

# Perpetual Care/Perpetual Fostering

Perpetual Fostering Limited  
31 Chorley New Road, Bolton BL1 4QR  
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This fostering agency is privately owned. It was registered in April 2005. The service operates primarily in the north-west of England, although does have a number of fostering households in the Midlands. At the time of this inspection, 23 approved fostering households were providing foster placements for 22 children and young people. The agency currently provides the following types of foster placements:

- emergency
- short-term
- long-term
- respite
- parent and child.

**Inspection dates:** 12 to 15 February 2018

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **Good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **Good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **Good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of last inspection:** 31 October 2014

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Many children and young people are living in permanent placements where they are able to thrive. They have a sense of belonging to their foster family.
- The vast majority of children and young people are attending school or college. Agency staff and foster carers promote learning and swiftly liaise with other professionals to secure education for those who do not have a place of learning.
- Good-quality fostering assessments demonstrate that foster carers have the knowledge and skills to foster.
- Foster carers and staff are alert to children's and young people's vulnerabilities and potential risks. They follow clear safeguarding procedures to promote children's and young people's safety. Young people placed with the agency are rarely involved in risk-taking behaviour, such as going missing from home.
- A committed team of supervising social workers supports foster carers extremely well. Consequently, foster carers feel valued and part of the team.
- Staff have good knowledge of the agency's foster carers and children placed. This helps them to provide effective support in the event of an emergency.
- The agency benefits from good and enthusiastic leadership. Managers are visible to foster carers and children and young people. Furthermore, they demonstrate a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The agency's statement of purpose contains out-of-date information. In addition, a copy is not available on the agency's website and revisions have not been sent to HMCI, as required.
- Current staff recruitment practice does not comply with the principles of safer recruitment.
- Training for the fostering panel would enhance its functioning.
- The quality assurance of agency records is inconsistent.
- Assessment reports and matching records do not always illustrate the level of challenge and quality assurance that has taken place.
- Foster carers' recordings do not always contain sufficient information to illustrate the child's or young people's progress or to be able to identify areas of concern.

## 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>3: Statement of purpose and children's guide</p> <p>The fostering service provider must ensure that they place a copy of the statement of purpose on their website; keep it under review, where appropriate revise the statement of purpose and notify HMCI of any such revision within 28 days. (Regulation 3(2), regulation 4(a)(b))</p>	23/03/2018
<p>20: Fitness of workers</p> <p>The fostering service provider must not employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to so, and that full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20(1)(a)(3))</p>	23/03/2018

### Recommendations

- Ensure that the written report on the person's suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision maker need in order to make an objective approval decision. (National Minimum Standards 13.7)
- Ensure that 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. (National Minimum Standards 15.1)
- Ensure that each person on the central list is given the opportunity of attending an annual joint training day with the fostering service's staff and has access to appropriate training and skills development and is kept abreast of relevant changes to legislation and guidance. (National Minimum Standards 23.10/23.11)
- Ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. (National Minimum Standards 25.2)

- Ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. (National Minimum Standards 26.6)

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people said that they feel happy and settled living with their foster families. They feel part of the foster family and are included in activities and family events. One young person said in feedback requested by the agency, 'It's awesome because I feel like [name of foster carers] are my parents and they look after me the best.' Another commented, in the annual Ofsted survey, 'My foster carers are kind, caring, understanding and always listen to me.' This sense of security is helping children and young people to thrive.

The agency is committed to promoting stability for children and young people whenever possible. Many children benefit from permanent placements, even when they have experienced placement disruption previously. In the past, some young people have been able to continue to live with their foster carers after their 18th birthday, under 'staying put' arrangements. The agency also supports children to remain living with their birth parents by providing good-quality parent and child placements. Children's needs, both currently and in the future, are clearly a priority for the agency.

Whenever possible, children and young people move into their foster families in a planned manner. However, when this is not possible the agency does its best to ensure that children receive some information to ease their anxieties about their move. The agency keeps helpful profile booklets about its' foster carers electronically. It is able to send these to children's social workers immediately, giving them the opportunity to share this information with children prior to meeting their new family. Children also receive a welcome pack of information following their placement. This includes a copy of the children's guide to the fostering agency, information about who to contact if they are unhappy or wish to make a complaint, and a welcome gift. This helps children settle.

Generally, matching is effective. The number of stable long-term placements reflect this. Social workers know the foster carers extremely well and they use their knowledge of them to inform matching decisions. Matching documents reflect the initial matching considerations and demonstrate that managers request additional information from children's and young people's social workers, to ensure that they have as much information as possible. However, records do not always reflect discussions that have taken place regarding specific matters, such as the assessment of risks when placing a child or young person in a fostering household with pets, where there have been known difficulties with animals in the past. On one occasion, this did result in a placement move for a child, as the foster carer felt unable to manage the situation safely in the long term.

