

New Life Fostering Agency

90 New Town Row, Aston, Birmingham B6 4HZ

Monitoring visit

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This small fostering agency is privately owned, and was registered in May 2012. It currently supports 17 children in nine fostering households. It provides planned and emergency short-term and long-term placements. This is the sole branch of this agency. The directors operate, from the same premises, a supervised contact business for children separated from their parents.

Inspection date: 5 October 2017

Date of previous inspection: 27 June 2017

This monitoring visit

Ofsted judged this fostering agency to be inadequate at a full inspection on 27 June 2017. Ofsted issued three compliance notices. Inspectors had serious concerns about the registered provider's and registered manager's lack of care, competence and skill in operating the agency. They did not operate safe systems to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. They had not prepared or implemented a written safeguarding policy. Ineffective governance affected the safe operation of the agency.

In order to evaluate the progress that the registered provider has made in addressing these concerns, two inspectors undertook a monitoring visit on 5 October 2017. Inspectors found that they had not taken enough action to meet the three compliance notices.

During this inspection, the directors of the agency told inspectors that they planned to replace the current responsible individual with a newly employed consultant. The registered manager resigned following this monitoring visit after the registered provider acknowledged to Ofsted that they had not done enough to improve.

The registered provider has not taken the four required steps to demonstrate their care, competence and skill. They have not implemented a written policy on the purpose, format, content, security and accuracy of records. Consequently, they still

cannot ensure the credibility and reliability of records. The registered provider has not defined the levels of responsibility for the director, working as a supervising social worker in relation to the registered manager, panel chair, agency decision maker and responsible individual. Consequently, there is still no clear accountability for decision-making. Furthermore, the registered provider has not identified the person in charge of the agency when the registered manager is absent. The registered provider had not made clear plans for the registered manager to undertake training to refresh their knowledge of their legal obligations. There were unconfirmed plans for training for the registered manager and the responsible individual, now superseded by their resignation and replacement. Failing to improve means that the agency continues to have shortfalls in leadership and management. Ineffective governance has the potential to compromise the safety and welfare of children.

The registered provider has not taken sufficient action to ensure that the welfare of children placed with the agency is safeguarded or promoted. Placement endings are higher than the national average. The supervising social worker and the registered manager have reviewed six foster placement endings. However, the quality of this review is poor. They did not look at whether placements were planned or made in an emergency, they did not review the original matching decision and they did not review whether the agency had met the purpose of the placement. As a result, the registered provider did not identify any learning to promote children's placement stability in future placements and reduce unnecessary placement breakdown. The registered provider and the registered manager did not take action to show that the agency provides care that is in line with the child's local authority plan. The registered provider still has no operational system to ensure that foster carers are delivering care according to the child's care plan. The registered provider and registered manager have not reviewed children's care to track this in the three months since the last inspection.

The agency is now confident that all foster homes are safe, because they have a system that tells them so. The agency is now ready to share accurate information with placing authorities, prior to the decision to match and place a child, about the skills, training and competencies of foster carers. The registered provider and the registered manager have taken swift and appropriate action to refer to children's social care and the police when they have had concerns about children's safety. The agency has better systems ready to place children in safe households with foster carers whom they know are sufficiently skilled, from the outset, to deliver care to meet children needs.

The registered provider and the registered person have not taken any of the four required steps to prepare and implement an effective safeguarding policy. They had obtained a safeguarding policy, but this belongs to, and names, another fostering agency. They have not submitted it for consideration to the local safeguarding children board (LSCB) and the designated officer in the local authority for comment. They have not read it through and noticed that it still names another agency. Consequently, staff and directors are not competent in the execution of this

safeguarding policy and procedure. The registered manager has not effectively reviewed any serious incident or safeguarding concern to identify learning or retain evidence of what worked well. Of four safeguarding incidents, the registered manager had partially reviewed the earliest incident in an incomplete draft document. This review did not lead to any actions to improve or to a confirmation of what worked well. The registered manager did not review any of the three subsequent serious incidents. Children have gone missing and been subject to online sexual exploitation. The registered provider and registered manager did not make sure that risk assessments were clear and up to date after all significant incidents. They did not plan effectively to reduce risk in future. The supervising social worker and registered manager had minimised the risk of one child's vulnerability to sexual exploitation in a risk assessment that was delayed by two months. Another risk assessment lacked sufficient detail to make clear how the foster carer should ensure the child's subsequent safety online.

The agency's systems to review safeguarding issues and assess and reduce risk do not protect children, because they are incomplete and ineffective. The delay in addressing the practical, policy and procedural aspects of safeguarding illustrates the lack of grasp of this issue and the lack of care and skill of the registered provider and registered manager.

The registered provider has proposed a newly employed consultant as the responsible individual to make the required improvements. The newly employed consultant plans to audit skills within the agency and replace and recruit to positions where required to ensure that they have the capacity to improve. This process is in its infancy, but has begun with the appointment of an experienced fostering administrator. The need to do this has resulted from the recognition that the current responsible individual and registered manager do not have the capacity for independent improvement.

