

Child Focus Fostering Agency

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

Monitoring visit

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 this inspection, the agency had 13 approved fostering households with six children in placement.

The fostering service was registered with Ofsted in 2003. The post of registered manager is currently vacant.

Inspection date: 31 May 2022

Date of previous inspection: 8 April 2019

This monitoring visit

This monitoring visit was triggered after Ofsted received information expressing concerns about the fostering service. The concerns raised include:

- Leaders' day-to-day management of the service is ineffective.
- Leaders do not respond promptly or appropriately when safeguarding issues arise.
- Leaders do not ensure that the vetting of foster carers is robust and thorough.

The monitoring visit found that:

- Leaders are not effective in managing the day-to-day operation of the fostering service.
- Leaders do not respond promptly or appropriately when safeguarding issues arise.

- Leaders do not ensure that the vetting of foster carers is robust.
- Leaders' oversight of the quality of the service is poor.
- Leaders have failed to appoint a permanent manager to manage the fostering service.
- Staff's supervisory visits to foster carers are ineffective in ensuring that the needs of children and foster carers are met.
- Leaders do not ensure that the annual reviewing process for foster carers is robust and effective.
- Leaders do not ensure that staff conduct unannounced visits to foster carers' homes at least once a year.
- Leaders do not notify Ofsted of serious safeguarding issues as required.

The inspector viewed documents and interviewed the responsible individual.

The provider has failed to appoint a manager for the fostering service. The service's previous registered manager resigned from the post in April 2021. The provider has been unsuccessful in appointing a permanent manager. Currently, the responsible individual is responsible for the day-to-day management of the service, maintaining an overview of the quality of the service. She is also the fostering service's only supervising social worker. The responsible individual is, therefore, currently responsible for supporting all children's placements and foster carers. This situation is untenable and not in children's best interests.

A child recently made an allegation against her foster carers. The child's social worker and, subsequently, the local authority designated officer experienced difficulties in contacting fostering service staff and receiving pertinent information from them. There are poor systems in place to ensure that professionals and others are able to contact staff quickly to explore safeguarding issues. This does not help to keep children safe.

The fostering service's vetting processes are not sufficiently thorough. There was no local authority check on file relating to when the foster carers subject to an allegation had originally applied to be approved by the fostering agency. However, the foster carers' file does contain an updated local authority check. This document highlights serious historical concerns relating to the foster carers' care of children who were related to them. The responsible individual said that she was not aware of and had not seen this document. This demonstrates that the provider has failed to ensure that, when they receive key updated information, prompt action is taken to ensure that foster carers are suitable to care for children.

Leaders do not ensure that supervisory visits are effective in exploring the needs of children and foster carers. The inspector reviewed several records of supervisory visits to foster carers. Staff do not explore placement progress or issues. Records do not include any discussion or interaction with children. These records are very

limited in detail and sometimes duplicate records from the previous visit. Records of supervisory visits do not highlight children's experiences or foster carers' support needs. This does not ensure that foster carers are adequately meeting children's needs.

The foster carers' annual review process is not consistently effective. In some cases, leaders have failed to obtain feedback from foster carers or their supervising social workers. This means that the process is not informed by the views of foster carers themselves and staff supporting children's placements. The effectiveness of foster carers' annual reviews is therefore compromised by the lack of contribution from key people involved in the process.

Leaders do not ensure that at least one unannounced visit per year to foster carers' homes is carried out. This is not in compliance with the fostering regulations and does not ensure that children, foster carers and children's environments can be seen by staff at a time when visits are not expected.

The responsible individual failed to notify Ofsted of the recent allegation made against the foster carers. This is not in accordance with the fostering regulations and does not ensure that Ofsted has the opportunity to review significant safeguarding events without delay.

A recommendation raised at the previous monitoring visit was not reviewed during this visit and is repeated. This relates to the fostering panel providing feedback about assessments presented at the fostering panel.

Shortfalls in staff recruitment practices were again identified at this monitoring visit.

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>	1 July 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>	1 July 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 carers is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11 (a))</p>	1 July 2022
<p>The fostering service provider may carry out an assessment of any person who applies to become a foster parent and</p>	1 July 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>1 July 2022</p>

<p>At the conclusion of the review, the fostering service provider must prepare a written report, setting out whether—</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>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. This relates to foster carers' completion of recommended training courses and the quality of support provided to foster carers at supervisory visits. (Regulation 17 (1))</p>	1 July 2022
<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>	1 July 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>	1 July 2022
<p>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))</p>	1 July 2022

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that panel(s) provide quality assurance feedback to the fostering service provider on the quality of reports being presented to panel. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 14.2)
- The registered person should ensure that each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings should have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. The frequency of meetings for short-break foster carers should be proportionate to the amount of care provided. Foster carers' files should include records of supervisory meetings. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 21.8).

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: SC036628

Registered provider: Sherico Care Services Limited

Registered provider address: Sherico Care Homes Ltd, 2-4 Balmoral Road,
London E10 5ND

Responsible individual: Veleta Hayles

Inspector

Sandra Jacobs-Walls, Social Care Inspector

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