

Private Fostering Annual Report

April 2024 – March 2025



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Date Published: June 2025

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1. Introduction

This report is a statutory requirement laid down in the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering (July 2005). It provides an overview of Private Fostering in Kent from 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025. It should be read alongside the Kent's Private Fostering [Statement of Purpose](#) which sets out the arrangements and expectations for managing private fostering arrangements in Kent.

2. Actions completed since 2024-2025 Annual Report

The 2023-2024 set out a number of actions, some of which are undertaken every year. Some of the objectives and key actions are shown in table 1 with details of progress. Further information about activity throughout the year is included in sections 3, 4 and 5.

Table 1: Actions from 2024-2025

Action:	How:	Date completed
Continue to raise awareness of Private Fostering with partner agencies and wider community	Private Fostering Awareness Raising leaflet to be sent to partner agencies and wider community, including Education, Health, Language Schools and Faith organisations.	Feb 2025
	Promote Private Fostering Day to raise awareness with partner agencies	Nov 2024
	Information shared with language and private schools in each area about the legal provisions and their duties and responsibilities to children who are privately fostered.	Feb 2025
	Advertise and provide virtual training for multi-agency partners from statutory and voluntary services. Training will be twice a year, booked via KSCMP	Continuing through the year. Twice

		yearly – May and Nov 2024
Develop Private Fostering practice across Integrated Children’s Services	Continue to provide access to Private Fostering training and relevant resources on the Kent Academy and Kent Procedures Online.	Throughout the year
	Private Fostering e Learning within induction and training programmes for new staff, Newly Qualified Social Workers, social work students on Step Up to Social Work programmes, Frontline and Apprenticeships.	Throughout the year
	Good Practice in Private Fostering Forums to be held with district Private Fostering Leads to discuss best practice and disseminate information. Private Fostering Leads to feed back to districts.	Quarterly throughout the year
	The Private Fostering Teams Channel to be set up and used as an information exchange and arena for promoting information and guidance to Private Fostering Leads.	Set up July 2024
	Consultations available and advice given by Private Fostering Lead regarding complex Private Fostering Arrangements. These are now recorded on Liberi by the Private Fostering Leads.	As and when required
	Business Support to monitor agency check requests and initial visit ‘packs’ which contain all necessary paperwork for proposed Private Foster carers to complete. Packs to include new Privacy Notice for Private Foster Carers.	Throughout the year.
Ongoing audit and monitoring of practice	4 Private Fostering children to be included in each audit cycle with moderations by moderators with Private Fostering experience.	Throughout the year
	Additional dip sample of 6 privately fostered children to ensure the quality and consistency of practice.	Jan – Mar 25

3. Summary of data for 2024 – 2025

There were 67 different Private Fostering arrangements open during 2024–2025, some of whom had a dual plan of Child Protection or Child in Need. Table 2 indicates the changes from the previous in respect of dual planning.

Table 2 – Percentage of Private Fostering subject to other plans

% PF dual plan	2023-2024	2024-2025
Child Protection	2%	7.5%
Child in Need	27%	31%

This shows a slight increase in dual plans. However, only 2 children were subject to plans due to concerns about the care provided in the Private Fostering arrangement. The first was following a child alleging a Private Foster Carer threatened to harm them. The incident was investigated and a period of support provided by a Social Work Assistant, which led to improvements in the care provided. The second involved an adolescent found to be living on his own. A friend agreed to be assessed as a Private Foster Carer and the adolescent was subject to Child Protection while assessments were undertaken. The Private Fostering arrangement formally ended due to the adolescent's age but support is still in place under Child in Need.

Notifications-

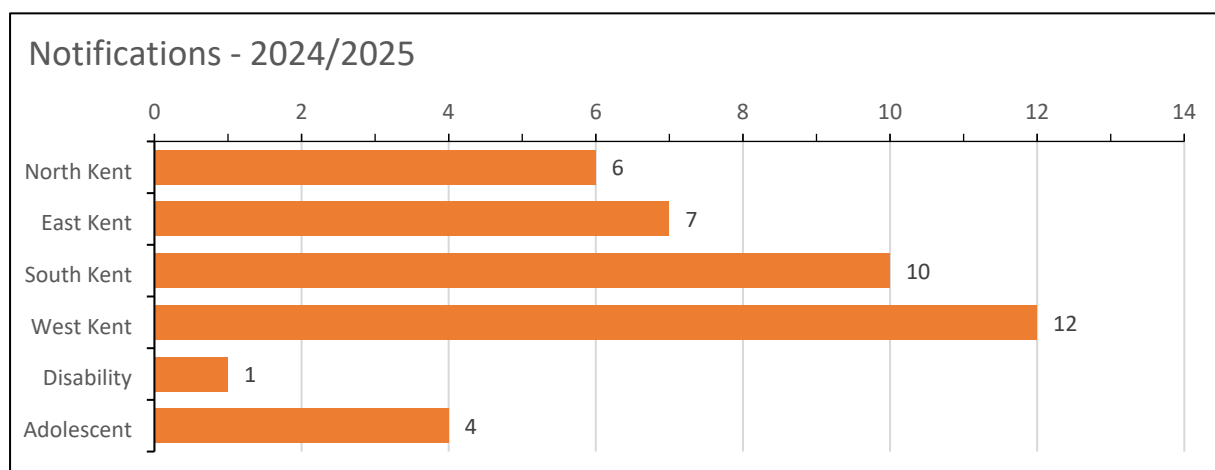
In the year 2024-2025, there were 40 new Private Fostering notifications, a drop of 34% from the previous year and the lowest since 2014. This shows a continuing steep decline but is indicative of the national picture and Kent is not an outlier.

