

KCC Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

Unique reference number	SC072007
Inspection date	24 July 2008
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Type of Inspection	Key

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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

Kent County Council's Private fostering service is centrally co-ordinated by a designated lead officer. Individual social workers are placed within the three separate children and family teams across this large county. At this time there are 40 private fostering households receiving support from this service. The team is comprised of qualified social workers who are line managed by practice supervisors and district managers.

Summary

This was an announced inspection completed by two inspectors over three days. This was found to be a strong service with clear lines of accountability and effective responsibility. Good communication systems promote a consistent approach and experienced qualified staff ensure the suitability of all aspects of the placement. Whilst it is recognised that far more private fostering households potentially exist, the service is actively promoting awareness in the wider community to encourage notifications to be made. There are also areas of the service requiring development, however the service is very aware of the continued progress it needs to make. Clear development plans show these shortfall are being actively addressed. One recommendation was made to ensure accurate running records are written to demonstrate the nature and type of information that has been given to parents, carers and young people.

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 for this service.

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 local authority takes a proactive approach to inform its wider community about private fostering. It has a comprehensive communication strategy that was developed in 2006 and is reviewed annually. Presentations have been given to professional groups including health, education and children's social services in an attempt to raise their awareness about private fostering and their own roles in making notifications. This has led to a good number of initial referrals being made by these departments. It is positive for those young people concerned that a clear system is in place to ensure the local authority duty team swiftly responds by passing such information on to the private fostering team of both notified and un-notified arrangements. Whilst such professional agencies understand their role in terms of making notifications, there is less public awareness, however this is clearly being addressed. Initial visits are being conducted within the prescribed time scales and include private discussions with young people to ascertain their views. Whilst clear policies and procedures are in place with regards disqualification and the imposition of requirements, none have been necessary within the last year. This is an area currently being prioritised and policies and training plans are in development. Robust assessments are conducted by knowledgeable experienced staff, who determine the suitability of all aspects of the placement. Carers are formally interviewed and checks including enhanced CRBs and

written references, including one from their general practitioner are undertaken. Other adult household members are suitably vetted. Households are also subject to health and safety checks. Detailed paperwork, including core and children in need assessments, clearly record how the young person's needs are being met. Supervision records include a format which reflects the Every Child Matters framework. Arrangements for meeting religious and cultural needs are clearly explored and financial arrangements are being recorded. Annual reports are sent to the local safeguarding board detailing the outcomes for privately fostered children. The majority of those private foster carers interviewed state they receive good advice and support from the dedicated social worker. Contact arrangements with birth parents are clarified and parents are supported to understand their continuing responsibility for the young person, including financial arrangements. The physical situation of the private fostering social workers impacts most positively upon service delivery for youngsters. Individual private fostering social workers are within designated children and family teams of the three Kent areas and are line managed by practice supervisors and ultimately district managers. Hence, they are integral to the children and family teams and although they perform a specific role, their awareness of safeguarding and children in need issues remain very live and up to date. Clear decisions are reached through the assessment process, as to where individual children 'fit' within service delivery. Those requiring a designated children and family social worker, due to their defined status are allocated with one, as well as receiving a service from the private fostering social worker. These arrangements are clear and there is good liaison between all parties, which ultimately benefits the child. The authority actively seeks the views and opinions of its service users. Leaflets, fliers and information packs are routinely given to those children and young people in private fostering placements. More recently, all of those in placement were given the opportunity to engage in a public consultation with the Children's Rights Director and the services of an independent complaint's service is routinely advertised. The policy and performance manager has clear and explicit plans in place to continue to develop and improve on this aspect of service delivery. Written records show that children and young people are routinely seen in private during visits to the households. Those carers and children seen during this inspection further confirmed this happens in practice and there is a firm commitment from the team that its primary role is to protect and safeguard the children and young people that are in placement.

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.

The Statement of Purpose clearly describes the aims and objectives of the private fostering service. It defines the legal context and the prescribed duties of the local authority. Before the introduction of the National Minimum Standards for private fostering arrangements, consideration was given to outsourcing this responsibility, as the authority already recognised the existence of this very vulnerable group. Sound consultation within the authority informed the decision to continue to deliver this service from within. This has resulted in the composition

of a highly motivated, experienced and knowledgeable team, which provides a good quality service. Sound monitoring systems ensure areas for improvement are recognised and duly acted upon. This is a pro-active service. Arrangements have been made for the policy and performance manager to be the named person with responsibility for the coordination of the private fostering service and it is staffed by a team of experienced, designated social workers with backgrounds in assessments and safeguarding. They are actively involved in extending their knowledge and understanding by attending conferences and special interest groups, as well as being afforded the same training opportunities as their colleagues within children and family teams. Sound support and advice is given to the carers and parents of privately fostered children as a result. Much time has been spent over the past three years developing clear recording systems. Files for children and carers are well ordered and easy to read. They contain explicit details, including assessments and plans of care. Running records are appropriately signed off by those with line management responsibility and there is an effective random auditing system in place. There are some instances whereby visit records do not always explicitly record the detail of information and guidance given to carers and parents. The local authority has several systems for recording the number and nature of enquiries received in relation to the service and the quality assurance manager is aware of ensuring all information is gathered and compiled in a comprehensive meaningful way. There is an annual safeguarding report made available to senior management, which evaluates the service and takes into account the roles of other associated agencies. Various steering groups are made up of individuals from a range of outside agencies, including health, education and police representatives. Their primary function is not only to monitor existing practices, but also to improve upon raising the awareness of the concept of private fostering within public and private services. Development plans recognise the need for continued development as the wider community continues to be targeted with information. The service anticipates more referrals in the future and is mindful it may need to expand upon its resources as a result.

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 accurate running records are written to demonstrate the nature and type of information that has been given to parents, carers and young people (NMS 7).

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.