



Inspection Report on

Foster Wales Newport

**Newport City Council
Civic Centre
Godrey Road
Newport
NP20 4UR**

Date Inspection Completed

08/07/2024

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About Newport City Council Fostering Services

Type of care provided	LA Fostering Service
Registered Provider	Newport City Council Adults and Children's Services
Language of the service	English
Previous Care Inspectorate Wales inspection	2 February 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

The Local Authority fostering service is provided by two teams, with specific roles and functions. Foster Wales Newport is responsible for the recruitment, supervision and support of general foster carers, who are approved to look after children, providing respite, short and long-term care. The Newport Family & Friends (F&F) team is responsible for the assessment and support of connected person foster carers and supports children to remain where possible, with people they know. The F&F team also support children's arrangements which fall outside of fostering regulations including special guardianship orders (SGO's). This inspection is focused on the role of the service in supporting children placed with general and connected person foster carers. At the time of inspection there were approximately 122 approved general foster carers supporting 150 children, 23 approved connected person foster carers supporting 29 children and 15 temporary approved connected person carers supporting 18 children. The service also supports unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Children receive care from foster carers who are supported by a service which promotes and improves their well-being outcomes. Additional services are available to children to understand their history and experiences. Carers are supported to better understand children, how they can best respond and meet their needs. Most 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.

Areas for improvement have been identified in several areas, including care and support, systems for recording and monitoring records, foster carers agreements and provision of the service. The service has experienced changes in leadership and management within the past twelve months. The provider told us action will be taken to review the inspection findings and inform service development plans.

Well-being

The children's guide to the service provides information about their rights, entitlements and how to raise a complaint. The guide includes prompts for children to record personal details and have discussions with their carers about their wishes, likes and dislikes. The guide is available in formats for older and younger children in both Welsh and English. Managers told us translation services are provided to children who require information in other languages. Children have opportunities to express their views about their care. Most children are consulted as part of their carer's annual reviews. Their views are considered as part of their Child Looked After (CLA) reviews. Reviews are held online which we were told by carers encourage some but not all children to attend. The procedures for gathering children's views when relationships with their carers break down and their views in developing the service need further strengthening.

Children are supported to achieve positive health and emotional well-being. Each foster home is provided a leisure card, for all household members to access a variety of free leisure activities. Children's health is monitored during their annual CLA health assessments, their CLA reviews and supervision visits to carers homes. Children are registered with universal health services and are supported to attend routine and specialist appointments. There are additional services for care experienced children, which support them to understand their life journey and stability with their carers. When children present with additional needs, prompt action is taken to ensure these needs are supported and additional training is provided to carers, to understand children's trauma, early life experiences and how best they can respond.

Children's education is promoted. Carers value and advocate for children, ensuring they are supported to learn and develop to their full potential. Children have personal education plans and the providers CLA education co-ordinator monitors and ensures their educational needs are met. Additional support is provided to children who need it, which for some includes extra tutoring. Education professionals are included in CLA reviews and meetings regarding children's stability, to ensure the team around the child, understand their needs. The provider is keeping data on attendance levels for children looked after, but data does not consider the numbers of children not accessing statutory education.

Carers are trained in safeguarding and understand their role and responsibilities. Immediate action is taken when children raise concerns regarding their care, but not all actions identified as part of safeguarding investigations and carers annual reviews are followed. Safer caring plans which consider how best to safeguard children and promote healthy relationships within fostering households are not routinely reviewed. Children are supported to maintain relationships with people who are important to them. This includes previous carers.

Care and Support

The service is actively recruiting more carers to meet the needs of all children referred to the service and reduce the need to use private providers. Assessments of prospective carers are detailed, consider their suitability and ensures all checks are undertaken. The F&F team is supporting the reduction of children looked after, by supporting carers when appropriate, to apply to court for a SGO. The service ensures connected person foster carer assessments are carried out quickly to avoid delay for children.

The team know their carers well. When referrals are received, the team considers general carers strengths and any vulnerabilities. The processes for assessing the suitability of matching between children and general carers needs strengthening. Carers told us they are provided information verbally, but written records of children's needs are not always accurate. Matching processes described in the services statement of purpose (SOP) including placement planning meetings are not consistent. There is no procedure for assessing the suitability of long-term matches for children to ensure carers understand their needs may change, are committed and consideration is given to the potential impact on other household members.

Children can access several services which support their well-being. The providers consultant social worker facilitates initial placement meetings for some children who have experienced lots of changes. These provide an early therapeutic intervention to share historical information about the child's experiences. Where relationships between children and their carers are at risk of breaking down, the consultant social worker facilitates multi-agency stability meetings to consider how children and their carers can be supported. Staff and carers report these as beneficial and have prevented placement breakdown. When breakdowns have occurred, this is partly considered in carers annual reviews, however they do not include all the issues or the voice of children. This would enable the provider to identify any lessons learnt and inform service development plans.

