



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## LOCAL COUNCIL PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS

### **South Tyneside MBC Private Fostering Arrangements**

**Childrens Services  
Kelly House  
Campbell Park Road  
Hebburn  
Tyne & Wear  
NE31 2SW**

*Lead Inspector*  
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*Announced Inspection*  
12th December 2006      10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
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This is a report of an inspection to assess local authority private fostering arrangements against the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering. These standards can be found at [www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk). The NMS specify a minimum standard for local authority practice in the fulfilment of their duties and functions in relation to private fostering under the Children Act 1989. Along with the new measures in section 44 of the Children Act 2004 and the 2005 regulations, they are intended to better focus local authorities' attention on private fostering, in part by requiring them to take a more proactive approach to identifying arrangements in their area.

*Every Child Matters*, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life.

Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above. The Private Fostering National Minimum Standards are mapped to just two of these outcomes, Staying Safe and Management.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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# Local Authority INFORMATION

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# **SUMMARY**

## **South Tyneside Council**

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

This was the first inspection of the arrangements put in place by South Tyneside Council to meet the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering which came into force on 18 July 2005, and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

The Inspector would like to thank those staff involved in developing and implementing these policies and procedures for their welcome and the important part they played in the inspection. Information and evidence in this report was gathered by the inspector over a 2 day period through:

- Talking with the officer responsible for developing the management of private fostering arrangements
- Discussions with staff involved in raising awareness of private fostering through publicity materials and campaigns
- Discussions with staff involved in developing procedures to respond to notifications of private fostering arrangements
- Discussions with staff involved in developing arrangements to monitor the effectiveness of the Directorate in responding to, assessing and supporting private fostering arrangements
- Reading policies, procedures and publicity material
- Reading information provided by the council to the inspector before the inspection started

### **What the local authority does well:**

The authority has developed a statement and procedure for private fostering arrangements, which meet the requirements of regulation. A communication strategy is in place to ensure that those professionals and community groups who come into contact with privately fostered children understand what is private foster care.

Training has been provided to most social work staff and managers and some staff are knowledgeable about these procedures.

Arrangements are being put in place to ensure that annual reports will be prepared and will be provided to the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Director of Children's Services. This will review the overall quality of work undertaken with regard to private fostering arrangements and examine any patterns of concern. Data collected will also be used to provide

required statistical information and reports to the Department for Education and Skills.

Key staff members are beginning to identify community groups who may have knowledge of existing private fostering arrangements and are working to develop links with them. They are also developing good links and joint working initiatives with other local authorities in the region.

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

This is the first inspection.

## **What they could do better:**

Although the current lead officer has worked productively to roll out the authority's statement and strategy to increase awareness of private fostering arrangements, the responsibility for this lead role should be contained within the fieldwork teams management structure. This will make a clear distinction between the private fostering and mainstream fostering responsibilities of the authority, and clear up any ambiguity as to where the private fostering functions fit within its fieldwork structure.

The authority should ensure that children who are looked after do not have their 'looked after' status changed without consultation with the young person and where they maintain parental responsibility, their birth parents.

In order to ensure that children are safeguarded at all times, assessments of private fostering placements should start at the point of notification to the authority. The private fostering procedures should make this explicit. Where serious concerns for welfare are identified, the authority should consider issuing a notice of prohibition.

The publicity information and literature should be produced in other languages and not only in English so that information is available to black, minority and ethnic communities.

The authority should formalise the training arrangements to private foster carers and staff so they are aware of the assessment processes and support available to them.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from [enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

## **CONTENTS**

Staying Safe

Management

## Staying Safe

The intended outcome for these Standards are:

(NMS 2) The local authority is notified about privately fostered children living in its area.

(NMS 3 ) The welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted

(NMS 4) Private foster carers and parents of privately fostered children receive advice and support to assist them to meet the needs of privately fostered children; privately fostered children are able to access information and support when required so that their welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

(NMS 5) The local authority provides advice and support to the parents of children who are privately fostered within their area as appears to the authority to be needed.

(NMS 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.

