

# Birmingham; Children, Young People and Families Private Fostering Arrangements

Inspection report for private fostering arrangements

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<b>Inspector</b>	Janet Manders / Jacqui Gosling
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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**

A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately (that is to say without the involvement of a local authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Local authorities are required to raise awareness of the necessity to notify the authority of any private fostering arrangement, to encourage positive outcomes for privately fostered children and young people and reduce any risks to their welfare and safety. Birmingham City Council has appointed the Assistant Head of Child Protection and Review as the responsible person within the Authority. Assessments of the suitability of arrangements are undertaken by the duty and assessment teams and agreed by the team manager. Ongoing support is given to young people, private foster carers and parents by the case management teams. There have been 11 private fostering arrangements notified to the Authority in the last 12 months.

### **Summary**

Initial awareness-raising work within the authority and with local agencies has been undertaken. However, there is still a considerable amount of work required to ensure that all professionals and staff within the Authority are aware of the meaning of private fostering arrangements and their role in identifying them and ensuring the safety of any young person placed within a private fostering arrangement. The Authority had detailed procedures in relation to private fostering arrangements, but these have not always been followed by staff. The quality of assessments undertaken to ensure the suitability of arrangements were poor, with not all relevant areas being covered. The role of the team managers and the nominated person in ensuring that arrangements are satisfactory is not providing the necessary safeguards to young people.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

This is the first inspection of Birmingham City Council's Private Fostering Arrangements.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards for private fostering arrangements under this outcome.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is inadequate.

The authority has undertaken an awareness-raising campaign regarding private fostering arrangements and the requirement that these are notified to the authority. Leaflets have been widely distributed within the community, which include a definition of a privately fostered child, the duty to notify and who to contact. These leaflets are available in different community languages. There have been briefing events and e-mails briefings to all significant professional groups who may come into contact with privately fostered children; however, the authority

accepts that the dissemination of this information requires auditing. Appropriate documentation has been developed for the notification and assessment of the suitability of private fostering arrangements. It is surprising that for a large authority that there have only been 11 notifications of private fostering arrangements in the past 12 months and at the time of the inspection there were only six young people who were privately fostered. The duty and assessment social worker is responsible for undertaking an assessment of the young person's needs and of the carers to ensure that they are suitable to provide care for the young person. Once this assessment has been completed the report is discussed with and signed off by the team manager. Not all assessments of the suitability of arrangements examined by inspectors had been conducted within the prescribed timescales and all showed a lack of thoroughness and competence in the assessments, with vital areas not being robustly examined or analysed. This could seriously risk the young person's safety and well-being. Nonetheless, all had been signed off by the team manager. In respect of one case, the initial assessment had indicated that the arrangements were not suitable but no action had been taken to consider how the young person's needs could be met. The young person remained with the carer for a further two months during which time she made a number of accusations against the carer. She then left of her own accord and was subsequently accommodated. Criminal Record Bureau checks had been undertaken but there was no record on any of the files as to whether the checks had been returned and whether any offences were recorded. In another case examined by inspectors, procedures had not been followed in respect of a disqualified person. Due to an inadequate assessment of the carer's suitability, the worker had not pursued issues around whether the carer was a disqualified person. Another file did not contain any detail about the sleeping arrangements available for the young person, another had no record of whether the young person's health or education needs were being met. There was a lack of understanding of the process of assessment with one file containing a suitability report completed by the young person rather than the assessing social worker, on another file an exemption certificate had been completed although there was only one young person in the home. Inspectors examined the files of five young people where records indicated that they had been privately fostered, however, only one young person remained in placement. Inspectors met with this young person, who confirmed that he was being well cared for by his carers. Nonetheless, inspectors found that this was not a private fostering arrangement, as the young person had not been placed with the carer by anyone with parental responsibility; his father had stated he did not want the young person placed under private fostering arrangements. No-one with parental responsibility was in the country to ensure the well-being of the young person. Once an assessment has been completed, the case is allocated to a worker from the case management team, who is responsible for offering ongoing support to the young person, carers and parents. Not all foster carers were provided with information regarding their responsibilities as a private foster carer; although there was evidence on some files that verbal guidance had been given. No written guidance is available to private foster carers. One carer had made a complaint to the Authority about the lack of support she had received. Financial support had been offered by the authority to support some of the placements. Young people are provided with information as to whom they can contact if they have any concerns. Evidence provided to inspectors indicated that not all young people had been visited within required timescales, with a six month gap being recorded between visits for one young person. Social workers admitted that private fostering arrangements were not always the highest priority in busy social work teams.

