



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

LOCAL COUNCIL PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS

Middlesbrough Council Private Fostering Arrangement

**Review and Development Unit
Children, Families & Learning
Park House, Worcester Street
Middlesbrough
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Lead Inspector
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Key Announced Inspection
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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

Middlesbrough Council

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

This was the first inspection of the arrangements put in place by Middlesbrough Council Social Services to meet the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering which came into force on 18 July 2005, and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

At the time of this inspection the Department had identified some private fostering arrangements within the area, with work ongoing to introduce appropriate policies and procedures to assist social work staff in identifying and responding appropriately both to these and any other such arrangements. This ongoing work, when fully implemented is likely to lead to 'good' outcomes for privately fostered children living in the area.

The inspector would like to thank those staff involved in developing and implementing these policies and procedures for their welcome and the important part they played in the inspection. Information and evidence in this report was gathered by the inspector over a 2 day period through:

- Talking with the officer responsible for coordinating and developing the management of private fostering arrangements
- Discussions with staff involved in the Private Fostering Steering Group who are raising awareness of private fostering through publicity materials and campaigns
- Discussions with staff involved in the Private Fostering Steering Group who are developing procedures to respond to notifications of private fostering arrangements
- Discussions with staff involved in developing arrangements to monitor the effectiveness of the Directorate in responding to, assessing and supporting private fostering arrangements
- Discussions with staff who have had direct responsibility for the initial assessment and ongoing monitoring of those existing private fostering arrangements that have been identified
- Reading draft policies, procedures, publicity material, social worker questionnaire responses, private foster carer assessments and children's files.

Prior to the inspection staff from Middlesbrough Social Services had identified and provided two examples of existing private fostering arrangements. Unfortunately, both of these arrangements had ended prior to the commencement of this inspection. The private foster carers and the children previously placed with them were contacted and invited to participate in the inspection, however each declined the opportunity to do so.

What the local authority does well:

The local authority has identified staff who are continuing to develop the action plan for private fostering arrangements.

A publicity campaign has commenced to promote awareness of the notification requirements and ensure that those professionals who come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in notifications.

Key staff members are developing links and promoting awareness with health and education staff and are beginning to identify community groups who may have knowledge of existing private fostering arrangements.

Key staff members are using resources provided by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), to provide initial information to social work staff, privately fostered children, their parents and carers.

The Department has developed procedures to ensure the effective assessment and ongoing review of any private fostering arrangements identified. Arrangements to independently review the individual care arrangements for each privately fostered child using the 'Private Fostering Steering Group' have been put into place.

The Department has developed a written statement, setting out its duties and functions regarding private fostering and describing how these will be carried out.

Arrangements are in place to ensure that annual reports are prepared and provided to the Local Safeguarding Children Board. This will review the overall quality of work undertaken with regard to private fostering arrangements and examine any patterns of concern. Data collected will also be used to provide required statistical information and reports to the Department for Education and Skills.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This was the first inspection of these arrangements.

What they could do better:

To ensure that the Department is notified about privately fostered children living in the area the proposed arrangements to further promote awareness of the notification requirements should be fully implemented. Additionally, the department should identify a named person within the local authority with expertise in private fostering, whom social workers can contact for advice. Contact details for this named person should be added to the Department's written statement on private fostering and should be promoted.

Relevant staff in education and health should be made aware of local authority duties and functions by providing them with access to the Department's policy statement in relation to private fostering. The ongoing work to raise awareness of private fostering within the local community should continue.

To ensure that the suitability of all aspects of any private fostering arrangement are determined and monitored in accordance with the regulations, the Department must ensure that social work staff members are using the agreed policies and procedures provided to them for their guidance.

The Department must ensure that privately fostered children, their parents and their private foster carers are provided with the advice and support they need to ensure that the welfare of each privately fostered child is safeguarded and promoted.

The Department's written statement on private fostering should include details of any available training provided to the benefit of private foster carers.

The Department must ensure that the systems introduced to monitor how its duties and functions in relation to private fostering are discharged, are effective and is used to improve existing practice where necessary.

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 'poor'. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service. The Social Services Department has developed policies and procedures which, when fully implemented will work to ensure that privately fostered children are kept safe. They are working to promote awareness and highlight the responsibilities of parents, carers and child-care staff to ensure that the Department is notified of privately fostered children living in their area. They have developed procedures to ensure that the welfare of children is safeguarded and promoted and that privately fostered children, their parents and carers receive necessary advice and support. This ongoing work, when fully implemented, is likely to lead to 'good' outcomes for privately fostered children.

