

London Borough of Barking & Dagenham Private Fostering Arrangements Service

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Sharon Lewis
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Address	London Borough of Barking & Dagenham 512a Heathway Heathway DAGENHAM Essex RM10 7SJ
Telephone number	020 82272233
Email	Tolis.Vouyioukas@lbbd.gov.uk
Registered person	London Borough Of barking And Dagenham
Registered manager	Baljeet Nagra
Responsible individual	Baljeet Nagra
Date of last inspection	

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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 London Borough of Barking and Dagenham's Private Fostering Service is currently based in the Placements Service, within the Safeguarding & Rights division. This division of Children's Services is headed by the Divisional Director, Safeguarding & Rights. It is overseen by the Group Manager, Placements and consists of one fostering social worker with a lead on private fostering who is line managed by the fostering team manager. The local authority has received over 20 notifications. At the time of the inspection there were five private foster care arrangements .

Summary

The purpose of this key announced inspection is to ensure the private fostering service safeguards and promotes the rights and welfare of children. All seven of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering were examined. This was in relation to all the Every Child Matters outcome areas. Private fostering is a new area of work and substantial time has been spent raising awareness and building links across various council departments, faith groups and voluntary agencies. Children benefit from good health outcomes. Great efforts are made to address children's behavioural, emotional and physical needs. All other outcome areas were judged to be satisfactory. The local authority is fully aware of the areas for further improvement. A service development has been produced. This demonstrates the local authority's commitment to securing positive outcomes for privately fostered children. In addition to reducing any risks to their welfare and safety.

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 Barking and Dagenham's first inspection of their private fostering service. Therefore there are no previous requirements.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The local authority effectively assists in meeting children's health needs. The initial assessment of private fostering arrangements addresses health needs. This includes registration with a doctor, regular optical and dental checks and the ongoing monitoring of health appointments. Staff ensure that children's immunisations are up-to-date and they are meeting their developmental milestones. A health and safety checklist assists in ensuring that accommodation safeguards children's welfare. Children benefit from a range of additional specialist health services. Social work intervention enables the monitoring of children's physical, mental and emotional health. Children receive services from the Children and Adolescent Health Service (CAMHS), paediatricians and the audiology department. The local authority recognises the need to further promote good health outcomes for children. Future developments include delivering of health training for private foster carers. This will be a joint partnership with the Looked after Children Health and Education Service (LACHES) nurse and a Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) health representative. The fostering service also aim to provide greater accessibility to children's mental health services to tackle the issues of separation and loss.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children benefit from a publicity strategy which assists in raising the general awareness of private fostering. Leaflets and posters highlight the definition of private fostering and the importance of notifying the fostering service. Information includes contact numbers, notification requirements, the procedure for notifying, the benefits of notification and possible consequences of non-notification. The fostering service has the option of translating private fostering publicity and information material, into appropriate community languages. The strategy includes regular advertisements in local newspapers and publications. The local authority also provides targeted and current information to those who may come into contact with privately fostered children, including teachers, health visitors, nurses, doctors, housing officers and community workers. The fostering service distributes information throughout the various council services, the Local Safeguarding Children Board and partner agencies, faith groups and throughout the voluntary sector. Staff additionally highlight private fostering during the general fostering recruitment campaigns. The local authority aims to safeguard and promote the welfare of privately fostered children. Private fostering assessment protocols provide guidance in determining each child's vulnerability. Assessments consider the individual needs of the child. This includes their educational, religious, cultural, linguistic, physical, emotional and health needs. Staff evaluate the capacity of the private foster carer to effectively meet the child's needs. The assessment considers the suitability of the household, premises and the contact arrangements with their birth family. Where a child is in need, referrals are made to the relevant child care team. The local authority may provide additional resources and support to meet the child's specific needs. This may include reviewing the viability of the arrangement and offering the parent alternative forms of support to care for their child. Safeguarding concerns trigger the implementation of the child protection procedures. The private fostering procedures identify the timescales to visit within seven working days. In the majority of cases staff visit within this timescale. The procedures states the arrangement will go to panel for ratification. This has not been happening. Procedures do not detail the action to be taken if social workers are repeatedly unable to gain access. Although staff state a strategy meeting will be undertaken, the volume of notifications are small. The service uses a generic multi agency referral form. Children's records evidence that all information as detailed in regulations is available on file, but not in the referral form. The local authority demonstrates the ability to provide a range of advice and support to assist private foster carers and children. Social work intervention positively assists in enhancing the care arrangements, addressing their health, legal status, housing, behavioural and emotional needs. Privately fostered children are able to access information and support when required. This includes visiting social work offices independently. Children receive information relating to complaints and resources that are available within the borough for them. This includes youth services and community participation opportunities. Staff also highlight the local and national voluntary agencies that they can access for help and advice. The local authority recognise the need to specifically produce an information guide for children in private foster care. The local authority provides advice and written information to the parents of children who are privately fostered within their area. This includes contact details of an allocated social worker who they can contact if they have any welfare concerns. Children benefit from staff assistance to maintain contact with their families. Staff work across international boundaries and evidence a commitment to working in partnership with parents.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

