

Bury Social Services Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Jeffrey Banham
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Date of last inspection	20 November 2006

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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 Children's Services Department of Bury Council is responsible for implementing The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. The Department works with other relevant agencies to promote an awareness of private fostering in the community and to ensure that notifications of private fostering arrangements are made. The Children's Services Department undertakes assessments to determine the suitability of arrangements and monitors identified arrangements to ensure that the welfare of children and young people is promoted and safeguarded.

Summary

The publicity strategy of the Council has so far not had the desired impact with the result that there has only been one notification of a private fostering arrangement. There is no overall statement or plan and there has only been one annual review of the Department's response to the implementation of the regulations. Arrangements for responding to notifications and of monitoring private fostering arrangements have not complied with the required timescales to promote and safeguard the welfare of children. The Department has produced an action plan that is designed to develop the service over the next two years.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of the authority's private fostering arrangements.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

The Department's strategy since 2005 for raising awareness of the private fostering arrangements, both amongst the public and relevant professional organisations, has not had the intended effect of providing the community with knowledge about what constitutes a private fostering arrangement and what are individual and organisational responsibilities to inform and notify. Only one private fostering arrangement has so far been notified and responded to. It is recognised that it is likely that there are private fostering arrangements in existence of which the local authority has no knowledge. A more focussed publicity strategy has been commissioned as part of the Private Fostering Action Plan designed to develop the service up to 2010. The timing of responses to notifications of private fostering arrangements has compromised safeguarding of children. Initial visits, for example, have been outside the required timescales. Subsequent visits to children in private fostering arrangements have similarly not complied with the required timescales. On one occasion, for example, there was a gap of fifteen weeks between home visits. Advice, guidance, and support are provided to young people in placement. When it undertakes visits, the local authority ensures that young people are safe and are that they are satisfied with the arrangements. Parents are seen to be in regular contact with carers and there is an understanding of the purpose and likely duration of the arrangements. Assessments of the suitability of the accommodation are not detailed.

They do not give officers with the responsibility of authorising the arrangements sufficient information to be satisfied that this aspect of the placement is satisfactory.

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 inadequate.

The authority had not until recently produced an effective strategy setting out how it will implement its responsibilities in relation to private fostering arrangements. For example, it does not have a single document that constitutes a written statement or plan which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out. There are a number of documents, such as publicity leaflets and procedural documents for departmental use that contain aspects of the required information. The information is not organised into one coherent document available to the public and professional organisations and does not provide, for example, information about the training available for private foster carers. The first annual review report for the Director of Children's Services and the Local Children's Safeguarding Board was written in September 2008; none has been provided before that. The Department has produced a Private Fostering Action Plan for the period 2008- 2010 setting out how it will develop its service in the future.

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):

- produce a written statement statement or plan setting out the duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be met (NMS 1)
- determine effectively the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangements in accordance with the regulations (NMS 3)