

Hartlepool Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Stephen Graham
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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 Hartlepool lies within the authority's Children's Services. A placement panel takes 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 on overall arrangements to the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) and the Head of Children's Services. The Lead Officer is also a point of contact for advice where any concerns are raised regarding non-compliance with the guidance and regulations for private fostering. Although the authority had been previously aware of and had successfully monitored a small number of private fostering situations, at the time this inspection was undertaken they were not aware of any current existing arrangements in Hartlepool.

Summary

This was the first inspection of the actions of Hartlepool 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 (NMS) for Private Fostering and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. The authority has developed a plan and provides detailed policy and procedures for staff to follow which help manage responsibilities in relation to private fostering. Where private fostering arrangements have been identified, staff have responded by completing satisfactory initial assessments of these and have maintained subsequent close monitoring of each arrangement. Good levels of advice and support have been provided to children, carers and parents. Some minor amendments are needed to the plan to ensure that all the information required by the NMS is being provided. Some minor amendments to the procedures in use will also help to ensure that all necessary information is obtained and stored in a consistent way. Steps have been taken to raise awareness of private fostering with both the public and child care professionals. The effectiveness of the local publicity campaigns is monitored but would benefit from better recording of any enquiries and better overall reporting on arrangements within Hartlepool. The publicity material in use would benefit from a clearer definition of private fostering. Examples of the training available to private foster carers should also be included. Children would benefit from their own written guide to private fostering. Training events relating to private fostering have been provided and further training events have been planned. However the take up of this training has so far been low. Information has been circulated to partner agencies to ensure that other professionals working with children understand their responsibilities regarding private fostering.

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.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Hartlepool Council has worked to promote awareness of private fostering within the local community. The lead officer has placed adverts in local community magazines. They have also circulated information leaflets and posters to community venues, council offices and to professional staff working in health and education. This material includes legal definitions, notification requirements and highlights that advice and support is available. The leaflets do not make it clear that more distant family members caring for children are not exempt from the private fostering regulations and would need to be assessed. The publicity material would also benefit from the inclusion of examples of the training available to private foster carers. Private foster care has been included in the directory of council services with information about it available through the public website. Although there are currently no identified private fostering arrangements within Hartlepool, those arrangements previously notified had been responded to promptly. To ensure that appropriate action is taken on receipt of any notification, clear procedures have been established to the benefit of staff. The previously completed assessments examined were thorough and had been completed within the required timescales. In one example, a delay in the completion of necessary local checks on the adult carers had occurred. Although the reasons for this delay had been resolved at that time, it was agreed that the arrangements to complete any future checks should be formalised and agreed. The referral and monitoring forms in use are satisfactory but would benefit from a formal health and safety checklist to help staff assess the suitability of the accommodation. The authority has provided good support to those children they were aware of living in Hartlepool and cared for through a private fostering arrangement. Those children had been visited regularly and knew how to contact their social worker in between visits if they needed to. Children spoken to felt that they were well cared for when privately fostered, and had been visited regularly by social workers and community support staff. They had received regular advice and support with regard to their education, employment, health and family contact issues. Although general information leaflets about private fostering are available, there is currently no written guide to private fostering produced specifically for children themselves.

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 satisfactory.

Through its lead officer, the local authority has 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, it does not include the name of the person with expertise in private fostering whom social workers can contact for advice. There are no descriptions of the advice and support available to the parents and carers of those children privately fostered including any access to training

or the benefits of this. The statement is available to all staff through the Hartlepool intranet and has direct links for social work staff to access the documentation and forms needed to carry out initial assessments and subsequent monitoring visits. The statement and documentation are routinely revised and updated, most recently in July of this year. Awareness of this document has been raised with social work staff through their initial induction and subsequent ongoing supervision. Training events relating to private fostering have been provided by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) and further training events have been planned. However, the take up of this training has so far been low with one planned event cancelled due to the low numbers of staff applying for it. On behalf of the authority the Lead Officer monitors the number and nature of private fostering arrangements. Any new notifications are recorded within the overall statistical data for the authority and routinely returned to the Department for Children Schools and Families. There is no current system to record the number and nature of overall enquiries received in relation to private fostering. Records are maintained for privately fostered children and their carers. Information is currently stored in combined files rather than separate files specific to the carer or the child. Detailed reports of statutory visits completed are kept on file and are routinely monitored by social work managers. Visits are frequent and the reports provide many examples of the practical support and advice given to children and their carers. The necessary annual written report to the Director of Children's Services evaluating outcomes for privately fostered children has not yet been provided. In addition, the annual report to the LSCB demonstrating how the welfare of privately fostered children is being safeguarded and promoted has not been provided to schedule.

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 the publicity materials used to promote awareness of private fostering and notification requirements include an accurate legal definition of a privately fostered child (NMS 2)
- ensure that local arrangements used to confirm whether the private foster carer or anyone in the household is disqualified from privately fostering children are formally agreed and followed (NMS 3)
- introduce health and safety checklists for use by staff undertaking assessments (NMS 3)
- ensure that private foster carers are made aware of and can utilise any local training that may help them meet the needs of the children they look after (NMS 4)
- provide children with age appropriate written information about private fostering (NMS 6)

- ensure that the written statement on private fostering includes all necessary information (NMS 1)
- maintain separate confidential records for each privately fostered child and each private foster carer (NMS 7)
- maintain a system for recording the number and nature of enquiries received in relation to private fostering, the responses given and any action taken (NMS 7)
- provide a written report on private fostering to the Director of Children's services each year and report annually to the LSCB (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.