

**PRIVATE**

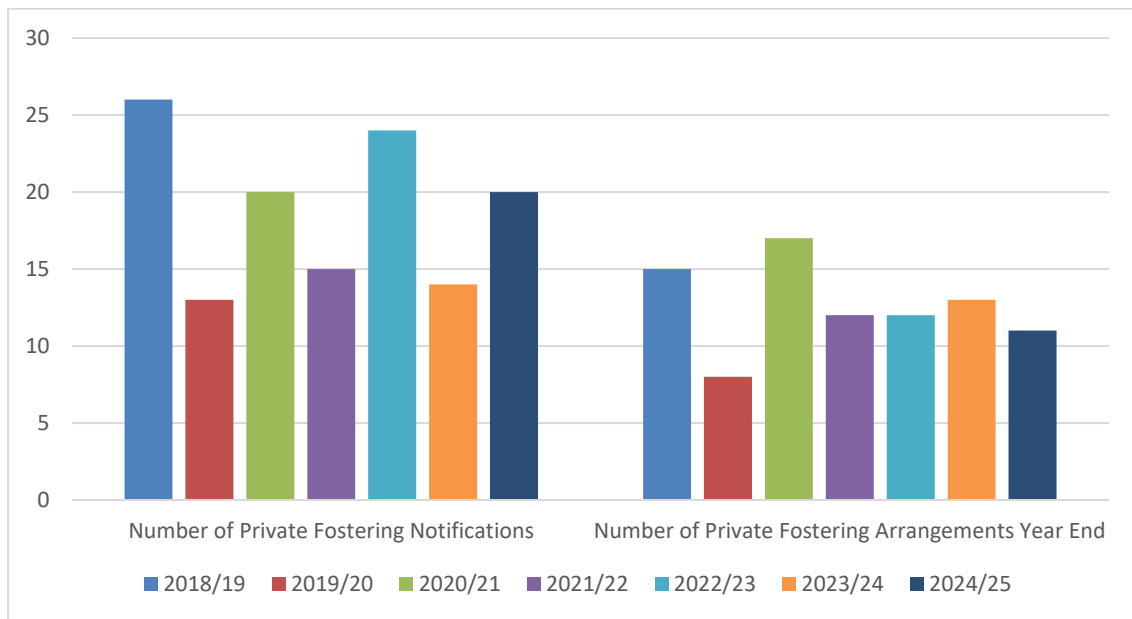
# **FOSTERING REPORT**

**Lincolnshire Fostering Service**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**2024/2025**





The chart above shows key data regarding private fostering within Lincolnshire over the past years.

Focusing on 2024/2025 the following can be noted:

- There were 20 notifications to the Council spread throughout the County.
- Of the 20 Notifications received, 1 was in relation to young people via the Homes For Ukraine Scheme.
- All Private Fostering Arrangement Assessment Records are completed within the 7 day timescale.
- All the Regulation 7 visits were undertaken within the 7 day timescale.
- All the Regulation 8 visits continue to be tracked with reminders sent to individual workers to ensure these are recorded on Mosaic. Responses are received to explain any gaps or delays. Where these relate to young people housed under the Homes For Ukraine Scheme, there have been instances of video contact taking place where children have returned to Ukraine for visits.
- 17 children ceased to be privately fostered during the 2024/2025 period.
- 11 Children were recorded as privately fostered at the year end.
- Of the 17 children whose private fostering status ended:
  - 10 returned home to parents
  - 1 returned to Ukraine following the Homes For Ukraine Scheme
  - 1 had turned 16
  - 2 had turned 18 (Homes For Ukraine scheme)
  - 1 moved out of area with their carers
  - 1 applied for an SGO
  - 1 returned to the care of their SGO carer
  - 1 moved to another carer

## **Procedures**

The Children Act 1989 brings together the law relating to children's welfare within a single coherent legislative framework. It aims to strike a balance between the duty of parents to exercise their responsibilities towards their children and the duty of the state to intervene to ensure that children's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

The legislation relevant to private fostering is set out in Part 9 of, and Schedule 8 to, the Children Act 1989, and regulations made under Part 9 of that Act.

