

Children's Services

ANNUAL PRIVATE FOSTERING REPORT

MEDWAY FOSTERING SERVICE

Portfolio Holder	Cllr Adam Price
Report from	Kelly Cogger, Assistant Director, Children's Services
Author	Chi Chiringa, Head of Provider Services, Medway Council
Date	1 st April 2025- 31 st March 2026

1. INTRODUCTION AND LEGAL CONTEXT

The Children Act 1989 places a duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of privately fostered children and to provide advice and support to private foster carers. The Children Act 2004 further requires local authorities to raise public awareness of Private Fostering arrangements.

The National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering (2005) provide the framework for the delivery and monitoring of these services. The Private Fostering framework also applies to certain arrangements under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, where children or young people arrive in the UK without a parent or legal guardian. In these circumstances, local authorities are required to assess and support the arrangement as a Private Fostering arrangement.

Medway Council maintains up-to-date policies and procedures to support the identification, assessment, and monitoring of Private Fostering arrangements. During 2025/26, the Private Fostering threshold and referral process were reviewed and updated, with revised guidance incorporated into awareness-raising materials to promote timely identification and referrals across partner agencies.

2. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This report outlines how Medway Council has met its duties under the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering during the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. It summarises service activity, safeguarding arrangements, outcomes for children, performance data, and priorities for service development.

Medway Council is mandated to meet the statutory requirements established by the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005 which states: *"the Local Authority reports annually to the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership on how it satisfies itself that the welfare of privately fostered children in this area is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, including how it co-operates with other agencies in this connection."*

3. SERVICE ACTIVITY 2025

3.1 Awareness Raising

During 2025/26, the Private Fostering Social Worker delivered awareness-raising sessions and bite-size training across Children's Services, including Social Work, MASH, Early Help and Youth Services, and reintroduced monthly virtual drop-in sessions for staff and Designated Safeguarding Leads. Awareness and training were also provided to schools across Medway, alongside consultation and support to education professionals regarding their duty to notify Children's Services of Private Fostering arrangements.

The service continued to work closely with partner agencies, faith groups, and community organisations, including the Medway Ghanaian Association, Medway Interfaith Group, Medway Diversity Forum, and Nigerian Community Association, promoting awareness through information sessions, literature distribution, and professional engagement.

Awareness materials were disseminated to schools, health services, GP surgeries, police, and other partner agencies, supported by regular features in education and safeguarding

newsletters. Community awareness was further promoted through social media, public engagement events, a dedicated awareness stall at Dockside Shopping Centre and Medway's Private Fostering Awareness Week, which included training, drop-in sessions, and public information events.

The Medway Council website continues to provide guidance on eligibility, responsibilities, and referral processes. Awareness activity is further supported through targeted digital marketing, local media partnerships and social media campaigns delivered through the Medway Fostering Facebook, Instagram, and X platforms. Further details of awareness-raising activity are provided in Appendix 2.

3.2 Voice of the child and their lived experiences

The service continues to strengthen how children's views are captured and reflected in assessments and reviews. Consultation forms are completed with children and young people prior to annual reviews, supported by direct communication with the Private Fostering Social Worker through text messaging and the Mind of My Own app. This has increased opportunities for children to share their wishes, feelings and experiences and has received positive feedback from those using it.

A revised Private Fostering booklet for children, parents, carers, and professionals has been introduced to further support participation and understanding of Private Fostering arrangements. The booklet includes information about rights and responsibilities, alongside space for children and young people to record their views.

Feedback from language students regarding their placements and host carers is collected during final visits and shared with language schools to support service improvement and address any issues identified.

4. PRIVATE FOSTERING RETURN 2025-2026

4.1 Analysis of quantitative data regarding Private Fostering notifications/referrals

An analysis of Private Fostering arrangements between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026 shows that most children were aged 10–15 years (20). There was one child aged 5–9 years, no children aged 0–4 years, and five young people aged 16–18 years. The ages of seven children were not recorded at the time of reporting. Demographic figures exceed the number of referrals as sibling groups have been recorded as individual children wherever possible.

