

Cornwall County Council Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Paul Clark
Type of Inspection	Key

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Registered person	Cornwall County Council: Children and Young People and Families Service
Registered manager	Robin Heath
Responsible individual	Colin Reed
Date of last inspection	1 January 1900

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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 private fostering arrangements at Cornwall County Council are part of the Children, Young People and Families Directorate of the council and are overseen by the Assistant Director, Children's Services and directly managed by the Foster Care and Short Break Services Manager. The initial assessment of private fostering households is carried out by social workers in the three Area Children's Teams and ongoing assessment and review is carried out by them and signed off by their line managers and monitored by the Registered Manager.

The Registered Manager is the Foster Care and Short Break Services Manager and the Responsible Individual is the Senior Manager, Children in Care. The local authority has notified Ofsted in writing of the names of the people holding these positions.

At the time of the inspection there were five active private fostering households accommodating five young people.

Summary

This announced inspection was the first formal Ofsted inspection of the private fostering arrangements at Cornwall County Council and was carried out by a single inspector over a one day period. The authority completed and returned a data sheet and a self-assessment form giving detailed information about the service. The inspector interviewed the Registered Manager, Responsible Individual and social workers, and consulted with private foster carers. Individual case files of young people and private fostering households were scrutinised and the service policies and procedures, Statement of Purpose and all relevant information documents were inspected. A questionnaire survey of young people, private foster carers and other stakeholders was conducted. The authority takes active steps to promote information about the service. Social work practice and the provision of training and guidance for staff is generally sound. Recording systems are generally sound. The service is well managed. However, initial assessments need to be promptly carried out within seven days of notification.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This was the first inspection of this service by Ofsted.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards which apply to this outcome group.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The service makes strenuous efforts to ensure that all relevant agencies and the public generally are aware of the need to notify the local authority of any private fostering arrangements that come to their attention. This is achieved by poster and leaflet distribution, local newspaper and radio campaigns and electronic communication to Designated Child Protection Officers in

schools. The authority has a website giving information about its services which includes an information page about private fostering. The name and contact details of the person responsible for managing private fostering within the council is contained within these information sources.

The council is currently constructing leaflets/posters in Portuguese and Polish (who are the largest minority groups in the region) to be available within six weeks. This will be a focus of the next inspection. All information documents are available in large print, audio format and Braille on request. The council's Equality and Diversity Officer makes information about the need to notify the authority about private fostering arrangements known to groups of Travellers who come to the area.

All referrals and notifications are passed to the Registered Manager of the service or their deputy and logged onto an electronic data management system, then passed to a social worker within an area team who should carry out an initial assessment within seven days. Examination of records showed that initial assessments are not being carried out within seven days.

Assessments are now recorded on a recently constructed formatted record. Social workers have written guidance on the assessment requirements. The initial assessment is 'signed off' as appropriate by the social worker's line manager and this is monitored by the Registered Manager of the service. The assessment and the health and development of the young person are reviewed by the social worker, who conducts visits to the private fostering household at least every six weeks and who sees the child alone and ascertains their view of the placement. Some past historical records indicated that records were not always kept that the child had been seen alone by the social worker but the new format assessment form now addresses this shortfall.

Electronic records are held centrally by appointed senior administrators that show that Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are carried out on all adult members of private fostering households and that these checks are updated every three years. The authority has a written protocol within its 'Policies and Procedures' document with regard to how decisions are to be made about the suitability of carers with previous convictions. The service is currently moving from hard copy records of private fostering households to an electronic system. An electronic record and a written hard copy record is not kept of CRB checks in the individual records of private fostering households.

A discretionary carer's allowance can be paid to private fostering households based on assessed need. Social workers will advise carers if they are eligible. However, payment of this allowance is not explicit in the social workers' guidance documents.

The contact arrangements between young people, their families and significant others is contained in the initial assessment form and reviewed at the six weekly visits. Private foster carers spoken to confirmed that they know the names and contact details of the social workers assessing the placements.

The local authority has a service level agreement with Barnardos to provide advocacy for all 'children in need' (including privately fostered young people). Privately fostered young people of the appropriate age may also access support from the Leaving Care Team and will be allocated a personal advisor.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards which apply to this outcome group.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards which apply to this outcome group.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards which apply to this outcome group.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity in this service is good, as evidenced by sound corporate policies and practices and the use of a range of diverse literature formats giving information about the service.

A comprehensive and clearly written Statement of Purpose contains details about the service and how it promotes awareness to key bodies about the need for local authorities to be notified about any private fostering arrangements that come to their attention. It also contains the legal definition of 'private fostering'; the outline of staff training on private fostering; how private foster carers can access any necessary training; the name and contact details of the person within the authority who has expertise in private fostering; and the people who monitor and 'sign off' social workers' assessments about the suitability of private fostering placements.

There is a specific 'Policies and Procedures' document which gives comprehensive guidance to staff and other stakeholders on the provision and practice of the private fostering service. Private foster carers are given a comprehensive Code of Practice document which details the service provision and which gives them information about their rights and entitlements. As previously stated, the authority has a website giving the public information about its services and which includes an information page about private fostering.

There are separate hard copy case files for private fostering households and for young people using the service which are well ordered and up to date. The authority is also running electronic records of these with the intention of eventually making all records electronic. As previously stated, a new format is now in place for social work assessments and reviews and these are signed off by line managers and monitored by the Registered Manager.

The Registered Manager conducts an annual written review of the quality of the private fostering arrangements and copies of this report are sent to the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Director of Children's Services.

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
3	ensure that initial assessments of the suitability of Private Fostering placements are carried out within seven days. (Reg.4)	2 March 2009

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure a hard copy record is kept of CRB checks in the individual records of private fostering households (NMS 3).
- ensure that social workers' guidance documents inform them how carers may be eligible for financial support (NMS 5).