**The Commission considers that all these Standards should be inspected.**

**JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for the following Standard(s):**

2, 3,4,5,6,

Quality in this outcome area is 'poor'. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service. Current arrangements have not ensured that children privately fostered have their welfare safeguarded. Adequate systems are in place to provide advice and support to privately fostered children, their parents and carers, though not all staff have followed these. Training to private foster carers is not sufficiently developed.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The authority has developed a statement and procedures for the management of private fostering arrangements. This meets the requirements of regulation and includes information as identified in NMS 1.2 'Supporting Criteria'. Training about private fostering has been provided to many social workers and their managers. The social worker interviewed during the inspection demonstrated a sound understanding of the procedures and had applied them correctly in dealing with a notification of a private fostering arrangement. However, it is acknowledged by the lead officers for private fostering that significant staffing changes have occurred within the field teams and some staff may not have received the training. Assessments of private fostering arrangements are undertaken by field social workers using the authorities children's assessment framework. It was reported by the lead officer for private fostering that although not formalized, it is the authority's intention to offer training and support to private foster carers where needed.

To ensure that the council is notified of privately fostered children living in its area, a targeted campaign to promote awareness of the notification requirements and ensure that those professionals who come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in notifications is underway. In keeping with its private fostering communication strategy information leaflets and posters have been circulated to libraries, GP surgeries, churches, schools and local community groups and a direct link to private fostering information is contained within the council's website in order to raise awareness. It was noted that this information is not available in any language other than English, although the lead officer has made links with other local authorities and ethnic minority community groups to see how the authority can produce the literature in different languages and formats.

At the time of inspection South Tyneside Council did not have any identified private fostering arrangements, although it recognizes that there will be children living in such placements that are not known about. The inspector, therefore, conducted a case tracking exercise in respect of two recent placements. One of the placements ended very shortly after notification, but it was found that the social worker involved had carried out their responsibilities in full up until this point.

The second case which was looked at, however, was concerning. This involved a 15-year-old young person whose placement with an independent fostering provider had broken down. The local authority under Section 20 of the Children Act 1986 looked after the young person at this time. Another fostering placement was offered to the young person, but they refused this. They were subsequently placed at their own request with a family friend. The social worker sought agreement from the friend. The following day a looked

after review was held and it was decided that the young person's looked after status should be withdrawn. It was concerning to note that the file did not contain any evidence that the young person's birth mother had been consulted about this decision. The recordings on the file in fact indicated that the parent was informed the following day that their child was no longer looked after by the authority; that they were now placed in a private fostering arrangement; and that she was responsible for financing the placement. This case presented to the inspector as an expedient way of reducing the looked after population and failed to provide appropriate support to the young, private foster carer or the young person's birth parent.

Equally concerning was a recording made by the social worker in the file which indicated that no assessment needed to be carried out until after the young person had been in placement for 28 days. Although the records do confirm that the authority did provide some financial support to the private foster carer during this period. The authority finally started an assessment of the placement some six weeks after the placement had started. Most worryingly it started some 10 days after the authority was notified of a serious incident involving the private foster carer, which resulted in their arrest and spending three days detained in police cells. Throughout this time the young person lived alone at the carer's home. Despite this, there were no records, which indicated that the authority considered ending the placement or issuing a prohibition notice in respect of the private foster carer. The lead officer who was not made aware of the case before the inspection said, "If I had advised on the matter, I would have suggested that a prohibition notice be issued". The placement ended 26 days after the incident due to a breakdown caused by the young person's behaviour. It is clear from the case tracking that it is questionable as to whether this should have ever been considered a private fostering arrangement given the young person's looked after status at the point of placement.

# Management

## **The intended outcomes for these Standards are:**

- (NMS 1) Relevant staff are aware of local authority duties and functions in relation to private fostering.
- (NMS 7) The local authority monitors the way in which it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering.

## **The Commission considers that all these standards should be inspected**

### **JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following Standard(s):**

1 and 7

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit of the authority. The authority has a strategy setting out how it will carry out its duties. However, it needs to consider where management of private fostering will fit within its organisational structure. Monitoring of arrangements are effective though training in respect of private fostering arrangements needs to be rolled out to all children's fieldwork staff.

### **EVIDENCE:**

The authority has a communication strategy and commenced in November 2006 a programme of providing information about private fostering arrangements to the public and other agencies. At the time of the inspection, the authority had written to all schools, GP surgeries, churches, libraries and a number of community groups with its boundaries. The letter contained basic information about what is a private fostering arrangement and requested display of posters and information leaflets. The authority has put a link on its website to private fostering information. Although the authority has started to raise the profile of private fostering the information provided to the public had not resulted in any new notifications. The information published is only written in English and does not give information in any other ethnic languages despite the pockets of ethnic communities with the council's area.

