

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Hythe House Support Ltd

59 Staplehurst Road Sittingbourne Kent ME10 2NY

Lead Inspector
Lucy Ansell

Announced Inspection 24th January 2006 09:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Hythe House Support Ltd Name of service

Address 59 Staplehurst Road

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Kent

ME10 2NY

Telephone number 01795 438634

Fax number

Email address vernaljeffers@hythehousesupport.co.uk

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company

(if applicable)

Hythe House Support Ltd

Name of registered

manager (if applicable)

Mr Vernal Jeffers

Type of registration Fostering Agencies

No. of places registered

(if applicable)

0

Category(ies) of registration, with number

of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

1. A satisfactory CRB clearance for the Registered Manager is to be received by the National Care Standards Commission

Date of last inspection 21st February 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Hythe House Support Limited is an independent fostering agency. The agency offers foster placements for assessment, support, respite and rehabilitation guided by individual children's and young peoples' ongoing care plan. As appropriate placements can be made for the short, medium and long term and if required on an emergency basis. Services offered also include organising and supervision of family contact, meeting daily travel arrangements with driver and escort services.

Additional services that can be provided include access to the companies educational unit and nursery, arrangements made for therapy and counselling. The office premises are close to Sittingbourne town centre and can provide a suitable venue for training, meetings and contact visits – supervised or otherwise. The agency has 12 foster carers based in Kent and Medway and has 22 children placed with them.

SUMMARY

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This announced inspection commenced on 24th January 2006 and focused on key standards, and was conducted over 3 days by one inspector Lucy Ansell. All key personnel were interviewed, a panel meeting was observed and carers and young people were visited in their own homes. Unfortunately due to time a restraint training session was unable to be observed.

Policies and procedures were read and a selection of staff personnel files were scrutinised. A case tracking exercise was undertaken with regards to three foster carer families and the young people placed with them, in order that the agency's assessments and continuing support of carers could be inspected, as well as the initial matching and ongoing placements of children.

Further material was gained through the receipt of questionnaires completed by placing authorities, young people and carers and the pre – inspection questionnaire, completed by the agency. Six children, six foster carers and twelve placing social workers completed pre inspection questionnaires. The outcome of these on the whole was very positive and expressed that a good service is being provided and the children are satisfied with the care given. Some of the comments from the foster carers that were received "very impressed with the levels of support " "Small homely agency that really cares about the children and their carers".

Throughout the inspection process the agency's, social workers, administrative and management team were very welcoming, open and receptive to the inspection process.

Three foster homes who were visited and the many foster carers who took part in the inspection are thanked for taking the time to speak to me or for the contribution that they made.

What the service does well:

Carers feel they have excellent support and are visited regularly and receive ongoing training and guidance. They all agreed the out of hours system and being able to always contact a social worker or director was excellent. It was also felt because it was still a small agency there was always a friendly voice to reassure and who knew you and your young person or carer or young person was welcome to pop in to the agency.

The agency exceeded in the following; policies and procedures being regularly updated and the monitoring procedures being efficient ensuring systems are working correctly. The agency also provides carers with a policy and excellent training on Child protection and also a user-friendly child protection flow chart which is clear and easy to use. The staff files are excellent and contain all the required information in a clear and easy to read way. The finances of the agency are well maintained and the staff responsible for them has worked hard

at ensuring they are not dry numbers but provides an easy to read pictorial format which is understandable.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This is only the agency's second inspection and significant progress has been made. Most of the requirements and recommendations from the last inspection had been actioned, with work in progress on the others.

It was clear much work had taken place to ensure all the paperwork was now in place, with more recording and collating of all the necessary written information. All policies and procedures has been reviewed and rewritten as required. The agency has placed much emphasis on staff training and although not quite met was clearly making great strides to meet the requirements. The staff team is now all in place and this will enable the last few areas that need to be looked at be initiated, and work was being started on the recommendations and requirements made from this inspection as the inspection ended.

What they could do better:

The health standards need to be looked at to ensure the agency is accessing all available resources. The recording of health appointments and information from Local Authorities regarding health is still poor.

Leaving care and preparing for adulthood is very much an area where improvements need to be made and the agency is aware of where they would like to go with this.

Although training is an area where great improvements have been made it still needs to be more targeted, specific to carers and staff. It would also help them if a training matrix for all personnel was created then a clearer picture would evolve. There also appears to be a need to ensure supervision is a time for reflection so carers can see how they could incorporate or have used training in their daily routines.

The case records on the children's files lack enough detail and this may have been in the past due to lack of adequate staff and time to complete this comprehensively. There also needs to be a case recording policy as some carers are also recording at varying levels. On the paperwork they need to ensure signatures and dates are clear on all paperwork.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

 The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT - The intended outcomes for these Standards are

12

The children placed with the agency can be confident that the foster carers positively promote their health and development, however the agency does not maintain detailed health care notes which could be transferred with the child.

