



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

LOCAL COUNCIL PRIVATE FOSTERING ARRANGEMENTS

Lewisham Local Authority Private Fostering Arrangements

**Laurence House
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Catford
London
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Announced Inspection
5 and 6 October 2006

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. 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

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SUMMARY

Lewisham Social Care & Health

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

This inspection was conducted over two days in October 2006 and included:

- Discussion with the social worker assessing the private fostering arrangement, (at the time this was the only current arrangement known).
- Discussion with the service manager and other professionals within the authority, with responsibility for the service.
- Inspection of relevant documentation.

The inspection was also informed by the service manager's own written assessment of the strengths of the service and the areas where urgent progress was still needed.

No visit was made to the carers, as part of this inspection, as their assessment had not yet been completed, but their views were sought by means of questionnaires.

While private fostering arrangements are not regulated services, local authorities have functions and duties with regard to children who 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 Lewisham is one of the local authorities whose private fostering arrangements have been inspected in the first year. It should be noted that in comparison to those authorities due to be inspected in years two and three, those in year one would have had less opportunity to progress work in this area, by the time of their inspection.

The service was in its infancy and it was too early to test the effectiveness of what was being put in place. This inspection therefore concentrated on the service's potential and capacity.

What the local authority does well:

Lewisham is regarded as having made a good start in meeting its responsibilities to privately fostered children and young people. This is because of evident managers' awareness, the confidence expressed by staff and other strengths in the work of the children's department.

Lewisham expected private foster carers to value and to understand how to promote the child's culture, racial identity, faith, preferred language, sexual orientation and differing abilities.

Lewisham expected assessment and placement visits to include speaking to the child / young person alone, unless inappropriate to do so. The procedures developed placed emphasis on ensuring that the young person would be listened to and their views acted upon.

A temporary specialist private fostering post had been created, to help in setting the new service. This was at managerial social work level, directly responsible to the service manager, in recognition that the task involved much strategic planning and development work. It was envisaged that, in the longer term, the post would be advertised as permanent, at senior practitioner level.

The service manager (for children's referral and assessment) was directly managing the work. This was to ensure that this area had high priority and progressed quickly, pending the permanent specialist post holder starting.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This was the first inspection conducted by CSCI under the national minimum standards for private fostering, which came into force in July 2005 and the children (private arrangements for fostering) regulations 2005.

However, it was noted that Lewisham Children's Social Care has undergone a considerable transformation in the last 12-18 months. From a position of high staff vacancies and extensive use of agency staff the service had only recently been fully staffed with predominately permanent staff. This meant that the department had had to focus on the highest priority child protection cases and court work. The service manager was confident that now that the department has achieved a more settled management team and work force, it should be in a position to move things forward quickly in private fostering.

What they could do better:

Lewisham was in its infancy in developing private fostering (for the reasons discussed above). At the time of inspection there was one privately fostered child only, whom the authority was aware of. This indicated the need for a more consistent approach to information sharing and the need to raise the profile around privately fostered children in the borough.

Although a letter was circulated to professionals in 2005, the lack of referrals would indicate that a one-off mail shot was not sufficient.

The authority needed to urgently find effective ways to promote awareness, so as to ensure that it receives notifications about private foster arrangements. This should include, for example, having regular and appropriate publicity campaigns and making links with representatives of the diverse population such as local churches, faith groups, places of worship, local voluntary and community organisations, refugee groups and organisations working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

It was reassuring, though, that the challenges had been identified by the service manager in the assessment that he made of the strengths and weaknesses of the service, to inform the inspection. Action to address such challenges was being progressed quickly.

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 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

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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 area was adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including a visit to the service.

Although Lewisham was in its infancy in developing its private fostering service, thought and planning had been devoted to this task in the three months preceding this inspection. Quick progress had been made in the previous four weeks to establish procedures, protocols, staff training and information.

This gave confidence that the authority would now be able to respond to notifications and to conduct appropriate assessments and therefore to progress safeguarding and promoting the welfare of privately fostered children.

EVIDENCE:

Lewisham private fostering service was in its infancy. The authority had just received some notifications of privately fostering arrangements, which had been allocated to a social worker. The service manager said that they would be responded to within one week of them being received. The notification, which had been previously received, was responded to within the set timescales and was at an advanced stage of assessment.

The service manager assured that the authority was now at the stage where they were ready to receive and respond appropriately and swiftly to notifications and were therefore starting a full publicity campaign to promote awareness.

Leaflets for children, parents and carers and other means of publicity were being printed. In fact the leaflets for the carers were ready by the second day of inspection and it was envisaged that full-scale publicity would start within a couple of weeks. Publicity material being prepared was not yet in the range of community languages, but one of the first tasks for the steering group (referred to below) was to identify the community languages to prioritise.

Publicity about private fostering had been included in the free magazine distributed to all Lewisham households and it was Lewisham's intention that such would be a regular feature in the magazine.

The service manager, in a recent presentation to head-teachers about the role of his department, used the opportunity to inform them about private fostering. He envisaged that much energy would be devoted to liaise with education, health, faith and community representatives to raise awareness and enable notifications.