The Key demographic findings highlight:

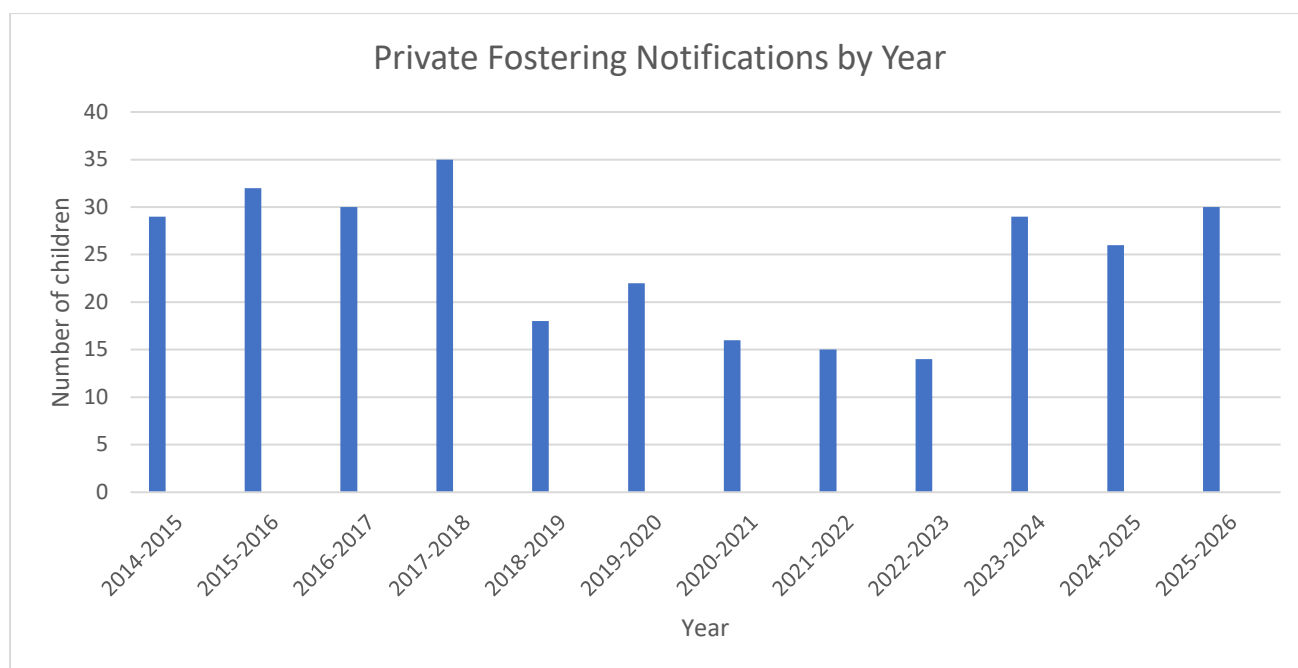
- The majority of children in Private Fostering arrangements were aged 10–15 years (20).
- 56% of children were female (19) and 32% were male (11).
- The largest recorded ethnic group was White British (14) followed by Black African/Black Caribbean (6).
- Ethnicity was not recorded for 10 children, highlighting an area for improved data quality.

Table 1: Demographic Summary 2025/26

Category	Breakdown	Number
Age	0–4 years	0
	5–9 years	1
	10–15 years	20
	16–18 years	5
	Unknown	7
	Total	33
Sex	Male	11
	Female	19
	Unknown	4
Ethnicity	White British	14
	Black African/Black Caribbean	6
	White Other	1
	White Other – German	1
	Mixed White & Asian	1
	Unknown	10

During 2025/26, Medway received 30 Private Fostering notifications, including two sibling groups and one sibling group of three children. Referrals were received from a range of sources, including families, schools, language schools, other local authorities and Children's Social Care teams. All notifications were assessed to determine whether they met the criteria for Private Fostering and to ensure that children's welfare was safeguarded. The Private Fostering Social Worker worked closely with Social Work teams and partner agencies to oversee placement suitability, coordinate support and ensure effective safeguarding arrangements were in place.

