



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

LOCAL COUNCIL PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS

**London Borough of Redbridge Fostering
Service (PFA)**

**Station Road
Barkingside
Ilford
Essex
IG6 1NB**

Lead Inspector
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Announced Inspection
5th June 2006 10:00

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

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SUMMARY

London Borough of Redbridge

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

Private Fostering Arrangements are not regulated services, they are private arrangements and Local Authorities have functions and duties with regard to Children that are privately fostered. CSCI have agreed with the Department for Education and Skills to inspect all Local Authorities against the new national minimum standards over the next three years. The purpose is to lever improvement, assess how well the new government measures are safeguarding children in private fostering arrangements and assess Local Authorities against the new national minimum standards and regulations.

The Government's new measures on private fostering in section 44 of the Children Act 2004 and replacement regulations (the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005) came into force on 1 July 2005.

This inspection was organised and undertaken at short notice, and the inspector would like to thank the managers and staff of the London Borough of Redbridge for their assistance in the conduct of this inspection.

There are currently ten private fostering arrangements known to the London Borough of Redbridge, all but one being asylum seeking young people. All the private foster carers except one live in the Ilford area of Redbridge.

Prior to this inspection, the inspector met with a manager of the service to plan the inspection, and read the pre-inspection information sent by the London Borough of Redbridge. The fieldwork phase of the inspection took place between 5th June 2006 and 5th July 2006, and consisted of a day in the offices viewing records, interviews with three social work managers and two social workers from the fostering team. The inspector also contacted the chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Head of Children's Services. Questionnaires were sent out to five carers and seven young people. Two carers and four young people returned completed Questionnaires. The inspector spoke to one carer at length on the telephone and visited another in her home. The inspector would like to thank the carers and young people who took the time to respond.

What the local authority does well:

The local authority has raised awareness of private fostering amongst staff, and has systems in place to respond to both notifications and arrangements that come to their attention. Children and young people have their needs assessed and their welfare is monitored on a regular basis by appropriately trained and experienced social workers, which means they feel supported and listened to. The local authority discharges its responsibilities respect of safeguarding children and young people, and there are systems in place to monitor the way in which the local authority discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This is the first inspection of Local Authority Private Fostering Arrangements under the Governments new measures on private fostering in section 44 of the Children Act 2004, and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. These regulations came into force on 1 July 2005.

What they could do better:

There are eleven recommendations made following this inspection. The principle areas in which the local authority is aware that it must improve are to engage the awareness of the wider community with regard to private fostering, and to review the arrangements for the management oversight of the suitability of arrangements, and the ongoing monitoring and support of private fostering arrangements. Further recommendations are made as to written information provided to private foster carers, ensuring confidentiality when interpreters are used, the provision of services to people whose first language is not English, and the revision of the Statement of Purpose. It is also recommended that matters of interest to children and young people who are privately fostered are included on the proposed Looked After Children Website, and that children and young people are consulted as to whether a support or activity based group would be helpful to them.

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

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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

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service.

Whilst the local authority has raised awareness of private fostering amongst staff, work with staff from other organisations and the wider community needs to be developed. There are appropriate systems in place to respond to notifications and to unnotified arrangements. There are robust arrangements to safeguard children and young people whose needs have been fully assessed. The support to private foster carers and the promotion of young people's welfare would be enhanced by less fragmented management oversight of the suitability of arrangements or ongoing support. Young people placed under private fostering arrangements feel listened to and supported by the social workers that visit them.

EVIDENCE:

NMS 2 – Notification

Promoting Awareness

Steps taken by the local authority to promote awareness that private fostering arrangements must be notified to the local authority have included the distribution of the Dfes Private Fostering Information leaflets to social care, health and education establishments and local libraries. The local authority ran an advertisement in the local press, and a further advertisement is to be placed in the next edition of the local authorities magazine, which is distributed to all homes in the London Borough of Redbridge. The inspector was also told that electronic information mailouts are used to raise awareness amongst health, education and social care staff.

The local authority has begun to develop links with community and faith groups, though this work is in its early stages, and the authority is aware that this work requires further development. It is recommended that the local authority develop a programme of communication activities for the public, local authority staff and other agencies, and that the local authority develop appropriate publicity materials to support this programme.

All but one of the private fostering arrangements currently known to the authority has come to the attention of the authority when young people sought asylum status or leave to remain in the United Kingdom from the Home Office. It is recommended that the local authority establish a protocol for working with the Home Office to ensure that all childcare arrangements that appear to be a private fostering arrangement are appropriately notified to the local authority.

Responding to Notifications

The authority has yet to receive any formal notifications of private fostering arrangements, or been required to disqualify any person from caring for a child or young person under a private fostering arrangement. The local authority has local systems in place to manage both notifications and disqualifications, and is aware that these require updating.

Case records seen during this inspection demonstrate that the local authority have taken the appropriate action when they have not been satisfied that the welfare of a privately fostered child is being, or will be satisfactorily promoted. In one case, following concerns raised during the Initial Assessment, the local authority undertook a further assessment in accordance with the Framework

for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (2000), and the outcome was that the child was accommodated.