The agency regularly monitors children's and young people's attendance at health appointments. Foster carers ensure that they register all children and young people with health services. They attend regular check-ups with the dentist and optician. The agency also ensures that foster carers have access to specialist training, when

the child or young person that they care for suffers from a specific medical condition. This ensures that foster carers have the information that they require to provide the best quality care.

Similarly, the agency monitors children's and young people's attendance and progress at school or college. Agency staff and foster carers promote learning and swiftly liaise with other professionals to secure education for those who are not being suitably educated. One young person commented, 'I am trying hard at school at the moment. I am enjoying school.' Foster carers and agency staff praise and reward such progress. This helps to motivate children and young people to try their best.

Children and young people enjoy normal family life. This includes access to a wide range of activities, many denied to them previously. Children are now engaging in activities such as taekwondo and they are learning to swim. They have also been able to enjoy holidays abroad with their foster carers. These new opportunities help to enhance children's self-esteem and they grow in confidence. In addition, the agency has a participation champion, who ensures that children have regular opportunities to meet up with other children in foster care. They enjoy fun days out together. Recent venues include a trip to a local farm and ice-skating. All children in the fostering household can participate. Similarly, all children receive gifts for their birthday and the agency acknowledges their achievements. This reinforces the importance of the fostering family unit.

The preparation, training and assessment of foster carers is good. The agency has approved three new fostering families in the last six months. The most successful method of recruitment is via word-of-mouth recommendation. Foster carers receive appropriate pre-approval training to ensure that they have a realistic view of the fostering task. Fostering assessment reports contain good analysis and evaluation, demonstrating the applicants' ability to care for children and young people's safely and competently. Reports receive appropriate scrutiny and challenge by the registered manager. However, the new information gleaned is not always clear in the completed assessment report. Consequently, the fostering panel and decision maker may not have access to the full information that they need to inform their decision-making.

Foster carers understand how important it is for children and young people to continue relationships with significant people, such as parents, relatives and friends. Foster carers appreciate the significance of these relationships for children, and do not undermine them. This helps children to maintain a sense of family identity.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: good**

The safety and welfare of children and young people are clearly a priority of the agency. Children and young people said that they feel safe and secure in their foster families. One young person commented, as part of his feedback to the agency on his own progress, 'I feel safe at home because [name of foster carers] are always there for me.'

The agency has two children's guides to fostering so that children and young people

can receive essential information in the most appropriate format. These contain details about how they can raise any concerns or complaints. Supervising social workers ensure that they see children and young people regularly, including alone, so that they can be assured of their well-being. Staff also undertake unannounced visits to foster carers twice yearly, so that they can be assured that children and young people are receiving high-quality care when the foster carer is not expecting a social worker to visit. Improvements in recording since the last inspection now ensure that clear records reflect the content of these visits.

Foster carers compile their own safe caring policy. This outlines the rules and expectations for all those living in the family. Foster carers share this with the children and young people in their care, reducing the potential for the carer's actions to be misinterpreted. In the event of an allegation against a foster carer, the agency is proactive and liaises well with other individuals who have safeguarding responsibilities, such as the designated officer. Foster carers have access to independent support during this difficult period. The registered manager also ensures that she completes any follow-up actions in a timely way. This includes returning to fostering panel and updating risk assessments.

Staff complete a risk assessment for each young person. These refer to a wide range of potential risk-taking behaviours. They include strategies for preventing or reducing risk. Young people rarely engage in risk-taking behaviour, such as going missing from home. However, when incidents do occur, foster carers and staff are quick to take the appropriate action. Foster carers maintain a clear chronology of their actions to help the agency and the police accurately assess the situation. When the young person has safely returned to the foster home, staff complete a return interview with them to address any immediate concerns and ensure that representatives from the local authority also visit to complete their own. Staff escalate their concerns by requesting a strategy meeting if required. These actions ensure that safeguards are in place to address concerns early and young people know that their foster carers and the agency staff are worried about their welfare. There have been significant reductions in missing episodes for some young people, because they have established relationships with their foster carers and are learning to keep themselves safe.