Chart 1- Number of Private Fostering notifications since 2014



During 2025/2026 there has been a small increase of notification numbers compared to previous years, but also similar to 2023/2024 and 2024/2025, which we believe indicates a positive reaction to the enhanced awareness raising and wider understanding of Private Fostering arrangements across agencies, including schools and internally in Children's Services.

Table 2 – Data regarding Private Fostering arrangements

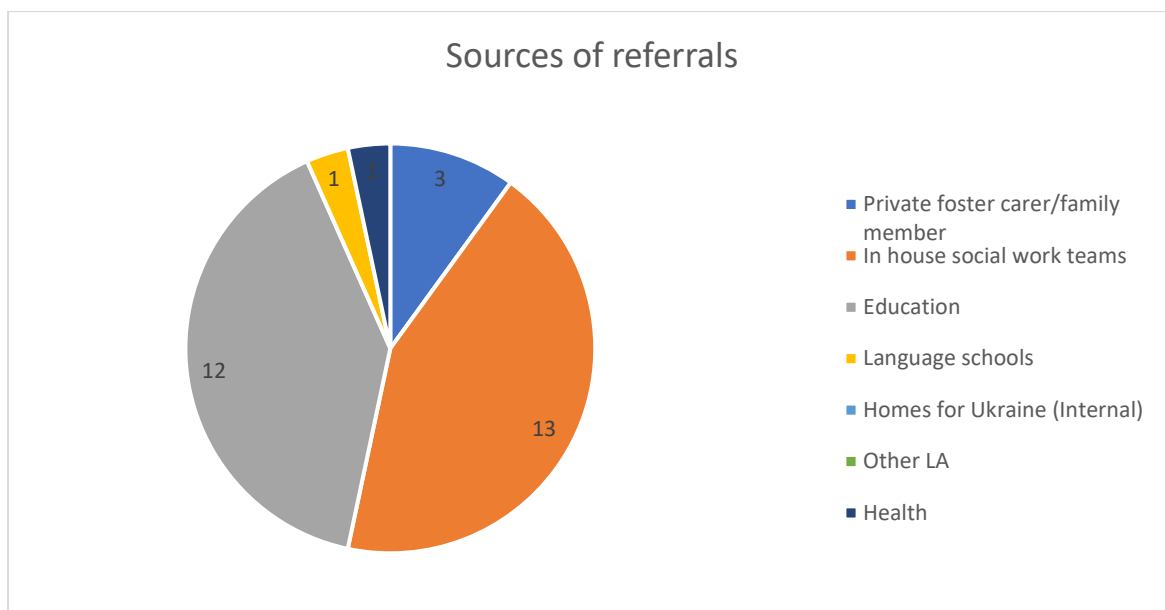
	2025
Private Fostering arrangements already in place on 1 April 2025	8
New notification during year	30
Notifications closed during the year (2025-2026)	7
Private Fostering arrangements continuing (2025)	6

The number of continuing Private Fostering arrangements reduced from 10 in 2024/25 to 6 in 2025/26, alongside an increase in both new notifications and arrangements that closed during the year.

Referrals were received from a range of sources, with Children's Social Care teams accounting for the largest proportion. This reflects increased awareness and understanding of Private Fostering arrangements across Children's Services following ongoing awareness-raising activity. Education settings represented the second largest source of referrals.

