

# Lighthouse Fostering

Lighthouse Fostering Limited

Unit 3, Business Suite, Abbey Business Centre, London Road, Faversham, Kent ME13 8RZ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Lighthouse Fostering is a privately owned independent fostering agency registered with Ofsted since 2014. It currently has 13 active fostering households with 12 children and young people in placement. The agency provides short-, medium- and long-term foster placements for children looked after as well as parent and child placements and remand placements. The current manager has applied to be registered with Ofsted.

**Inspection dates:** 21 to 25 January 2019

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

**requires improvement to be good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected

requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

requires improvement to be good

The independent fostering agency is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

**Date of last inspection:** 12 February 2016

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency requires improvement to be good because:

- Safeguarding processes are not consistently followed. One case demonstrated a breakdown in safeguarding reporting and practice errors; however, this is not a systemic failing in the agency.
- Placement-matching decisions do not always consider foster carers' skills and training, so some carers have insufficient training to understand the needs of the children in their care.
- Not all carers complete all mandatory training.
- Quality assurance provided by the panel is not always actioned by the agency. Trends and patterns identified by the panel are not evaluated and learned from.
- The managers have not ensured that sufficient numbers of qualified staff are employed by the agency.
- There are shortfalls in some of the monitoring of the service by managers. The lack of oversight of the quality of work of supervising social workers means that ineffective practice is not always recognised and rectified.

The independent fostering agency's strengths:

- Placement stability has improved since the last inspection. The vast majority of children live in settled placements that meet their needs and in which they are making progress.
- Children have strong attachments with their foster carers and say that they feel part of the family and safe.
- Foster carers spoke warmly of the agency and feel well supported and highly valued.
- The agency's response to children going missing is proactive. Children with missing behaviour benefit from regular management oversight. The agency works hard to ensure that children's missing episodes decrease in number.
- Managers, leaders and staff have created a family-orientated service.
- The fostering panel always provides sufficient oversight, scrutiny and challenge about assessments.

## 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>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 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>	30/04/2019
<p>The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that—</p> <p>(a) the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster carers is safeguarded and promoted at all times.</p> <p>(Regulation 11 (a))</p> <p>Specifically, ensure that effective action is taken when children have injuries and that foster carers and staff have the skills and knowledge to protect children from harm.</p>	30/04/2019
<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.</p> <p>(Regulation 17 (1))</p> <p>In particular, both mandatory training and child-specific training is to be provided.</p>	30/04/2019
<p>The fostering service provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that foster parents are familiar with, and act in accordance with, the policies established in accordance with regulations 12(1) and 13(1) and (3)</p> <p>(Regulation 17 (2))</p> <p>In particular, this is regarding the child protection procedures and ensuring that behaviour management is restorative rather than punitive.</p>	30/04/2019

### Recommendations

- Ensure that foster carers keep a written record of all medication, treatment and first aid given to children during their placement. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 6.11)
- 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. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure that the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 15.1)
- Ensure that foster carers actively safeguard and promote the welfare of foster children. Specifically, ensure that children's individual risk assessments and safer care guidance are regularly reviewed and monitored by foster carers and their supervising social workers. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 4.2)
- Ensure that the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 1.7) In particular, ensure that participation for children is captured and used in developing the agency.
- 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. Ensure that immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.2) In particular, include quality assurance by and for the agency's panel.
- Ensure that the children's guide includes a summary of how children can find out their rights, how a child can contact their independent reviewing officer and the children's rights director if they wish to raise a concern with inspectors, and how to secure access to an independent advocate. Where a child requires it, the guide should be available, where appropriate, through suitable alternative methods of communication, e.g. Makaton, pictures, tape-recording and translation into another language. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 16.4 and 16.6)

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good**

Many of the children are settled and doing well in their placements. There is a marked improvement in their physical and emotional well-being, a reduction in their risk-taking behaviour and an improvement in their engagement with education and activities outside school. Children informed the inspector that they like their carers and feel part of the family. Children said of their carers: '[They are] really supportive. They help me to do different things and understand things. They could do nothing better', '[He] is my best dad ever' and 'I'm part of the family'. The children who have been matched with their foster carers for a significant amount of time develop positive attachments with them.

The foster carers are actively involved in the day-to-day planning about decisions which matter to children. They challenge professionals when decisions are made that are not in the best interests of the children living with them. One independent reviewing officer states that their child 'benefits from continuity of care in relation to their health, educational and emotional and behavioural needs'. One placing social worker commented that these carers had gone above and beyond for their young person, who had been placed while on remand and about whom there were serious concerns: 'They prioritise my child's needs while safeguarding the needs of other children. ... The foster carers have supported the local authority care plan and certainly supported me in engaging with the young person.'

However, the agency fails to promote the experiences and progress of all children. For example, one foster carer and one supervising social worker did not take effective action to ensure that two children were appropriately safeguarded. Although this one case demonstrated a breakdown of safeguarding reporting and practice errors, this is not systemic failing within the agency. Managers were unaware of these shortfalls until highlighted by the inspector during the inspection.

The children are encouraged and supported to attend mainstream or alternative educational provisions. A carer commented that her child 'has done so well and has progressed from bottom of the class to now meeting expectations'. All children have personal education plans and education, health and care plans, if required. A newly appointed educational consultant has delivered training, and feedback has been positive from carers. One carer commented that they had 'learned more about the role of virtual head and school's responsibilities – well delivered and made age-appropriate to our children'.

