

# Child Focus Fostering Agency

Sherico Care Services Limited

2-4 Balmoral Road, Leyton, London, E10 5ND

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency is based in East London. At the time of the inspection, there were 13 fostering households with six children in placement.

The fostering service registered with Ofsted in 2003. Currently, the registered manager's position is vacant.

### Inspection dates: 13 to 17 June 2022

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<b>inadequate</b>
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	inadequate
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	inadequate
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There are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and/or the care and experiences of children and young people are poor and they are not making progress.

**Date of last inspection:** 8 April 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate**

The experiences and progress of children is judged to be inadequate. This is due to significant shortfalls in the fostering service's ability to keep children safe. Children largely receive adequate care as a result of the efforts and commitment of their foster carers rather than the actions of the agency. The inspector finds that the leadership of the agency is weak and that the protection of children is poor.

Children who spoke with the inspector said they were happy living with their foster carers and were observed to be settled and secure with their foster families. However, children are not listened to, and do not have a voice within the agency to share their views about their care.

Records of supervisory visits indicate that children are very rarely seen or spoken with by staff. Children sometimes do not contribute to their foster carers annual reviews, and there have been no events or activities that help to gather children's views. Monthly summaries of children's progress and experiences are often insufficiently detailed. The agency therefore does not have good insight of the progress children are making or whether their experiences are positive.

There are no records of children making complaints about the service. Staff do not ask children whether they are satisfied with the care they receive. The children's guide needs revision to include accurate information about who children can contact outside of the agency if they have concerns.

Children largely attend school or college. Some attend regularly, but the attendance of other children is sporadic. Foster carers work hard to ensure that children are engaged with their education. However, foster carers feel that they do not receive adequate support from staff to ensure that children receive good learning opportunities. One foster carer said that for several months, she had taken responsibility for challenging professionals to allocate nursery places to the children she was caring for.

Foster carers work hard to ensure that children lead healthy lives. However, foster carers say that they feel that they get little support from staff to help promote children's physical and emotional health care needs. Foster carers feel solely responsible to ensuring that children's health care needs are met. This is the case for a foster carer caring for children who have significant and complex health conditions.

The foster carer told the inspector that she had received no relevant training to improve her family's understanding of the children's health care needs. This sentiment is shared by some local authority workers. A different child's social worker said, 'The child's health needs have not been adequately supported for the duration of the placement'. This was verified by the child's diabetes nurse specialist. This does not demonstrate that children's health and well-being needs are met.

The agency's matching process is not robust. In some cases, it is unclear why some foster carers have been selected to care for certain children. In one case, a child and parent placement had been agreed. However, the foster carer had no relevant training or experience of parent and child placements and they had not been approved to care for child and parent placements. This was the foster carer's first placement.

Foster carers do not share professional supportive relationships with staff of the fostering agency. Foster carers say that in recent months they have not been well supported by the agency. A foster carer said, 'There is no one to help us. There is no staff here. My young person was very challenging. I had to call the local authority to come and remove the child.' Staff's poor support of foster carers and children's placement hinders foster carers' ability to provide effective, well-coordinated, high-quality care to children.

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

Significant weaknesses are evident in staff's ability to keep children safe. The recent high turnover of staff and the provider's inability to appoint a manager has meant that staff's child protection practices have at times been unsafe.

Staff do not conduct regular home visits to speak with children. Therefore, children do not have an opportunity to speak with staff about any concerns they may have. In some cases where foster carers' quality of care is cause for concern, managers do not increase the training and support for the foster carers. Furthermore, managers do not closely monitor these households.

Some foster carers' assessments are of a poor quality. For example, in some cases, assessments are presented to the fostering panel without the completion of key checks. This does not confirm that prospective foster carers are suitable, if approved, to provide safe care to children.