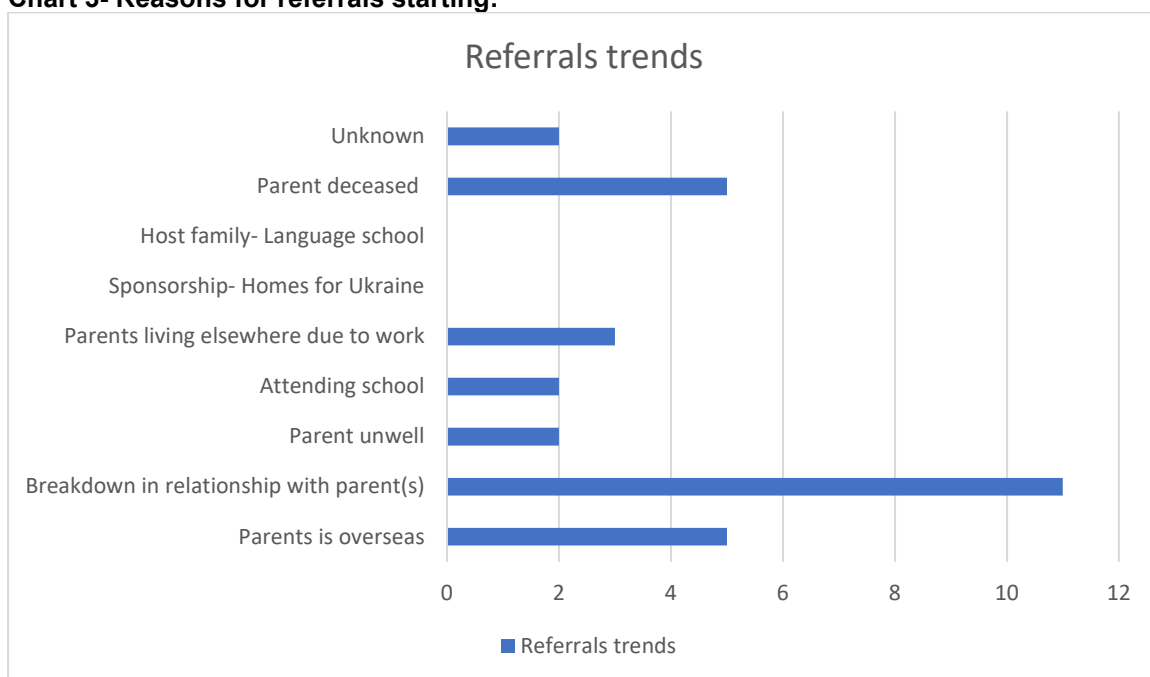
While referrals from Children's Services and education remain strong, referrals from health services were limited to one notification and no referrals were received from voluntary or community organisations. These sectors will therefore remain a focus of targeted awareness-raising activity during 2026/27.

Chart 2 – Source of referrals for Private Fostering arrangements



A review of the current arrangements showed the following reasons for referrals starting:

Chart 3- Reasons for referrals starting:



Referral reasons reflected a range of family circumstances. Of the 30 notifications received during 2025/26, 19 were subsequently found not to meet the criteria for Private Fostering and therefore required no further action.

For arrangements that met the Private Fostering threshold, the most common reasons for referral were family relationship breakdown, parents living overseas, parental employment commitments and bereavement. Five referrals related to children being cared for by non-parental carers following the death of a parent.

Other arrangements included children living with host families for educational purposes, children staying with extended family members while attending school in the UK, and temporary arrangements arising from parental ill health. 5 referrals relating to parents intending to leave the UK did not progress to Private Fostering arrangements as parents subsequently remained in, or returned to, the UK.

4.2 Analysis of the quality of practice

External referrals are received through the Service Portal and screened by the Single Point of Access to determine whether the Private Fostering criteria are met, and appropriate documentation has been provided. Referrals are then allocated to the Private Fostering Social Worker within 24 hours. 19 of referrals were subsequently found not to meet the Private Fostering threshold, indicating a continued need to strengthen professional understanding of the criteria.

Performance against statutory requirements remained strong throughout 2025/26. All children and young people were seen within seven working days of notification, statutory visits were completed within required timescales, and all suitability assessments were approved by the Head of Service. Annual reviews were completed for all eligible arrangements.

Additional visits and support were provided where required, including during the completion of DBS checks or in response to identified needs. Children and carers also accessed therapeutic services, educational support, and other targeted interventions to promote safeguarding, stability, and emotional wellbeing.