As a result of this inspection, three compliance notices have been raised.

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 within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The fostering service provider must provide a copy of the statement of purpose to the chief inspector, place a copy on their website, produce a written guide to the fostering service ('the children's guide') and ensure that the fostering service is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose. (Regulation 3(1)(2)(3)(5)) In particular, the statement of purpose must contain accurate information about the types of foster care that the agency provides.	01/12/2017
The registered provider and the registered manager must: have regard to the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and 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)(a)(b))* In particular, the registered person must have knowledge of the fostering regulations and associated statutory guidance.	21/01/2018
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))* In particular, ensure that foster homes are safe and children are well matched to foster carers' skills and experience, review and learn from placement successes and those that end early, and work with the placing authority to provide children with the support they need as outlined in the child's plan.	21/01/2018
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	21/01/2018

procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect. (Regulation 12(1)(a)(b))* This relates to escalating concerns about children's welfare and safety relating to radicalisation and acting on recommendations raised by the local authority designated officer.	
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. (Regulation 17(1))	01/12/2017
The fostering service provider must not employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so. For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20(1)(a)(3))	01/12/2017
The fostering panel must make a written record of its proceedings and the reasons for its recommendations. (Regulation 24(2)) This relates to clarity of recommendations and panel meeting minutes.	01/12/2017
Where a person ('X') applies to become a foster parent and the fostering service provider decides to assess X's suitability to become a foster parent, any such assessment must be carried out in accordance with this regulation. (Regulation 26(1))	01/12/2017
A fostering service provider must, in deciding whether to approve X as a foster parent and as to the terms of any approval, take into account the recommendation of the fostering panel. If a fostering service provider decides to approve X as a foster parent they must give X notice in writing specifying any terms on which the approval is given and enter into a written agreement with X covering the matters specified in Schedule 5 (the 'foster care agreement'). Regulation 27(3)(5)(a)(b))	01/12/2017
If a fostering service provider considers that X is not suitable to be a foster parent, they must, subject to paragraph (7), give X written notice that they propose not to approve X as suitable to	01/12/2017

be a foster parent (a 'qualifying determination'), together with their reasons and a copy of the fostering panel's recommendation, 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))	
The fostering service provider must review the approval of each foster parent in accordance with this regulation. A fostering review must take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider considers it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year. The fostering service provider must on the occasion of the first review under this regulation, and may on any subsequent review, refer their report to the fostering panel for consideration. (Regulation 28(1)(2)(5))	01/12/2017
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. (Regulation 35(1)(a)(b)(2)(3))	01/12/2017
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))	01/12/2017
The registered person must give notice in writing to the chief inspector without delay if there is to be any change in the identity of the responsible individual. (Regulation 39(1)(e)(iii))	01/12/2017

* These requirements were subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- Ensure that, unless an emergency placement makes it impossible, children are given information about the foster carer before arrival, and any information (including, where appropriate, photographic information) they need or reasonably request about the placement, in a format appropriate to their age and understanding. This information could be made available electronically to placing authorities to share with children on their emergency journeys. (National minimum standard (NMS) 11.3)
- Ensure that: the written report on the person's suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision-maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision; the reports are accurate, up-to-date and include evidence-based information that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third party information; the reports are prepared, signed and dated by the social worker who assessed the prospective foster carer and countersigned and dated by the fostering team manager. (NMS 13.7)
- Ensure that, following a review of the carer's approval under regulation 28, the fostering service provides the foster carer with a written statement setting out whether they consider the foster carer's household, including any children placed there, to have additional support needs as a result of the change, and, if so, what these support needs are and how they will be met, and the foster carer provides their written agreement to the change. Foster carers must not be pressured to accept changes to their terms of approval. ('Assessment and approval of foster carers: amendments to the Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations', volume 4: fostering services, page 15)
- Ensure that no one may foster more than three children unless the foster children are all siblings in relation to each other, or the local authority within whose area the foster carer lives exempts the foster carer from the usual fostering limit in relation to specific placements (in which case they must set out the terms as detailed below), and the foster carer's terms of approval allow it. (Any terms of approval must be compatible with the number of children the foster carer is caring for even if an exemption to the usual fostering limit has been granted, unless the placement is in an emergency and for less than six days.) ('Assessment and approval of foster carers: amendments to the Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations', volume 4: fostering services, page 16)
- Ensure that entries in records, decisions and reasons for them, are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, and distinguish between fact, opinion and third party information and are signed and dated. (NMS 26.5)
This relates to the authenticity and reliability of any record made by the registered person.

Information about this inspection

The purpose of this visit was to monitor the compliance 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: SC447166

Registered provider: New Life Fostering Agency Limited

Registered provider address: 90 New Town Row, Aston, Birmingham B6 4HG

Responsible individual: Colin Tucker

Inspectors

Christy Wannop, social care inspector

Anne Daly, social care inspector

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Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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