



Southwark Council
Private Fostering
Annual Report
2022-2023

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Message from Head of Service

1. Private Fostering is a focus and priority to ensure that children who are privately fostered are receiving the right level of care and support. It is important to Southwark that children in private fostering arrangements have their needs consistently met and are given the opportunity to thrive and have successful outcomes.
2. The annual report will provide a review of the 2022-2023 private fostering arrangements. This will include a reflection around minimum standards looking at notifications, sources of referrals, age, gender to help us consider any patterns around private fostering which will also help us to understand how to work more closely with our community.
3. In September 2022, Southwark had an inspection visit by Ofsted which reviewed the arrangements around children privately fostered. This highlighted some gaps in practice; specifically, arrangements for privately fostered children not being sufficiently robust as a consequence the authority being unable to assure itself that safeguarding and welfare needs are met. This included the regularity and timeliness of visits, the timeliness of statutory checks and the tracking and management oversight of privately fostered children.
4. In Southwark, we pride ourselves on making best efforts to do what is right for children and made immediate efforts to strengthen the practice and management overview. This report will detail the journey over the year, review and reflect on practice and learning and offer some insights into the forward planning to ensure that we are consistently scrutinizing what we do to improve the experiences of children and their private foster carers.
5. There has been changes to the team overseeing Private Fostering. There is a new lead Service Manager and a new Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker. The team have been working hard to deliver improvements around private fostering. I express thanks and gratitude for the work they have accomplished to date and for the exciting

developments and enhancements around private fostering in Southwark in the future. We endeavor to see our children and members of the community having full access to understanding more about private fostering as well as access to support and services for families with private fostering arrangements in place.

I) Service Profile

Private Fostering arrangements within the London Borough of Southwark is held within the Safeguarding & Family Support Service. The aim of the service is to ensure that the needs and care arrangements of all children in Private Fostering arrangements within Southwark are adequately assessed and supported, in line with the requirements outlined in the 1989 Children Act, as well as the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering, which came into force on 18 July 2005 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

In January 2022, there was a change in the Service Manager lead, with Joyce Patton taking on this role. There were plans to improve the service provision which led to an agreement to recruit a Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker. This role was identified following a review of Private Fostering services in Southwark in 2021/22 and a recommendation of the improvement plan 2022, which aimed to ensure the continued development, awareness and enhancement of service delivery to all children in Private Fostering arrangements within Southwark.

There were concerted efforts to recruit to the Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker role, with the view that they would be a direct lead and named expert for Private Fostering in Southwark. This would include tracking notifications around privately fostered children and completing all assessments in respect of privately fostered children, ensuring that they received the support that they needed, included ensuring that plans were appropriately reviewed and considered children's need for permanency. The aim of this role is to also enhance the collaboration with the multi-agency and community network to raise awareness around Private Fostering within Southwark.

Until September 2022, all privately fostered children in Southwark were supported and managed by social workers based across various teams in the Safeguarding and Family Support Service. However, from September 2022 the appointed Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker was allocated and responsible for privately fostered children in Southwark. This ensured streamlining of our work and further improved oversight, quality and timeliness of our work.

The Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker has been directly line managed by the lead Service Manager in the Safeguarding and Family Support

Service. All new notifications around children in Private Fostering arrangements are sent to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) within Southwark Children's Services. These notifications are screened in MASH, checks completed and once the Private Fostering arrangement is confirmed, the case is progressed and allocated to the Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker to undertake the relevant assessments, complete required checks and maintain responsibility for the overview of children in privately fostered care arrangements.

II) National Minimum Standards

Southwark ensures that it is compliant with the statutory expectations and guidelines around private fostering. In this section, we will explore the notifications, sources of referrals, timeliness of visits, age, gender, ethnicity and country of origin. Within this information, we will also explore if there are any particular patterns to be identified to help us in our work with children in private fostered situations.

- i) Notifications, incl. characteristics, source of referrals and timeliness of visits

The number of notifications around children privately fostered increased from 8 in 2020/2021 to 9 notifications in 2021/2022 to 13 notifications in 2022/23. The increase in notifications is perhaps a positive indicator of increased awareness about Private Fostering duties and responsibilities amongst professionals and families in Southwark along with the end of the Covid 19 pandemic. It is however acknowledged that awareness generation work is an area on ongoing work and progress.

Activity Overview including Source of Referral

Table 1 below reflects the activity overview around the number of Private Fostering notifications received and number of privately fostered children. This reflects some variability since 2017 and notes that between 2017 to current, the highest number of notifications received were in the last year, 2022/23.

Activity Overview	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Notifications of Private Fostering Arrangements	3	10	8	9	13
Number of open children privately fostered as at 31st March	12	11	5	8	13
Number of children's cases closed in year	11	12	15	6	5

In 2022/23, we received 13 new notifications of privately fostered children in Southwark. The largest referral source were from schools accounting for 3 of the 13 referrals and an internal source – social worker within the Local Authority, which accounted for 3 referrals. Of the remaining 7 referrals, 2 were from other Local Authorities, 1 from an individual family member, 1 from the Education Service, 1 from the Home Office, 1 from a legal agency (Court) and 1 from the Housing service. This showed a wide variation in referral source, although compared to the previous year, no referrals were received from the Police or Health services.

It is observed that most of the referrals are coming from schools and local authorities including Southwark. We are hoping that with closer collaboration with agencies, this will spread further awareness of Private Fostering within professional networks and communities and will enable Family and Community members to identify if they are supporting a Private Fostering arrangement or are familiar with any to encourage families to seek appropriate support.

Table 2 shows the different routes of notification broken down quarterly, which reflects an increase in referrals following the first quarter of 2022/23.

