

Independent fostering agency – Monitoring visit

Name	Jay Fostering
Inspection date	23/06/2016
Unique reference number	SC053859
Type of inspection	Monitoring
Inspector	Christy Wannop

This monitoring visit

Ofsted received concerns on 25 May 2016 suggesting that, safeguarding policies and procedures have not been correctly implemented. Ofsted also had concerns about other safeguarding issues raised through statutory notifications between March and June 2016 around foster carers' knowledge and implementation of the agency's safeguarding procedures. In order to look closely at these concerns, a monitoring visit was undertaken on 24 June 2016.

This inspection found that the agency had failed to implement its safeguarding policy. The registered person did not ensure that concerns were passed to the local authority's designated officer. Additionally, the agency did not notify concerns to Ofsted.

Ofsted's June 2015 full inspection judged the agency as requiring improvement. It raised two requirements, about safeguarding and notifications, and made a recommendation about referring safeguarding concerns.

From looking at other, more recent, safeguarding practice at the agency, Ofsted finds additional shortfalls. The agency was not active in supporting foster carers in the early days of a challenging placement. Consequently, inexperienced, recently approved foster carers did not share with the agency information about a police investigation that was initiated without the agency's knowledge. Ofsted had recommended to the agency in June 2015 that systems for monitoring incidents, allegations and complaints should be clear and effective. In this case, they were not. Managerial oversight and decision-making are not always evident in the management of direct foster care practice, where there have been concerns.

Ofsted has identified two additional regulatory shortfalls and two weaknesses against the national minimum standards. This is addition to the 12 previous requirements and 16 recommendations made at the June 2015 inspection.

Supervision of foster carers, and between social work staff and managers, does not have a thorough focus on safeguarding. Safeguarding policy and practice issues that are raised by foster carers and supervising fostering social workers are not always followed through. Some records were not available.

Regarding a safeguarding allegation, there is no clear and comprehensive summary kept on file of the actions, decision-making and resolution of the allegation.

Some foster carers do not engage with the training that is offered. One foster carer has not had safeguarding training since 2007. Reports for foster carers' annual reviews do not always contain essential information about safeguarding events during the preceding year. Consequently, the fostering panel and decision maker do not have full information on which to base a robust recommendation and decision about continuing suitability to foster.

An investigation was hampered by the agency's inability to present records of events at the time of the visit, due to computer system issues. Additionally, the

agency acknowledges that it has lost significant records in the change to computerised recording systems and now has only partial records of some events.

The wider organisation is working on improvements to strengthen managerial arrangements and practice at the agency. Training is scheduled for improvement.

This visit confirms that improvement is not yet secure, despite an action plan from the agency following the last inspection. Ofsted will continue to monitor outcomes for children and young people, and the quality of the foster care provided.

Information about this independent fostering agency

Jay Fostering Limited was acquired in November 2010 by National Fostering Agency, a privately owned organisation with a number of independent fostering agencies. The agency's statement of purpose defines the nature of placement types provided as: short term; long term; bridging; respite; pre-adoption; and parent and child.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Requirement	Due date
Ensure that the fostering service is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose. (Regulation 3(5))	30/10/2016
Ensure that in relation to X and any other members of X's household who is aged 18 or over, an enhanced criminal record certificate is issued under section 113B of the Police Act 1997 which includes suitability information relating to children. (Regulation 26(2)(a))	30/10/2016
Ensure that 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))	30/10/2016
Implement a written policy which provides in particular for the prompt referral to the area authority of any allegation of abuse or neglect affecting any child placed by the fostering service provider, and consideration to be given to the measures which may be necessary to protect children placed with foster parents following an allegation of abuse or neglect. (Regulation 12(1)(3)(b)(e))	30/10/2016
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. (Regulation 17(1)(2))	30/10/2016
Give the foster parent such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child. This refers to documentation to help them reduce and respond to risk in any placement. (Regulation 17(3))	30/10/2016
Ensure that a written record is made of any complaint or representation, the action take in response to it, and the outcome of the investigation. (Regulation 18(4))	30/10/2016
Ensure that a system is maintained for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and improving the quality	30/10/2016

