

North Somerset Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Paul Clark
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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

The Private Fostering Service of North Somerset Council is part of its Children and Young Persons Service. It is currently overseen by a team manager and a service manager who act as the registered manager and responsible person respectively. These positions represent changes to the records held by Ofsted and the officers have been advised that they should inform Ofsted in writing of the names of the officers now holding these positions. Assessments of the suitability of private fostering households made known to the authority are carried out by social workers who are known as Adoption and Fostering Support Workers. The assessments of a young person's suitability to be privately fostered are carried out by field social workers. Each assessment is 'signed off' by the related team manager and passed to the service manager for a final decision about the suitability of each placement. At the time of the inspection there were three young people placed in three approved private fostering households.

Summary

At this announced inspection there were found to be systems of policy and appropriate procedures in place to ensure the safety of privately fostered young people. The council must ensure that initial assessment and visiting frequencies are in line with their stated policies and procedures.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This was the first service inspection of this service by Ofsted.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards which apply to this outcome group.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The council has appropriate policies in place which try to ensure that privately fostered young people are kept safe. Strenuous efforts are made to try to raise professional and public awareness of the need to notify the local authority whenever a private fostering arrangement is in place. The council have a website with a page dedicated to 'Private Fostering' and this includes a statement about the need to notify the local authority. Additionally, the council have a 'Marketing/Recruitment Officer' who distributes information leaflets about private fostering to GPs, health centres, schools and school nurses, council offices, libraries and local newspapers. The council also participates at local events to make information known. They recently had an information stand at a local multi-cultural event. The notifications about the three young people currently being privately fostered came from an education welfare officer and two of the private fosterers themselves. Notifications are received by a duty social worker in the 'Intake Team'. An 'Initial Assessment' of the arrangement is then carried out by the duty social worker who makes a judgement about the safety of the young person placed. The 'Intake Team' notify the 'Adoption and Fostering team' who must carry out a formal assessment of the private

fostering household within seven days. The stipulation of this timescale is contained within the council's 'Private Fostering, Policy and Procedures' document. However, records indicated that one of the young people placed had not been visited until one month after the notification had been received. The policy also stipulates that in the first year of placement young people must be visited at six weekly periods. However, one young person was not visited within this frequency on several occasions. At the initial assessment and at the subsequent reviews of placement the social worker completes a dedicated 'Privately Fostered Young Person' form. This provides a record that the young person is seen alone and asked their view about whether they are happy about the placement; the duration of the placement; the financial arrangements between the birth parents and the private foster carers; and the contact arrangements between the young person and their birth parents. The council have leaflets available for private fosterers, birth parents and young people which give them information about what support services are available to them. These are available in different languages and formats upon request. However, the leaflets do not advise young people who meet the category of being assessed as a 'Child in Need' that they have the right of access to an advocacy service. Further the leaflets given to private fosterers do not contain information about any financial benefits that they may be eligible for. Private foster carers are given the contact details of the social worker they can approach for help and support and they are advised about the training that is available to them.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards which apply to this outcome group.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards which apply to this outcome group.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards which apply to this outcome group.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The council have information documents and policy systems in place to ensure that there is professional and public awareness of the private fostering service and that it meets its duties and functions in this regard. The council have a clearly written Statement of Purpose. However, this has not been reviewed since 2006 and needs to be updated to include the name of the person in the authority identified as the person with expertise in private fostering and the name of the manager who signs off the appropriate private fostering households. The statement states that the authority will support private fosterers including the provision of training and it also spells out the legal framework, the duty of other professionals to notify the council of private fostering arrangements and it gives a clear description and definition of the privately fostered child. The council has a clearly written 'Policy and Procedures' document on private fostering which spells out its duties and functions. The council's intranet includes guidance and information for its staff and multi-agency professionals on private fostering. There is currently a vacancy for the trainer who conducts the multi-agency child protection programme which contains information about private fostering. The service manager stated that they are

currently recruiting for this vacancy. The council keeps an electronic record for every child who is privately fostered and a hard copy file for every private fostering household. These records were seen to be clearly written, full and up to date. The council conducts a questionnaire survey of young people placed which takes account of the diversity issues affecting young people. A copy of the annual quality report of the service is sent to the Director of Children's Services and the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

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
3	ensure that assessments of the suitability of Private Fostering arrangements are carried out within seven working days of their notification. Regulation 7 (1).	30 October 2008
3	ensure that young people placed in Private Fostering households are visited at least every six weeks within their first year of placement. Regulation 8 (a).	30 October 2008

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that young people assessed as being a 'Child in Need' are given information about advocacy services. NMS 6.4
- ensure that the leaflets given to private fosterers contains information about any financial benefits that they may be eligible for. NMS 4.2
- ensure that the Statement of Purpose is updated to include the name of the person in the authority identified as the person with expertise in Private Fostering and the name of the manager who signs off the Private Fostering households as appropriate. NMS 1.2