

# North Yorkshire County Council Private Fostering Arrangements Service

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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<b>Inspector</b>	Jeffrey Banham / Helen Humphreys
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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**

North Yorkshire County Council has established its policies and procedures in relation to the discharge of its duties under the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering Regulations) that came into force on July 1st 2005. The responsibility for the service rests with the Safeguarding Board. A multi-agency private fostering subgroup has been established. Assessments of the suitability of carers rests with the assessment and safeguarding teams. Social workers undertake assessments on all privately fostered children and young people and assess the suitability of private foster carers.

### **Summary**

The inspection was announced and covered all of the National Minimum Standards relevant to private fostering arrangements. Some examples of the local authority's response to private fostering arrangements promote the welfare of children. However, the systems and procedures on which the service is based do not enable it to offer a consistent, effective and systematic framework that provides children with the safety and protection they require. The local authority does not have a written statement of its duties and functions. The procedures for assessing private foster carers are not sufficiently robust. Arrangements for identifying and supporting children in need do not provide sufficient safeguards for their welfare. The recognition of the significance and potential impact on children of private fostering arrangements is not adequately established throughout Children's Social Care.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

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 inadequate.

The local authority does not have a sufficiently effective programme of communication activities for the public and its own staff and other agencies. Awareness of the definition of what constitutes a private fostering arrangement and the duties of those involved is not promoted in a systematic and ongoing fashion. This has the potential impact of not enabling children subject to these arrangements to be sufficiently protected. The local authority does not provide targeted information for those who may come into contact with privately fostered children in, for example, the extensive military community and local public schools. Assessments of the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangements is not always effective and the systems within which the assessments take place do not reflect the potential complexity and significance of some private fostering arrangements. Assessments of carers' suitability can be basic and lack thoroughness with insufficient regard being paid to the suitability of the premises, the suitability of the carers, or appropriate checks on other people living in the house. This can lead to children living in households that may not adequately promote their welfare. There is no evidence of support offered to parents to prevent the need for private fostering

arrangements. A number of managers and deputy managers sign off the suitability of arrangements and this leads to inconsistency of decision making and lack of oversight of placements and practice across the authority. There are not always explicit agreements between the parent and the private foster carer about financial arrangements. There is not always evidence that carers have delegated consent to medical treatment and other aspects of the care of children, and the duration of placements can be indeterminate and lack clarity. Children in need are not always sufficiently protected through the assessment, planning and reviewing processes. There is insufficient recognition of those cases of children in need which require more robust intervention and planning than that required by private fostering arrangements. Information for private foster carers, parents and children is not always available and private foster carers are not always provided with sufficient levels of training and advice to enable them to meet the needs of children for whom they care.

### **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 inadequate.

The local authority has not developed an effective and systematic strategy for raising the awareness of the local authority's duties and functions amongst relevant staff, in agencies and organisations that may be involved with private fostering. Members of the public and staff in agencies involved with actual or potential private fostering arrangements are not sufficiently aware of either their own responsibilities or the duties of the local authority. Whilst the figures produced by the local authority indicate a slightly higher rate of reporting than the national average, the authority recognises that there are significant differences in terms of awareness and reporting across the county and that there is likely under reporting in some areas. As a result there may be children in private fostering arrangements who are not afforded the protection offered by the local authority's required response to these arrangements. The Annual Report to the Children's Safeguarding Board identifies a number of actions that have only recently been, or are about to be initiated. For example, a new leaflet has just been produced and a distribution plan will be devised and multi-agency procedures have been developed and will soon be available on the web site. In addition there has been no awareness raising strategy in the garrison communities located within the local authority boundary, even though this is recognised to be the largest in Europe and from where there have been no notifications. Particular problems are known to exist with the response of local private schools and the Safeguarding Board in one area of the county has not yet discussed any issue to do with private fostering. It is unclear who has operational responsibility for the private fostering procedures. The role of overseeing private fostering arrangements in North Yorkshire is held by the Safeguarding Board. The responsibility for the implementation of the private fostering arrangements, such as assessments of carers and monitoring placements is held within the assessment and safeguarding teams. The named manager is however responsible for the Looked After Children service. Awareness of the significance of, and duties and functions in relation

to, private fostering within Children's Social Care is not sufficiently robust. The local authority has not produced a written statement or plan setting out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering in accordance with the details set out in the National Minimum Standards. The authority has produced a set of operational procedures but these are not available as a public document. The publicity leaflet provides basic information. Neither document contains information about how staff are trained; the name of the person within the local authority whom social workers can contact for advice; the name of the manager(s) who sign off decisions about the suitability of arrangements; training available to private foster carers; and the advice and support available to private foster carers.

## 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):

- produce a written statement or plan that sets out the duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out (NMS 1)
- produce a programme of communication activities and a range of up to date publicity materials for the public, local authority staff and other agencies (NMS 2)
- ensure that the welfare of children is safeguarded and promoted by determining effectively the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangements in accordance with the regulations. (NMS 3)

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## 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.**