of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (Regulation 35(1)(a)(b))	
Ensure that if the fostering service provider considers that X is not suitable to be a foster parent, they give X written notice that they propose not to approve X as suitable to be a foster parent (a 'qualifying determination'), together with their reasons and a copy of the fostering panel's recommendations, and advise X that, within 28 days of the date of the qualifying determination, X may submit any written representations that X wishes to make to the fostering service provider, or apply to the Secretary of State for a review by an independent review panel of the qualifying determination. (Regulation 27(6)(a)(b)(i)(ii))	30/10/2016
Ensure that, if the fostering service provider decides to approve X as a foster parent, they enter into a written agreement with X covering the matters specified in Schedule 5 (the 'foster care agreement'). (Regulation 27(5)(b))	30/10/2016
When undertaking a review, the fostering service provider must make such enquiries and obtain such information as they consider necessary in order to review whether the foster parent continues to be suitable to be a foster parent and the foster parent's household continues to be suitable. (Regulation 28(3)(a))	30/10/2016
If, taking into account any recommendation made by the fostering panel, the fostering service provider is no longer satisfied that the foster parent and the foster parent's household continue to be suitable and that the terms of the approval are appropriate, they must give written notice to the foster parent that they propose to terminate, or (as the case may be) revise the terms of, the foster parent's approval (a 'qualifying determination'), together with their reasons and a copy of any recommendation made by the fostering panel, and advise the foster parent that, within 28 days of the date of the qualifying determination, they may submit any written representations to the fostering service provider or the Secretary of State for a review by an independent panel of the qualifying determination. (Regulation 28(7)(a)(b))	30/10/2016
Ensure that no business is conducted by a fostering panel unless at least the following meet as the panel— one member who is a social worker who has at least three years' relevant post-qualifying experience. (Regulation 24(1)(ii))	30/10/2016
Ensure that, in relation to the membership of the fostering panel, a person is independent of the fostering service provider and not employed by the fostering agency. (Regulation 23(10)(a)(iii))	30/10/2016

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- Ensure that each person on the central list is given the opportunity of attending an annual joint training day with the fostering service's fostering staff. (NMS 23.10)
- Ensure that each person on the central list is given induction training which is completed within 10 weeks of joining the central list. (NMS 23.9)
- Ensure that all people included on the central list of persons considered suitable to be members of a fostering panel have references checked to assess suitability before taking on responsibilities. Telephone enquiries are made to each referee to verify the written references. (NMS 19.1)
- Ensure that the fostering service has a record of the recruitment and suitability checks which have been carried out for those working for the fostering service. (NMS 19.3)
- Ensure that the record shows the date on which each check was completed and who carried out the check. (NMS 19.4)
- Ensure that foster carers are supported to make reasonable and appropriate decisions within the authority delegated to them, without having to seek consent unnecessarily. (NMS 7.4)
- Ensure that allegations about members of the fostering household are reported by the fostering service to the local authority designated officer. This includes allegations that, on the face of it, may appear relatively insignificant or that have also been reported directly to the police, or children and family services. (NMS 22.6)
- Ensure that a clear and comprehensive summary of any allegations made against a particular member of the fostering household, or staff member, including details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, a record of any action taken and the decisions reached, is kept on the person's confidential file. A copy is provided to the person as soon as the investigation is concluded. The information is retained on the confidential file, even after someone leaves the organisation, until the person reaches normal retirement age, or for 10 years if this is longer. (NMS 22.7)
- Ensure that foster carer supervision meetings 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. (NMS 21.8)
- Ensure clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. This includes any serious incidents, allegations or complaints about the service and ensuring the quality of the service. (NMS 25.1)

- Ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. (NMS 26.6)
- Ensure efficient and robust administrative systems, including IT and communication systems. Premises have: a. Facilities for the secure retention of records; b. appropriate measures to safeguard IT systems; and c. an appropriate security system. (NMS 27.1)
- Ensure that appropriate arrangements are made to support children and young people for whom English is not their first language (especially refugees and asylum seekers). Volume 4 (3.34))
- Ensure that, when reaching a decision or making a qualifying determination, the decision maker considers *Hofstetter v LB Barnet and IRM* (2009). Volume 4 (5.40)
- Ensure that, before a child is placed with a foster carer, consent to such a placement is given by any other responsible authority with a child already placed with the foster carer. (Volume 4 (3.2))
- Ensure that the fostering panel membership has the experience necessary to effectively discharge the functions of the panel. (Volume 4, paragraph 5.8)
- Ensure that each member's performance, including that of the chair, is reviewed annually and that views about the chair's performance are sought from other panel members and from those who attend panel meetings. (Volume 4, paragraph 5.15)
- Ensure that panel members sign an acceptance form to record their agreement to the performance objectives set out by the fostering service. (Volume 4, paragraph 5.14)

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.

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