

# East Dunbartonshire Council Fostering Service Fostering Service

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**Type of inspection:**

Announced (short notice)

**Completed on:**

12 December 2018

**Service provided by:**

East Dunbartonshire Council

**Service provider number:**

SP2003003380

**Service no:**

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 which includes a team manager, senior practitioner and three supervising social workers. A new manager has been appointed since the last Inspection and this has had a positive impact on the service. The team also work for the East Dunbartonshire adoption service and provide assessments and support to kinship carers. The adoption service was Inspected at the same time and a separate report is available.

At the time of the Inspection, 23 children and young people were being cared for by 16 foster carers from East Dunbartonshire Council. A further 24 children and young people were being cared for by foster carers who were registered with external fostering agencies.

## What people told us

We met with five young children during a home visit, and spoke with another two young people by telephone. We met with 12 foster carers in total, and received two responses to questionnaires that were sent to foster carers prior to the Inspection starting. We also spoke with locality social workers and a worker from 'Who Cares? Scotland', an independent advocacy service.

Most of the feedback from foster carers we spoke with was very positive, and they gave clear examples of how they thought the service had improved since the last inspection. Some carers and young people were still concerned about the amount of time it was taking to secure permanency arrangements, and we also heard from a number of carers that they did not always feel fully valued in relation to the work they did.

This will be discussed further within the report. Young people we spoke with told us that they felt safe in placement and looked after by their carers.

Comments from foster carers included:

'I have had the same supervising social worker for years, and I really appreciate that but I know I can contact anyone of the workers and get a response at anytime'

'The training has been much better, more relevant to the children we have in placement and with some of it being on-line this offers more convenience'

'We have a good relationship with the young persons social worker, she visits regularly and listens to the young person'

'I attended a group for men who foster, and got a lot out of it, I would like to attend more of that'

'We have met with the new manager, she is very efficient and has higher expectations on her staff, we are starting to see a move in the right direction'

'When my worker was on maternity leave, this was covered which was really good. I see my worker every month for supervision, she is professional and accountable'

'There is sometimes a misunderstanding about our role, and there is a feeling at times that we are not on the same side'

'We transferred from an independent agency, the assessment process felt thorough and our panel experience was very good'

Comments from young people included:

'I see my social worker regularly, and I can speak with her quite openly'

'I am going to stay here until I am an adult, and hope my permanency order comes through soon that's important'

'The carers give me great support and I am learning so much from them, I feel safe and get on really well with all the family'

Suggestions about improvements received from foster carers during the Inspection were shared with Managers at feedback. We were confident that these comments had been taken seriously and that they are likely to be used to improve service delivery.

As the findings of this inspection are based on a sample of foster carers, children and young people, Inspectors cannot assure the quality of experience for every single child receiving a service.

## Self assessment

We did not request a self-assessment for this inspection year, however, the manager provided relevant documentation and the service development plan in readiness for the inspection.

## From this inspection we graded this service as:

Quality of care and support	5 - Very Good
Quality of staffing	5 - Very Good
Quality of management and leadership	4 - Good

## Quality of care and support

## Findings from the inspection

The majority of carers and young people said they felt respected within the care planning process with their views being carefully sought. Information provided to carers prior to placement was usually very good. This could sometimes be more difficult in an emergency situation, however relevant information was sought quickly within the cases we tracked. Carers felt that good matching was always attempted and that in general their views were being listened to when important decisions were being made.

Children's views were also sought through the annual foster carer review process. Feedback forms that we examined describing the views of children were positive and reflected a general sense of wellbeing. The template for recording children's' views (for carer reviews) required updating in order to make these more engaging and accessible, as this will encourage children and young people to be more included. Managers were receptive to this improvement being taken forward during feedback.

Carers attended children's hearings, took an active part in multiagency meetings and reviews and where appropriate children and young people also took part. Records we examined of these meetings appeared to be child focused. Securing children's futures was still noted to be a concern for some young people and carers, and this should be addressed through the new permanency procedures, however it is too early for us to comment on the outcomes on all of these particular cases. The service is well placed to make good progress in this area, and we will look at this again during the next service inspection.

Children and young people were benefitting from warm nurturing care provided by well supported and committed foster carers. For many children purposeful activity was part of their daily routine. Interests included golfing, swimming and taking part in drama classes. This meant that most children had the opportunity to participate in local community resources and establish friendships. As a result, children and young people were having their needs met and were achieving good outcomes.

Specific examples included:

Young people were being provided with the skills and knowledge to make informed choices and keep themselves safe, and were achieving well at school and college.

Children were meeting their developmental milestones, and making great progress emotionally, socially and in terms of their overall health. When additional health needs had been identified these had been addressed through the LAAC (Looked After Children) nurse, paediatrician and dietician, all of which had been beneficial.

