

Future Fostering

Edgefield, Green Street Green Road, Dartford DA1 1QE

Monitoring visit

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Future Fostering Limited is an independent fostering service providing services for children and young people from birth to 18 years. The service is owned and managed by the registered manager and the responsible individual. At the time of this monitoring inspection, there were 38 approved fostering households and 52 children in placement.

Inspection date: 5 December 2017

Date of previous full inspection: 8 October 2014

This monitoring visit

This monitoring visit was conducted in response to serious concerns raised during a previous monitoring visit completed on 26 September 2017 and information shared with Ofsted by the registered manager and responsible individual at a meeting held with them on 28 November 2017.

Following the monitoring visit of 26 September 2017, the responsible individual and the registered manager confirmed a plan to work together in order to address the serious concerns that were identified. However, subsequent correspondence received from the responsible individual on 24 October 2017 described additional issues and concerns. Interviews conducted with the responsible individual and the registered manager on 28 November 2017 found that a complete breakdown in their working relationship had occurred. This second monitoring visit was conducted to examine the impact and extent of the concerns raised.

Two social care regulatory inspectors conducted this monitoring visit over three days. They identified a significant number of regulatory breaches that question the fitness of the agency. Serious and widespread failures of the agency's safeguarding practice were found to present serious risks to the children's welfare and safety.

Inadequate matching has resulted in the children being placed with foster carers who do not have the necessary knowledge or skills to meet their needs. This has resulted in children being placed in inappropriate and unsafe placements. Children who are at high risk of sexual exploitation have been placed with foster carers who

have not received sufficient training or guidance to recognise the signs and symptoms of exploitation. Therefore, they do not possess the knowledge or skills to reduce the likelihood of future occurrences. Consequently, such children remain at significant risk of being exploited further.

Agency staff and the foster carers lack understanding of the risks faced by children and inadequate risk management strategies have failed to keep the children safe. Poor-quality risk assessments fail to identify all of the risks to the children. Risk assessments do not give foster carers sufficient information or advice on how to reduce risk or prevent further harm. This is compounded by the agency's staff and the foster carers' failure to complete sufficient safeguarding training, including training in child exploitation, going missing and gangs. As a result, the agency has failed to identify children at risk or to effectively intervene to protect them.

Examples include the failure to recognise the significance of a child's missing from care behaviours and the fact that the child is known to be at high risk of exploitation. Staff and foster carers accepted that the child was staying at 'friends', although nothing was known about these people. As a result, those involved in the child's care did not know where the child was, who the child was seeing, or whether she was being exploited. The agency failed to recognise the significance of another child, who was assessed as being at high risk of exploitation, having a relationship with an adult male. This information was not reflected in the child's risk assessment and the agency did not act on these concerns.

Safeguarding policies and procedures are inadequate and fail to direct the staff and foster carers on the actions that they should take in response to, and as a result of, children being at risk of harm. There are examples of the foster carers not following the agency's procedures, thus hindering the ability of other safeguarding agencies to take the required actions. There have been instances of foster carers not following the child's placing authority's guidance. For example, a foster carer did not follow the placing authority's advice to limit the internet access of a child who is at significant risk of child exploitation and online grooming. Consequently, the child's internet access remained unchecked and the child continued to be at significant risk of exploitation.

Unsafe recruitment procedures and practices have resulted in unvetted staff being employed by the agency. The unvetted staff include the registered manager, responsible individual, supervising social workers, independent assessors, reviewing officers and panel members.

Insufficient staffing levels have contributed to the inadequate supervision of the foster carers and the poor-quality guidance given by the staff. Poorly trained and inadequately supported supervising social workers carry high caseloads. They have missed significant safeguarding information. One example includes the failure to recognise an escalation in a child's self-harming behaviour that resulted in the child's admission to hospital. In another case, a supervising social worker failed to recognise the impact of the foster carer's poor approach to the emotional well-being of a child in placement who had significant mental health needs. As a result, this

child's psychological needs were not met.