CoramBAAF undertook a national survey published in 2024. 11 local authorities responded. 44% received between 1 and 20 notifications, 28% received between 41 and 60 notifications and only 8% received over 61 notifications. This national picture would indicate a lack of awareness in Kent is not the reason for the decline/ It appears to be due to other factors, such as a decrease in children coming from other countries to learn English. Work opportunities, the cost of living and the cost of study all seem to impact on notifications for children from other countries. However, we have to remain vigilant and ensure awareness raising is a key component of our work in this area.

Graph 1 shows notifications by area with West Kent being the highest with 12, Strengthening Independence Service (recorded as Disability) with 1 arrangement and Adolescent Service with 4. The significant needs of children with disabilities make it difficult for them to be looked after by friends or family, so they are less likely to be privately fostered and more likely to access short breaks care or residential settings. It is positive to see an increase in notifications from the Adolescent Service which previously had extremely low or no notifications, although working with adolescents who may live in alternative living arrangements.

The spread of notifications across the social work teams is even, which is similar to last year and again, indicative of fewer foreign students as there were variations in spread previously, with higher numbers where English language schools are situated.

Graph 1 – Notifications Received by Area April 2024–March 2025



Source of Private Fostering Notification -

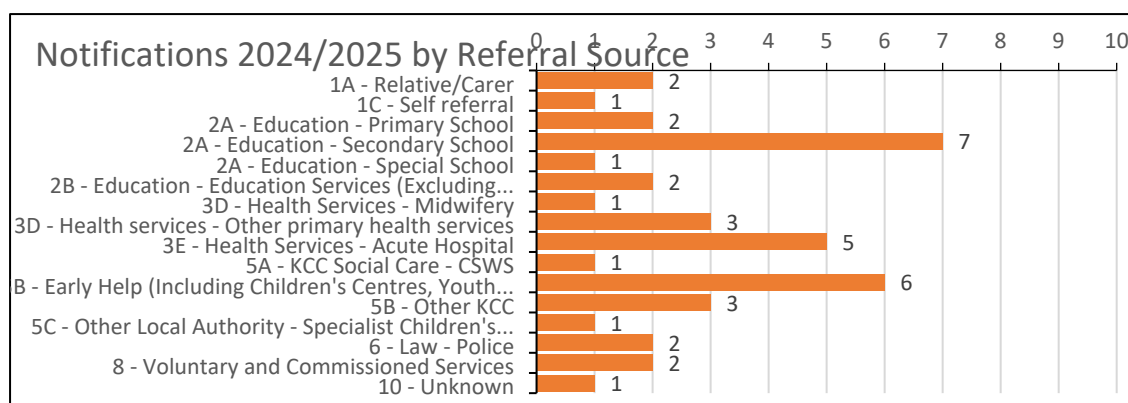
Notifications from education decreased from 38% to 30%, with secondary schools seeing the most significant drop from 17 notifications in 2023/2024 to 7 in 2024/2025. It is not clear why there has been a drop. Some schools are seeing fewer exchange students who come for an academic year but it is more likely that schools are not identifying privately fostered children due to higher numbers of exclusions or elective home education. These young people may be more likely to be privately fostered but hidden. If this continues to be a trend, further work with schools will help identify the cause of fewer notifications.

Notifications from Early Help increased from 1 to 6 which may reflect improved awareness, training and support from Early Help Private Fostering Leads.

Notifications from health tripled from 3 to 9, likely to have been influenced by attendance at training. Historically notifications from Health have been low, so this is a positive development.

Referral by ICS (KCC Social Care- CSWS remained at the same level, as last year, of 1.