Placing social workers confirmed good outcomes for children and commented:

'The carers have a good understanding of each child individually, and there has been an absolute transformation in their presentation and health since being accommodated'

'The young person responds and engages well with the foster carers, their approach is very helpful and the young person is viewed as very much part of the family'

In some cases we tracked, very good care and support had been provided to reunite sibling groups and keep birth parents with their children. These very good outcomes were also linked to sensitive and carefully co-ordinated transition planning, with all key individuals being fully involved. Carers informed us that they had been supported very well by the service during these crucial times.

In contrast to this, we did not hear the same consistent message about positive work carried out by children's social workers from all foster carers.

There was particular concern about the impact of staff turnover and medical absence on the availability and quality of that support. We discussed this with managers, who advised that they are now taking steps to intervene earlier when foster carers report these difficulties. An example of this would be monitoring the frequency of children's social workers visits during monthly carer supervision meetings. We will look at this area during the next service Inspection.

When required external advocacy was available to further support children to give their views on important decisions about their future living arrangements by 'Who Cares? Scotland', an independent advocacy service. The fostering service intend to further involve advocacy services to enhance participation for children and young people in foster care, and we welcomed this inclusive approach.

It was evident that the good outcomes we identified for children and young people were linked to the very good level of support provided to foster carers by the service. This was generally proportionate to the needs of the carers and young people in their care; visits and developmental work was increased if there were any difficulties within a placement. A particular strength of the service was that staff were confident and able to address any practice issues with carers in a supportive yet robust manner. The continuity of supervising social workers was also seen as beneficial to both carers and children, particularly in terms of knowledge about the child's history.

A promising new development since the last Inspection was the introduction of the carer portfolio. This reflective document will be used to highlight any developmental needs and consolidate learning through carer training, which we concluded had improved since the last Inspection. Foster carers informed us that training on topics such as child sexual exploitation, adverse childhood experiences and trauma based practice had been particularly helpful in relation to helping them re-frame some of their children's behaviours, and as beneficial in helping them to respond in a more meaningful way.

### Areas for Development

We acknowledged that useful and relevant training had been introduced and this had been very well received by carers, we were also impressed that bespoke training for some carers had been provided, for example giving evidence within court processes. However, we advised managers at feedback about more specific training that could be provided for carers who had specialist placements, as this could help improve outcomes for children.

### Requirements

**Number of requirements:** 0

### Recommendations

**Number of recommendations:** 0

**Grade:** 5 - very good

## Quality of staffing

## Findings from the inspection

The manager had made some changes to development days for staff members since the last Inspection and this was seen to be beneficial in terms of helpfully separating out key areas for discussion.

As a result, this had allowed greater focus to take place on team and practice development as well as a review of recently introduced changes. Team meetings were held regularly where discussion was held around relevant agenda items, such as placement scoping and recruitment. These types of regular forums enable clarity over identified actions to be taken forward and ensured that these were completed within timescales.

All staff had regular supervision by the team manager who also audited and reviewed case work. Supervision minutes sampled confirmed detailed and reflective discussion and opportunities for further learning and development. Staff informed us that the annual appraisal process was now more purposeful and led to forward planning in terms of their learning and development.

Additional training opportunities had been secured by the new team manager to enable staff to complete relevant formal post graduate training courses. All staff had benefitted from attending a range of courses and conferences in relation to fostering and their learning had been shared during regular practice development sessions.

Staff informed us that they had worked closely together over a number of years and that they viewed themselves as a stable, committed and enthusiastic team of social workers. Staff advised us of the impact of changes and developments since the beginning of the year with positivity and all reported feeling involved and included in the progress and development of the team going forward. One member of staff commented 'We feel that our Team Manager enjoys a high level of credibility with senior staff in all services and this has made such a difference, we feel that our voice is now heard'

All staff members remained highly motivated and enthusiastic about their role, with a genuine passion for improving the service and outcomes for children.

## Requirements

**Number of requirements:** 0

## Recommendations

**Number of recommendations:** 0

**Grade:** 5 - very good

## Quality of management and leadership

### Findings from the inspection

Recruitment had been prioritised since the last Inspection and several campaigns had taken place. Good efforts had been made to attract potential foster carers using various means including a greater emphasis on advertising through social media, and new materials had been devised that were more engaging and attractive.

Although it is still early days in terms of the provider strengthening the area of recruitment, there had already been some enquiries and several new approvals at panel for a respite carer and carers transferring from external agencies since the last Inspection. In particular the service want greater focus on recruiting carers who can look after sibling groups and older children. It was encouraging to learn that further scoping and analysis will take place in the near future to assess the full extent of what specific types of resources are required within East Dunbartonshire Council.

The majority of carers we spoke with were optimistic that they were starting to see the service moving in the right direction to improve outcomes for children, and that overall there was a clearer sense of structure. However, we were concerned that the view of some carers was less favourable, they felt undervalued at times and were not always confident airing their views. Even where efforts had been made to improve service, an example being a recent annual survey to obtain carer views, the impact of these negative experiences was evident in discussion with some carers. This could ultimately affect the care experience of some children and young people. The service advised us that they intend to give priority to the development of more trusting relationships.

During feedback we made some suggestions that would help to improve the current situation, examples included:

The potential appointment of a carer representative who could collate and provide views on behalf of all carers.