The local authority has not yet had to handle an appeal in respect of decisions it has made relating to private fostering arrangements. There are systems in place to do so.

Responding to Unnotified Arrangements

All the private fostering arrangements currently known to the local authority have been brought to their attention once the child or young person was living with their private foster carer. The local authority responds to these notifications by undertaking an initial assessment on the child/young person, and referring on to the fostering service for an assessment of the carer. The local authority has recently developed its systems so that initial assessments from the Adolescent Service Initial Assessment Team are included in the referral to the Fostering Service in order to speed up the response to the referral and avoid the duplication of work. Case records seen during this inspection demonstrated that initial assessments are undertaken within seven days as is required under the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

NMS 3 – Safeguarding and Promotion of Welfare

The inspector read the case files of four young people and their carers during the inspection, and was satisfied that the local authority has taken sufficient steps to determine the suitability of the private fostering arrangements which become known to it, by establishing all of the matters set out in national minimum standards 3.2.1 to 3.2.11. Assessments held on file, included consideration of the child's health, education, religious and cultural needs, their family relationships, emotional and behavioural development, social presentation and self-care.

There are clearly some difficulties for the local authority in establishing the matters above in relation to the role of birth parents, as they do not have the information available to them that would allow contact to be established with them.

The carer visited during this inspection confirmed that the social worker had asked her opinions and those of the child during the assessment. There was evidence that where appropriate the local authority has provided interpreting services to enable communication during the assessment process, and on an ongoing basis when required. One carer said that she had to ask for a new interpreter as the one allocated lived in her community and was telling people her business. Whilst this may be an isolated incident, it does raise a legitimate

concern, and it is recommended that the local authority review the provision of interpreting services with regard to client confidentiality.

Case files had evidence of appropriate management oversight, though current arrangements are somewhat disjointed, with the separate team managers signing off on the assessments of children and carers. It is recommended that the local authority review the systems in place for management decisions as to the overall suitability of private fostering arrangements.

NMS 4 – Advice and Support for Private Foster Carers

The current system of supporting private foster care arrangements involves visits by social workers from the children’s social work team, and the fostering development team. The reports of these visits are made to the social workers respective managers, but there is no formal system for managers of both teams to regularly meet and have an oversight of the overall quality of support to the private foster carers. This system opens up possibilities of confusion and is wasteful of scarce social work time. These difficulties are compounded by the fact that whilst fostering social workers are allocated to support private foster carers, social work visits from the children’s social work team are undertaken on a duty basis. As one carer told the inspector, “always a different social worker”. It recommended that the local authority review the provision of support to private foster carers, and that all private foster carers and young people have the details of an allocated social worker who they can contact. It is also recommended that the local authority review their contact arrangements for private foster carers who have limited English language skills, as this places a further barrier to their raising concerns about the welfare of the child, or in requesting a visit from a social worker. One foster carer told the inspector that the social worker sometimes only visited for a few minutes, and did not seem interested in anything other than a quick check that everything was alright.

The local authority provides information to private foster carers on financial matters as part of the assessment process. Two carers who the inspector spoke to raised the issue of financial support for private foster care arrangements. One carer told the inspector that they had engaged a solicitor and were now receiving a regular payment to support their care of a child. The inspector noted that another carer was receiving no financial assistance, and said that she had been told forms were not available to claim benefits, and that the social worker had not been particularly helpful given that she was on income support and money was tight. The inspector understands the level of support offered to individual private foster carers is assessment based, but in order to empower private foster carers it is recommended that written information be given to them about financial support that may be available.

NMS 5 – Advice and Support for Parents of Privately Fostered Children

All but one of the current private fostering arrangements known to the local authority are unaccompanied asylum seekers whose parents live overseas, and whose precise whereabouts are unknown. In the event that the local authority believe a private fostering arrangement is unsuitable, attempts are made to contact the birth parents to advise them to make alternative arrangements.

NMS 6 – Information and Support for Privately Fostered Children

Questionnaires were sent out to seven young people, and three young people returned completed Questionnaires. Their views are summarised in the table below.

		Yes	No		
1	Have you met with a social worker to discuss where you are living ?	3	0		
		Once	A few Times	Regularly	Don't Know
2	If so, roughly how many times have you met with the social worker ?	0	1	2	0
		Yes	No	Wouldn't want to	
3	Do you know how to contact the social worker if you need to ?	2	0	1	
		Yes	No	Don't Know	
4	Do you feel well cared for where you are living now ?	3	0	0	
5	Do your carers listen to you and take notice of your opinions ?	3	0	0	
6	Does your social worker listen to you and take notice of your opinions ?	3	0	0	
7	Do you know who to speak to if you are not happy or have a personal problem ?	2	1	0	
8	Do you know how to make a complaint ?	2	1	0	
9	Are you being bullied ?	0	3	0	

Young people surveyed feel well cared for and safe in their private foster placements, and are seen regularly by their social worker, who they felt listens to them and takes notice of their opinions. Young people are given a copy of the local authorities complaints leaflet, which is translated into community languages. A senior manager told the inspector that some young people have requested a decrease in the frequency of visits, or that they no longer required an interpreter as their English improved. The local authority has managed to meet these requests whilst still meeting its statutory obligations as to the

frequency of visits from social workers. The authority is aware from its own case file monitoring that not all discussions with young people during social work visits are made in private, and is aware that this aspect of practice must improve. None of the young people who returned their questionnaires reported that they were being bullied.

