



Inspection Report on

Caerphilly County Borough Council Fostering Services

**Caerphilly County Borough Council
Unit 7 De Clare Court
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Caerphilly
CF83 3HU**

Date Inspection Completed

06/09/2024

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About Caerphilly County Borough Council Fostering Services

Type of care provided	LA Fostering Service
Registered Provider	Caerphilly County Borough Council Adults and Children's Services
Language of the service	English
Previous Care Inspectorate Wales inspection	20 January 2016
Does this service promote Welsh language and culture?	This service is providing an 'Active Offer' of the Welsh language. It anticipates, identifies, and meets the Welsh language and cultural needs of people who use, or may use the service.

Summary

Foster Wales Caerphilly comprises one team, split into two roles. One has responsibility for recruitment and assessment, and the other provides support and supervision of approved carers. There is a registered manager who is supported by senior social workers. Foster carers are assessed and approved to look after children providing short breaks, short and long term care. Assessments of connected foster carers are also carried out by the fostering service. A "Family and Friends Team", supports the reduction of children looked after, by supporting carers when appropriate, to apply to court for permanency orders. The service supports some care experienced young people, post eighteen in 'When I am Ready' arrangements.

Children receive a good standard of care from foster carers, who support them to meet their well-being outcomes. Children's education, physical and emotional health needs are promoted, they are encouraged to have fun and enjoy a range of interests and activities. Specialist services are available to children to help them make sense of their history and experiences. Foster carers are supported to understand children from a trauma informed perspective. Most foster carers told us they feel well supported in their role. Management and staff are dedicated, feel supported and are provided regular supervision and training opportunities.

Improvements are needed to the frequency of the quality of the care and support review.

Well-being

Children can access a guide with information about the service, but this lacked information about children's rights and entitlements. Some children are starting to attend a newly formed children's forum called 'chatterbox' where information is shared about relevant topics, such as criminal exploitation and internet safety. The forum also aims to gain children's views about service development and improvement. Children are supported to attend their children looked after (CLA) reviews and have access to independent advocacy. Some children take part in the consultation process as part of their foster carer's annual reviews. The service provider is aware it needs to strengthen its consultation with children and ensure they use feedback from children to inform the development of the service.

Children are supported to be healthy; they are registered with universal health services and are supported to attend routine and specialist appointments. Foster carers promote healthy lifestyles and structured routines to encourage good personal hygiene practices. Children are provided with a leisure card to access a variety of free leisure activities within the county. Some foster carers receive specific training to meet children's health needs and all foster carers are expected to complete paediatric first aid training. Children's health is monitored via annual health assessments, reviews and supervision visits to foster carers' homes. Interventions from My Support Team (MyST) and Intensive Support Team (IST) are highly valued by foster carers and they have a significant and positive impact on children's well-being outcomes. These services offer direct work with children, they also help foster carers to understand children's early life experiences and provide them with suitable therapeutic strategies.

Children are supported to attend education and reach their potential. Foster carers value the importance of education, promote attendance and advocate on their behalf during meetings. Some foster carers show great commitment to support children's development, working in partnership with a wide range of health professionals and education. They show an enthusiasm to learn new skills and techniques to provide stimulation for children and to meet their needs. Children have personal education plans and the provider's CLA education lead monitors and promotes educational outcomes. However, supervising social workers told us some children are not accessing suitable education provision, which impacts their outcomes and places additional pressure on fostering households. The CLA education lead will be attending foster care development groups to increase awareness about their role.

Children do things that matter to them and have fun. Foster carers transport and supervise children's time with their families and maintain positive relationships with family members. Children access clubs and extra-curricular activities such as swimming lessons, sports clubs and dance classes. They enjoy trips to parks and beaches and go on holidays with their foster carers. Each fostering household is provided with free Cadw passes. The fostering service also organises activities and events for children and carers to coincide with school holidays, including well-being walks. Some children remain with their foster carers after they reach adulthood, in 'When I am Ready' arrangements and have continued positive relationships with them.

The local authority service provider is actively recruiting foster carers to meet the needs of children referred to the service. The service provider does not currently have foster carers who specifically provide emergency, or parent and child arrangements but plans are underway to address these shortfalls. External foster care providers are utilised to fill any gaps and the service provider has a low level of exemptions in place. Foster carers told us they do not feel pressurised to accept children who are not a suitable match.

