



Inspection Report on

Wrexham Fostering Service

**Wrexham County Borough Council
Crown Buildings
31 Chester Street
Wrexham
LL13 8BG**

Date Inspection Completed

22/04/2024

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About Wrexham Fostering Service

Type of care provided	LA Fostering Service
Registered Provider	Wrexham County Borough Council Adults and Children's Services
Registered places	0
Language of the service	English
Previous Care Inspectorate Wales inspection	6 November 2014
Does this service promote Welsh language and culture?	The service provides does not provide an 'Active Offer' of the Welsh language.

Summary

The local authority fostering service operates five separate hubs. All with specific roles and responsibilities; the assessment of foster carers; recruitment and retention, supervising and support, special guardianship, and supported lodgings. A team manager oversees the whole service and is supported in their role by four assistant team managers who lead individual hubs.

The service has made significant progress in recruiting social workers to permanent roles. Agency social workers are employed to fill roles not yet filled with permanent staff. The staff team are competent, committed and experienced with skills to meet the requirements of the service. Staff benefit from development opportunities and told us they are well supported in their roles. The service recognises and utilises specific areas of expertise and knowledge, using this to further develop the service.

Children receive care from well supported foster carers. Foster carer's attendance at training is currently low, but they have access to extensive and varied training opportunities. Children's health needs and educational needs are recognised. They are encouraged to take part in activities they enjoy and have opportunities to attend regular social events organised by the fostering service.

Recent positive changes have been made, and the service has clear goals for the future in terms of developing the service to meet with current demands. Areas for development are recognised, and resources are allocated accordingly to try and ensure the service can meet demands. Ongoing quality assurance systems regularly review performance and recognises where action is required.

Well-being

Children are consulted about their care and can make their views known through their child looked after meetings, consultation with their social workers and access to advocacy services. However, children's voices are lacking within the paperwork. Developing further ways to gather feedback from children would provide valuable information to inform service development.

The matching of placements is delegated to a specific hub, meaning it is not always possible for the work to be carried on by another member of the hub team. Formalising the matching process would provide consistency. Children are placed with registered foster carers if it is not suitable for them to live with their families. The service relies heavily on connected persons placements and independent fostering agency placements. The assessments of connected family members are comprehensive, and reports are detailed. Despite this, they lack the children's voice and personal views regarding where they are living, and the local authority's care plan. At the time of the inspection, there were no vacant foster placements, meaning it was not possible to place children within their own fostering service, making matching very difficult.

Children are supported to be healthy. Foster carers are expected to promote healthy lifestyles, provide routines and consistent boundaries. Foster carers support children to participate in hobbies and activities of interest to them. Children are registered with primary health care agencies. They attend appointments as necessary, and access additional specialist services if needed. There is currently an extensive waiting list for local mental health services. The fostering service has a service level agreement with a third sector provider; however, this agreement is currently under review. Senior management are considering what services are available within the fostering service, looking at staff members skills and experience and providing packages of mental health care to individual children.

All children are currently attending suitable education provision. Supervising social workers and children's social workers work together to monitor children's educational attainment. Foster carers provide transport if required. They also regularly promote family contact. It was difficult from supervision records to fully evidence how foster carers are supporting children to make progress towards achieving well-being outcomes. There is limited evidence of how children are supported to manage their money. Pocket money is occasionally referenced to; however, it was noted a number of children do not have a savings account. This should be considered in foster carers supervisions and closely monitored.

Children have opportunities to participate in fun and interesting activities. The fostering service arranges regular social and seasonal events throughout the year. Foster carers and the fostering staff team told us the Christmas event is well attended and regarded as being

the “*highlight of the year*” within their social calendar. There are also regular walks, picnics and opportunities for children and families to get together.

The fostering service and children’s team work closely to safeguard children. All foster carers are expected to complete mandatory safeguarding training. Information is shared when there are concerns and any required actions are acted upon promptly. Foster carers told us they know who to talk to if they have concerns, and there is always someone available. Senior management told us they are also in the final stages of planning for delivering a helpline to be available out of hours.

