

# Fostering Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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**Unique reference number** SC488290  
**Inspection date** 16/08/2016  
**Inspector** Mandy Williams/Jackie Line  
**Type of inspection** Full  
**Provision subtype**

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**Setting address** Suite 110 Imperial House, 79–81 Hornby St, Bury, Greater Manchester BL9 5BN  
**Telephone number** 0161 705 4315  
**Email**  
**Registered person**  
**Registered manager** Mrs Caroline Larkin  
**Responsible individual** Mr Najam Asghar  
**Date of last inspection** N/A

## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Fostering Ltd is an independent provider of fostering services. The agency recruits, assesses, approves and supports foster carers, who provide a range of placement types. This includes emergency, short-term, long-term, and parent and child placements.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had 21 approved fostering households, caring for 31 children and young people.

### 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**

This fostering agency has a positive impact on the outcomes for children and young people who live with the agency's foster carers. Many children benefit from the stability of long-term, stable placements, placed alongside their brothers and sisters. They feel fully integrated into their fostering families, where they are making meaningful attachments. They demonstrate that they feel happy, safe and secure.

Good-quality preparation and assessment result in the approval of foster carers who understand their role and are committed to improving the life chances of those in their care. Good matching and levels of support ensure that children and young people benefit from placement stability and emotional security. They are thriving with their foster families.

Foster carers feel valued and part of the Fostering Ltd team. Managers are visible and approachable. Foster carers are willing and able to contribute to the development of the service. They feel supported by each other and by the social

work team. Foster carers benefit from the open and, if necessary, challenging approach adopted by the agency. Consequently, social workers swiftly address any poor practice and positive working relationships remain intact.

The agency has very positive relationships with placing agencies, and communication is effective. The safeguarding ethos of the agency is good and liaison takes place with other safeguarding bodies. The safety of children and young people is a priority for the agency.

Managers demonstrate a commitment to develop and improve the service further. They started to address the issues for improvement raised at this inspection prior to its conclusion, illustrating their capacity for improvement.

This inspection has resulted in making three requirements. These relate to the training of foster carers, changes to foster carers' terms of approval and the agency's internal review of its service. An additional three recommendations relate to the detail of young people's risk assessments, the principles of safer recruitment practice and the follow through of issues raised with other safeguarding bodies.

## 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 within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>17: Support, training and information for foster parents</p> <p>Ensure that the fostering service provider provides foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them; and that the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child; specifically that missing documentation from local authorities is obtained. (Regulation 17(1) (3))</p>	<p>1/10/2016</p>
<p>28: Reviews and terminations of approval</p> <p>Ensure that the fostering service provider reviews the approval of each foster parent in accordance with this regulation; specifically, when considering a change to the terms of the foster parent's approval during the first year, a review is held which informs the report that is then presented to the fostering panel for consideration. (Regulation 28(1)(2)(5))</p>	<p>1/10/2016</p>

<p>35: Review of quality of care</p> <p>Ensure that the registered person maintains a system for monitoring the matters set out in schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (Regulation 35(1)(a)(b))</p>	<p>1/10/2016</p>
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**Recommendations**

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

Ensure that children's safety and welfare are promoted in all fostering placements; specifically, that risk assessments outline strategies to minimise the identified risks. (NMS 4.1)

Ensure that the fostering service works effectively in partnership with other agencies concerned with child protection; specifically, that issues are followed up until they reach a satisfactory conclusion. (NMS 4.7)

Ensure that the fostering service can demonstrate that it consistently follows good recruitment practice and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance in foster carer selection, and staff and panel member recruitment. (NMS 19.2)

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The vast majority of children and young people placed with the agency's foster carers benefit from the stability of a long-term placement. This is of particular significance, as some have previously experienced a number of placement disruptions. The agency is also in its infancy and, as such, has not been part of any regional contract with placing local authorities. Hence, it is often approached as a last resort, when the placing agency has been unable to identify a foster placement elsewhere. Consequently, the low disruption rate is particularly pleasing.

Whenever possible, children and young people move into their foster families in a planned way. However, when this is not achievable, the agency does try to ensure that it receives some helpful information about the family prior to the placement. The agency keeps foster carers' profiles electronically, so that it is able to send these to placing social workers for them to share with young people prior to meeting their new family. This helps to reduce their anxiety.

Children and young people feel part of their foster families. They are involved in the usual family activities and events. They also enjoy holidays abroad, both with their foster carers and on school trips. Young people's individual interests and talents are also actively encouraged. Examples include horse riding, swimming, trampolining and the skate park. These opportunities help to broaden young people's knowledge and develop peer relationships. They have grown in confidence, as a result. The agency has also hosted two family events in its first year of operation: a Christmas party and a summer picnic. Attendance at these events was very high and feedback was positive.