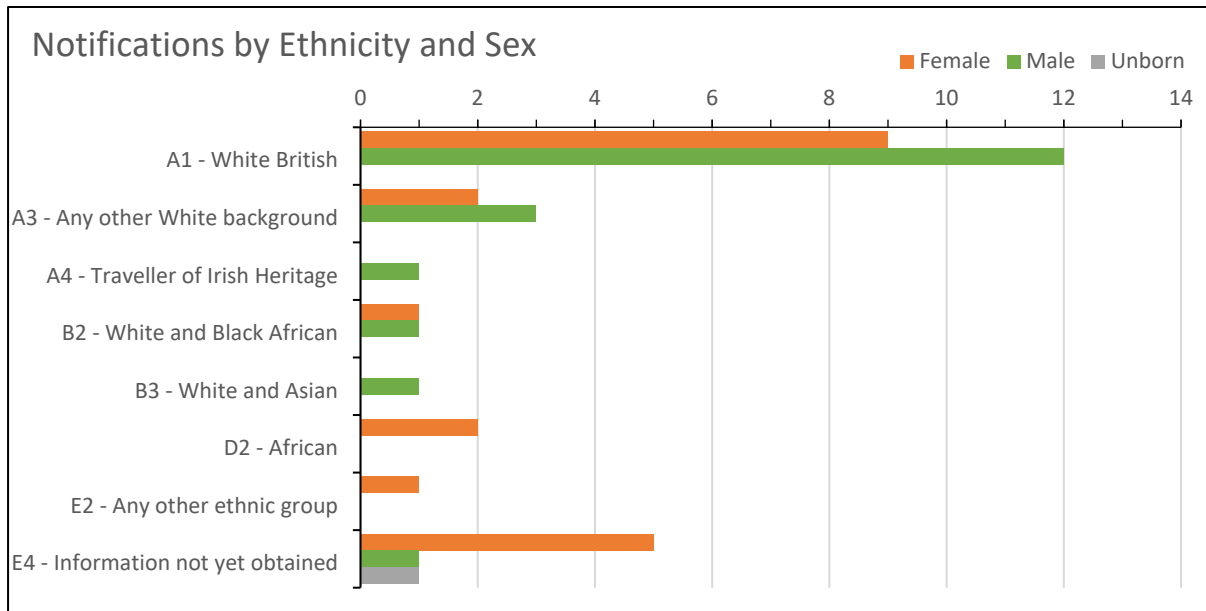
Graph 2 – Referrals by source



Ethnicity and Nationality –

There is still some work to do to improve recording of this important area. Graph 3 shows the ethnicity of children. Most children are White British (52.5% from the UK) but 17.5% have no ethnicity recorded

Graph 3 – Ethnicity and sex of privately fostered children

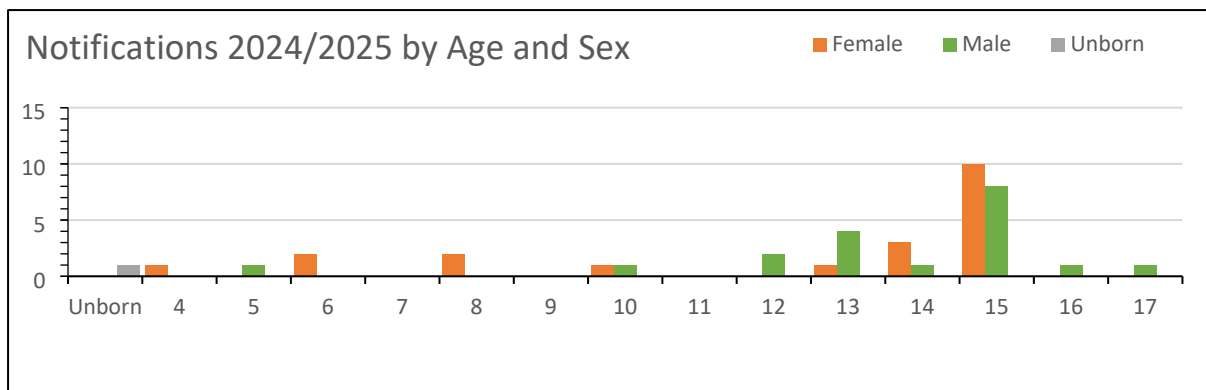


2024/2025 is the first year data collected about Nationality but it is disappointing that for 24 children this was not recorded (60%). This needs to be more of a focus throughout the year as every child’s nationality and ethnicity should be recorded.

Age and Sex of Children at Notification -

Notifications were weighted towards the older adolescent age band of 12 to 15, with a similar number of females (50%) to males (47.5%). In previous years there were slightly more females than males, but the numbers are not so significant as to indicate a change in trend.