Approved foster carers' annual review meetings are not always held each year as expected. In some cases, this includes foster carers who have cared for children a year after their initial approval. This does not confirm that foster carers remain suitable to continue to care for children. Additionally, foster carers reviews that are due to be presented at the fostering panel following an investigation do not happen, preventing a further avenue of support. Unannounced visits to foster carers homes do not take place each year as required. This prevents staff from speaking with children and foster carers when they are not expecting staff to visit.

Staff do not inform Ofsted and other professionals of key safeguarding events as required. Managers do not monitor foster carers' completion of recommended training following investigations. This does not help to keep children safe.

Communication between foster carers and local authority staff is regular, but this contact is not always open, transparent, or effective. In one case, a foster carer failed to share pertinent information with professionals about a mother's failure

several times to return to the home on several occasions to care for her baby. The mother had persuaded the foster carer to keep this information from staff of the fostering service and the local authority social worker. This is not safe care practice.

The fostering service does not have well-developed strategies to support foster carers to keep children safe. Foster carers say that dealing with safeguarding issues is largely left to their own skills, knowledge, and initiative. Foster carers say that of late, staff have been difficult to contact and they have not responded to their telephone calls and emails. This has been the case during emergency situations. A foster carer said, 'I've called the out of hours number every day when I was having difficulties. You get no answer.' Another foster carer said, 'Even when children are missing, no one responds.'

Foster carers' homes are not always safe and secure. In one case, the foster carer did not have stairgates erected in the home. This was despite having a toddler in placement who was able to walk. In another case, windows were not appropriately restricted. This posed a hazard as the child was able to climb up furniture nearing access to an open window; the child was lifted out of the window by his mother and a 'passer-by', while the foster carer was asleep in the same room. Staff had failed to monitor the foster carer's well-being or the safety of the child's environment.

A local authority social worker said of a child's placement, 'There does not seem to be any understanding or acknowledgment of risk (with health needs, education, extra-familial harm, etc). This placement has not been safe from the outset. We have been searching for an alternative option for [child's name] throughout the duration of the placement to no avail, hence why this placement has lasted as long as it has.'

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

The fostering agency is poorly and inappropriately staffed and resourced to meet the needs of children and foster carers. Currently, the responsible individual is managing the service and is the service's only supervising social worker. This arrangement does not promote effective overview and scrutiny of the fostering service. This does not help to improve the quality of care provided to children.

Managers do not ensure that the recruitment of staff is in accordance with safe recruitment practice and that gaps are noted in the process. For example, managers do not verify the qualifications of prospective staff. This does not demonstrate that they are suitably qualified to support children and foster carers.

The arrangements for appraisals are poor. For example, the agency's fostering panel have not had appraisals for a number of years.

The monitoring of the service is inadequate. For example, case records appear not to have been audited as the quality of some records are very poor. An example of this are records of supervisory visits. These are consistently very brief, repetitive, and lacking pertinent details of placement issues.

Children, foster carers, external professionals, and others have very limited opportunities to share their views about the fostering service. This does not ensure that stakeholders' opinions help to shape the development of the service and improve the quality of the service.

The service's fostering panel has not convened for one year. The panel is represented by individuals in key fields related to childcare and child development. The administration of the fostering panel requires improvement. Key panel documents are sometimes forwarded to panel members late, and the minutes of fostering panel meetings are not consistently reflective of panel discussions. Case files do not evidence confirmation of the Agency Decision Maker's decisions about approved and prospective foster carers as expected.

Foster carers' training, development and induction activities require improvement. Some foster carers approved for over one year, have not obtained the Training, Support and Development Standards within the 12-month timeframe. Foster carers' personal development plans are vague and not tailored to meet the needs of individual foster carers. For example, a foster carer supporting a child and parent placement had received no specialist training to do so.

The fostering service's statement of purpose and children's guide contain inaccurate information about the current staff team and about making complaints.

The leadership and management of the fostering service is weak. The lack of effective leadership and management has meant that children and foster carers do not receive good support. The fostering service's procedures and processes are not robust, and this means that children are not well protected from harm.

