

Knowsley Council Private Fostering Arrangements Service

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Jeffrey Banham
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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

Knowsley Council is responsible for implementing The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. The Council works with other relevant agencies to promote the awareness of private fostering in the community and to ensure that notifications of private fostering arrangements are made. The Council undertakes assessments to determine the suitability of arrangements and monitors identified placements to ensure that the welfare of children and young people is promoted and safeguarded.

Summary

The inspection was announced. Documentation relating to private fostering was examined and key staff interviewed. The local authority recognises that it has been a challenge to raise and maintain a high profile for private fostering in the community over the last 12 months. Despite an extensive publicity and training campaign the number of notification remains low overall. The local authority is currently involved in the early stages with one private fostering notification. The small numbers of private fostering arrangements in Knowsley limits the development of staff familiarity with guidance, policy and procedure. The authority has sound and comprehensive procedures and management arrangements in place to ensure that agreed procedures are implemented. It has established a multi-agency steering group to ensure the continued development of practice that will ensure children subject to private fostering arrangements are safe. Case records do not always reflect the consideration that is given to determining if private fostering arrangements are the most appropriate for the child or if the local authority should exercise any of its functions under the Children Act 1989.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of the local authority'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 satisfactory.

The Council has a comprehensive strategy for promoting awareness of the notification requirements and ensures that those professionals who come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in notification. Sound procedures have been developed to ensure that the local authority determines effectively the suitability of all aspects of any private fostering arrangement. Private foster carers are assessed by social workers from the family placement team. The procedures for assessing suitability are similar to those for mainstream foster carers and include checks with Police and the Criminal Record Bureau, health and safety checks and comments from referees. The responsibility for determining the suitability of any private fostering arrangement rests with the agency decision maker after due consideration by the fostering panel. This ensures effective oversight of practice and provides consistency in decision making. The needs of children are assessed and the regular supervision of placements ensures that their needs for health and education support, and contact with parents are met.

Private foster carers, and the parents of children in private fostering arrangements, receive advice and support to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities and are able to meet the needs of children subject to private fostering arrangements. The intended duration of placements and financial arrangements for the care and maintenance of the child are not always agreed between the parents and the private foster carer. In these cases, records do not always demonstrate the extent to which the status of private fostering is considered to determine if it is the most applicable for the child in the circumstances, and the extent to which the local authority should exercise any of its functions and powers under the Children Act 1989 with respect to the child.

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 satisfactory.

The local authority has a written statement that sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out. This statement provides clear and detailed information for all relevant professionals and provides a format for monitoring the development of private fostering practice within the community. The local authority recognises that it has been a challenge to raise and maintain a high profile for private fostering given the low rate of notifications. In addition the small numbers of private fostering arrangements in Knowsley limits the development of staff familiarity with guidance, policy and procedure. Nevertheless the sound management arrangements and the continuing commitment to the development of practice enables the local authority to provide safe care for children and young people. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The creation of the multi-agency steering group and the effective system for monitoring the way in which it discharges its duties and functions, provides the local authority with an effective basis for reviewing its practice.

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):

- ensure that the assessment of any private fostering arrangement demonstrates that consideration has been given about the extent to which (if at all) the Council should exercise any of its functions under the Children Act 1989 with respect to the child (NMS 2.3)