

Local Authority Private Fostering Arrangements, Suffolk

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Joe Staines
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Suffolk County Council's Private Fostering Team was created, and added to the Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers Team in 2005. Procedures have developed, since then, in line with guidance and the newest procedures/national guidelines. The team is based and managed within the southern area, but has a county wide remit. A nominated safeguarding manager has county responsibility. There is a central panel based in Ipswich.

Summary

This inspection was undertaken over four days and covered all of the key National Minimum Standards (NMS) for private fostering. This was the first inspection of the service and found that the council had made excellent progress in developing the service. There are robust procedures in place for all areas of private fostering; a great deal of work has been undertaken in relation to raising awareness of private fostering and ensuring that all known arrangements are suitably monitored. There are clear management arrangements in place with regular monitoring of files and referrals.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

This was the first inspection of this service.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Suffolk County Council has introduced a number of measures to raise awareness of the private fostering notification requirements within the local community and among groups of professionals who may, in the course of their work, come into contact with children and young people who are, or may be, being privately fostered. In 2005 a conference, hosted by the Local Safeguarding Children Board for all relevant professionals, was held to promote awareness of the private fostering National Minimum Standards and relevant guidance. Private fostering letters and leaflets are circulated to professionals, voluntary organisations and local community groups across the county. The leaflets are put in locations accessible by the public, for example, libraries, GP surgeries, schools, CAB, Refugee Council, interfaith groups, black minority ethnic communities, Suffolk County Council local offices and training centres. This is done every six months. Suffolk County Council's website has a useful and informative webpage about private fostering, with contact information and names of relevant personnel. Seminars have been held across the County, in order to raise awareness and focus professional attention on private fostering by requiring them to take a proactive approach to identifying arrangements in their area. The County Asylum and Private Fostering Team (CAPFT) have attended meetings for maintained and independent schools in Suffolk, highlighting the new regulations and expectations on schools. There has been a major focus on the language schools. An inter-agency steering group of professionals meets every six months. The function of this group is to share good practice in relation to private fostering, contribute to raising awareness in their own

services and to the overall private fostering development. Relevant staff are trained to ensure they have appropriate understanding and expertise in relation to private fostering arrangements on the Integrated Induction Programme (Children's Workforce Development Council) and is included as part of the safeguarding component for all practitioners in Children and Young People's Services. The policies and procedures relating to private fostering, along with relevant documentation, have been subject to an equalities impact assessment to ensure all those likely to be affected have access to the required information in a non-discriminatory way. The local authority also regularly places advertisements in local community publications to raise awareness and provide information on how a notification can be made.

The local authority has sound and robust systems in place for responding to notifications or information received about a possible private fostering arrangement. Regular meetings take place with professionals from other organisations to ensure that the needs of different groups involved in private fostering are taken into account. They also ensure that visits are subsequently carried out in accordance with the regulations, so that children and young people's welfare are safeguarded and promoted. The local authority has clear procedures for dealing with situations where it is not satisfied that a child or young person's welfare is being, or will be, satisfactorily safeguarded or promoted by a private fostering arrangement.

There is a thorough assessment process used to determine the suitability of all aspects of a private fostering arrangement in accordance with the regulations. Staff are employed in a dedicated team, along with supporting asylum seekers. They are experienced and qualified with excellent knowledge and understanding of the relevant National Minimum Standards, regulations and safeguarding issues. Regular reports are produced covering all the required matters and are of a high standard.

The private fostering team ensures continuity and quality of service are provided to children and young people being cared for in private fostering arrangements, their parents and private foster carers. The local authority has produced very good written information for parents, professionals and private foster carers. Children and young people are provided with a booklet and information about fostering contact details for the private fostering social worker and information about advocacy and other services.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is not judged.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The local authority has a comprehensive written statement, which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out. Staff working for the private fostering service have excellent knowledge and awareness of the local authority's duties and functions in relation to private fostering and safeguarding children and

young people. Other relevant professionals and local authority staff are provided with good information and training about private fostering. They know how to make a referral to the service if they become aware of a child or young person who is, or may be, privately fostered so that children and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

A private fostering panel is chaired by the nominated safeguarding manager for private fostering. The members make recommendations about the suitability of private foster carers, any support indicated and whether additional resources are needed. Any recommendations to impose requirements, prohibitions and/or permit disqualified carers to be private foster carers will be authorised by the Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance. The private fostering panel is reviewing all current private fostering arrangements on an annual basis. Any notification of a change of circumstances and the end of a private fostering arrangement is also reported to the private fostering panel. As part of the monitoring of compliance, the nominated safeguarding manager reviews a sample of individual children and private foster carers records every six months. The manager provides a written audit report, investigates any patterns of concern raised by privately fostered children and can take action to improve practice where indicated. An inter-agency steering group meets twice a year to assist the local authority in carrying out its duties. The nominated safeguarding manager provides an annual report to the Director of Children and Young People's Services, Vulnerable Children's Operational Management Group and Suffolk Safeguarding Children Board with an action plan.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):