



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

LOCAL COUNCIL PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS

Swindon Borough Council Private Fostering Service

**Swindon Borough Council
Euclid St
Swindon
Wiltshire
SN1 2JH**

Lead Inspector
Sophie Barton

Announced Inspection
15th November 2006 10:00

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 Swindon Borough Council Private Fostering Service

Address Swindon Borough Council
Euclid St
Swindon
Wiltshire
SN1 2JH

Telephone number 01793 463000

Fax number

Email address

Local Authority Web address

SUMMARY

Swindon Borough Council

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

Swindon Borough Council was informed in July 2006 that the Commission for Social Care Inspection would be inspecting Private Fostering. The inspection was carried out over two days by one inspector. The inspection involved interviewing the Monitoring Officer, the Head of Safeguarding, the Director of Children's Services and the Group Director. Further interviews were carried out with a group of children's social workers and a family placement team member responsible for assessing private foster carers. The inspector examined the files of four private foster carers (and the six children living with these carers).

Questionnaires were also sent to private foster carers, young people and professionals. Two questionnaires were received back from privately fostered young people and forty received from professionals.

At the time of the inspection the local authority was aware of 20 children in private fostering arrangements. A further 20 private fostering arrangements had ceased within the last year.

What the local authority does well:

The local authority is widely promoting awareness of private fostering and the notification requirements, and this has been actively happening over the last 18 months. There is a clear communications strategy which is targeting a wide range of professionals and agencies.

Relevant social work staff are aware of the local authority's responsibilities and the procedures to be followed when a notification is received. The monitoring officer and designated family placement worker for private fostering are very knowledgeable about private fostering and have a good understanding about the needs of privately fostered children. The private fostering procedures and 'plan' are detailed and well written. The procedures have been in place for some time, including the 'fostering panel' making recommendations on the suitability of new arrangements. This ensures a quality assurance and monitoring role of private fostering, which also includes the Director of Children's Services reviewing the panel paperwork and agreeing the suitability of arrangements.

There has been a recent thorough audit of all 40 private fostering arrangements notified to the authority this year by the monitoring officer and Head of Safeguarding. The Local Safeguarding Children's Board and the

Corporate Parenting Board are regularly updated about how the authority is fulfilling its responsibilities.

Children are being safeguarded by a number of checks being carried out on the suitability of the private foster carer.

The local authority have developed information packs for teenagers all about what private fostering means, the responsibility of private foster carers and what support is available from social workers.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Not applicable. This is the first inspection of the local authority's Private Fostering.

What they could do better:

There has been a considerable lack of contact made with parents of privately fostered children. This is during the initial consultation and during subsequent visits to children, which is a breach of the regulations. The welfare of three of the children case tracked was not being promoted because of the lack of parental contact and/or the emotional needs of the child being significantly affected. This also meant that parents were not being given advice and support, and consent to medical treatment and financial arrangements were not clarified.

Other breaches of regulations included social workers not always seeing the child alone.

The awareness campaign has yet to include press coverage, which would improve the coverage of people being informed of the notification requirements. Further work also needs to be carried out with professional agencies in Swindon as 40% replied that they did not know what action to take if they became aware of a privately fostered child.

The information pack for children is not in a format suitable for younger children.

The Family Placement Worker does not remain in contact with the private foster carer following the initial assessment of their suitability. This has resulted in carers not receiving advice and information regarding training opportunities, support groups, or reviews of the carer's competence and health and safety of the environment.

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

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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 area is **adequate**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.*

The local authority has a good strategy for promoting awareness of the notification requirements to professionals and members of the public.

There is an effective policy in place to ensure that notifications are responded to and that children in these arrangements are safeguarded. However, some children's welfare has not been promoted following limited assessments of their needs.

Advice and support to children and carers has been sufficient, although lack of contact with parents fails to fully determine what is in the child's best interests.

EVIDENCE:

Swindon Borough Council have a rolling programme of awareness raising, targeting staff who work for the Borough Council, other agencies that come into contact with children and families, and informing the public. The programme has consisted of distributing the Department for Education and Skills booklets on private fostering to public services, agencies and community centres. 4000 copies have been distributed so far with a further 2000 due to be sent out shortly. Presentations have been given to groups of school nurses, health visitors, teachers and governors, social workers, and at the Local Safeguarding Children's Board conference. Private Fostering was included in the LSCB training event on child protection given to faith and community groups earlier this year. The information provided by the local authority includes the legal definition of private fostering, the notification requirements and the procedure for notifying.