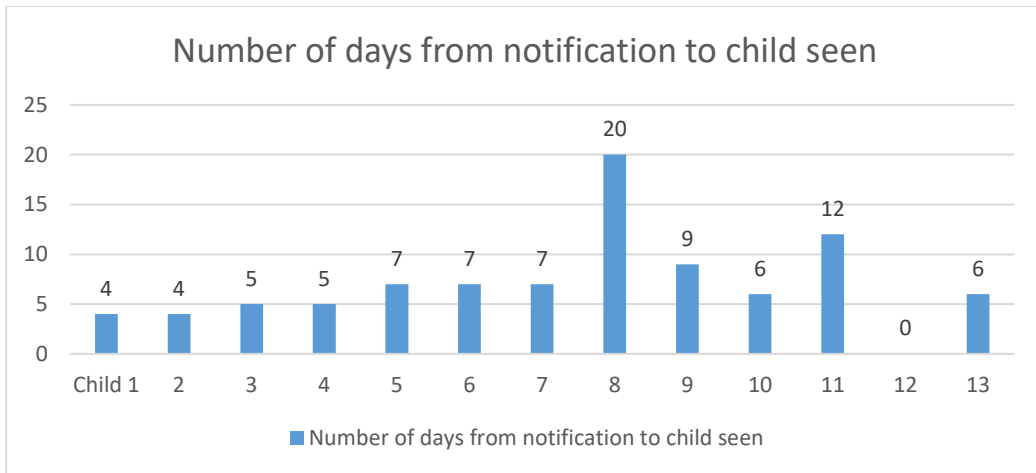
Quarter	Notifications	Referral Source
Q1 (April- June)	0	-
Q2 (July - September)	5	2 school, 2 internal - social worker within the Local Authority, 1 Housing
Q3 (October - December)	2	1 Education, 1 Home Office
Q4 (January – March)	6	1 school, 2 external – another Local Authority, one from other legal agency, 1 internal, 1 individual (family member)

Duration between Notification received and Child seen by a Social Worker

In 2022/23, 9 of the 13 children we were notified about were seen between 3 to 7 days of the notification date, which is within the 7 day requirement. There were 4 children who were seen beyond 7 days of the notification date and these were for multiple reasons detailed below and reflected in table 3 below.

One child (Child 8), was not seen until day 20 of the notification. This was due to the carer’s availability and the initial visit being cancelled at the doorstep as family members were reportedly unwell. The second child (Child 9) was seen at day 9 of the notification, again due to the carer cancelling the initial visit; this had been initially scheduled on day 7 which the carer could not make. The third child (Child 11) was seen at day 12 of the notification due to a combination of factors, initially due to checks and enquiries being made at MASH and subsequently due to delay in the carer’s availability for a home visit. The fourth child (Child 12) has not been seen by the Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker due to the carer’s view that the arrangement is not a Private Fostering arrangement. The child was however seen by their allocated social worker who was supporting her under a Child in Need plan, until the family were stepped down to support via our Family Early Help Service. The Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker has however written to the carer and it has been agreed that they will be checking in with the carer every 3 months for an update.

Table 3



Age at time of Notification

Of the 13 new notifications we received in 2022/23, 7 children were in the 12+ age range, 5 in the 6-11 year age range and 1 child in the 3-5 year age range. This variation in age is similar to the pattern seen in 2021/2022. While several notifications of the 12+ age group were timely referrals, in and around the actual date the Private Fostering arrangements commencing, some of them indicated a delayed notification to the Local Authority, often via an external agency. Schools however were a key agency in ensuring timely recognition and referrals of children in private fostering arrangements. While this highlighted a good level of awareness amongst school professionals, it perhaps highlights the importance of awareness generation for families based in the community.

In September 2022, there were notifications on 2 children who had previously been assessed by the Assessment and Intervention (A&I) Service who were in private fostering arrangements. At the conclusion of these assessments, the service ended without progressing via the private fostering pathway/Specialist private fostering social worker. This was identified during a review and audit carried out by the Service Manager of the A&I Service. This led to close liaison and work with colleagues in MASH and the A&I service to ensure that social workers were well informed and aware of what a Private Fostering arrangement is and our duties to children in such arrangements as a Local Authority.

Table 4

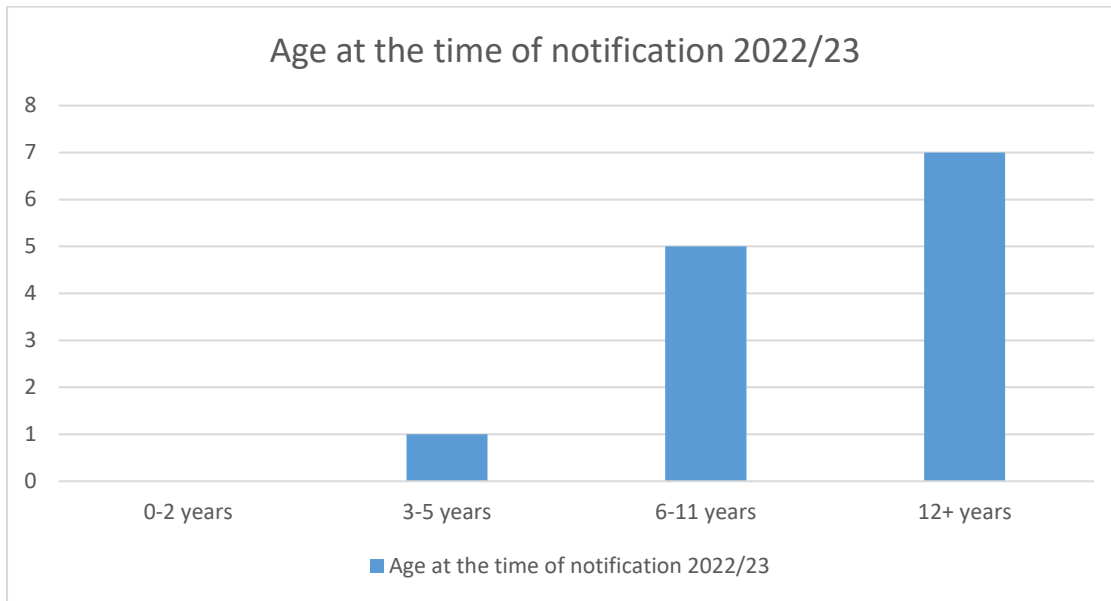
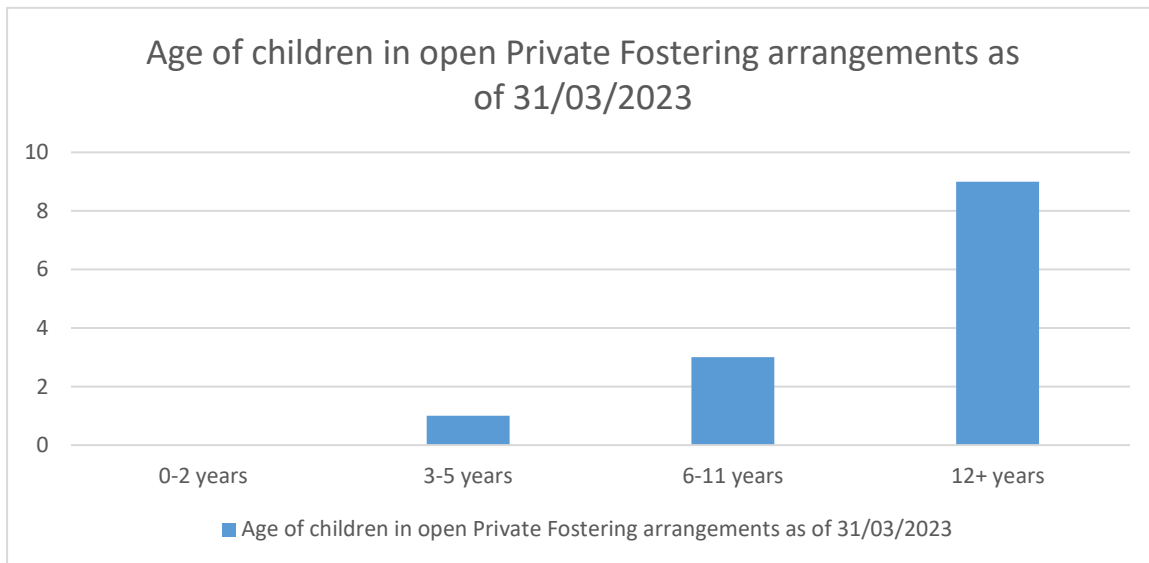


