

# 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, 423 children were being cared for. Families providing care included mainstream foster carers and connected carers.

There is no registered manager.

The responsible individual has recently resigned. Because of this, Olivia Ives is currently acting as an interim responsible individual.

**Inspection date:** 3 July 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.

There is evidence of supervising social workers spending time with children on a regular basis. The acting manager has ensured that children have separate records to their foster carers. Children's progress is also discussed at each foster carer's supervision visit. Children are now safer because they are being seen and spoken with on a regular basis. This is a significant improvement since the last full inspection.

Overall, it is suggested that foster carers are receiving regular, quality supervisions. However, this remains a mixed picture because the quality of work is variable. For example, there is a pattern of some foster carer agreements being out of date. Furthermore, many documents are not signed by foster carers. Therefore, it is sometimes unclear how well foster carers and supervising social workers are working together to plan care for children and keep them safe.

The fostering service has introduced several new policies and procedures. This has been necessary to underpin quality practice. However, some supervising social workers have struggled to implement these changes at pace. It is recognised that the fostering service needs more time to build on current practice and stabilise the social work teams.

Where staff may have underperformed, there is evidence of action being taken to support staff to improve and embrace necessary organisational change. Where staff are performing to a high standard, there is evidence of this practice being celebrated and shared between practitioners.

Staff recruitment and retention remains an area for development. The acting manager is leaving the service and the responsible individual has resigned. There has been no registered manager since December 2021. It is paramount that any new manager completes an application to register with Ofsted. Overall, staff recruitment and retention has improved. However, this is still a working progress.

Senior leaders use a data-tracking system to oversee practice. This is being used to quantitatively identify when supervising social workers have completed necessary social work tasks. This data-tracking system has some utility; however, its data is not yet consistently reliable. To compensate for this unreliability, senior leaders are also completing regular audits and are reviewing the quality of completed work. These extra safeguards help to give a clearer picture of what the quality of the fostering service looks like. Senior leaders have committed to install a new data-tracking system by November 2023. Senior leaders aim for this to improve the quality of recording and the reliability of overall data.

Overall, the fostering service has made enough progress to meet the compliance notices that were issued at the last full inspection. There is recognition that the fostering service is on an improvement journey and that it will take time to further embed social work practice and stabilise the social work teams.

## 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, carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill. (Regulation 8 (1))</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 20 August 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))</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 20 August 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 plan provided to the fostering service provider under</p> | 20 August 2023 |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations.<br>(Regulation 17 (1))                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                |
| <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.<br/>(Regulation 18 (4) (5)(a))</p> | 20 August 2023 |
| If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule and 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))                                                             | 20 August 2023 |

## Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that each approved foster carer has regular supervision meetings with a suitably qualified social worker. Meetings 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. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 21.8)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carer's 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:** Mrs Christina Skeel

## **Inspectors**

Andi Lilley-Tams, Social Care Inspector

Tracey Cogan-Greig, Social Care Inspector

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