



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

LOCAL COUNCIL PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS

Tameside MBC Private Fostering Arrangements

**Services for Children and Young People
Council Offices, Wellington Road
Ashton-under-Lyne
Tameside
OL6 6DL**

Lead Inspector
Susan Winson

Announced Inspection
10th January 2007 09:30

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

Name of Local Authority Tameside MBC Private Fostering Arrangements

Address Services for Children and Young People
Council Offices, Wellington Road
Ashton-under-Lyne
Tameside
OL6 6DL

Telephone number 0161 368 8865

Fax number 0161 342 4200

Email address

**Local Authority Web
address**

SUMMARY

Services for Children and Young People

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

This inspection was carried out over one day. The team manager with responsibility for private fostering arrangements was unavailable so the inspector met with her manager and the private fostering social worker. The inspector also saw the records and information leaflets.

This is the first inspection of Tameside's private fostering arrangements.

What the local authority does well:

The location of the private fostering service within a family centre, where a range of resources can be accessed, is clearly beneficial.

The social worker and managers of the private fostering service are aware of facilities and resources within the area which can be accessed as part of the general support packages to parents, carers and young people. A range of support is provided, sometimes in conjunction with workers from the family support teams or other professionals.

The service is well managed and staff involved in private fostering arrangements have relevant experience and skills. Comprehensive procedures and strategies are in place which are carried out in practice.

The local authority has worked for some years to inform the other professionals and families in the area about private fostering. The quality of publicity materials is good. The service is continuing to look at how communication with the public can be improved.

Young people's needs are assessed and their progress monitored in private foster care. There is a commitment to working in partnership with parents and carers to ensure young people's needs are met.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Not applicable.

What they could do better:

The use of unannounced visits to private fostering households is being considered as an additional safeguarding measure.

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

CONTENTS

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 and 6

Quality in this outcome is good. Children's welfare is safeguarded and promoted, private foster carers and parents receive advice and support and young people are encouraged to participate in decision making. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including a visit to the private fostering service.

EVIDENCE:

The authority has a communication strategy through which they have taken a pro-active approach to raise the awareness of private fostering and the notification requirements over several years. A wide range of publicity materials, available in different languages, are used which include leaflets, posters and articles in the free newspaper.

Comprehensive information is also on the website. There have been low numbers of identified private fostering arrangements in the authority and the need to continue to disseminate information on a regular basis, and to keep the communication strategy under review, is acknowledged.

Records demonstrate that responses to information about potential private fostering arrangements and initial assessments are carried out within seven days. The policy states that the prime objective of the suitability assessment is to meet a child's needs and to ascertain if private fostering is the best option for the individual child. The scope of the assessment is also outlined, as are the arrangements for disqualification and for prohibiting private arrangements.

There is a focus on safeguarding young people. All managers have recently undertaken a two-day child protection revision course. Privately fostered children are visited on at a minimum of every six weeks during the first year and are seen alone by the social worker. The manager acknowledges that unannounced visits would improve the monitoring process.

Records demonstrate that statutory checks are taken up on all members of the fostering household who are over 18 years, personal referees are interviewed and the suitability of the accommodation is assessed and, where necessary, a health and safety action plan is drawn up with the carer. Although none of the present private fostering arrangements have yet reached this stage, systems are in place for reviews of the arrangements are carried out annually.

Private foster carers, parents and young people in their care have access to the range of family support services within the local authority. A holistic approach to ensuring that children and young people's needs are met is evident.

Information for children and young people is provided which includes the support offered to the child, their carers and their families. Their views are sought on social work visits and recorded on file. They are encouraged to attend meetings and have been involved in developing an information leaflet, which is in draft form at present.

Tameside MBC has a robust policy on involvement and inclusion of young people in decisions, both personal and in the improvement of services. The social workers involved have encountered difficulties in consulting with a group of privately fostered young people due to the small numbers involved. They have instead met with an existing group of young carers to ask their opinion on the information leaflets for young people in private fostering arrangements and have made amendments on their advice.

