



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

LOCAL COUNCIL PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS

Redcar & Cleveland Private Fostering Arrangement

**Social Services Department
Seafield House
Kirkleatham Street
Redcar
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Lead Inspector
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Key Announced Inspection
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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

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SUMMARY

Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council

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

Two inspectors carried out this inspection over one day. The inspectors also looked at information provided by the service before the inspection started. The inspectors would like to thank the children, their carers, staff and managers at Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council for their help during the inspection. Evidence and information for this inspection was gathered through:

- Reading reports and information provided by the council before the inspection
- Reading policies and procedures
- Reading children's and carers' files
- Visiting the home of a privately fostered child
- Speaking with a privately fostered child
- Speaking with a private foster carer
- Speaking with the head of children's social care
- Speaking with social workers and their managers

This was the first inspection of the arrangements put in place by Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council to identify, respond to and monitor private fostering arrangements. These arrangements have been put into place to meet the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering which came into force on 18 July 2005, and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

What the local authority does well:

At the time of this inspection the Directorate had identified a small number of private fostering arrangements within the borough and was monitoring and supporting the families and young people involved. The authority has a clear procedure for responding to situations of private fostering and is aware of the areas it needs to concentrate on as this plan develops.

The authority has developed good systems for raising awareness of private fostering. It has done some good publicity in areas identified as the most likely for private fostering arrangements to exist, having identified this as a priority before carrying out wider 'awareness raising' publicity for the public in general. It is working with local education and health professionals together with its own staff to raise community awareness. It has produced easy to read booklets, which includes contact information for people where their first language is not English. These booklets that are colourful and attractive are easy to read using larger fonts.

Advice and support to privately fostered children and their carers is good, as is the information they receive. Staff and their managers are knowledgeable about private foster carers. The authority has produced a comprehensive procedure for staff to following regarding the notification, assessment and support of private foster placements. The authority has a very clear step-by-step procedure in place for staff members to follow when dealing with notifications or the discovery of private fostering situations. This procedure states what staff should do initially and then on a long-term basis to support children and private foster carers.

The quality of assessment is good, which ensures that the carer can meet the child's needs. The authority undertakes additional safeguarding checks, in addition to the criminal record bureau (CRB) disclosure, due to the delay in these checks being received by the authority. These additional checks ensure that children's welfare is safeguarded during the time of the assessment process. One privately fostered child told us about their placement, 'It's the same as before but more people come to talk to me and that's fine'. They said that they had been visited regularly by the social worker and are 'safe and well looked after'. They felt that the social worker listened to their views and respected their feelings about what they wanted to happen to them. The case we tracked as part of the inspection the process was considered to be an example of good practice.

The same training, which is undertaken by kinship and mainstream carers, is made available to private foster carers if they chose to do it. This makes sure that carers will have the skills and knowledge to meet the needs of the children they look after.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This is the first inspection of the authority's management of these arrangements.

What they could do better:

The authority should ensure that it maintains up to date information in respect of notifications made to it and the number of carers approved or undergoing assessment so as to ensure that private fostering work is appropriately resourced.

The authority should consider drafting a standardised contact letter to private foster carers for use when social workers have been unable to make contact. This letter should include information about 'what is a private fostering arrangement' and contact details of the responsible officer so that private foster carers are properly informed.

Currently, private fostering arrangements are included within the Kinship Care Policy. The authority should write and implement a separate policy for private fostering arrangements so that these arrangements are dealt with separately and differently to kinship care.

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 good. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to the authority. The authority has put in place systems, which ensure that it is notified about private fostering arrangements and that children living with private foster carers are safeguarded. The authority has put in place appropriate assessment and support arrangements for privately fostered children, their parents and private foster carers.

EVIDENCE:

Redcar and Cleveland Council have made significant improvements in its systems and procedures to ensure it is notified of any private fostering arrangements (PFA) within the borough. It has produced easy read booklets which give information about private fostering and what people should do if they know of, or they are providing a private fostering arrangement. The booklets are colourful, in large print and include the council's contact details in a number of foreign languages in order that people from the ethnic communities can access the information if needed. Booklets and large posters have been distributed to libraries, doctors' surgeries and other public buildings.

The authority is committed to raising awareness of PFAs and is currently putting in place an awareness campaign. The campaign includes private fostering information being included within its free magazine, which is delivered into every home in the borough; raising awareness with schools through the head teachers forum and local school networks; and briefings to its social work teams, including the first contact team. Briefings have also been made available to healthcare workers such as health visitors. It was confirmed during case tracking and through speaking with a team manager that the authority had received notifications through schools and healthcare professionals, and from private foster carers who had directly contacted the authority. It was further noted that at the time of the inspection the authority was undertaking assessments in respect of 5 new referrals, which had been notified to it in the preceding weeks.

As part of the inspection an in-depth case tracking was undertaken of one case. This case and others looked at, but not as in depth, confirmed that the authority has put in place sound systems and assessments, which safeguard privately fostered children's welfare. The authority has created an assessment process based on the National Framework for Assessment of children. This framework, which is well known to the authority's social workers, and is a slimmed down version of the assessment framework, has been adapted to meet the requirements of private fostering. Assessments are undertaken by social workers within the protection and support teams. Those social workers and managers interviewed demonstrated a sound knowledge of PFA. The authority has produced a procedure in respect of the management of PFA notifications, assessments, support and where necessary the disqualification of private foster carers. The procedure gives short timescales for the completion of assessment and approval of private fostering arrangements. Due to the delay in the return of criminal record bureau (CRB) disclosures the authority makes a separate check with the local police safeguarding unit to see if they hold any information on private foster carers and other adults living at the carers' address.

