

# Foster Care Connect Limited Fostering Service

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Type of inspection: Announced (short notice)  
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**Service provided by:**  
Foster Care Connect Limited

**Service provider number:**  
SP2005007159

**Care service number:**  
CS2005086428

## About the service

Foster Care Connect Ltd is an independent company. The company is based in the Scottish Borders but supports carers in a wide geographic area. The service has been registered with the Care Inspectorate since the Care Inspectorate was formed in 2011. It was previously registered with the Care Commission.

Foster Care Connect Ltd provides a family placement service for children and young people aged from 0 to 18 years who are assessed as in need of alternative family care. The agency recruits and supports carer families to provide a range of fostering placements to children including, permanent, long terms, interim and short break.

During 2017, the service recruited three new fostering families, however three fostering families stopped fostering for various reasons meaning there was no net increase or decrease in fostering capacity. Demand for the service remains high and at 31 December 2017 a total of 13 foster carer households were looking after 15 children and young people. 13 of these children and young people were placed permanently in fostering families.

The service's mission statement states: 'Foster care connect is an independent fostering agency - established in 2004. Our mission is to provide safe and loving home-based care for children and young people in Scotland who are not able to live with their own family. We strive to enable them to achieve and have the confidence to develop and grow healthy relationships at home, in their communities and into adult life'.

As an organisation, the service were open, transparent and helpful throughout the inspection process. As the findings of this inspection are based on a sample of children and young people, inspectors cannot assure the quality of experience for every service user.

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## What people told us

We spoke with three foster carer families individually and two children who were looked after by them. We had email communication with a further six foster carer families.

Foster carers told us that they were happy about the quality of support they received. One carer told us:

'As an agency they have been very open with information, fair with their thoughts and expectations and incredibly supportive.'

Learning and Development was reported to be of a good quality and individualised based on the needs of the child and fostering family. This was delivered in a range of ways including face to face in the carer home, online, signposted reading and group support. One foster carer told us:

'We are given yearly learning plans ...these have been very helpful and relevant to the stages of our child. We meet up at our home which is helpful to us.'

Foster cares told us they felt involved in the agency. They thought the agency communicated well and informed them about action they intended to take (or not take) based in foster carers views. One carer told us:

'I feel valued, part of a team.'

Most fostercarers told us that information about children's needs was usually available in advance supporting the foster carer to make decisions about their capacity to meet those needs. Foster carers felt well-informed about the child's plan and were supported by the agency to raise any issues.

A minority of foster carers thought the agency could do more to support their own sons and daughters who are part of fostering families and to ensure that geographical considerations are taken to support training and meetings.

We spoke with two looked after children who told us how the fostering family helped them to stay healthy, do well at school, and keep in touch with their families. One young person told us about the many activities he took part in which he enjoyed and another told us.

'I like the animals and the food is yum.'

## Self assessment

The service had not been asked to complete a self assessment in advance of the inspection. We spoke with the management team about the agency. This demonstrated their priorities for development and how they were monitoring the quality of the provision within the agency.

## From this inspection we graded this service as:

Quality of care and support	4 - Good
Quality of staffing	3 - Adequate
Quality of management and leadership	3 - Adequate

## Quality of care and support

### Findings from the inspection

Foster carers had a good sense of how to keep children safe. Children told us that they felt happy in their fostering homes. The care and support needs of young people and how these should be met should be appropriately assessed by the fostering agency. We saw that foster carers had the opportunity to discuss how they might meet the needs of children being placed prior to placement. However we thought that the service could make clearer how foster carers would meet the current and future needs of children using the service. This also means that the agency should regularly assess the capacity of foster carers to meet children's needs and the safety of the foster care environment. We saw that carer medicals and unannounced visits to foster carers' homes had not been routinely happening. The service were now addressing this and although some remained outstanding at the point of the inspection, we were confident that the agency would continue to address this.