Graph 4 – Notifications by age and sex



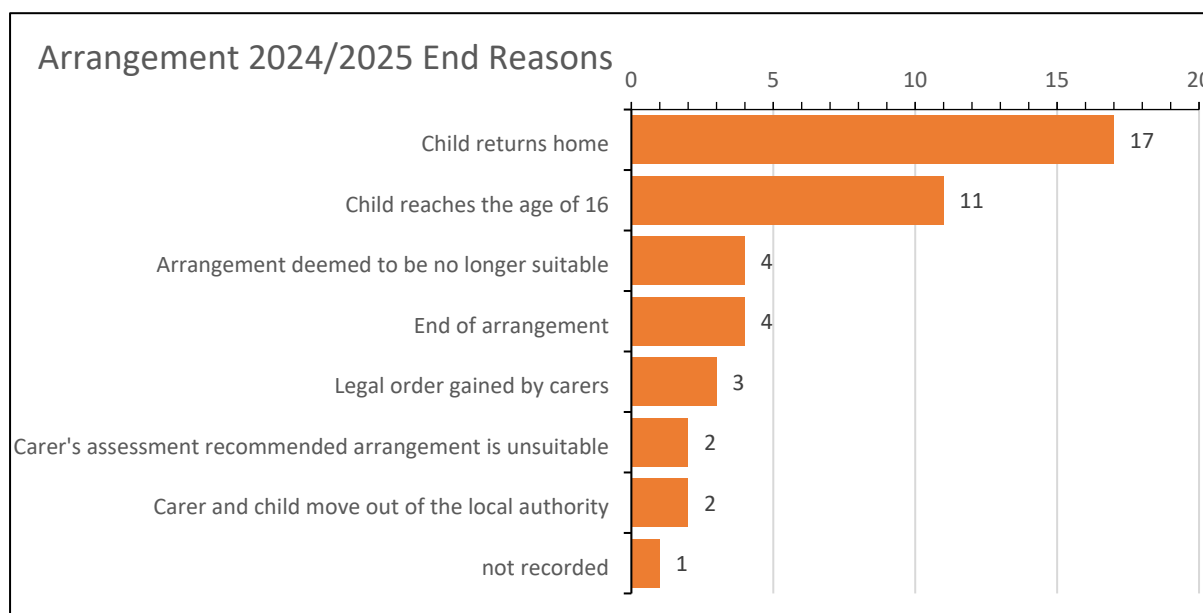
There were 9 notifications for children 11 years and younger (7 in 2023-2024). Private Fostering arrangements are only suitable for younger children for a limited period of time. Stable permanent plans should be sought if there is no plan for the child to return home. In the majority of situations for younger children, they return home or go on to kinship care arrangements. In 2024-2025, the Private Fostering arrangement ended for 3 children due to legal orders being obtained and securing permanence for them. Permanency planning is monitored within moderations of audits and within the Good Practice in Private Fostering Forums.

Private Fostering Arrangements Started and ended -

37 Private Fostering arrangements started from April 2024 to March 2025. The peak being July and September, linked with the arrival of international students into the country and those students who remained in boarding schools for over 2 weeks during school holidays, as these children are subject to Private Fostering arrangements.

44 arrangements ended during the report period and the range of reasons is shown in graph 5. 'Child returns home' data will include international students returning to their country.

Graph 5 – PF arrangements ended by reason



Children over 16 who have a disability should be subject to a Private Fostering arrangement until the age of 18. Within the Private Fostering Regulations there is no definition of what is considered a disability. The current eligibility criteria for Strengthening Independence Service is applied, but following a safeguarding review in 2023, consideration was given to children with Education Health Care Plans and significant mental health problems being included so they would receive support in a

private fostering arrangement beyond 16. The balance between ensuring vulnerable children are supported and monitored and proportionality in terms of least intervention is difficult. The guidance was updated to reflect this vulnerability and for a level of discretion within social work teams to consider each child's needs and vulnerabilities when considering closing involvement when children over 16 are not living at home. The social work teams have the option to consider support for these children under Child in Need, although this brings additional difficulties as consent is required and Private Fostering is a statutory process, requiring a duty to assess and monitor arrangements.

The data indicated 4 arrangements ended as these were no longer deemed suitable, and 2 Private Fostering assessments concluded the arrangement would not be suitable for the child. Table 3 shows reasons for the arrangements ending. This also shows some appear to have been recorded as unsuitable incorrectly.

Table 3 Reasons for PF arrangements ended due to no longer being suitable.

Child	Age	Reason for end- Arrangement deemed no longer suitable	Current status of child
Child 1	15	Returned to care of mother.	No longer in need of service.
Child 2	17	Young person turned 16 and although had some additional needs they were not to the level that it met the criteria for Private Fostering until 18.	Remained with carer post 16 but no longer in need of service.
Child 3	15	Child moved after concerns about Private Fostering carers following domestic abuse incident where carer was intoxicated.	Child looked after s.20.
Child 4	16	Arrangement with Private Fostering carer broken down.	Child looked after CA s.31.
Child	Age	Reason for end- Assessment recommended arrangement is unsuitable	Current status of child
Child 5	16	Concerns arose about domestic abuse, mental health and alcohol use by Private Foster Carer. Child returned to care of mother.	Child in Need.
Child 6	16	Private Foster Carer not able to offer a long-term arrangement.	Child looked after s.20.

