



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

LOCAL COUNCIL PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS

Wiltshire County Council Private Fostering Service

**County Hall
Bythesea Road
Trowbridge
Wiltshire
BA14 8LE**

Lead Inspector
Sam Chisholm

Key Unannounced Inspection
8th February 2007 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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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. 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

Name of Local Authority	Wiltshire County Council Private Fostering Service
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Telephone number	01225 713000
Fax number	
Email address	
Local Authority Web address	

SUMMARY

Wiltshire County Council

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

This inspection was carried out through discussions with staff and a carer, questionnaire feedback from a parent, carer and child and scrutiny of records.

What the local authority does well:

The service has carried out a comprehensive initial programme of publicity and awareness raising and has clear plans for further developments in this area.

The service has made commendable efforts to make its information and assessment processes accessible to people whose first language is not English and parents living overseas.

Carers, parents and young people have been offered a good level of information, advice and support.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This is the first inspection of this service.

What they could do better:

The service is currently carrying out thorough comprehensive assessments of private fostering arrangements which is good practice. However they need to ensure that the initial assessment is carried out within seven working days of notification. The procedure needs to be revised to reflect this.

Although the case records for the young people and carers were audited by team managers, it is recommended that the monitoring officer now carries out further monitoring activity in accordance with Standard 7 and Regulation 12.

It is recommended that the action plan is updated to reflect the current progress and plans of the service.

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 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

The service has carried out a comprehensive initial programme of publicity and awareness raising and has clear plans for further developments in this area.

The service is currently carrying out thorough comprehensive assessments of private fostering arrangements which is good practice. However they need to ensure that the initial assessment is carried out within seven working days of notification as detailed below. The procedure needs to be revised to reflect this.

The written guidance for carers is clear and comprehensive but needs to be checked for discrepancies with the requirements of the standards and regulations.

The service has made commendable efforts to make its information and assessment processes accessible to people whose first language is not English and parents living overseas.

Carers, parents and young people have been offered a good level of information, advice and support.

EVIDENCE:

A social worker had been employed for a temporary period to develop an action plan and promote awareness of the need for notification of private fostering arrangements.

Awareness had been raised among other professionals and the public through publicity and press releases, talks to area children's teams and extensive mail drops to libraries, schools, health centres and other community settings.

At the time of the inspection the initial publicity had produced three notifications. The service intends to give further talks to other agency professionals during the coming year. This will be supported by further press releases, revision of leaflets and a presentation of support available for caring for children with diverse needs.

The service has a written procedure for dealing with a notification and subsequent assessments. This says that the department has 42 working days to complete the assessment, but also says the assessment of needs is to be done within 7 days. Evidence from the files showed that assessments hadn't been completed within 7 days. Discussions with the staff involved revealed that this was due to them completing Core Assessments and Fostering Capacity Assessments that were more comprehensive than initially needed. This work had also been split between the children's teams and the family placement teams, which had caused delay in one case.

It is recommended that the procedure is revised to comply with the regulations. An initial assessment covering the areas detailed in Standard 3, regulations 4 and 7 and Schedules 2 and 3 needs to be completed within 7 working days. Further, more in-depth assessments can then be carried out over a longer period of time if deemed necessary as stated in Standard 3.5.

The revision of the procedure also needs to make clear that the time limit for the initial assessment starts from the time the service is made aware of a proposed or existing private fostering arrangement. Staff currently send a form out to be completed and returned by the carer before an assessment is made, thereby exceeding the time limit.

The procedure needs to make clear what action should be taken in the event of carers evading assessment. One file showed that a member of the family placement team had made three pre-arranged attempts to visit and assess a carer, but had not been able to gain access. This situation needs to be resolved and the assessment completed.

The service has made arrangements for all completed assessments to be presented to the fostering panel. The one assessment completed at the time of the inspection had been to the panel. This is good practice.

Written guidance for carers regarding notifications and the assessment process was seen. This included good examples of private fostering arrangements and a generally good level of detail about notifications. It is recommended that the guidance information is checked against the requirements of the standards and regulations (as there were a few discrepancies) and amended where necessary.

