



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

LOCAL COUNCIL PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS

Poole Private Fostering Service

**Borough of Poole
14a Commercial Road
Parkstone
Poole
Dorset
BH14 0JW**

Lead Inspector
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Announced Inspection
17th October 2006 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

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SUMMARY

Adoption & Fostering Services

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

The Borough of Poole was informed in June 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 children's services, and the fostering team's senior practitioner. Two case files were examined of recent private fostering arrangements and a private foster carer and a young person were visited at their home.

Questionnaires were also sent to private foster carers, young people and professionals. One questionnaire was received back from a privately fostered young person.

At the time of the inspection the local authority was aware of only one child in a private fostering arrangement. One had recently returned home and therefore ceased to be privately fostered.

What the local authority does well:

The local authority is now widely promoting awareness of private fostering and the notification requirements. There is a clear communications strategy with its timescales being met, and is ensuring that a wide range of professionals are being informed of the need for private fostering arrangements to be notified to Children and Families. The awareness campaign includes press releases, distribution of easy to read leaflets, meetings and talks to groups of professionals.

The monitoring officer and dedicated worker in the fostering team are actively communicating the Borough's procedures to all relevant staff. The procedures are detailed and include a range of good practice. There are areas in the procedures that exceed minimum standards, and they are the support to be given to private foster carers by a named worker in the fostering team and annual reviews of the suitability of the carers.

There is close monitoring of the suitability of private fostering arrangements by principal managers (of the child care teams and the fostering team). Files have been audited, and good information systems ensure that private fostering case files are maintained satisfactorily and that the numbers of privately fostered children are kept.

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:

The case files examined identified that some information required by regulation was missing. This related to details that need to be included in notification, and areas that need to be covered at visits to children in private fostering arrangements. This will involve developing the forms used by workers to ensure this information is captured.

The authority has yet to produce written information for children and young people about the responsibility of private foster carers and their rights to be safeguarded. One child who was privately fostered was not seen alone, although the regulations require this (or there is a clear record made of why this was considered inappropriate).

Some amendments are needed to the 'Statement on Private Fostering' to ensure further details are given on examples of private fostering, clarifying timescales and the range of information to be obtained to assess the suitability of private fostering arrangements.

As yet there has yet to be an annual report to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board or to the Director of Children's Services on the evaluation of how the authority is safeguarding privately fostered children. This forms part of the monitoring role needed by the local authority, although the inspector is aware that this is planned for shortly.

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 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. However, the delay in setting this up has led to few arrangements being notified this year and therefore there may be arrangements that have yet to be considered as safe.

There is an effective policy in place which should ensure that notifications are responded to and that children in these arrangements are safeguarded.

Advice and support to children, carers and parents has been limited, but with better procedures now in place information and support will be more accessible to ensure children's welfare is promoted.

EVIDENCE:

The Borough of Poole has recently begun raising awareness about privately fostered children, with the campaign starting in July 2006. The legislation came into force in July 2005 however which placed a duty on local authorities to promote public awareness in their area of the notification requirements. Poole Borough Council therefore has acted slowly on responding to the legislation. There is however a clear communications strategy now being followed. Leaflets and posters have now been developed for professionals, carers and parents informing them of the legal definition of a privately fostered child, the notification requirements and the procedure for notifying. These leaflets are bright, eye catching and easy to read. They have been distributed to agencies and to community centres (including libraries, health centres). The principal manager and senior practitioner of the fostering team are attending 'Locality Meetings' to promote private fostering. These meetings are attended by representatives of schools, primary care trusts, and voluntary agencies which are key professionals. The senior practitioner has also spoken to groups of health visitors. Adverts have gone out in the local press (the Echo in August 2006) and in the free 'Poole News' paper in October 2006. The principal manager has further set up meetings and discussions with the Police, designated teachers, youth service and housing department to raise awareness.

The notifications of privately fostered children in Poole remains very low, and this may be a reflection of the fact that the awareness campaign has only just started. At the time of the inspection there was only one privately fostered child known to Poole Borough Council. Between April 2005 and March 2006 there were three known children privately fostered. These numbers are small compared to national figures and in comparison to other similar local authorities in the South West.

Social work staff within Poole Borough Council's Children and Families team have received updated information about private fostering. The Policy Officer and the fostering senior practitioner have met with childcare social workers and provided initial training on awareness and procedures. Team managers have also been updated on the legislation. There are new procedures, policies and protocols in place stating how notifications are to be responded to. These again have only just been implemented and agreed by Senior Management Team in June 2006. These policies clearly set out how notifications are to be responded to, the agreed process for prohibiting any arrangements and for imposing requirements where necessary. There is clear management monitoring and agreement of assessments and suitability of arrangements.

The inspector examined two files of private foster carers and of the children in the private fostering arrangements. One of these children had recently left this arrangement however. One of these arrangements had been notified in July

2006 and the other one in September 2006. The forms seen on the files to record the details of the notification, did not satisfactorily meet the regulations (Regulation 3 and Schedule 1 of The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005), with details of previous addresses of carer, sibling details, and declaration of previous convictions of carers being omitted from the proforma. Other letters and forms on file were also referring to the 1991 and not the 2005 regulations.

