

Luton Borough Council Private Fostering Arrangements Service
Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Sharon Treadwell / Trisha Gibbs
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Address	Luton Borough Council Unity House 111 Stuart Street LUTON LU1 5NP
Telephone number	01582 546000
Email	
Registered person	Luton Borough Council
Registered manager	
Responsible individual	Johnathan Whalley
Date of last inspection	

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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

Within Luton Borough Council the service manager for looked after children is responsible for overall monitoring of private fostering arrangements with day to day management delegated to the service managers for children in care and for child protection and family support. Initial assessments of private fostering arrangements are undertaken by social workers from the intake and assessment team with responsibility for subsequent supervision passing to the fostering team. All decisions about private fostering arrangements are signed off at managerial level and an annual written report is presented, by the service manager for children in care, to the director of children's services and to the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Summary

The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations and the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering came into force in July 2005. Although this authority has been somewhat tardy in developing its policies, procedures and organisational arrangements for the management of private fostering, it now has clear systems in place and has begun to implement them appropriately. A comprehensive statement of purpose is in place and this is supported by robust procedural guidance and pro-forma recording documents. Policies, procedures and information leaflets for staff, professionals, carers, parents, young people and the public in general, contain a good definition of a private fostering arrangement as well as clear information about notification responsibilities and contact details for the authority. The authority is working to develop the awareness of associated professionals as well as using a good range of strategies to raise public awareness, including targeting particular ethnic minority groups. An appropriate range of safeguarding checks are incorporated within the assessment and supervision processes to promote young people's safe and positive development within private fostering arrangements.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of Luton Borough Council's 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 good.

The authority has developed a clear communication strategy document, which demonstrates good awareness of the issues it faces in promoting notifications of private fostering arrangements and clarifies the strategies it will utilise to raise awareness about private fostering with staff, associated professionals and the general public. A database has been developed of associated professional organisations and of local community and faith organisations and the authority is circulating information documents about private fostering to and through these contacts. The Council's website contains information about what constitutes a private fostering arrangement and additionally an article has appeared in a free newspaper, which is delivered to all households in the borough. Advertising campaigns have been undertaken through local radio stations and newspapers and information sheets have been placed in community centres

and GP surgeries. The authority is adopting a staged approach to awareness raising, having split the borough into three geographical areas, targeting one area at a time to ensure that any increase in notifications can be appropriately managed in a timely manner. All publicity information includes full contact details for the local authority and a clear definition of what constitutes a private fostering arrangement. Good, clear information fact sheets have been developed to help parents and private foster carers to understand their respective responsibilities, in terms of both notifications and placement arrangements. A pro-forma agreement form has been developed for use between parents and private foster carers to ensure that young people's health, education and contact needs are fully addressed and that appropriate financial arrangements are in place. The initial assessment process details that these issues must be satisfactorily addressed to ensure that the placement outcomes are positive for the young person. An appropriate information leaflet has been developed for young people providing them with good information about their rights within a private fostering arrangement and with contact details for children's rights services. The authority has developed clear and comprehensive procedures for dealing with notifications of private fostering arrangements and these include appropriate timescales for the completion of visits, for checks on private fostering households and their members and for the completion of required written reports. A very good range of pro-forma recording tools has been developed for use by intake and assessment team social workers in completing their initial assessment and by fostering team workers in their subsequent supervision of the placements. At the time of completion of the pre-inspection paperwork the authority was aware of three private fostering arrangements and this had increased to five by the time of the inspection. Two private fostering files were examined during the inspection. Although there has been considerable delay in formally recognising these as private fostering arrangements, appropriate visits are now being made and, in one case some good support is being provided to the carer and to the young person, particularly in relation to the young person's education. Appropriate assessments as to the carers' capacities to safeguard and promote the young people's welfare have been undertaken, or are in process, and young people are being consulted and their views listened to and acted upon. Private foster carers are provided with full contact information for the out of hours duty service and are encouraged to access training opportunities available to mainstream foster carers.

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 good.

A comprehensive Statement of Purpose has been developed in relation to private fostering and has been submitted to the director of children's services and to the Local Safeguarding Children Board for approval. Designated responsibilities within the authority, in relation to monitoring and day to day management of private fostering, are clearly stated and decision making is at an appropriate managerial level. Appropriate training opportunities are being provided to all relevant local authority staff and to associated professionals, particularly in the

health and education sectors. Clear procedural guidelines are in place to detail how disqualifications and prohibitions will be managed and recorded. The Local Safeguarding Children Board has a good awareness of the potential high risk status of young people in private fostering arrangements, has approved the private fostering statement and the policies and procedures developed to support it and has requested that a written report is presented in April 2008. Very clear written guidelines have been produced for staff involved in the assessment and supervision of private fostering arrangements and these fully detail the required elements of the assessment process and the timescales for their completion and clarify the issues to be covered in subsequent supervision visits. There is good emphasis on the need to prioritise the needs of the young person. The records examined demonstrate that young people's health and educational needs are being given very good attention by their private foster carers. Luton has a very diverse population and managers and staff have a good awareness of the implications of this for private fostering. Work is being undertaken to further develop relationships with colleagues in immigration so that, where necessary, the legal status of young people notified as privately fostered can be quickly ascertained in order that their care needs can be fully and fairly assessed and their safety prioritised.

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):

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.