Table 3 – Compliance with timescales for visits

Frequency of visits	Compliance in the period April 2025-March 2026
6 weekly visits within timescale	100%
12 weekly visits within timescale	100%

All host family suitability decisions were completed within required timescales, with all new arrangements assessed and approved by the Head of Provider Services. Although annual reviews are not a statutory requirement for host family arrangements, Medway continues to undertake these as good practice to ensure arrangements remain appropriate and continue to meet the child's needs.

Reviews consider the ongoing suitability of the arrangement, the views of carers, parents and children, and any changes in circumstances. Children's wishes and feelings are obtained through visits prior to the review and are reflected in review discussions. All arrangements requiring an annual review were completed within timescales.

The service maintains comprehensive records for children and carers, including assessments, statutory visits, reviews, and feedback. Close working relationships with MASH, SPA, Assessment Services and Children's Social Care teams support effective safeguarding and timely intervention where concerns arise.

Quality assurance arrangements include regular supervision, dip-sample audits and management oversight undertaken by Team Managers, Service Managers and the Head of

Service. These processes provide assurance regarding compliance, timeliness, and the effective capture of the child's voice. During 2025/26, no disqualifications, prohibitions or requirements were issued in relation to Private Fostering arrangements.

4.3 Impact on the children

Private Fostering arrangements continue to provide children and young people with safe, stable, and supportive living environments, particularly where family circumstances have made it difficult for parents to provide care. The Private Fostering Social Worker maintains regular contact with children and young people, ensuring their views, wishes and feelings inform assessments, reviews, and support planning.

Where families have experienced financial hardship, practical support has been secured through successful grant applications. Additional support has also been provided through Children's Champions, Therapeutic Support Workers, and specialist services where needs relating to bereavement, parental ill-health, substance misuse, or emotional wellbeing have been identified.

During 2025/26, three children received ongoing therapeutic or specialist support to help them understand their family circumstances, process experiences of loss and trauma, and promote emotional wellbeing and stable relationships within their arrangements. Bereavement support referrals were also made for two children following the death of a parent.

5. SERVICE DEVELOPMENT FOR 2025/2026

5.1 Raising Awareness

The Fostering Service will continue to deliver targeted awareness-raising activity across the local authority, partner agencies, schools, community organisations and online platforms to promote understanding and identification of Private Fostering arrangements.

Building on the success of Private Fostering Week in November 2025, awareness campaigns will continue to target both professionals and the wider community through training, information sessions and digital communications. Information on the Medway website and social media platforms will be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure clear guidance on Private Fostering responsibilities and referral pathways.

Monthly bite-size training sessions for council staff will continue, alongside targeted awareness and training for schools, health services, places of worship and other partner agencies. Private Foster Carers will also continue to have access to support groups, training opportunities, and resources available through the wider fostering service.

The service will further strengthen partnership working and utilise a range of communication channels, including newsletters and school networks, to extend the reach of awareness-raising activity and support professional development across the partnership.

5.2 Professional practice and support to Private Fostering arrangements

The Private Fostering Social Worker continues to undertake professional development through regular training, policy briefings, and participation in the CoramBAAF Private

Fostering Special Interest Group. Regional networking arrangements have also been strengthened through quarterly meetings with neighbouring local authorities to share learning, best practice, and emerging developments in Private Fostering.

The service remains committed to effective partnership working with health, education, youth services and other key agencies to promote early identification of Private Fostering arrangements and ensure children receive appropriate support and safeguarding. Quality assurance arrangements continue through routine case audits, supervision and management oversight to monitor compliance and drive continuous improvement.

Children in Private Fostering arrangements continue to benefit from regular oversight by a designated Social Worker, ensuring that potential risks are identified and addressed promptly. Private Foster Carers are offered ongoing support, guidance and access to training to help them meet the needs of the children in their care.

The service has continued to respond to arrangements arising through the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Assessments consider safeguarding risks, including the potential for exploitation, alongside the impact of displacement, trauma and loss. Close partnership working with Homes for Ukraine colleagues, community groups and local support networks has strengthened the support available to children and young people affected by the conflict in Ukraine.