Section 67 of, and Schedule 8 to, the Children Act 1989 have been amended by section 44 of the Children Act 2004 which came into force on 1 July 2005. The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 which came into force on the same date replaced the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 1991

'The Care of Children: Principles and Practice in Regulations and Guidance', published by the Department of Health in 1989 relate the law to practice and the context in which regulations and guidance are issued.

Private foster carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt.

However, a person who is a "relative" under the Children Act 1989 i.e. a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full or half blood or by marriage) or step-parent will not be a private foster carer. 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.

## **Organisational and Structural Aspects**

Lincolnshire County Council Children's Services continues to be committed to maintaining high standards in relation to private fostering service provision and ensuring that this service is continually reviewed.

The Panel Advisor has the lead for private fostering and her role is to monitor the compliance with the National Minimum standards on a monthly basis and to ensure that performance in the area remains high.

The monthly reporting figures that are seen by Social Care Team Managers and Practice Supervisors allow them to maintain their overview of how each team is performing in relation to private fostering.

Daily recording of work undertaken in relation to Private Fostering is recorded on Mosaic.

The specialist fostering service dedicated to kinship/connected person assessments continues to have responsibility for undertaking the assessment of the private foster carer's suitability. There continues to be regular communication between the Practice Supervisor in this team and the Panel Advisor.

### **Background information**

Any parent proposing to have their child cared for by someone other than a close relative for more than 28 days, or a carer who is proposing to look after someone else's child who is not a close relative, should notify Children's Services at least 6 weeks before the arrangement is due to begin.

This is known as a "Proposed Arrangement". In these circumstances the Customer Service Centre should be contacted, and the referral will be passed on to the relevant locality Family Assessment and Support Team. However, the more usual presenting situation is one whereby the Customer Service Centre is notified of an arrangement when the child is already with the prospective private foster carer.

According to current agreed private fostering processes, the Customer Service Centre sends the received notifications directly to The Family Assessment and Support Team (FAST) within one working day to avoid any unnecessary delay and this type of notification bypasses the usual screening process aligned to other social care requests.

FAST undertakes the management of the referral of privately fostered children and their timescale for completing the Private Fostering Assessment of Arrangement (PFAAR) is within 7 working days of referral (notification) and they liaise with Kinship team for the completion of the assessment of the carer's suitability.

Within each FAST team, there are a small number of Social Workers that tend to be allocated any new private fostering cases and they receive support and advice from their Practice Supervisor.

At this point the Social Worker is required to visit and see the child, the carer and also the parents or those with Parental Responsibility.

Visits to see and speak with privately fostered children/young people are carried out in accordance with statutory timescales and recorded on Mosaic. The visits should include seeing the child, their bedroom and speaking with them alone. This is to ensure that the child's voice is heard and if any actions are needed to promote their welfare.

The assessment of the arrangement (PFAAR) is authorised by the Team Manager of the child's social worker. The decision about the overall suitability of the arrangement is completed by the Team Manager of the social worker to the child, in consultation with the Team Manager of the Fostering Services.

It is the responsibility of the Team Manager of the child's social worker to notify in writing the Parent or others with Parental Responsibility, Private Foster carers and relevant agencies that the child/young person is living in or will live in a Private Fostering Arrangement.

The Practice Supervisors in the Children in Care Teams are also notified of the child/young person that is in a private fostering arrangement.

Once the private fostering arrangement has been confirmed, at the point of the second Regulation 8 private fostering visit, the FAST worker will undertake a joint visit with a worker from the Children in Care teams. On completion of the visit, the overall management will transfer to the CIC Team in order to provide the child/young person with a consistent response for the duration of the arrangement.

Each private fostering arrangement is annually reviewed by the Team Manager in line with the statutory requirements and as such, the cases are open to scrutiny in respect of care planning and intervention.