Prohibitions and Disqualifications-

There were no recorded prohibitions or disqualifications during 2024-/2025. However, one arrangement ended with the child moving to another care arrangement, which is the initial course of action required. The two children where there were concerns about the quality of care being provided remain involved with children's social care, so have continuing oversight. There is no indication from the case records the carers are providing care to other children under a Private Fostering arrangement. It would have been good practice for a disqualification or prohibition of the Private Foster Carer to have been considered and recorded by the team with a clear rationale for why this was not required. This is learning being taken forward with the Private Fostering Leads.

Ongoing Visiting Requirements (reg. 8 visits) -

Each Private Fostering visit is recorded on a statutory Regulation 8 form. The target for visits to be completed within timescale in Kent is 90%. Children are visited 6 weekly within the first year and 12 weekly thereafter. The average percentage of visits within timescale over the 12-month period was 88.2%. A slight increase from 2023-24 (85%). This is particularly evident when notifications (expected 6 weeks prior to a Private Fostering arrangement starting) are for children who are not yet in the country and cannot be visited. This usually applies to foreign students or Ukrainian children waiting for a visa (60% of the arrangements). The assessments and statutory checks can be started but the child cannot be seen in person until arrival which is then out of the statutory timescale. The initial visit in person is required within 7 days of being in the arrangement, or within 24 hours if from Ukraine. This year the 'Out of Country PF Communication' option for a case note was introduced for children in another country. This has yet to be embedded as only 10 case notes were recorded under this heading, in relation to 7 children.

The percentage of visits where children were seen alone was 71.7%. This is low and in response to this a checklist was added to the Assessment for Service Managers to review this before approval. This will continue to be an area of focus in the Good Practice in Private Fostering Forums held quarterly and will be added to the update of Private Fostering Guidance.

Private Fostering is reported on PowerBI and the monthly scorecard. Performance is discussed in Good Practice Forums. Further exploration of month-on-month figures shows a more accurate picture of visiting timescales within each area and by each District.

The process of recording a Private Fostering visit differs to that for a child subject to Child in Need and this is not always being recorded accurately. However, this is a recording issue, and not a practice issue, as visits are taking place. This is regularly discussed with Private Fostering Leads and reminders posted on the Private Fostering Teams channel to ensure recording accurately reflects the practice.

4. Private Fostering Awareness Raising 2023-2024

Multi-agency partners -

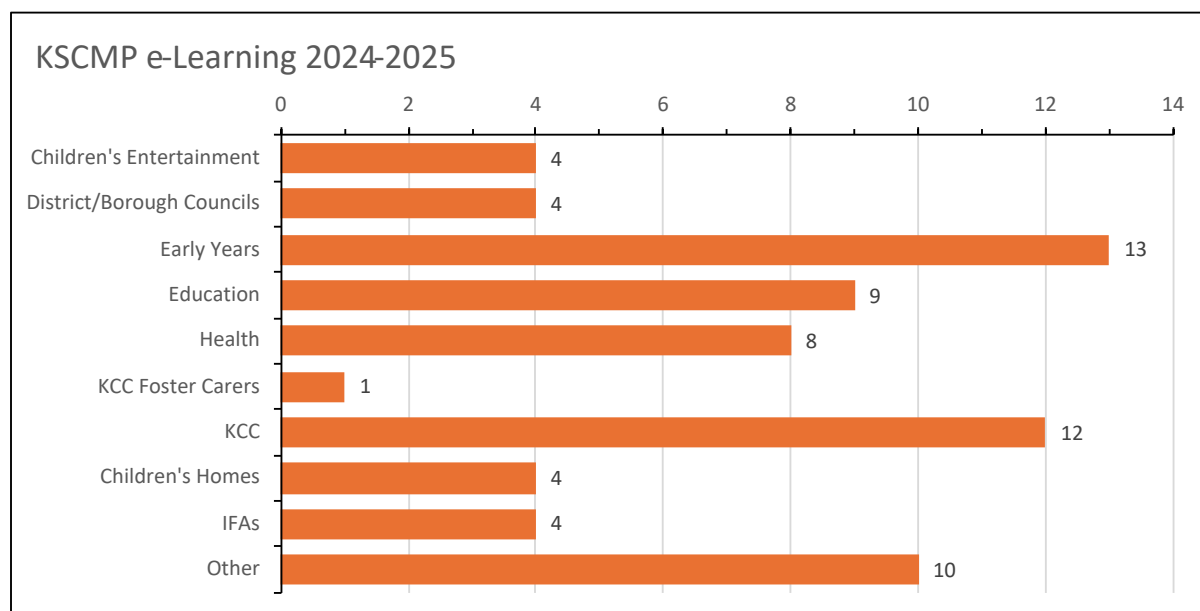
The Local Authority has a duty to promote and raise awareness of Private Fostering with partner agencies. Some of the activity this year included:

In February 2025, a Private Fostering leaflet was circulated to partner agencies who may encounter children in Private Fostering arrangements, including English language schools, faith organisations and youth groups.

