

The Together Trust Fostering Service

The Together Trust Centre, Schools Hill, Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 1JE

Registered provider: Together Trust

Monitoring visit

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency is owned and managed by a registered charity. The charity also provides education services and owns and manages several residential care homes.

The agency registered with Ofsted in 2003.

The manager registered with Ofsted in May 2017.

At the time of this inspection, there were 28 children placed with the agency in 23 fostering households.

The agency provides short-term, long-term and respite placements.

Inspection date: 13 March 2026

Date of previous inspection: 1 December 2025

This monitoring visit

The purpose of the monitoring visit was to review the actions taken by the provider to meet the compliance notices served on 16 December 2025. The notices were served under Regulation 11, the duty to secure welfare; and Regulation 8, the registered person general requirements.

Leaders and managers have recruited an external consultant who has supported them to develop and improve their safeguarding policies and procedures. As a result, the agency now has a clear standard of care policy in place.

The consultant and another external trainer completed comprehensive training for managers, staff, panel and others on safeguarding responsibilities. Additionally, the

consultant completed a learning review of some concerns raised during the full inspection and shared the identified learning with the team.

The new and revised policies, and the learning that managers and staff have undertaken, have not been put into practice. There has been no meaningful exploration of safeguarding concerns throughout staff supervisions and team meetings. More worryingly, when a children's social worker raised concerns about the care provided to two young children, the concerns were not appropriately investigated or challenged by the agency. Additionally, these concerns and a previous allegation were not reported to the regulator to enable clear oversight.

Files are now audited to check that visits have taken place and documents have been received. However, the manager does not monitor safeguarding concerns to identify patterns and trends. This does not enable sufficient oversight or challenge to foster carers.

Some members of staff have been placed on performance improvement plans to address timeliness in writing records. However, these are not individual to staff, do not include any exploration of the barriers to staff in achieving the planned outcomes and do not include any support from managers. Additionally, there are no clear timescales provided to staff to enable them to understand when the steps included need to be achieved. This limits the effectiveness of these plans.

Managers and staff have failed to discuss foster carer roles and responsibilities with the foster carers in the agency. There has been no exploration of allegations, missing from home procedures, or other safeguarding policies and procedures. This means that those delivering the care to children, have not been provided with clear guidance around the expectations of the agency.

Children's risk assessments and safe care plans have been reviewed by supervising social workers and are now more comprehensive and useful for foster carers

Following this monitoring visit, a case review was held on 16 March 2026 where it was agreed that the compliance notices above have not been met. New compliance notices have been issued and an additional requirement has been issued relating to notifying the regulator of concerns. Other requirements made at the last inspection were not considered as part of the monitoring visit and have, therefore, been restated.

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
*The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that— the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11 (a)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that risk assessments and safe care plans are robust and include potential risks as well as mitigation strategies. Additionally, when practice concerns arise, appropriate challenge should be made to ensure that carers are suitable to continue to meet children's needs.	10 May 2026
*The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must manage the agency with sufficient care, competence and skill. (Regulation 8 (1)(b)) Specifically, the registered manager must monitor all records to ensure compliance with the service's policies, identify patterns and trends and take immediate action to respond to concerns raised by this monitoring.	10 May 2026
The fostering service provider must ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the fostering service. (Regulation 19 (a)(b)) Specifically, the registered person must have a clear understanding of the regulations and standards that govern the service. Additionally, the registered person must ensure that the agency decision-maker is a qualified social worker with a minimum of 3 years post-qualifying experience in childcare social work and has knowledge of childcare law and practice.	10 May 2026
The registered person must maintain a system for— improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (Regulation 35 (1)(b))	10 May 2026

Specifically, the registered person must ensure that opportunities to learn are taken at the earliest possible time to ensure that children are kept as safe as possible, as quickly as possible.	
The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy which— is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse or neglect, and sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect. (Regulation 12 (1)(a)(b)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that foster carers and staff know what to do if an allegation is made, and that allegation policies are consistently followed. The fostering service must ensure that the required actions are immediately taken in any relevant situation of which it is aware. Foster carers and staff must have clear guidance about how carers will be supported during an investigation into an allegation.	10 May 2026
The registered person must ensure that foster carers and staff know and follow policies and procedures relevant to safeguarding children, behaviour management, and children who are missing from home. Additionally, the registered person must ensure that foster carers act in accordance with the agency's statement of purpose and children's guide. If foster carers do not follow agency policies, this must be challenged and revisited. (Regulation 17 (2))	10 May 2026
The registered person must ensure that all relevant information about foster carers' practice is provided within the carers' annual review, to enable robust oversight and decision-making about their suitability to continue fostering. (Regulation 28 (1)(3)(a))	10 May 2026
The registered person must ensure that all relevant information is provided to panel, including comprehensive information about concerns relating to the practice of foster carers. (Regulation 25 (3))	10 May 2026
The registered person must ensure that all necessary notifications are shared with the regulator. Specifically, when concerns are raised about a foster carer approved by the agency. (Regulation 36 (1))	10 May 2026

*These requirements are subject of a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- The registered person should have a policy that sets out what constitutes a concern about standards of care, when an investigation should be initiated and how standard of care concerns will be investigated. The fostering service should ensure that a clear distinction is made between investigations into allegations of harm and discussions over standards of care. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 22.10)
- The registered person should take efficient action to address any issues of concern that they identify or which are raised with them. When concerns are not rectified in a timely manner, the registered person should provide appropriate challenge and escalate the concern further. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 25.8)
- The registered person should ensure that staff within the fostering service are professionally curious to ensure that children are safeguarded both within the fostering household and in the community. Meetings should have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work and 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 reviews of foster carers' approval are sufficiently thorough to allow the fostering service to properly satisfy itself about its carers' ongoing suitability to foster. Specifically, the registered person must ensure that those chairing foster carer reviews are provided with all information relevant to the review to provide robust and independent oversight. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 13.8)
- The registered person should ensure that managers, staff and foster carers write about children in a way that is non-stigmatising, distinguishes between fact and opinion and does not apportion blame to children. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 26.5)
- The registered person should ensure there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record-keeping and take action when needed. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 26.2)
- The registered person should ensure that when reaching a decision or making a qualifying determination, the decision-maker should consider *Hofstetter v LB Barnet and IRM* [2009] EWCA 328 (Admin), in which the court set out guidance for the way in which an adoption agency decision-maker should approach a case, whether it is a decision based on the agency panel's recommendation or the independent review panel's recommendation. This applies equally to fostering decision-makers. The court said that it would be good discipline and appropriate for the decision-maker to:
 - list the material taken into account in reaching the decision;
 - identify key arguments;

- consider whether they agree with the process and approach of the relevant panel(s) and are satisfied as to its fairness and that the panel(s) has properly addressed the arguments;
- consider whether any additional information now available to them that was not before the panel has an impact on its reasons or recommendation;
- identify the reasons given for the relevant recommendation that they do or do not wish to adopt; and
- state (a) the adopted reasons by cross reference or otherwise and (b) any further reasons for their decision. (The Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations, Volume 4: Fostering Services, paragraph 5.40)

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: SC031288

Registered provider: Together Trust

Registered provider address: Together Trust Centre, Schools Hill, Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 1JE

Responsible individual: Ian Uttridge

Registered manager: Lisa Grundy

Inspectors

Aislinn Cooper, Social Care Regulatory Inspector

Sarah Probert, Social Care Regulatory Inspector

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