

# North Tyneside Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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<b>Inspector</b>	Stephen Graham
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<b>Address</b>	North Tyneside Council: Private Fostering Unicorn House Suez Street North Shields Tyne and Wear NE30 1BB
<b>Telephone number</b>	0191 200 8181
<b>Email</b>	denise.priest@northtyneside.co.uk
<b>Registered person</b>	North Tyneside Council
<b>Registered manager</b>	Paul Cook
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Helen Jane Watson
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	

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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 North Tyneside Council lies within the authority's Children and Families Services. The manager of these services is the person with overall responsibility for deciding whether any identified private fostering situations are suitable. The Council also has a Lead Officer for private fostering who takes key responsibility for publicity and awareness raising, developing policies and procedures and reporting regularly on overall arrangements to the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) and the Head of the Children and Families Services. The Lead Officer is also the first point of contact where any concerns are raised regarding non-compliance with the guidance and regulations for private fostering. At the time this inspection was undertaken the authority was aware of and was monitoring a small number of existing private fostering situations.

### **Summary**

This was the first inspection of the actions of North Tyneside Council to identify, respond to and monitor private fostering arrangements. The authority's work with private fostering has been put into place to meet the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. The authority has a clear plan for managing its responsibilities in relation to private fostering. It has developed a comprehensive policy and procedure document for staff members to follow. This has led to good initial assessments of these arrangements and good ongoing monitoring. Young people, their families and their private foster carer are being provided with good support by the authority. The ongoing revision of the procedures and recording documents in use is continuing to further improve the effectiveness of this work. Good steps have been taken to raise awareness of private fostering with both the public and child care professionals. Publicity campaigns have taken place both locally and jointly with other local authorities in the area. The effectiveness of these campaigns is being closely monitored. Staff members have been provided with detailed briefings relating to private fostering and further training events are planned. Extensive work has also taken place with partner agencies to ensure that other professionals, working with children, are aware of their responsibilities to notify the council of any private fostering arrangement they become aware of. This work is ongoing. The authority is making appropriate reports about private fostering to the LSCB.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

This is the first inspection.

### **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.

Through their Lead Officer, North Tyneside Council has undertaken extensive work to promote awareness of private fostering within the local community. Information booklets, which include legal definitions, notification requirements and examples of the advice and support available

to children and carers are in place at council offices and a variety of other community venues. Private Foster Care posters are on display in public buildings and in other public areas. Private foster care has been included in the A-Z directory of council services and a dedicated private fostering link has been added to the authority's public website. Earlier this year the local authority worked in partnership with other local authorities to increase public awareness of private fostering both regionally and locally. During this joint campaign private fostering notices were placed in newspapers across the North East and were broadcast on local radio. Additional advertisements were also placed in two local papers and one local magazine which is delivered to every household in North Tyneside. The Lead Officer regularly evaluates the response to local and regional advertising in partnership with other lead local authority staff in the region and reports on it to the LSCB. To further increase awareness amongst its own staff and those within other agencies likely to come into contact with privately fostered children, an intensive rolling programme of awareness raising and training sessions was organised by the Lead Officer. These have taken place with the First Call team which is the identified point of contact for any new private fostering referrals, along with all other social work teams in the authority. Meetings have also taken place with a variety of other agencies including Children's Centre's staff, the LSCB training group, designated teachers for child protection and the Corporate Parenting Committee for North Tyneside. The programme is ongoing and future sessions are planned with professionals involved with asylum seekers as well as raising awareness with local faith groups and school head teachers. Social work staff speak highly of the quality of training and written guidance provided to them, they highlighted their confidence in the Lead Officer, describing them as both approachable and available. The Lead Officer has developed a detailed policy and procedure guide, it is subject to regular review and has been revised as necessary. It has been distributed in paper form and is also available for all child care professionals through the North Tyneside intranet. Private fostering is now included extensively in the Children and Families Services training programme as well as in local health and education staff training. The view of the chair of the LSCB was that staff generally have a good and improving understanding of their role with private fostering as a result of this training and guidance. To ensure that appropriate action is taken on receipt of a notification, North Tyneside has established clear procedures in which initial information and advice is provided through the First Call referral team. Staff from this team spoke clearly about the assessment process involved and their understanding of the checks to be undertaken. These are also clearly described in the written guide to the assessment process, provided to their benefit. Staff were also aware of the ongoing support and supervision of arrangements to be provided to privately fostered children. They understood how their needs should be assessed and recorded through care plans and were able to describe how these are regularly reviewed, with input from health and education staff and others involved in the children's care. The recent assessments examined were thorough and had been completed in line with the procedures and guidance provided to the staff involved. However, examples of some documents not being signed or dated were noted, this made it more difficult to confirm that all work had been completed within the required timescales. In one less recent assessment a delay in the prompt completion of necessary checks was acknowledged by the lead officer as were some small weaknesses in the forms currently used to complete local checks on the adults caring for children. In addition formal health and safety checklists are not yet available for staff to use during their assessments. However, the referral and monitoring forms in use are generally good and allow staff to gather the information required by schedule. This enables them to determine effectively the ongoing suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangements in accordance with the regulations. The authority is providing good support to those children they are aware of, living in North Tyneside and