EVIDENCE:

Young people's care files were inspected, with particular attention paid towards 'health' records. There is a separate section dedicated to health however it was strongly recommended that this be reviewed to ensure all information recorded is accurate and up to date. Whilst information sheets were held to record the contact details of a child's GP, Dentist and Optician, and visits made to them, in many instances these details had not been fully completed. In some cases, carers held more information than was on file at the agency.

A separate sheet was seen on most detailing consent for first aid or any required emergency treatment in foster carers files. Some files held relevant LAC documentation, although there were instances whereby information pertaining to 'consent' for treatment was not filled in; more positively, evidence was found to support that the agency had 'chased' the placing authority for such missing information and had updated their consent forms. Through the reading of files and from speaking directly with carers and young people, it was evident that all of the young people had been registered with local health services and their immediate health needs were being met. Carers are required to notify the agency of all accidents, injuries, illnesses and use of medication and this information is transferred into the agencies monitoring systems.

In terms of looking after an individual's mental and emotional health, the agency works hard to ensure the 'right' provision is secured through accessing psychiatric and psychology services, both for the child and the family they are placed with.

The inspector found evidence to support that carers do receive some guidance but need more training to assist them to meet the health needs of those in their care, it was pleasing to find that this subject has now been more extensively covered within the recently revised Foster Carer's Handbook. The inspector advised that efforts should now be made to ensure that the subject of 'health promotion' be extensively covered, in terms of showing evidence as to how young people are being supported in preventative measures, such as healthy eating and advice on smoking, alcohol and illegal substances. The agency has also started to access the LAC nurse's and services and support they can provide. The new social worker is also experienced in nursing and this will enable the agency to focus on the health needs of the young people still not being met and help to improve practice in certain areas.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people. (NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT - The intended outcomes for these Standards are

3, 6, 8, 9, 15,30

The children placed with the agency can be assured that the persons running and managing it are suitably qualified and experienced and will protect their best interests.

Children are protected by robust recruitment procedures for agency staff and carers.

Children can be confident that their needs will be well matched to the experience and skills of foster carers with whom they are placed. Children are protected by the agency's robust child protection systems and procedures.

The Panel works to clear and effective protocols, and ensures that the interests of children are protected with regard to the recruitment and monitoring of foster carers.

EVIDENCE:

The manager has now enrolled on to the NVQ5 management diploma at Mid-Kent College. His previous experience has included three years in a supervising social work role for another independent fostering agency.

Two separate fostering households were visited and each provided a safe, warm and clean environment. All of the children seen in placement had their own bedrooms. Carers' homes continue to be subject to annual health and safety checks and the inspector observed no obvious hazards during these

visits. All of the carers interviewed confirmed a rigorous assessment process, which included their attendance at the 'Choosing to Foster' course. They all confirmed that they had been given a very accurate introduction to fostering, including the 'difficulties' and 'issues' they should expect. From such discussions and through the reading of files, the inspector concluded that the revision of the Foster Carer Agreements has been a timely and necessary piece of work. Emphasis now needs to be placed upon focussing upon the immediate and ongoing formal training needs of carers to ensure they possess the necessary skills and expertise required to accommodate children with complex needs.

A new 'matching' pro forma has been produced and this incorporates a wider range of factors than the previous document. Through the reading of carers' and children's files and through visiting fostering households, it was evident that children are carefully 'matched' However the agency should develop where gaps in matching have been identified to show clearly how these will be addressed.

Although carers are usually approved for three placements, the inspector found the majority of households to be accommodating two children occasionally three. To protect placements that are working well and in an effort to avoid disruption, both for the family and the current children in placement the inspector recommends that 'blanket approvals' of 'three children' should be avoided.

The agency's training and policies and procedures on child protection were excellent, clear and concise with a good depth of information. The agency also has provided an extra flow chart on whom to inform and what the foster carers need to do. The agency renews and reviews yearly these policies and due to changes in legislation has updating them. Evidence was found to demonstrate that allegations of neglect and / or abuse are investigated by the agency, systems whereby this information is collated and regularly scrutinised are held in a file by the agency.

There are also clear procedures on unauthorised absences with whom to notify and what action to take. In the foster carers handbook is policies on bullying, however training needs to be given on the vulnerability of looked after children. Evidence of good practice was seen in ensuring all safe caring guidelines are child specific. Evidence was seen of the agencies policy on corporal punishment, and what forms of sanctions can be used that are permitted.