The initial visit to one of the private fostered child did not take place within 7 working days of the notification, as stated in the regulations, but took place over 10 weeks later. Checks and references on the carers had not been undertaken until after three months from the notification. The principal manager (Monitoring Officer) was aware of this and the new procedures that are now in place should ensure that these delays are not repeated. Indeed for the other child who was recently in a private fostering arrangement an initial visit had taken place within 7 working days and checks/references sent to other agencies promptly. The initial report did not adequately address whether the financial arrangements are sufficient or that the arrangements for care of the child's health (including medical consent) have been confirmed. One of the children was also not seen alone, or their wishes and feelings adequately recorded. The form devised for recording subsequent visits to children does not adequately cover the details required in Schedule 3 (in particular the intended duration, the child's health and development, financial arrangements, education).

The Borough's procedures identify that the initial assessment is completed by the child's social worker and the fostering team undertake a fuller assessment of the private foster carer (within the timescales of the Assessment Framework - 42 days). The inspector did not see an assessment on a private foster carer as one has yet to be completed.

The inspector visited one private foster carer and a young person. They had recently been visited by a social worker but confirmed that limited information had been given. The young person had not been given any written information about their rights, the responsibility of the carer or about any advocacy services. The carer had also not been given any written information but was in contact with the young persons parent, school and receiving some financial support. The file evidenced that the social worker had attempted to make contact with the parent. Another file checked did identify that the parent had been visited and provided with support and information. The child in this arrangement had also been seen alone and given support and advice about her rights. The inspector was informed that private foster carers would be able to access training that is provided to mainstream foster carers. The procedures also identify very good practice, in that the private foster carer will remain allocated to a worker in the fostering team, who will visit as appropriate and review the suitability of the carer annually. This exceeds the minimum standards.

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 **adequate**. 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 Children and Families duties and functions in relation to private fostering, and this has recently improved practice.

EVIDENCE:

The Borough of Poole has recently developed a 'Statement on Private Fostering' (dated July 2006). This statement includes a range of information about the local authority's duties and functions, including how awareness of the requirements will be promoted, how the suitability of arrangements will be assessed and how the welfare of privately fostered children in Poole will be safeguarded. This 'Statement' does need to be further developed to ensure that it details examples of private fostering arrangements, the required timescales for visiting, corrects the ages for when members of households should have a CRB check, and provides more details on how the suitability of arrangements will be assessed.

As stated above social work teams have been spoken to by the fostering senior practitioner and policy officer about the new procedures and private fostering in general. The inspector was informed that this will be on a rolling programme due to the changes of social work staff among the childcare teams. The

monitoring officer for private fostering is well known within the management teams and this information is detailed in the new staff procedures. The monitoring officer stated that a 'champion' will be nominated in each childcare team, and the senior practitioner in the fostering team is knowledgeable about private fostering arrangements.

The inspector has been provided with clear information about the number of notifications received. The Management Information Officer has also provided a report on the analysis of the statistical data returns to the Department for Education and Skills, highlighting how Poole compares to other local authorities.

The principal manager has audited the private fostering files, and will be making recommendations to the childcare teams about complying with required timescales and quality of reports. The inspector met with the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and was further informed that private fostering will be included in the LSCB's Business Plan. The local authority has yet to provide a written report for consideration by the Director of Children's Services or report annually to the chair of the LSCB on how the authority is safeguarding the welfare of privately fostered children. The inspector was informed that this is planned for March 2007.

The inspector was shown files/case records for children privately fostered and for private foster carers. These files were well-organised, but a lack of casenotes / chronology meant it was difficult to ascertain clearly the dates of notifications, and the discussions at visits for one of the arrangements. As stated above the forms have been re-developed to ensure that regulations are met, and this will also ensure that the information needed to meet regulations will be better recorded. It is recommended however that the forms clearly indicate if a child was seen alone, or the reasons why the child was not seen alone.

There has yet to be any prohibitions, disqualifications or requirements imposed on private foster carers. The procedure and policy in place however details clearly how these will be monitored.

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	2
4	3		
5	3		
6	2		

N/A

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	PF1	<p>There should be further amendments made to the 'Statement of Private Fostering' to ensure it gives examples of arrangements, confirms timescales for visits, and includes more details on how the private fostering arrangements will be assessed as suitable or not.</p> <p>This 'Statement' needs to be made available to relevant staff.</p>
2	PF2	<p>A notification about a private fostering arrangement needs to include all the information specified in Schedule 1.</p> <p>(In particular this refers to details about previous addresses of the carer, details about siblings, who else is involved in arrangements and details of any previous convictions/prohibitions).</p>
3	PF3	<p>Following a notification an officer of the authority needs to visit the child within seven working days, and the child needs to be seen alone (unless the officer considers it inappropriate).</p> <p>The written report following an initial visit to a child and subsequent visits needs to include all the areas specified in Schedule 3.</p> <p>(In particular this refers to the proforma including the intended duration, the child's health and development, cultural and religious needs, educational arrangements, financial and medical consent arrangements)</p>

4	PF6	Privately fostered children should be provided with information in formats appropriate to their age and level of understanding, about their carers responsibilities, the meaning of private fostering status and their right to be safeguarded.
5	PF7	There should be an annual report to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and a yearly written report, considered by the Director of Children's Services, which includes an evaluation of the outcomes of its work with privately fostered children.

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