

Foster for Bradford, Bradford Children and Families Trust

Bradford Children and Families Trust

Bradford Metropolitan District Council, Sir Henry Mitchell House, 4 Manchester Road, Bradford BD5 0QL

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency registered in April 2023 under a trust arrangement. The service operates from offices in Bradford. The manager also registered in April 2023.

The agency undertakes the assessment, approval and supervision of foster carers who provide a wide range of placements to children and young people. This includes respite care, permanent, short-term and long-term placements, kinship carers, remand fostering, and 'staying put' arrangements.

At the time of this visit, the fostering service had 489 approved foster carers providing placements for 711 children and young people.

Inspection dates: 11 to 15 March 2024

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: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: not applicable

Inspection judgements

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

Children are typically living in stable foster placements. Children receive a letter from the registered manager when they are matched to stay long term with their foster carers. This helps children settle into their placements. For older children, there is early planning to consider them remaining in 'staying put' arrangements with their carers. This reassures children and endorses their inclusion in the family. As children prepare for adulthood, they are supported to develop independence skills, such as taking driving lessons. Foster carers go above and beyond when caring for children. This contributes to most children having positive experiences and making progress from their starting points.

Some children experience unplanned endings because assessments for kinship placements have not been sufficiently thorough or because children have not been matched as well as they could be to a foster carer. This does not provide children with stability or promote opportunities to develop trusting relationships.

Foster carers and children living out of area are signposted to local and national resources. Foster carers living in Bradford welcome the introduction of an innovative programme which nurtures relationships between children and foster families. In addition, there has been an increase in support groups and enrichment opportunities such as Eid celebrations and a visit to a Hindu temple, which celebrates children's uniqueness. Carers approved by this agency in the main feel valued and there are increased social and learning opportunities for children.

Children in foster care with this agency benefit from the wraparound care they receive from partner agencies. Children in Care nurses remain linked to the child throughout their care journey. This offers consistency of health information. In addition, foster carers feel confident to contact the nurses for medical advice. There is improved monitoring of children's health and the administration of medication through the reporting and notification of recording of these incidents.

The virtual school maintains comprehensive oversight and support for children and their foster carers. Foster carers benefit from training delivered by the virtual school professionals as well as opportunities for discussion at regular drop-ins. Children are provided with tuition as well as links with higher education providers to promote their educational achievement and aspirations.

Foster carers have a voice within the agency because of the proactive independent foster carer association. This includes consultation with carers and support groups with speakers, both of which provide carers with learning opportunities as well as the development of social networks.

Some children attend a participation group to share their views and discuss key issues about how language is used in the agency. Children are not yet routinely contributing to the development of the agency, for example helping to redesign the children's guide, or

commenting on the quality of service they receive. These are missed opportunities to promote children's voices within their fostering service.

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

Most children are protected by safeguarding arrangements which promote their welfare. The registered manager responds promptly to concerns and recognises increasing risk for children. The agency has good working relationships with the missing and exploitation team. The robust referral process into this team ensures children are supported and foster carers advised on how to reduce risks.

Foster carers provide children with a consistent approach to managing their behaviour. Foster carer trainers are delivering additional training alongside supervising social workers. This further enhances the skills of foster carers who are managing children's behaviour without the need to physically intervene.

The registered manager liaises appropriately with designated officers and monitors concerns about an individual foster carer's standard of care in order to promote completion of investigations in a robust and timely way. The agency follows safer recruitment practice for the staff, including fostering panel members.

The fostering panel operates effectively. The chair has a clear understanding of her role with a strong focus on safeguarding. The central list of panel members provides a mix of panel members, which reflects the diversity of Bradford. This includes Children in Care nurses and virtual school staff both of whom provide other panel members with relevant information to help them in their role. The minutes demonstrate the robustness of panel members when making their recommendations about foster carers.

A recently recruited panel adviser brings additional scrutiny of the quality of the foster carer assessment reports as well as improved oversight of the timeliness of the process. This helps to reduce the likelihood of fostering families being presented to panel without full information. The agency has also recruited an internal agency decision-maker who has sufficient experience and independence to fulfil the role.

Too many children live in unregulated kinship placements. A significant contributing factor causing delay to the placements being approved relates to the timeliness of statutory checks and medicals.

Assessing social workers do not always show sufficient professional curiosity or persistence when exploring details and checks on ex-partners or adult children. This leaves a gap when assessing an applicant's suitability to foster and could place children at risk.

The quality of unannounced visits to the foster carers is variable. There have been occasions when children and other members of the fostering household have not been seen and the standard of recording is mixed. This means that the registered manager is not always sufficiently assured of the quality-of-care children are receiving.

Safe caring plans completed by supervising social workers do not always include all the risks or changes to children's circumstances. This does not provide carers with clarity on how to manage these.

