



Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Care Standards Act 2000

Inspection Report

Flintshire Fostering Services

County Hall
Mold
CH7 6NN

Type of Inspection – Focussed

Date(s) of inspection – 20th, 21st, 22nd and 28th January 2014

Date of publication – 31st March 2014

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Summary

About the service

Flintshire County Council's fostering service provides a range of family based services to children and young people that are long term, short term, respite, short break and kinship care. The responsible individual is Carol Salmon, Head of Children's Services and the registered manager of the fostering service is Liz Byrne.

The data previously submitted showed there were 102 approved foster carers providing 165 placements (including respite care) and there were 142 children in placement, with 22 of these children with other fostering providers.

What type of inspection was carried out?

This inspection focussed specifically on the quality of life of children and young people in general foster care. Information for this inspection was gathered from submitted data, the history of the service and the annual quality of care review of the service. We (CSSIW) examined 3 looked after children reviews and the associated chair's reports along with foster carers reviews. We visited two of the foster carers supporting two of the children whose reviews we looked at. We had discussions with the team manager, 2 child care social workers, 3 fostering officers, the participation officer, an independent reviewing officer, the fostering panel chair and the agency decision maker. We attended the fostering panel, two young people's participation groups and the authority's Children's Services Forum. We contacted 10 foster carers to seek their permission to send them questionnaires and elicit their support in assisting the children they were caring for to complete questionnaires. We sent questionnaires to child care social workers, fostering team staff and the fostering panel members and received 8 from foster carers, 2 from child care social workers, 5 from panel, 7 from fostering staff and 1 from a young person.

What does the service do well?

- We heard from foster carers that they valued the support from the fostering service and they appreciated that the team was stable and consistent
- We found the fostering panel was well organised to address the business presented to them. We saw a very detailed analysis of a particularly complex case.
- We saw several entries in the fostering panel minutes where there was evidence of the Agency Decision Maker's scrutiny of cases.

What has improved since the last inspection?

- The senior practitioner of the service spends one day a week with child care teams to participate in legal advice, permanence planning and matching meetings and provide advice on potential kinship carers.
- On-line training for foster carers has been introduced and training is open to foster carers who participate on courses alongside child care staff
- A part time therapist post with Action for Children (AFC) has been funded by the authority to provide support to foster carers caring for children and young people who would benefit from such a service.

What needs to be done to improve the service?

- The newly appointed children's participation officer's plans to expand and develop participation by young people. Participation would benefit from a strategy to inform

other looked after children about the groups and the things they discussed.

- The ability of the fostering team to respond to the strong emphasis on placing children within their birth families by encouraging, developing and supporting the kinship carer role is limited by the financial constraints of the authority, the re-designation of one post and the loss of another post. However, the introduction of the connected person's assessment and the planned development of a support service for Special Guardians may lead to an improvement in this area. We were encouraged to learn that the fostering service had completed the vacancy requisition processes for this development and it had been submitted for consideration.
- We found that some foster carers missed the opportunity to participate in the CAMHS support group which no longer operates. Some foster carers would welcome the opportunity to determine the need for this type of support service and how best it could be delivered.

Quality of life

Children and young people can be confident that the Fostering Service promotes and safeguards their physical and emotional welfare because the service has a robust recruitment and assessment process for foster carers. We saw a meeting of the fostering panel that considered requests for long term foster care for a specific child, a change of approval for a foster care couple and an assessment of the suitability of kinship carers. The meeting focussed on the needs of children and young people and used headings for analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the carers being presented. Each member of the panel had clearly studied the reports and was assisted by the chair to contribute to a structured analysis of the ability of the prospective carers to provide an environment that met the needs of the children both in the short and long term. The independent chair ensured that the panel remained child focussed, was evidence based and grounded in contemporary research. The chair confirmed the role of panel as being to ensure that prospective applicants had the potential to provide good quality care to children looked after with a focus on permanency early in the process. We saw evidence of the agency decision maker providing an objective oversight of panel deliberations and seeking further information as relevant before approving panel recommendations.

On the whole, children and young people can be confident that the foster carers who are caring for them are offered a comprehensive training programme both during recruitment and throughout their fostering. We saw that this training had been extended to include a wide ranging set of short courses available on-line to foster carers to provide more flexible training opportunities. The foster carers we spoke with told us they had been on courses which were open to all and enabled a sharing of knowledge between foster carers, social workers and other child care workers, which they valued. The foster carer review includes a section detailing the training undertaken by them during the review period and each foster carer has a training portfolio.

