

Sheffield Local Authority Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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Inspector	Jacqueline Malcolm
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Address	Floor 2 Castle Marketing Building Exchange Street Sheffield South Yorkshire S1 2AH
Telephone number	0114 273 5155
Email	
Registered person	Family Placement Service (scc)
Registered manager	Pauline Turner
Responsible individual	
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

Sheffield local authority is responsible for identifying and responding to notifications and monitoring private fostering arrangements. A social worker is employed to respond to all private fostering notifications and referrals. They have been located in the adoption team since 2007 and are supported by a team manager. A senior manager in the adoption service makes the final decision about overall suitability. There are currently three private fostering arrangements in place.

Summary

This was the first announced inspection in which Sheffield local authority identify and respond to notifications and monitor private fostering arrangements in the area. All of the National Minimum Standards (NMS) were assessed. There are a number of strengths in the way that the service is delivered. There is a clear management structure and lines of accountability. The service has policies and procedures to support private fostering arrangements that make clear the duties and responsibilities of relevant staff. A lot of work has been done to raise awareness about private fostering and, although the notification figures are low, the responses from professionals have been positive. Once a private fostering arrangement is referred, visits to assess the suitability of carers are carried out. Support, advice and information are provided to carers, children and young people and their parents. However, not all staff have responded in a timely way when a private fostering arrangement is identified and needs to be referred. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosures and agency checks are not always obtained within appropriate timescales. This causes delays in deciding on the suitability of an arrangement and does not sufficiently protect children and young people. Not all carers are aware about decisions affecting the outcome of an assessment of their suitability.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of the local 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 satisfactory.

The local authority has a good notification system to promote awareness of private fostering arrangements. These are supported by updated policies and procedures, which make clear the definition of private fostering and the action to be taken. Publicity material has been sent out to agencies in the local authority and external services. For example, health, education, voluntary, leisure and community groups from the diverse communities in the area. Information is also available on the local authority's website, including the Sheffield safeguarding website. Leaflets are available in the eight languages used in Sheffield. Training sessions are delivered by the manager and social worker with the lead in private fostering arrangements. These initiatives have been positively received by other professionals. Children and young people are living with carers whose suitability to care for them is not always known. The local authority is made aware

about private fostering arrangements that have not been notified in accordance with the regulations. However, some placements in excess of 28 days are not allocated in a timely manner. The local authority assesses the suitability of potential carers using an approved format and these are completed and a decision is made, pending the return of agency checks and CRB disclosures. Not all agency checks are responded to in a timely manner and the tracking process is not clear. There is also a delay in the completion and sending of CRB disclosures to ensure their return and decision about suitability within the timescale set by the local authority of 42 days. Not all carers are aware about decisions regarding the outcome of their suitability assessments. The quality of life for most children and young people living within private fostering arrangements has improved. Private foster carers and children are visited by a social worker. This happens mostly within the timescales. All parties have access to information and advice, including a welcome pack. Children and young people are encouraged to express their views and most are seen alone during the visits. Parents are clear about their responsibilities to meet the financial costs of placements and the Local Authority provide written welfare rights advice. Contact between parent and child is promoted and children benefit from this.

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 statement on private fostering has been updated and is endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Panel. It sets out the duties and functions in relation to private fostering arrangements and how the local authority intend to carry them out. However, not all relevant staff have an appropriate understanding of their responsibilities once an arrangement has been identified as private fostering. For example, an identified arrangement was allocated in excess of 28 days. The local authority has a system for monitoring the way it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering arrangements in the area. There is a dedicated social worker with private fostering lead and good management support with clear lines of accountability. A multi-agency private fostering working group is chaired by a member from the Local Safeguarding Children Board. They meet regularly to monitor and develop services for children and young people who are privately fostered. The local authority reports annually to the chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board on how it satisfies itself that the welfare of privately fostered children is safeguarded. Shortfalls in practice are identified. An action plan is in place to ensure that practice is improved and monitored. Some of the actions have been progressed within timescales. One of the areas identified by the local authority for improvement is the delay in meeting the timescales for signing off suitability assessments. This has not yet been fully implemented.

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 decisions about the overall suitability of arrangements are made within required timescales (NMS 3.4)
- ensure that carers know what to expect regarding decisions affecting the outcome of an assessment of their suitability (NMS 4.1)
- ensure that CRB and other checks are carried out and followed up in a timely manner (NMS 7.2)
- ensure that all relevant staff have an appropriate understanding of the local authority's duties and functions in relation to private fostering arrangements and their responsibilities (NMS 1).