As yet there has been no press or media coverage. An article is however being planned in the Council newspaper which is distributed to all households in Swindon four times a year.

Ninety one questionnaires were sent to a range of professionals working in Swindon as part of evidence gathering for this inspection. Forty questionnaires were returned at the time of writing the report. 72.5% confirmed that they had seen information from the local authority telling them about private fostering, therefore 27.5% stating they had not seen any information. 40% stated that they did not know what action to take if they became aware that a child was being privately fostered.

As of the 31st March 2006 Swindon were aware of 20 children under private fostering agreements. A further 20 had ended during the year. Notifications therefore are being received regularly, and although it is considered that there are more arrangements that have yet to be notified, the number of notifications is higher than other comparable local authorities.

The authority has procedures and policies in place relating to responding to notifications. These have been updated in May 2006 and include the legislation, the responsibility of the different professionals involved (referral team, family placement team, long term social worker and fostering panel), receiving notifications, initial assessments, concerns about the arrangement, and specific guidance around children from overseas, asylum seekers and trafficked children. There have been no prohibitions or requirements on private fostering arrangements. The monitoring officer has received guidance from the Borough's legal department about how to deal effectively with situations where an arrangement has not been notified in accordance with the regulations.

As part of the inspection the inspector examined the files of four private foster carers (and the six children living with these carers). Of the four children who had moved to the private foster carers this year, three had been visited within

7 working days of the notification being received. This visit was carried out by a child care social worker and they had completed an Initial Assessment form. There had been no contact made (or evidence of attempts to contact) the parents of two of these children, which is a requirement under regulation 7, Schedule 3. The initial assessment forms seen were limited in detail and did not adequately cover the contact arrangements and suitability of this, or how decisions about the child's day to day care are being taken. The issue of identity, emotional welfare, attachment and behavioural development were not addressed in the assessment for one child who had been with several carers. Written medical consent from a person with parental responsibility had been obtained for only one child. Further to this the initial assessment did not look at the suitability of all household members and Criminal Record Bureau checks were not being actioned immediately.

The procedures are for the family placement team to undertake an assessment of the suitability of the carer after the initial assessment had been completed. This report and the initial assessment is then considered by the fostering panel. Having the fostering panel consider the suitability of arrangements is very good practice, and ensures further safeguarding and monitoring of the local authority's functions. The family placements role also ensures fostering knowledge and skills are employed. The majority of assessments were being presented to panel (and then the Director of Children's Services) within 6 weeks.

For two children who had been in a private fostering arrangements for several years, there had been no contact made with parents. Concerns about the children's welfare raised by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service had not been adequately addressed by the local authority. A core assessment had not been completed although there were highlighted emotional and behavioural needs of the child, and later concerns about the carer's suitability.

The social worker had been visiting monthly, but the report of the visit was very limited in detail, and did not address issues of welfare, contact, financial arrangements, standard of care or decisions about the child's day to day care. The children were also not seen alone during the visits. However for two other children living with private foster carers there had been more input from the social worker. For one child in particular there had been considerable support and assessment of the child's health and wellbeing. For another child support was being given to the carer, child and parent in relation to contact issues, family workshop, support in school, and financial support to the carer.

The family placement team do not remain in contact with the private foster carer after they have completed the initial assessment. This does mean that general fostering support and information is not readily available to them, and files did not evidence that the child's social worker was giving advice and information about training available or support groups. Private foster carers

are currently not able to attend the training for foster carers, but should be signposted to other community training (from SureStart for example).

As stated above contact from the local authority with parents is considerably lacking. The monitoring officer and the Director of Children's Services are fully aware of this. Team Managers within the child care teams have been informed that this is an area of practice that needs to improve. The local authority have developed information packs for children who are privately fostered. This is good practice and gives teenagers easily accessible information about their rights and the responsibility of others. The pack does not include information on 'Leaving care' and whether they qualify for support from the local authority post 16 years. The local authority also need to consider the information available for younger children.

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 area is **good**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.*

The local authority has provided a range of information to staff, which ensures they have good awareness of their duties in relation to private fostering.

There are effective procedures in place for monitoring the local authority's duties and functions in relation to private fostering, with thorough auditing to improve practice.