The Head of Regulated Services is the named person within the local authority with expertise in private fostering whom social workers and managers can contact for advice.

Decisions regarding requirements, disqualification and prohibition should be referred to the Head of Regulated Services.

In relation to young people who are subject to the Homes For Ukraine Scheme, the eligibility requirements for children who are not travelling with or joining a parent or legal guardian are set out below:

The children:

- Must have an immediate family member who is Ukrainian.
- Must have been residents in Ukraine before 1 January 2022 or have been born after that date.
- Can apply from Ukraine or from any other country except the UK.
- This will be assessed by UKVI.

Eligible children may include those who:

- Intend to be sponsored and hosted by an adult relative other than a parent or legal guardian, who may or may not also travel with the child
- Are accompanied by an adult relative and will both be living with a sponsor or in self-contained accommodation provided by a sponsor who is not related to them. The adult relative may or may not also travel with the child.
- Will not be accompanied by an adult relative and intend to be sponsored and hosted by a sponsor who is not related to them.

- Parental or legal guardian consent
- They must have the required parental or legal guardian consent documents

## **Activity and Performance 2024-2025 in relation to National Minimum Standards**

### **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.**

Lincolnshire Council has a statement of purpose on private fostering.

Information about private fostering is available through the Lincolnshire County Council website.

Lincolnshire County Council works with partners through LSCP to raise awareness and ensure effective awareness raising across key partner agencies.

### **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 arrangement comes to their attention, which has not been notified**

### **Awareness Raising**

The Panel Advisor works with the Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership in relation to private fostering which previously included targeted information about the Homes For Ukraine Scheme, a photo campaign which reflected the target demographic of predominantly older children and teenagers, and signs to look for as indicators a child may be in a private fostering arrangement.

In order to continue to raise the awareness of private fostering within the Local Authority, and an understanding of roles and responsibilities in relation to private fostering, the Panel Advisor has reviewed and circulated an updated briefing which is accessible to all employees.

Information continues to be available on the Lincolnshire County Council website and the NHS staff Intranet

Lincolnshire County Council is committed to evaluating the effectiveness of its activities to ensure that they contribute to a positive change in relation to children who may be privately fostered.

The private fostering e-learning training has been rolled out by the LSCP and is available to all partners. Course engagement from 01 April 2024 – 31 March 2025 is as follows :

<b>01 April 2024 - 31 March 2025</b>	
<b>Agency</b>	<b>Total</b>
Voluntary Sector	38
District Council	4
Early Years	80
Education	172
Foster Carers	2
Health	3
Independent Care Sector	1
LCC Adult Services & Resources	4
LCC Children's Services	110
Police & Criminal Justice	0
	Total 414

### **Response to Notifications**

In Lincolnshire, the majority of notifications are received once the arrangement has been made and following a referral by the carer to Customer Service Centre. The current arrangements ensure there is an assured and timely response to all notifications/ referrals.

### **National Minimum Standard 3**

#### **Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare**

**The local authority determines effectively the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangement in accordance with the regulations.**

The safeguarding of children who are privately fostered is a responsibility which impacts upon all parts of the local authority, health authority, district councils and the voluntary and private sectors, and as such the LSCP are proactive in monitoring the multi-agency approach in relation to private fostering.

Children's Services continue to ensure that privately fostered children/young people's welfare is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted by qualified social work staff undertaking the assessments and support of the arrangement and private foster carers. This is reflected in the very low numbers of young children assessed to be privately fostered as this is acknowledged as being an unsuitable permanent arrangement for young children.

#### **Prohibitions and Requirements**

Section 69(1) Children Act 1989, confirms that a local authority can prohibit a Private Fostering Arrangement under the following circumstances :

- assessed as not being suitable
- accommodation is not suitable
- would be prejudicial to child to remain in care of private foster carer

#### **Requirements:**

- The Local Authority can stipulate changes to make an arrangement suitable.

There have been no prohibitions or requirements made in this financial year.

