

# Gateshead Council Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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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**

The responsibility for identifying, responding to and monitoring private fostering arrangements in Gateshead Council lies within the authority's Children's Service Access and Assessment social work teams. The authority's arrangements are managed by the Service Manager, Access and Assessment and this person is responsible for deciding whether any identified private fostering situations are suitable. At the time this inspection was undertaken the authority was not aware of any existing private fostering situations but had previously been involved with a small number of arrangements that had come to an end.

### **Summary**

This was the first inspection of the actions of Gateshead Council to identify, respond to and monitor private fostering arrangements. The authority's work with private fostering takes place to meet the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. The authority has a clear plan for managing its responsibilities in relation to private fostering. It has developed and recently revised a comprehensive policy and procedure for staff members to follow. Not all the work done to assess the suitability of private fostering arrangements before the revision of this policy was robust enough, and recording did not always fully demonstrate the work carried out. Similarly, the work to monitor private foster placements was not always good enough. However, in one case the young person, the young person's family and the private foster carer were provided with good support by the authority. The revised procedure and newly developed recording documents have been developed to improve the effectiveness of this work. The authority has taken good steps to raise awareness of private fostering with the public and professionals. Publicity campaigns have taken place both locally and jointly with other local authorities in the area. The authority monitors the effectiveness of its publicity well and is aware of the nature of private fostering arrangements that are likely to exist in the area. The authority acknowledges that there is further work to do to bring private fostering to the public's attention and recognises that there are likely to be private fostering arrangements it does not know about. Further publicity is planned. Staff members have received training relating to private fostering and further developments are planned through induction and other training. Work with partner agencies to ensure that other professionals, working with children, are aware of their responsibilities to notify the council of any private fostering arrangement they encounter is ongoing. The authority makes appropriate reports about private fostering to the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB).

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

This was the first inspection of Gateshead Council's arrangements for private fostering.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is not judged.

There are no national minimum standards relating to this outcome area.

## Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The authority is working hard to promote public awareness of private fostering. It has carried out two awareness raising campaigns, one in 2005 and the other undertaken jointly with the other local authorities in the area in spring 2007. This latter campaign included press and local radio advertising. Leaflets and posters have been distributed to council offices, schools, leisure and community centres and doctors' surgeries. Guide booklets about private fostering for adults and children are available and appropriate information has been included in the staff magazine and the council's magazine, which is distributed free to all homes in the council area. Detailed information for the public is available on the authority's website with a direct link from the home page. The authority records the number of visitors to the private fostering web page. Records show that despite a massive increase in the number of people viewing the web information about private fostering, after the last media campaign, no new notifications of private fostering situations were received. The council and its staff members are aware of the demographic make-up of the authority area and the nature of private fostering arrangements that are most likely to occur. It has plans to work in a targeted way with specific sections of the community as well as raising general public awareness. The authority has identified private fostering arrangements in respect of a small number of children but all these arrangements have come to an end. At this time there are no private fostering arrangements that the authority is aware of. The authority has identified that the private fostering arrangements most likely to exist in its area are those involving children and families experiencing difficulties. Field social workers therefore, are likely to be aware of new arrangements as they develop but there is no formal system for identifying and tracking any early indicators of likely future private fostering arrangements. This limits the ability to plan for a prompt assessment of the suitability of any arrangements identified. Staff members receive training in matters relating to private fostering and more detailed induction training for new staff members is planned. Information is circulated to professionals in other agencies working with children and families and awareness of private fostering is promoted by the LSCB. The authority has a policy and procedure in place in relation to private fostering that it has recently revised. The agency has not identified any private fostering arrangements since this policy was revised and all arrangements of which the authority was aware ended before this time. Not all of the arrangements being monitored and supported by the authority before it revised the procedure had been dealt with in a sufficiently rigorous manner. One assessment did not contain evidence of any detailed assessment of the private foster carer's attitudes and ability to care for the young person. It also contained no evidence that proper checks of the carer's suitability had taken place or that the physical safety and suitability of the carer's home had been assessed. The majority of the areas set out in the national minimum standards and regulations as requiring consideration were not addressed in the report. The suitability report itself was presented and agreed some five months after the private fostering arrangement began. The authority does not use any formal tools to assess the health and safety or safe caring arrangements within private fostering arrangements. Similarly the assessment of the abilities, attitudes and motivations of private foster carers is carried out by social workers relying on their own experience and training. As such the assessment work is not as robust as it should be. Children's needs are assessed using the National Assessment Framework. Work is done to ascertain the views and feelings of the child, about the private fostering arrangement and to identify the likely duration of the arrangement. The authority provides good support to the privately fostered children that it is aware of. Social workers visit children very regularly and provide support to them in line with their needs, wishes

