

Portsmouth City Council Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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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

Portsmouth City Council have a dedicated social worker, based in the fostering team at Chaucer House, to develop and support services for privately fostered young people. At the time of inspection there were 10 private fostering arrangements being supported. Another eight arrangements had ceased since 1 April 2007. All young people in notified private fostering arrangements have an allocated social worker and the arrangements have been assessed as meeting their individual needs.

Summary

This is the first inspection of the private fostering arrangements provided by Portsmouth City Council and assesses the key National Minimum Standards. The dedicated worker has developed good systems to meet the standards and keep young people safe. A wide range of methods have been used to raise the awareness of private fostering with the general public and with professionals. The numbers of notified arrangements are low and plans have been drawn up to ensure the need to inform the service are advertised. Assessment procedures are thorough and there is a clear decision making process regarding the suitability of arrangements. Outcomes for young people are good in the key areas and there is evidence that young people's health and education needs have been promoted. The council has taken responsibility for the arrangements and support the involvement of all social work teams in identifying and assessing private fostering arrangements.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of the private fostering arrangements

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

There is a dedicated social worker for private fostering, within the fostering team, who has developed good systems to raise awareness of the need to notify the council of private fostering arrangements. Presentations are made at social work team meetings, schools and multi-agency workshops to ensure other professionals are aware of their responsibilities. Articles have been included in professional and public journals and newsletters setting out the requirements of notification. The leaflets used are well presented, easy to read and are different for each audience such as parents, young people and professionals. There is an understanding that raising awareness of private fostering is an on-going task and a schedule has been set up to achieve this. Clear, user friendly forms have been devised to aid notification. These ask all the relevant questions about the arrangements. The process following notification is set out in policy and procedure documents given to all staff. Documents show that the appropriate responses have been given. Initial visits are made by the dedicated worker, sometimes in conjunction with a social worker from the children and families team. An initial assessment is sent to the agency decision maker for consideration. There has been no disqualifications but

alternative arrangements have been made where the private fostering arrangement was not considered to be in the young person's best interests. There is a clear appeals process, but this has not yet been used. The social worker and managers are aware of their responsibilities when an offence, due to lack of notification, appears to have been committed and have clear processes to deal with this. All young people referred are allocated a social worker if there is not already one involved. This is to ensure support to the young person, a joint approach to assessment, consideration of the safety of the young person and an examination of other options. The dedicated worker has devised a specific assessment tool using the requirements of the regulations and the comprehensive assessment framework to ensure thorough assessment of the suitability of the arrangements. The assessment takes into account the views of young people, parents, and the proposed carers. It assesses physical, emotional, intellectual and cultural issues. Religion, race and gender issues are also considered to ensure the young people's needs are met by the arrangement. The financial arrangements are looked at and appropriate advice given where needed. The assessment establishes whether the young person in question should be classified as a child in need and what responsibilities this places on the authority. Accommodation, working arrangements of the carer and the needs of other people in the household form part of the assessment. Checks with schools, local authority, police and criminal record bureau are undertaken during the assessment to ensure suitability of the private foster carers. Many of the arrangements have led to the young person being registered with a general practitioner and a dentist for the first time. This has increased the young person's access to health advice and services. This is also true for schools and there is evidence that some young people have been encouraged to return to school having not done so for many months. There are not enough long term arrangements to judge the long term educational outcomes for young people in these arrangements. Contact arrangements with family and friends are considered and in some cases this has led to young people to having increased contact with their parents. Private foster carers are assisted by the support worker to appreciate the benefits of maintaining safe contact with the parents and family of the young person. Good support and advice is made available to private foster carers with provision of a telephone contact number for the dedicated worker. This is complimented by the involvement of a social worker from one of the children's teams where appropriate. Leaflets and information about private fostering are produced in different languages and translation arrangements are made when needed. The dedicated worker is part of a larger group across the region dealing with private fostering arrangements and part of their remit is to look at appropriate training and support for carers. Contact with the parents of privately fostered children are made as soon as the arrangement is notified. They contribute to the assessment of whether the arrangement is in the best interests of their child. They are given the dedicated workers contact number and are provided with support. Information, including other available options, is provided to the parents and in some cases has led to the young person returning to live with their parents. Parents supported to understand their continuing responsibility for the young person. Young people are seen individually and their views taken into consideration throughout the process. They too are made aware of any alternative options and are helped to take part in the decisions made about their future. Useful information is provided including contact numbers of advocacy services and who to contact if they are unhappy with the arrangement.

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 good.

The service has very clear policies and procedures relating to private fostering. These are set out in an easy to read style. They cover all of the regulations and standards. The guide has been given to all members of the social work staff. The responsibilities of the various roles such as the child's social worker and the dedicated family placement worker are described. There is good communication between the teams and social workers have responded positively regarding their duties and responsibilities, although some difficulty in meeting the required frequency of visiting has been experienced. Private fostering arrangements form part of the induction pack for new social workers to ensure they are aware of the regulations. The decision making process is easily tracked and a statement and signature is recorded on each file about the decision of suitability of the arrangements. Monitoring of the way the responsibilities are discharged is undertaken by the senior manager - service quality in children's services. There is also an annual report made available to senior managers evaluating the service and noting the work undertaken in this area. Development plans and need for further resources is looked at in this report. Good records are kept of all notifications, the action taken and decisions made. The records are kept safe and secure and young people, parents and private carers are made aware of their right to see the records. Appropriate procedures are in place to refer any issues of concern about young people's safety to the correct team for investigation. This is done as soon as the concern is raised regardless of where the worker is in the assessment process. One case evidenced that concerns about a young person's safety had led to different arrangements being made. The chair of the safeguarding board is provided with information on an annual basis to ensure the safety of privately fostered young people in the area has been assessed.

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):

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.