



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## LOCAL COUNCIL PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS

### **Barnet Private Fostering**

**Barnet House  
1255 High Road  
Whetstone  
London  
N20 OEJ**

*Lead Inspector*  
Mrs Angela Grier

*Key Announced Inspection*

5<sup>th</sup> December 2006

09:30

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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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](http://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** Barnet Private Fostering

**Address** Barnet House  
1255 High Road  
Whetstone  
London  
N20 OEJ

**Telephone number** 0208 359 2000

**Fax number** 0208 359 5749

**Email address**

**Local Authority Web  
address**

# **SUMMARY**

## **London Borough of Barnet**

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

The inspection took place over a period of two days. The inspection began on the 5<sup>th</sup> December 2006 and was completed by the 7<sup>th</sup> December 2006. The inspection of Barnet's Private Fostering Arrangements included meeting with the fostering service manager and the team manager for the newly formed Kinship and Permanence Team. The inspector interviewed the Communications Officer for Children and Families division and the designated keeper of the register of private foster carers. The inspector also met with the Chair of the Safeguarding Children Board for Barnet. While attempts were made to make telephone contact with the Chair of the Children's Fund in Barnet Voluntary Services, this was unsuccessful. The inspection also involved case tracking three private fostering cases. Discussion took place with the assistant divisional manager and the team manager regarding the possibility of visiting the carers. It was agreed that as the process of assessment had just begun with these carers, it would not be appropriate to visit them to discuss the service they were receiving from the local authority. There are two recommendations made which look at the need to publish information in languages other than English and to provide training, which is taken into the community to encourage registration.

While Private Fostering Arrangements are not regulated services, they are private arrangements and Local Authorities have functions and duties with regard to children that are privately fostered. The Commission for Social Care Inspection has agreed to inspect all Local Authorities against the new National Minimum Standards over the next three years. The London Borough of Barnet is one of the Local Authorities whose Private Fostering Arrangements have been inspected in the first year. It should therefore be noted that in comparison to those Local Authorities due to be inspected in years two and three, those in year one have had less opportunity to progress work in this area.

It should be noted that the optional sections towards the end of the report have not been assessed and therefore these sections have been left blank.

### **What the local authority does well:**

The London Borough of Barnet has made a good start in promoting awareness with a multi agency approach which was targeted to health, education, housing, social services and the voluntary sector including African and Asian communities. The communications strategy was written in July 2005 and is under constant review.

The Private Fostering register was launched on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2005 at a multi faith conference and was backed up by a leaflet and poster campaign. There is a dedicated Private Fostering web page on the Barnet Council web site giving comprehensive information about private fostering and includes a notification form.

The person responsible for maintaining the new register reports on the progress of the campaign to the Safeguarding Children Board every six months.

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

This is the first inspection against the National Minimum Standards of the London Borough of Barnet private fostering arrangements.

## **What they could do better:**

The local authority understands the need to reach all the different and diverse communities in the borough. Workshops have been arranged to keep the private fostering high on the agenda of all professionals working in the borough. There are agreed timescales for the work to be carried out by the team and it will be the responsibility of managers to ensure that these timescales are maintained. The local authority should consider translating existing documents into languages commonly used in the borough. The local authority should consider providing training packages which can be taken into the local community groups to inform existing private foster carers who have not registered to access help and support from the borough.

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](mailto: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, 6

Quality in this outcome is good. The judgement has been made using available evidence from meetings with key staff, examination of part of the publicity literature, inspection of three files and the response from three questionnaires. This newly formed team has been allocated direct resources to develop the private fostering service and has plans to extend the service if required.

### **EVIDENCE:**

Since July 2005 the local authority has begun to promote awareness of the issues which surround private fostering. The local authority has provided a clear legal definition of private fostering and includes leaflets about private fostering in all their information packs. The social work team in the hospitals has included hospital junior doctors and paediatricians in their training sessions for staff. There is a dedicated web page for private fostering on the council's site. The launch of the private fostering register was at a multi faith



conference attended by 120 professionals from various agencies within the boroughs of Barnet and Enfield.

Barnet does not have their own in house translation service and uses a translation/interpreter service from a private company. There is a paragraph on the back of the leaflets in different languages but this will not be suitable for people who do not have English as their first language. The local authority intends to target materials towards local community groups and seek their help to produce information in individual languages. It is recommended that all information about private fostering be made available in an appropriate range of languages.

