



Scrutiny Commission

Tuesday 23 May 2023

Agenda Item 5

Northamptonshire Children's Trust Fostering Agency

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Northamptonshire Children's Trust Fostering Agency

One Angel Square, Angel Street, Northampton, Northamptonshire, NN1 1ED

Monitoring visit

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency was registered on 1 November 2020 under a newly formed trust arrangement. The agency offers a range of placements, including short- and long-term, connected persons and remand placements.

At the time of the last full inspection, 495 children were being cared for. Families providing care included mainstream foster carers and connected carers.

There is no registered manager.

The responsible individual has had a period of absence. Because of this, Olivia Ives is currently acting as an interim responsible individual.

Inspection date: 11 April 2023

Date of previous inspection: 6 February 2023

This monitoring visit

At the last full inspection, the independent fostering agency received an inadequate judgement. Enforcement action was taken in the form of three compliance notices being issued.

Since the last inspection, the manager has implemented a new data-tracking system. This is being used to identify when children have been seen by the fostering service. This tracking system is in its infancy. Managers and social work staff are familiarising themselves with how to input the necessary information. This data is necessary for leaders and managers to be able to accurately assess how well the service is meeting the needs of children and foster carers.

The manager has introduced a new recording system to identify which children are the most vulnerable within the fostering service. This is based on an assessment of risk. This system provides better oversight of all children, but also enables staff to focus on the children whose case plans require more regular review, alongside other multi-agency professionals. This helps to keep these children safer, as well as supporting their placements. The manager recognises that more work needs to be done to better recognise children's needs before they become high risk.

Staff recruitment and retention remain areas for development. Although efforts are being made to recruit new staff, there has been high turnover in the workforce. This makes it more of a challenge to improve overall standards.

The manager is supporting supervising social workers to better understand their roles in relation to safeguarding. Since the last inspection, most social workers and foster carers have undertaken some form of safeguarding training. However, this training has only been accessed recently and, consequently, its overall effectiveness remains untested.

The manager has devised new policies that describe what is expected of supervising social workers when visiting foster carers and children. These policies have not yet been implemented in day-to-day social work practice. Therefore, the impact of these policies is not yet known.

Three children's files were viewed at this visit, and these were of a good standard. The files gave a chronological overview of children's lives, and it was evident that supervising social workers had recorded each child's wishes and feelings. However, the quality of recording is not yet reflective of the service overall. It is also not easy to assess whether children are making progress.

The manager has taken steps to recognise and respond to complaints. Where concerns have related to practice outside of the fostering agency, the manager has escalated these concerns appropriately.

Overall, the fostering service has made some progress since the last full inspection. However, this progress is at a very early stage and the impact of new initiatives could not be determined at this monitoring visit. For such reasons, the compliance notices have been reissued.

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 with the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>*The registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to—</p> <p>the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and</p> <p>the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency,</p> <p>carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill. (Regulation 8 (1)(a)(b))</p>	30 June 2023
<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 (1)(a))</p>	30 June 2023
<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>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>The fostering service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care</p>	30 June 2023

<p>plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations. (Regulation 17 (1) (2) (3))</p>	
<p>The registered person must ensure that a written record is made of any complaint or representation, the action taken in response to it, and the outcome of the investigation.</p> <p>The registered person must ensure that—</p> <p>children are enabled to make a complaint or representation. (Regulation 18 (4) (5)(a))</p>	<p>30 June 2023</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>	<p>30 June 2023</p>

*These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that each approved foster carer has regular supervision meetings with a suitably qualified social worker. Meetings should have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure that 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. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 21.8)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers' personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs and experience. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 20.5)

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: 2615433

Registered provider: Northamptonshire Childrens Trust Limited

Registered provider address: One Angel Square, Angel Street, Northampton, Northamptonshire NN1 1ED

Responsible individual: Christina Skeel (interim responsible individual Olivia Ives)

Inspectors

Andi Lilley-Tams, Social Care Inspector

Tracey Coglean-Greig, Social Care Inspector

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