Assessments of prospective carers are detailed, consider their suitability and all checks are completed. All prospective carers attend foster panel, and the quality of their assessment is scrutinised. There has been an increase in the demand for connected person carer assessments and the service has been responsive in employing additional assessors, to avoid delays for children. An additional team in the service, is supporting the reduction of children looked after, by supporting carers when appropriate, to apply to court for permanence orders.

A multi-disciplinary resource panel considers the matching of children to foster carers, and we found most arrangements were presented retrospectively. We saw compatibility assessments, but some records lack details about children's needs and risks. The fostering service try to share as much information about children with foster carers prior to their arrival. However, foster carers told us they "*do not have the luxury to match*", and they do not always have all the information they need about children.

Care and support plans for children are reviewed and updated at every CLA review meeting. Some are outcome focused but this practice is not consistent. All foster carers have up to date foster care agreements, which are reviewed annually. Safe care agreements are in place at the time of children's arrival; however, some require improvement to ensure they are personalised and reflect children's individual needs.

There are a range of support services available which foster carers and staff find beneficial and promote children's outcomes. The service provider has robust systems in place to identify any concerns early and this triggers fast and responsive additional support. Children can be referred to the MyST and IST services, in order to improve the emotional and psychological well-being of children. They offer a range of support including direct work with children and they upskill foster carers to meet children's needs. They also provide consultations to foster carers and supervising social workers which promotes placement stability. Foster carers and staff speak positively about the services and told us they are "*beneficial*" and "*invaluable*".

The service provider works in partnership with other relevant agencies, including health, education, youth offending services and housing. Multi-agency "complex needs" panels are held, which consider additional support and external services available to children. This ensures children receive the right care and support as early as possible.

Children's care and support is monitored by the service during supervision and support visits to foster carers. This includes discussions around how children's health, well-being, education and independence skills are supported. Most foster carers report they have

established good working relationships with their supervising social workers. The frequency of supervision visits varies. Unannounced home visits are also routinely undertaken.

One foster carer told us: *“Support is great in my experience. I have phone calls and home visits to check in, or if I need advice someone always answers. If my link isn’t in work then someone else helps me, so I think having such a friendly helpful team who support all foster carers and not just their own is amazing”*. Foster carers have a strong identity, and they are motivated to create a supportive culture. The mechanism to support the development of buddying or a mentoring system requires strengthening.

Foster carers confidently advocate in the best interests of children. They are supported to register concerns and complaints, although, the outcome is not always clearly communicated to them. They receive safeguarding training, and they value the emergency support and advice and guidance they receive. Appropriate actions are taken in response to safeguarding issues and matters are referred to safeguarding as required. When they are subject to safeguarding investigations, foster carers are provided with information in relation to independent support. They receive additional support and visits from their supervising social worker and they are offered debriefs at the end of the process. Foster carers are returned to foster panel following any safeguarding concerns, to review their suitability and approval.

Environment

The local authority provider operates the fostering service from suitable offices within a large building, which also includes other children's services teams. Staff told us these arrangements facilitate a cohesive approach with other professionals working with children and their families.

The building has adequate kitchen and toilet facilities. There are appropriate health and safety systems in place. Meeting rooms are available and provide opportunities for private and confidential discussions. Foster carers told us they have difficulties contacting staff due to technical issues with the telephone system and poor mobile phone coverage in the area. The local authority service provider is aware, and they have taken action.

Access to the office is secure. It is not accessible to members of the public or foster carers. Visitor identification is checked at reception, and a visitor pass is provided to access the building. In person meetings, fostering events, support groups and training are held in suitable venues within the local authority. The provider adopts a hybrid approach, which means some meetings are held virtually, including foster panel. Foster carers use their own devices to access virtual meetings and messaging groups. Some foster carers told us they have difficulties utilising the digital foster care handbook. Training and development sessions are available to support and assist carers using technology.

Records within the main office building are stored securely, including password protected electronic records, in line with legislation. Some foster carers told us they require lockable units to store confidential records within their homes. Foster carers also told us they require identification badges, the manager is taking action to address both issues.

Staff have suitable and secure equipment to work remotely. The service adopts an agile and hybrid working approach which allows staff to work remotely from offices across the county, or from their own homes. Staff have clear procedures to follow when lone working.