The local authority are currently in the process of setting up a website for looked after children. It is recommended that matters of interest to children and young people are included on this website. It is also recommended that the local authority consult with young people who are privately fostered as to whether a support or activity based group would be helpful to them.

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

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service.

There are systems in place to raise the awareness of staff as to their duties and responsibilities, which would be enhanced by an appropriate programme of training. The local authority has systems in place to monitor the way in which it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering.

EVIDENCE:

NMS 1 – Staff Awareness of Duties and Functions

The local authority has a written statement setting out its duties and functions in relation to Private Fostering, entitled *Private Fostering*, this statement is part of the *Children Looked After, volume 2, Children and Families Procedures, January 2001*. The local authority is aware that this statement does not currently include all the matters as set out in national minimum standard 1.2, and requires updating to take into account section 44 of the Children Act 2004, the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering. It is recommended that revision of this document take into account not only the above changes, but the desired outcomes for children and young people set out in the national minimum standards and every child matters.

The local authority has publicised arrangements for private fostering to social services and health/education authority staff, and the authority is expecting

the formation of the children's trust to further improve communication as these separate departments now operate as a unified body.

The current private fostering arrangements are included in staff induction training, and this training is clearly overdue for review. It is recommended that a training strategy be put in place to identify appropriate staff for training, not only from the Children's Trust, but also from other relevant organisations operating within the local authority area. It is also recommended that the monitoring of the effectiveness of staff training is included in the annual report made to the Head of Children's Services.

NMS 7 – Monitoring

The separate records for children and carers seen during this inspection were well organised and appropriately stored in lockable filing cabinets. These files contained the information required in national minimum standards 7.2 and 7.3. The files have been recently audited as part of the ongoing file auditing procedures operated by the local authority.

The local authority maintains a record of privately fostered children and private foster carers living in their area, and information on new notifications is submitted to the Department for Education and Skills as required.

The chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board has confirmed in writing to the Commission for Social Care Inspection that there have been no child protection enquiries conducted by the London Borough of Redbridge in relation to a privately fostered child, a private foster carer or other child in the household of a private foster carer.

The inspector saw reports prepared for the Head of Children's Services and the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. These reports not only provide a statement of the welfare of privately fostered children in the local authorities area, but also provide an action plan to address shortfalls the authority has identified in regard to its compliance with the new regulations and national minimum standards.

Optional

Being Healthy

JUDGEMENT –

THIS STANDARD NOT INSPECTED

EVIDENCE:

Enjoying and Achieving

JUDGEMENT –

THIS STANDARD NOT INSPECTED

EVIDENCE:

Making a Positive Contribution

JUDGEMENT –

THIS STANDARD NOT INSPECTED

EVIDENCE:

Achieving Economic Well Being

JUDGEMENT –

THIS STANDARD NOT INSPECTED

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	3
3	2	7	3
4	2		
5	3		
6	3		

Are there any outstanding recommendations from the last inspection? N/A

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	PF2	It is recommended that the local authority develop a programme of communication activities for the public, local authority staff and other agencies, and that the local authority develop appropriate publicity materials to support this programme.
2	PF2	It is recommended that the local authority establish a protocol for working with the Home Office to ensure that all childcare arrangements that appear to be a private fostering arrangement are appropriately notified to the local authority.
3	PF3	It is recommended that the local authority review the provision of interpreting services with regard to client confidentiality.
4	PF3	It is recommended that the local authority review the systems in place for management decisions as to the overall suitability of private fostering arrangements.
5	PF4	It is recommended that the local authority review the systems in place for management decisions as to the overall suitability of private fostering arrangements.
6	PF4	It is recommended that the local authority review their contact arrangements for private foster carers who have limited English language.
7	PF4	It is recommended that written information be given to private foster carers about financial support that may be available.
8	PF6	It is recommended that matters of interest to children and young people are included on the proposed Looked After Children Website.
9	PF6	It is recommended that the local authority consult with

		young people who are privately fostered as to whether a support or activity based group would be helpful to them.
10	PF1	It is recommended that revision of the Private Fostering Statement of Purpose take into account not only the changes in legislation but the desired outcomes for children and young people set out in the national minimum standards and every child matters.
11	PF1	It is recommended that a training strategy be put in place to identify appropriate staff for training, not only from the Children's Trust, but also from other relevant organisations operating within the local authority area, and that the monitoring of the effectiveness of staff training is included in the annual report made to the Head of Children's Services.

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