

Shropshire County Council Childrens Placement Services

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Janet Manders / Jackie Callaghan
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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

A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately (that is to say without the involvement of a local authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Local authorities are required to raise awareness of the necessity to notify the authority of any private fostering arrangement, to encourage positive outcomes for privately fostered children and young people and reduce any risks to their welfare and safety. Shropshire County Council has appointed a senior practitioner as the responsible person within the Authority. Assessments of the suitability of arrangements are undertaken by the social workers from the children's placement service and are considered by the authority's fostering panel and signed off by the Head of Children's Placement Service. Ongoing support is given to private foster carers by a social worker from the children's placement service; young people and parents receive support from the district case management teams. There have been four private fostering arrangements notified to the Authority in the last 12 months. At the time of the inspection only one young person was placed in a private fostering arrangement.

Summary

This was an announced key inspection, which concentrated on the progress made by the authority in meeting the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering. It concentrated on the services ability to keep young people safe and the organisation and management of the service and covered all seven standards. Gaps were identified in all areas of the services work in respect of private fostering arrangements. This included a lack of awareness raising, procedures do not fully reflect the current legislation and systems to monitor the service have not been developed. Therefore the service is not providing the necessary safeguards to young people.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of Shropshire County Council's Private Fostering Arrangements.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards for private fostering arrangements under this outcome.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

Young people are generally kept safe by the local authority; however, there are considerable gaps in the service, which potentially results in young people not being sufficiently protected. The local authority has not given sufficient time and resources to raising awareness of private fostering arrangements. Whilst a general leaflet was produced two years ago and delivered to all households, no information has been produced for private foster carers, young people, parents or professionals. The nominated worker has undertaken briefings regarding private

fostering arrangements to all social work teams, but no work has been undertaken with professionals to ensure that those who may come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in the identification and notification of private fostering arrangements. This potentially results in young people who are placed with private foster carers not being identified and therefore not appropriately protected and supported. The local authority has developed appropriate notification documents that ensure they receive all appropriate information regarding a young person who may be privately fostered. The young person's needs are assessed by a social worker from the district team. A social worker from the children's placement team assesses the suitability of foster carers. The assessment examined was of a good standard; however, it did not cover all areas as required by the regulations as the format has not been updated to take into consideration the new regulations. The gaps in the assessment were not identified by the Fostering Panel who signs off the suitability of the carers. Panel members have not received any training in respect of private fostering arrangements and their responsibility in respect of them. The authority's procedures state that a review of each private fostering arrangements will be undertaken on an annual basis, with individual suitability and health checks being undertaken every three years, to ensure that young people continue to keep safe. Private foster carers are provided with ongoing support from the children's placement team. Foster carers felt well supported by their worker who provided good information. However, there was no evidence that written guidance and a sample agreement are being used on a routine basis within private fostering arrangements to ensure that all available information is shared between parent and carer. Young people are supported by a social worker from the district team. This social worker is also responsible for providing support and advice, where necessary to the parents of young people who are privately fostered. Evidence confirmed that regular visits were being undertaken, within appropriate timescales. Young people had not been given information as to whom they can contact if they have any concerns; this may potentially mean young people are vulnerable and put them at risk of harm.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards for private fostering arrangements under this outcome.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards for private fostering arrangements under this outcome.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards for private fostering arrangements under this outcome.

Organisation

The organisation is inadequate.

Young people's safety, welfare and care is potentially compromised because not all relevant staff are aware of the procedures for private fostering arrangements and managers do not undertake regular quality assurance monitoring of the service. Shropshire County Council has

developed a Statement of Purpose, which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out. Staff were not aware of the statement of purpose or its contents. Potentially this would result in privately fostered young people not being identified or protected by appropriate procedures. Each young person and private foster carer has an individual file, however, not all required information was included on the files for most foster carers and young people and there was no evidence of robust monitoring of these files, either by team managers or by the nominated person. This potentially results in young people being put at risk as not all available information is recorded and shared. Records were on file of visits undertaken by social workers, which included whether the young person was seen alone. The local authority does not have in place robust monitoring processes, to ensure that the service offered to young people who are privately fostering adequately protects them. Whilst the local authority has produced an action plan to ensure that action is taken to address gaps in the service, there are no adequate processes in place to ensure that young people are visited within timescales, whether young people are seen alone or the quality of assessments. The authority completes statistical returns, which are submitted to the relevant government department. The service has not provided reports to the Director of Children's Services or to the Local Safeguarding Children Board so that the service can be appropriately monitored and improved, so that young people were appropriately protected.

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):

- promote awareness of the notification requirements and ensures that those professionals who may come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in notification. (NMS 2.2.3)
- develop publicity material for professionals, carers and parents to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities. (NMS 2.2)
- ensure that reports of the suitability of private foster carer cover all issues identified in Schedule 2. (NMS 3.2)
- provide training for fostering panel members as regards to private fostering arrangements and their responsibilities. (NMS 3.4)
- ensure that all staff are aware of policy and procedures and routinely use written guidance and agreements in their work with private foster carers. (NMS 4.2)
- provide privately fostered young people with written information regarding who they can contact if they have concerns and how to access an advocate. (NMS 6.4)

- ensure that all staff are aware of the services statement of purpose, including their duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out. (NMS 1.3)
- develop processes for robustly monitoring the service. (NMS 7.7)
- present a report to the Director of Children's Services, which includes an evaluation of the outcomes of the work undertaken. (NMS 7.9)
- prepare a report annually to the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board on how the authority satisfies itself that the welfare of privately fostered children in its area is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, including how it co-operates with other agencies in this connection. (NMS 7.10)

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for private fostering arrangements

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the local authority is notified about privately fostered children living in its area (NMS 2)
- the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted. (NMS 3)
- 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 4)
- the local authority identifies and provides advice and support to the parents of children who are privately fostered within their area (NMS 5)
- 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 (NMS 6).

Ofsted considers 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

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

Ofsted considers 1 and 7 the key standards to be inspected.