

# Child Care Bureau Fostering Services

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC034788
<b>Inspection date</b>	11/01/2016
<b>Inspector</b>	Dawn Bennett
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Full
<b>Provision subtype</b>	

---

<b>Setting address</b>	First Floor, Unit 11-13, Elgar Business Centre, Moseley Road, Worcestershire, WR2 6NJ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01905 640 022
<b>Email</b>	enquiries@childcarebureau.co.uk
<b>Registered person</b>	Child Care Bureau Limited
<b>Registered manager</b>	Howard Verran
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Samantha Purser
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	12/02/2013

---

© Crown copyright 2016

Website: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

## Service information

### Brief description of the service

This independent fostering agency operates in England. The office is based in Hallow, Worcestershire. It provides short-term, long-term, sibling groups, short breaks and parent and child fostering placements. On 15<sup>th</sup> January 2016 there were 88 children and young people in placement. On that date the agency had 59 fostering households, of which seven were approved between April 1st 2015 and 15<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

### The inspection judgements and what they mean

**Outstanding:** An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

**Good:** An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

**Requires improvement:** An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

**Inadequate:** An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

## Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Most young people are achieving good outcomes. Placement stability over the last year has increased from 18 months to 2 years 3 months. Children and young people are listened to and well supported by the agency and their foster carers. The children and young people's council are actively involved in consultations and new initiatives.

Foster carers effectively meet the needs of children and young people. There are robust assessment, preparation, training and panel procedures which ensure the agency recruits foster carers who are skilled. They continually develop their knowledge through an evolving programme of training. Most speak highly of the agency and are positive about new and proposed developments. All are proud of the children and young people in their care. They feel a key strength of the agency is the staff team. Supervising social workers provide 'constructive supervision' and 'are always there' for them. Support workers are 'fantastic' providing valuable support to foster carers and children and young people.

Partnership work with other professionals is positive and ensures children and young people receive the support they need to progress. Placing authority's acknowledge the good quality of support staff provide to placements and the positive achievements of children and young people. The registered manager provides robust challenge to local authorities where the needs of children and young people are not being met.

Staff and foster carers promote children's and young people's safety and well-being. The management team have undertaken significant work to reduce unplanned endings to placements. Over the last 6 months this figure has halved. A range of initiatives have been introduced which are having a successful impact.

Since the last inspection the agency has had some changes in staffing and senior management including the registered manager post. The new registered manager and management team are proactively developing the service. This work is on-going but has resulted in positive progress. They continue to embed good quality reflective practice and use quality assurance systems to address areas for development. Areas for improvement include ensuring there are clear records of matching needs, foster carer supervisions and major decisions effecting placements of children. Ensuring the registered manager uses a wider range of consultation as part of the regulation 35 process.

## Areas of improvement

### 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 (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
Ensure the system referred to in paragraph (1) provides for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents and their placing authority. (Regulation 35 (3))	15/04/2016

---

## Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure foster carers' files include records of supervisory meetings. This specifically relates to the quality of the content of these records (NMS 21.8)
- ensure entries in records, decisions and reasons for them are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, distinguished between fact, opinion and third party information and are signed and dated (NMS 26.5)
- ensure the fostering service only suggests foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required. This specifically relates to training needs (NMS 15.1).

## Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement **Good**  
outcome:

Most children and young people make good progress in most areas of their lives. Placement stability in this agency has improved over the last twelve months. Most children and young people have positive relationships with their foster family which are sustained on into adulthood. Some young people remain living with their foster family through local authority staying put arrangements.

Most children and young people settle quickly into their new foster home. There are good resources that support this process to be as smooth and positive as possible. For example, tea visits and a range of useful child friendly information. This information continues to be reviewed and strengthened. For example, the management team and agency's children and young people's council have recently redesigned the two children and young people's welcome guides and made them more accessible and informative.

Children and young people develop a strong sense of identity and experience positive personal achievements which builds self-esteem. They are active participants in clubs such as Beavers, Scouts, dance and drama groups and after school clubs. They also have a wide range of hobbies and interests which they pursue with their foster family and on their own. Children and young people are in good health. Foster carers ensure they are active, eat well and attend medical appointments. Any developmental delays or behavioural concerns are quickly identified and age appropriate routines are introduced. For example, a young person has been supported to attend dental appointments which have addressed serious historical decay concerns. Children and young people have good school attendance and educational outcomes. All have appropriate educational placements, and the majority achieve above expectations as they settle and engage. Wherever possible foster carers support young people to maintain their existing educational placement. Children and young people learn skills that prepare them for adulthood. They successfully progress and achieve in line with their local authority placement plans.