EVIDENCE:

To ensure that the Department is notified of privately fostered children living in its area, a campaign has been planned and partially implemented to both promote awareness of the notification requirements and to ensure that those professionals who come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in notifications. To achieve this the Department has established a 'Private Fostering Steering Group' to co-ordinate publicity, promote awareness and monitor how effectively Private Fostering Regulations and minimum standards are being implemented.

To ensure that those professionals who come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in notifications, key staff members from the Private Fostering Steering Group have developed comprehensive policies and procedures to guide staff in their roles and responsibilities. Members of the Private Fostering Steering Group have also worked to raise awareness and understanding of these procedures by undertaking visits to local area social work teams and talking directly with social work staff themselves and their managers. Social workers responding by questionnaire were able to confirm that they had received copies of these policies and procedures and were able to describe what action they would take if they became aware that a child or young person was being fostered privately. Although an individual 'key staff member' has not yet been identified, members of the steering group are available to offer advice to social workers and other professionals who are dealing with private fostering arrangements. However, when asked in their questionnaires "Do you know who is responsible for monitoring private fostering in your local authority?" neither of the social workers responding could identify either the Private Fostering Steering Group or a named person from within it as holding this responsibility.

Discussion and examination of examples of local advertising confirmed the work being undertaken by key staff members to promote awareness through features in the local media and press advertising. Articles with contact telephone numbers have been published in the Middlesbrough News (a free paper delivered throughout Middlesbrough), the autumn edition of the Governors Gazette (distributed amongst Education staff) and the 'Middlesbrough Matters' publication, a council employees newsletter.

To supplement this process, leaflets available and on order from the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), have been obtained and are being used to provide initial information to those responding to the advertising campaign and requesting further information. Examples of these were seen and staff confirmed the initial use of these, whilst the Department further develops their own leaflets and posters for local use.

Discussion with steering group members also highlighted their plans to further broaden the understanding of professionals who may come into contact with private fostering arrangements by developing links and raising awareness with community groups and educational networks. The Private Fostering Steering Group have highlighted health visitors, primary health trusts, ethnic groups, 'Sure Start' and early years networks as key target areas to raise awareness of private fostering through the provision of publicity material and direct discussion.

To ensure that the welfare of privately fostered children living in its area are safeguarded and promoted the Department has developed comprehensive procedures based on agreed frameworks to ensure the effective assessment and ongoing review of any private fostering arrangements identified. Discussion with key staff and examination of the guidance and documentation itself confirmed that the assessment framework developed for the use of social work staff is comprehensive and will ensure that when used fully and effectively by social work staff, the information gathered through notifications, assessment and monitoring visits will be compliant with the appropriate schedules to the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering.

Plans to create arrangements to independently review the quality of the assessments undertaken as well as review the ongoing effectiveness of the individual care arrangements for each privately fostered child were also discussed. The Private Fostering Steering Group has produced its first annual report on Private Fostering to be presented to the Local Children's Safeguarding Board. This draft report was examined during the inspection and whilst it provides an 'overview' of progress by the Steering Group, it was recommended that the report should also comment on the individual quality of work already undertaken with regard to private fostering arrangements identified.

As previously highlighted, staff from Middlesbrough Social Services had identified two examples of existing private fostering arrangements, both of which had been identified during 2006 but had ended recently, prior to the commencement of this inspection. Although the private foster carers and the children previously placed with them were contacted and invited to participate in the inspection, each declined the opportunity to do so. Despite this, the files containing information regarding the initial notifications received and assessments commenced by social work staff were examined as part of this inspection. Positively, those social workers responding by questionnaire had confirmed that they had received guidance and were aware of their expected role in the assessment and monitoring of arrangements. However, the quality of the information held within the files examined was not sufficient to allow the inspector to fully confirm that the Department's own Private Fostering Procedures (introduced in May 2006) had been followed on each occasion.

From the files examined, examples of insufficient detail regarding the timescales for the assessments being undertaken or confirmation of the 'checks' being completed on private foster carers were noted and fed back for review. Assessment reports did not always contain clear details of how notifications had been received. Examples of private foster carers and the children in their care not being visited within required timescales and at the required frequency were also noted and fed back for review. It was also recommended that individual files be established for each private foster carer being assessed to hold all information regarding the assessment process and statutory checks being completed.