Table 5



There were 13 open privately fostered children as of 31st March 2023 as reflected in the chart above. Of 9 children in the 12+ age group, 4 of them have since turned aged 16. They continue to be settled and remain with their carers, however, their Private Fostering arrangements will be ending and they will be signposted to Universal services for ongoing support.

Identification of Ethnicity

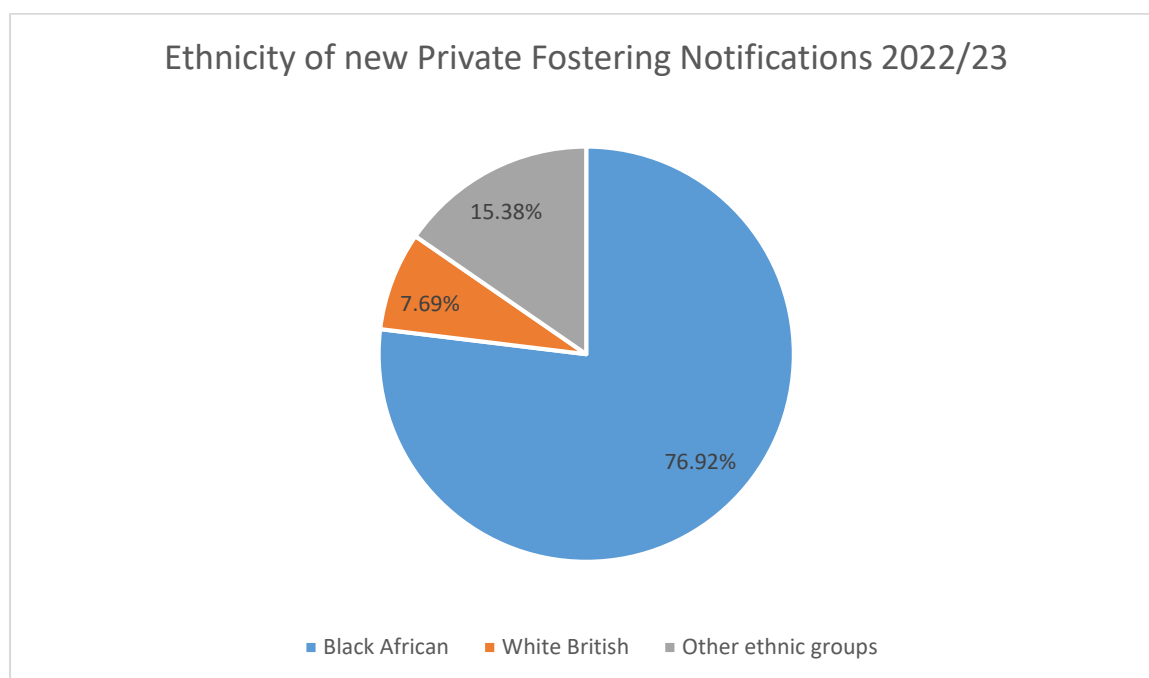
Of the 13 new notifications received, the largest ethnic group was Black/Black British (African) at 76.92% (Ten children), followed by other ethnic group (Spanish) at 15.38%

(Two children) and White British at 7.69% (One child.) Within the cohort of children from Black - African backgrounds, six children were from Nigeria, one from Sierra Leone, one from the Congo, one from Ghana and one from Cameroon.

Table 6 below reflects the breakdown, which is further visualized in table 7 below.