The lead officer for private fostering arrangements is currently the service manager of the fostering team. This officer has worked hard to raise the profile of private fostering within the authority, ensuring that training regarding the authority's private fostering policy statement and procedures are rolled out to fieldwork staff. However, having this individual as lead officer also has the potential to lead to ambiguity as to where private fostering arrangements fit within operational delivery.

In common with many local authorities, South Tyneside Metropolitan Council delivers its private fostering functions through its children's fieldwork teams. The teams are responsible for receiving notifications, assessing private foster care placements and providing support and monitoring of the welfare of privately fostered children. As responsibility for this work is located within the teams, together with the need for private fostering to be seen as a separate function to the authority's mainstream fostering function, it is advisable that the lead officer for private fostering is located within the fieldwork management structure. This will ensure that the lead officer maintains both a sound knowledge of private fostering responsibilities and current operational assessment delivery and practice.

As stated previously, the lead officer has ensured that training in respect of private fostering has been rolled out to fieldwork staff. The social worker interviewed as part of the case tracking presented as having a sound knowledge about what constitutes a private fostering arrangement, and a thorough understanding of the authority's procedures. They raised, however, that social work staff could interpret the procedure to mean that there was no need to commence a core assessment of a private fostering placement until the child had been in placement for 28 days. The social worker interviewed rightly stated their view that it is the point of notification when social workers should commence their assessment. Another case tracking exercise undertaken noted that the assessment of a private fostering placement did not commence until some six weeks after the child had been placed. This confirmed that there had been some ambiguity around when assessment should commence. Recent changes and an influx of new staff within the field work teams means that a number of social workers may not have received the private fostering training.

Information about private fostering arrangements is maintained on the authority's SWIFT database. Information is collated and forms part of the annual data return to DfES. This information will also form part of an annual report to the local safeguarding children board (LSCB). Records of two children previously considered to be in a private fostering placement were examined, as at the time of inspection no children were known to be in such placements. Records in respect of one child were found to be incomplete and as stated in the 'Staying Safe' section of the report identified some elements of poor practice and misinterpretation of the private fostering procedures.

Optional

## **Being Healthy**

### **JUDGEMENT –**

N/A

Arrangements to ensure that the health needs of privately fostered children are supported and met were not inspected on this occasion.

### **EVIDENCE:**

## **Enjoying and Achieving**

### **JUDGEMENT –**

N/A

Arrangements to ensure that privately fostered children are supported in both enjoying and achieving were not inspected on this occasion.

### **EVIDENCE:**

# **Making a Positive Contribution**

## **JUDGEMENT –**

N/A

Arrangements to ensure that privately fostered children are supported in making a positive contribution were not inspected on this occasion.

## **EVIDENCE:**

# Achieving Economic Well Being

## **JUDGEMENT –**

N/A

Arrangements to ensure that privately fostered children are supported in achieving economic wellbeing were not inspected on this occasion.

## **EVIDENCE:**

# SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering have been met and uses the following scale.

**4** Standard Exceeded (Commendable)      **3** Standard Met (No Shortfalls)  
**2** Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls)      **1** Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion

"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

STAYING SAFE		MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>2</b>	3	<b>1</b>	2
<b>3</b>	1	<b>7</b>	3
<b>4</b>	2		
<b>5</b>	2		
<b>6</b>	1		

Are there any outstanding recommendations from the last inspection? No

<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>		
These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Local Authority to consider carrying out.		
No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	PF4	Training should be available to private foster carers where appropriate
2	PF3	Where it appears that children’s welfare is not appropriately safeguarded the authority should consider issuing a prohibition notice to the private foster carer  Assessment of private fostering arrangements should start at the point of notification
3	PF5	Birth parents should be consulted before any placements are made and their child’s looked after status is changed
4	PF2	The publicity information and literature should be produced in other languages and not only in English
5	PF1	The authority’s procedure should be amended to state that the point of notification is when assessments of private fostering arrangements should start  Training should be undertaken by all staff in respect of private fostering arrangements  The lead officer for private fostering arrangements should be located in the management structure for the fieldwork teams

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