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 and 7

Quality in this outcome is good. The local authority can demonstrate that relevant staff have information and knowledge, and that it carries out its functions effectively. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including a visit to the private fostering service.

EVIDENCE:

Information sessions have been held with social work teams, learning mentors, members of the council, children's centre managers and senior social care managers. They are offered to all organisations that are in contact with children and young people.

Private fostering is discussed as part of induction for new staff by the training section and at multi-agency safeguarding board training meetings. Schools within the authority have information posted to them and a 'reminder email' is sent twice a year to all heads.

The private fostering service is located within family support services of the local authority and roles, responsibilities and line management are clear. The social worker, manager and service manager have experience and expertise in the areas of private fostering and family support. From records and discussions, it is evident that there is management monitoring of the way the duties are discharged. Since 2001 the authority has had a named social worker with responsibility for private fostering and her role in developing the service and in supporting the young people and carers is clear.

Policies and procedures are in place which are carried out in practice. Files are well organised and contain all the relevant information. The authority is advised to review which case records should be kept on the carers' files and which on the children's files.

Effective systems are in place for the manager to monitor the arrangements and annual statistics are gathered.

Optional

Being Healthy

JUDGEMENT –

Quality in this outcome is good. Children's health and development are monitored and promoted. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including a visit to the private fostering service.

EVIDENCE:

Permission for medical treatment is gained and is kept on file, or it is noted that the young person is competent to make their own decisions. The private fostering social worker checks that the carers have up to date medical information and that records are kept to ensure that young people have access to GP's, health visitors, dentists, opticians and other relevant services to meet their needs. On the files inspected there were examples of liaison with other health professionals, who also may be involved in the suitability assessments where appropriate.

Training is offered to private foster carers where appropriate.

Enjoying and Achieving

JUDGEMENT –

Quality in this outcome is good. The education of young people in private foster care is promoted. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including a visit to the private fostering service.

EVIDENCE:

All the social work teams in Tameside have a nominated equalities representative to raise awareness and all staff receive training in equality and diversity and cultural competence. During the private fostering assessment young people's ethnic, religious and cultural needs are considered and there have been instances when translators have been used to improve communication. Information leaflets for carers, parents and children are available in different languages and formats.

The service can demonstrate that education is promoted and support to carers includes discussion of educational issues. Where appropriate, education welfare officers are involved and families and carers are encouraged to support young people by attending school meetings and events. There is a clear expectation that private foster carers will keep a file of school reports.

Education professionals contribute to the suitability assessments of private fostering arrangements, where appropriate, and the private fostering social worker works with them when necessary to meet young people's needs.

Recreational activities are discussed with the young people and encouraged.

Making a Positive Contribution

JUDGEMENT –

Quality in this outcome is good. The service promotes parental involvement and consults with young people. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including a visit to the private fostering service.

EVIDENCE:

The service has an ethos which recognises that parents retain their rights and responsibilities. Where possible, agreements with parents are drawn up and parents are encouraged to continue to be involved with their children and in decision making.

Young people are supported and consulted regularly by the named private fostering social worker. It is evident that they are encouraged to express their views and opinions and they are listened to.

Achieving Economic Well Being

JUDGEMENT –

Quality in this outcome is good. Young people are supported into adulthood. Parents and private foster carers are informed and advised about financial issues. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including a visit to the private fostering service.

EVIDENCE:

Young people's needs in terms of emerging independence and developing life skills are part of the assessment of need which continues throughout their time in private foster care. The policies and procedures include information and guidance on the transition of young people with disabilities to adult services and the local authority's responsibilities in regard to them.

The information for parents and carers gives clear information about the financial aspects of private foster care.

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	
Standard No	Score	Standard No	Score
2	3	1	3
3	4	7	3
4	3		
5	3		
6	4		

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	PF7	The local authority should consider reviewing the contents of children's and foster carers' files.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Ashton-under-Lyne Area Office

11th Floor, West Point

501 Chester Road

Old Trafford

Manchester

M16 9HU

National Enquiry Line:

Telephone: 0845 015 0120 or 0191 233 3323

Textphone: 0845 015 2255 or 0191 233 3588

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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