Inexperienced and unqualified staff are carrying out social work roles, resulting in the insufficient assessment of potential foster carers. Assessments have been completed in breach of the relevant legal requirements. Assessments sampled showed that they were not carried out rigorously enough and there were many weaknesses. Significant areas were not robustly challenged or scrutinised. Applicants have been approved without sufficient exploration of their ability to care for vulnerable children. The most basic checks of households have failed to question why and how children have been placed with foster carers who do not have the number of bedrooms to sufficiently accommodate all members of the family and the foster child. Examples of birth children moving into their parents' bedrooms have been deemed to be acceptable. These assessments were subsequently recommended by the panel and approved by the agency decision-maker. Consequently, children have been failed at every level of quality assurance and safeguarding systems that are supposed to be in place to protect them.

Incompetent reviewing procedures have resulted in the failure to sufficiently scrutinise foster carers' practice, training and circumstances. For example, a review of a foster carer and subsequent panel discussions did not consider the findings of a section 47 investigation, standard of care investigation, or allegations against the foster carer of aggressive behaviours. Such practice demonstrates that foster carers are reapproved without their poor practice being addressed, therefore further compromising the children's safety.

The lack of monitoring systems, and ineffective oversight by leaders and managers, has resulted in inadequate practices and safeguarding concerns not being acted on, compromising the agency's ability to safeguard children. Leaders and managers say that they rely on the 'competence of the supervising social worker' to make them aware of concerns. There is no mechanism in place to check that these workers understand what, and when, they should refer information to the leaders and managers. Those leading the agency have not satisfied themselves, or the inspectors, as to how they have measured staff competence.

Leaders and managers have failed to notify Ofsted of significant incidents in line with the regulations. This includes police attending fostering households and the hospitalisation of children. Consequently, the regulator is unable to effectively monitor the agency in between inspections.

The responsible individual and the registered manager are in direct conflict with each other. They work in isolation and this has resulted in a fragmented staff team, where individuals demonstrate an allegiance to either the responsible individual or the registered manager. This is an untenable situation. Personal and professional conflicts and disagreements undermine the day-to-day operation of the agency. This is undermining the safety and the quality of the fostering households.

There has been a failure by leaders and managers to recognise and act on serious and widespread failures across the agency or to address shortfalls and make improvements. The agency does not have a development plan and there are no

systems in place to drive improvement. The significant failings of the provider, the responsible individual and the registered manager to carry out their roles and responsibilities, in line with the fostering regulations, raise serious questions about the fitness of the agency.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet 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>(1) A person must not carry on a fostering agency unless— (d) in the case of an organisation carrying on a fostering agency, where the organisation has given notice to the Chief Inspector of the name, address and position in the organisation of an individual (“the responsible individual”) who is a director, manager, secretary or other officer of the organisation and is responsible for supervising the management of the fostering agency, the responsible individual, satisfies the requirements of paragraph (2) as to fitness.</p> <p>(2) The requirements are that— (a) the person is of integrity and good character, (c) full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1.</p> <p>(Regulation 5(1)(d)(2)(a)(c))</p>	22/01/2018
<p>(1) A person must not manage a fostering agency unless they are fit to do so.</p> <p>(2) A person is not fit to manage a fostering agency unless that person— (a) is of integrity and good character; (b) having regard to the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by it— (i) has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for managing the fostering agency.</p> <p>(Regulation 7(1)(2)(a)(b)(i))</p>	22/01/2018
<p>The registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to— (a) the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and (b) the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency, carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill.</p>	22/01/2018

