

Fosterplus (Fostercare) Ltd Fostering Service

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Service provided by:

Fosterplus (Fostercare) Ltd

Service provider number:

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Service no:

CS2004080743

About the service

The Care Inspectorate regulates care services in Scotland. Information about all care services is available on our website at www.careinspectorate.com

This service was previously registered with the Care Commission and transferred its registration to the Care Inspectorate on 1 April 2011.

Fosterplus (Fostercare) Ltd is an independent fostering agency which provides Local Authorities with foster placements and support to carers, children and young people. The organisation employs social work staff and a number of external consultants who work within their five offices. There has been a recent change of ownership to a private equity firm (capvest partners). The service is a not for profit organisation.

Fosterplus is registered to recruit, assess and provide a fostering and family placement service for children and young people aged from 0 to 18 years and their families. The agency recruits and supports carer families throughout the central belt and South of Scotland.

The service is now linked to Fosterplus (Fostercare) Ltd adult placement for the purposes of continuing care. The service was registered with the Care Inspectorate in July 2018, and this means that carers can be dual registered to provide a fostering and adult placement carer role.

This arrangement was designed to provide a seamless transition for young people who use the fostering service, and allows young people to remain in their caring environments until they are 21 years of age. Four foster carers had been approved as adult placement providers for the purposes of continuing care, and four young adults were placed with them. This service was Inspected at the same time, and a separate report is available.

Children and young people are placed by local authorities who retain statutory responsibility for their welfare, and the service works closely with these placing local authorities. The service is based in Edinburgh (both the Scotland Headquarters and the local Edinburgh team) with local teams based at offices in Dundee, Paisley, Hamilton and Ayr.

At the time of the inspection, Fosterplus reported that they had 134 approved foster carers offering temporary and permanent care to 169 children and young people.

For the purposes of this inspection, we were based at the Paisley office, and visited the Hamilton and Ayr offices.

What people told us

We examined feedback from a number of sources, including questionnaires that had been sent to foster carers prior to the Inspection taking place. We received 10 responses with mixed views in terms of carers experiences of the service. We met with 17 foster carers during the inspection, carried out three home visits, and made contact with four foster carers by phone. We met with a young adult and three younger children during home visits. We also observed children within the Paisley office when they visited with their foster carers.

We observed a fostering panel during this Inspection, and held discussion with the panel chair.

Some foster carers reported very good supports and outcomes for themselves and the children placed with them, however, a considerable number of carers spoke of the significant challenges in relation to service delivery since the time of the last inspection. This was mainly in relation to numerous staffing changes within the organisation, allocation of case work, and in several instances poor communication from some local offices.

Comments from foster carers included:

'We have fortnightly visits from a supervising social worker. We can text anytime or call with any worries or concerns no matter what time day or night it may be and foster plus always let us know if any changes need to take place to a Childs original plan that has been already acknowledged and put into practice'.

'My experience of fostering has been met with challenges from the placement, and I have always found that the support is endless from the Paisley Office and has made this whole journey in our life a lot easier because there always is someone there just to listen, because the majority of the time, that's all I need, just someone who understands and is willing to listen'.

'The prep groups were fine, we are still in touch with some of the others from the group so a good local network. I attended support group recently to give a talk about foetal alcohol syndrome this was well attended'

'We know our social worker is leaving but do not know who our next worker is going to be, it's a bit worrying all round'

'I do sometimes attend support groups, but it can be a bit of a moaning session. Good annual events are arranged by carers, the big picnic and Halloween party. Christmas events include the whole family, we get financial help for holidays and that great'

'We have not had a visit from the local authority for the child we care for since she was placed. Our worker has tried hard to arranged meetings but nothing is happening, we don't know what the plan is'

'We have regular visits from our SSW and have opportunities to voice any concerns that we have, they respond well as soon as we contact them'

'I think that the service has changed a lot over the past year or so and not for the better as far as I am concerned'

'I am on my third SSW since my approval mid April 2019'

As the findings in this inspection are based on a sample children, young people, and carers we cannot assure the quality of experience for every single child or carer receiving a service.

Self assessment

The service had not been asked to complete a self-assessment in advance of the inspection. We looked at the services Improvement and Development plan and annual return.

From this inspection we graded this service as:

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

What the service does well

There was good evidence of children and young people experiencing positive outcomes during this Inspection. Feedback from young people during the inspection, and also comments provided by children and young people when carers were reviewed evidenced that they were experiencing nurturing care.

