

Cambridgeshire County Council Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Jane Barton / Fiona Parker
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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

A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately (that is to say without the involvement of the local authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16. (Under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or a close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Local authorities are required to raise awareness of the necessity to notify the authority of any private fostering arrangement, to encourage positive outcomes for privately fostered children and young people and reduce any risk to their welfare and safety. Cambridge County Council has an effective private fostering scheme, with a well developed awareness campaign to help raise the profile of private fostering arrangements within the county. The agency manager has undertaken a thorough assessment of the private fostering arrangements carried out by the county council. A number of developments have been identified and there is enthusiasm to build on the good practice that is already in place.

Summary

The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations and the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering came into force in July 2005. This authority has good, clear systems in place with policies, procedures and organisational arrangements for the management of private fostering. Robust procedures support a comprehensive Statement of Purpose and leaflets contain good definitions of private fostering arrangements. Work is being carried out in producing leaflets in alternative languages. The authority has a cohesive strategy which continues to develop the awareness of other professionals and the general public with a focus on primary and secondary schools. Safeguarding checks are in place with good assessment and supervision processes which promote young peoples' safe and positive development within the private fostering arrangements

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of this service

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The County Council have an effective programme of communication activities and campaigns designed to raise the awareness of private fostering arrangements. The publicity is clear and explains to those providing such a service in their own home, of their responsibilities to notify the County Council of any such private fostering arrangement. The majority of statutory agencies including some local educational establishments, the primary health care teams, the police, housing agencies, and the probation service have been informed of their notification responsibilities. The raising awareness campaign is ongoing and further work is to be carried out with primary and secondary schools. Publicity materials are very good, however, these need to be translated into a range of languages and formats. Through the scheme there is a focus on identifying where children and young people are living in private fostering arrangements.

This ensures their needs are safeguarded and those caring for them are appropriately assessed, suitable and supported through the scheme. By developing good networks through the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) special interest group, the manager and staff team have been able to identify a small private fostering population in several local schools. Working closely with legal advisers and the education department, the County Council have been able to formalise these private fostering arrangements. This ensures that children and young people are safeguarded. The manager continues to promote awareness of the scheme in other local educational establishments, to make sure children receiving such care come to the attention of the council and the private fostering scheme. It is believed this has improved as the profile of private fostering is raised and the vulnerability of children is identified. The County Council have good policies and procedures to underpin their social work practice. These are being developed further to provide a greater clarification of roles within the private fostering scheme. The policies will strengthen the service which will place the responsibility for the care and support of the placements with area childcare teams once the Kinship team have assessed the suitability of the carers. Systems for dealing with referrals are robust and a full assessment is carried out within five weeks of notification. This process includes, within seven days, an initial assessment to identify potential risks. This ensures that any safeguarding issues are identified early on. Health and education form part of the early assessment to ensure private foster carers have information from the child's or young person's parents, to enable them to provide appropriate care. Their wellbeing is part of the overall assessments and linked with other agencies, such as schools and local health care agencies. The County Council are supporting 20 children placed in private fostering arrangements of which two have the potential to develop into longer term arrangements. Statutory visits within the timescales are made to ensure appropriate decisions are taken in the interest of the children. All child protection concerns are reported through the County Council's safeguarding procedures. Case files are well organised and contain evidence of thorough child-focused assessments and the needs of the children are clearly identified. Carers spoken to confirm there are robust support mechanisms in place and good advice is given by social workers which helps them to support the children in their care.

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 good.

The Statement of Purpose clearly sets out the council's duties and functions and the way the work is carried out to support children and young people being privately fostered. It contains all the required elements of the National Minimum Standards and outlines the decision making processes of the private fostering arrangements. The staff are fully aware of their responsibilities with regard to the scheme. The policies and procedures clearly support them in their work. The policy and procedure manager, a recent appointment, will undertake a review of all the procedures and policies. The council are in the process of developing data collection to enable

them to identify the privately fostered population in Cambridge. Systems for new notifications to the Department for children, schools and families (DCSF) are in progress and these will be included in the statistical data return. Case files are well organised and contain evidence of thorough child-focused assessments and the needs of the children are clearly identified. Comprehensive records are kept on each child and carer; they cover all the information required to enable good effective decision-making processes to take place. An annual report is presented to the Chief Executive and the Acting Director for Inclusions on the council's private fostering arrangements. The business plans for the county council demonstrate that the private fostering arrangements are promoted throughout the council's work. Workshops have been provided to support carers in understanding their roles and responsibilities and additional training opportunities are planned. Kinship workers have received specialist training through BAAF. Social workers have received refresher training on safeguarding, both informally through team meetings and with a facilitator in workshops ensuring their practice and knowledge remains current. Social workers receive formal supervision each month. There are very good links between the teams with regular meetings used to track where children and young people are privately fostered. These meetings also provide opportunities to reinforce close links with key agencies to ensure that children are referred on. Clear line management structure, formal systems and processes ensures that the status of private fostering is reinforced. Discussion with carers demonstrates they are well supported and feel social workers understand the complexity of their situation in looking after family members in complex relationships and situations.

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 publicity materials are available in an appropriate range of languages and formats which are accessible to different groups of private foster carers, parents and communities (National Standard 2.2.2)
- continue to provide targeted and current information to those who may come into contact with privately fostered children, for example, schools (National Standard 2.2.3)
- ensure that new notifications are recorded on the statistical data return PFI, and submitted to the Department for children, schools and families, as required. (National Standard 7.5).

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.