

Stoke on Trent City Council Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

Unique reference number	SC068630
Inspection date	6 February 2009
Inspector	David Morgan
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	2nd Floor Glebe Street Children & Young People's Services Stoke on Trent Staffordshire ST4 1RN
Telephone number	
Email	
Registered person	Stoke on Trent City Council
Registered manager	Satinder Gautam
Responsible individual	
Date of last inspection	1 January 1900

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Cripins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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

Stoke-on-Trent City Council's arrangements regarding Private Fostering reflect the Children Act 1989, which defines a privately fostered child as: a child under the age of 16 or 18 if the child is disabled, who is cared for (or will be cared for) and provided with accommodation by someone who is not a parent, a close relative or someone who has no parental responsibility for the child for a continuous period of 28 days or more.

Although the service is described as private fostering, it is distinct from fostering services and is located in the children in need social work section of Children and Young People's Services. A service manager oversees the day to day operation and she is managed by a strategic manager who signs-off decisions.

Children and young people have contributed to the inspection by being contacted in person and through replies to written questions. Approximately 16 children and young people are currently involved in the service.

Summary

This report summarises an announced inspection of the private fostering arrangements in Stoke on Trent. With private fostering, there are only National Minimum Standards applying to Staying Safe and Organisation. The service operates at a good standard overall. There are no major deficits and most areas operate well. Areas requiring development include the provision of information to parents and children. Some improvement is also necessary in areas of monitoring. Issues of equality and diversity are addressed well.

This inspection of the private fostering arrangements is the first and no further inspections are required. No complaints have been received by Ofsted about the service.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Not applicable.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards under this outcome.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

There are satisfactory arrangements in place to notify the local authority about privately fostered children and young people living in its area. Families, carers and professionals have been alerted by a recent programme of publicity and further work in this area is planned in order to access all sections of the community. Documents are available on demand in an appropriate range of languages and formats via translation services. Records indicated that visits are made to children and young people as soon as possible after their referral, subject to statutory timescales and individual circumstances. Such timescales are carefully monitored.

The welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted well. Assessments follow a clear process and properly identify any practical or care issues, for example, regarding health, education and finances. Consultation with young people occurs routinely and in private wherever possible and any individual needs arising from religion or culture are identified. The needs of children already in households are taken into account. Decision-making within the authority is clear, timely and occurs at a senior level.

The local authority provides advice and support to private foster carers as needed. Carers receive information, for example, about the legal position, and regular visits and phone calls which address any subsequent issues. Support is provided to enable children and young people to adhere to their religious beliefs, for example, by clarifying with schools any religious events that might keep children and young people away.

The local authority provides a good level of advice and support to the parents of children who are privately fostered. Given some variations during the development period, social workers now operate at a level above minimum, for example in terms of frequency of contact and in their understanding of private fostering. Written summaries are sent to parents and documents are translated as necessary. However, parents are not always provided with information explaining how to contact social workers or other sources of support.

Children and young people who are privately fostered have good access to information and support when required so that their welfare is safeguarded and promoted. They benefit from use of a variety of methods, including text calls, depending on their age and understanding, and some contact social workers from school by email. Social workers have a good understanding of the vulnerability of children and young people who live away from home. However, not all children and young people have received the written information that is available about private fostering. Privately fostered children and young people have ample opportunities to participate in decisions about their lives, for example, through the assessment and review processes as well as informally. This ensures that their individual wishes are taken into account.

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.

Relevant staff are fully aware of their duties and functions in relation to private fostering; they have a good understanding of the standards and are able to cross-reference effectively with their other responsibilities towards vulnerable children and young people. They know who to consult about any private fostering issues and they benefit from effective training.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Children and young people, their parents and carers have access to a range of community services and there is an in-house translation service. Individual issues are identified and addressed appropriately. Social workers ensure that cultural

and religious matters are given sufficient priority and also that education is supported in order to maximise the life-chances of children and young people.

The local authority has satisfactory systems in place to monitor private fostering. There is particularly effective leadership and managers know how the service is operating on a day to day basis and identify areas for development. However, managers cannot identify the number of enquiries about private fostering. Also, although a system is in place to routinely monitor a random sample of records, it does not automatically consider a number from private fostering or address them in the way required. Such improvements would be a useful contribution to the existing monitoring processes.

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
----------	--------	----------

Recommendations

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

- ensure that parents are provided with information, in different languages and formats as appropriate, on the advice and support that may be available from the authority itself and from other agencies, and, that they receive the contact details of an allocated social worker (NMS 5.3 and 5.6)
- ensure that privately fostered children are provided with information about their private foster carer and his responsibilities, the meaning of their privately fostered status, and their right to be safeguarded (NMS 6.2)
- ensure there is a system for recording the number and nature of enquiries received in relation to private fostering (NMS 7.6)
- ensure the local authority regularly reviews a sample of individual child and private foster carer records in order to check the matters required (NMS 7.7).