Children and young people were being encouraged to be active, pursue talents and interests and develop meaningful relationships with peers. In some of the cases we tracked, young people were sustaining work placements and managing full time employment. Children and young people were seen to be gaining increasing confidence and an understanding of personal responsibility through the development of age and stage appropriate independence skills. This was underpinned by the significant levels of support and encouragement being offered by their carers to help young people reach their full potential. Carers we met with were strong advocates for the children and young people they cared for, and understood who to contact if independent advocacy services were required to help young people make decisions.

Carers were very proud of children and young people's achievements, they spoke enthusiastically about the children's future and their intention to remain fully involved in their lives as they grew older. The services' newsletter, which was informative and engaging also highlighted achievements for carers, children and young people, and provided information about upcoming events. It was encouraging that the service had participated in a new drama and creative arts initiative to engage young people in the performing arts. This type of activity, promotes good outcomes for young people as it can build on talents and interests and create opportunities going forward into adulthood.

Some very sensitive work was being undertaken to ensure that children and young people were fully supported by their carers during contact with birth family, and we heard that some carers had developed appropriate relationships with these family members. This approach can help children and young people make sense of their history and foster carers have a crucial role to play in this.

The service had been proactive in their planning and collaborating with Local Authorities in relation to the continuing care agenda. It was evident that planning for young people had commenced at an early and appropriate stage, and policies and procedures had been formed.

We agreed with managers at feedback that as the adult service had recently been registered (July 2018) further work was required to ensure that changes to policy and practice were relevant and becoming embedded. It is important that the service now reviews their policies to ensure for example, that appropriate agreements are in place for carers and that there is clarity around terms and conditions. We will look at this area during the next service inspection.

There had been significant staffing changes within the service since the last Inspection. This included changes of role for some service managers, the appointment of three interim posts and the head of operations manager has retired. Staff had worked hard to prioritise the care and support for carers and children under difficult circumstances. For some offices the availability of staff had been more problematic than others, but overall there had been consequences in terms of staff consistency, mentoring for newly qualified staff and we noted a significant number of carers had been moved to different offices. We also heard several examples where staff had gone above and beyond to support carers through very testing times and new members of staff were enthusiastic to establish trusting relationships.

Overall staff members received supervision and annual appraisal from the manager of the service, although we noted inconsistencies during the Inspection. This provided opportunity for them to seek advice and to reflect on practice and learning.

We examined three files of staff that had been recruited since the last Inspection. It was evident that the service was following safer recruitment procedures within the information provided to us. This included obtaining appropriate references and safety checks to ensure any applicants were safe to work with vulnerable children. We discussed with managers at feedback some inconsistencies regarding terms and conditions for staff and have referred them to the 'Safer Recruitment Through Better Recruitment' best practice guidance (November 2016).

Prior to the Inspection ending, it was reassuring to hear from senior managers that decisions had been taken that will allow staffing levels to increase within some local offices. As we are unable to report on the outcomes of this development, we will examine this area at the next service Inspection.

The fostering panel comprised of a good mix of skills and there was a consistency of membership and experience which strengthened the quality assurance of practice, assessments and decision making. Panel members had attended relevant training and they were receiving appropriate annual appraisals.

We observed thorough discussion taking place regarding cases being considered, and an appropriate focus was maintained on the competency and ability of carers to provide on-going nurturing environments for children and young people. The panel demonstrated a balanced and skilled approach when they had to deal with any sensitive matters.

Managers were receptive to feedback about the importance of a panel membership which included those with direct experience of working in adult placement and the education system.

What the service could do better

We sampled risk assessments and noted that a significant number were not always being reviewed and updated at regular intervals or timeously when new information became available. For a small number of children and young people we did not see risk assessments being completed (See recommendation 1)

Training opportunities for carers had continued since the last Inspection, and we could see that carers were attending mandatory training (externally provided), and when appropriate carers could suggest relevant training to help support the child in placement. Overall carers informed us that they found training to be beneficial particularly in relation to self-regulation and behaviour management. However, there had been a weakness regarding internal training being provided due to fluctuating staffing levels, and this requires attention. In addition, no adult support and protection training was being provided, and this will be crucial in meeting the needs of young adults who are placed with foster carers on a continuing care basis. (See recommendation 2).

The service offers additional external professional therapeutic support for children and young people and their carers if this is thought to be necessary, and agreed by all key individuals.

