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**From:** Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services  
Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education

**To:** Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee  
21<sup>st</sup> November 2024

**Subject:** Private Fostering Annual Report 2024

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Past Pathway of report:** Children's Assurance Board 11/09/2024

**Future Pathway of report:** None

**Electoral Division:** All

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**Is the decision eligible for call-in?** *N/A*

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**Summary:**

This report is a statutory requirement laid down in the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering (July 2005). It provides an overview of referrals, assessment and support of privately fostered children referred to Kent Local Authority from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024, and awareness raising with the multi-agency partnership.

**Recommendation(s):**

The Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee is asked to **CONSIDER and NOTE** the annual report and its recommendations for 2024-25.

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**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 A Private Fostering arrangement is one 'made privately (without the involvement of a Local Authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled or under Homes for Ukraine Scheme) by someone other than a parent or close relative i.e., a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, or aunt, whether of full or half blood or by marriage, or a stepparent. This is with the intention it should last for 28 days or more. The Local Authority maintains a duty under s44 of the Children Act 2004 (amendment to s67(1) Children Act 1989) to satisfy themselves the welfare of privately fostered children in their area are being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted.
- 1.2 It has been a positive year for Private Fostering with audits showing an improvement in practice across Kent. The additional audits identified good practice, for example an increase in offering Social Work Assistants to ensure stability of arrangements for those children subject to Child in Need Plans or Child Protection Plans. The audits found that some of the regulatory checks required for a Private Fostering assessments were not completed prior to

approval and furthermore that there is room for improvement for visiting timescales.

## **2. Key Considerations**

- 2.1 This 2024 report has identified a number of areas where our data systems need to support our developing practice to really understand the lived experience of our privately fostered children in Kent.
- 2.2 The report also identified a number of tasks for the Private Fostering Leads and services to build links with various partners including health and voluntary services as well as language and private schools in each area to improve communication and practice.

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 The 2023 Private Fostering Annual Report raised 3 overarching areas of focus to improve practice: Continue to raise awareness of Private Fostering with partner agencies and wider community, develop Private Fostering practice across Integrated Children's Services **and** ongoing audit and monitoring of practice. All actions were achieved in the 12 month period with elements now forming part of regular cycles/expectations.

## **4. Conclusions**

- 4.1 The number of children in Private Fostering arrangements is relatively small compared to the number of children open to services but they are an extremely vulnerable group. These children are not with their birth family; may speak another language and be far from home; may have limited oversight from professionals unless identified as privately fostered; and may go under the radar and be at risk, as a result. The challenge is to ensure that all children in these arrangements are identified and the arrangements are assessed to ensure children are safe. Therefore, awareness raising is vital for both practitioners within Integrated Children's Services and other agencies. We are committed to ensuring that privately fostered children are identified, assessed, supported, and safe within Kent, and ensuring they receive the same service as other children open to services. This includes ensuring that children have stability and permanency when these arrangements are identified as being long-term.

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### **Recommendation(s):**

The Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee is asked to **CONSIDER** and **NOTE** the content of the annual report.

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**10. Contact details** *(please insert details below)*

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