Individual children's and young people's successes are supported and celebrated. The whole agency hears about achievements through the agency's monthly magazine and a series of annual award ceremonies which were introduced as a result of a suggestion from a foster carer.

Most children and young people form positive friendships and are active within their local communities. Children and young people continue to have contact with their family and maintain relationships which are important to them. Foster carers and support workers talk about and help them understand their past. This results in children and young people improving and sustaining relationships that support them as they move towards adulthood.

Children and young people feel valued because their opinions are acted upon. The management team have significantly improved and continue to develop children and young people contribution to the service and care they receive. They are asked their views through six monthly surveys, their own reviews and through the children and young people's council. The council was newly formed last year. Members feel 'listen to' and 'involved'. Their options have been sought and acted upon to develop a number of the agency's resources. They also took a lead on and planned the young people's award ceremonies.

## Quality of service

Judgement **Good**  
outcome:

The agency recruits foster carers who on the whole meet the needs of children and young people placed. Over the last year the management team have introduced new practice and procedures to ensure the assessment of foster carers is robust and that they receive professional preparation, support and training. They have raised standards and have higher expectations of foster carers. Improved placement stability and increased foster carer engagement demonstrate the success of these initiatives.

The process for preparing, assessing and approving foster carers is timely. A secure base model is used to inform assessments which are generally of a good quality. They are analytical and focus on the competencies required to be a foster carer. Feedback from panel is used to inform staff training and supervision to address any shortfalls. This effectively improves future practice.

Most foster carers are professional and knowledgeable. They complete the training, support and development standards within timescales. There is a good programme of training which ensures they are skilled to meet the changing needs of children and young people. The management team now expect both primary and secondary carers to attend all training sessions. This ensures all carer's practice is underpinned by the same theory.

Staff ensure foster carers receive an annual appraisal and regular supervision and support. However, records of supervision sessions do not evidence the foster carer's performance or how they are to develop their competencies and skills. The management team are aware of this shortfall. As part of the agency's quality assurance system they have introduced manager observations of supervising social workers supervisions of foster carers.

Most foster carers are well informed, work in partnership with staff and contribute to the development of the agency. They undertake training alongside agency staff. They also access information and contribute their views through the foster carer's council and area support groups. These were newly established in 2015. The foster carer's who sit on the council co-ordinate the area support groups. The number of support groups continue to increase. This means most foster carer's have easy

access to a group. It is the management team's expectation that in the future all foster carers will be required to attend a percentage of these meetings.

Foster carers are recognised as a core member of the team around the child. The whole of the family is involved in assessment, reviews and supervisions. They all welcome and support children and young people who come to live with them. They are recognised as members of the family and participate in family holidays and activities. Respite care is not encouraged and is only supported if it is needed to sustain a placement. A young person commented: 'They are really kind hearted lovely people. We have great weekends in town laughing about things we have done together. They always encourage me to try hard at school. We have some great memories together that I will cherish.'

The chair and members of the fostering panel have a good range of personal and professional experiences. They continue their professional development attending relevant training and reviewing their practice. They demonstrate rigour and make well-balanced decisions. The agency decision maker reads all the papers in every case prior to making a decision regarding foster carer approvals. Her reports clearly evidence her decision making process.

Supervising social workers and foster carers ensure all children's and young people's plans are regularly monitored and reviewed. Delegated authority is clear and an area which is chased up where necessary.

## **Safeguarding children and young people**

Judgement outcome: **Requires improvement**

The majority of children and young people are safe and their well-being is effectively promoted. In partnership with local authorities they are supported to take age-appropriate risks. Risk assessments and safe caring family plans take into account their individual circumstances and understanding. They identify where children and young people have more complex risks such as self-harm, child sexual exploitation, safe use of the internet or going missing from care. Children and young people are involved in discussions which identify the actions foster carers and staff take to reduce risks. These include strategies in partnership with schools, local authorities and the police. These are successful in supporting most children and young people to stop harmful and high risk behaviours.

Staff and support workers provide foster carers with increased support, interventions and supervision when children and young people are unsettled. Support workers undertake successful direct focused work with children and young people which foster carers feel have a positive outcome. For example, helping young people understand the risks they face when they go missing from care and successfully supporting foster carers to reduce incidents.

Children and young people who continue to display high risk behaviours are



supported to move onto placements that can meet their needs. Where possible the agency works in partnership with other professionals so that these moves are planned.

There have been a high number of unplanned endings to placements. Records do not clearly evidence strategies, interventions and events leading up to and informing major decisions such as giving notice on a child's or young person's placement. This does not support the management team to look for patterns and trends to improve practice and outcomes. The management team do however hold post placement disruption meetings where lessons learnt and patterns and trends to unplanned endings are discussed.