## 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 registered provider must appoint an individual to manage the fostering agency.</p> <p>Where the registered provider is—</p> <p>an organisation, it must not appoint the person who is the responsible individual as the manager,</p> <p>a partnership, it must not appoint any of the partners as the manager.</p> <p>The registered provider must notify the Chief Inspector without delay of—</p> <p>the name of any person appointed in accordance with this regulation, and</p> <p>the date on which the appointment is to take effect. (Regulation 6 (1) (2)(a)(b) (3)(a)(b))</p>	7 Aug 2022
<p>For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person—</p> <p>is of integrity and good character,</p> <p>has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform,</p> <p>is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform,</p> <p>and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20 (3)(a)(b)(c))</p>	7 Aug 2022
<p>The fostering service provider may carry out an assessment of any person who applies to become a foster parent and</p>	7 Aug 2022

<p>whom they consider may be suitable to become a foster parent ("X"), and any such assessment must be carried out in accordance with this regulation.</p> <p>The fostering service provider—</p> <p>must obtain the information specified in Schedule 3 relating to X and other members of X's household and family, and any other information they consider relevant,</p> <p>must interview at least two persons nominated by X to provide personal references for X, and prepare written reports of the interviews,</p> <p>except where the fostering service provider is a local authority and X lives in the area of that authority, must consult with, and take into account the views of, the local authority in whose area X lives. (Regulation 26 (1)(2)(a)(b)(c))</p>	
<p>The fostering service provider must review the approval of each foster parent in accordance with this regulation.</p> <p>A review must take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider consider it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year.</p> <p>When undertaking a review, the fostering service provider must—</p> <p>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, and</p> <p>seek and take into account the views of—</p> <p>the foster parent,</p> <p>any child placed with the foster parent (subject to the child's age and understanding), and</p> <p>any placing authority which has, within the preceding year, placed a child with the foster parent.</p> <p>At the conclusion of the review, the fostering service provider must prepare a written report, setting out whether—</p>	<p>7 Aug 2022</p>

<p>the foster parent continues to be suitable to be a foster parent and the foster parent's household continues to be suitable, and</p> <p>the terms of the foster parent's approval continue to be appropriate. (Regulation 28 (1)(2)(3)(a)(b)(i)(ii)(iii)(4)(a)(b))</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. (Regulation 36(1))</p>	7 Aug 2022
<p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy which—</p> <p>is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse or neglect, and</p> <p>sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect. (Regulation 12(1)(a)(b))</p>	*7 Aug 2022
<p>The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that—</p> <p>the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11(a))</p>	*7 Aug 2022
<p>The registered person must ensure that foster carers receive suitable support, training and information to meet the needs of children in their care.</p> <p>In particular,</p> <p>Foster carers must be able to contact the agency at all times.</p> <p>Children's views about their placement should be ascertained and they should contribute to foster carers annual reviews.</p> <p>Unannounced visits to foster placements must take place at least once a year.</p> <p>Foster carers should have annual reviews.</p>	*7 Aug 2022



Foster carers should be provided with relevant training to meet the specific needs of children in their care. (Regulation 17(1))	
The fostering service provider must—  keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children's guide. (Regulation 4(a))	7 Aug 2022
The fostering provider must ensure that all persons employed by them—  receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21(4)(a))	7 Aug 2022
The fostering provider must obtain such information as the fostering panel considers necessary and send that information to the panel, and provide such other assistance as the fostering panel may request, so far as is reasonably practicable. (Regulation 25(3))	7 Aug 2022

\* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

## Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that they regularly monitor 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. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 25.2)

## Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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:** SC036628

**Registered provider:** Sherico Care Services Limited

**Registered provider address:** Sherico Care Homes Limited, 2-4 Balmoral Road,  
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**Responsible individual:** Veleta Hayles

**Registered manager:** Post vacant

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## **Inspector**

Sandra Jacobs-Walls, Social Care Inspector

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