During 2026/27, the service will continue to review policies, procedures and practice to ensure compliance with current guidance and the delivery of high-quality services. Key priorities include:

- Strengthening links with Designated Safeguarding Leads and increasing awareness within health and community services.
- Further developing collaborative working with MASH, SPA and Assessment Services to improve understanding of the Private Fostering threshold and referral criteria.
- Expanding engagement with health, probation and prison services.
- Developing a post-16 information booklet to support young people approaching adulthood.
- Establishing a joint working protocol with Homes for Ukraine colleagues to strengthen partnership working and improve access to support and local resources.

5.3 Voice of the child

Children's views remain central to Private Fostering practice and inform assessments, reviews, and decision-making. The service adopts a child-centred approach, ensuring children and young people are supported to express their wishes, feelings and experiences in ways that are meaningful to them.

Children's voices are captured through direct engagement, observation, play-based approaches with younger children, and the use of the Mind of My Own app, which supports ongoing communication and participation. Where appropriate, independent advocacy is made available to ensure children are supported to contribute fully to decisions affecting their lives.

The service remains committed to adapting its approach to meet individual needs and circumstances, ensuring every child can be heard. Feedback from parents and carers is also

routinely sought to ensure arrangements continue to meet the needs of the child and promote positive outcomes.

6. CONCLUSIONS

During 2025/26, Private Fostering notification levels remained consistent with recent years, reflecting continued awareness-raising activity and improved recognition of Private Fostering arrangements across Children's Services and partner agencies.

The service continued to provide effective oversight of Private Fostering arrangements, with regular visits, assessments and reviews ensuring that children's welfare, education, and wellbeing were monitored and that appropriate support was available where required. Private Foster Carers were supported through advice, training, and access to wider fostering resources to help them meet the needs of the children in their care.

Awareness raising remained a key priority throughout the year, supported by targeted engagement with professionals, community organisations and the wider public. Further work is planned to strengthen awareness within health and community settings and to improve the timely identification and notification of Private Fostering arrangements.

Robust quality assurance processes, including case audits, supervision and management oversight, continue to provide assurance that statutory responsibilities are being met and that services are delivered effectively and within required timescales.

Medway Council recognises that children living in Private Fostering arrangements can be particularly vulnerable and remains committed to maintaining high standards of safeguarding, ensuring the suitability of arrangements, and promoting positive outcomes for all privately fostered children and young people.

7. IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Area	Impact and Outcomes
Impact on Children and Young People	Children living in Private Fostering arrangements were regularly visited within statutory timescales, ensuring that their welfare, safety, and wellbeing were monitored effectively. Children were supported to express their views through direct engagement, consultation tools, and the Mind of My Own app. Where additional needs were identified, children accessed therapeutic support, bereavement services, and Children's Champion interventions, contributing to improved emotional wellbeing and placement stability.
Impact on Private Foster Carers	Carers benefited from regular social work support, advice, guidance, and access to training opportunities. Additional support was provided where families experienced financial hardship or required specialist interventions. Ongoing reviews and visits provided assurance that carers were able to meet children's needs and maintain safe, stable placements.
What We Have Learned	Increased referrals from Children's Social Care and Education Services suggest that awareness-raising activities are improving understanding of Private Fostering arrangements. However, the high number of notifications that did not meet the Private Fostering threshold indicates that further work is required to improve professional understanding of the criteria, particularly across health and community-based services. Low referral rates from health and voluntary sector organisations highlight areas for further development.
Quality and Performance	Statutory compliance remained strong, with 100% of required visits completed within timescales and all suitability assessments completed and approved appropriately. Robust management oversight, supervision and auditing provided assurance regarding practice quality and safeguarding standards.
Next Steps	Priorities for 2026/27 include strengthening awareness within health, community and voluntary sector organisations; improving understanding of Private Fostering thresholds and referral criteria; further developing post-16 resources and support; enhancing partnership working with Homes for Ukraine colleagues; and continuing quality assurance activity to maintain high standards of safeguarding and service delivery.

