

Bournemouth Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Sophie Jane Barton
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Address	Bournemouth Borough Council Children's Social Care Dorset House 20 - 22 Christchurch Road Bournemouth BH1 3NL
Telephone number	01202 458000
Email	
Registered person	Bournemouth Borough Council
Registered manager	Christine Shepherd
Responsible individual	
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 are managed within the Fostering and Placements Team of Bournemouth Borough Council. Supervising social workers from the team undertake the suitability checks of private foster carers and will continue to give support and advice to the carers. The Children's Assessment Team complete the initial assessment of the child's welfare and continue to visit and support the child. At the time of the inspection the Borough were aware of two children in private fostering arrangements, and a total of five notifications have been received in the last year.

Summary

Overall children and young people's welfare in private fostering arrangements is safeguarded. Notifications are responded to promptly, with children and carers visited within seven working days and subsequently at monthly to six weekly intervals. However, there is a significant delay in carrying out a comprehensive assessment of the suitability of the arrangement. This results in some young people remaining with carers for a considerable length of time before it is concluded whether the carers can appropriately care for them. Social workers are not routinely contacting parents or speaking to the child alone which limits the quality of the overall assessment. When seen, the children and young people are listened to and supported. Carers are allocated a supervising social worker from the fostering team, and these workers are committed to providing good quality support and advice. The local authority has made adequate efforts to raise awareness of private fostering arrangements. Monitoring of their duties and effectiveness at safeguarding children and young people has also been adequate, although the lack of auditing of files has led to some poor practice not being identified promptly.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Not applicable. This is the first inspection.

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.

Children and young people in private fostering arrangements receive an adequate service from the local authority. Notifications are responded to, and the children and carers are visited promptly, mostly within seven working days as the regulations state. The children and young people continue to be safeguarded by regular visits by a social worker. The reports completed by social workers of these visits to the private fostering placements include limited detail however, and do not meet the regulations. Children and young people are not always seen alone, and their birth parents are not always contacted which affects the overall quality of the safeguarding assessment. The local authority has set procedures forwarded to all staff on how private fostering arrangements should be assessed and monitored. However, the children's social workers do not promptly refer the private fostering arrangement to the fostering team. This leads to significant delays in assessing the overall suitability of the arrangements. Mostly,

the Criminal Records Bureau checks are completed promptly by social workers, but further suitability checks including references, checks on other members of the household, and the assessment on the capacity of the carer to meet the child's needs have taken up to a year to be completed. Furthermore, social workers and managers are not aware of the legal distinction between a private fostering arrangement and a Regulation 38 (Fostering Regulations 2002) placement. This has resulted in a number of children being considered to be in a private fostering arrangement, instead of a family and friends foster placement, although the local authority have been involved in arranging the placements. Although the children's welfare has been safeguarded by an allocated social worker visiting and supporting them, it continues to be a seriously inappropriate use of private fostering, and does not safeguard the long term needs of the children. Social workers also do not have clear guidance on prohibiting arrangements and imposing requirements where appropriate. Private foster carers benefit from having an allocated supervising social worker from the fostering team. The supervising social workers show a commitment to the private foster carers, giving emotional and practical support where necessary. Children and young people have also been given appropriate support and advice. Young people's views are listened to, and in particular young people have benefited from support in relation to ensuring positive contact with family and friends. The local authority has developed leaflets on private fostering, one specifically designed for parents/carers and one for young people. However, these leaflets are not routinely given to carers, parents or young people. The local authority has begun to raise the awareness of private fostering. The number of notifications and known private fostering arrangements remains low however, with the authority currently supporting only one arrangement. The large number of language schools in the area have been contacted and informed of the need to notify private fostering arrangements. Leaflets have been disseminated to all relevant agencies and community settings to promote awareness. Information is further available to members of the public and professionals on the council's website. The local authority has developed forms to assist professionals, parents, carers and social workers in notifying a private fostering arrangement in writing. The forms used, however, do not appropriately include all the areas that are required by regulation, which can result in particular safeguarding issues not coming immediately to light, for example whether siblings are being cared for appropriately.

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 local authority has a written statement which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. This is accurate, well considered, up to date and informative for those who may read it. The manager of the fostering team is the named contact for professionals to seek advice from. This manager has a good understanding of the relevant legislation and good practice guidance. There is a private fostering sub group to the Local Safeguarding Children Board, which addresses the short term and long term safeguarding implications. The local

authority reports annually to the Director of Children's Services and to the Local Safeguarding Children Board, which includes an evaluation of its work on how they are adequately safeguarding privately fostered children. The local authority commissioned a benchmarking audit of the private fostering service in Bournemouth earlier this year. This provided a detailed report on the awareness of workers and other professionals of the relevant regulations and procedures, the quality of the current service and recommendations of how to improve practice. The recommendations have been, or are due to be acted upon, resulting in better outcomes for privately fostered children. A named worker is to be recruited who will have lead responsibility for undertaking private fostering duties, and training is to be provided to new staff during their induction. The new leaflets distributed throughout the council were as a result of this audit. However, there has been very limited formal monitoring and oversight of private fostering case work. The case records have not been audited. The records of private fostering arrangements have not contained the records required by regulation, and are not comprehensive and well organised. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. All staff receive training in equality and diversity. The service promptly uses interpreters where necessary and leaflets can easily be translated into a different language where needed. Assessments of carers include their ability to meet the child's religious, cultural and language needs, and the workers are knowledgeable about signposting carers on to different community groups and 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
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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 a notification of a private fostering arrangement contains the information specified in Schedule 1, in particular the names of any siblings and who they are living with (NMS 2, Regulation 3)
- ensure that the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangement is determined in accordance with the regulations, in particular that the information detailed in Schedule 2 and 3 is considered at each visit to the child (NMS 3, Regulation 7 and 8)
- ensure that the assessment of the suitability of private foster carers is completed within 42 working days (NMS 3)
- ensure that following a notification the responsible officer speaks to and, if practicable to do so, visits every parent or person with parental responsibility for the child (NMS 3, Regulation 7.1)
- ensure that at each initial and subsequent visit to a child the officer speaks to the child alone unless it is considered inappropriate (NMS 3, Regulation 7 and 8)

- ensure that the written report completed after each visit to the child covers the examination of the areas detailed in Schedule 2 and 3 and includes the conclusions drawn, whether the child was seen alone, the child's wishes and feelings, the child's welfare, and whether the placement is satisfactory (NMS 3, Regulation 4, 7 and 8)
- develop a programme of communication activities to promote awareness (NMS 2)
- review a sample of individual child and private foster carer records regularly (NMS 7).