Children can be referred to the My Support Team (MyST) and Family Support Services which aim to improve the emotional and psychological well-being of care experienced children. These services offer a range of support including consultations, direct work and training to help carers understand children's needs. Children have received direct support to help them understand their experiences. Additional support has been sought for some children from external services to ensure they receive the right care and support as early as possible. Carers and staff speak positively about the support offered and told us this is improving children's stability, their sense of belonging and carers skills. Most carers told us they feel there are good services available to children, but some report the support services available to children with disabilities are limited.

The provider gathers feedback from children and their social workers as part of carers annual reviews. This feedback is considered in the services quality assurance processes. Feedback from children has included *'We have fun days out, we eat healthy meals, I feel loved and I feel safe'* and *'We go to really nice places. they are really kind, always help us when we need help'*.

Children's voices are listened to if they raise concerns regarding their care and support and action is taken to safeguard them, but processes for identifying and mitigating risks need strengthening. Safer care plans which consider safeguarding arrangements within fostering households are not routinely reviewed or updated with carers to ensure all risks are considered and carers are aware of their responsibilities. Incidents have occurred where concerns have been raised about safe care practices. Some carers have not completed training, which has been identified as a need, during annual reviews and safeguarding investigations.

Most carers support children to achieve positive well-being. Children are provided opportunities to be part of families and create memories including going on holiday. Children's care and support is monitored by the service during supervision and support visits to carers. This includes discussions around how children's health, educational and independence skills are supported. Most carers report they have established good working relationships with their supervising social workers, but some have been impacted by changes of workers. Not all records of formal supervisions were available for inspection. Connected person carers who are temporarily approved to care for children while a full assessment is completed, are not provided formal supervision. Reflections of how training is supporting carers to meet children's needs, require strengthening.

Some children are remaining with their carers after they turn eighteen years old in 'When I'm ready' (WIR) arrangements. Carers report they are committed to children they care for but are not clear on how they will be supported, once children turn eighteen and cease being a child looked after. The provider is responding to this by providing additional information sessions to carers and there is a designated WIR lead in the team to support transitions. We found procedures have not been consistently followed and records did not include plans for children who are due to turn eighteen shortly. An area for improvement has been identified for care and support due to processes which require further strengthening, including processes for matching, identifying and mitigating risks, support available to children and carers when placements end and support available to children as they transition to adulthood.

Environment

The service operates from an open plan office, which is fit for purpose. Staff can choose to attend the office and work remotely. Other children service teams operate from the same office, which supports positive multi- agency working. Meeting rooms are available, to provide opportunities for confidential discussions. Records are stored securely, including password protected electronic records, in line with legislation. Staff told us they have suitable equipment to work remotely. Access to the office is secure. Events which are arranged by the service, including appreciation events, support groups and training are held in meeting rooms at the office and across venues in Newport.

Prior to carers being approved, an assessment is carried out on the suitability of the home environment, to ensure this supports children's well-being. The service uses a national good practice home safety checklist to consider any risks and actions required. The suitability of home conditions is routinely reviewed during home visits completed by staff. Childrens bedrooms are seen to ensure they are suitable and children have everything they need. Children personalise their rooms to their taste. Managers told us the home safety checklist is regularly reviewed alongside pet assessments to ensure any risks can be mitigated, but not all records were available. Additional support is provided to connected person carers to ensure their housing meets the long-term needs of children.

Leadership and Management

The statement of purpose provides information about the service's aims and objectives. This requires updating, to reflect current management arrangements and to ensure the service described accurately reflects the service delivered. The provider recognises they need to recruit more carers and specific posts have been created to support this. Regular recruitment events are held and data is collected on the numbers of prospective carers making enquiries and progressing through assessments. Managers told us they are considering ways they can gather further feedback on this process, to inform service plans. Managers told us areas of the service currently being developed, include recruiting pioneer carers who will support the recruitment and retention of foster carers and creating foster carer profiles, which will support the matching process.

Prospective foster carers have access to information about the service to enable them to have a clear understanding of the service provision. They receive information and 'skills to foster' training prior to their assessment, to ensure they understand the role and their responsibilities. Carers' participation in this training, forms part of their assessment. Connected carers told us they receive sufficient information on their roles and responsibilities as part of their assessment. The service sends carers newsletters every three months of important updates. Carers told us they often find out information from speaking to other carers. Carers do not have access to a current fostering handbook. The provider is currently updating the handbook, which contains key information for carers around roles, responsibilities and entitlements. Processes for recording and managing records needs improvement. Not all records were available for inspection. Inconsistencies were found in where records are stored and we did not see evidence key documents are shared and agreed with foster carers.