Discussions with the child and private foster carer who were case trace tracked as part of the inspection confirmed that the authority had provided them both with information regarding PFAs. The child interviewed told us, 'It's the same as before but more people come to talk to me and that's fine'. They said that they had been visited regularly by the social worker and are 'safe and well looked after'. They felt that the social worker listened to their views and respected their feelings about what they wanted to happen to them. The carer told us that the social worker is 'very supportive' and 'explained everything I needed to know about private fostering. She told me about the girl in London, Victoria, and how she was killed whilst living with a carer. I think it is necessary to do all the checks and see the children to make sure they are safe'. The carer went on to explain the assessment done by the social worker and confirmed that she had received a booklet from her which explained about private fostering.

The assessment viewed was thorough and included all the necessary information to determine the appropriateness of the placement including safeguarding checks, health, education and the child's views. Although the initial referral was made to the authority in February 2006, the assessment was not commenced until June 2006. This was due to the social worker not being able to make contact with the carer. They had left messages on the carer's telephone answering machine and left calling cards, but they did not write to the carer to explain the reason for the contact. This was confirmed by the carer who explained that the reason they had not contacted the authority was because the child's father was working away from home for this period. At the point contact was made with the private foster carer the assessment progressed speedily and in accordance with the authority's procedure. A social worker interviewed spoke positively of the assessment process. She said, 'Because the assessment is like the assessment framework we use for children in need, social workers already have experience of doing them. The report format is easy to complete. We all got a briefing about private fostering which was easy to understand. The procedures are very clear and easy to follow'. The assessment and support undertaken by the authority is, in the view of the inspectors, an example of good practice.

Interviews with senior managers and social work staff identified that private foster carers can access the same level of training provided to the authority's mainstream and kinship carers if they chose to do so. The private foster carer interviewed told us, 'the social worker said I could do some training with other carers if I wanted. But I've looked after (child's name) since she was six. She sees me as her mum and I didn't need it. But it is good to know that it is there if I need it'.

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 & 7

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to the authority. Relevant staff are aware of the local authority duties and functions in relation to private fostering. The authority has appropriate systems in place to monitor the way it discharges its functions in relation to private fostering.

EVIDENCE:

The lead officer for private fostering arrangements (PFA) within the authority is the business manager (protection and support) who is line managed by the head of children's social care. The business manager is responsible for the monitoring of the PFA work. Reports on PFA function, statistical information and service delivery are made by the officer to the local safeguarding children board (LSCB) and the authority's corporate parenting board. At the inspection the business manager was unavailable, however, the head of children's social care demonstrated a clear vision for how the service should develop, and understanding of the authority's duties and responsibilities for private fostering. This was confirmed during interviews with social workers and managers who, like the head of children's social care, were clear about the management and delivery of the private fostering function as detailed within the PFA procedure.

There are systems in place to compile statistical data for the DfES return and reports to the LSCB and corporate parenting board. However, this inspection identified that the authority had more PFAs than it had informed the inspectors of, although some of these were very recent. The authority should, however, make sure that it is well informed of the number of PFAs so that it can appropriately resource this work.

Currently the service does not have a separate PFA policy. Private fostering is included within the authority's kinship care policy. This policy does not sufficiently cover the matters listed in Standard 1.2 of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering. However, these matters are covered within the PFA procedure distributed to and known by social work staff.

The authority maintains accurate, well organised and confidential records in respect of children and private foster carers. Systems are in place to record all notifications to the authority, and a briefing to relevant staff regarding PFA work has been issued, together with the comprehensive procedure. Booklets and posters were displayed and available in all the offices visited during the inspection. The records looked at recorded good examples of the support offered to children who are privately fostered.

Optional

Being Healthy

JUDGEMENT –

Arrangements to ensure that the health needs of privately fostered children are supported and met were not inspected on this occasion.

EVIDENCE:

Enjoying and Achieving

JUDGEMENT –

Arrangements to ensure that privately fostered children are supported both in enjoying and achieving were not inspected on this occasion.

EVIDENCE:

Making a Positive Contribution

JUDGEMENT –

Arrangements to ensure that privately fostered children are supported in making a positive contribution were not inspected on this occasion.

EVIDENCE:

Achieving Economic Well Being

JUDGEMENT –

Arrangements to ensure that privately fostered children are supported in achieving economic well being were not inspected on this occasion.

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	2	1	2
3	3	7	3
4	3		
5	3		
6	3		

No

Are there any outstanding recommendations from the last 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	PF7	The authority should ensure that it maintains up to date information in respect of notifications made to it and the number of carers approved or undergoing assessment
2	PF2	The authority should consider drafting a standardised contact letter to private foster carers for use when social workers have been unable to make contact. This letter should include information about 'what is a private fostering arrangement' and contact details of the responsible officer
3	PF1	The authority should write and implement a separate policy for private fostering arrangements

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