<p>(2) The registered provider must ensure that—</p> <p>(b) where the registered provider is an organisation, the responsible individual, undertakes, from time to time, such training as is appropriate to ensure that they have the experience and skills necessary for carrying on the fostering agency.</p> <p>(3) The registered manager must undertake from time to time such training as is appropriate to ensure that they have the experience and skills necessary for managing the fostering agency. (Regulation 8(1)(a)(b)(2)(b)(3))</p>	
<p>The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11(a))</p>	22/01/2018
<p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy which—</p> <p>(a) is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse or neglect, and</p> <p>(b) sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect.</p> <p>(Regulation 12(1)(a)(b))</p>	22/01/2018
<p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a policy which is agreed with the local police, setting out—</p> <p>(a) the measure to be followed to prevent children placed with foster parents from going missing from their placement, and</p> <p>(b) the procedure to be followed when a child is missing from a foster parent's home without permission.</p> <p>(Regulation 13(3)(a)(b))</p>	22/01/2018
<p>15.—(1) The fostering service provider must promote the health and development of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>(2) (b) In particular the fostering service provider must ensure that each child has access to such medical, dental, nursing, psychological and psychiatric advice, treatment and other services as the child may require.</p> <p>(Regulation 15(1)(2)(b))</p>	22/01/2018
<p>The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17(1))</p>	22/01/2018
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the fostering service, having regard to—</p> <p>(a) the size of the fostering service, its statement of</p>	22/01/2018

<p>purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by it, and</p> <p>(b) the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>(Regulation 19(a)(b))</p>	
<p>For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform. (Regulation 20(3)(b))</p>	22/01/2018
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21(4)(a))</p>	22/01/2018
<p>The fostering panel must—</p> <p>(a) advise, where appropriate, on the procedures under which reviews in accordance with regulation 28 are carried out by the fostering service provider, and periodically monitor their effectiveness,</p> <p>(b) oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service provider, and</p> <p>(c) give advice, and make recommendations, on such other matters or cases as the fostering service provider may refer to it. (Regulation 25 (a)(b)(c))</p>	22/01/2018
<p>Where a person ("X") applies to become a foster parent and the fostering service provider decide to assess X's suitability to become a foster parent, any such assessment must be carried out in accordance with this regulation.</p> <p>(1)(b) where X has been a foster parent within the preceding 12 months and was approved as such by another fostering service provider, must request a written reference from that other fostering service provider,</p> <p>(e) may, where X was approved as a foster parent by another fostering service provider and consents, request access to the relevant records compiled by that other fostering service provider in relation to X.</p> <p>(Regulation 26(1)(b)(e))</p>	22/01/2018
<p>A fostering service provider must not approve a person who has been approved as a foster parent by another fostering service provider where that approval has not been terminated.</p> <p>(2) A fostering service provider must not approve X as a foster parent unless—</p> <p>(a) they have completed their assessment of X's</p>	22/01/2018

<p>suitability, and (b) the fostering panel has considered the application. Regulation 27 (1)(2)(a)(b)</p>	
<p>(3) When undertaking a review, the fostering service provider must— (a) make such enquiries and obtain such information as they consider necessary in order to review whether the foster parent continues to be suitable to be a foster parent and the foster parent’s household continues to be suitable. (12) As soon as practicable after making the decision referred to in paragraph (9), (10)(b), or (11), the fostering service provider must give written notice to the foster parent stating (as the case may be)— (a) that the foster parent and the foster parent’s household continue to be suitable, and that the terms of the approval continue to be appropriate, (b) that the foster parent’s approval is terminated from a specified date, and the reasons for the termination, or (c) the revised terms of the approval and the reasons for the revision. (Regulation 28 (3)(a)(12)(a)(b)(c))</p>	<p>22/01/2018</p>
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for— (a) monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and (b) improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (2) The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority. (3) The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35(1)(a)(b)(2)(3))</p>	<p>22/01/2018</p>
<p>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (2) Any notification made in accordance with this regulation which is given orally must be confirmed in writing. (Regulation 36(1)(2))</p>	<p>22/01/2018</p>

Information about this inspection

The purpose of this visit was to monitor the action taken and the progress made by the independent fostering agency since its last Ofsted inspection.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: SC415679

Registered provider: Future Fostering Limited

Registered provider address: 5 Crayford Road, Dartford DA1 4AN

Responsible individual: Pankaj Gupta

Registered manager: Mrs Savitri Panwar

Inspectors:

Helen Lee, social care inspector

Melissa McMillan, social care inspector

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