The service manager had also talked to all staff in the department about private fostering, the definition under the Act and the threshold. He was therefore confident that all staff were clear of what they needed to do and whom to contact if they became aware of possible private fostering arrangements.

The authority appreciated that in most cases lack of notification from carers would be due to ignorance or anxiety. The service manager said that training for staff and other professionals would emphasise that carers needed to be informed, counselled and encouraged to come forward.

However the authority was also putting in place proper procedures for handling disqualifications and for prosecutions or prohibitions, should there be concerns about the motives of the carers and the welfare of the child. The legal department was represented on the steering group and had already advised on procedures and protocols that were being finalised. Such issues would be immediately taken to service manager level, to ensure prompt action.

A process for the authority to handle appeals, against decisions such as refusals to lift disqualifications or decisions to impose a prohibition or requirement, was still to be considered.

Live issues for the service manager, which he was considering how to progress, were about education for the privately fostered children, housing when they reached 16 and generally how to use the legislation to ensure that they would not have less opportunities than the children looked after by the authority. The service manager was confident that these important issues would be given due and continuing consideration, as the authority regarded children in private fostering arrangements as children in need.

Private fostering had been on the agenda of Lewisham safeguarding board meetings. From that it had been decided that a steering group would be formed to include representatives from a wide range of sectors, such as education, health and suitable representatives of the community. The group was to start meeting at the end of October 2006.

Funding had been allocated for a specialist post, at social work team leader level, in recognition that setting the private fostering service involved much strategic planning and development work. The person would initially undertake assessments stemming from private fostering referrals and raise awareness of the need to refer children in these fostering placements. The person would report on the work to senior managers, the local safeguarding board and other fora. It was envisaged that, in the longer term, the post would be advertised at senior practitioner level.

The service manager said that, if the number of notifications warranted it and once the size of the task could be more accurately predicted, he would submit a business plan to the director regarding the number of social work staff needed for private fostering. There was also a contingency plan in place. This was to allocate notifications to qualified social workers in the children's referral and assessment department.

Lewisham's expectations required an initial assessment on all notifications to determine whether they met the private fostering threshold and a comprehensive assessment to be undertaken, within the timescales laid down by the national assessment framework.

Such assessment would take account of the private foster carer's parenting capacity and the child's development needs. This would include assessment of how the carer would deal with diversity issues, contribute to the maintaining of a positive identity for the child, promote health, education, emotional and behavioural development and social presentation. That the above was being done for the current arrangement was evident from the discussion with the assessing social worker and from inspection of extracts of documentation kept on the file.

The service manager said that additional resources would be made available if carers needed them to meet cultural, religious or any other need of the children. Consideration would also be given to a prohibition notice if, even with support and advice, carers would not be able to meet such needs.

It was also evident from the discussion, comments from the carer and the file that the social worker had been ascertaining the views of the child and had been liaising with the parents. The social worker had been supporting the mother with some practical issues, which, if resolved, might enable a return home for the child. He had been looking at the financial arrangements and how the department might be able to help if necessary. The assessment had been considering the suitability of the carer and of the premises; police and other checks had been initiated.

The social worker had been offering support and advice to the carers also, for example about entitlement to financial benefits, educational provision, contact with parents. This was also confirmed by the carer.

The social worker was clear of the expectations that visits should be carried out at least every six weeks, once the assessment was completed and that they should include seeing the child. For the time being visits had been conducted weekly and included speaking to the young person on her own.

Both the social worker and the service manager were clear that, once the assessment would be completed, the decision about the suitability of the arrangement would be signed off at team manager's level or, if contentious, at service manager's level. Approved private foster carers would be given information in writing about their responsibilities under the regulations and standards and also those of the local authority; specific training would be planned for them.

It was discussed, during the inspection, that the service manager might want to establish some form of decision-making forum to consider assessments and give recommendations to the service manager. This would be helpful in better informing the service manager's decision in case of contentious issues or should there be a significant number of assessments being conducted at the same time.

The service manager recognised that work with birth families would be integral to the work of the private fostering service. He had access to Lewisham's facilities for interpreting and translation. Thus the service manager was confident that every family for whom English was not their first language would have important documents and letters translated in their own chosen language and interpreters would be used for face to face work.

Lewisham children or adults with disabilities teams would provide the specialism needed when a particular impairment required it.

Lewisham had a number of contracts with Barnados', to provide advocacy services to looked after children. The authority was looking to extend these advocacy projects to include children in private fostering arrangements. That was an ongoing piece of work at the time of inspection.

As mentioned above in the report, information for children had been printed and was going to be distributed in October 2006. This would include information about private fostering, what it would mean for them, the role of the social worker, what children could expect from their carer and how to complain. The authority had not yet started to drafted the following, although was already thinking about it:

- A version of the leaflets suitable for younger children.
- A version of the leaflets in the range of community languages.
- Information for young people with disabilities approaching the age of 18, with details of Lewisham's procedure for assessing eligibility for adult community care services
- Information about the arrangements for providing advice and assistance to those privately fostered children who would qualify for this (under section 24(2)(e) of the children act 1989.

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 area was adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including a visit to the service.