There are a limited number of Welsh speaking foster carers. If possible, they will care for Welsh speaking children, however there are currently no Welsh speaking staff employed by the service. This is a service that does not provide an 'Active Offer' of the Welsh language. It does not anticipate, identify, or meet the Welsh language needs of people /children who use, or intend to use their service. We recommend that the service provider considers Welsh Government’s ‘More Than Just Words follow on strategic guidance for Welsh language in social care’.

Care and Support

The fostering service considers all applications for new placements. A designated member of the fostering team maintains oversight of all the placement requests, and availability within the resources accessible to the team. At the time of inspection, resources are limited, with little to no vacancies within the authority's own registered foster carers. The service is heavily reliant on external independent fostering agencies to provide much needed placements. There is no evidence of compatibility assessments being completed, meaning children are placed with foster carers they have not been matched with. However, placement disruptions are infrequent and there is evidence foster carers and children are supported in these situations.

Wrexham Fostering Service have invested time and money into their recruitment strategy. They are supported by Fostering Wales to try and increase the number of registered foster carers. We saw how several forward-thinking initiatives had recently been implemented, and they are currently recruiting for specialist foster carers. This has significantly increased the number of general enquiries received by the fostering service.

The standards of care and support to be provided to children is outlined within the recently updated statement of purpose. Foster carers are provided with the essential information to support children to achieve personal outcomes and they benefit from monthly supervision. The service provider provides a set format for the recording of supervisions, however we found various versions being used and it was not clear which was the correct format. We also found information recorded on the wrong file, this was shared with senior management who told us they would address this immediately.

Supervision records provide an overview of children's needs. Current pressures within the home, as well as recording positive progress and what support the foster carers are providing to build independence skills. However, the records sometimes lack clarity, are repetitive, and do not provide enough detail of what had been discussed. Records failed to provide evidence of what action was required and how this had been followed up at the next supervision, such as whether foster carers had attended the required training. This was discussed with the management team who stated they would review the documentation.

Foster carers are made aware of the need to keep daily records and to share these with the fostering team. We found inconsistencies in the way this is happening, and how they are shared, not all foster carers are fulfilling this duty.

Foster carers can access an extensive suite of training relevant to their role. Training is available online and face to face, and if required can be tailored to individual needs and can be delivered on a one-to-one basis. The training record shows foster carer's attendance at

training is poor, and there is little evidence this is addressed during monthly supervision. The fostering service are aware of this and are considering ways to improve the situation. Foster carers told us the quality of the training is '*very good*' and helped them in their role.

There have been significant changes in the fostering service's supervising and support hub. The service provider has been unsuccessful in recruiting permanent workers and the hub is currently mainly staffed by agency workers. Most foster carers have recently had a change in their supervising social worker, however, positively we were told that nearly all had met their newly allocated social worker. They said they are confident they could access the right support when they need it and there is always someone available to provide guidance.

The service recently introduced a 'fostering pioneer'. The role is another avenue of support for both newly registered and experienced foster carers. Regular social events provide opportunity for discussion and reflection. The events arranged are very well attended Initial feedback is that the role is a bridge between the foster carers and fostering service through open and meaningful communication.

Environment

The fostering service office provides a comfortable and suitable environment and workspace for the team. The dedicated number of desks available to the team supports the hybrid working approach in a large, open plan area. Smaller offices and meeting rooms with access to information technology communication systems are also available and are used for a variety of purposes. All staff have their own work mobile phones and laptops.

There are adequate kitchen and toilet facilities. The building is secure and security arrangements are in place so it cannot be accessed freely by members of the public. Specific rooms are available for foster carers groups and events. There is a visitor logbook in the reception area and staff at reception ensure visitors provide identification. Visitors are also given lanyards with temporary badges to access the building where necessary. Records are kept securely and are mostly electronic.

Foster carers' homes are assessed when they are recruited to determine their suitability in meeting children's needs. Supervising social workers visit fostering homes during announced and unannounced visits, which provide opportunities to monitor the environment. Children's bedrooms are routinely seen as part of visits. Standards of health and safety in foster carers' homes are considered as part of the formal annual review process, together with pet assessments which consider potential risks. Children have a say in how they want their bedrooms decorated and personalise these to their taste. The suitability of the environment children live in is further monitored during reviews of their care and support plan.