The agency prioritises children's health needs. All the relevant health checks are closely monitored and up to date. Carers help children engage with a range of therapies, including reflexology, which a foster carer said has 'helped tremendously and enabled them [their child] to be more relaxed'. However, the arrangements for managing medication are insufficient. Neither written records nor the policy include a clear audit mechanism or link practice with safeguarding responsibilities. On one occasion, a child drank an unknown amount of medicine.

Children choose activities they want to engage in. They are supported by carers to pursue skills that assist in developing their independence and are encouraged to develop positive relationships with others in the community. Children maintain relationships crucial to their identity and culture. The agency is proactive in assisting children to spend time with their birth families and friends.

The agency's process for approving foster carers is well organised. At the point of initial enquiry, potential applicants are promptly engaged and a detailed assessment is undertaken before the applicants are presented to panel.

Placement matching does not always consider fully foster carers' training history; not all carers have completed the training they need in order to meet the identified needs of the children placed with them. In some instances, when mandatory training had not been completed, foster carers were not sufficiently challenged about this. In some cases, gaps in placement matching remain unidentified and unaddressed. In one example, the impact of a newly placed child on the other children in the carer's home was not assessed. Carers spoken with confirmed that they received the information they require about children who come to live with them and were knowledgeable about the emotional impact on the child when being introduced to the home.

Although the agency was originally set up with an advisory board comprising adult care-leavers, the board last met in September 2017. Children's participation currently is mainly achieved through infrequent activity days.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good**

In the majority of cases, there is an improvement in the safety and welfare of children placed with the agency. Children's risk-taking behaviour reduces as they settle into their placement. There has been improvement in the stability of children's placements since the previous inspection.

Children who are exposed to, or at risk of, child sexual exploitation receive good support. Foster carers contribute to and work with the local authorities to manage risk. This includes liaising with professionals and attending regular meetings. Carers use their positive relationships with the children to enable them to monitor their whereabouts and keep them safe.

Investigations into allegations and complaints are well reported, in an appropriate and timely manner; this promotes the safety and welfare of children. However, there are shortfalls noted regarding the reporting of one safeguarding concern. An incident that occurred three weeks prior to the inspection was found by the inspector, which unfortunately meant that due processes could not be actioned, because of the delay. The agency took immediate action once notified by the inspector, and put in place a plan including several measures to mitigate the risks.

When children exhibit complex and challenging behaviour, a small number of agency plans provide insufficient guidance, alternatives or challenge to carers to ensure that any measures put in place are restorative and effective, and not punitive (such as writing lines or stopping treats).

Recruitment of new employees is good. The improved safer recruitment practices used by the agency minimise the risk of unsuitable people being employed to work with children. The children who were spoken with during the inspection confirmed that they feel safe in their foster homes and have the confidence to speak to their foster carers about any concerns or worries that they may have.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good**

There has been some change of managers at the agency since the last inspection. A new manager was appointed six months prior to the inspection. She has high ambitions for the agency and high expectations for children. However, these have not yet been realised across all areas of practice. At the time of this inspection, her application to be registered with Ofsted was underway.

Although many children find stability and security with their foster carers, in a small number of instances the agency did not take sufficient steps to safeguard children or to ensure that the risk of harm to children or carers is minimised. In some instances, managers have failed to oversee and monitor organisational practice and the quality of care provided to children effectively; this fails to identify and rectify shortfalls in practice. Some of the concerns raised by the inspector were unknown to leaders and managers.

Unannounced visits to foster carers take place in line with the fostering standards. The agency has one supervising social worker. Independent social workers are also commissioned to undertake initial assessment work and more recently to provide supervision to some carers. The agency is not sufficiently staffed currently and will not be able to fulfil its development plans.

The agency panel is good. The responsible individual is the agency decision-maker, and makes appropriate decisions effectively and transparently to safeguard children. The members of the panel offer a variety of perspectives and knowledge when making recommendations for approval or review of foster carers. The panel prepares well and asks appropriate questions arising from the assessments. It places emphasis upon the safety and well-being of children and demonstrates a commitment to high standards. The panel provides feedback to the agency regarding the assessment process. However, managers do not make sufficient use of the panel as a critical friend, and some matters raised were not addressed effectively in a timely manner. Other trends and patterns found by the panel, such as accessibility to training, are not evaluated and learned from.

The statement of purpose has been updated and remains under review. Placing social workers confirm that its stated aims and objectives are being delivered. The agency's information for children about their rights is several years out of date, and although there is a version for younger children with pictures of Raddy the dog, it is not available in other methods of communication.

Foster carers have a high regard for the agency. Their comments include 'it is excellent', 'always there for us all', 'amazing difference to previous agency with the support we now get' and 'when times are stressful, they have called every day and made sure we are ok'. This results in the carers feeling valued. Professionals have a good opinion of the service provided by the agency. One independent reviewing

officer states, 'This child's placement is well matched to their needs.' Placing social workers believe that the communication from the supervising social workers has improved greatly very recently, due to a change in supervising social worker.

Over the course of the inspection, leaders and managers were prompt to respond to the concerns raised and began to immediately implement and further develop an action plan to address the identified shortfalls.

## **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:** SC479090

**Registered provider:** Lighthouse Fostering Limited

**Registered provider address:** Business Suite, Brogdale Farm, Brogdale Road,  
Ospringe, Faversham, Kent ME13 8XU

**Responsible individual:** Mary Vincent

**Registered manager:** Post vacant

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## **Inspector**

Helen Lee, social care inspector



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