

Borough of Telford & Wrekin Private Fostering Arrangements Service

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Janet Manders
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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 awareness of the necessity to notify the authority of any private fostering arrangement and to encourage positive outcomes for privately fostered children and young people, and reduce any risks to their welfare and safety.

The Telford and Wrekin Council has located the nominated person for private fostering within the Family Placement Team of the Children and Young People service. Decisions regarding the suitability of private fostering arrangements are considered by the Resources Allocation Meeting (RAM), which is chaired by a senior manager within the department.

Summary

The dedicated part-time worker has undertaken initial awareness raising work within the authority and with local agencies. However, there is still a considerable amount of work required to ensure that professionals are aware of the meaning of private fostering arrangements and their role in identifying them and ensuring the safety of any young person placed within a private fostering arrangement. The worker is also responsible for undertaking the assessment of the suitability of any carers notified to the authority.

Evidence gathered during this inspection indicated that not all staff within the initial assessment and case management teams were fully cognisant of the definition of a private fostering arrangement and therefore had not always taken the appropriate action to safeguard young people.

Arrangements are not fully in place to monitor the service.

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 the Borough of Telford and Wrekin'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 inadequate.

The authority has developed a basic leaflet for the public to raise awareness of private fostering arrangements and the action that should be taken. This leaflet is available in different languages and formats. In addition the authority uses national publications to inform professionals from other agencies of their role and responsibility with regards to private fostering. A nationally produced leaflet is also available for young people, which has space for the inclusion of social workers' contact details, but they do not receive any written information as to what they can expect on a local level, with local details.

There has been some limited training for professionals from other agencies to raise awareness of private fostering but further work is required to guarantee that all agencies are aware of when an arrangement is a private fostering arrangement and what their role is in ensuring that young people are properly safeguarded.

The authority has developed policies and procedures, which cover all areas, specified in The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005, including what action will be taken if they become aware of an un-notified arrangement. However, it is not clear as to whether any legal action would be taken against the carer.

Examination of records indicate that appropriate procedures were not followed in respect of either of the cases examined by inspectors, with two young people having been placed with a carer for nine months prior to a notification being made to the authority and the process of suitability being considered, although the local authority were already involved with the young person. In respect of the other case, the authority viewed the arrangement as a private fostering arrangement, when it clearly was not. The young people had been placed with the carers under a Police Protection Order. Checks on the carers' suitability were delayed due to administrative difficulties and the appropriate information was not gathered. The young people were removed six weeks later and placed with approved foster carers. This situation could have jeopardised the young people's safety and well-being.

The authority has developed a pro-forma agreement to be used by carers and parents. This clearly identifies how the young person's needs will be met and includes the length of time the placement is expected to last, contact arrangements, medical consent and arrangement for financial support of the young person. This was in place for one of the arrangements but not for the placement where young people had been placed under a Police Protection Order as the parent would not agree to the arrangement.

The appointed private fostering social worker is responsible for undertaking an assessment of the carers to ensure that they are suitable to provide care for the young person to be placed or who has already been placed. Once this assessment has been completed a report is presented to the Resources Allocation Meeting, which is chaired by the senior manager for the fostering service, for the arrangement to be signed off. The young person's social worker is responsible for undertaking an initial assessment to identify the young person's needs and to ensure that they can be met by the proposed or actual arrangements. Evidence of this was seen on the file of the young people visited by the inspector.

The two young people met as part of the inspection were being well cared for and the carer was ensuring that their health and educational needs were being met. Evidence provided by the young people, the carer and the social worker indicated that the young people had made good progress since they were placed with their current private foster carer.

Once a placement has been accepted as suitable, the case is allocated to a worker from the case management team. There are clear expectations as to how frequently young people are to be visited by workers and evidence gained from discussion with the young people visited confirmed that the worker visited frequently and within timescales. The private fostering arrangement social worker also visited the foster carer on a regular basis to offer support and guidance. Additional guidance is provided to carers by written guidance that has been developed by the authority. The carer and young people visited felt they had a positive relationship with their workers and felt able to contact a worker whenever they needed advice. Financial support had been offered by the authority to support the placement. Private foster carers are also able to attend joint training and support events with family and friends of foster carers, which are provided by the Family Placement Team.

In respect of both arrangements inspected by inspectors, the authority were actively involved in offering support to the families of the young people being cared for by the private foster carers.

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.

Telford and Wrekin Borough Council has appointed a social worker within the Family Placement Team with designated responsibility for oversight of private fostering arrangements. This appointment was made in March 2006 and is for 18½ hours per week. Whilst considerable work has been undertaken, the amount of time allocated to the work is insufficient for the worker to undertake the assessments, raise awareness of private fostering and undertake training of staff.

The authority has a detailed Statement of Purpose which contains most of the relevant information, however, it does not include the name of the manager who will sign off the suitability of any private fostering arrangement. Although the Statement of Purpose states that information can be found on the authority's website there are no obvious links to any information regarding private fostering.

Discussions with staff within both the case management team and the fostering service indicated that not all staff are aware of the definition of private fostering or the procedures for approving such an arrangement. Staff were provided with a half-day training in May 2007, however, this was not mandatory training and many staff did not attend.

Each young person and private foster carer has an individual file which contains all relevant information about the young person and the arrangements for the private fostering arrangement. The designated worker has introduced systems to collect relevant data relating to private fostering arrangements, however, due to other time constraints it has not been possible for any robust analysis to be undertaken of the statistics. In line with procedures within the department as a whole, files are audited to ensure that they contain all necessary information and that required timescales are met.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) has undertaken training in respect of their role in private fostering arrangements. However, an annual report has not yet been made available to them to enable them to monitor the progress in ensuring young people are kept safe and that inter-agency working arrangements to safeguard children are appropriate and effective. Neither has a report been presented to the director of the authority. Nonetheless, the worker has developed an action plan as to how gaps in the service will be addressed and this will be reviewed on an annual basis.

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 criteria for a private fostering arrangement are met, where a young person is clearly placed under other provisions of the Children Act 1989, the appropriate procedures must be followed (NMS 2)
- ensure that appropriate procedures are followed and timescales met (NMS 2)
- ensure that there are sufficient staff available to promote awareness of private fostering, assess the suitability of foster carers and provide ongoing support and advice (NMS 3)
- clarify what legal action will be taken if there is a failure to notify a private fostering arrangement (NMS 2)
- consider providing written information to young people, in formats appropriate to their age and level of understanding, regarding local arrangements for private fostering and what they should expect from their carers and their allocated social worker (NMS 6)
- include in the Statement of Purpose details of the named person, who is responsible for signing off the suitability of arrangements (NMS 1)

- ensure that information regarding private fostering is readily available to members of the public, including on the authority's website (NMS 1)
- ensure that all staff receive training in respect of private fostering arrangements and that information is included in all induction programmes (NMS 1)
- ensure that there are sufficient staff available to promote awareness of private fostering, assess the suitability of foster carers and provide ongoing support and advice (NMS 7)
- present a report to the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Director of Children's Services (NMS 7)
- undertake regular analysis of the statistics gathered in respect of private fostering to ensure that improvements are made to the service (NMS 7).