

# Peterborough City Council Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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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**

Private fostering arrangements are currently managed within the Intake and Assessment Team. Since the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations and the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering came into force in July 2005 responsibility for private fostering arrangements, within this local authority, has shifted between this team and the Fostering and Adoption Team. During late 2005 and early 2006 the then Service Manager Specialist Services developed guidelines for the management of private fostering arrangements and commenced a programme of awareness raising within the city. This programme was short lived and ineffective, largely due to subsequent serious staffing difficulties and a shortfall in investment across children's services within Peterborough City Council. Only two private fostering arrangements are currently supported by Peterborough City Council and the fact that both of these originate with other local authorities indicates that local awareness is poor. There is a stated commitment within the Specialist Services Business Plan 2007/10 and within the Fostering Service Business Plan 2007/08 to raise the profile of private fostering. A capacity bid has resulted in the allocation of additional funding across specialist services and it is now proposed to appoint a qualified social worker, with designated responsibility for private fostering, within the Fostering Team. There are now clear proposals for how notifications will be managed and how young people in private fostering arrangements will be safeguarded and their carer's and parent's supported.

### **Summary**

The Peterborough City Council private fostering arrangements are being inspected for the first time as part of an announced inspection of the Fostering Service. Written information supplied to Ofsted, prior to the inspection, detailed that there were only two private fostering arrangements being supervised at this time. Two additional notifications of private fostering arrangements have been received but both have terminated prior to commencement of assessment. Neither the young people currently accommodated in private fostering arrangements, their parent's or their carer's were prepared to meet or speak with the inspector and none completed questionnaires forwarded to them prior to the inspection. During this inspection the inspector spoke with the Service Manager, one of the Team Managers and a social worker from the Intake and Assessment Team. The inspector also interviewed the chair of the Peterborough Safeguarding Children Board. Written records relating to both current placements were examined.

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 Peterborough City Council's Private Fostering arrangements.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards under this outcome. Two private fostering arrangements are currently in place and written records indicated that young people's health needs were being appropriately met by their carers. Young people's individual health needs were clarified in the initial assessments examined but reports of subsequent visits did not always

indicate that the social worker had obtained an update on health issues. Records indicated that carers were supporting young people to access specific services, such as seeing an Educational Psychologist, where there were particular health concerns.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is inadequate.

Peterborough City Council currently has no communication programme or publicity materials designed to raise awareness and promote notification of private fostering arrangements. Local authority staff do not currently have a good awareness of what constitutes a private fostering arrangement or of the legislative requirements in relation to notification and monitoring. A comprehensive document has recently been produced detailing the authority's proposed policies and procedures in relation to private fostering and a Private Fostering Statement is also now in place. These evidence an awareness of responsibility and a commitment to awareness raising within the staff team and the wider community. Both the Specialist Services Business Plan 2007/10 and the Fostering Team Business Plan 2007/08 detail a commitment to achieving this by April 2008. Both current private fostering arrangements originated in other local authorities and the records indicate shortfalls in terms of both the timely transfer of information from those authorities and in the initial completion of appropriate assessments by those authorities. The arrangements were initially managed, in Peterborough, by an unqualified social worker seconded from the Fostering Team, who established contact with both families and endeavoured to commence appropriate assessments, before the secondment was withdrawn and responsibility transferred to the Intake and Assessment Team in March this year. Only one of the files contains an assessment of the private foster carer's capacity to safely accommodate the young person and there is no evidence on either file of the completion of appropriate checks on the safety of the private fostering household. The Service Manager of the Intake and Assessment Team says that Criminal Records Bureau checks have been undertaken in respect of the carers but this is not evidenced on the files. An initial assessment of the young people's needs has been completed (not within the required timescale) in relation to both placements, and records evidence regular social worker contact with both young people and their carer's since about June this year. Visit records do indicate that social workers are now consulting and supporting the young people and the authority is providing financial support to one placement where a young person has been determined to be 'in need'. No 'Child in Need' plan is in place. The records examined and discussions with social workers also indicate that appropriate contact has been made with the young people's birth families and that they are in agreement with the private fostering arrangements. Both young people have regular contact with their birth families. Written records indicate that young people's needs are being appropriately met within their private fostering arrangements.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards under this outcome. Only two young people are currently accommodated in private fostering arrangements. The records indicate that both are being supported and encouraged to attend regularly and to achieve their academic potential. The files evidence that social workers have contacted and visited schools and have spoken with young people about their school experiences.

## Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards under this outcome. The records retained in relation to the two current private fostering arrangements contain good evidence of social workers' discussions with the young people and their views about their placements are noted in the visit records.

## Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards under this outcome. The files examined recorded social workers' discussions with young people about continuing education and employment prospects. Social workers are able to support young people to access the services provided by Connexions.

## Organisation

The organisation is inadequate.

The Interim Service Manager Specialist Services has recently developed a Private Fostering Statement and a document detailing proposed departmental policy and operational procedure in relation to private fostering. Both documents are clear and concise and meet the requirements of the the Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. To date these documents have not been circulated generally to staff. It is proposed that the arrangements detailed in these documents will be fully implemented by early 2008. The prepared documentation fully clarifies the timescales to be met in relation to notification, assessment, visiting and decision making and identifies those responsible for decision making and monitoring. The written records currently retained in relation to private fostering arrangements are not adequate. Separate records are not kept for each privately fostered child and each private foster carer. Where young people in private fostering arrangements, and sometimes their carers, have long histories of involvement with social services, there is insufficient background information contained in the written records. In one file the legal status of the young person was unclear. The Service Manager gave a commitment to clarify this. Written records of visits to private fostering arrangements do not evidence coverage of all the appropriate areas, as detailed under Schedule 3. Visits to private fostering arrangements are not always being undertaken at the required frequency. A new database has recently been launched within the local authority, which will provide statistical information about notifications, assessments and support visits in relation to private fostering arrangements in order to monitor compliance with required timescales and frequency of social worker visits. A new Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Team has been established as part of reorganisation and this team will be responsible for monitoring access to all specialist children's services. The low number of private fostering arrangements currently supported by Peterborough City Council suggests that a body of knowledge and expertise in this area has not been developed. Personnel currently involved with private fostering arrangements wholly accept this. The chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board was interviewed during this inspection. She confirmed that a presentation had initially been made to the board in respect of private fostering arrangements in late 2005. This included reference to strategies employed to raise awareness of private fostering arrangements as well as plans to manage notifications and support notified arrangements. The momentum has not been sustained and the initial commitment to ensuring

appropriate notification and support to these placements has been lost. Resourcing issues have recently been addressed and plans are now in place for the appropriate management of private fostering notifications. The Local Safeguarding Children Board is fully aware of proposed arrangements and of current private fostering situations and recognises its role in promoting awareness.

## 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):

- raise awareness of the public, local authority staff and other agencies about notification requirements, the notification process, the benefits of notification and the consequences of non-notification (Standard 1.3, Standard 2.2.1)
- provide written information (in accessible formats), detailing private fostering procedures and support available, for parents and private foster carers (Standard 5.3, Standard 4.3)
- complete an appropriate assessment of the capacity of any private foster carer to safely care for any young person accommodated (Regulation 4; Standard 3.2.6, Standard 3.3)
- evidence that agreements are in place between parents and private foster carers in relation to finance and how decisions about other care issues will be taken (Regulation 3 (g) and 3 (j); Standard 3.2.5, Standard 3.2.7)
- provide written information for young people in private fostering arrangements detailing their right to be safeguarded, the meaning of their privately fostered status and information about access to advocacy. In respect of disabled children written information must include details of the process for accessing adult community care services (Standard 6.4, Standard 6.5)
- ensure that required timescales are adhered to in relation to initial visits, initial assessments and decision making (Regulation 7; Standard 2.3.1, Standard 3.4)
- Retain separate, accurate, comprehensive, well-organised and confidential records in respect of each private foster carer and each privately fostered young person (Standard 7.2)
- ensure that visits to young people in private fostering arrangements are undertaken at the required frequency and that appropriate written reports are completed (Regulation 8; Standard 7.3).

## 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.**