

Southend Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Helen Norry / Hazel Hudson Green
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 the awareness of the necessity to notify the authority of any private arrangement, to encourage positive outcomes for privately fostered children and young people and reduce the risks to their welfare and safety. The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations and the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering came into force in July 2005.

Within Southend-on-Sea the Group Manager for Young People and Family Support has responsibility for the overall monitoring of the council's private fostering arrangements with day to day management delegated to the fostering team manager. The authority have appointed a full time qualified social worker as the responsible person for following up on notifications, assessments and the support of carers. This post is located in the fostering team.

Initial assessment visits are carried out by the children's social work teams to identify the needs of the children and young people in placement. The assessment of the suitability of the carers is carried out by the dedicated social worker for private fostering. The decisions and suitability of the arrangements are signed off by the private fostering panel.

At the time of the inspection Southend-on-Sea had two private fostering arrangements in place.

Summary

This was an announced, key inspection of Southend-On-Sea which concentrated on the progress made by the authority in meeting the National Minimum Standards for private fostering arrangements. The council have been making good progress in implementing the requirements of the legislation.

During the inspection the inspectors spoke to the Group Manager for Young People and Children, the Fostering Team Manager, the Designated Private Fostering Social Worker, the Group Manager for Quality Assurance and Chair of the Private Fostering Panel, Children's Social Workers, and a Carer with children in placements under the terms of the private fostering arrangements. Files and written records relating to current placements were also read.

Written information supplied to Ofsted by the authority prior to the inspection was detailed and informative.

The authority have a comprehensive statement of purpose that sets out the responsibility and requirements of the authority in supporting private fostering arrangements, supported by robust policies and procedures.

The main area of concern was that despite an ongoing awareness-raising campaign there have been very few notifications. The authority have reviewed its publicity material and are hopeful new more visual and colourful posters will attract attention and generate notifications.

The files contain a written assessment, case records of visits, panel minutes and statutory references. There were gaps in one file which showed a delay in seeking appropriate references, other references were also missing.

Staff spoke very highly of the organisational and management structures in place to support them in their work.

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 Southend-on-Sea Borough 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.

Initial awareness-raising work within the authority has taken place, the response to the campaigns has been disappointing and the number of notifications suggest it had little impact on raising awareness in the community. The campaigns have been evaluated by managers and further awareness-raising events have been planned to ensure it remains high on the agenda of professionals and staff within the authority and the general public. The authority have reviewed its publicity material with the help of young people and are hopeful their new more visual and colourful posters will attract attention and generate more notifications to ensure children and young people's welfare is safeguarded.

There is an action plan that addresses how the authority will target its raising-awareness campaigns across the borough and use different forums in which to get the message across including local radio.

Raising-awareness and the scrutiny of private fostering arrangements is overseen by the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) to ensure it has a multi-agency approach and a collective responsibility across the partnership. It is a key objective of the board to raise-awareness to ensure children cared for in private arrangements are known about and safeguarded.

Notifications are received by the contact centre which has a centralized number and is widely known. Information packs are available for parents, carers and young people.

Initial assessment visits are carried out by the children's social work teams to identify the needs of the children and young people in placement. The assessment of the suitability of the carers is carried out by the dedicated social worker for private fostering and includes visits to the home, a formal assessment, statutory checks, health and safety checks on the home, fire plan and consultation with the children in placement. The decisions and suitability of the arrangements are signed off by the private fostering panel which provides an additional level

of scrutiny and reinforces quality assurance with regard to assessments and placements and further safeguards children and young people. There was one set of panel minutes available, they were detailed and identified areas were discussed and recorded with assessments scrutinised for compliance with equality and diversity issues.

An annual review is part of the ongoing work with private foster carers and is central to reviewing the ongoing suitability of the placement.

The carers file contain a written assessment, case records of visits, fostering agreements, panel minutes and statutory references. There were gaps in one file which showed a delay in seeking an appropriate reference, other references were also missing. Response to a notification by the private fostering team in one file was two months after the initial contact was made by the children and families team. This is outside of the prescribed time frame of seven days. Supervision and decision-making processes are clearly evident on both children and carers files.

Where placements are not considered suitable the child care social workers are responsible for seeking alternative resources through the department's formal looked after children processes.

One carer spoke of receiving "very good support" from the private fostering social work team. She felt supported both in terms of meeting the care needs of children and in receiving some financial assistance to meet their practical needs.

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.

Within Southend-on-Sea the group manager for Young People and Family Support has responsibility for the overall monitoring of the council's private fostering arrangements with day to day management delegated to the fostering team manager. The authority have appointed a full time qualified social worker as the responsible person for following up on notifications, assessments and the support of carers. This post is located in the fostering team.

The authority have a comprehensive statement of purpose that sets out the responsibility and requirements of the authority in supporting private fostering arrangements, supported by

robust policies and procedures. It has been considered by the Executive Councillor for the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee.

The Annual Report is prepared for the Director of Children and Learning. It is a factual report and does not include an evaluation of the service and outcomes of its work in relation to privately fostered children.

Private fostering arrangements are overseen by the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) to ensure that all partnership organisations work closely together and effectively to safeguard children and young people who are privately fostered. There is a work strand leading off from the work of the safeguarding board where the emphasis is on private fostering and how to raise the awareness of private fostering arrangements, to review the performance of the team, the publicity materials used and how to reach all areas of the community. There was an acknowledgment that there are private arrangements in the borough that are not coming to the attention of the council and that publicity material may not be reaching them.

Social work staff spoke highly of the organisational and management support structures in place,

they were complimentary about the availability and quality of training with forthcoming training, which includes "The National Multi-Agency Training on Safeguarding Black African Children and Families". Training is available for carers but to date these opportunities have not been taken up.

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):

- present a report to the Director of Children and Learning, which includes an evaluation of the outcomes of the work undertaken
- undertake appropriate references to determine the suitability of the carers
- ensure that all assessments of the suitability of private fostering arrangements are undertaken within prescribed timescales.