EVIDENCE:

The local authority has a written plan "Every Privately Fostered Child and Young Person matters" which sets out its aim to make sure the welfare of a privately fostered child within Swindon Borough is promoted and safeguarded. This plan is well written in plain English, comprehensively covering all the necessary areas. The inspector noted that some procedures (relating to good practice) in the plan were yet to be carried out. For example health and safety checks on the carer's house, health checks on carers, checks with schools and other agencies of members of the household, recording monthly visits on carers file, training opportunities for carers. The monitoring officer and Head of Safeguarding however has recently carried out a thorough audit of the private fostering casefiles. This included examining all files (forty seven children and 21 carer's files) and sending questionnaires to relevant professionals. The results of the audit are due to be presented to the Quarterly Performance Review panel.

All staff within the Borough have access to the procedures and policies relating to private fostering electronically. Staff have also attended mandatory training on private fostering. However this needs to be on a rolling programme, due to the high turnover of staff in child care teams. The inspector was informed however that it is included in induction training for new staff. The monitoring officer and a family placement social worker responsible for private fostering are very knowledgeable about private fostering issues, legislation and good practice recommendations. They are members of the BAAF special interest group and have attended workshops run by the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

The Head of Safeguarding has presented an annual report to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board, and the six monthly report on the local authority's functions presented to the Corporate Parenting Board includes information on private fostering.

New notifications are recorded on statistical data return PF1 and submitted to the Department for Education and Skills. There is also a system for recording the number and nature of enquiries. The inspector was provided with accurate data about private fostering arrangements from the monitoring officer.

As stated above the Initial Assessment form being completed (by the social worker visiting the child and carer following notification) is not capturing the information required by regulation. Social workers are however completing a report after subsequent visits to children. These vary in quality but the form does include all the areas that need to be considered (i.e. contact arrangements, financial considerations, educational and health needs of child, standard of care etc). The monitoring officer has reviewed a number of forms being used (notification forms to be completed by parents, carers and other interested parties, family placement assessment form, agreement between carer and parent, and closing summary of arrangement) and these all meet the regulations relating to the information that needs to be captured.

The process of the fostering panel and decision maker seeing each assessment of a private fostering arrangement is good practice. It ensures better monitoring across the child care teams, and compliance with regulations. The inspector examined a fostering panel where three private fostering cases were being presented. The fostering panel were thorough in their discussions about the case and whether they consider it suitable. They also raised safeguarding issues that were fed back to the child care teams and to the decision maker.

Optional

Being Healthy

JUDGEMENT –

EVIDENCE:

Enjoying and Achieving

JUDGEMENT –

EVIDENCE:

Making a Positive Contribution

JUDGEMENT –

EVIDENCE:

Achieving Economic Well Being

JUDGEMENT –

EVIDENCE:

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	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
2	3	1	3
3	2	7	3
4	3		
5	3		
6	2		

Are there any outstanding recommendations from the last N/a inspection?

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	PF2	<p>The awareness campaign should include press coverage.</p> <p>Continued work should be carried out with the range of professional agencies and groups to ensure they are fully aware of private fostering.</p>
2	PF3	<p>Initial visits to children in private fostering arrangements must establish the areas specified in Regulation 7 and Schedule 3.</p> <p><i>(In particular this relates to the need to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i> speak to, and visit where reasonable, parents</i> • <i> speak to all members of the household</i> • <i> to assess the child’s emotional and behavioural development).</i> • <i> Consider arrangements for care of the child’s health (including medical consent)</i> <p>Children must be seen and spoken to alone, unless it is considered inappropriate. (Regulation 8(3))</p>
3	PF4	<p>Private foster carers should be given information about and the opportunity to attend relevant training courses and support groups.</p>
4	PF5	<p>Parents need to be contacted regularly, given advice and support as needed.</p> <p>In particular consideration whether the provision of services would remove the necessity for the child to be privately fostered.</p>

		<p>Parents should be encouraged to maintain regular contact with the child.</p> <p>Parents should be provided with the contact details of an allocated social worker.</p>
5	PF6	<p>Information given to children about being privately fostered should be in a format appropriate to their age.</p> <p>It should also include information on who would be qualifying children as defined by Section 24(2)(e) Children Act 1989.</p>

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Poole Office

Unit 4

New Fields Business Park

Stinsford Road

Poole

BH17 0NF

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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