



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

LOCAL COUNCIL PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS

**Local Authority Private Fostering Arrangement
Devon C.C.**

**County Hall
Topsham Road
Exeter
Devon
EX2 4QJ**

Lead Inspector
Romana Young

Announced Inspection
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The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
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- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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This is a report of an inspection to assess local authority private fostering arrangements against the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering. These standards can be found at www.dfes.gov.uk. The NMS specify a minimum standard for local authority practice in the fulfilment of their duties and functions in relation to private fostering under the Children Act 1989. Along with the new measures in section 44 of the Children Act 2004 and the 2005 regulations, they are intended to better focus local authorities' attention on private fostering, in part by requiring them to take a more proactive approach to identifying arrangements in their area.

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life.

Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above. The Private Fostering National Minimum Standards are mapped to just two of these outcomes, Staying Safe and Management.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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Local Authority INFORMATION

Name of Local Authority	Local Authority Private Fostering Arrangement Devon C.C.
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Telephone number	01392 386052
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Local Authority Web address	www.devon.gov.uk

SUMMARY

Devon County Council

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

Devon County Council is one of the first local authorities to have their arrangements for private fostering inspected against the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering and The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. Inspection of the remaining local authorities' arrangements for private fostering will take place over the next two inspection years. This inspection was undertaken at the same time as the statutory annual inspection of Devon County Council's fostering service, for which a separate report has been produced.

Two inspectors undertook the inspection of these services over the course of one week, from 5 to 9 February 2007. Observation of the operation of a fostering panel, took place prior to this, in January 2007, as none were being held within the week that was available for the inspection fieldwork activity. The local authority fostering panels, currently, have the role of considering social workers' reports on the suitability of private fostering arrangements and making a recommendation to the local authority's decision maker.

During the course of this inspection, an inspector visited one of the two office bases of the private fostering service and interviewed the manager of the service, the two social workers and the development worker employed by the service, one of the two fostering panel chairpersons, and the Local Safeguarding manager. Two homes where children are being privately fostered were visited and the inspector spoke with the private foster carers, and two of the three young people living with them. One of the young people was not present when the inspector visited and so was not interviewed. The inspector met with a parent of one of these young people, but contact with the parent of the other two young people, could not be arranged, as they were unwell at the time of the inspection visit. A report on the assessment of the suitability of a private fostering arrangement was considered at the fostering panel observed. The inspector also examined the records kept on the private foster carers visited, and the young people they are caring for. The social worker for one of these young people was interviewed. The inspector was not able to interview the social worker for the other two young people, but did speak with their previous social worker. Other documentation examined, and used to inform the judgements in this report, include the Annual Quality Assurance Assessment (AQAA) and data set, the local authority's written statement on private fostering and other written information supplied at the inspector's request.

The inspector thanks the private foster carers, young people and their parents, and Devon County Council staff for their cooperation and assistance with this inspection.

What the local authority does well:

The local authority has made a good start setting up, and establishing, a service to fulfil its functions and duties in relation to private fostering. By far the largest group of children and young people who are privately fostered in Devon are teenagers who are temporarily estranged from their parents. The local authority is currently conducting a survey of language schools in its area to try to establish to what extent the arrangements made for the children and people attending these schools are private fostering arrangements. There is concern that there may significant underreporting of children and young people in this category.

In partnership with the other local authorities in the South West - Plymouth City Council, Cornwall County Council and Torbay Council – Devon County Council has mounted a successful publicity campaign to educate the public and professionals about safeguarding children and young people who are privately fostered, the local authority's role, and the notification requirements. Information leaflets, posters, and an introduction letter, have been produced, launched through articles in the local media (press, television and radio) and then distributed widely to libraries; social services offices; hospitals, health centres and GP's surgeries; sports centres, town halls, Citizen Advice Bureaus and the education welfare service. A dedicated page has been added to the Devon County Council fostering website with information, a downloadable leaflet, and contact details for those who need to notify the local authority about a private fostering arrangement.

The local authority has created separate roles to fulfil its duty to promote awareness of the notification requirements and to respond to notifications. This has meant that campaigning work to raise awareness has not been compromised by the need to respond to, and manage, a higher number of private fostering arrangements than was initially thought might be the case.

The local authority is to be commended for ensuring that assessments of the suitability of private fostering arrangements are undertaken by qualified and experienced social workers. The assessments are thorough, focussed on ensuring that the child's welfare is being, or will be, satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, and the social workers have been able provide to excellent advice and support to both parents and the private foster carers, during the process of assessment, and after.

The subsequent statutory visits to children and young people who are privately fostered are undertaken by an appointed care manager from the local district children and families social care team, who is responsible for visiting the child at a minimum frequency of 6 weekly within the first year (or 12 weekly thereafter), or when reasonably requested to do so by the child, their private foster carer, or parent.

