

London Borough of Enfield Private Fostering Arrangements Service

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Seka Graovac
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Date of last inspection	

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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 London Borough of Enfield has a Private Fostering Task Group that includes representatives from Children in Need management team, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance team, School Admissions service, Health service, Asylum team and Community groups. The main objectives of this Task Group are to: review the current practice/model for delivering a private fostering social work service to the community in Enfield, consider the most effective way to promote private fostering within the area, develop the best practice to effect this and continue to raise the awareness of private fostering in the borough. The outcomes are reported to the Community and Communication sub-group of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) that is chaired by Andrew Fraser, Assistant Director of Children's Services. The Deputy Head of Children in Need Service, Assessment and Safeguarding is currently responsible for the operational management of the private fostering. She is also the chair for the Task Group and takes the active role in the strategic development of the service, while the designated lead member of the LSCB for that role is seconded to a different task.

Summary

This inspection was announced. At the time of the inspection, the council supported eight private fostering arrangements and was assessing further four cases. The main finding of the inspection is that the London Borough of Enfield has initiated good strategies in order to raise the awareness of the private fostering. The adequate processes are implemented to safeguard children involved in these arrangements. The service has been rated as satisfactory as the strategic plan is still in the draft format and some of the initiatives and procedures have not been fully implemented. The service is 'travelling in the right direction'.

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 the private fostering arrangements service provided by the London Borough of Enfield.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The Private Fostering Task Group has the main aim to ensure that all children who are in private fostering arrangements are promptly identified and that the appropriate referrals are made. The Task Group meets on a regular basis and is participating in the development of a Strategic Plan for Private Fostering. This plan includes development and implementation of a Communications Plan. Multi-agency training on private fostering is delivered twice a year. The Task Group has established good links with the education and admission service and is seeking to promote further liaison with health services and faith communities. The Enfield Council published a leaflet on Private Fostering subtitled 'Just looking after someone's child?' On request, the leaflet is available in other languages and formats, such as Braille or audio-tape. The number of notifications of planned or current private fostering arrangements in the borough

by fostered children or carers remain small. The majority of the private arrangements have been brought to the council's attention by education or immigration services. Appropriate written guidance for staff has been developed to ensure that the welfare of children who are privately fostered is appropriately promoted and safeguarded. The guidance is written with regards to current legislation and good social work practice. However, not all staff and managers who are engaged in delivering or overseeing the support given to privately fostered children and their carers have detailed knowledge of the guidance. This resulted in the right procedures not being always followed. The duty office receives notifications or information about potential private fostering arrangements. Initial assessments are carried out within seven working days and full Core-assessments are completed within 35 working days. The checks on private foster carers include obtaining enhanced Criminal Records Bureau disclosures and interviews with two referees. Decisions regarding suitability of the private fostering arrangements are signed off by the Deputy Head of Children in Need. If the arrangement is deemed unsuitable, appropriate actions are taken to safeguard the children. Suitable private fostering arrangements are appropriately supported via identified social workers. They make regular visits to the homes of the foster carers. They endeavour to speak to children on their own in order to ascertain children's own views, feelings and needs. Private foster carers and children receive information, advice and support about the range of the topics that might be relevant to them, such as entitlement to financial benefits, health services, housing, education, voluntary organisations and community groups. Support is also available to the fostered children's birth parents. However, none of the children that the inspector case-tracked knew where their parents were. The arrangements are formally reviewed every three months.

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 satisfactory.

The London Borough of Enfield Private Fostering Arrangements Service has developed or is in the process of developing and formally agreeing various documents that set out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and how these would be discharged. There is a specific leaflet regarding private fostering, a draft statement proposed to be included in the Community Handbook and a draft Strategic Plan for Private Fostering. However, some of the information as described in the related National Minimum Standard was missing. For example, the name of a person within the local authority with expertise in private fostering, whom social workers can contact for advice, was not included within the documents shown to the inspector. With the Lead person for private fostering being seconded to a different task, the Deputy Head of Children in Need is also carrying out this role in addition to her operational responsibilities as an interim arrangement. Electronic records are confidentially kept for each privately fostered child and each private foster carer. As private fostering arrangements are integrated within the Children in Need department, the same assessment tools, notification and referral recording formats are used both for the private fostering arrangements and children and families in need.

This means that some information, such as the private foster carers' intention, duration of the private fostering arrangement and the relationship with the child's birth parents might not be given the appropriate significance. The same monitoring and quality assurance methods are also deployed across the workings of this department. At the time of the inspection, no written reports on private fostering in the borough have been provided to the Director of Children's Services for their consideration. The Chair of the LSCB is also the nominated officer responsible for monitoring of the ways in which this local authority discharged their functions in relation to private fostering. The Task Group and its reports to the Communities and Communication LSCB sub-group helps keep monitoring, reviewing and development of the London Borough of Enfield Private Fostering Arrangements Service on the council's safeguarding agenda.

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 statement of purpose that includes all information listed in the National Minimum Standard (NMS 1)
- consider developing the role of the named worker with a distinct responsibility solely for private fostering (NMS 1)
- formally agree and fully implement a strategic plan (NMS 1)
- raise staff knowledge of the existing guidance on private fostering (NMS 2)
- review the current formats used to record private foster care notifications and referrals (NMS 2)
- review the current formats used to record private foster care assessments of suitability (NMS 3)
- provide a written report each year for consideration by the Director of Children Services, which includes an evaluation of the outcomes in relation to private fostering arrangements in Enfield (NMS 7)