Not all foster carer approvals are reviewed within timescales. Fostering independent reviewing officers (FIROs) report that some reports lack evidence of consultation with other professionals working with the child or foster carers. Supervising social workers do not always request statutory checks in a timely way or complete actions from the re-approval panel or previous annual reviews. FIROs have now introduced a mid-review check and they provide consultation to supervising social workers to support their preparation for annual reviews. This provides an additional level of scrutiny to prevent drift and management oversight to improve the quality of reports.

Leaders have been responsive to feedback during the inspection and have acted to implement changes. For example, individual safe caring plans now require team manager sign off.

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

The fostering agency is operated by Bradford Children and Families Trust. The co-location with children's social work colleagues enables supervising social workers to have timely discussions with relevant trust colleagues. This supports effective planning for children and their foster carers.

The certificate of registration is displayed as required in The Care Standards Act 2000. The office area is maintained to a satisfactory standard now that the building work underway at registration has been completed.

Foster carers and supervising social workers, many of whom have had long service, spoke about a smooth transition from Bradford Council to the Trust. Foster carers report a more stable workforce within the agency and improved opportunities to meet with leaders. Supervising social workers state the improved processes, such as family finding, is resulting in better consistency of practice.

The registered manager oversees the complaints received by the agency. She maintains integrity to Fostering Regulations and agency policies when considering a complaint. The registered manager advocates for foster carers and for additional resources when appropriate.

The responsible individual and registered manager are visible leaders. Supervising social workers describe them as approachable and knowledgeable. The Bradford Independent Foster Carer Association meets monthly with leaders. Their working relationship is evident in the progression to locality-based support groups.

Supervising social workers describe beneficial training which is both child focused and fostering specific. Foster carers have a mixed response to training which, since the pandemic, remains mainly online. There has been a delay to the roll out of face-to-face

training, including first aid. Currently, the agency's training does not meet the learning styles of all foster carers.

The leadership team has vision and ambition for the agency. The service development plan demonstrates that leaders know the fostering service well. Some areas of growth are underway, such as the foster carer ambassador role in supporting the recruitment of foster carers and interviews of staff. Many areas, however, are still in their infancy. For example, the agency is developing its independent disruption process. There is still more work to do to understand the frequency of children's placements ending in unplanned ways, and to address the contributing factors to these unintended outcomes.

Children's records do not consistently provide a comprehensive account of the child's time in placement. Foster carers are not routinely maintaining or sharing logs to help supervising social workers understand children's experiences. These will also create a record for the child of their time with foster carers. Team managers do not increase case supervision in line with escalating risks for children, including when some children go missing. The responsible individual has identified that increased management oversight and improved case recording are fundamental areas for the agency to address.

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, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>All amendments to Reg 26 were amended by Reg 5 and 7 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013.</p> <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>Subject to paragraph (1B), the fostering service provider—</p> <p>must, as soon as reasonably practicable, obtain the information specified in Part 1 of Schedule 3 relating to X and other members of X's household and family. (Regulation 26 (1)(1A)(a))</p>	<p>26 April 2024</p>

Recommendations

- The fostering service provider should ensure that children understand how their views have been taken into account and where significant wishes or concerns are not acted upon; they are helped to understand why. This relates to ensuring that children contribute to the children's guide and their views are considered within the review and development of the service. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 1.2)
- The fostering service provider should ensure that each foster carer is aware of all the necessary information available to the fostering service about a child's circumstances, including any significant recent events, to help the foster carer understand and predict the child's needs and behaviours and support the child within their household. This relates to ensuring that safer care plans are updated to reflect children's circumstances and guide foster carers in caring for children. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 3.9)
- The fostering service provider should ensure that areas of concern, or the need for additional support, that are identified between reviews are addressed. Such matters identified between reviews are addressed at the time they are identified, where appropriate, rather than waiting for a review. This relates to ensuring that checks are undertaken, and actions are completed in a timely way for fostering panel and annual reviews. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 13.9)

- The fostering service provider should ensure that all training fits within a framework of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice and is organised to encourage and facilitate attendance by foster carers. This relates to ensuring that training is delivered in accordance with foster carer learning styles. This includes face-to-face first aid training. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.10)
- The fostering service provider should ensure that the foster carer understands the important supporting role they play in encouraging the child to reflect on and understand their history. The child, subject to age and understanding, is encouraged to keep appropriate memorabilia (including photos) of their time in the placement. The fostering service makes this role clear to their foster carers and ensures they can record, and help children make a record of (subject to age and understanding), significant life events. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.7)
- The fostering service provider should ensure that where a family and friends foster carer is temporarily approved as a foster carer under regulation 24 of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, a full assessment is completed as soon as practicable, where the intention is for the child to stay with the carer, and always within the statutory timeframe set out in the Regulations. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 30.14)

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: 2725774

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