The local authority seeks to promote the educational and social needs of children in private foster care. Universal services are in place to encourage and support all children within the borough to enjoy and achieve. There are opportunities through the youth service and community engagement strategies for children to access resources and take part in activities both in and out of school. Developments within the Extended Schools strategy and Children Centres provide opportunities to enhance the educational and social wellbeing of children.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Social workers regularly consult with children living in private fostering arrangements. Children are able to make decisions about their lives and explain their views regarding contact with their parents. At the six weekly visits staff give children the opportunity to express their views. The local authority plans to consult with children to establish if they would like their own support group.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

The local authority examines the economic wellbeing of children in private foster care. Initial visits enable the gathering of financial information. Additional financial support may be available in accordance with Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. This is where an assessment indicates that a child meets the threshold as a child in need and financial assistance is necessary to meet identified needs. The local authority aims to develop a clear assessment of the economic position of parents seeking private fostering arrangements. This information can then inform future planning for children and family support services.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Children receive assurance that staff are aware of their private fostering duties. The Statement of Purpose details the local authority's responsibilities and functions relating to private fostering. The Statement of Purpose includes the legal responsibilities, contact person, assessment details, safeguarding issues, notification process and staff training. In addition to support for children, private foster carers and parents. Interested parties can access the Statement of Purpose on the local authority website. Copies in community languages are also available on request. The monitoring of the private fostering functions assists in promoting positive outcomes for children. Staff maintain records through the computerised integrated recording system. Although written records are not consistently undertaken after each visit. Staff usually visit or maintain telephone contact with children. Monitoring of arrangements are also inconsistent. At times this may be weekly or at other times at intervals of more than six weeks. The local authority maintains a system for recording the number and nature of enquiries received in relation to private fostering and the outcomes. The local authority provides a written report each year, for consideration by the Director of Children's Services, which includes an evaluation of the outcomes of its work in relation to privately fostered children within its area. In addition to reporting annually to the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Reports demonstrate that the local authority endeavours to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within private foster care and works positively

with other agencies. Staff within fostering take a lead role in relation to private fostering. Initial visits may involve joint visiting with social workers within the children's team. Staff raise the profile of private fostering through training team members and other teams within the organisation. There are no formal arrangements in relation to meeting with children's team, although they strive to work closely together. In addition there is currently no system to review private foster care arrangements. Children will benefit from the local authority's plans to further develop the private fostering service. This includes the scheduling of a private fostering awareness day, mandatory training for children's teams and fostering panel members. In addition to the recruitment of a designated private fostering co-coordinator.

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
2	ensure a worker visits the child within seven days of notification [Regulation 4 (1)]	1 April 2008
7	produce a written report after each visit to the privately fostered child [Regulation 8 (5)].	1 April 2008
7	visit the child in the first year of the private fostering arrangement, at intervals of not more than six weeks [Regulation 8 (1) (a)].	1 May 2008

Recommendations

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

- produce a notification form which includes all information detailed in Schedule 1 [NMS 2]
- consider ratifying private fostering decisions at the fostering panel [NMS 3]
- update procedures to include action to be taken if continually unable to visit a child [NMS 3]
- undertake Criminal Bureau Record checks for members of private fostering households aged over 18 [NMS 3]
- produce an information guide for children in private foster care [NMS 6]
- develop a forum to formally discuss private fostering with involved children's social work staff [NMS7]
- introduce a system to review private foster care arrangements [NMS 7].

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.