Children and their carers are supported by a service which provides appropriate numbers of staff. Most staff recruitment checks are completed in line with regulation. Both teams are currently stable but have experienced staff sickness and turnover in the last two years, which has impacted capacity. Staff are dedicated and want what is best for children. Staff have opportunities to attend a range of training specific to the needs of children looked after. An analysis of the services training needs is completed every year and action is taken to address any learning needs. Staff in the F&F team have opportunities to change roles, in order to develop further knowledge and skills. Staff receive regular supervision which considers their well-being. Staff who support general carers have group supervision which they find beneficial and provides opportunities for whole team reflections. Both teams feel well supported by their team managers and report morale has improved. Staff told us there can be challenges due to capacity and competing demands. They value the support provided by the consultant social worker, but their hours have been reduced which has impacted the support available. Additional posts have recently been created in both teams to provide administrative support, support children's family time and develop more consistent support groups. Staff in the F&F team told us they would benefit from more opportunities to

share good practice with colleagues and develop further knowledge and understanding of fostering.

Foster care agreements are in place which set out expectations for carers. Annual reviews of foster carers approval consider their compliance with the requirements of the foster care agreement. Assessments and carers' annual reviews are presented to the Local Authority's fostering panel for consideration, who scrutinise information and make recommendations including whether carers should be approved. Panel recommendations are considered by the Agency Decision Maker. Panel members receive regular training to support them within their role. We found not all recommendations made by panel are actioned. This includes recommendations for carers to undertake training to reduce risks and improve their skills. Requests by panel for update reports, have not been presented in the requested timescales. There have been delays in the timescales annual reviews have been completed and unannounced visits have not occurred annually. This is an area for improvement.

Most carers told us they feel supported within their role and when they ask for support, action is taken, but some carers have experienced several changes of worker. The provider offers a range of additional support to increase carer retention and support them to feel valued. Appreciation events and family activities are held during the year. Support groups are held for general foster carers and include a specific group for male foster carers. There is no group currently for connected person foster carers due to low turnout, but the provider has plans to review this. There is an out of hours phone service which operates for a few hours every evening and on weekends. Carers value this support.

The Family and Friends team facilitate specific training for connected person foster carers around supporting children to understand their family and history. They also provide information to carers on SGO's and support carers who are ready to make applications to court. Carers told us requests have been made for face-to-face training on first aid and this is now provided. The provider is monitoring attendance at training and some events have been cancelled due to low numbers. The team is working closely with the learning and development team, to establish how this can be addressed. Records of carers training does not reflect on how this has supported them within their role. Carers told us they value the support provided by the consultant social worker in the team and specific training provided on trauma and attachment.

The provider has arrangements for the oversight of the service and quality assurance systems to review standards of care and compliance with regulations, but this needs further strengthening. The provider is monitoring temporary approvals of connected carers to ensure there are no unnecessary delays to children's care planning. Quarterly reports on the adequacy of resources and quality of care reviews are completed within the required timescale. These consider views collected from children, carers, carers children and children's social workers during annual reviews, but do not analyse all feedback. Further analysis is needed on significant incidents including safeguarding concerns to inform improvements in the service. Managers told us there are areas of the service which are being developed, but the services action plan has not been reviewed in over a year. A report was completed by the provider two years ago on placement stability and made

several recommendations. These recommendations have not been actioned. There have been several changes in the leadership and management of the service in the last twelve months. An area for improvement has been identified in relation to the provision of the service. The provider told us they are in the process of developing up to date service development plans to drive forward and monitor recommendations for improvements.

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 expect the provider to take action to rectify Areas for Improvement. We will follow this up at the next inspection.

Area(s) for Improvement

Regulation	Summary	Status
13	The provider has not ensured matching processes are robust, carers are provided information on children's needs, the provider is responsive and proactive in identifying and mitigating risks, carers are provided consistent supervision and training, children and carers are supported when a placement ends and children are supported into adulthood and when leaving care in line with national guidance.	New
15	The providers has not ensured there are effective arrangements in place to monitor and review the obligations placed upon foster parents as set out in the foster care agreement. Not all reviews are taking place annually. Recommendations made by fostering panel have not been actioned and updated reports not presented back to panel within the requested timescale. Annual reviews have not thoroughly considered all issues relating to standards of care including safe caring practices.	New
37	There are inconsistencies in the procedures for recording and storing records. Not all records were available on the providers data base system. Some records are stored on other systems which were not	New

	made accessible to inspectors. Foster carers records including supervisions and safer caring plans have not been signed by carers to evidence they agree with records and understand any actions identified. Records do not provide information of plans for children who are due to turn eighteen shortly and cease being a child looked after.	
3	The provider has not ensured there are clear arrangements for the oversight and governance of the service in order to establish, develop and embed a culture which ensures that the best possible outcomes are achieved for children using the service and to meet the requirements of the Regulations. Quality assurance records do not analyse data to identify any patterns or lessons which would drive forward improvements in the service. The services action plan was last reviewed in May 2023 and actions have not been met. Recommendations from internal reports on placement stability have not been actioned. Shortfalls have been found in the processes of recording and storing records and care and support delivered to children.	New

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