The interview with the Chair of the Safeguarding Children Board confirmed that the authority is aware of the need to have policies and procedures in place to ensure that there is disqualification process in place to protect children. Any such actions would have ramifications for children under the Children Act 1989 and this has implications for future budget projections for the Looked After Children's team.

As the team has just begun the work of assessing private foster carers it has not tested the process of responding to un-notified arrangements.

The local authority's written statement on private fostering makes clear their duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need and that privately fostered children can be removed from their private foster home, if there is sufficient reason to believe that they are or likely to be at risk of significant harm. The local authority has devised a form that encourages the parents and private foster carers to come to an arrangement that is in the best interest of the child. Information has been disseminated to schools, GPs and all health professionals to encourage notification to the Kinship and Permanence team.

The establishment of a new Kinship and Permanence team with a new social worker post will cover all the assessments of private foster carers, once it has been agreed by a manager that the child is being privately fostered. The role of the team is to provide support to private foster carers including help with benefits and other welfare issues. The team became responsible for private fostering referrals in October 2006. The inspector saw three files which have been referred to the team during October. The timescales for the initial assessment has been kept and the private foster carers are clear about the way the local authority intends to proceed. On one of the files seen by the inspector the social worker had made contact with the parent of the child being privately fostered and was encouraging a formal arrangement to be set up in the interest of all parties. The manager of the team understood the need to provide support to parents which may lead to the child being returned to the care of the parent.

The local authority is developing a leaflet specifically for children who are privately fostered. The protocol for the team is to ensure that children are seen individually and their views are properly recorded within the Initial Assessment framework. The team has plans to develop a support group for privately fostered children. The team manager told the inspector that information about the child remains confidential to the child. Information has been provided to schools to encourage notification of any suspected private fostering arrangements. The Chair of the Safeguarding Children Board confirmed that schools have been requested to ask questions about parental responsibility when new families apply for school places.

The local authority is in the process of devising a Safer Parenting Handbook which is due to be published in December 2006. The inspector was told by the team manager that private foster carers will be given a hardback file to use as a memory box for the children they care for on a private fostering arrangement. It is recommended that the local authority should consider establishing a training package for private foster carers and take this training into local community groups, to encourage prospective or existing private foster carers to come forward and register.

# 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):**

1,7

Quality in this outcome is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including examination of the draft leaflet for children and young people, interviews with staff and the case tracking of three files.

### **EVIDENCE:**

The launch of the register of private foster carers informed all professionals working within the borough of Barnet of the need to support this initiative and of the process that would take place within the Kinship and Permanence team. Social workers in this team have briefed their colleagues in other teams and information will be given to all new employees as part of their induction.

The electronic database SWIFT is used to record all instances of private fostering in the borough. The records on SWIFT are monitored and will flag up the need for action to be taken. There is a flowchart for staff to describe how to record private fostering arrangements and this is published on the council's intranet. There are individual files for private foster carers and for each privately fostered child and these files are maintained in the same confidential and secure manner as other files within the department. The Performance Information team are responsible for the returns to DfES and the numbers of privately fostered children is included in the service performance indicators that are monitored and assessed by senior management.

The local authority has received an increase in their referrals since the system was established. In March 2006 seven children were known to be privately fostered. In September 2006 there were 13 known cases of private fostering. Figures provided by the local authority provide a breakdown of who made the

referrals and this information indicates that the initial launch reached schools, the voluntary sector and a self referral from a child.

Updates on the progress of the private fostering service are provided to the Safeguarding Children Board meetings which are chaired by the Head of Children and Families.

The information provided as part of the inspection shows a clear plan to improve and monitor the service.

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

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

No

Are there any outstanding recommendations from the last 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	PF4	The local authority should consider training for private foster carers which is taken to local communities.
2	PF2	Information about the private fostering arrangements service should be made available in an appropriate range of languages commonly used in the borough.

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

Southgate Area Office  
Solar House, 1st Floor  
282 Chase Road  
Southgate  
London  
N14 6HA

National Enquiry Line:

Telephone: 0845 015 0120 or 0191 233 3323

Textphone: 0845 015 2255 or 0191 233 3588

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: [enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk)

Web: [www.csci.org.uk](http://www.csci.org.uk)

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