Overall Impact

The Private Fostering Service continues to provide effective oversight of arrangements, ensuring children are safeguarded, their voices are heard and support is available when needed. Strong statutory compliance, targeted support for children and carers, and sustained awareness-raising activity have contributed to positive outcomes during 2025/26. Future activity will focus on strengthening partnership awareness, improving referral quality, and continuing to enhance outcomes for privately fostered children and young people.

Signed: Date:

(Head of Service, Provider Services)

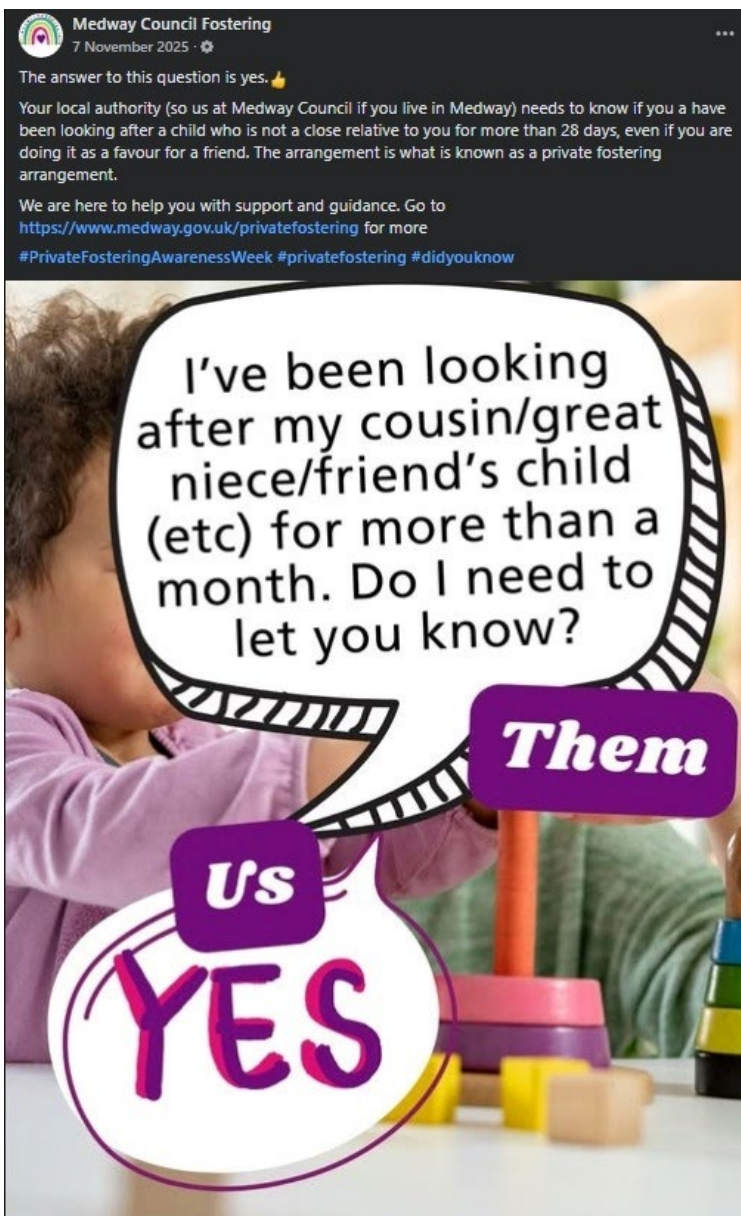
Signed: Date:

(Assistant Director, Children's Services)

Signed: Date:

(Portfolio Holder for Children's Services - Lead Member)

Appendix 1



< Medway Council Fostering ... 🔍

All Photos Reels Events Mentions



We had a great time at Bluewater Shopping Centre yesterday with our stand to raise awareness of fostering and the need for more foster carers in Medway.

Did you miss us? We are always happy to answer any questions you may have for yourself or a friend. Just email us at fcrecruitment@medway.gov.uk or give us a call on 01634335726.

