

Aberdeenshire Council - Fostering Service

Fostering Service

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Service provided by:

Aberdeenshire Council

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About the service

Aberdeenshire Council Fostering Service has been registered with the Care Inspectorate since the Care Inspectorate was formed in 2011. It was previously registered with the Care Commission.

Aberdeenshire Council Fostering Service provides a fostering and family placement service for children and young people aged from 0 to 18 years who are assessed as in need of alternative family care. The agency recruits and supports carer families to provide a range of fostering placements to children including, permanent, long terms, interim and short break.

The service told us that during 2018, the service recruited 15 new fostering families. However 21 fostering families stopped fostering for various reasons meaning there was a net decrease in overall fostering capacity. Demand for the service remains high and as at 31 December 2018 a total of 108 foster carer households were looking after 144 children and young people. During 2018 a further nine children had been placed with foster carers provided by other fostering services.

The service aims to provide high quality secure and stable fostering families offering opportunities for children to grow, develop and realise their potential.

As the findings of this inspection are based on a sample of children and young people, inspectors cannot assure the quality of experience for every service user.

What people told us

We spoke with 12 foster carers and two children and young people who were looked after by fostering families. A further four fostering families responded to an email requesting their views about their experience of using the service.

Most foster carers told us they received a reasonable quality of information about children before being asked to look after them. Two foster carers told us the information they had received was not as good as it could be.

All foster cares felt generally well supported by their supervising social workers and other professionals in health and education. Most foster carers told us that they were less happy with the frequency of visits from children's social workers.

"Our linkworker is great, she visits regularly - it's good to talk things through."

"I feel the service listens to foster carers."

"I would like (name of child) to have more contact with their social worker. Although there is not really a pressing need, its more about sustaining a relationship which they might need in the future."

The range and quality of training was viewed as very good. One foster carer noted that some training before children were placed to meet specific needs might be helpful to consider.

Foster carers generally felt valued and respected by the agency. They were involved in regular planning meetings for the children they were looking after and had copies of the child's plan. However, foster carers were less clear about how they influenced the service overall.

Overall foster carers told us the agency were good at keeping the child at the centre, working as a team and being available for advice and support.

Young people told us they were well looked after, healthy and their foster carers advocated well for them. They understood why they were living in foster care and for some, there was regular contact with family.

"Foster Care is good. It's given me more stability - it's perfect for me."

"I'm going to stay here forever."

Self assessment

The service had not been asked to complete a self assessment in advance of the inspection. We looked at the annual report for the service, the corporate parenting report and spoke with the management team about the agency. This demonstrated their priorities for development and how they were monitoring the quality of the provision within the agency.

From this inspection we graded this service as:

Quality of care and support	5 - Very Good
Quality of staffing	not assessed
Quality of management and leadership	4 - Good

What the service does well

Children told us they felt safe and protected from harm. We saw that foster carers and staff understood their respective roles in child protection and in keeping children safe in a wider sense, for example, understanding practical hazards as well as more emotional issues such as relationships and sexual health. Foster carers were committed to the children in their care and we saw loving and enduring relationships being formed and sustained with children and young people using the service and for those who had left. Children and young people told us that their carers advocated for them, provided sound advice, and made sure that their health and educational needs were met. Children knew about the children's right service which ensured that children received information about advocacy and their rights.

We were told and saw that children moving into foster care, experienced positive outcomes in terms of improved opportunities to learn, improved self esteem and improved access to health services. Participatory opportunities for children and young people were arranged throughout the council area and supported children and young people to influence how services were developed. The recent awards event celebrated success and supported young people to feel valued and evidenced a culture of pride shared between all within the fostering agency.

People should be cared for by staff who are competent and receive training that is relevant to their needs. This helps ensure that people feel valued and receive appropriate support. Foster carers told us about the good quality support available from supervising social workers who they saw as helpful, available, responsive and supportive. Training for foster carers was varied and provided in a range of ways, face to face, online and through support groups which made it more accessible to all foster carers. Most foster carers reported that information was provided to help them meet children's needs and fostering situations were regularly reviewed to make sure they were still appropriate.