Children and young people can be confident that their physical and emotional needs will be met because the authority has a robust assessment of these through their looked after children processes. One young person recorded in their questionnaire that it was the right place for them because 'it is good and awesome', the foster carers 'listen to me read' and they 'were not allowed to eat 'too may sweets'. Foster carers are involved in the review of the arrangements to meet a looked after child's needs and their ability to meet those needs, and the support to do so, is considered. We saw an example of the need for training in autism being identified to support foster carers in supporting a young person. The authority has funded a part time therapist post with Action for Children to assist foster carers supporting young people with emotional difficulties and we saw reference to this source of support by the agency decision maker in the panel minutes. However, two foster carers told us in their questionnaires that they missed the CAMHS support group which no longer operated.

Overall children and young people can be confident that they will have a voice and be encouraged to express an opinion. We saw the voice of the child or young person recorded in all the LAC documentation we looked at and where a child was too young to express their views, the IRO assessed how settled and content they were in their placements and recorded this in their review, taking account of the views of carers and significant others. The IRO we spoke with expressed concern that the increasing numbers of children becoming looked after limited the time they were able to spend with children and young people outside of the actual review meeting. They told us how they

supported the participation groups and were addressing the issues raised by the groups in relation to the process of LAC reviews.

We talked with the newly appointed children's participation officer and heard from them about their plans to develop and expand participation by young people. We observed a meeting of a Speak Your Mind (SYM) group for younger people and a Care Leavers Support Group where children and young people met to discuss issues facing them as looked after children. There are six young people in each group and they received a small monetary incentive to attend. The young people in the groups told us that sharing what they discussed in their groups was limited to the annual 'Speak Out' events and we saw from reports that the last event was attended by 21 young people aged 11 to 16 years. We feel it would be helpful if information from these groups was routinely shared with the looked after child population.

Young people can be confident that they will have influence in the development of services to children looked after by the local authority because representatives of the participation groups attend the Children's Services Forum with support from the participation officer. It is an official committee of the County Council which may, in part, explain why the meeting we attended appeared as a committee to which young people were invited rather than it being led by young people. The young people present reinforced the feedback to the meeting about LAC language and housing issues by giving their views and describing their experience. The Forum heard that two of the IROs would be attending the participation groups in February 2014 to address the issues arising from the LAC mind maps.

Quality of staffing

The inspection focussed on the quality of life of children and young people in general foster care and we did not consider it necessary to look at the quality of staffing on this occasion because previous inspections have found that staff turnover is low and there is a good range of skills, knowledge and experience within the team. We found that one post had been lost and one post had been re-designated as a kinship care support assistant which did not require a professional qualification. However we did not find this had affected the quality of life being provided to looked after children. Fostering staff expressed concern that they did not have the capacity to respond to the increasing emphasis on supporting children with special guardians because of the need to develop and support this role whilst also supporting the increasing numbers of kinship carers with a reduced staffing capacity. The proposals to recruit a new member of staff to develop and support the role of special guardians should strengthen this capacity and be beneficial to kinship carers and the service.

Quality of leadership and management

The inspection focussed on the quality of life of children and young people in general foster care and we did not consider it necessary to look at the quality of leadership and management on this occasion because previous inspections have found the fostering service to be well managed and very responsive to issues raised by foster carers, children and inspections.

Quality of Foster Carers

The inspection focussed on the quality of life of children and young people in general foster care and we did not consider it necessary to look at the quality of foster carers on this occasion because previous inspections have found that foster carers receive good assessment, regular training and are well supported by the fostering service. We found this to remain the case when we looked at how these areas affected the quality of life experienced by children and young people placed with foster carers.

How we inspect and report on services We conduct two types of inspection; baseline and focussed. Both consider the experience of people using services.

- **Baseline inspections** assess whether the registration of a service is justified and whether the conditions of registration are appropriate. For most services, we carry out these inspections every three years. Exceptions are registered child minders, out of school care, sessional care, crèches and open access provision, which are every four years.

At these inspections we check whether the service has a clear, effective Statement of Purpose and whether the service delivers on the commitments set out in its Statement of Purpose. In assessing whether registration is justified inspectors check that the service can demonstrate a history of compliance with regulations.

- **Focussed inspections** consider the experience of people using services and we will look at compliance with regulations when poor outcomes for people using services are identified. We carry out these inspections in between baseline inspections. Focussed inspections will always consider the quality of life of people using services and may look at other areas.

Baseline and focussed inspections may be scheduled or carried out in response to concerns.

Inspectors use a variety of methods to gather information during inspections. These may include;

- Talking with people who use services and their representatives
- Talking to staff and the manager
- Looking at documentation
- Observation of staff interactions with people and of the environment
- Comments made within questionnaires returned from people who use services, staff and health and social care professionals

We inspect and report our findings under 'Quality Themes'. Those relevant to each type of service are referred to within our inspection reports.

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