The Department is taking steps to ensure that private foster carers and parents of privately fostered children receive advice and support to assist them to meet the needs of privately fostered children. They are also working to ensure that privately fostered children are able to access information and support when required so that their welfare is safeguarded and promoted. Initially this will be achieved through the provision of the previously referred to information leaflets, supplemented by consultation and discussion with the social work staff involved in the assessment and monitoring of each private fostering arrangement. It is planned for social work staff to have access to guidance and support through their line managers, and members of the Private Fostering Steering Group. Parents and foster carers will also be provided with direct access to line managers and members of the Private Fostering Steering Group to supplement the advice and support available to them.

It was also confirmed that it is planned that social work staff involved in the assessment and monitoring of each arrangement will also provide advice and information to private foster carers regarding the support available to them from other agencies, to ensure that the care needs of each child are met. They will also ensure that children have their contact details and are provided with any necessary advice, support and reassurance.

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 currently 'poor'. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service. The Social Services Department have developed policies and procedures to ensure that relevant staff members are aware of their duties and functions in relation to children who are privately fostered. They have also developed policies and procedures to monitor the way the directorate discharges its duties and functions in relation to privately fostered children to ensure their effectiveness. This ongoing work, when fully implemented and acted upon by social work staff and their managers, is likely to lead to 'good' outcomes for privately fostered children.

EVIDENCE:

Through the Private Fostering Steering Group, the Department has developed a written statement, which sets out its duties and functions regarding private fostering and describes how these will be carried out. The document itself was examined and contained almost all of the information highlighted within Standard 1 of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering. It was recommended that details of an individually named person with expertise in Private Fostering including their individual contact details should be added to the document. It was also recommended that details of any available training, which could benefit private foster carers could be added to the written statement as an addendum. Discussion with members of the Private Fostering Steering Group confirmed their ongoing plans to raise overall awareness of the Department's written statement on private fostering through promotional events planned for health, education and community groups.

The Private Fostering Steering Group will have access to data provided to them by the Children's Safeguarding Standards Unit using the Department's computerised 'Care First' system. Steering group members confirmed that access to this information would allow sampled audits of work undertaken with privately fostered children including examination of individual records of this work. From this information six monthly audits and annual reports will be prepared and will be provided to the Department and the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). In discussion, the Vice-Chair of the LSCB confirmed that these would be used to facilitate a review of the overall quality of work undertaken and allow any patterns of concern to be examined. Data collected will also be used to provide required statistical information and reports to the Department for Education and Skills.

Optional

Being Healthy

JUDGEMENT –

N/A

Arrangements to ensure that the health needs of privately fostered children are supported and met were not inspected on this occasion.

EVIDENCE:

Enjoying and Achieving

JUDGEMENT –

Arrangements to ensure that privately fostered children are supported in both enjoying and achieving were not inspected on this occasion.

EVIDENCE:

Making a Positive Contribution

JUDGEMENT –

Arrangements to ensure that privately fostered children are supported in making a positive contribution were not inspected on this occasion.

EVIDENCE:

Achieving Economic Well Being

JUDGEMENT –

Arrangements to ensure that privately fostered children are supported in achieving economic wellbeing were not inspected 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	2	1	2
3	1	7	2
4	2		
5	2		
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	To ensure that the Department is notified about privately fostered children living in the area the proposed arrangements to further promote awareness of the notification requirements should be fully implemented. Additionally, the Department should identify a named person within the local authority with expertise in private fostering, whom social workers can contact for advice. Contact details for this named person should be added to the Departments written statement on private fostering and promoted.
2.	PF2	Relevant staff in education and health should be made aware of local authority duties and functions by providing them access to the Departments policy statement in relation to private fostering. The ongoing work to raise awareness of private fostering within the local community should continue.
3.	PF3	To ensure that the suitability of all aspects of any private fostering arrangement are determined and monitored in accordance with the regulations the Department must ensure that social work staff members are using the agreed policies and procedures provided to them for their guidance.
4.	PF4 PF5 PF6	The Department must ensure that privately fostered children, their parents and their private foster carers are provided with the advice and support they need to ensure that the welfare of each privately fostered child is safeguarded and promoted.
5.	PF1	The Department's written statement on private fostering should include details of any available training provided to the benefit of private foster carers.
6.	PF7	The Department must ensure that the systems introduced

		to monitor how its duties and functions in relation to private fostering are discharged, are effective and used to improve existing practice where necessary.
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Commission for Social Care Inspection

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