The service has planned to revise the leaflets to include a statement informing that the leaflets can be produced in three other languages. In addition, the service has access to interpreters and an overseas social work service which has been used in one of the cases currently being assessed. These efforts are commended.

Evidence gathered from files, discussions with staff and a carer and written feedback from a young person and parent all showed that appropriate levels of support were being provided by the family placement and children's teams.

The carer had been given a proforma of an agreement to use with the young person's parents, information about the support available and advice about safer caring. Ongoing quarterly support visits had been arranged. The head of service confirmed that the carer would also have access to the Emergency Duty Service outside office hours. The carer confirmed that she had been offered support and advice about private fostering, integrating the young person into the family and the services and training that are available.

A Code of Practice was seen for carers which gave clear, detailed advice on the quality of care expected, suitability of accommodation, health and hygiene and child abuse.

The young person's social worker confirmed that they had visited the young person and had held a review meeting to discuss their future plans. The young person arranges contact with their parents themselves. The young person and their parents confirmed that they were happy with their care and support.

The social worker for a young person whose carer is currently being assessed confirmed that they had visited every two to four weeks due to the uncertain housing situation of the carer. They did however feel that the placement was satisfactory. The social worker had provided advice and information, financial help, liaised with the parent, liaised with school and behaviour support staff, organised funding for a referee course for the young person and offered a Family Group Conference if wanted. Records were seen that evidenced this.

The social worker for the other young person whose carers are being assessed confirmed that she had visited the young person four times and held a review meeting. She had offered support and advice and worked with the family placement social worker to address issues. She confirmed that the young person was happy and settled with the family.

The family placement team were in the process of trying to locate and obtain the views of the young person's mother as she had come to England from a children's home overseas.

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):

1,7

Staff demonstrated good awareness of the local authority's responsibilities in relation to private fostering. It is recommended that the action plan is updated and the procedure revised as detailed in the 'Staying Safe' section of this report.

Although the case records for the young people and carers were audited by team managers, it is recommended that the monitoring officer now carries out further monitoring activity in accordance with Standard 7 and Regulation 12.

EVIDENCE:

Two versions of a Private Fostering action plan were seen. Although it was not clear which one was the most recent, they both addressed the requirements of the Standards and included dates for implementation. It is recommended that this is updated to reflect the current progress and plans of the service.

The written Statement of Policy and Procedures included good sections on the Legal Context and definitions and Notification Responsibilities. The procedure for assessments needs to be revised as detailed in the 'Staying Safe' section of this report, as it is currently leading to delays in completing initial assessments.

Leaflets were seen for Parents, Carers and Professionals. These were clear and informative.

The staff interviewed had a good understanding of the local authority's responsibilities in relation to private fostering but had been confused to some extent by the current procedure's assessment arrangements.

Comprehensive records were seen for each of the young people and their carers. These included records of assessments and support visits. These records are audited by team managers, but no further monitoring activity had been carried out at the time of the inspection.

The Head of Looked After Children Placement Services has been nominated as the monitoring officer. It is recommended that further monitoring activity is now carried out in accordance with Standard 7 and Regulation 12.

Optional

Being Healthy

JUDGEMENT –

Not assessed

EVIDENCE:

Enjoying and Achieving

JUDGEMENT –

Not assessed

EVIDENCE:

Making a Positive Contribution

JUDGEMENT –

Not assessed

EVIDENCE:

Achieving Economic Well Being

JUDGEMENT –

Not assessed

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>
2	2	1	2
3	2	7	2
4	3		
5	3		
6	3		

N/A

Are there any outstanding recommendations from the last inspection?

RECOMMENDATIONS

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	PF3	An initial assessment covering the areas detailed in Standard 3, regulations 4 and 7 and Schedules 2 and 3 needs to be completed within 7 working days. The procedure needs to be revised to reflect this.
2	PF3	The procedure needs to make clear what action should be taken in the event of carers evading assessment.
3	PF7	It is recommended that the monitoring officer now carries out further monitoring activity in accordance with Standard 7 and Regulation 12.
4	PF1	It is recommended that the action plan is updated to reflect the current progress and plans of the service.

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