

Wolverhampton City Council Private Fostering Arrangements Service

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Janet Manders
Type of Inspection	Key

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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 and to encourage positive outcomes for privately fostered children and young people, and reduce any risks to their welfare and safety. Wolverhampton City Council has appointed a social worker to act as the authority's nominated person for private fostering. This worker is responsible for providing information regarding private fostering arrangements to others within the authority and for raising awareness within the wider community. The worker undertakes suitability assessments of private foster carers and offers ongoing support. Decisions regarding the suitability of private fostering arrangements are to be considered by the fostering panel once appropriate training has been provided to the panel members. The inspector was informed of 12 private fostering arrangements that the authority is aware of in its area.

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 service's ability to keep young people safe and the organisation and management of the service and covered all seven standards. The authority has undertaken some awareness raising of private fostering arrangements within the local community, but have not successfully connected with different faith and racial groups. The authority relies on the work undertaken by the nominated worker for raising awareness, assessing and supporting private foster carers. This has resulted in a number of private fostering arrangements not being fully assessed within appropriate timescales; however the support given to prospective private carers and those whose arrangements have been approved is excellent. This minimises the risk to young people of assessments not having been completed. The authority has satisfactory monitoring systems in place, with appropriate management arrangements in place to promote young people's well-being. The authority has recently implemented a new computer system, which will strengthen the monitoring of private fostering arrangements. This will further protect young people.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of the Wolverhampton City 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 satisfactory.

The authority provides satisfactory support to young people who are privately fostered, their carers and parents so that young people are kept safe. The authority has developed policies and procedures for staff to follow when they become aware of a private fostering arrangement. This ensures that young people in private fostering arrangements are protected, as staff are clear about what tasks need undertaking to consider whether a placement is suitable. The authority has appointed a social worker (the nominated worker), who is responsible for the raising awareness of private fostering arrangements within Wolverhampton. Leaflets and posters have been printed and distributed in the local community to raise awareness of private fostering arrangements. However, these do not contain information about the consequences of not notifying a private fostering arrangement. Awareness raising has not reached all sections of the community, especially different racial and faith groups within the city. There has been limited work with boarding schools, to ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities when a young person is privately fostered. This may result in some placements not being appropriately notified to the authority, thus suitability assessments are not undertaken. This could result in young people remaining in placements that are not suitable. The nominated worker undertakes assessments of the suitability of private fostering arrangements, which are notified to the authority, this takes into consideration the views of the parents, carers and young people concerned. Where it is felt that arrangements are not suitable, the authority takes appropriate action to safeguard young people. However, not all assessments have been undertaken in a timely fashion, with considerable delays in obtaining Criminal Record Bureau checks in relation to private foster carers and members of their households. There have also been delays in signing off the suitability of arrangements, as the authority have decided to use the fostering panel for this purpose. However, at the time of the inspection the panel had not received the appropriate training to enable them to do this. These delays could potentially result in young people being left in unsafe situations. However, it was reassuring that the young people visited by the inspector felt that their needs were being met by their carers. The nominated worker provides ongoing support to private foster carers and where necessary identifies appropriate training for the carers to undertake. Carers commented that the support offered by this worker was excellent. Carers are encouraged to assist in supporting young people to maintain contact with their parents and siblings and carers acknowledged the importance of contact for young people. The needs of the young person are assessed by a social worker allocated to them. The young person's social worker and the nominated private fostering worker, work closely together to ensure that the placement is suitable for the young person and that the carers are able to meet the needs of the young person. The young person's social worker is also responsible for working with the young person's family and this has resulted in a number of young people successfully being returned home to the care of their parents. Young people's views are sought and taken into consideration when decisions are being made in respect of their future.

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 satisfactory.

Wolverhampton City Council has in place satisfactory systems of audit and management to promote the effective organisation of support for young people who are privately fostered and their parents and carers. The authority 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. It is an informative document and contains useful examples of types of private fostering arrangements. Staff have received training in respect of their roles in identifying and supporting private fostering arrangements. New staff are also informed of their responsibilities during the induction process. This ensures that all workers receive information regarding private fostering. Each young person and private foster carer has an individual file, which contains relevant information regarding the assessment and support they receive. The authority has in place systems to monitor its practice in respect of private fostering arrangements; however, this has not been effectively recorded and therefore the actions that have been taken to rectify shortfalls are not apparent. The authority's monitoring will be enhanced with the introduction of the Care First computer system. Both the Director of Children's Services and the Local Safeguarding Children Board receive an annual report evaluating the work undertaken in relation to privately fostered children and whether the welfare of privately fostered children is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, including how the service co-operates with other agencies.

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):

- ensure that publicity materials are accessible to different groups of private foster carers, parents and communities, so that they are aware of the need to notify the authority of any private fostering arrangement (NMS 2)
- amend the notification form so that it contains all element referred to in Schedule 1 (NMS 2)
- visit any young person who is privately fostered and undertake an assessment of the suitability of arrangements within prescribed timescales (NMS 3)

- undertake appropriate checks in respect of private foster carers in a timely fashion (NMS 3)
- ensure that there are effective and timely procedures in place to enable decisions about the overall suitability of arrangements are made within required timescales, and signed-off at managerial level (NMS 3)
- review regularly a sample of individual child and private foster carer records in order to check such matters as: compliance with required timescales for action to be taken on receipt of a notification, decisions about the overall suitability of arrangements and subsequent visits are appropriately conducted and recorded. The findings of this monitoring is clearly recorded. (NMS 7)