

# London Borough of Harrow Private Fostering Arrangements Service

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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<b>Inspector</b>	Tola Akinde-Hummel / Jackie Graves
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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**

Harrow social services team has a system for dealing with all notifications of private fostering. All referrals are taken through the duty and assessment service. Following assessment these arrangements are monitored within the adoption support and kinship team. Private fostering has been widely publicised to raise awareness within all communities in the borough.

### **Summary**

This announced inspection looked at the key standards, staying safe and organisation. No other standards were assessed. Harrow have worked hard to publicise private fostering arrangements. The system of assessment and monitoring is now much clearer and all staff have received additional training. The number of notifications indicates that the message is being heard although the team acknowledge that more work needs to be done. The support offered to families is valued and safeguarding continues to be a priority. Harrow must have a clear audit trail of criminal records bureau checks and make clear where records should be held on the framework I system. Minor amendments to the written statement on private fostering will demonstrate what development and partnerships are in place.

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.

### **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.

Harrow private fostering service has been active in promoting awareness of privately fostered children with other professionals. This promotion is done on many levels from the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) to individual services within the partnership such as health, education and the police. Examples include meetings with independent schools, presentations to health service colleagues and letters to raise awareness amongst other directorates within the council.

Private fostering and how these arrangements should be made is present in all literature relating to children and young peoples services including the recently published LSCB booklet. Information is also available on the Harrow council website. This publication has included children in private fostering arrangements amongst the list of vulnerable children and young people. All professionals have access to information and named a contact should they have a query.

Harrow has effective links with an umbrella community organisation that has good relationships with all community groups in the borough. Leaflets produced by Harrow have been distributed through this network. Whilst the leaflet is informative, it does not include indigenous populations as an example of how private fostering arrangements may be identified.

The recent appointment of a training and development officer in the fostering service will assist in strengthening the relationship between the harder to reach community groups and Harrow private fostering service. Information is displayed in health centres, libraries, leisure facilities, children's centres, places of worship and schools in the borough. Private fostering has also been included in a free magazine distributed to all Harrow residents.

The service effectively responds to notifications. Harrow private fostering service has 11 arrangements at present. These vary in ages, racial origins, religion and gender. An initial assessment is completed within seven working days following a referral. A private fostering assessment is then completed within 35 working days. The service is able to access interpreters as necessary. The private fostering assessment document is comprehensive. Issues addressed include young people's wishes and feelings, their health and welfare, living arrangements and all matters relating to the proposed family. All children and young people are seen alone where appropriate. Records show that where possible parents of privately fostered children are contacted. However, this is not always undertaken within seven working days of receiving the notification.

The suitability of the private foster carer and an overview of the proposed arrangement is taken into consideration before a decision is reached. Information records young peoples origin, religious background and that of their carers. Staff identify if arrangements are suitably matched in terms of culture. If this is not the case assistance is provided by the team to ensure children and young peoples needs are met holistically. Criminal records bureau checks are undertaken for adult members of the household. The present system for recording these checks on Framework I work flow system is unclear.

All assessments are taken to the monthly child care panel for scrutiny prior to an arrangement being agreed. A social worker in the adoption support and kinship team is then allocated and six weekly visits are undertaken. Children and young people are given a copy of their assessment and any identified needs are supported by the team where appropriate.

The service has so far not refused any private fostering arrangements put forward. There is a process in place to deal with this issue. In addition, actions can be imposed to ensure the well being of the child in placement.

Advice and support is available to children and young people and their carers through their allocated social worker. Young people and their carers made some positive comments about the support they receive, " she gave me her telephone number and tells me to call if I want to talk", " I received advice on benefits, a doctor, a dentist and school", They are useful, supportive, friendly and gentle."

The private fostering service also advises parents and private foster carers where arrangements require review. This is to ensure that the best interest of the child/ young person continues to be met. Where necessary alternative care arrangements to private fostering are made.

### **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.

Harrow's written statement on Private Fostering includes most of the criteria as specified in the National Minimum Standards but does not address how relevant staff will be trained. This is despite the fact that staff working with children and young people have received training. The head of service recently attended a conference on Private fostering and cascaded the information to staff.

The statement does not explain the role of other agencies assisting the local authority to carry out its duty. Again evidence suggests that this is in place with partnership working taking place with education and the police services.

Harrow has a register of children and young people who are privately fostered. This is incorporated into the Children's Services Framework I integrated case management system. Records indicate when children have been seen, if they have been seen alone and their general health and wellbeing. All information relevant to the arrangement is recorded including contributions provided by health and education colleagues. Any areas of concern are detailed with clear actions. The system set up in October 2008 has had some technical problems and staff have been recording information in different places. This sometimes makes it difficult to have a clear chronology of events.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The staff team come from a variety of backgrounds adding value to the work they undertake. The team are consistent in addressing the individual needs of children and young people according to their cultural references.

The service provides a written report each year to the Director of Social Services and the LSCB. The head of service is a representative on the board and is part of the senior management team reporting to the director.

## 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 information on private fostering includes reference to the indigenous population (NMS 2)

- speak to and, if it is practicable to do so, visit every parent or a person with parental responsibility for the child within seven working days of receiving notification (NMS 3)
- review system for criminal records bureau checks ( NMS 3)
- make sure that all supporting criteria are included in the Statement on Private Fostering (NMS 1)
- ensure a clear chronology of records (NMS 7)