cared for through a private fostering arrangement. Children are visited regularly and know how to contact their social worker in between visits if they need to. The children who wrote to us were all able to confirm that they had met with a social worker on more than one occasion to discuss the arrangements about where they are living now. All feel well cared for, one described this as being true as the carers they live with 'treat me with respect'. Children also felt listened to by their social workers and carers. They know who to speak to if they are unhappy or wish to complain and all reported that they are not being bullied. Carers are also receiving good support. They told us that they are visited frequently by social work staff. One described how 'we have been assessed, also informal telephone calls and have seen the young person's social worker when they came to our home'. Another described how a social worker had visited when they asked for a little help and added 'I can only praise her for everything she has done'. Carers also confirmed that they receive advice and support to help them care for the children and that social workers spend time alone with the child when they visit. They also gave examples of arrangements for contact with birth families being discussed and agreed with social work staff. One described how their social worker 'helps us with money, education, talks to (the young person), helps a lot, she has been marvellous'.

### **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.

Through its Lead Officer, North Tyneside have developed a written statement which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which these will be carried out. The statement is comprehensive, containing most required information. However, the descriptions of the advice and support that will be available to the parents of those children privately fostered is currently limited. In addition, although the route by which private foster carers can access training is clearly stated, no examples of the type of training available and the possible benefits of it are currently given. Awareness of this document has been raised with social work staff and other professionals through the previously mentioned programme of briefings and training events. The statement itself is available to them through the North Tyneside intranet. Details from it have been integrated into the private fostering procedures which are also made available to staff through the same route. The effectiveness of the written statement and its supporting procedures are routinely monitored and reported on by the Lead Officer themselves in consultation with staff who use them. The procedures are routinely revised in response to this monitoring and consultation to ensure they remain effective, this occurred most recently in July of this year. On behalf of the authority the Lead Officer has put into place an effective system to monitor the number and nature of private fostering arrangements that it is aware of. The Directory of Arrangements, as it is named, is used to record all private fostering arrangements and their status at any point in time. Any new notifications are recorded within the overall statistical data for the authority and routinely returned to the Department for Education and Skills. The Directory is well presented but does not currently include

information about why an arrangement ends or where a child may subsequently go to live. Comprehensive and well presented records are maintained for each child and carer. These contain all required information including written reports from the visits undertaken by social workers. Summary sheets are used to demonstrate the frequency of visits undertaken, however some of these were not clearly presented. To further ensure that duties and responsibilities to privately fostered children are being fulfilled, regular file audits are undertaken by the Team Manager and the Lead Officer. Quarterly monitoring reports are also prepared by the Lead Officer and are presented to the Chair of the LSCB, the annual report is also provided to the Director of Children's Services.

## 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 assessment documentation is signed and dated to provide confirmation that work undertaken is completed within the required timescales (NMS 3)
- improve the forms currently used to complete local checks on the adults caring for children to ensure that all adults are properly checked. Ensure that necessary checks are completed promptly (NMS 3)
- introduce formal health and safety checklists for use by staff undertaking assessments (NMS 3)
- include descriptions of the advice and support that is available to parents in the written statement on private fostering (NMS 1)
- include examples of the type of training available to private foster carers and the possible benefits of it in the written statement on private fostering (NMS 1)
- include information about why an arrangement ends and where a child subsequently goes to live in the directory of private fostering arrangements (NMS 7)
- ensure that the summary sheets used to demonstrate the frequency of visits undertaken to privately fostered children are properly completed and clearly presented (NMS 7).

## 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.**