and circumstances. Records of social workers' visits to monitor private fostering arrangements are not always good enough. In the case of one arrangement that ended before the authority's revised procedure was introduced, there was no report showing that monitoring of the matters required by the regulations and national minimum standards had taken place. The recently revised private fostering procedure is detailed and thorough. It sets out how any private fostering arrangements will be responded to after they have been identified. The procedure clearly identifies how arrangements will be assessed to ensure that they safeguard and promote the welfare of the children concerned. It also sets out the timescales that this work must be completed in and the arrangements for the assessment of the suitability of a private fostering arrangement to be agreed. The authority works effectively with the private foster carers, young people and their parents in the situations it is aware of. Young people get good support and advice appropriate to their needs and wishes. One young person for example received good support to enable a move back home to take place and another young person was helped to move into semi-independent living. Work takes place with other services and agencies to ensure that appropriate services are provided.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is not judged.

There are no national minimum standards relating to this outcome area.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is not judged.

There are no national minimum standards relating to this outcome area.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

There are no national minimum standards relating to this outcome area.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The authority has a clear plan in place which sets out its duties and responsibilities in relation to private fostering. A comprehensive and recently revised policy and procedure is in place to support this plan. The plan specifies the arrangements for raising public awareness of private fostering. It also sets out the arrangements for ensuring that staff working within the authority and with partner agencies are aware of their roles. This plan is kept under review and the effectiveness of work carried out in line with the plan is monitored. Staff members are provided with written information about private fostering and training is provided. Information and training is provided to staff from partner agencies from the authority itself and through the LSCB. The plan clearly sets out how decisions about the suitability of foster carers will be signed off within the authority and the newly revised policy and procedure makes clear how this process works. The authority has an effective system in place for monitoring the number and nature of private fostering arrangements that it is aware of. This information is collated by the authority's management information system and made available to senior managers for planning purposes. An annual report is prepared for the Director of Children's Services and the chair of the LSCB. Statistical information is collated for submission to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) as required. Within the authority the Service Manager, Access and Assessment has overall responsibility for the arrangements put in place regarding private

fostering. Suitable arrangements are in place for this manager to sample and monitor the quality of work done and the subsequent file recording carried out. This monitoring recently resulted in a revision of the authority's procedure and the development of new private fostering assessment and monitoring forms to ensure effective practice in this area. Although the records of the assessment and monitoring of one private fostering arrangement was not detailed enough, the new procedure and forms set out the standard required in any new situation identified. The authority effectively monitors the effectiveness of its awareness raising activity and the nature and number of any enquiries about private fostering received.

## 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):

- develop a system for identifying and monitoring situations, moves and changes in relation to children and families already known to the authority in order to identify those that may become private fostering arrangements, so that plans for robust early assessment of the suitability of the arrangement can be made (NMS 2)
- ensure that assessments of all private fostering arrangements consider all the matters set out in the national minimum standards and regulations and that reports of these assessments and the recommendations made are produced for prompt consideration by the responsible senior manager (NMS 3)
- ensure that visits to privately fostered children monitor and record the matters set out in the national minimum standards and regulations and that a full written report to the local authority is produced after such visits (NMS 3)
- use structured, consistent methods to assess and record the suitability of private foster carers, their homes and the arrangements for providing the young person with care. (NMS 3)

## 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.**