Breakdown of Ethnicity	Proportion of Children	No of Children
Black/Black British - African	76.92%	10
Other ethnic group - Spanish	15.38%	2
White British	7.69%	1

Table 7



Breakdown of Ethnicity for open Privately Fostered Children as of 31st March 2023

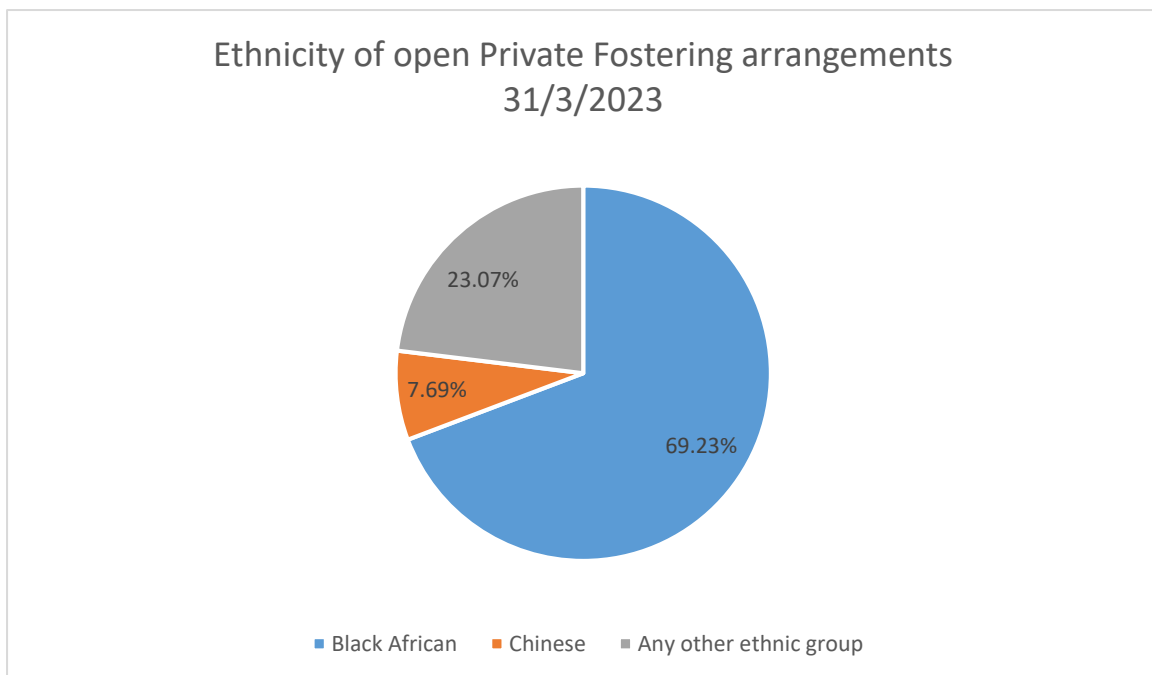
At the end of the year (31 March), there were thirteen children remaining subject to Private Fostering arrangements, which was an increase on the previous year which closed with 5 children subject to Private Fostering arrangements. The breakdown of ethnicity remains similar with Black/Black British - African children accounting for majority of the cohort at 69.23% (Nine children). This included five children from

Nigeria, one from Benin, one from Ghana, one from Sierra Leone and one from Cameroon. The next cohort is recorded as three children from other ethnic group, at 23.07%. This included one Spanish, one Bolivian and one Brazilian child. The last cohort was one child from other ethnic group – Chinese, accounting for 7.69%. See table 8 below

Table 8

Breakdown of Ethnicity (open)	Proportion of children	No of Children
Black African	69.23%	9
Other ethnic group - Any	23.07%	3
Other ethnic group - Chinese	7.69%	1

Table 9



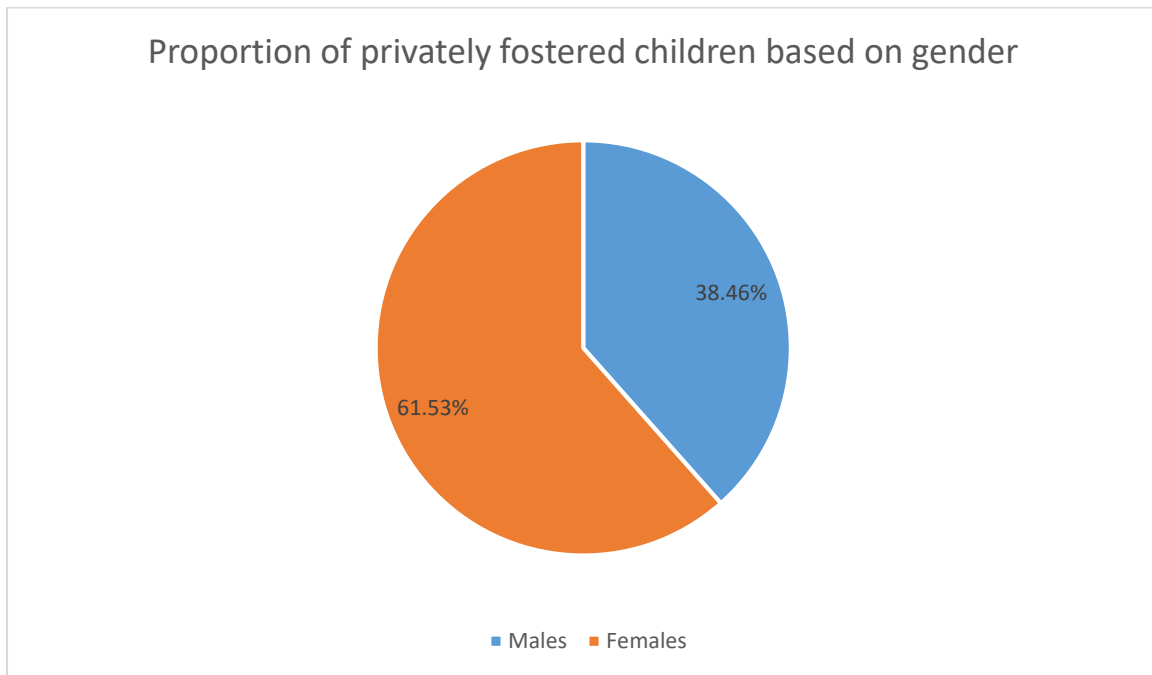
Gender of Children Privately Fostered as of 31st March 2023

Of the thirteen privately fostered children, 8 were females and 5 were males. This showed an increase in proportion of females from 2021/2022.