In June 2024 and November 2024, the Practice Development Team provided 2 virtual training events for multi-agency partners, advertised through the Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership (KSCMP). 21 attended in June 2024 and 15 in November. The training included information about Private Fostering; risks and vulnerabilities; duties; and actions for external professionals as well as Children's Social Work Teams. Participants at the event included Safeguarding Leads and teachers from primary and secondary schools, health practitioners, 2 faith organisations and colleagues from Integrated Children's Services.

KSCMP also provide a Private Fostering e-learning course and from 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, this was completed 73 times by partner agencies from Early Years, Education, Health, fostering agencies and Children's Services in Kent and Medway.

Graph 6 – Bar chart showing breakdown of organisation type/sector for KSCMP e-learning



Additionally, awareness raising took place with language schools with a letter sent in February 2025 to all language schools reminding them of their duties in relation to Private Fostering. A poster and leaflet were included in the letter for the language schools to display and disseminate within their schools.

Integrated Children’s Services -

Good Practice in Private Fostering Forums continued quarterly throughout the year, chaired by a Social Work Standards Officer with Private Fostering responsibility and overseen by the Private Fostering Lead Officer. All services have a Lead currently, including the Adolescent Service and Early Help. There is an expectation a representative from each Service attends the forums but there were some regular gaps in attendance highlighted with the Service Managers.

Agenda items include trends and themes (including from audit findings), key performance indicators, challenging aspects of the work and good practice examples. This helps inform changes to the Private Fostering resources, Liberi and the Private Fostering guidance. Information was disseminated back to services by the Leads and audits continued to indicate practice improvement throughout the last year.

There is a Private Fostering Teams Channel for the Leads. Information is shared on a regular basis which provides helpful reminders about practice, information from case law and training.

The county Private Fostering Lead Officer and the Social Work Standards Officer provide individual consultations and guidance to practitioners to help inform practice.

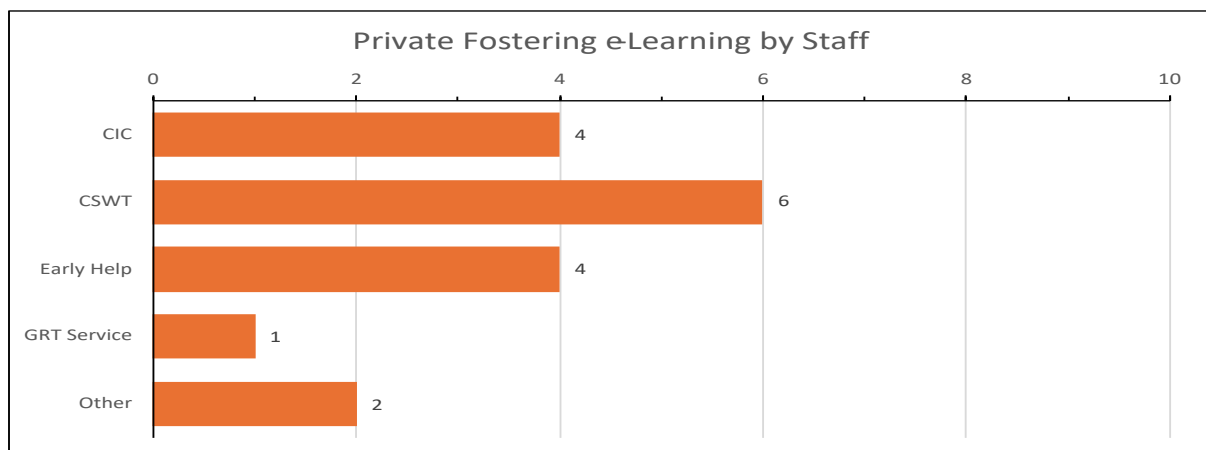
Guidance is regularly reviewed for Kent Procedures Online.

Additional training for Integrated Children’s Service -

Kent Academy provides dedicated training and resources for Integrated Children’s Services and 17 members of staff accessed the Private Fostering e-learning during 2023-2024 (16 less than the previous year).

Areas identified for promotion of Private Fostering and training include Early Help, Youth Justice and Family Hubs.

Graph 7 shows ICS staff professions accessing e-learning 01.04.24 – 31.03.25



Whilst it is positive staff are engaging with ways to learn more about Private Fostering, the numbers of attendees or views are low in relation to the total workforce. However, Leads disseminate information and facilitate training in their districts and this work would not be reflected in these figures. The grades from audits (further information in next section) would appear to evidence the impact of their training and roles.

5. Audits

Private Fostering work is audited as part of the county audit process in line with other children receiving support from the Children’s Social Work Service. From April 2024 to March 2025 inclusive, 22 privately fostered children’s records were audited by the allocated districts. Moderation is a valuable check on the quality of audits undertaken, as well as an opportunity for the Private Fostering lead to give informal training. This usually includes information about the importance of Reg 8 forms and discussing permanency and vulnerability.