Matching does not always identify new training needs for foster carers that relate to the placement of a new child or young person. Gaps in knowledge often relate to the limited understanding and managing of high risk behaviours prior to placements commencing. Although in many cases foster carers eventually attend the required training, this delay hinders them having a strategic approach in place from the start. The current approach also does not allow for additional, more depth training or reading to take place in a planned way. However, when staff and carers receive this additional training their understanding of high risk behaviours, attachment and how children's previous life experiences affect their behaviour is strengthened. For example, this training has ensured foster carers and staff know how to respond to safeguarding allegations, risks from child sexual exploitation and children who go missing from care. The agency continues to develop training to meet the changing needs of children, young people, staff and foster carers. For example, they are currently commissioning additional training on radicalisation.

Allegations and disciplinary actions against foster carers are dealt with appropriately. Foster carers are given independent support while an investigation takes place. Referrals passed back to the agency from Local Authority Designated Officers are investigated robustly. When complex, the management team use an independent social worker to investigate. This ensures rigour and objectivity. In all cases foster carers go back to panel for their approved status to be reviewed. Where appropriate the decision to de-register is taken.

Staff, panel members and foster carers are recruited using robust procedures to ensure they are safe and suitable people to work with and have access to children and young people.

## Leadership and management

Judgement **Good**  
outcome:

This agency has had a challenging fourteen months with a number of changes to the staff and management team. Since August 2015 the staff team has been stable. The registered manager has been in post since April 2015 and registered with Ofsted since November 2015. He is appropriately qualified and experienced.

Since his appointment he has worked with the responsible individual, a newly appointed senior practitioner and independent external consultant to undertake a quality assurance review of the agency. This highlighted shortfalls in practice and outcomes. Significant work has been undertaken to re-established procedures and introduce new expectations. This is having a good impact on the standard of practice and outcomes for young people.

On the whole the agency has effective working relationships with partner agencies. The management team have a clear understanding of the requirements of all local authorities they work with. Good focus is given to the knowledge and expertise of foster carers to meet the current and future needs of children and young people. The registered manager and staff team challenge local authorities where necessary and have introduced procedures for escalating concerns with partner agencies for issues such as missing paperwork and no missing from care return interviews.

Children and young people are provided with the opportunities to make good progress. Foster carers and staff monitor and review the progress of individual children and young people. This information is gathered by the management team and used at a corporate level to improve services and ensure the best outcomes.

There are good quality assurance processes which continue to be developed. They identify the service's strengths and areas for continuing improvement. The management team actively meet and consult with foster carers, staff, children and young people through councils and support groups. Staff have completed an employee satisfaction survey which the management team plan to revisit at the end of the year. Views are acted upon and feed into the registered manager's quarterly internal monitoring which is used to inform quarterly management quality assurance meetings. This current consultation process does not gather the views of all foster carers, children and young people. It also does not gather the views of partner agencies.

The recruitment of foster carers reduced in 2015. The focus of the management team has been on strengthening practice and training for existing foster carers. Where this has not been achieved, foster carer's approval has not been continued. The management team have also been clear about the age and needs of the children and young people for whom they are likely to provide a service. Some foster carers have moved agencies as a result of these factors. There are now clear plans in place and a new recruitment drive is underway. This will continue to enable the agency to ensure children and young people are placed in appropriate and local foster placements.

The statement of purpose and children's guides are clearly written and provide a good understanding of the service to those who read them. The Foster Carers' Charter is easily accessible and reflects the service offered. Most foster carers feel the management team are 'far more accessible' and 'are now listening to our views and acting upon them'. Members of the carer's council are positive about their role to 'reach all carers and provide increased opportunity for two way dialogue'. The management team welcome feedback and complaints. Issues raised are given

careful consideration and used to improve future practice.

Staff, managers and panel members are appropriately qualified and experienced. Each individual has an annual appraisal which feeds into a personal development plan. The agency employs a learning and skills development officer who ensures there is a diverse programme of training for foster carers and staff. This continued professional learning is enhanced by staff attending a range of external courses including theraplay, form-f, bereavement and life-story work. A social worker commented: 'I really only have positive things to say about the supervising social workers. They are most thorough and efficient. Any little detail they will chase me for. They provide excellent support to the placement which at times has stopped it breaking down.'

Overall the new management team have a clear vision for the agency and plans to progress. They have addressed previous requirements and recommendations and are appropriately notifying Ofsted of key events. There is a good awareness of shortfalls in practice and strategies in place to continue develop the service.

---

## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to inform children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of independent fostering agencies.