Table 10

Breakdown of gender (open)	Proportion of Children	No of Children
Male	38.46%	5
Female	61.53%	8

Table 11



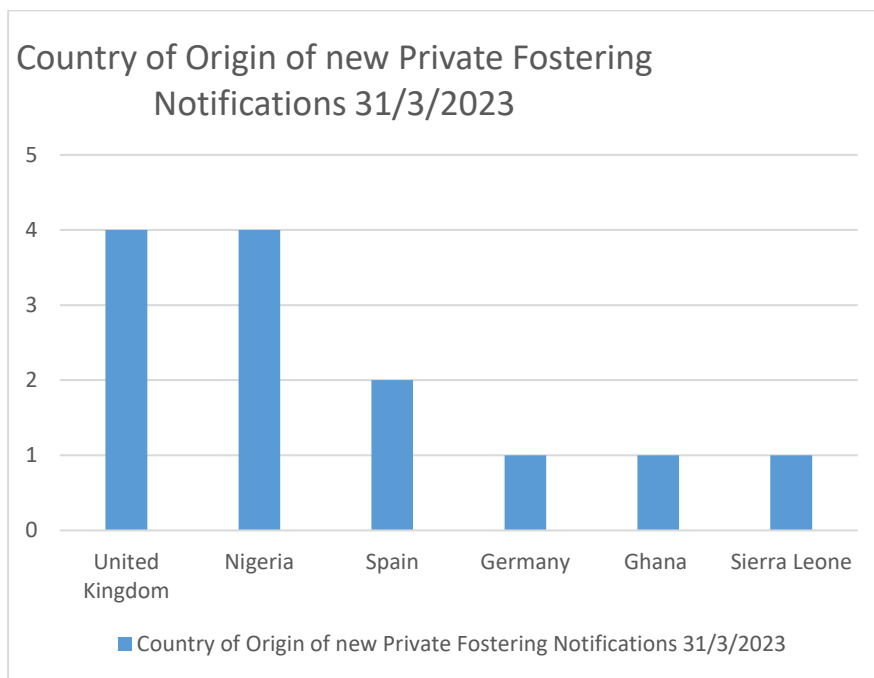
Country of Origin of Private Fostering Notifications

Of the 13 new notifications received in the last year (2022/23), four children were from Nigeria, four children were from the United Kingdom, two children were from Spain, one child from Germany, one from Sierra Leone and one from Ghana.

Table 12

Country of origin (open)	No of Children	Proportion of children
United Kingdom	4	30.77%
Nigeria	4	30.77%
Spain	2	15.38%
Germany	1	7.69%
Ghana	1	7.69%
Sierra Leone	1	7.69%

Table 13



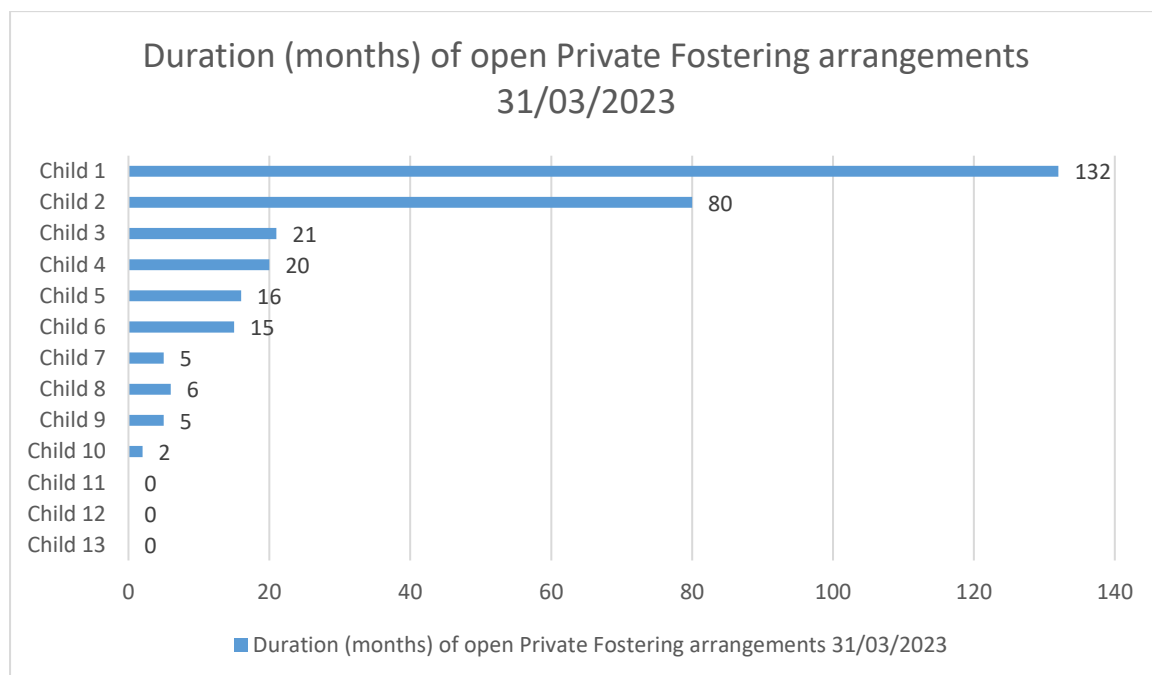
Number and Duration of Open Private Fostering Cases at March 2023

There were thirteen children continuing to be privately fostered as of 31st March 2023. Of the thirteen children, the longest duration of being privately fostered was 132 months with the shortest duration being 0 months indicating that the referral was received in March 2023. The child who is being privately fostered at 132 months has since become aged 16. Her parents are both in Nigeria and her mother has consented to the private foster carer applying for a Special Guardianship Order for her daughter.

The assessment has been completed, however, there has been a delay in the carer's DBS checks being processed. The Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker has completed an addendum assessment and is awaiting the outcome of the DBS checks before the carer's Special Guardianship application can be submitted. Although the child is now aged 16, thus ending the current Private Fostering arrangement, given the length of our involvement with the child and her carer, we remain involved to ensure that the carer can be supported until the application is submitted to the courts. The child continues to be well fared for and is doing well in this care arrangement.

In addition to the above, child 2, child 5 and child 9 (reflected in table 14 below) who have been in Private Fostering arrangements for 80, 16 and 5 months respectively, have since turned 16 years of age and therefore, they will be stepped down to universal/early help services where appropriate or alternatively close to the Department.