We noted generally that the agency needed to adopt a risk management approach to situations as they arose. We discussed with the agency how new information might inform safer caring plans being reviewed. **(See recommendation 1)**

Individualised learning and development plans supported foster carers to meet children's needs as they were identified. This helped foster carers to feel well supported in their care of children. We were impressed at the approach to learning and development within the agency. The use of Personal Development Plans, bespoke masterclasses, library open hours and links with other agencies supported a flexible and creative approach for foster carers who may have different learning styles. The service now needed to ensure that where foster carers had attended key training in other settings, this was appropriately recorded by the service. Foster carers should also be supported to complete reflective learning records as part of the Personal Development Plans to ensure that the effectiveness of learning and development could be monitored.

The agency advocated and supported foster carers to advocate for the children in their care. This had resulted in children seeing their social workers more regularly and receiving some additional support if this was required. Generally we noted positive outcomes for children in a range of areas. The agency had begun to map outcomes for children using the service. This supported foster carers and children to see the benefits of stable and consistent care. We thought the service could do more to support children's voices being heard at all levels within the organisation. We saw some examples of very good practice but most children experienced basic levels of participation.

Children experienced stable, nurturing family situations which were mainly well supported by staff within the agency. Staff took time to build good trusting relationships with children and foster carers and this supported people who used the service to talk openly about their experiences and they trusted the agency to take appropriate action.

Regular wellbeing meetings provided opportunities for foster carers to meet together and experience peer support and guidance. Most of the foster carers who took part in the inspection process told us how much they valued these meetings.

In conclusion, we identified important strengths in care and support within the agency which had a significant positive impact on people's experiences and outcomes. However the service need to take action in respect of the areas identified for improvement for these positive outcomes to be consistently sustained in the longer term. This has informed the grade of good for this theme.

## Requirements

**Number of requirements:** 0

## Recommendations

**Number of recommendations:** 1

1. The agency should adopt a risk management approach to new information or new situations.

**This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care standard which states: "My care and support is provided in a planned and safe way, including if there is an emergency or unexpected event." (HSCS 4.14)**

**Grade:** 4 - good

## Quality of staffing

### Findings from the inspection

We saw evidence of good quality relationships between children, foster carer and supervising social workers. Staff advocated for foster carers, children and young people and we saw where this had improved the service that children and young people received.

Internal communication had improved with the creation of a shared IT system and more regular staff meetings.

There continued to be significant changes to management and staffing within the agency and more changes were planned. We considered staff recruitment and saw that appropriate procedures were now in place and all staff had a copy of the employee handbook which detailed expected codes of behaviour and appropriate employment policies and procedures. The agency were now supported by an independent company to advise them on employment matters. At the time of the inspection we considered the recruitment of the last member of staff which was not in accordance with best practice.

The creative and flexible approach to learning and development within the agency extended to the staff working in the service. However there was no clear framework of expectation around learning and development such as a training matrix of core mandatory training. There was no current system of appraisal which would support and direct staff learning and development. This meant it was difficult for the service to be sure that all staff had the appropriate training for their role. **(See recommendation 1)**. We saw that an appraisal process was being planned.

All staff had regular supervision and the frequency was improving. There were plans to review the template used for supervision to encourage more reflective discussion about practice and to focus on learning and development. Staff development days supported staff to share their learning within the wider team and this was valued by all staff.

The service had begun to involve people who used the service in assessing the performance of staff through the use of questionnaires.

We saw that despite significant changes within the service staff morale remained positive and focussed on improvement. It was evident that there were many positive aspects of this theme aimed at improving the quality of staffing within the agency. However at the time of the inspection many of these had not been implemented. This has informed the grade of adequate for this theme.

## Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

## Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 1

1. The agency should ensure that staff learning and development takes account of core mandatory expectations.

**This is to ensure that the quality of staffing is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standard which states: "I have confidence in people because they are trained, competent and skilled, are able to reflect on their practice and follow their professional and organisational codes."**

Grade: 3 - adequate

## Quality of management and leadership

### Findings from the inspection

The new leadership team have continuously and positively supported staff and foster carers through challenges and changes in how the service is delivered. People who use fostering services benefit when the agency has a culture of continuous improvement with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes. The agency had recently introduced some management systems to overview their work. For example they had introduced systems to monitor statutory checks, foster care reviews and children's reviews. We discussed with the agency the need to develop a systematic approach to quality assurance including the production of an annual report.

People who use services benefit from different organisations working together and sharing information where appropriate. We noted that the agency had not notified the care inspectorate of some incidents. It is important that there is an overview of incidents to ensure that action is taken in respect of all notifiable events.

We saw the service were mapping outcomes for young people which would allow them to showcase the quality of the service provided by foster carers and staff and experienced by children and young people.

Where there have been a number of staff and service changes, it is important that key information is available quickly and in a format that supports staff to be fully informed about children's and carer's histories and any impact this has had. Chronologies can provide a short key history of events to support this.

Staff practice was now monitored through regular supervision and an appraisal system was planned.

People who use services should know how to make a complaint should they wish to do so. The complaints procedure was contained within the fostering handbook which was being updated. We were less clear that children and young people had access to a complaints procedure independent of their foster carer. We thought the service could provide more information to children about being in foster care and using Foster Care Connect.

The fostering panel had a good independent focus and regularly approved and reviewed foster carers. A new Agency Decision Maker had just been appointed and will take up the role in the near future. Panel members have opportunities for their learning and development needs to be met and regular supervision/appraisal is planned. We thought the panel could be more challenging of practice within the agency particularly where foster carers are not meeting key competencies.

The agency planned to establish a Board to improve governance within the agency and are currently in discussion with the care inspectorate about this.

In conclusion we noted a hardworking management team who were in the process of reviewing practice, processes and policies governing the agency. This was clearly a strength within the agency. However, the role of the fostering panel needs to be more professionally challenging to assure a quality service and good governance. This has informed the grade of adequate for this theme.

## Requirements

**Number of requirements:** 0

## Recommendations

**Number of recommendations:** 1

1. The fostering panel and Agency Decision Maker should provide more professional challenge of the work of the agency particularly where key competencies are not being met or statutory checks are not in place.

**This is to ensure that the quality of management and leadership is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standard which states: I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes." (HSCS 4.19)**

**Grade:** 3 - adequate

**What the service has done to meet any requirements we made at or since the last inspection**

## Previous requirements

There are no outstanding requirements.

## What the service has done to meet any recommendations we made at or since the last inspection

### Previous recommendations

There are no outstanding recommendations.

### Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at [www.careinspectorate.com](http://www.careinspectorate.com).

### Enforcement

No enforcement action has been taken against this care service since the last inspection.

### Inspection and grading history

Date	Type	Gradings
28 Apr 2017	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 5 - Very good Environment Not assessed Staffing Not assessed Management and leadership 4 - Good
26 Jun 2015	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 5 - Very good Environment Not assessed Staffing 4 - Good Management and leadership 4 - Good
10 Jul 2014	Unannounced	Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed Staffing 4 - Good Management and leadership 3 - Adequate



Date	Type	Gradings
15 Apr 2013	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed Staffing 4 - Good Management and leadership 2 - Weak
3 May 2012	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed Staffing Not assessed Management and leadership 4 - Good
26 Aug 2011	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 3 - Adequate Environment Not assessed Staffing Not assessed Management and leadership 3 - Adequate
28 Oct 2010	Announced	Care and support 5 - Very good Environment Not assessed Staffing Not assessed Management and leadership Not assessed
9 Feb 2010	Announced	Care and support 5 - Very good Environment Not assessed Staffing 5 - Very good Management and leadership 5 - Very good
11 Nov 2008	Announced	Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed Staffing 3 - Adequate Management and leadership 3 - Adequate

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