#FosteringAwareness #CouldYouFoster
#BluewaterShopping @bluewatershopping Bluewater



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All Photos Reels Events Mentions

Earlier in November we marked Private Fostering Awareness Day. We are happy to share that [Coram BAAF](https://corambaaf.org.uk/practice-areas/kinship-care/private-fostering/private-fostering-awareness-day-2025), an organisation for professionals working in fostering, adoption and kinship that we are a member of, have added their Breakfast Briefing onto YouTube - you can watch via the link below. The briefing covers what a private arrangement is, what is required of professionals who have identified an arrangement taking place, and more.

<https://corambaaf.org.uk/practice-areas/kinship-care/private-fostering/private-fostering-awareness-day-2025>

We have a number of other resources to support professionals and we also offer bite size training delivered by our team. Email us at private.fostering@medway.gov.uk for more information

#PrivateFostering #PrivateFosteringAwareness
#InformationSession



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All Photos Reels Events Mentions



It's Throwback Thursday! 📅

Here are a couple of photos from our pop-up stand at Dockside Shopping Centre in Chatham last month for Private Fostering Awareness Week. 📍 We enjoyed meeting shoppers and sharing information and resources about private fostering specifically (an arrangement where a child is being looked after by a non-close relative without involvement of a Local Authority or Independent Fostering Agency).

Did you know that we have some more pop-up stands coming up? 📅 We will be out and about in Medway this festive season, raising awareness of fostering and the need for more foster carers in Medway. Tomorrow (Friday 5 December) we will be at Jasper's Café in Rochester (in the Library) 10am-2pm. Next Thursday, 11 December, we will be at Odeon Cinema, Dockside, 6pm-6.30pm, as we will be joining Child Friendly Medway with their Zootropolis film screening event.

The busy December period continues, as on Tuesday 16 December we will be at Sunlight Café, Gillingham (part of the Sunlight Centre) 10am-1.30pm, and finally on Monday 22 December we will be at Moat House Coffee Shop, 10.30am-1.30pm.

If you or someone you know is interested in fostering, we welcome you (and them!) to come along to meet us. Some of these pop-up stands will take place in cafés, so are a good opportunity to learn more about fostering in a relaxed, informal setting.

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All Photos Reels Events Mentions



Today is Private Fostering Awareness Day.

If you have been looking after a child who is not a close relative for 28 days or more, then under the Children Act 1989, you need to let us know. We'll give you the support and guidance you need in managing this situation, which we know can be physically tiring and financially and emotionally difficult. Email us at private.fostering@medway.gov.uk or go to <https://www.medway.gov.uk/privatefostering> for more information.

Coram Baaf also have great resources available to support you.
<https://corambaaf.org.uk/>

If you are a professional working with children, who not join our drop-in session tomorrow at 7pm? A great way to learn more about private fostering and how to identify and report it, in an informal setting. Email private.fostering@medway.gov.uk to book.

#PrivateFosteringAwarenessWeek #PrivateFostering
#FosteringAwareness #DropInSession

Appendix2

[Event calendar 2025](#)

[Awareness raising spreadsheet](#)

[Leaflet](#)

[Booklet](#)

[Help us identify Private Fostering card](#)

[Professionals card](#)

[Private Fostering presentation](#)



Bite-size training

Do you know what private fostering is?

Book one of our virtual bite size training sessions for yourself or your colleagues to gain an understanding of private fostering and how to identify and report it. All private fostering arrangements need to be reported so that we can **keep children safe**. Please email us at **Private.Fostering@Medway.gov.uk** to book the time and date you would like, or to find out more information.

Training dates

Thursday 24 February
12.30pm-1pm & 1-1.30pm

Thursday 12 March
3.30pm-4pm & 4-4.30pm

Wednesday 1 April
12.30pm-1pm & 1-1.30pm

Monday 20 April
12.30pm-1pm & 1-1.30pm

Contact details

Karen Alemao, Team Manager
Sally Dellow, Private Fostering
Social Worker
Tel: 01634335726