Table 14



Number of Private Fostering arrangements Ceased

There were 3 children who ceased to be in a Private Fostering arrangement over the last year 2022/23 as a result of returning to their mother's care.

Table 15

Reasons for Closing	Number
Assessment confirmed did not meet PF arrangement	0
Reached age of 16	0
Appropriate arrangements in place	0
No Safeguarding concerns	0
Child returned to mother's care	3
TOTAL	3

ii) DBS numbers and timeliness

Disclosure and Barring Service checks (DBS) are completed on all carers; in addition, any member of the household over the age of 16 years. Local Authority checks are also completed on all members of the household. DBS checks outcomes where received are kept on files.

Of the 13 children in Private Fostering arrangements on 31 March 2023, the carers of 6 children all have updated and clear DBS checks. There was however one person, who is the husband of one of the carers whose DBS checks is over 3 years. As a result, an updated DBS check was requested in March 2023 but pending outcome. The carers of 3 children have submitted their DBS application and the outcome of these checks are currently pending. One child's carer was adamant that she is the child's blood relative (paternal grandmother) and was therefore declining to provide documents for DBS checks to be progressed. She has since submitted documents to evidence that she is the child's grandmother, thus ceasing the Private Fostering arrangement before the DBS checks could be pursued.

One child ceased to be privately fostered and moved out of borough to the joint care of her father, thus ceasing the Private Fostering arrangement before the DBS checks could be progressed. One child's carer has declined to provide documents for the DBS checks to be completed, although Police checks have been completed via 87B request. Lastly, there is a current ongoing assessment and DBS application is due to be submitted for the carer.

There has been no prohibition or disqualifications of carer's in 2022/23. The numbers of privately fostered children in each household is recorded.

As of December 2022, there is a new system in place to support the DBS applications of Private Foster carers and household members. This continues to be tracked in the Private Fostering panel to ensure that checks remain in date, however, there have been delays in the DBS checks being completed/updated in a timely manner. While systems to process DBS checks have been formalised since December 2022, we're still seeing delays in checks being completed by the police, as well as reluctance in some carers providing documents necessary to progress these checks. This is therefore an area of ongoing work and improvement.

III) Management Discussion and Analysis

Over the last year, there has been a lot of activity and work within the department to enhance Private Fostering delivery to children within Southwark. These are discussed in further details below.

The Practice Guidance has been updated and finalised for launch in June 2023 and this incorporates the expectations around working with Private Fostering arrangements. This was shared with members of the Private Fostering Steering Group in March 2023 as part of the consultation process and no further recommendations were made. There needs to be confirmation about the process for police checks, whilst DBS checks of the carers/adults in the household are awaited as the police are reporting that they cannot fulfil the previously agreed expectations of September 2022.

i. Effectiveness of the Private Fostering panel

The current lead Service Manager holds operational leadership, chairs the Private Fostering Panel, directly line manage and supervise the Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker and works closely with all service leads to ensure there is regular information provided to colleagues and partners, as well as consultation on cases and Private Fostering regulations.

The Private Fostering Panel was reinstated in May 2022, following a brief hiatus due to staffing issues, after the previous lead had left the service. These panels are held every 8 weeks and the aim of the panel is to review and track the arrangement with a focus

on ensuring that the child is being safeguarded, having their needs adequately met and also that the carers have had their DBS checks approved. During this process, the panel also ensures that children are being seen regularly and their progress is being tracked. Where appropriate, discussions around how to progress plans for these children to achieve permanence are also held.

There have been 6 panels held since May 2022, on 13 May 2022, 1 July 2022, 26 August 2022, 21 October 2022 and 15 December 2022. There was a 16 week hiatus between the panel on 15 December 2022 and the next one on 6 April 2023 (instead of 9 February 2023 at 8 weeks.) This was due to a brief gap between the old agency Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker leaving the service and the new permanent staff member starting in the role and settling into the service.

Following a review which identified that the panel needed to be strengthened, new terms of reference was completed to aid with the enhancement of the functioning of the panel. To ensure robust oversight and scrutiny the Private Fostering Panel membership was extended to colleagues in MASH, Special Guardianship (SG) Team and the Clinical Service in September 2022, in addition to the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU.) Due to staffing issues there has not been a representative from the QAU since October 2022, as well as from the Clinical Service. The panel has however had regular attendance by colleagues from MASH and the SG team. This has helped ensure that we are getting things right from the point of notification and also actively considering permanency plans for children in Private Fostering arrangements, alongside their parents/carers and advising them of options available to them such as via a Special Guardianship Order or a Child Arrangements Order etc.

Private Fostering panels are held every 8 weeks with the purpose of reviewing and tracking the private fostering arrangement with a focus on ensuring that the child is being safeguarded, having their needs adequately met and also that the carers have had their DBS checks approved. During this process, the panel also ensures that children are being seen regularly and their progress is being tracked including their need for permanence.

- ii. Improved ways of working (e.g. IT developments)

Mosaic documents around Private Fostering, particularly the Private Fostering Assessment document, Child and Family Assessment document and the Private Fostering Panel workflow have been reviewed closely with colleagues from the Performance and Systems team to capture and record all relevant and important information about the child's journey and their lived experiences in the Private Fostering arrangement. This includes ensuring that the documents are able to capture and enable tracking of clear dates including details of when parental consent was obtained, when the last DBS was obtained/checked, tracking around permanence planning and tracking around ending of Private Fostering arrangements. While the current document templates on Mosaic adequately capture the above, there is ongoing work to amalgamate the Private Fostering assessment template within the current Child and Family assessment template instead of having two separate assessment templates. This would minimise duplication of work whilst ensuring that all relevant information about the Private Fostering arrangement is recorded appropriately.

The Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker has been an active role since September 2022 and all Private Fostering and Child and Family assessments are directly allocated to the worker as soon as the case is screened at MASH and the Private Fostering arrangement is confirmed. The lead Service Manager has direct oversight of these assessments and once completed the Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker attends the Private Fostering Panel to present the case. If the Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker is in annual leave, there is a contingency in place that MASH would liaise with the lead Service Manager to ensure that these notifications are picked up and addressed in a timely manner.

iii. Audit and learning findings

Southwark have robust programme of audit and learning across all areas of Children's Services set out in the Quality Assurance framework. Children who are privately fostered are included in the audit selection across different themes over the year.