Staff show commendable commitment to providing a high quality service to children and young people who are privately fostered, their parents and private foster carers.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This is the first inspection against the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering and The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

What they could do better:

The statement on private fostering needs to be amended to ensure that all the areas detailed in National Minimum Standard 1 are fully covered.

Initial statutory visits are not being made within the required timescale of seven working days. As very little was known about the number of these arrangements, both nationally and within the county, an estimate of the volume of work that might be generated had to be made, initially, with resources allocated in line with this. However, it is now apparent that the numbers of these arrangements is much higher than was estimated. The current staffing level, and the systems for managing the intake of work, have been somewhat overwhelmed by this higher than anticipated level of notifications, and as a result, have not able to meet the seven working day timescale for visits as required under Regulations 4 and 7 of The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations. It is likely that further investment in staffing will be required to meet the demands of the service, as awareness about notification requirements grows through all parts of the community.

Young people the inspector had contact with said that they needed continuity in the allocation of their social worker. In one case, there had been three changes of social worker in less than a year. The young people involved said that they found it disconcerting and upsetting to have to keep getting to know and trust a new social worker, and that the changes eroded their confidence in the support provided. Also, some children and young people do not have an allocated social worker, and some visits to a child or young person who is being privately fostered, are not taking place within the statutory interval of not more than six weeks in the first year of a private fostering arrangement. The inspector is aware of the action plan currently being implemented, to improve consistency in service provision, and quality performance monitoring, across the county's children and families social care services, which should address these issues.

Close monitoring is required, to ensure that adequate post-16 care and support is being made available to children and young people who are being privately fostered and receiving financial assistance to meet their needs, through S17 support from the local authority, as there may be a gap in provision for

children and young people in these circumstances, particularly if they are continuing in education.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

Staying Safe

Management

Staying Safe

The intended outcome for these Standards are:

(NMS 2) The local authority is notified about privately fostered children living in its area.

(NMS 3) The welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted

(NMS 4) 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 5) The local authority provides advice and support to the parents of children who are privately fostered within their area as appears to the authority to be needed.

(NMS 6) 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.

The Commission considers that all these Standards should be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for the following Standard(s):

2, 3, 4, 5 and 6

The local authority has satisfactorily established means of raising awareness about private fostering, and the notification requirements, among the local community, and professionals who may come into contact with children and young people in the course of their work. The local authority responds effectively to notifications but needs to ensure that statutory visits are being undertaken within the required timescales.

EVIDENCE:

In partnership with the other local authorities in the South West, Devon County Council have mounted a campaign to raise awareness among the local communities, and professionals who come into contact with children and young people in the course of their work, about the need to safeguard the welfare of children and young people living with someone other than their parents, and the requirements for notifying the local authority of these arrangements. The

inspector has seen a sample of the leaflets produced, a press release, and a power point presentation used for training, and been told by the manager of the service, and staff, about distribution of leaflets and posters throughout the county, and the media campaign.

The inspector met with the development officer who outlined his role, the work that has been undertaken so far, and future measures planned to continue the promotion of awareness about private fostering. Some examples of the work undertaken so far, in addition to the media campaign and distribution of leaflets and posters, are: presentations given to local authority staff (both in the fostering service and the locality children and families social care teams), fostering panel members, Youth Offending Teams, education welfare officers, and school nurses; induction training for new staff; meeting with child protection police officers; attendance at Local Safeguarding Board meetings; the circulation of introductory letter, information on private fostering and a PowerPoint presentation to every police, ambulance and fire station in Devon; presentations to social work students at the University of Plymouth; involvement in the "Excellence Not Excuses" group; a fact finding trip to Gloucestershire Social Services to look at how their private fostering service is operated; participation in the national debate on private fostering through attendance at the BAAF special interest group, CSCI meetings and national training days for fostering service inspectors; and assisting in the production of policies and procedural guidance for staff. This was a temporary appointment, which has now been confirmed for a further period. As further work in raising awareness in other sections of the community (such as faith groups and communities, and local language schools) needs to be undertaken, the value in making this a permanent position should not be overlooked. Separating out the roles of raising awareness and responding to notifications has meant that the necessary campaigning work has continued, despite a higher number of notifications than was thought would be the case. There was evidence from a number of sources of the effectiveness of this work – the local authority have been notified of private fostering arrangements by schools, private foster carers and health professionals.

