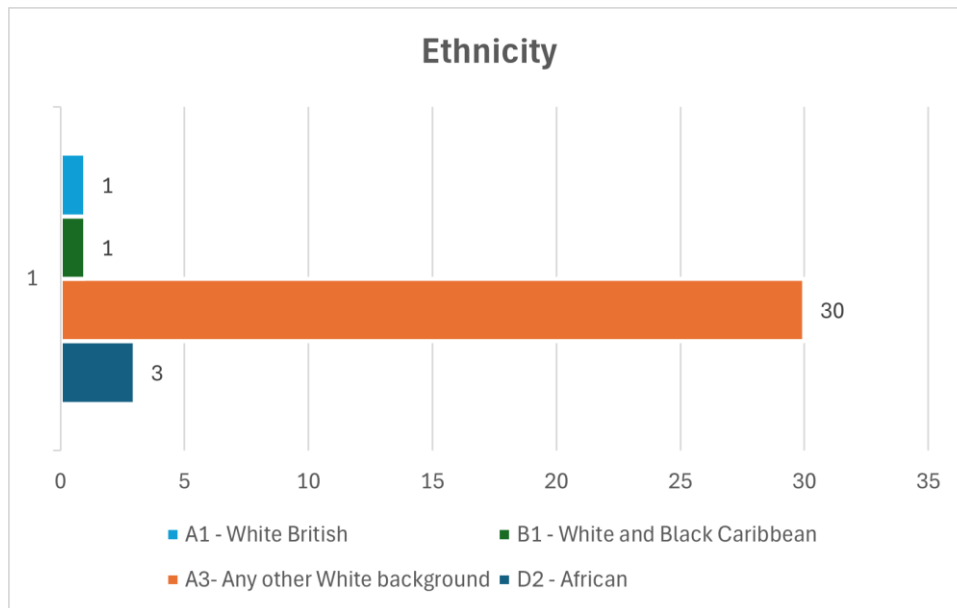
The ages when the Private Fostering assessment/ arrangement



6.13. Unlike previous years the majority of Private Fostering notifications for this reporting period is for children aged 14, the second highest is for children aged 13 and the third is for children aged 15. The data continues to show that there are more assessed and authorised Private Fostering arrangements within Croydon for older children than younger. The data shows that this is largely the result of the majority of referrals coming from language schools.

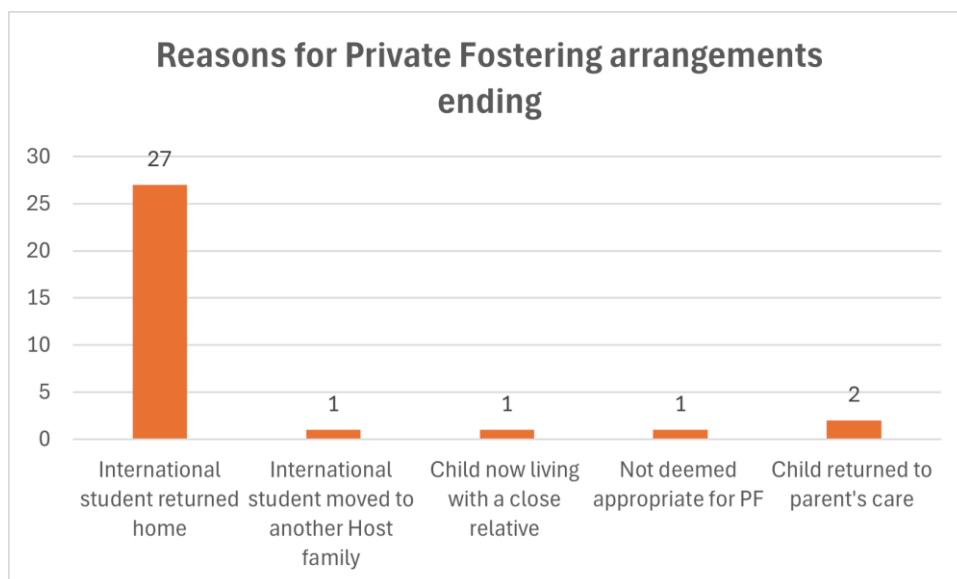
6.14. Targeting awareness-raising with professionals who work with younger children was previously identified as a priority; this has been progressed, with the Private Fostering social worker targeting awareness-raising at child minders. The data for this reporting period does show an increase of notifications for younger children. Out of the 35 notifications 37 % were under 13 years as opposed to only 13. % in 2023/2024. Nevertheless, this remains an area that requires further targeted work to ensure that notifications are being made of children within the younger age range.

Race and Cultural Considerations



6.15. Historically, the highest group of children who were privately fostered have been Chinese; 2022-23 revealed that the highest number were Western Europeans. These were all language students who are in the UK to promote their education.

Reason why the Private Fostering Arrangement Ended:



- 6.16. Of the 35 Private Fostering notifications that had been received in 2023/2024, 32 of these arrangements have ended.
- 6.17. In addition to the 35 notifications received in this reporting period there was also an existing Private Fostering arrangement which begun in January 2021. This arrangement is in relation to a 7-year-old back British male who remains in the Private Fostering arrangement to date and is our longest Private Fostering arrangement. The Private Foster carers are currently being supported to obtain a Child Arrangements Order.

7. Summary and Areas of Development

- 7.1. Continue drive to raise awareness to all agencies to ensure that they take responsibility with ensuring staff are aware of Private Fostering regulations and their responsibility for notifying the local authority.

Collaborative work with the CSCP to continue, to encourage agencies to be more proactive in applying curiosity, in identifying possible Private Fostering arrangements and notifying the local authority. Current data highlights that it remains the case that a vast majority of our Private Fostering arrangements are international students.

- 7.2. Raise awareness to parents and carers regarding their responsibilities under the private fostering regulations.

The number of Private Fostering arrangements continue to fluctuate in accordance with the number of international students in the borough. One hypothesis is that the number of Private Fostering arrangements, discounting international students, does not reflect the demographics of the borough. Whilst this is not unique to Croydon there remains a need to raise awareness even further.

- 7.3. Ensure there are clear internal processes in Croydon

SPOC but referrals to PF team to complete reports. . *Managing of notifications via MASH still remains a challenge. This is being addressed through clarification of the CRS pathway.*

- 7.4. This report highlights the ongoing concern that the number of PF arrangements does not reflect the size and demographics of the borough. The urgency continues for all agencies to robustly ensure that their staff are aware of the Private Fostering Regulations and their responsibility to notifying the local authority of any such arrangements.

- 7.5. Over the next 12 months Social Care is to focus on all children who are privately fostered, ensuring that the initial visit is completed within 7 days of the local authority being notified of the arrangement.

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