Audit analysis –

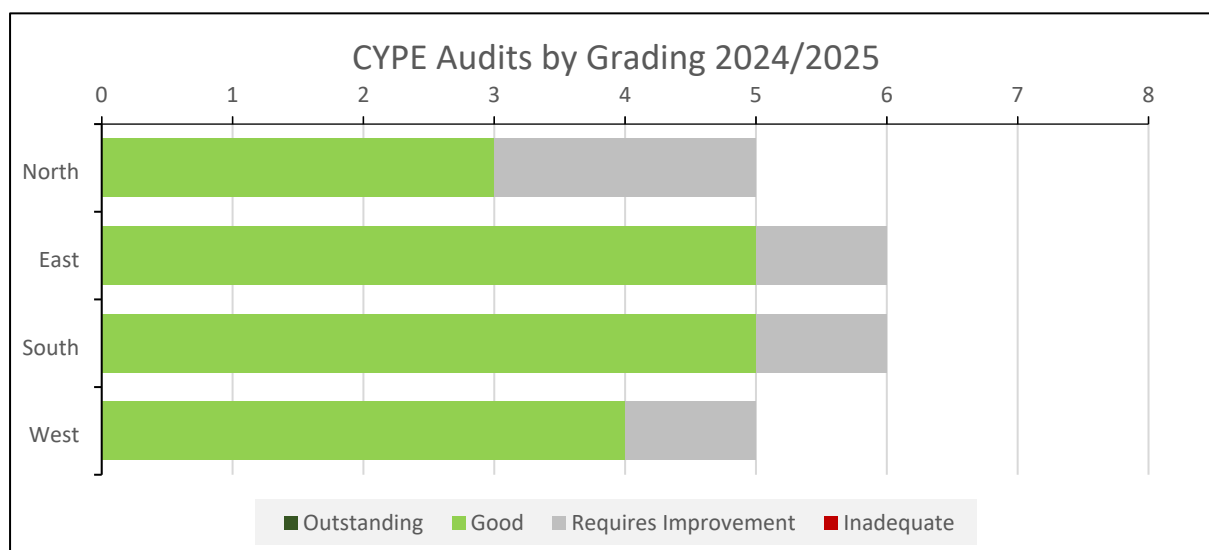
Audits showed quality of practice remained static over the last year.

Within the sections of the audit, the ‘response to referral’ was seen as consistently strong practice with just over a quarter identified as outstanding (27%). ‘Management oversight’ was an area identified as needing improvement from additional audits undertaken last year. This year, 68.2% were graded good for Management oversight which denotes an improvement from last year. the quality of practice is fairly consistent across the county.

Table 4 – Grade comparisons from year to year

Percentage grades	2023-2024	2024-25
Good	76%	77%
Requires improvement	24%	23%
Inadequate	0%	0%

Graph 8 – Table showing audit gradings broken down by Area



Additional dip sample -

Six additional dip samples were undertaken by the Social Work Standards Officer in the Practice Development Team, to consider areas of concern identified in the 2024 annual report: the DBS check; oversight of PFAAR by the Service Manager; seeing the child alone; and planning for permanence.

- Only 2 of the dip samples had a completed assessment. Both were approved by the Service Manager but 1 was prior to the DBS being received.
- In 3 there was a delay in in the PFAAR being signed off, but the reason for the delay was not recorded as management oversight.
- The child was seen alone in 4 out of 6. This indicates some areas of positive practice in relation to children being seen alone consistently and permanency being discussed where needed.
- In 5, consideration was given to a plan for permanence.

Learning from the dip samples will be shared at the Forums to be disseminated back to districts and addressed in training.

6. Systems

A Management Information Officer in the Management Information and Intelligence Team continues to work closely with district social work teams to improve recording, reduce data errors and ensure compliance with statutory requirements. The Management Information Officer attends the Good Practice Forums and training events and offers one-to-one support to practitioners. In 2023, MI created “bitesize” videos to improve knowledge of the Private Fostering pathway on Liberi. The videos were accessed by 24 people. These are relatively low numbers and suggest further promotion of these resources is needed.

The MIU Officer is a member of the Teams Channel and posted advice and information about Liberi recording.

The Liberi Operational Group approved the following changes in December 2024 to enable more sophisticated data collection, including information about prohibitions and requirements.

A new checklist in the PFAAR to ensure the Service Manager checked the documents (e.g., DBS check) and quality of practice required (e.g., child seen alone) prior to sign off. This will go live in May 2025 and be available for reporting next year.

Reason for arrangement ending will be mandatory. This will go live in July 2025 and reporting will be available next year.
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Service Manager requirement for sign off for Annual Reviews.
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Confirmation of the recording of data related to prohibitions and requirements to ensure any identified within a PFAAR have Service Manager agreement and sign off.

