

London Borough of Greenwich Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Elisabeth Brunton
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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

Private fostering is dealt with by the referral and assessment service within Greenwich Council's children's service and by a specialist social worker in the council's fostering service. The service manager with responsibility for fostering and other direct services is the council's designated monitoring officer for private fostering. At the time of the inspection, approximately 12 privately fostered young people were known to the council.

Summary

The service has done well at disseminating information and raising awareness about private fostering. Referrals of privately fostered young people are dealt with thoroughly though not always within the required timescale. The suitability of arrangements is thoroughly checked and assessed and private foster carers are giving good care. Young people are visited but not always as regularly as required. Information and advice is given to private foster carers and parents. Relevant staff are aware of the council's responsibilities in relation to private fostering and training and written guidance is provided. There is a current statement about private fostering, comprehensive file records are maintained and the required reports on private fostering have been prepared. Monitoring of the work needs to be further developed.

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.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

There are no standards under this outcome and this provision is therefore not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Greenwich Council's Children's Safeguarding Board has taken a key role in publicising private fostering amongst professionals and in raising awareness through multi-disciplinary training. Publicity materials have been developed and there has been a programme of communication activities. Links have been established with other services and community groups, some of which have been particularly targeted. The profile of private fostering within the council has also been raised by the involvement of the Director of Children's Services. The number of referrals of private fostering arrangements has remained relatively constant but has recently begun to increase. Very few notifications are received directly from private foster carers and parents.

The initial response to private fostering referrals and notifications is normally made by social workers from the council's Initial Response and Assessment Teams (IRAS). Some initial visits are made within the statutory seven days but with others there is some delay. Young people are seen on initial visits and the necessary matters covered. Subsequent visits are made to young people in private foster homes but these are not always as frequent as required by the

regulations. Visits are now recorded on a dedicated Integrated Children's Service (ICS) format, which includes all relevant issues. The need to prohibit private fostering arrangements, impose requirements or disqualifications has not so far arisen in Greenwich but the necessary guidance is in place. The service has dealt appropriately with unsuitable arrangements. Legal advice is available to assist in clarifying whether some arrangements are private fostering or not.

The suitability of private fostering arrangements is now determined through initial assessment, followed by completion of a dedicated ICS private fostering assessment, both of which are normally undertaken by social workers from the IRAS teams. The latter assessment has recently been introduced and includes those matters listed under the standards and regulations. Additional and in-depth assessments of private foster carers, their households and capacity to meet a young person's needs are undertaken by a specialist social worker in the council's fostering service. However, this resource is limited and, prior to the introduction of the dedicated ICS private fostering assessment, there were delays in establishing the suitability of private fostering arrangements. This is no longer the case. Assessments include private foster carers' ability to safeguard young people and to meet their health, education, contact, equality and diversity and other needs. The suitability of private fostering arrangements is said to be agreed by managers in the children's service, once assessment is complete but this is not evident from the records. A number of checks are made on private foster carers and their households, including checks with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). However, the latter are subject to some delay. Parents are contacted wherever possible in order to ascertain their views. Young people say they are receiving good care in private foster homes, with comments such as 'I am very happy now'.

Most privately fostered young people in Greenwich are regarded as children in need. Consequently, some young people continue to receive a social work service beyond the age of 16, when they are no longer classed as privately fostered.

Private foster carers are provided with good support and advice to assist them in meeting young people's health, education, equality and diversity needs and the need to stay safe. Private foster carers are also promoting young people's contact with their birth families, with the encouragement of social workers. Advice and support is provided by both the young person's social worker and the specialist social worker in the fostering service. Practical support to private foster carers includes letters in support of housing applications and benefit claims and direct contact with young people's schools. Some private foster carers are given financial assistance, normally in the form of one-off payments but occasionally as regular payments, in the absence of financial support from a young person's parents. However, the provision of financial support is not always consistent. Private foster carers are given written information about private fostering and contact details for young people's social workers. They may be informed verbally about the services available from other agencies and local groups but this information is not given to them in writing. A minority of private fostering arrangements have had frequent changes in social worker which has inevitably affected the service given. However, this situation is said to be improving. Private foster carers are invited to attend training courses provided for the council's foster carers.