This inspection identified some shortfalls in relation to the recruitment of staff and panel members. In one case, it was evident that there were gaps in employment dates, with no documentation evidencing exploration of this with the applicant. It transpired that the registered manager was aware of what the individual was doing at this time, as he had worked for the agency as a student, but this had not been explored further in relation to the specific detail required to cover this four-year period. In addition, the individual had lived abroad during this time but no additional international checks had been completed to confirm that he had not been convicted of an offence during this period. The registered manager was taking action to rectify this shortfall during the inspection. Furthermore, some verification of references has been taking place via email and not telephone call, denying the opportunity for the registered manager to raise pertinent issues with the referee. This process is not yet sufficiently robust, to ensure the integrity of all those in employment.

## **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The registered manager is a qualified social worker and has relevant experience in children's social care and fostering. She is currently studying for a level 5 management qualification. She has been employed for the agency for a number of years, taking on the role of manager in August 2016. She is dedicated to the future development of the service. Her practice is child centred and she displays a passion for improving outcomes for children and young people in placement with the agency's foster carers. She is a visible presence to foster carers and children, who said that they would feel confident in raising any concerns with her. Similarly, the responsible individual demonstrates a good knowledge of the service and shares the manager's passion for improving the life chances of the children and young people living with their foster carers.

The agency's statement of purpose outlines the aims and objectives of the service. It also contains a summary of its complaints procedure. However, this document has not received regular update, it is not on the agency's website and a copy has not been sent to the HMCI, as required. Consequently, it is difficult for stakeholders to access this information.

The agency is well resourced, and caseloads are small. Consequently, supervising social workers are able to provide a high level of support. Staff receive regular supervision and performance appraisal. They feel well supported by their immediate managers. Supervising social workers are qualified and experienced. They are able to make best use of their own skills and interests, by taking the lead on the development of a certain area. The agency supports staff development and is currently supporting a number of social workers to complete a management qualification. This investment in their career progression helps to keep staff motivated and committed to the agency.

The staff team is largely stable. During the inspection, many foster carers commented on the significance of this stability. Their comments included, 'I receive fantastic and continuous support,' and 'I am very happy with this agency. They are always there for me when I need them.' Supervising social workers make weekly contact with their foster carers and complete supervisory visits monthly, as a minimum. Foster carers also have access to regular support groups and an out-of-hours service, in the event of an emergency. These measures ensure that foster carers have access to advice if they need it and enable them to reflect on their practice. It also allows the agency to monitor the level of care provided and identify any areas for learning and development.

The agency's central list of fostering panel members brings a range of experience, both professional and personal, to the panel. The panel chair is independent of the agency and is suitably qualified and experienced. The panel provides a degree of scrutiny and challenge. However, panel members have received little update training over recent years, or specific training pertinent to their role. Consequently, on



occasion, they have been unsure of their roles and responsibilities. The agency decision maker makes her decision promptly, listing her own reasons for the decision.

Foster carers enjoy a varied training programme. This can provide them with further opportunities to meet up with other carers. However, supervising social workers also provide update training to foster carers on a one-to-one basis, during their monthly supervision. Foster carers are positive about this, as social workers are able to tailor this training to the carers' specific situation or learning needs. Foster carers also have access to a range of online training modules. This variety of delivery methods ensures that foster carers training needs are met. The vast majority of foster carers complete their training, support and development standards within 12 months of approval.

Foster carers complete daily records on the children and young people in their care. Foster carers enter these directly into the agency's electronic record-keeping system. Supervising social workers then review these and produce weekly reports for children's social workers, outlining the children and young people's progress. However, inconsistencies in the standards of the foster carers' records were evident during the inspection. While some clearly outline the child or young person's day, including achievements and challenges, others contain limited information, making it difficult to gain a sense of the child's day or to identify any concerning patterns of behaviour. While the registered manager's monitoring systems had identified this as an issue, it has yet to be satisfactorily addressed.

The registered manager utilises a number of monitoring and auditing systems to help her keep abreast of children and young people's progress, as well to ensure that essential tasks are completed and records up to date. However, despite such monitoring, inspectors discovered a number of documents missing from panel members' files, such as confirmation of social work qualifications and registration, up-to-date training records and annual appraisals. The registered manager completes good-quality internal monitoring reports and does have a good grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the agency. This helps inform her development plan.

The agency has positive relationships with those commissioning its services. They report that communication with staff is good and that they have confidence in the agency. One commissioner commented, 'The agency is responsive to our need. They always reply promptly to any placement requests. We view them as a supportive agency.'

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the

independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards.

## **Independent fostering agency details**

**Unique reference number:** SC063316

**Registered provider:** Perpetual Fostering Limited

**Registered provider address:** 31 Chorley New Road, Bolton BL1 4QR

**Responsible individual:** Tahir Khan

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## **Inspectors**

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Nicola Thomas, social care inspector



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