

## Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council

Inspection report for local authority private fostering services

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<b>Lead inspector</b>	Simon Morley
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Full
<b>Type of registration</b>	Private Fostering Arrangements

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## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to judge the quality of local authority private fostering services to promote and safeguard children's and young people's welfare.

### The key 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

### Information about the services

Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council is responsible for raising the awareness of private fostering arrangements throughout the local authority. The council also has a duty to identify, assess and monitor any private fostering arrangements that it is made aware of. A senior manager is responsible for ensuring the council fulfils its duties.

A designated social worker, based in the Children's Services Department, assesses and monitors all private foster care arrangements. He works closely with colleagues from all departments, including legal services to raise awareness of private fostering amongst professionals and the public. At the time of inspection there were seven identified cases of private fostering in the local authority.

### Summary

**The services were judged to be Good**

### Improvements/developments since the last inspection

There were eight recommendations for improvement made at the last inspection. Five of these have been fully implemented and one recommendation is partially met.

The local authority facilitates written agreements between private foster carers and parents with regard to the duration and details of the arrangement. This helps ensure the welfare of children is suitably promoted.

There is a new Statement of Purpose that satisfactorily reflects the operation of the service.

There are improved systems for recording new referrals and the number of arrangements ensuring the local authority meets its duties to protect children.

There are better arrangements for checking the suitability of carers, this includes, obtaining enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosures. In a minority of cases there is unnecessary delay in applying for these.

The local authority has raised the awareness of the notification requirements and partner agencies now have a much better understanding of their role to safeguard children.

Once notified, the local authority has improved the way cases are allocated promptly for assessment.

The recommendations to maintain detailed case records and to provide carers with training opportunities have not been adequately met.

## The effectiveness of the services

### The overall effectiveness of the private fostering services

Since the last inspection the local authority has taken steps to improve the quality and effectiveness of the service.

Strong leadership and management ensures this is an effective service. There have been substantial improvements in raising awareness of private fostering arrangements, which is now a strength of the service. There is good multi-agency understanding of the duty and process to notify the local authority of a private fostering arrangement. Notifications are processed efficiently and initial assessments completed in required timescales.

There are shortfalls in the local authority's individual case records which makes it hard to monitor the effectiveness and safety of private fostering arrangements. This also impacts on the ability to support children with their individual needs and inhibits the identification of carers' training needs. Suitability checks about carers are not always processed efficiently, which can delay the assessment of the safety of the arrangements.

There is good capacity for further improvement with ample resources to facilitate this. The local authority is aware of the shortfalls in the service and has the ability to put these right. Continued improvement is enhanced by an effective and experienced manager, who, alongside designated and specialist staff, works closely with partner agencies.

Children say they feel safe and are happy with their care. Private foster carers report they receive a good quality service from the authority.

	Judgement
<b>The overall effectiveness of the private fostering services</b>	<b>Good</b>

### The quality of the service

Local authority staff work hard to raise awareness of private fostering. There is good work with partner agencies to ensure relevant professionals in universal services including schools, health services and community centres know how to notify a private fostering arrangement. There is an ongoing publicity campaign to continue to promote awareness in all community groups. As this has led to an increase in the number of notifications being made, fewer children are in unknown arrangements, so children are better protected.

Good arrangements ensure that all notifications are made to the local authority's duty and assessment team. Trained staff complete initial assessments to identify private fostering arrangements within the required timescales. A specialist worker is assigned to assess the suitability of the arrangements and to promote the welfare and safety of children. However, the assessments lack depth and analysis in terms of identifying children's individual needs and carers' ability to meet them. This compromises the effectiveness of providing carers with appropriate training. Senior managers are aware of this shortfall and are taking steps to improve matters so that children's welfare can be better promoted.

	<b>Judgement</b>
<b>The quality of the service</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>

## Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of privately fostered children and young people

The welfare of privately fostered children is adequately safeguarded and promoted.

Children report they feel safe, are not bullied and know how to complain and contact their social worker. The designated social worker service ensures children are registered with a general practitioner, have access to other health services and attend school regularly.

Checks on the suitability of carers are completed but sometimes there are delays in processing these, for example where there are language barriers. These delays are a risk to children's welfare from living in arrangements not fully assessed as safe.

The designated social worker monitors children's welfare through regular statutory visits that are carried out within required timescales. Records of these visits do not show that the local authority is adequately monitoring how children's individual needs are promoted. However children report they are happy with the arrangements made to look after them.

	<b>Judgement</b>
<b>Safeguarding and promoting welfare</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>

## Promoting equality and tackling discrimination

Children's individual needs are adequately assessed. However the local authority does not always record well what children's religious needs are and how they are met. This compromises the support available to private foster carers as to how they might meet these needs.

Through good links with partner agencies staff are aware of the different ethnic

groups and communities in the local authority. There is a range of publicity materials aimed at raising awareness of private fostering arrangements amongst children, parents, carers and professionals. Publicity material is available in different languages and there is access to interpretation services to help people whose first language is not English.

The local authority has identified some community groups that have not yet benefited from the publicity campaign. There is an action plan to establish links and raise awareness with these groups. This is to further promote the safety and welfare of children in potentially unknown private fostering arrangements within these communities.

	<b>Judgement</b>
<b>Promoting equality and tackling discrimination</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>

## The quality of leadership and management

There are still some shortfalls in meeting all the national minimum standards but these have minimal impact on the safety and welfare of children. The local authority is aware of the shortfalls and is taking action to address them.

A senior manager is effectively leading the service and ensures rigorous monitoring through well-developed action plans. The manager takes the responsibilities for private fostering seriously and has raised the profile of private fostering arrangements throughout the local authority. This has helped to ensure that privately fostered children are suitably safeguarded.

Since the last inspection, the quality of the service has developed well. Strong leadership and management has ensured there are effective quality assurance systems and continuous improvement. Commitment to improvement has ensured good links with partner agencies to raise awareness and increase the number of notifications.

	<b>Judgement</b>
<b>The quality of leadership and management</b>	<b>Good</b>

## Capacity to improve

The local authority has implemented most of the recommendations from the last inspection. Through rigorous self assessment, there is a good vision with clear targets and priorities for further improvement.

Action taken is carefully planned, based on an excellent understanding of the local community and designed to have the greatest impact on children's safety. Harder to



reach groups are targeted with an imaginative use of resources.

There is an accurate understanding by all staff of the effectiveness of the service and what is needed for further improvement. This is reflected in reports to the Director of Children's Services and the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Designated staff members regularly attend good practice forums and national conferences. This ensures the sharing of best practice and also facilitates the development of the service.

	<b>Judgement</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Good</b>

## What must be done to secure future improvement?

### Recommendations to improve the quality and standards of the local authority's private fostering services

This section sets out the recommendations to improve the quality and standards of the local authority's private fostering services.

<b>Type</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
Regulation	ensure that case records comply with Regulations 4, 7 and 8 and corresponding Schedules 2 and 3 to demonstrate the welfare of children is safeguarded and promoted well (Regulations 4(1)(c) &(e), 7(1)(c) &(e), 8 (3)&(4), Schedules 2 & 3)
NMS	ensure that private foster carers have opportunities for training in relation to promoting the assessed needs of children living with them (NMS 4.6)
NMS	ensure the suitability of private foster carers is determined effectively; in particular ensure there are no unnecessary delays in applying for CRB disclosures relating to private foster carers. (NMS 3.1)