Personnel files were randomly selected and scrutinised. Those in post, for example; the manager, new social worker, director and admin assistant all possessed the qualifications needed to fulfil their respective roles. There are robust written procedures in place for recruitment and selection of staff. Overall the practices are excellent and the responsible personnel is aware of the procedures and does a good job of managing the files and getting all

checks and references. All required paperwork was seen for confirmation of the post, to acceptance letters and interview notes, contracts and proof of identity. A recommendation is made to ensure telephone enquiries are made as well as well as obtaining written references.

A Panel meeting was partially observed, members of the group were spoken with and minutes of previous meetings were read. The Panel consists of an independent chairperson, members of the agency staff team and independent members including a foster carer, social worker and an individual with an educational background. The inspector observed annual reviews being presented to the panel.

Through direct observation, the inspector concluded that the collective views of the members was always fully explored and made clear at the point of the Chair confirming re-approval. However many issues where debated and then debated again and no real conclusion reached, this was possibly down to new paper work that had been instated and inexperience of the panel. The panel is now having annual training and the policies and procedures seen were very thorough, it may well being that all that is needed is more experience. The panel is still relatively new and they have addressed the minutes not containing enough information from the last inspection.

Records of previous Panel meetings indicated that the group has been quorum and the members within this group come from a wide range of relevant backgrounds. All Panel members now have been subject to CRB clearance and are on the staff register; there is now a clear procedure in place to cover decision – making, when all members are not in agreement.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT - The intended outcomes for these Standards are

7, 31-NA

The children can be confident that the agency clearly values diversity among its carers and staff.

EVIDENCE:

Whilst the agency attempts to recruit carers from a range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, the majority are white / English. However, this is also reflected in most of the referrals and subsequent placements made. Initial training for carers incorporates elements of equal opportunity and valuing diversity, and such subjects are being expanded upon throughout a carer's career. As previously stated, the matching considerations pro forma has been extensively updated however greater evidence could still be sought with regards to identifying that proposed carers can meet the child's linguistic, religious, ethnic and cultural needs.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT - The intended outcomes for these Standards are

10,11

The children can be confident that the agency will provide support and facilities for contact arrangements.

Children and their families are assured that the agency will promote consultation with them at all times.

EVIDENCE:

Carers confirmed that the importance of maintaining appropriate relationships and contacts is made explicitly clear throughout their own recruitment and induction. They confirmed that their own role is made clear, whether this is to provide transport, facilitate or simply ensure the child is ready and prepared to attend contact meetings.

Such arrangements are clearly recorded on files, including any instances whereby contact with particular individuals may be restricted or not permitted for legal reasons. Young people confirmed they are enabled to maintain friendships and family relationships through regular telephone calls, outings, letters and visits.

Questionnaires received from young people confirmed that they know how to make a complaint and the young person's guide has been amended to include greater details as to whom they can contact both within and 'outside' of the agency.

The agency does consult with the young people via the owner making visits to them or the agencies social worker checking when he visits. The agency is keen to extend this to include the birth children of carers, so they are regularly consulted to ascertain their views about living with fostered children. The agency remembers all fostered and carer's childrens birthdays with gift vouchers and is looking to include all children in future outings or achievement days.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT - The intended outcomes for these Standards are

14

Whilst the foster carers do prepare and support their young people in preparation for adult independent living, the agency has significant shortfalls in meeting this standard.

EVIDENCE:

The agency at present has no formal written requirements of what it expects its foster carers to do in preparing young people for independence or semi-independent living. They have been advised to look at "Get a Lifestyle" from one of the other agencies which offer young people a chance to prepare for living independently and to get a recognised award to prove they can.

The agency's social worker will work closely with the foster carers to assist in the move towards independence. One young person has been assisted with learning the skills to cook and promote good housekeeping.

Discussion with staff, carers and young people indicated that local authorities are still slow to implement Pathway plans and are only doing this when referred to the 16 Plus team, and they are still lacking full involvement with the children and carers in the decision making process.

Management

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff. (NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required. (NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT - The intended outcomes for these Standards are

2,4,16,17,19,21,22,23,24,25,27,28 32-N/A

Whilst the managers of the service are suitably qualified and experienced to provide a fostering service, the registered manager needs a management qualification.

The inspection evidence indicated that the management of the agency is effective and efficient, with good monitoring systems.

Whilst children can be confident that there is sufficient number of qualified staff, they need to ensure there is a good quality training program.

Carers receive frequent support visits and clear written guidance however their training needs to be more specific and targeted.

The care of the children is promoted by the agency, however the case recordings need to be more comprehensive and administrative records are maintained as required. The service is financially viable and has robust financial processes.

EVIDENCE:

The levels of the management structure appear to work effectively providing an effective service. The registered manager is taking a management course and hopes to finish this by the end of the year. Lines of communication, accountability and responsibility were clear and monitoring and quality assurance systems were robust and effective.