Carers informed us that they appreciated this level of support and that young people were benefiting from well-planned interventions. However, during this Inspection, it was evident that for at least one case this type of support had been suddenly disrupted with no planned ending for the young person and this had led to a poor outcome (see requirement 1)

At the last inspection the service had developed a process to ensure that contingency plans were always in place to avoid key processes being overlooked during staff shortages. This involved allocating foster carers alternative workers should a member of staff be absent for longer than two weeks and employing temporary staff. During this Inspection the service had not entirely followed this policy and we concluded that at times staffing levels had not been satisfactory (See Recommendation 3).

It was evident that several factors including the merger and change of ownership of the service, has had a significant impact on the day to day delivery of service. The service is in the midst of a major transition, and over the past 12 months the main priority for senior managers has been dealing with management change, numerous staffing issues and in addition dealing with a significant number of complaints. Staff and managers were operating in an environment of uncertainty and in some instances important operational decisions had been delayed. This had led to staff in several offices working below the necessary staffing complement or working between offices.

In contrast to what we had found previously staff morale appeared to be low, and we were concerned to find a lack of trust between staff and management. A number of carers informed us that they were concerned about the impact of staff and management changes, the quality of support they were receiving and at times they felt undervalued. It is difficult to see how these features would not have had a negative impact on the care and support of some children, young people and foster carers.

There was a lack of clarity about the organisations complaints procedures and findings following internal investigations. We noted a lack of independent scrutiny and the service was not adhering to its own policies in terms of timescales. The complaints policy should be urgently reviewed, as at present it does not achieve the desired results (See requirement 2).

New management systems should be developed to provide a more robust overview of the service. This would act to support improvements and identify gaps in information, for example in relation to consistency of documentation being used, the auditing of risk tools and ensure the quality of report writing. We also found a lack of consistency and quality in reports being presented to panel, in particular continuing care assessments (See requirement 3).

During the course of the inspection, in one case we found clear evidence where weak planning within the service led directly to a poor outcome for a child and carer. In this instance there was an absence of clear decision making, and a comprehensive view was not taken of all the information available. In addition, there was no review of this case (see requirement 4).

The services improvement and development plan identified areas that required attention and detailed what was happening at present. The development plan should follow SMART principles (Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely) and be regularly reviewed. (Refer to recommendation 4).

To support good outcomes and well planned transitions for children and young people, we discussed areas for improvement with managers at feedback. These included, the consistent use of the managers matching form when a child is placed with a carer, and a review of the current internal move process to ensure that all up to date information is available and shared.

For some members of staff there was a lack of awareness and confidence about the current whistle blowing procedures. Given the extensive changes currently taking place within the organisation, it is important that all channels of communication work effectively. We have asked the provider to review their current policy to ensure that this is of assistance to people. We will look at this area during the next service inspection.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 4

1. The provider must ensure that the health and well-being of children is always appropriately managed. In order to achieve this, the provider must ensure that for any child or young person receiving a therapeutic intervention, a robust plan must always be in place to enable a positive ending.

This is necessary in order to comply with:

The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 - Regulation 4(1)(a) - 'A provider must make proper provision for the health, welfare and safety of service users'.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state "I experience stability in my care and support from people who know my needs, choices and wishes, even if there are changes in the service or organisation" (HSCS 4.15) and "I have confidence in people because they are trained, competent and skilled and are able to reflect on their practice and follow their professional and organisational codes". (HSCS 3.24)

Timescale: With immediate effect

2. The provider should ensure that a robust complaint recording system is in place. An appropriate record of information should be maintained from the point of complaint, to the point of resolution, which is monitored by Fosterplus Fostercare Ltd, and is transparent for external scrutiny.

This is in order to comply with:

The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011, Regulation 4 (1) (a) Welfare of users. &
The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011, Regulation 18 Complaints.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care standards which state that "I know how, and can be helped to make a complaint or raise a concern about my care and support" (HSCS 4.20) and " If I have a concern or complaint, this will be discussed with me and acted on without negative consequences for me" HSCS (4.21).

3. The provider must ensure that quality assurance systems are robust and used effectively in order to identify areas for improvement.

This is in order to comply with:

The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 - Regulation 4 (1) (a) - 'A provider must make proper provision for the health, welfare and safety of service users.'

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state "I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes". (HSCS 4.19)

4. The provider must ensure that when any changes are being made to a child's placement the views of all key individuals are clear and shared to ensure transparency. Reasons for decision making must be evident, and any judgements made be grounded in the best interests of the child. In addition, any sudden end of placement should be reviewed taking a lessons learned approach and be appropriately recorded.