Work is undertaken with parents and young people towards reunification and in order to avoid the need for private fostering. This is extensive in some cases and includes the provision of other services, such as family therapy. Social workers retain contact with the parents of privately fostered young people, wherever possible and encourage them to maintain contact with their

children. In some cases, social workers and private foster carers have helped to promote better contact between young people and their parents and improved family relationships. Parents are said to be given written information about private fostering, together with contact details for their child's social worker. In the small number of cases, where a private fostering arrangement has been regarded as unsuitable, social workers have supported parents in making alternative arrangements for their children.

Comprehensive written information about private fostering, presented in appropriate language and format, is available for privately fostered young people, together with information about how to complain. However, this information is not always given directly to young people and some privately fostered young people have not received it. Advocacy services are available but privately fostered young people do not have contact details for this service. Young people feel generally well supported by their social workers and this support continues beyond the age of 16 in some cases, as previously mentioned. The need to provide information to disabled young people approaching the age of 18, about procedures for assessing eligibility for community care services, has not yet arisen. Information about arrangements for providing advice and assistance to 'qualifying children' under s24 of the Children Act 1989 has also not yet been needed.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is not judged.

There are no standards under this outcome and this provision is therefore not judged.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

There are no standards under this outcome and this provision is therefore not judged.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

There are no standards under this outcome and this provision is therefore not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Greenwich Council has an up-to-date statement of its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which these are carried out. The statement is comprehensive except that it does not include details of the training made available to private foster carers. Training has been made available to staff and comprehensive written procedures for dealing with the work are in place. Relevant staff appear to understand the council's responsibilities towards privately fostered young people and consultation is provided by a knowledgeable and experienced manager and specialist social worker in the fostering service. The development of private fostering work in Greenwich has been spearheaded by two project groups and informed by membership of the British Association of Adoption and Fostering's Special Interest Group.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Private foster carers are meeting young people's individual needs, including needs arising from their racial and cultural backgrounds. They are assisted in this by support and advice from young people's social workers and the training made

available. The assessment of private foster carers includes their ability to meet young people's diversity needs.

Comprehensive electronic records are maintained for each privately fostered young person, which include those reports required by regulation. As previously mentioned, standardised ICS private fostering recording formats are now used, which include all the necessary information. There are paper files for private foster carers within the fostering service. Records are maintained about the numbers of private fostering arrangements identified within the borough and the responsible manager confirms that the required statistical returns are made to the Department for Children, Schools and Families. File records include evidence of managerial supervision of private fostering work within the children's teams but there is no evidence that records for private foster carers or young people are audited or that a sample is reviewed in order to check compliance with required timescales and other activities. A report describing the council's recent private fostering work has been provided for the Director of Children's Services and the chair of the local safeguarding children board.

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 initial visits to privately fostered young people are made within required timescales (NMS 2.3.1)
- ensure that subsequent visits to privately fostered young people are made within required timescales (NMS 2.3.1)
- arrange for checks on the suitability of private foster carers and adult members of their households, particularly with the CRB, to be made promptly (NMS 3.2.6)
- ensure that decisions about the overall suitability of private fostering arrangements are signed-off at managerial level (NMS 3.4)
- provide private foster carers with information, in appropriate languages and formats, on the advice and support available from other services, organisations and local groups (NMS 4.3)
- ensure that any provision of financial support under s17 of the Children Act 1989 to privately fostered young people who are children in need, is fair and consistent (NMS 4.1)
- ensure that privately fostered young people receive the necessary information about their status and rights and the responsibilities of their private foster carers, together with information about available advocacy services (NMS 6)

- amend the council's statement on private fostering to include details of the training made available to private foster carers (NMS 1.2)
- arrange to regularly review a sample of private fostering records to check compliance with the regulations and standards (NMS 7.7).