7. Summary

Children in Private Fostering arrangements are particularly vulnerable due to the lack of family and formal oversight and the potential for their needs and safety to be hidden or overlooked. The number of children in these arrangements is low both in Kent and nationally. Despite the decrease in numbers, we must remain cautious and vigilant to a lack of awareness by our own staff and partner agencies. It remains crucial for awareness raising to continue and for all agencies to be provided with the knowledge and skills to respond appropriately.

In Kent, we are confident the overall practice is positive, as evidenced by good audit gradings. There is evidence from dip sampling that permanence planning is being addressed effectively. Additionally, there was an increase in notifications from Early Help and Health, and positive attendance by multi-agency partners at KSCMP training, facilitated by the Practice Development Team.

Areas of development are identified, including ensuring DBS checks are received prior to approval of assessment and completion of statutory Reg 8 Forms for every visit. The Next Steps Plan highlights the work which needs to continue over 2024-2025.

8. Next Steps Plan

See page 15

	Objectives 2024 - 2025	Responsible person	Complete by
1	Continue to raise awareness of Private Fostering (PF) with partner agencies and wider community		
1.1	Advertise and provide virtual training for multi-agency partners from statutory and voluntary services. Training will be twice a year, booked via KSCMP with one coinciding with Coram BAAF Private Fostering day. Build training into Family Hubs Workforce Development Plan.	PF Lead / KSCMP	Bi-annual April 2025 Nov 2025
1.2	Share Private Fostering Day events, including Coram BAAF activities	PF Lead	5 th November 2025
1.3	Build links with language and private schools in each area to improve communication and practice. Utilise current newsletters and organisations such as Education Safeguarding Service and British Council.	PF Lead	July – Dec 2025
1.5	Private Fostering leaflet and poster to be sent to partner agencies and wider community, including Education, Health, Language Schools and Faith organisations	PF Lead	Nov 2025
2	Develop Private Fostering practice across Integrated Children's Services		
2.1	Highlight in CYPE bulletin practice expectations and statutory requirements for Private Fostering and link to updated guidance.	PF Lead	June 2025
2.2	Good Practice in Private Fostering Forums to be held with district Private Fostering Leads to discuss best practice, learning from audits and data and disseminate information. Private Fostering Leads to feed back to districts.	PF Lead and District Leads	Quarterly
2.4	Continue to review and highlight if absences from the Good Practice in Private Fostering Forums with Service Managers and link with data/audit findings	PF Lead	As and when required
2.5	Consultations available and advice given by Private Fostering Lead regarding complex Private Fostering Arrangements	PF Lead	As and when required
2.6	Provide Private Fostering Bulletin and Communities of Practice event on Private Fostering Day	PF Lead	Nov 2025
2.7	In conjunction with Private Fostering Business Support leads, provide training for Business Support colleagues.	PF Lead	Dec 2025

2.9	Continue to promote Private Fostering training and relevant resources on the Kent Academy and Kent Procedures Online.	PF Lead	2025-2026
2.10	Private Fostering promotion within induction and training programmes for new staff, Newly Qualified Social Workers, social work students on Step Up to Social Work programmes, Approach Social Work (formerly Frontline) and Apprenticeships.	Team Managers/ district Leads / ASYE and student programme co- ordinators	Throughout 2025-2026
2.11	Liaison with specific services regarding identifying PF – Adolescent Service, Strengthening Independence. This may include visits to service meetings.	PF Lead	Throughout 2025-2026
2.12	Exploration of top tips sheet or built in checklist within the PFAAR for Service Managers to assist with checks prior to signing off assessment.	PF Lead	Sept 2024
2.13	Improve recording of Regulation 8 visits, especially within services where this is challenging, e.g., Adolescent Service. This will be through the visits to service meetings, within awareness raising/moderations/Good Practice in Private Fostering Forums, and COP in Private Fostering Week.	PF Lead and Practice Development Team	Throughout 2025-2026
2.14	Legal briefing session on achieving permanence to incorporate children in private arrangements, such as Private Fostering.	Legal Briefings Co-ordinator	Dec 2025
3	Ongoing practice monitoring		
3.1	4 Private Fostering children to be included in each audit cycle, with moderations by moderators with Private Fostering experience	Management Information Team	2026-2026
3.2	Via Power Bi, review completion of ethnicity, country of birth, regulatory and out of country visits and highlight and address any gaps	PF Lead / Management Information	2024-2025
3.3	Work with Management Information and Intelligence to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand data on nationality and country and correlate this to initial visits to report separately regarding Kent children and international students or Ukrainian nationals. - Capture and monitor child seen alone data. 	PF Lead / Management Information	Oct 2025
3.4	Further analysis required to understand and report on initial visits to children within Private Fostering arrangements. Changes to Liberi already made will support this but further work is required to improve reporting.	PF Lead / Management Information	Oct 2025