

East Dunbartonshire Council Fostering Service Fostering Service

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Type of inspection: Unannounced
Inspection completed on: 30 November 2017

Service provided by:
East Dunbartonshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003003380

Care service number:
CS2005087079

About the service

This service registered with the Care Inspectorate on 1 April 2011.

East Dunbartonshire Council provides a fostering and family placement service for children and young people in need of foster care. The service recruits and supports foster carers and their families to provide a range of fostering services, including, foster care and respite foster care.

The fostering service aims are; to provide foster care for every child for whom it is the appropriate resource and to ensure sufficient quality and choice of foster carers to meet the physical, emotional, education and cultural needs of each child.

The service is based in Kirkintilloch. The service manager has overall responsibility for the service with a senior practitioner and four supervising social workers. The team also work for the East Dunbartonshire adoption service and provide assessments and support to kinship carers.

At the time of the inspection the service were in the process of recruiting a new manager. East Dunbartonshire has 14 registered fostering households, 3 of whom provide respite, caring for 13 children. A further 50 East Dunbartonshire children were being cared for within 23 fostering households registered with other registered fostering agencies.

What people told us

We met a focus group of 11 foster carers. We also visited 3 foster households meeting carers and 3 children.

Children told us they were happy and felt part of the foster family. Children confirmed receiving visits from their foster carers social worker and from their own social worker. Children expressed the view it was good when social workers didn't change as it gave you time to get to know them.

Foster carers told us that they received good support from individual workers and when they were unavailable other members of the team would step in and assist. Training was described as good and that requests for specific training would be made available. Work and child care commitments could sometimes impact on their availability to take up all training offered, however, this wasn't regarded as a major issue.

Foster carers considered the support groups were well run and by including a practice / development element helped the meetings remain productive. Foster carers expressed confidence that suggestions made were taken forward.

There were a few areas where foster carers considered the service could improve;

- By their views about the needs of children being valued more with acknowledgment of their skills, experience and knowledge of individual children,
- Improvements to transition planning in recognition of the bonds children have formed with foster carers and the potential detriment to sudden endings,
- Improving the time it takes to secure children's futures
- limiting the frequent changes of social workers.

Self assessment

We did not request a self-assessment for this inspection year, however, the senior practitioner provided relevant documentation and the service development plan in readiness for the inspection. This alongside organising meetings with key people was a welcomed and considerable aid to the inspection process.

From this inspection we graded this service as:

Quality of care and support	4 - Good
Quality of staffing	not assessed
Quality of management and leadership	3 - Adequate

What the service does well

Care plans for children were structured using GIRFEC (Getting It Right For Every Child) wellbeing indicators which promoted a holistic view of the needs of children. These were regularly formally reviewed which took account of changing needs and circumstances.

The safety and wellbeing of children was prioritised by foster carers who were trained in child protection and safer care. Consequently children were protected from harm and appropriate action was taken to report and address welfare concerns. Recent training in internet safety and children sexual exploitation had further strengthened foster carers ability to protect children and help them keep themselves safe.

There were good arrangements to meet the health needs of children with initial health checks carried out by the LAAC (Looked After And Accommodated) nurse. Foster carers were pro-active in following up on health matters and ensured children took attended routine proactive health appointments such as, the dentist, and opticians. We also found carers advocated on behalf of children who required specialist service, such as counselling or mental health services.

Foster carers were aspirational in relation to educational achievement for children and kept close contact with schools and supported the completion of homework and advocated for additional supports when needed. Reports from educational staff confirm the positive impact on stability on children's learning.

A particular strength of the services was the benefit for children from the nurturing relationships within fostering households. Foster carers spoke highly of past training on the importance of attachment and were knowledgeable and skilled on this area. This was enabling children to build attachments, learn to trust and commence the journey to overcoming past trauma. It was evident that some children considered themselves as part of the family of their foster carer's and felt secure and loved. Some children were now in permanent fostering arrangements with their carer's with their future now more certain.

It was clear that foster carers understood the need for children to have a sense of their identity and there were outstanding examples of foster carers supporting, enabling and re-establishing relationships between children and birth families.

Foster carers were helping children to develop hobbies and interests and we found that talent was nurtured. Children were also building friendships in the community and developing social skills and self-confidence.

Children and young people were being encouraged to take responsibilities in keeping with their age and understanding. For some children this had been their first opportunity to develop these skills in a supported and appropriate manner. East Dunbartonshire Council were embracing the continuing care agenda and had young people remaining in foster care beyond their 18th birthday. To further support older children there were good links to the Leaving Care Service for young people who would be moving to eventual independence.

Children and young people had the support of independent advocacy services when needed. One young person had also benefited from the arrangement with 'Who Cares? Scotland' to attend Harvard University on secondment and another young person is in the process for acceptance at present.

There were some very good practices in the monitoring of the quality of the fostering service. These included robust initial assessments of the suitability of foster carers, strengthened by further scrutiny by the fostering panel and agency decision maker. The annual review of foster carers was comprehensive in gathering of the views of children and foster carers, both placing supervising social workers and of teachers. This enabled in-depth consideration of support provided to foster carers and of the progress of children. Very positive reports confirmed the progress of children and of very good levels of support provided to foster carers along with good training opportunities.