There was evidence from case files, interviews with social workers, the manager of the service and private foster carers that the local authority takes appropriate action on the receipt of a notification, although due to a higher volume of notifications than was anticipated, initial visits have not been taking place within the statutory timescale of seven working days from when the local authority receives the notification. The social workers who undertake the assessments of the suitability of the private fostering arrangement are qualified and experienced and undertake thorough assessments and produce detailed, and high quality, written reports which adequately cover the matters listed in Schedule 2 of The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. The private foster carers the inspector spoke with praised the way in which these social workers worked with them and felt that they

gave them good advice and support throughout the assessment process and after.

The inspector was told that children and young people who are privately fostered are given a copy of the BAAF guide for children and young people "Private Fostering – What it is and what it means" by the assessing social worker. They are also allocated a care manager from the children and families social care service to visit them regularly and provide advice and support.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- (NMS 1) Relevant staff are aware of local authority duties and functions in relation to private fostering.
- (NMS 7) The local authority monitors the way in which it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering.

The Commission considers that all these standards should be inspected

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following Standard(s):

1 and 7

Staff have a good knowledge and understanding of the local authority duties and functions in relation to private fostering. The local authority needs to instigate an effective system for monitoring the way in which it discharges those duties and functions.

EVIDENCE:

The local authority has produced a written statement on its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out. This statement needs to be updated to correspond with the development of the service, and some further information needs to be included to fully meet NMS 1.2 – for example:

- the legal definition of a privately fostered child and a list of examples
- the name of a person within the local authority with expertise in private fostering, whom social workers can contact for advice
- the name(s) of the manager(s) who will sign off decisions about the overall suitability of an arrangement and
- the role of other agencies in assisting the local authority to carry out its duty under section 67(1) of the Children Act 1989, in particular through notifying the authority of an arrangement where they are not satisfied that the local authority have been, or will be, notified of that arrangement.

Interviews with the development officer, social workers, the manager of the service and other information provided to the inspector show that staff have been provided with training on the private fostering legislation and the local authority's duties and functions in relation to private fostering. Interviews with

the development officer and managers confirmed that training in this area is included in the induction training programme for new social services staff.

The inspector examined the case records for three privately fostered children and young people and their private foster carers. The records contained the written reports required by the regulations and were well documented.

At present, there is no coordinated procedure for monitoring how the local authority is discharging its duties and functions in relation to private fostering, although plans are being made for this to happen. The inspector was told that a "champion" for private fostering is to be established in each local district office, to ensure that staff are kept well informed about how to respond to notifications, provide appropriate support and advice to children and young people who are privately fostered, their parents and private foster carers, and ensure that children and young people are adequately safeguarded in these situations. The manager of the private fostering service is also a practice manager within the local authority's mainstream fostering service. She liaises with practice managers in the locality offices but does not have responsibility for the allocation of social workers to children and young people, or information about visiting patterns. Better strategic liaison is needed to properly monitor performance across the service. Also, discussion with the assessing social workers who also provide on-going support and advice to private foster carers, and the social workers for the children and young people, showed that there is a need for better communication, and joint working, at this level also, to provide a more coordinated service overall.

Optional

Being Healthy

JUDGEMENT –

EVIDENCE:

Enjoying and Achieving

JUDGEMENT –

EVIDENCE:

Making a Positive Contribution

JUDGEMENT –

EVIDENCE:

Achieving Economic Well Being

JUDGEMENT –

EVIDENCE:

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering have been met and uses the following scale.

4 Standard Exceeded (Commendable) **3** Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
2 Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls) **1** Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion

"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

STAYING SAFE		MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
2	2	1	2
3	3	7	2
4	3		
5	3		
6	2		

Are there any outstanding recommendations from the last **NA** inspection?

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Local Authority to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	PF2	The local authority must ensure that the visits detailed in Regulations 4 and 7 of The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 are undertaken within the required timescale of seven working days from the receipt of a notification made in compliance with Regulations 3, or 5, of The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.
2	PF7	The local authority must ensure that subsequent visits to children and young people who are being privately fostered are taking place within the statutory minimum intervals detailed in Regulation 8 of The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.
3	PF7	The local authority should establish a more efficient and effective system for monitoring the way in which it discharges its functions.
4	PF6	The local authority should ensure that good continuity of support is available to children and young people who are privately fostered - in particular, that changes to a child's allocated social worker are minimised as far as possible.
5	PF1	The local authority should review its written statement on private fostering and ensure that all of the points set out in the National Minimum Standard for Private Fostering 1.2 are fully covered, in particular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the legal definition of a privately fostered child and a list of examples • the name of a person within the local authority with expertise in private fostering, whom social workers can contact for advice • the name(s) of the manager(s) who will sign off decisions about the overall suitability of an arrangement and

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the role of other agencies in assisting the local authority to carry out its duty under section 67(1) of the Children Act 1989, in particular through notifying the authority of an arrangement where they are not satisfied that the local authority have been, or will be, notified of that arrangement.
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