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

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards for private fostering arrangements under this outcome.

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

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards for private fostering arrangements under this outcome.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

There are no National Minimum Standards for private fostering arrangements under this outcome.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is inadequate.

The Authority has a Statement of Purpose which contains most of the required information; however, it does not include the names of the managers who will sign off the suitability of any private fostering arrangement. The authority reviewed and updated their policies and procedures regarding private fostering in 2006 and has produced a detailed procedural manual, which cover all areas, specified in The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005, including what action will be taken if they become aware of an un-notified arrangement. Discussions with staff and evidence on files confirmed that not all staff are aware of the definition of private fostering or the procedures for approving such an arrangement. Operational and team managers have been provided with a briefing from the Assistant Head of Child Protection and Review. The expectation is that this information will then be cascaded down to front line staff who deal with private fostering arrangements. The Authority has appointed the Assistant Head of Child Protection and Review to monitor the way in which it discharges its functions in respect of private fostering. Evidence gained during this inspection confirms that this arrangement is not effective in ensuring the safety and well-being of the young people placed within private fostering arrangements. Each young person and private foster carer has an individual file, however, not all required information was included on the files for most foster carers and young people and there was no evidence of robust monitoring of these files, either by team managers or by the Nominated Person. Records were on file of visits undertaken by social workers, which included whether the young person was seen alone. The Authority completes statistical returns, which are submitted to the relevant government department. A briefing report has been prepared for the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB), although there was a discrepancy as to whether this had been presented to the Board, as the Chairperson was not aware that it had been presented and discussed. However, inspectors were assured that it had been presented at the July meeting of the BSCB. It is intended that this report will also be presented to the Vulnerable Children Scrutiny Committee.

### **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):

- audit the dissemination of information to professionals to ensure that it is reaching the targeted audience. National Minimum Standard 2
- undertake further work to ensure that all young people placed in private fostering arrangements are identified and assessments undertaken. National Minimum Standard 2
- ensure that appropriate procedures are followed. National Minimum Standard 3
- undertake robust assessments of the young person's needs and the suitability of the private fostering arrangements. National Minimum Standard 3
- ensure that all assessments of the suitability of private fostering arrangements are undertaken within prescribed timescales. National Minimum Standard 3
- ensure that the criteria for a private fostering arrangement are met, where a young person is clearly placed under other provisions of the Children Act 1989, the appropriate procedures must be followed. Children Act 1989
- provide all staff who conduct assessments of suitability and those who sign them off, with further training regarding the information required in the assessment. National Minimum Standard 3
- audit the standard of reports completed regarding the suitability of arrangements and take any necessary action to improve the standard of reports. National Minimum Standard 3
- develop written guidance for private foster carers as to their ongoing responsibility for the young person. National Minimum Standard 4
- develop a pro-forma that can be used by parents and carers to clarify arrangements for how the young person's needs will be met including the length of time the placement is expected to last, contact arrangements, medical consent and arrangement for financial support of the young person. National Minimum Standard 4
- visit young people who are privately fostered in line with regulations. National Minimum Standard 6
- include in the Statement of Purpose details of the named persons, who are responsible for signing off the suitability of arrangements. National Minimum Standard 1
- ensure that all staff receive training in respect of private fostering arrangements and that information is included in all induction programmes. National Minimum Standard 1
- ensure that all private fostering arrangements are robustly monitored and that action is taken where the Authority's responsibilities have not been fulfilled. National Minimum Standard 7
- present a report to the Director of Children's Services, which includes an evaluation of the outcomes of the work undertaken. National Minimum Standard 7
- ensure that all foster carers and young people's files contain all required information. National Minimum Standard 7

- ensure that all members of the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board receive a written copy of the briefing paper written by the Assistant Head of Child Protection and Review in July 2007. National Minimum Standard 7

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## 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.**