Monthly monitoring procedures are effective in tracking the statutory aspects of private fostering as there are dedicated Business Support staff who collate the relevant data relating to private fostering and also sends out reminders regarding the timescales for visits.

In Lincolnshire all private foster carers are DBS checked and are assessed in accordance with the National Minimum Standards. The PFAAR and the carer's assessment form the completed suitability of the arrangement.

#### **National Minimum Standard 4**

**The local authority provides such advice and support to private foster carers and prospective private foster carers as appear to the authority to be needed.**

The dedicated Kinship workers who are responsible for the carer's assessment, has ensured that private foster carers have access to the similar support as local authority foster carers. Carers are also encouraged to attend training events or to access the E-Learning programme available.

The website and information pack includes local services that the carer may access including children's centres. As part of the regular visits to the children the social workers will discuss the current situation with those carers who are looking after the children to ensure that any questions or concerns that they have are addressed.

#### **National Minimum Standard 5**

**The local authority provides such advice and information to the parents of children who are privately fostered within their area as appears to the authority to be needed.**

The children's social worker provides parents with information regarding the legal and regulatory functions of the local authority during their work with those parents to ensure that they are aware of these and what they may expect from the local authority. This information relates to the name address and contact details of the child's social worker and information on the complaints.

Lincolnshire County Council through the monitoring of the case work for children who are in private fostering arrangements, ensures that plans for rehabilitation to birth families is considered, along with ongoing monitoring of the suitability of those private fostering arrangements

#### **National Minimum Standard 6**

**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.**

All children who are privately fostered in Lincolnshire have an allocated qualified social worker who provides advice and support to the child, private foster carer, and their parent(s) and/or any other person with parental responsibility. The level of contact that each private foster carer is determined through the Private Foster Carers Assessment and the Regulation 8 visits.

At the initial and subsequent visits, an information leaflet about private fostering along with a complaints leaflet and information about Total Voice advocacy service are provided to the child/ young person, their carers and family.

There is a requirement for a visit to be made to the carer and child within seven working days when the notification is received, and subsequent visits are to take place every six weeks in the first year and every three months thereafter.

In Lincolnshire we acknowledge the importance of completing the visits in required timescales, to ensure that the children are well cared for in a safe environment, also to identify the help and support available that may assist the private foster carer.

Regular audits are carried out on a range of casework within the authority and these have identified evidence within the assessment and Reg 8 visits, that children are seen alone; that they receive good social work support on an individual basis and are consulted about their views.

In order to ensure that our performance is maintained or improved where possible, the service proactively manages the schedule of visits with advance notice of scheduled dates for visits being forwarded to the allocated Social Worker and their Team Manager.

All children privately fostered in Lincolnshire were encouraged to maintain contact with their birth family and, where possible, their parents.

#### **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.**

#### **Complaints and Representations**

There have been no complaints or representations during this period; however, Lincolnshire County Council ensures that robust reviews of the services for children in privately fostered arrangements are safe and secure.

#### **Developments for the next twelve months for private fostering in Lincolnshire include:**

Looking forward to the next 12 months, our key priorities are further awareness raising activity, as well as engagement with LSCP to further support engagement with the online training offer to enhance widespread learning across key partner organisations.

**Overview of the Demographics of all Children Privately Fostered during the period 2024-2025**

Age		NO		Ethnicity		Gender		Nationality	
0 - 5	3					Male	11	British	22
6	1	White any other White background	7			Female	17	Ukrainian	6
7	0	White British	20						
8	0	Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups / White and Black Caribbean	1						
9	9	Asian/Asian British / Chinese	0						
10	1							Disabled	
11	0								
12	2								
13	1								
14	4								
15	11								
16	0								
17	4								

Lincolnshire County Council remain committed and are pro-active in ensuring that children are provided with permanency and accordingly ensure that the legal status of children remains appropriate to meet their long-term needs.

**Dawn Oldroyd**  
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**Nicola Brangam**  
**Head of Regulated Service**