Children and young people have a variety of ways to express their wishes and feelings. Supervising social workers ensure that they see them regularly as part of their support visits to foster carers. In fact, some young people struggled to identify which social workers were for them and which for their foster carers, such are the quality of these relationships. Young people are also routinely asked for their views in order to inform their foster carer's annual review. One young person recently commented, 'My foster carer is lovely, caring and funny. The whole family has welcomed me with open arms from day one. I am so grateful to have X (name of foster carer) as a foster carer. She makes me feel part of the family, happy, and I feel like I can open up to her if needed.'

A number of children have been enabled to grow up alongside their brothers and sisters. Some temporary placements have also become permanent. Foster carers promote meaningful contact between children who are unable to live together, and with family members. They support these relationships and do not undermine them. They are clear about their role and the importance of working together in the children's best interests.

Children and young people attend school regularly, and the school reports of many

indicate the substantial progress that they have made following their placement with their foster families. There are many positive examples of the progress that children have made. These include the increase by two years in one child's reading age in just a six-month period as result of the additional reading undertaken by her foster carer, and another where a young person is now functioning well above their peer group. Foster carers appreciate the significance of education and are prepared to put in extra work in order for young people to achieve their potential. One young person commented, 'My foster carer thinks education is important. She praises me when I get ticks and also good comments.' This serves to encourage children and young people.

Foster carers ensure that they actively promote the health and well-being of children in their care. They are registered with health practitioners and benefit from routine health assessments. They also work well with specialist services such as the child and adolescent mental health team and hospital specialists. They have completed specialist training when required. Commissioners are positive about the commitment demonstrated by foster carers. They have a good knowledge of the individual needs of those who they care for. However, the agency does not routinely request copies of children's and young people's health assessment reports from their local authority to ensure that it has all the historic health information that it may need.

## Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency's recruitment of foster carers has exceeded the figures that it set as a target at the time when it was registered. Some foster carers have transferred from other agencies, but the agency has also successfully recruited a number of families that are new to fostering. Agency staff have a good understanding of the needs of children and young people who require foster placements, and they target their recruitment appropriately. As highlighted above, the agency, in its first year of operation, has only been approached in relation to the children and young people who are most difficult to place. Despite this, all families recruited have remained with the agency. Occupancy rates are also high. At the time of the inspection, only two approved families were without placements.

The preparation, training and assessment of foster carers are good. The agency responds promptly to initial enquiries. Senior staff complete initial visits in a timely manner. One foster carer said, 'I tried another agency, too, but the reception from Fostering Ltd was much more positive. They were welcoming and it just felt right.' Fostering assessments contain good analysis and evaluation. One foster carer reported, 'My assessment was a positive process: thorough, but without being too intrusive.' Assessing social workers focus on the applicant's ability to meet the needs of children and young people. Both agency social workers and independent assessors complete assessments. This ensures that applicants are not kept waiting and that assessments are completed within recommended timescales.

Foster carers feel valued and part of the Fostering Ltd team. Support offered to foster carers is good. Supervising social workers clearly know their foster carers well,

and understand their strengths and weaknesses. This also results in good and careful matching.

Foster carers value the personal touch that the agency is able to provide, given its relatively small size. Staff maintain a record of all support visits, and copies are given to the foster carers. This transparency ensures that everyone is aware of any current issues and the actions that they need to take. Out of hours, support is available and used effectively by foster carers. They appreciate there always being someone whom they know to speak to for advice and guidance in a crisis. Respite is available, if this is in the child's best interest. However, supervising social workers also step in to offer this support in the foster carer's own home, if required, as this results in less disruption to children and young people. Commissioners report that social workers have 'gone over and above' in terms of supporting foster carers and, in turn, their children in placement.

Training opportunities are available to approved foster carers. Courses are held monthly. However, it is not clear which courses are mandatory, and expectations are not outlined in the foster carer agreement. Consequently, some foster carers have not yet completed some key training such as first aid and behaviour management. Foster carers receive support to complete the training, support and development standards, following approval. However, no certificates were available for some foster carers who had transferred from another agency. Records suggest that the current system for monitoring training has not been effective in identifying these shortfalls. The agency has taken action to remind foster carers of their expectations in writing or by making a home visit, when no post-approval training has been undertaken. This has had a positive response.

The agency has a central list of fostering panel members, who bring a range of experience and impartiality to the panel. The panel chair is independent of the agency and is suitably qualified and experienced. The panel offers a suitable degree of scrutiny and challenge. The agency decision is made promptly, and it clearly lists the agency decision maker's own reasons for reaching this conclusion. The qualifying determination and independent review panel processes are clearly explained to applicants, and are followed by the agency.

