

Together For Children Fostering - Sunderland

Together For Children Sunderland

Sandhill Centre, Grindon Lane, Sunderland SR3 4EN

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Together For Children Fostering- Sunderland registered as an independent fostering agency in March 2017 under a trust arrangement. The service operates from an office in Sunderland.

The service offers a range of foster placements, including respite care, permanent, long-term and short-term placements and connected carers arrangements.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had 180 fostering households that were caring for 274 children and young people.

The manager registered with Ofsted in 2024 and is suitably skilled and qualified.

Inspection dates: 7 to 11 April 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: 12 September 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Foster carers demonstrate a real commitment to children who live with them. Foster carers do not give up on children and are well supported when additional support is needed. Children benefit from nurturing and therapeutic parenting that is child centred and individualised. Due to this approach, children make exceptional progress from their starting points.

Managers and staff know their foster carers' strengths. Therefore, decisions for placing children with foster carers are made with careful consideration to the child and foster carer's circumstances. Staying put arrangements are discussed with children and their foster carers at an early stage. Children know their long-term plans, and their detailed pathway plans reflect this. There are a high number of children who remain with their fostering families into adulthood, and foster carers remain in touch with children, where possible, when they move out of their home.

Managers and staff make effective use of their in-house therapeutic resources. Foster carers receive well-planned formulations to help them manage children's behaviours. Foster carers embed their therapeutic approach to caring for children and receive invaluable support from a psychologist.

Foster carers are proud of the support networks they develop with each other. The commitment of foster carers to a mockingbird model has embedded networks of foster carers who work together to provide outstanding levels of support. Foster carers work creatively to achieve an 'extended family' for other carers and children, and long-term connections and friendships are created through their hard work. One grandparent said that they receive 'life changing' support from a foster carer. In addition, carers make arrangements so that siblings who cannot live together, can spend time together. This helps children to stay connected with their loved ones.

Support groups for foster carers are regularly arranged. To widen the support network for carers, there are additional groups for carers who are newer to their roles and those who care for children with complex needs. The agency has a children's support group, and children can attend a children's council. This helps children to contribute to decisions about the service to help make improvements. Children also have regular opportunities to meet with each other alongside their foster carers at a youth group or planned activities in the community.

Often, children move to live with foster carers with urgency. In these situations, carers' profiles are shared with children and this provides them with information about their fostering family and their home. These efforts ensure that children, no matter what their circumstances, are given as much information as possible to help them move into their foster carer's home with ease. When children have unplanned endings, disruption meetings are held to consider support for the child and foster

carers. Lessons are learned to help inform future living arrangements for children and support the needs of foster carers.

The fostering panel is held regularly, and detailed minutes show that there is an appropriate level of professional curiosity and challenge where needed. The panel is complemented by an experienced panel chair and agency decision-maker. The agency decision-maker responds promptly to provide approvals and has oversight of panel recommendations. The panel training is diverse, creative and inclusive.

The service supports many forms of kinship care arrangements, or temporary approval of foster carers. Some prospective adopters will embark on early permanence and are provided with information they need to make this decision. Although these families are supported by adoption social workers, managers have ensured that the staff develop their understanding of the fostering regulations to best support carers.

Matching processes for children with fostering families have some inconsistencies. Although the service as a whole is seen to provide good matching between children and their foster carers, the records of how these decisions are made are inconsistent and may range from a record of a conversation to a detailed matching report. Therefore, the matching considerations are not always clearly recorded.

The recruitment of new foster carers remains a challenge. Managers and social workers continue to consider diverse ways to encourage prospective carers to come forward, recognising that recruitment trends nationally are low.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding

Foster carers know the children they care for exceptionally well. They understand children's known risks and vulnerabilities and work very well with social workers and professionals to support children to access the services they need.

The fostering service has robust systems in place and responds quickly when allegations are made. The managers work in collaboration with children's social workers and the designated safeguarding officer to ensure that appropriate actions are taken to safeguard children. Safety plans for fostering families while investigations take place are detailed and well supported.

The managers complete thorough investigations into standards of care. When shortfalls in standards are identified, carers are provided with plans to support them to develop their skills and move forward. This ensures that any concerns about children's care arrangements are swiftly addressed.

When children go missing from their homes, foster carers are quick to respond and follow children's safety plans. However, the monitoring of return home interviews is not in place to ensure that children have the opportunity to speak with an adult

about the missing episode and for professionals to learn from this, to reduce future risks.

Social workers regularly see children in their fostering homes. Social workers take time to listen to children, and children said that they know the fostering social workers well. Unannounced visits take place regularly to foster carers' homes. If children are present and agreeable, fostering social workers will see children's bedrooms.

Some children and carers have detailed plans. These include known risk factors and clear strategies to support children. However, the inconsistency of plans, although having no current impact, is a recognised area for improvement.

The manager regularly provides notifications to Ofsted when there is a serious incident. However, following a section 47 investigation, the outcomes of these are not always provided. In addition, a safeguarding incident was not notified. This requirement was raised at the last inspection and will be restated.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The leaders and managers are ambitious to achieve better outcomes for children. The managers are child focused. They meet regularly to explore how the service is developing and consider areas for improvement. Actions are identified and followed up in monthly meetings. This ensures that there is accountability for the continuing development of the service.

Staff receive regular personal and case related supervision from a manager. This provides an opportunity for reflection and space to discuss the progress of children's living arrangements with carers. Appraisals are offered annually, and staff development is regularly reviewed throughout the year. However, not all staff receive their appraisals within timescales. Therefore, not all social workers are receiving the same formal support with their development.

The team meetings are well attended and used to discuss the fostering and kinship service. This includes what needs to be focused on, such as ensuring that foster carer agreements are signed, discussion about progress reports and information about the team, caseloads and training.

The support available to kinship carers has improved. They are invited to consultation meetings, which helps them to discuss how their support can be improved further. However, there is a shortfall in the registered manager's oversight of the kinship care team, which managers recognise can be strengthened through the registered manager's scrutiny and oversight of the service.

The agency does not have procedures in place to ensure that foster carers receive signed delegated authority forms. This is because the practice of delegated forms being signed by a parent, particularly for children who are voluntarily

accommodated, is not embedded into practice. The managers were able to accept this as a shortfall in practice.

The manager completes a review of the quality of care. However, they are not providing all the reports to Ofsted in line with regulation. In addition, there is a lack of evaluation to help inform how to make improvements. Therefore, the reports do not always inform a plan for how the service will be developed.

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
The registered person must maintain a system for— monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority. The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that they meet the shortfalls identified that relate to national minimum standards 4.5, 5.9, 15.1, 25.2, 25.7, 26.1 and 26.2.	30 May 2025
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. Any notification made in accordance with this regulation which is given orally must be confirmed in writing. (Regulation 36 (1) (2))	30 May 2025

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: 1254786

Registered provider: Together For Children Sunderland

Registered provider address: City Hall, Plater Way, Sunderland SR1 3AA

Responsible individual: Kathryn McCabe

Registered manager: Lisa Strother

Telephone number: 0191 561 2223

Email address:

Inspectors

Joanne Wallis, Social Care Inspector

Julia Hagan, Social Care Inspector

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