



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

LOCAL COUNCIL PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS

Oldham MBC Private Fostering Arrangements

**Oldham M.B.C. Social services
Civic Centre, West Street
Oldham
OL1 1UW**

Lead Inspector
Helen Humphreys

Announced Inspection
4th December 2006 12:00

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 Oldham MBC Private Fostering Arrangements

Address Oldham M.B.C. Social services
Civic Centre, West Street
Oldham
OL1 1UW

Telephone number 0161 474 4637

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Email address

**Local Authority Web
address**

SUMMARY

Oldham M.B.C. Children, Young People & Families

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

This inspection was carried out over three days and included an interview with the Head of Service, who is the nominated person, allocated social workers, a social worker who is also involved with the Inter-faith forum and a manager from one of the Children's Assessment Teams.

The files from the four cases currently open to Oldham of children who are privately fostered were read and these carers and young people aged over eight were sent questionnaires. At the time of writing, none had been returned. Various pieces of literature, policies and procedures and management were read.

Oldham provided information via an Annual Quality Assurance Assessment and dataset which provided statistical information.

This inspection preceded the joint fostering and adoption inspection and staff in these inspections were also asked about their general awareness of private fostering arrangements.

What the local authority does well:

Oldham was one of the first Local Authorities to be inspected under the new Regulations and Standards and, as such, it is recognised that their arrangements will not have been fully developed as yet. However, Oldham has an action plan and was aware of what still needed to be done.

Oldham has had information and policies and procedures available since the introduction of private fostering arrangements under the Children Act 1989. However, since the introduction of the new Regulations in 2005 these have been updated and there is a growing awareness of the revised arrangements.

The policies and procedures are clear and staff said they found them easy to follow and were accessible on the intranet.

Oldham has started to develop a notification system and had sent information and 'flyers' to colleagues in a range of services, including health, education, 'Connexions' and housing.

A social worker who is involved in the Inter Faith Forum has started to distribute leaflets within this group and is aware of further work required within the diverse communities in Oldham.

The files seen were organised and there was evidence of audit and recorded decision making during supervision. The case work was clear and the assessments followed the procedures and covered matters appropriately.

Some carers and young people had been offered information, support and advice.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This was the first inspection.

What they could do better:

Oldham need to continue work on the action plan and develop further the statement on private fostering which can be part of the policy and procedures.

Not all staff were aware of the changes in the private fostering arrangements and few were aware of the new Regulations and Standards and were working from legislation contained in the Children Act 1989. All staff said that they would value some formal briefing or training.

Some staff said that they would like further guidance on the completion of Criminal Record Checks as many staff do not normally encounter these tasks in other work.

The head of service has begun to develop some management systems to monitor the work and she aware that they needed some refinement to make them more useful and accurate.

There were justifiable concerns raised about workloads if the notification system is successful in bringing forward more referrals for assessments under the private fostering arrangements. From the files read, it is clear that they can potentially create a significant amount of work and take up social work time. At a time where caseloads are high and there are staff shortages, this is leading to anxiety about completion of work and regular visits. Oldham should monitor this to ensure that they have sufficient staff employed to meet any growing need.

In order to make the notification system effective, careful monitoring and ongoing 'raising awareness' work is required, with staff and the wider community. Oldham should consider seconding/employing a staff member to undertake some work to ascertain and monitor the extent of private fostering within Oldham.

The Head of Service is aware of the need to make a range of leaflets and information available in a range of languages to reflect the diverse community in Oldham. Some money has been made available and this work is in the very early stage and should be continued. A suggestion was also made that, in time, arrangements should be made so that people whose first language is not English have a facility where they can speak to someone in their own language.

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 good. The new arrangements in place are seeking to keep children who are privately fostered safe and supported.

This judgement has been made using available evidence, including a visit to the home.

EVIDENCE:

Oldham has been notified about children living in the Borough who are privately fostered. A briefing paper has been circulated to a range of agencies, including health visitors, schools, GP surgeries, 'Connexions' and the voluntary sector network. Staff from other agencies, who were interviewed as part of the local authority fostering service, were aware of the notification system.

The arrangements for dealing with appeals and disqualifications needs to be developed but as yet has not been required.

Inspection of files indicated that children who are privately fostered and their carers are visited regularly and provided with appropriate information. Appropriate checks had been undertaken on carers, although it is recognised that this can take some time for carers to respond in some circumstances appropriately. There was evidence that young people had been consulted about the arrangements and, in some situations, their overall welfare had improved as a result of being privately fostered.

Some core assessments had been undertaken as circumstances had required.

There was evidence in the case files that young people, carers and parents had been given advice and information. This included 'Section 17' money, help with school, clothing and other materials. Arrangements have been made for privately fostered children to access the dentist and other medical information.

From the case files inspected children who are privately fostered have been visited regularly. At least one carer was being advised to consider other routes (Residence Orders Special Guardianship) in order to protect the future of the child concerned.

Oldham is aware of the need to develop its work to include information in other languages. Staff who are part of the Inter-faith forum are involved in this development work.

Oldham has plans in hand to develop further leaflets and other information to support the notification system and provide more information to carers, parents and young people.

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):

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. Not all staff were aware of the new legislation and standards and the managements systems in place were not fully developed.

This judgement has been made using available evidence, including a visit to the home.

EVIDENCE:

The majority of staff interviewed were using the old legislation from the Children Act 1989 and were not aware of the revised legislation and standards issued in June 2006, or the reasons for this. Most staff said that they had not received any training or briefing.

However, staff were aware of the policies and procedures created by Oldham and where to find them and had found them thorough and easy to follow. They said that they would appreciate additional information on the Criminal Records Bureau procedures as this was a new area of work for them.

Oldham has not as yet created a statement on private fostering.

The head of service had begun to develop management systems to monitor the work but, at the time, these were not accurate or dependable. Files which were inspected had been audited by team managers.

The head of service had an action plan of what work was further required and was working through this.

Optional

Being Healthy

JUDGEMENT –

Not assessed on this occasion.

EVIDENCE:

Enjoying and Achieving

JUDGEMENT –

Not assessed on this occasion.

EVIDENCE:

Making a Positive Contribution

JUDGEMENT –

Not assessed on this occasion.

EVIDENCE:

Achieving Economic Well Being

JUDGEMENT –

Not assessed 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	3	1	2
3	3	7	2
4	3		
5	3		
6	3		

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	PF1	Oldham Children and Families should develop a statement on private fostering.
2	PF1	Oldham Children and Families should provide briefing or training for staff and provide additional information on the Criminal Records Bureau system.
3	PF7	Oldham Children and Families should develop the management systems so that they are accurate and dependable.
4	PF7	Oldham Children and Families should monitor the amount of work the private fostering creates to ensure that they have sufficient staffing to meet this demand.

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