A clear management vision was effectively shared and this ensured that children and young people were kept at the centre of all planning.

The service had produced an annual report and development plan which supported an overall strategic report and plan for children's services in the council area. Some systems were in place to provide a qualitative overview of key processes such as carer recruitment and permanence planning for children and very good levels of staff supervision and appraisal supported consistent practice amongst staff.

A fostering panel, chaired independently, and a well defined agency decision maker role, monitored the work of the service and provided appropriate challenge. Staff felt well supported and were able to contribute to the overall improvement of the service.

What the service could do better

Although we saw a range of training available for foster carers and were impressed with some of the reflective learning and development portfolios produced by foster carers, we thought the service needed to have a better overview of when core mandatory training such as child protection had been attended and revisited.

Some foster carers told us they did not feel that appropriate recognition had been paid to their achievements such as the number of years fostering. We discussed this with the service and asked them to consider how they could better celebrate key successes.

Although good systems were in place to agree the practical arrangements when children and young people started using the fostering service, we assessed that there was little recorded information about how a foster carer would meet a child's needs. This would provide information for children in later years and provide a platform for reflective discussions about why placements work well or why they break down. We also noted that safer caring was discussed verbally but not recorded in a clear way which would indicate how specific children were cared for within their fostering family.

Where permanent alternative care is identified for children, this should be expedited without unnecessary delay. We saw that permanence procedures were well articulated, timescales were measured and support and training were in place for staff. However due to difficulties in recruiting experienced qualified staff and permanent foster carers, some children had experienced some delay in planning. The service told us they planned to conduct a review of the situation starting imminently and would make plans in line with their findings.

Although we did not specifically see negative outcomes for the children and young people in our case sample, it is evident that the difficulties in recruiting social workers to support children would, in time, impact negatively on children and young people. Aberdeenshire council have clear expectations of visiting frequencies aimed at building and sustaining relationships as well as progressing planning for children and young people. We did not see that these were being met. The local authority were aware of the situation and continued to run recruitment campaigns and recruit where possible.

Foster carers were unclear about the management structure within the service. We noted at the time of the inspection the number of managers could potentially produce a lack of cohesion within the service. The situation was temporary and should be resolved in time. It is important that foster carers, children and young people, understand the management structure in terms of knowing who to contact should they wish to do so.

We discussed with the service how they could develop a more systematic approach to planning with more specific improvement planning and more comprehensive management information systems across the whole service. In addition the fostering agency recognised the need for a wider professional base for the fostering panel and continued to recruit accordingly.

In conclusion, we saw major strengths in relation to care and support and these clearly outweighed any areas for improvement noted above. We saw that the fostering service had identified many of the key issues and were taking steps to address them. This has informed the grade of very good given for this theme.

In relation to management and leadership, again we saw important strengths in this area and these outweighed the areas for improvement. However we thought the service needed to address some of the management issues raised in relation to having a visible management structure, a more systematic approach to management information systems and more specific service development planning. This has informed the grade of good for this theme.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 0

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

What the service has done to meet any requirements we made at or since the last inspection

Previous requirements

There are no outstanding requirements.

What the service has done to meet any recommendations we made at or since the last inspection

Previous recommendations

There are no outstanding recommendations.

Inspection and grading history

Date	Type	Gradings
23 Mar 2017	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership
		5 - Very good Not assessed 5 - Very good Not assessed
11 Feb 2015	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership
		4 - Good Not assessed 5 - Very good 5 - Very good
29 Jan 2014	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing
		5 - Very good Not assessed 5 - Very good

Date	Type	Gradings	
		Management and leadership	4 - Good
1 Feb 2013	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	5 - Very good Not assessed 5 - Very good 5 - Very good
18 Mar 2010	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	5 - Very good Not assessed 5 - Very good Not assessed
19 Feb 2009	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	5 - Very good Not assessed 5 - Very good 5 - Very good

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