The agency has appointed an independent reviewing officer, who has recently started to undertake the first annual reviews of foster carers. The views of foster carers, children in placement and their social workers help to inform these reviews.

## **Safeguarding children and young people**

Judgement outcome: **Good**

There is a strong safeguarding ethos within the agency. The safety and welfare of children and young people are paramount. Children and young people say that they feel safe and secure in their foster families. They are also able to identify trusted individuals whom they would be able to confide in if they had any concerns in the future. Details about how they can raise any concerns or complaints are also clear in the young person's guide to fostering, which they receive on placement. Young

people have sought the input of an advocate to assist them, on occasion. Supervising social workers ensure that they see children in placement on a regular basis and undertake one unannounced visit to foster carers annually. These measures ensure that young people are able to access support and help the agency to monitor the well-being of children and young people.

The agency acknowledges and deals with allegations and complaints safely. Liaison takes place with other bodies with safeguarding responsibilities. However, it has not always returned to some agencies to ensure a satisfactory conclusion of a matter, following being satisfied that the children in their care are safe.

Foster carers are clear about their safeguarding responsibilities. They have blown the whistle on poor practice that they have observed, which has allowed the agency to address this in a timely manner with those involved. The agency has also challenged a training provider that did not pass on similar concerns. Supervising social workers are able to challenge poor practice in a non-confrontational way. Their professional relationship with foster carers has not been adversely affected when issues have been addressed. Foster carers say that they appreciate their approach.

A small minority of young people are involved in risk-taking behaviour, such as going missing from home. Foster carers are aware of their responsibilities when incidents do occur and are proactive in trying to locate young people. They work alongside the police and placing social workers in educating young people about the risk that they place themselves in when their whereabouts are unknown. There has been a significant reduction in incidents for some young people since placement. The agency escalates concerns when it needs to.

Risk assessments are in place, outlining the specific risks for each young person. However, they do not always outline the strategies that the foster carers need to adopt to minimise the identified risks. A more robust approach would help to ensure consistent safeguarding practice, safety and the welfare of young people. It would also serve to protect foster carers in the event of a serious incident.

The recruitment of foster carers, staff and panel members is largely sound. However, the agency has not always sought a reference from an individual's last employer, an explanation of gaps in employment or verification of the reason why employment ceased for individuals who have previously worked with children or vulnerable adults. This does not conform to the principles of safer recruitment. The registered manager took action to address these issues during the inspection.

## **Leadership and management**

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The registered manager is appropriately qualified and experienced. She is a director of the agency. However, she has yet to complete her level 5 management qualification. She has personal experience as a foster carer and commands respect from those fostering for the agency, as they appreciate her professional and personal knowledge of fostering. Together with the responsible individual, she provides clear



leadership and direction for the agency. Agency staff and foster carers say that they are visible and approachable.

The agency remains financially viable. In fact, it has exceeded the challenging target that it set itself in terms of the numbers of approved fostering households that were recruited in the first year. Occupancy rates are also good and above expectations. It has been a busy first year for the agency, and managers have concentrated their efforts on the recruitment and approval of foster carers.

Managers have yet to undertake a comprehensive review of the agency. While some systems for monitoring are in place, these are not robust. They have failed to capture all incidents that they are trying to monitor, making them less effective. For example, the figures did not accurately reflect the episodes of young people going missing from home. Also, they had failed to capture that some local authority documentation was missing. Routine file audits are not completed, which would also help the agency to gather this information and ensure that such issues are addressed promptly.

A system is in place for monitoring the progress of children and young people. This demonstrates the progress that they are making and is regularly updated. Both foster carers and social workers were able to give many examples of successful outcomes.

The agency's processes relating to the change of approval for foster carers are in breach of regulation. One fostering household in its first year of fostering has had its approval changed prior to review and returned to the fostering panel. Some foster carers also have a large brother and sister group placed with them, which is outside of their terms of approval. While the agency has sought exemption from the home authority, some children are in long-term placements with foster carers without the appropriate terms of approval.

Staff receive regular supervision and feel well supported by the registered manager and responsible individual. Some staff have received their first annual appraisal. The agency is in the process of arranging the appraisals for panel members. Social workers have manageable caseloads. This ensures that they have the time to offer meaningful support to their foster carers and to contribute to the stability of placements.

The agency has positive relationships with those commissioning its services. They report that communication with staff is good, and feedback from children's social workers about the quality of placements was universally positive. One commissioner commented, 'Our experience with this agency has been excellent. The foster carer has provided an outstanding level of support.' The agency has a good reputation.

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## 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.