Leadership and Management

The fostering service has recently undergone several significant changes, the biggest being the introduction of different hubs. Specific roles and responsibilities are delegated to different hubs, this is widely seen as a very positive change, where significant improvements have been implemented. Even though some elements of the team is reliant on agency staff, overall, the service has successfully recruited permanent care staff to most roles. The service has workers with a range of skills from several different backgrounds and this supports the team. The management team recognise the value of the various skills, knowledge, and expertise available and utilise them to help and support the service. The service has appointed suitable leaders, and care staff value the support of the senior management team.

Not every hub is operating the same in terms of catching up and working together. Only one hub appeared to be having catch ups every two weeks. Whole team meetings take place every four months, but minutes were not available. Staff said they are part of a committed, tight team who work well together. They told us they feel well supported by their managers and the senior management team who are accessible and responsive. Staff are competent and skilled, safer recruitment processes are followed, and staff are supervised regularly. Staff responses to Care Inspectorate Wales questionnaires were positive and they told us they feel valued. Responses were also positive regarding learning and development opportunities available to them.

There are consistent audit system and strong governance arrangements meaning senior management at the service effectively monitor the day-to-day operations of the service. Senior management have oversight of the work that needs to be completed and areas where improvements are still needed. The quality-of-care review is detailed and highlights the service's aims and objectives for the coming months. The service provider is fully aware of the need to recruit additional foster carers and are working hard to recruit and increase the number registered. Different initiatives are being delivered, aiming to raise awareness within the local community to recruit local carers for local children. They are currently advertising for specialist foster carers, which has seen an increase in enquiries. There has also been significant increase in fostering fees recently.

The supervision of foster carers happens when required and unannounced visits are completed. Following a period of considerable change, the fostering panel is now well established. Fostering assessments are completed in line with set targets. Suitable evidence is gathered, but at times assessments lack evaluation and consideration of how individual circumstances will support or hinder applicants in their role as foster carers.

The panel receives information in a timely manner. The panel chair regularly meets with the agency decision maker, and they all have access to the training hub. The newly appointed panel chair is working through annual appraisals. Even though the panel is consistently the

required number the panel lacks diversity to ensure it is appropriately balanced. The relatively new panel chair is diligent and keen to develop the panel to be more open, diverse and evidence based in its approach. Any questions to be raised will be shared with the panel chair. Panel records are detailed to evidence careful consideration of issues and explain the rationale for decisions. Senior management are also aware improvements are still required in meeting foster carers annual review requirements; some remain outstanding. The service has introduced a new digital system. However, this is not yet being fully utilised, meaning there is variation in what is being recorded digitally which leads to inconsistencies and at times errors. Fully utilising with a digital system would benefit the service.

Policies and procedures are available and are shared with the team and foster carers. The fostering handbook is being updated, and foster carers are eager to be part of this process meaning they can make sure the information is relevant and useful to their role. Feedback from foster carers is regularly gathered, they are consulted on matters important to their role. Despite this, the feedback lacks consultation with children and is missing their views on what is important to them and what they want from the fostering service.

Summary of Non-Compliance

Status	What each means
New	This non-compliance was identified at this inspection.
Reviewed	Compliance was reviewed at this inspection and was not achieved. The target date for compliance is in the future and will be tested at next inspection.
Not Achieved	Compliance was tested at this inspection and was not achieved.
Achieved	Compliance was tested at this inspection and was achieved.

We respond to non-compliance with regulations where poor outcomes for people, and / or risk to people’s well-being are identified by issuing Priority Action Notice (s).

The provider must take immediate steps to address this and make improvements. Where providers fail to take priority action by the target date we may escalate the matter to an Improvement and Enforcement Panel.

Priority Action Notice(s)

Regulation	Summary	Status
N/A	No non-compliance of this type was identified at this inspection	N/A

Where we find non-compliance with regulations but no immediate or significant risk for people using the service is identified we highlight these as Areas for Improvement.

We expect the provider to take action to rectify this and we will follow this up at the next inspection. Where the provider has failed to make the necessary improvements we will escalate the matter by issuing a Priority Action Notice.

Area(s) for Improvement

Regulation	Summary	Status
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N/A	No non-compliance of this type was identified at this inspection	N/A
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