This is in order to comply with:

The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 - Regulation 4 (1) (a) - 'A provider must make proper provision for the health, welfare and safety of service users.'

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state "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" (HSCS 3.14).

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 4

1. The provider should ensure that risk assessments are completed within timescales, regularly reviewed and updated when any new information becomes available. In addition, an audit should be carried out to ensure every single child has an appropriate risk assessment.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state "I experience high quality care and support because people have the necessary information and resources". (HSCS 4.27) and "I am protected from harm, neglect, abuse, bullying or exploitation by people who have a clear understanding of their responsibilities" (HSCS 3.20).

2. The provider must ensure that foster carers and adult placement carers receive sufficient and regular adult protection training.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state "I am protected from harm abuse, neglect, bullying and exploitation by people who have a clear understanding of their responsibilities" (HSCS 3.20) and "I have confidence in people because they are trained, competent and skilled and are able to reflect on their practice and follow their professional and organisational codes". (HSCS 3.24)

3. To support good outcomes for carers, children and young people the provider should have robust contingency plans in place to ensure that satisfactory staffing levels are in place at all times.

This is to ensure that "my needs are met by the right number of people" HSCS (3.15) and "I experience stability in my care and support from people who know my needs, choices and wishes, even if there are changes in the service or organisation " HSCS (4.15)

4. The service should devise a development plan that follows SMART principles (Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely) and be regularly reviewed.

This is to ensure that "I use an organisation that is well led and managed " HSCS (4.23) The service should devise a development plan that follows SMART principles (Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely) and be regularly reviewed.

This is to ensure that "I use an organisation that is well led and managed " HSCS (4.23)

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

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

Recommendation 1

The service should always ensure that risk assessments for young people are robustly carried out where there is potential or identified risk. The assessment should also include how to respond to these risks and be shared with all key people in the child's plan. In addition, the service should ensure that risk assessments of extended family members and their home are always carried out prior to children and young people staying overnight.

National Care Standards, Foster care and Family Placement Services, Standard 2.

This recommendation was made on 26 June 2017.

Action taken on previous recommendation

Registered Manager and Quality Assurance Manager have undertaken review of current RAG ratings & will issue guidance to Service Managers and Staff on linking CHARMS RAG with an update/review of risk assessments. All Risk Assessments will have an automatic 6 month review date from date of development or review. Risk assessments should also evidence inclusion of service user (where applicable); LASW and extended family (again where appropriate)

Where extended (foster) family members who offer overnight stays to foster children this will only be permitted where a home visit, Health & Safety Assessment and assessment of sleeping arrangements have been undertaken by a SSW. This will be monitored via the main fostering household review and an outline report provided to the placing LASW. Where an overnight visit is for more than one night take place, or where there is a regular pattern of overnight stays the SSW will be expected to visit the household during at least one visit, and offer support to the family member as necessary.

This recommendation has been partially met, however the recommendation will continue as highlighted in the body of this report.

Recommendation 2

The service should always ensure that newly appointed staff members are provided with a robust induction period including professional training to support them to carry out their work.

National Care Standards, Foster Care and Family Placement Services, Standard 13.

This recommendation was made on 26 June 2018.

Action taken on previous recommendation

All full time staff recruited will have access PiCS group localised induction programme. This will include a skill analysis via supervision and action plan to address any training needs that arise. Skills development/ practice awareness sessions delivered by Training Manager or QA Manager will also be available.

Recommendation met.

Inspection and grading history

Date	Type	Gradings
29 Jun 2017	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership 5 - Very good Not assessed Not assessed 5 - Very good
26 Oct 2015	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership 5 - Very good Not assessed 5 - Very good 5 - Very good
11 Nov 2014	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership 5 - Very good Not assessed 5 - Very good 5 - Very good
7 Oct 2013	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership 5 - Very good Not assessed 5 - Very good 5 - Very good
6 Jun 2011	Unannounced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership 5 - Very good Not assessed Not assessed 4 - Good
27 May 2010	Announced	Care and support 5 - Very good

Date	Type	Gradings	
		Environment Staffing Management and leadership	Not assessed 5 - Very good Not assessed
30 Jul 2009	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	4 - Good Not assessed 4 - Good 5 - Very good
26 Jun 2008	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	3 - Adequate Not assessed 2 - Weak 3 - Adequate

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