

City of Sunderland - Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Stephen Smith
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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

The responsibility for identifying, responding to and monitoring private fostering arrangements in Sunderland City Council lies within the authority's Children's Services Department. The authority works to raise awareness of private fostering and to promote and respond to notifications of private fostering arrangements to ensure that children's welfare is safeguarded. The authority's arrangements are managed by the Head of Safeguarding. Decisions regarding the suitability of private fostering situations are made by Locality Managers within the authority's case management structure. At the time this inspection was undertaken the authority was aware of nine existing private fostering situations.

Summary

This was the first inspection of Sunderland City Council's arrangements to identify, respond to and monitor private fostering arrangements. This was an announced inspection, the purpose of which was to assess how the authority complies with all the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering. The authority generally works well to promote public awareness of private fostering. It uses a range of methods, although the information on its web site is not good enough. The authority responds well to notifications of private fostering. It provides very strong social work support to privately fostered children, their carers and their families. It carries out good assessments of the suitability of arrangements but the physical safety of private foster carers' homes is not assessed well enough. Effective social work supports children but the process of managing new private fostering arrangements that have arisen during existing case work is not always sufficiently clear or well handled. The authority has a clear and detailed statement that sets out its duties and responsibilities in relation to private fostering. This statement contains the great majority, but not all, of the information required. Staff members are well trained in their duties and responsibilities. The authority effectively monitors the way it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering at an individual case level and strategically.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This was the first inspection of Sunderland City Council's arrangements for private fostering.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The authority works well to promote awareness of private fostering within the general public. Information has been placed in setting such as hospitals, schools and council offices. The authority took part in a regionally arranged advertising campaign. It is continuing to develop new ways of informing the public about private fostering and the need to notify the authority of any arrangements. For example a full page, colour advert is planned within a booklet delivered free to every home in the authority area. However, the information about private fostering on the authority's website is difficult to locate and not in sufficient detail. It does not contain local

information that informs people who they need to contact or how they should notify Sunderland City Council. The authority works well, with other statutory and voluntary agencies in the area. It works effectively to raise the awareness of private fostering within professionals from the wider multi-disciplinary team. For example, training for other professionals has been provided within safeguarding training and a number of other awareness raising forums have taken place. Training and awareness raising activities are delivered in such a way as to ensure they reach as many professionals as possible. A multi-disciplinary private fostering group including health and education representatives monitors and manages work relating to private fostering. The authority has an effective policy and procedure in place that staff members know and it generally responds well to notifications. The majority of notifications come from existing case work and good work is undertaken to support children in these situations. A clear process is in place to receive new notifications of private fostering arrangements. However, the process of managing new private fostering arrangements that have arisen during existing case work is not always sufficiently clear or well handled. Good and effective social work continues to support the child but the additional element of visits, assessment and reporting can be missed. For example, initial visits are not always reported on correctly and assessments can be delayed. Sunderland City Council carries out a rigorous assessment of private fostering arrangements. After an initial visit within seven days, a full assessment is carried out within 6 weeks, though this policy is not always adhered to where arrangements take place within existing case work. It carries out Criminal Records Bureau checks on private foster carers and adult members of their households and seeks written references regarding their suitability. It clearly identifies children's wishes and needs and assesses the placement's ability to meet these. The assessment identifies the intended duration of the arrangement and ensures that arrangements for consenting to medical arrangements, education and contact are set out. The process for signing off the suitability of arrangements is clear and effective. However, checks on the suitability and safety for children of private foster carers' homes are not robust enough. Social workers use their own experience and knowledge to assess safety with no structured guidance or health and safety checklist to follow. A procedure for making requirements or prohibiting an arrangement is in place although such action has not occurred yet. The authority and its social workers provide privately fostered children, their carers and the people with parental responsibility for them with very good support. Private foster carers are provided with advice and guidance as well as practical help. Some financial support is provided based on individual need. For example, support was provided until a claim for child benefit could be made. Support is available to help private foster carers look after the child or work with their parents. For example, one private foster carer said that a child's social worker had visited three times within six weeks to offer support and help. Work takes place to support the families of privately fostered child and to help children maintain and develop contact with them. For example, very effective work has taken place to resolve some significant problems in the relationships between one child and a family member. Privately fostered children receive very good support, they are visited regularly and their ongoing needs are identified and supported. For example, effective social work takes place to help families work towards reconciliation, arrange therapeutic support for children, and work with children's families.

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 good.

The authority has a clear statement in place which sets out its duties and responsibilities in relation to private fostering. A comprehensive policy and procedure, that is kept under review, supports this statement. The statement contains the great majority of the information required but does not set out how training for staff will be provided and how awareness of the wider community of private fostering will be promoted. The other information in the statement is detailed and comprehensive. Staff members understand the authority's statement and its duties in relation to private fostering and understand their roles and responsibilities. The authority provides staff members with written information about private fostering and training is provided. Awareness raising training has taken place and private fostering is included in other training to ensure it reaches a wide audience. For example, safeguarding training contains information about private fostering and the action necessary. Further training is provided within social work teams. The authority effectively monitors the way it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. The authority is developing its record keeping systems in line with the Integrated Children's System and as such some records are retained in paper form and others electronically. Despite this, case records are comprehensive and generally of good quality. Quality assurance systems monitor the work carried out in individual cases through supervision and file audits. Wider aspects of the authority's work are monitored by senior managers and the multi-disciplinary private fostering group monitors effectiveness of work such as publicity, awareness raising in partner agencies and policy developments. Senior management monitor the number and nature of private fostering arrangements on an ongoing basis. An annual report is prepared for the Director of Children's Services and the local Children's Trust. A report is also sent to the chair of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and a briefing report is provided for the councillor with lead responsibility for children's social care. Statistical information is collated for submission to the Department for Children, Schools and Families as required.

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 material on the council's web site identifies who to contact in the authority for information about notification or about other aspects of private fostering (NMS 2.2.2)

- ensure that appropriate action is taken upon receipt of a notification of private fostering within situations where there is existing social work case involvement (NMS 2.3.1)
- ensure that robust checks of the safety of private foster carers' homes are carried out (NMS 3.2.6)
- ensure the authority's statement relating to private fostering includes all the matters set out in the national minimum standard (NMS 1.2).

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.