As has already been established, the agency has undergone many changes and improvements following on from the last inspection. A qualified experienced social worker has been recently recruited and this may help with many aspects of service provision that previously were being either covered by the office manager or staff not suitable for that post. Allowing this 'new comer' to settle into post, whilst reviewing the organisational structure and lines of accountability will give the agency every opportunity to ensure that staff are managed and deployed effectively. There is also every chance that as the agency grows they will need to employ new staff to keep up with the expansion.

Further areas, which required improvement and have been looked at by the agency was the support and supervision of staff and carers. It should be added that carers reported most positively in terms of the actual 'support' that has continually been provided, even when staffing has been an issue. The agency has introduced a new supervision format which looks at using the "Every child Matters" format and all staff have received training in using this. There also appears to be a need to ensure supervision for foster carers is a time for reflection so carers can see how they could incorporate or have used training in their daily routines.

The staff are supervised and managed in this role and have access to professional support, consultation and advice. All qualified staff are appropriately qualified, and receive regular supervision from either the manager or an outside supervisor on a monthly basis. Annual appraisals also take place and team meetings are held weekly. Such records were inspected and demonstrated these were happening regularly.

The agency needs to improve its recording of training that is taking place for staff and foster carers so it is clear to see what training is being implemented.

Hythe House Support Ltd

Individual training needs, which are specific and developmental for both carers and staff, need to be formally identified and included in this years training matrix. The induction training for all new staff needs to be formalised and a clear written plan devised and when it is completed added to new staffs file.

There is a clear written strategy in place for working with carers. Written evidence supported that all carers receive regular, recorded supervision from their agency. 'Out of Hours' support was described as "excellent" and very accessible. The carers also all receive respite with the foster children going to the same respite carers; this helps to relieve the risk of placement breakdown. All carers had up to date rewritten Foster Carer Agreements in place, which now contained all the required details and all were conversant with the agency's complaint's procedure.

Children's files did contain most of the necessary information, files were well ordered and it was not possible for pertinent information to be missed. However the inspector strongly recommended the agency considers designing its own case recording sheet, which should be tailored to reflect the ongoing and very specific individual pieces of work and support in place for individual children as recording is very much lacking in the files. Carers were aware of the need to keep day-to-day records and that these were to be kept secure, the quality of these varied from each carer. The agency needs to produce a written policy on case recording.

The administrative records now held by the agency are excellent and it is recognised how much work has been done to achieve this. There are systems in place to ensure all checks and monitoring is being carried out and cross-referencing is being used to evidence the monitoring role of the manager, in accordance with Schedule 7 requirements. The inspector was able to confirm the continued receipt of all Schedule 8 events and notifications being received promptly by the local CSCI office.

Evidence was seen to demonstrate and support the continued financial viability of the agency, for example; extensive foster carer recruitment and plans to progress with more staff recruitment. A qualified accountant undertakes accounts and payroll monthly. Every month the agency produces a balance sheet with profit and loss, which are independently audited. For the directors monthly meeting, a pictorial management account report is designed which ensures any financial problems are easily spotted and identified.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

4 Standard Exceeded (Commendable) 3 Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
2 Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls) 1 Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY		
Standard No	Score	
12	2	

STAYING SAFE		
Standard No	Score	
3	3	
6	3	
8	3	
9	4	
15	4	
30	3	

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING		
Standard No Score		
7	3	
13	X	
31	N/A	

MAKING A POSITIVE		
CONTRIBUTION		
Standard No	Score	
10	3	
11	3	

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC		
WELLBEING		
Standard No	Score	
14	1	
29	Х	

MANAGEMENT		
Standard No	Score	
1	X	
2	2	
4	4	
5	X	
16	3 3	
17	3	
18	X	
19	2	
20	X	
21	3	
22	x 3 3 2 2 2 3	
23	2	
24	2	
25	3	
26	X	
27	3	
28	4	
32	N/A	

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS2	7	The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.	30/10/06
2	FS12	15	The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.	30/07/06
3	FS14	16	The fostering service ensures that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge	30/07/06

			necessary for adult living.	
4	FS19	21 4(a)	There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.	30/05/06
5	FS23	17	The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.	30/05/06
6	FS24	22	The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care, which details the nature, and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of her/his life events.	30/03/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

	,	
No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS8	The agency should develop where gaps in matching have been identified to show clearly how these will be addressed.
2	FS10	The agency is advised foster carers have training on contact.
3	FS11	The agency is advised foster carers have training on listening to the child.
4	FS12	The agency to ensure Mar sheets and PRN policies in place.
5	FS19	To ensure a training matrix is provided to ensure clear training needs are addressed for staff and carers.
6	FS15	To ensure all references are followed up with a supporting phone call.
7	FS25	To ensure a policy is made on case recording and a system is in place to ensure the quality is monitored.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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