There was a clear aim for the service, backed by objectives and policies mostly supporting the main areas of its intended work. These needed to be drawn together in a single document (the statement of purpose) so that all stakeholders could be clearly informed about the authority's duties and functions in relation to private fostering.

While the monitoring of the service was not yet established, as the service was too new to be reviewed, there were systems being put in place and clear expectations of performance. This would aid monitoring and review.

EVIDENCE:

Lewisham aimed to provide a private fostering service that ensured that all children who are privately fostered are assessed, reviewed and supported, to make certain that they achieve their true potential. Lewisham also aimed to provide information and publicity in the community and amongst all their professional colleagues. This would be to enable and facilitate notifications of private fostering arrangements so that the authority can then ensure that all privately fostered children are safeguarded.

Although the service was in its infancy, the available evidence demonstrated that the service was being developed consistently with its aim.

The authority was drafting, but had not yet completed, its statement of purpose, to include all the information required by the relevant national

minimum standards. It was envisaged that the first draft would be ready by the end of October 2006, to be discussed at the first meeting of the newly formed steering group.

Clearly it was important that the authority should complete its statement of purpose quickly, so that all stakeholders can be clear of the authority's duties and function in relations to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out.

However most of the information that was to be included in the document was already available in the department. It was contained in a variety of documents such as policies, protocols, committee papers, minutes of safeguarding boards etc. This and the training received, meant that relevant staff and elected members in Lewisham should be aware of their duties and functions in relation to private fostering. For example, the service manager assured and gave some illustrations of how information about the local authority's responsibilities to privately fostered children had been cascaded down to staff in children's services through different fora and meetings.

It was not possible to properly assess the authority's monitoring of the way in which it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. As the service was in its infancy, with one assessment only being undertaken at the time of inspection, the evidence was still too limited to enable proper consideration of the effectiveness of monitoring. The judgment refers therefore to potential and capacity.

The points discussed above, in the section on safeguarding, regarding what the authority was putting in place and the resources that would be available in the department, were evidence also that the authority had given proper thought to monitoring.

The present computer system had been amended to enable all notifications to be logged, backed by a manual system for information such as reviews etc., which could not yet be logged electronically.

Additionally the service manager said that Lewisham was purchasing a new improved information technology system, to aid the work of all the children's departments. The service manager was involved in setting it up to ensure that it would be appropriate and compliant with the relevant standards and regulations for private fostering and therefore be a useful monitoring and management information tool. It would also be a useful tool for practitioners, both in guiding them in what is required and for showing them how they discharged the authority's duties, by presenting relevant performance indicators.

The above would complement regular staff supervision, audit of reports and other management monitoring and support means already in place. For

example, the present audit structure, in the children's referral and assessment department (where private fostering was set), involved monthly reviews of a random number of files by managers with different roles, including the chair of the child protection board.

The responsibility for annual evaluations of the service (and reports to the director of children's services and the safeguarding board) has been set with the service manager.

Optional

Being Healthy

JUDGEMENT –

The team of London fostering inspectors decided not to assess this outcome for privately fostered children, as there are no regulations or national minimum standards that specifically relate to it.

EVIDENCE:

Enjoying and Achieving

JUDGEMENT –

The team of London fostering inspectors decided not to assess this outcome for privately fostered children, as there are no regulations or national minimum standards that specifically relate to it.

EVIDENCE:

Making a Positive Contribution

JUDGEMENT –

The team of London fostering inspectors decided not to assess this outcome for privately fostered children, as there are no regulations or national minimum standards that specifically relate to it.

EVIDENCE:

Achieving Economic Well Being

JUDGEMENT –

The team of London fostering inspectors decided not to assess this outcome for privately fostered children, as there are no regulations or national minimum standards that specifically relate to it.

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

STAYING SAFE		MANAGEMENT	
Standard No	Score	Standard No	Score
2	2	1	2
3	2	7	2
4	2		
5	2		
6	2		

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	PF2 PF3 PF4 PF5 PF6 PF7	That the authority urgently finds effective ways to promote awareness, taking into consideration the diverse community needs in the borough, so as to ensure that: - It receives notifications about private fostering arrangements - Is able to safeguard the children in such arrangements and to monitor how effectively this is done. - Provide the children, parents and carers with advice and support.
2	PF2	That the authority urgently establishes a process to handle appeals against decisions such as refusals to lift disqualifications or decisions to impose a prohibition or requirement.
3	PF3	That the service manager considers whether establishing some form of forum, to advise on assessments, would be helpful to him in better informing his decisions in case of contentious issues or should there be a significant number of assessments being conducted.
4	PF6	That the authority gives priority to the drafting of the following for children: - A version of the information leaflets that would be suitable for younger children. - Information leaflets in the range of community languages. - Information for children with disabilities approaching the age of 18, with details of Lewisham's procedure for assessing eligibility for adult community care services. - The arrangements for providing advice and assistance to those privately fostered children who would qualify for this (under section 24(2)(e) of the children act 1989).
5	PF1	That the authority completes a written statement of

		purpose, drawing together in a single documents its duties and functions in relation to private fostering.
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