There had been two team development days which had resulted in the creation of a comprehensive development plan. Some progress included: near to completion of policy updates, reviewing of medication procedures, introducing a 'Friends and Family' policy and plans to increase the involvement of foster carers in service planning and development.

East Dunbartonshire Council were strengthening the role of corporate parenting board and partners now met regularly. A recent success had been securing funding to employ a coordinator with planned recruitment of two young care experienced young people in apprenticeship roles.

The fostering and approval panel routinely conducted satisfaction surveys of their performance and the feedback collated was overwhelmingly positive. Attendees stated panel members put them at ease, listened to their views and provided clarity of processes and decision-making. Action points were in place to address matters raised, i.e. room too hot and waiting times.

The provider were working with an independent consultant, whom as part of their remit, was looking at ways to reduce the need to place children outwith services provided by East Dunbartonshire Council. This work was in the early stages.

What the service could do better

There was not a designated recording tool in use to record accident or incidents which would allow an overview of such occurrences. We were told this would be introduced.

There had been a file audit undertaken and although this produced limited finding, it was recognised that a new tool was required in order to reach more qualitative findings.

We suggested the service consider introducing a formal supervision pro forma for foster carers and another for unannounced visits along with guidance on the use of both. We were told this would be explored.

Currently there was no training provided for nominated carers. (Refer to recommendation 1).

There was a lack of foster carers which had resulted in a significant reliance on external placements. Consequently some of East Dunbartonshire children were living distances outwith their community with the associated challenges this brings to family contact and school. (Refer to recommendation 2).

The service applicant tracker was not sufficiently robust as it did not keep a detailed timeline of applicant's journey to approval in order to keep good progress, identify reason for delay and for withdrawals. (Refer to recommendation 3).

Supervising social workers have not been provided the opportunity to complete post qualification awards despite requests. (Refer to recommendation 4).

There was no annual report completed on the work of the panel which could be beneficial to the service improvement agenda reporting on a summary of its work and linked to the service improvement agenda. (Refer to recommendation 5).

We asked the service to look into an allegation when it could not to be established whether or not this had been investigated at the time. We were told this would be looked into immediately. There was no system within the fostering service to record complaints and allegations. (This will form requirement 1).

At our last inspection we reminded the service of their responsibility to advise the Care Inspectorate of notifiable incidents. There have been notifiable incidents since the last inspection which have not been reported to the Care Inspectorate. (This will form requirement 2).

Requirements

Number of requirements: 2

1. The provider must develop a recording system for complaints and allegations and ensure that these are regularly audited so that any appropriate action is taken.

This is in order to comply with:

The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011, Regulation 18 (7) Complaints and Regulation 4 (1) (a) Welfare of users.

Timescale: two weeks from the publication of the report (17 January 2018).

2. The provider must inform the Care Inspectorate of notifiable incidents.

This is in order to comply with:

The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011, 28 Regulation 4 (1) (b) Records, notifications and returns.

Timescale: immediate from the publication of the report.

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 5

1. Training should be provided to nominated and support carers.

National Care Standards, foster care and family placement services - Standard 2: Promoting good quality care.

2. The service should develop an action plan to address the difficulties being experienced in recruiting foster carers.

National Care Standards, foster care and family placement services - Standard 1: Informing and deciding.

3. The service should improve the quality of tracking of applicants progress to enable an overview of performance and link to the improvement agenda.

National Care Standards, foster care and family placement services - Standard 13: Management and staffing.

4. The service should ensure that supervising social workers are considered for post qualifications awards in order to meet with their continued professional development and continue to build on the teams expertise.

National Care Standards, foster care and family placement services - Standard 13: Management and staffing.

5. The service should ensure that an annual report is provided by the fostering panel.

National Care Standards, foster care and family placement services - Standard 12: The fostering panel.

Complaints

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

Inspection and grading history

Date	Type	Gradings
12 Nov 2015	Unannounced	Care and support 5 - Very good Environment Not assessed Staffing 5 - Very good Management and leadership 4 - Good
30 Jul 2014	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed

Date	Type	Gradings	
		Staffing	4 - Good
		Management and leadership	4 - Good
24 Jan 2014	Announced (short notice)	Care and support	3 - Adequate
		Environment	Not assessed
		Staffing	2 - Weak
		Management and leadership	2 - Weak
2 Apr 2012	Re-grade	Care and support	Not assessed
		Environment	Not assessed
		Staffing	Not assessed
		Management and leadership	4 - Good
10 Feb 2012	Announced	Care and support	4 - Good
		Environment	Not assessed
		Staffing	4 - Good
		Management and leadership	4 - Good
23 Feb 2012	Re-grade	Care and support	Not assessed
		Environment	Not assessed
		Staffing	Not assessed
		Management and leadership	1 - Unsatisfactory
26 Nov 2010	Announced	Care and support	4 - Good
		Environment	Not assessed
		Staffing	3 - Adequate
		Management and leadership	Not assessed
30 Sep 2009	Announced	Care and support	4 - Good
		Environment	Not assessed
		Staffing	4 - Good
		Management and leadership	4 - Good
20 Feb 2009	Announced	Care and support	4 - Good
		Environment	Not assessed
		Staffing	4 - Good
		Management and leadership	4 - Good

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