

# Buckinghamshire County Council Private Fostering Arrangements Service

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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<b>Inspector</b>	Sophie Jane Barton
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<b>Address</b>	Buckinghamshire County Council Adult Social Care County Hall Walton Street AYLESBURY Buckinghamshire HP20 1YU
<b>Telephone number</b>	01296 387630
<b>Email</b>	fostering@buckscc.gov.uk
<b>Registered person</b>	Buckinghamshire County Council
<b>Registered manager</b>	Graham Smith
<b>Responsible individual</b>	
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	

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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**

<b>Outstanding:</b>	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
<b>Good:</b>	this aspect of the provision is strong
<b>Satisfactory:</b>	this aspect of the provision is sound
<b>Inadequate:</b>	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

## **Service information**

### **Brief description of the service**

Buckinghamshire County Council's private fostering service is managed within the fostering service, and in particular in the Family and Friends team. The initial assessments of children and young people are carried out by the childcare assessment teams, and an allocated childcare social worker continues to support the child. The specialist private foster care social worker assesses, supervises and supports the private foster carers. The service is further supported by a private fostering panel which consists of two children's services divisional managers. At the time of the inspection there were six notified private fostering arrangements in place.

### **Summary**

At this announced full inspection all key standards were assessed. This is the first inspection of Buckinghamshire County Council's private fostering arrangements. Overall, the authority's private fostering arrangements are satisfactory. In many respects the authority exceeds the national minimum standards, with good systems, procedures and monitoring in place. However, there have been breaches in regulations, particularly in relation to children not always being seen during statutory visits, social workers not visiting regularly enough and not evidencing full discussions to ensure the private fostering arrangements remain fully appropriate.

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 the first inspection.

### **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 satisfactory.

Children and young people's welfare in private fostering arrangements is being safeguarded. There are many areas of good practice in relation to how the service ensures the arrangements are appropriate for the child, although there have been areas that fall short of ensuring good practice at all times. This year has seen the appointment of a dedicated specialist private fostering social worker who is based in the Family and Friends fostering team. The worker and the manager of this team have considerable knowledge of private fostering, are very committed and dedicated to providing a good service, and are members of the British Association of Adoption and Fostering special interest group for private fostering. There are clear procedures in place to ensure notifications are responded to within timescale and that thorough suitability checks of the private foster carers are carried out. The manager has worked hard to ensure that the social work duty and assessment teams are knowledgeable about how to respond to notifications about private fostering arrangements. The manager holds regular training and information sessions for a range of staff and professionals promoting the awareness of private fostering and its regulations. A wide distribution of appropriate leaflets on private fostering have been circulated to different agencies and services. There has been some delay in raising

awareness with educational establishments and some community groups, such as faith groups, which could mean that some children in private fostering arrangements are not being appropriately identified and protected.

The authority is being notified of approximately ten private fostering arrangements each year. The authority has appropriately developed forms for carers and parents to complete for the written notification, declaration of any convictions and an agreement between the parent and carer in relation to day-to-day responsibilities for caring for the child. The written notification form has not always been obtained, and this form does not fully include all the statutory information. Apart from this, all the other private fostering forms developed by the authority are good, detailed and ensure that best practice is promoted.

There has been some very good work in relation to ensuring children receive an appropriate service. The team effectively and promptly meet with their legal advisors to ensure that they and other local authorities meet their responsibilities. Private foster carers are assessed thoroughly, with the qualified private foster care social worker using a comprehensive assessment tool to ensure that the assessments meet statutory and good practice guidance. Although systems, procedures and monitoring of private fostering arrangements are clearer now, there has been a delay in concluding the suitability checks of some of the arrangements. Although social workers have been visiting the placements, the child has not always been seen alone and visits have not been regular. In addition, issues relating to education, health and parental responsibility are not always addressed. However, practice has started to improve. A recent notified placement has been visited regularly; the assessment was concluded promptly and case records meet statutory guidelines. The final welfare and suitability assessments are presented to a private foster care panel within a targeted timescale of 42 days. Children and young people will benefit considerably by this panel overview, which gives a quality assurance role in ensuring the welfare of the child is safeguarded.

Birth parents are contacted and offered support and guidance, although this has not always been consistent. Some recording does not always evidence a clear agreement between the private foster carer and the birth parents about the responsibilities for the day-to-day care and emergency medical treatment of the child. Most children and young people are helped to maintain positive contact with their family and friends. Where appropriate, children and young people's welfare and needs have been monitored and promoted through children in need planning meetings and reviews. The private foster carers are supported well by the supervising social worker, and given advice and help with a range of issues such as benefits and Special Guardianship Orders.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is not judged.

There are no national minimum standards under this outcome.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is not judged.

There are no national minimum standards under this outcome.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

There are no national minimum standards under this outcome.

## Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The local authority is very good at monitoring the way it discharges its functions and duties in relation to private fostering. Senior managers sit on the private foster care panel, and this provides them with a clear overview of the quality of practice. Regular audits are carried out on all private fostering cases, although these audits did not highlight the breaches in regulations noted at this inspection. The team manager responsible for private fostering provides good management, advice and guidance to staff to ensure the private fostering regulations are met. Further monitoring and oversight is carried out through a private fostering group, attended by the managers involved in safeguarding and placements, which meets every six weeks to monitor the business plan and the awareness raising programme, and to evaluate the statistics of private fostering notifications. These statistics include the numbers of notifications, the allocated worker, and the outcome of the assessments. This information is shared regularly with the Local Safeguarding Children Board who also receive an annual report on how the authority is satisfying itself that the welfare of privately fostered children is satisfactorily safeguarded.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The assessments of the child's welfare and the suitability of the carer detail how the child's language, racial, religious, cultural or any disability needs are to be met. The assessments further reflect well on the promotion of the child's identity. The team are aware of the different cultures and faith groups and reflect on how private fostering is viewed and valued by different cultures.

The authority has an appropriate Statement of Purpose for private fostering, detailing the roles, responsibilities and duties. It clearly sets out who the responsible monitoring officer is, and describes the processes of assessing and monitoring the private fostering arrangements. Local authority staff are to receive training in the private fostering standards shortly and this will be on a rolling induction programme for staff. Staff currently have access to detailed policies and guidance. Private foster carers' details are held securely, and accurate and up-to-date case records are kept of their assessment, suitability checks and on the ongoing support given to them. Children's case notes do not fully evidence that satisfactory judgements have been made on the suitability of the placement.

## 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 written notification is obtained for each private fostering arrangement. The written notification must include all the information in Schedule 1 (Regulation 3 and 5, NMS 2)
- ensure that the initial assessment and visit to the private foster carer includes an evaluation of all the matters in Schedule 3 and includes speaking to the carer, members of the household, parents and others with parental responsibility, and visiting the child and speaking to them alone, unless considered inappropriate (Regulation 7 and NMS 3)
- carry out the checks, assessment of the suitability of the private fostering arrangements and assessment of the child's welfare within 42 working days (NMS 3)
- ensure that children in private fostering arrangements are visited at intervals of not more than six weeks, in the first year, and in the second and subsequent year at intervals of not more than 12 weeks. When carrying out the visit the officer must establish such matters listed in Schedule 3 as appears relevant (Regulation 8, NMS 3)
- ensure that an officer of the authority makes a written report to the local authority after each visit carried out in accordance with the regulation (Regulation 7.2, 8.5 and NMS 3)