The service uses a national good practice home safety checklist to assess the suitability of prospective foster and connected person carer's home environment. Home conditions are monitored during routine and unannounced home visits completed by staff. Standards of health and safety in foster carers' homes are considered as part of the formal annual review process, together with pet assessments. The service also accesses a specialist to assess dogs when required.

Leadership and Management

Information about the service is available but needs to be reviewed and updated. The service provider's Statement of Purpose (SoP) provides information about the service's aims and objectives, roles and responsibilities and standards of care. The SoP requires updating to ensure information is in line with regulations. There is a guide for children which provides some useful information, but consideration should be given to some of the content to ensure this aligns with a rights-based approach and a trauma informed model of care. The service is in the process of developing an interactive version to ensure the format is accessible to all children who use the service.

The service has policies and procedures in place to support managers and staff to achieve the aims of the service and support children to achieve their personal outcomes. However, some require updating to ensure they align with current legislation and procedures.

The service provider has systems in place regarding the recruitment and approval of foster carers. A specific recruitment post has been created to support and increase the numbers of foster carers. The management team told us they plan to develop emergency, and parent and child schemes. Regular recruitment events are held, and data is collected on the numbers of prospective carers making enquiries and progressing through to assessments. The service provider is also in the process of developing and recruiting pioneer foster carers who will support the retention of foster carers.

Foster carers receive 'skills to foster' training during their assessment, to ensure they understand their role and responsibilities. Connected person foster carers told us they receive sufficient information about their roles and responsibilities, and they attend 'skills to care' training. A connected person foster carer told us the training broadened their understanding of trauma. Foster carers have access to a digital fostering handbook, which contains useful and key information. However, some foster carers told us they have difficulties referring to the handbook because it is difficult to navigate. Foster carers told us they feel supported; most value training and they have started to engage well with the learning and development framework. Information about financial support available to foster carers requires improvement.

Most assessments we reviewed were of good quality and contain all the required information, analysis and checks to ensure prospective foster carer's suitability to care for children. The fostering panel ensures assessments and annual reviews of foster carers are scrutinised to confirm they are safe, suitably fit, and competent to undertake the role. Prospective carers attend panel and receive confirmation of their approval status. Panel records provide a summary and consideration of issues, however further detail explaining the rationale for decisions is required. Panel also needs to strengthen the way in which they capture children's voices.

The panel chair is keen to develop the diversity of panel members. A list of potential panel members has improved availability, and panel has remained quorate. Opportunities for panel members to attend training, including trauma informed practice, needs to be developed. All panels are held virtually, and this has increased overall efficacy. However,

some foster carers and staff told us they would benefit from meetings in person when panel

Summary of Non-Compliance

are considering new assessments or safeguarding matters.

The local authority provider follows safe recruitment practices to enable them to make an appropriate decision on the appointment of staff, but they need to strengthen processes for recording any gaps in employment. There is a well-established core team of staff who are experienced, and knowledgeable. They competently deliver the overall functions of the fostering service. There is a strong supportive team culture, and the team in turn feel supported by a visible, available and knowledgeable manager. Agile working suits staff, and they ensure they see each other regularly in the office. Team meetings are pro-active, providing opportunities to contribute to discussions and the development of the service. Staff told us there are good opportunities to learn and develop. They are provided with a range of training opportunities, relevant to their role. The team facilitates regular reflective group discussions. Additional support is provided through the therapeutic services, including consultations with psychologists. Staff are receiving regular supervision, and their appraisals are comprehensive, with a focus on staff development and achievements.

There are arrangements in place for the suitable oversight of the service through quality assurance processes, which review the standards of care and compliance with regulations. Quarterly reports on the adequacy of resources and quality of care reviews are completed. However, quality of care reviews are not undertaken in accordance with the timescales outlined in regulations. The quality of care review is structured and contains relevant data and information but it requires more in depth analysis of the feedback from children, foster carers and staff, to inform learning and developments to improve the service.

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 expect those responsible in the local authority to take immediate steps to address and rectify any areas identified for improvement. These will be followed up at the next inspection.

Area(s) for Improvement		
Regulation	Summary	Status
52	Quality of care reviews have not been carried out every six months.	New

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Date Published 25/10/2024