There was a dip sampling of all private fostering cases completed by the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) in September 2022 in light of a key line of enquiry from OFSTED. At the time there were 5 children in Private Fostering arrangements with 6 new additional notifications received in the same month. Overall the dip sampling highlighted good examples of direct work to understand their experiences and wishes

of young people in Private Fostering arrangements, as well as positive liaison with schools and a timely response to new notifications received. The quality and timeliness of case recordings, visits and supervision were however noted to be variable across the cohort and evidence of DBS checks on carers was also not noted to be consistently evident on the children's files. The management and allocation of all Private Fostering cases also changed with the appointment of the new Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker in early September 2022. The dip sampling exercised noted that having one worker lead and pick up on all new notifications lead to more timely responses.

iv) Awareness raising and engagement

The Private Fostering Steering Group has been key in enabling and enhancing partnership working across the multi-agency network in Southwark, with a focus on increasing the understanding and awareness of rights and duties for professionals and families in the community about Private Fostering. This has enabled improving links with colleagues in education and housing and enabled platforms to allow us to increase awareness about Private Fostering.

The steering group was relaunched in September 2022 after a hiatus and meets on a quarterly basis. This is chaired by the Head of Service for Safeguarding and Family Support. There is ongoing efforts to garner the membership. Currently, there are representatives from MASH, Family Early Help, Health, Housing, Education. The Private Fostering Steering Group maintains an overview of Southwark's compliance with the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering and issues arising for the Children's Social Care. The group enables the Council to improve and strengthen links between all the relevant professionals and partner agencies including social care staff who come into contact with privately fostered children and our colleagues in external agencies such as the UK Border Agency.

The London Borough of Southwark ensures that Private Fostering is on the web page and offers links and documents which details information about Private Fostering. This includes the Statement of Purpose, as well as leaflets for Private Foster Carers or potential carers, families, children and professionals. The new Private Fostering leaflets were finalised in the last quarter of 2022/23 and have been available for circulation, pending formal approval by the Southwark Communications team.

Over the last year 2022/23, there has been a lot of work to enhance awareness and communication about Private Fostering across the borough. This has involved presentations at service meetings within the Safeguarding and Family Support Service, as well as presentations at the monthly Children's Services Induction meetings. The Specialist PF worker has also been networking with the multi agency and has set up training events for the upcoming year for DSLs in school as well as within Housing. There is also an offer of support, advice and consultation for social workers and colleagues across the borough from the Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker and these have been used effectively.

As highlighted earlier in this report, there is an increase in notifications of Private Fostering arrangements since September 2022 and it is considered that this is linked to the ongoing work of increasing awareness and sharing information about Private Fostering.

The Specialist Private Fostering Senior Social Worker in her role continues to foster positive and supportive relationships with children, young people and families, with the view to understand their experiences, educate them, whilst also advocating and supporting them to ensure that all children in Private Fostering arrangements are safe, happy, achieving and developing well. Where appropriate, all efforts are made to ensure that children are seen on their own and to engage them in direct work activities to explore their wishes and feelings and ensure that they are feel safeguarded in their placements. Private Foster Carers are provided with information and advice regarding children's developmental needs and the social worker assists and advises all Private Foster carers with general parenting skills, as well as provide advice on an ongoing basis. They are given information on services and support available including support from Children's Centres and available parenting courses via Family Early Help. As part of their ongoing work, the social worker also provides support on an individual case-by-case basis, as well as practical assistance for carers around benefits and housing where required, including letters of support to Housing, Home Office etc. There is also information and leaflets available on Southwark's web page, which carers and prospective carers can access at any time.

Where it has been possible, all parents are met and spoken to during the course of establishing the arrangements. If they do not live in the UK, they are phoned, e-mailed,

and asked to provide documentation around their identification via e-mail. The first visit will ensure that any ongoing issues which might prevent the need for a Private Fostering arrangement to be made or where there is a clear safeguarding concern can be addressed at an early stage.

The Private Fostering social worker undertakes visits to children in their schools to discuss children's progress. The child will also be met at school in a different context other than the Private Fostering environment to discuss their needs, wishes and feelings. On occasions where there has been the need for additional support to be offered to the privately fostered child, their Social Worker will undertake direct work with children in the community and may support referrals to specialist services such as CAMHS. A leaflet on Private Fostering arrangements has been designed and is given to all children who are privately fostered. The Private Fostering social worker will advocate on behalf of privately fostered children with issues such as legal status etc.

An area of ongoing focus is around securing permanency care plans for all children in Private Fostering arrangements in conjunction with their parents and carers. The social worker therefore works closely with colleagues in the Special Guardianship team for advice and support for carers about permanency options available to them. Where parents and carers agree for Private Foster carers to continue to care for their child/ren beyond 16 years, we also consider one off support for carers to seek legal advice about the options available to them.

v) Effectiveness multi-agency working (including steering group)

The relaunch of the Private Fostering Steering Group in September 2022 has provided an impetus in enhancing and building relationships across the multi-agency network to ensure that there is a joint approach and duty in recognising, responding and supporting children and young people in private fostering care arrangements. Through discussions at the steering group meetings, the Head of Service and lead Service Manager were invited to attend the Southwark Safeguarding Children's Partnership (SSCP) in March 2023 to share our work about and with children in Private Fostering arrangements. This garnered interest from colleagues and as an outcome, work is being pursued to present at the Learning Network subgroup to present to the partnership and canvass support around Private Fostering.

There is ongoing work to progress with a consultation with young people who are currently privately fostered to hear their voices and to then look at how their feedback could impact the development of the Service. This is being reviewed to be taken forward by the Specialist Private Fostering Social Worker in conjunction with the Children's Rights Officer.

A key gap in our Private Fostering work has been in relation to progressing our links with colleagues in the UK Border Agency and Home Office. A large proportion of our children/young people being privately fostered do not have confirmed immigration statuses in the UK. It is often a challenge to obtain information and/or documents about their immigration history, as well as their options in the UK. We're currently working with colleagues in our No Recourse to Public Funds team to find ways to be able to complete checks/obtain this vital information, which will help significantly in the children's care planning.

IV) Discussion of key plans for 2023/24

- Addressing OFSTED concerns - Implementing an improvement plan which addresses some of the areas that need strengthening as identified by OFSTED
- Audit and learning priorities
- Awareness raising and engagement plans

OFSTED in their inspection visit in September 2022, highlighted that safeguarding arrangements for privately fostered children were not sufficiently robust and needed to improve. They reported "Intervention and oversight of provision for children who are the subject of private fostering arrangements are not sufficiently robust. Children are not visited at a frequency consistent with the legal framework. Leaders are not ensuring that statutory processes, such as Disclosure and Barring Service checks, are completed quickly enough. This means the authority cannot assure itself that the safeguarding and welfare needs of these vulnerable children are being met. Leaders took immediate action to address this shortfall."

There has been robust efforts to ensure that the areas noted above by OFSTED have improved and progressed. This has included audit and learning activities, oversight via supervision, enhancing private fostering panels and ongoing efforts across the

multi-agency steering group to ensure awareness generation and a joint approach to responding and supporting all children in private fostering arrangements.

An audit of all children in Private Fostering arrangements was completed in September 2022 by the Quality Assurance Unit. The appointment of the Specialist Private Fostering social worker has hugely aided in streamlining and improving practice areas identified in OFSTED's review and the subsequent audit activity. There has been a concerted effort to review and follow up on the DBS checks of all carers, whilst also ensuring that this information is readily accessible on the children's files.

The Private Fostering Panel now includes colleagues from other services including the MASH and the Special Guardianship team. This is to ensure that Private Fostering arrangements are being identified at the referral stage. The re-design of the panel should also improve the tracking and timeliness of permanence of children in long term private fostering arrangements, as well as providing a further oversight of safeguarding arrangements for children in these arrangements. In addition to this, the Private Fostering Steering Group continues to review awareness across the multi-agency network and seeks to grow membership.

The team is eager to progress the journey of private fostering in Southwark, enhancing the service delivery to children in privately fostered arrangements and enhancing the multi-agency networks to strengthen collaborative and multi-agency working in this area.

REFERENCES

Statistical First Release Notifications of Private Fostering arrangements in England: year ending 31 March 2015

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/440401/SFR22-2015_Text.pdf

Southwark published information about Private Fostering -
<https://www.southwark.gov.uk/childcare-and-parenting/fostering/private-fostering>

Private Fostering Improvement Plan 2023 – 2024

No.	What	How	Why	Who	When	What Will Success Look Like	Update
1.	Improve performance management arrangements	<p>Develop further clear statement of Private Fostering Practice Standards</p> <p>More collaborative working with MASH to agree on rag ratings in thinking of consistently improving the timeliness of notifications and visits of</p>	<p>Clear statement of good practice expectations provides clarity on our minimum and expected standards to hold practitioners and managers to account for delivery</p> <p>Operational managers and practitioners require efficient and effective tools to proactively track the completion of activity</p>	<p>Head of Service Safeguarding and Lead Service Manager for Private Fostering</p> <p>Performance and Systems/Quality Assurance</p>	<p>December 2023</p> <p>September 2023</p>	<p>Delivery around private fostering will not only be enhanced by the specialist private fostering social workers but will also enable other workers to identify private fostering arrangements in existing families they are supporting</p> <p>Clear line of sight to enable performance to be tracked ensuring that we are adhering to the practice standards and statutory guidelines</p>	

		private fostering arrangements					
		Implementation of Private Fostering in Power BI data reporting system to enhance tracking and timeliness of our work.					
2.	Improve professional understanding of Private Fostering regulations	Development of a joint Training offer for both for internal Local Authority staff members, as well as joined up multi-disciplinary training.	Ongoing awareness generation campaign alongside Southwark's Communications team. Discussion between senior leaders in southwark and the police to confirm a	Head of Service Safeguarding Lead Service Manager for PF Specialist PF SW	Ongoing	Enhanced multi agency working with children in private fostering arrangements	

		<p>Establish process that works for the police and social care that enables quick safeguarding checks on adults in family homes where PF notification is received</p>	<p>joint protocol/understanding around expectations of safeguarding checks</p> <p>Ongoing discussion with the Southwark Communications team to bring Private Fostering into social media spaces</p>	<p>Audit and Learning Partners</p>			
		<p>Bi-annual audit and learning activity</p>	<p>Private Fostering Campaign Planner for 2023/24 to be implemented</p>				

		<p>focusing on Private Fostering arrangements,</p> <p>Ongoing outreach work with Designated Safeguarding Leads in Schools, Housing and Health Services</p> <p>Improve links and liaison with the Home Office for checks on children in Private Fostering care arrangements.</p>				<p>Improved service delivery for privately fostered children, ensuring their needs are reviewed including that of their immigration status</p>	
3.	<p>Ensure sufficient resources are in place to deliver high quality</p>	<p>Review the structure in place around DBS checks to ensure that it is working efficiently and</p>	<p>Enhanced safeguarding for children within private fostering arrangements</p>	<p>Assistant Director for Safeguarding</p>	<p>September 2023</p>	<p>Efficient system in place to enable consistent and timely DBS checks for carers</p>	

	<p>practice for privately fostered children</p>	<p>to ensure contingency plans are in place that support these checks outside of named staff members, to enable a enhanced system delivery.</p> <p>Liaison with the Fostering Service to explore the development of forum for Private Foster carers where they can access support and advice and discussions around options for permanence of the children in their care or a joining of Private Foster carers to forums for</p>	<p>Ensure that children in PF placements, particularly long term placements are given opportunities for permanence where possible</p>	<p>Head of Service for Safeguarding</p> <p>Lead Service Manager for Safeguarding</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Children in long term arrangements could achieve permanence with their private foster carers by way of SGOs or other alternatives</p>	
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		<p>support for them as above.</p> <p>Continue to garner the membership to the private fostering panel to include a clinician and member from QAU, which could further help to strengthen the scrutiny and practice of children in PF arrangements.</p> <p>Continue to garner membership to the PF Steering Group to build networks and relationships.</p>					
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