Sharing of the annual report and the service action plan to ensure a mutual understanding about the future direction of the fostering service.

Clarity around the frequency of joint visits, and reassurance and support to continue around changes and introductions to new procedures.

Since the beginning of the year, with the appointment of a new manager, there have been some clear incremental improvements in the day to day operational delivery of services. These include the introduction of new quality assurance measures, the development of carer portfolios and positive changes to learning and development for both staff and carers. The need for strategic improvement to be carried out has also been recognised, alongside what action needs to be taken and how these improvements will be achieved. However, all this will need to be done in a balanced way, and it will take some time for these changes to be implemented and become fully embedded in practice. Staff and management of the service, should be commended for the tenacity and enthusiasm they have demonstrated so far. A period of stability for staff and carers and consolidation is now required. We anticipate that this process will eventually lead to improved outcomes for children and young people.

### **Areas For development.**

We have asked the service to review their annual review processes for carers as the current system means that carers return to panel each year. We had mixed views from carers we spoke with about the frequency of this and further consultation with carers should be held.

The aims and objectives of the service should be reviewed to ensure that current information is up to date and includes the introduction of continuing care legislation.

We have asked the service to review a particular case and hold a meeting with all key individuals involved to ensure a lessons learned approach is taken to practice. Management has assured us that the outcome of this meeting will be shared with Inspectors.

We were confident that any areas for development or improvement identified during this Inspection had been taken seriously by managers, and will be included within their overall service action plan. We look forward to assessing the outcomes of these developments during next service Inspection.

## Requirements

**Number of requirements:** 0

## Recommendations

**Number of recommendations:** 0

**Grade:** 4 - good

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

## Previous requirements

### Requirement 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.

**This requirement was made on 30 November 2017.**

### Action taken on previous requirement

All complaints procedures and child protection procedures must be adhered to. These procedures are to be reviewed and the information disseminated to staff. The manager will ensure procedures are followed. Any allegations will be recorded on the carers chronology. The manager will audit files, discuss at supervision and ensure notifications are made within appropriate timescales.

There was clear evidence that a tracking system had been devised and carer chronologies were established and updated. New audit systems were in place and discussed within the report.

**Met - within timescales**

### Requirement 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.

**This requirement was made on 30 November 2017.**

#### Action taken on previous requirement

Staff have been issued with and are aware of notifiable events.  
All notifications will be made within the appropriate timescales.

We could see that notifications were a standing agenda item during team meetings, and records of minutes evidenced that notifiable events had been discussed during support groups.

**Met - within timescales**

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

### Previous recommendations

#### Recommendation 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.

**This recommendation was made on 30 November 2017.**

#### Action taken on previous recommendation

The training calendar will be offered to all nominated and support carers.

Training has been improved since the last Inspection, with a clear plan in place for both foster carers and nominated carers. Dates of training and support groups have been provided to nominated carers - recommendation met.

#### Recommendation 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.

**This recommendation was made on 30 November 2017.**

#### Action taken on previous recommendation

Discussed within the body of the report under Management and Leadership - recommendation met.

## Recommendation 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.

**This recommendation was made on 30 November 2017.**

### Action taken on previous recommendation

A system for tracking, recording and following up enquiries will be developed.

The progress will be monitored through the managers quality assurance and supervision. This will form part of the service development plan.

Tracker in place and seen during the Inspection - recommendation met

## Recommendation 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.

**This recommendation was made on 30 November 2017.**

### Action taken on previous recommendation

The manager will identify on-going training needs via staff supervision and PDR.

The manager will report these needs via managers meetings and their own supervision.

Funding will be sought. Senior managers are committed to supporting post qualifying training.

Discussed within the body of the report under staffing - recommendation met

## Recommendation 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.

**This recommendation was made on 30 November 2017.**

### Action taken on previous recommendation

The panel advisor will support the panel to ensure an annual report is completed.

Annual report seen during the Inspection and will be shared with foster carers - recommendation met.

## Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at [www.careinspectorate.com](http://www.careinspectorate.com).

## Enforcement

No enforcement action has been taken against this care service since the last inspection.

## Inspection and grading history

Date	Type	Gradings
30 Nov 2017	Unannounced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership
		4 - Good Not assessed Not assessed 3 - Adequate
12 Nov 2015	Unannounced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership
		5 - Very good Not assessed 5 - Very good 4 - Good
30 Jul 2014	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership
		4 - Good Not assessed 4 - Good 4 - Good
24 Jan 2014	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership
		3 - Adequate Not assessed 2 - Weak 2 - Weak
2 Apr 2012	Re-grade	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership
		Not assessed Not assessed Not assessed 4 - Good
10 Feb 2012	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership
		4 - Good Not assessed 4 - Good 4 - Good
23 Feb 2012	Re-grade	Care and support Environment
		Not assessed Not assessed

Date	Type	Gradings	
		Staffing Management and leadership	Not assessed 1 - Unsatisfactory
26 Nov 2010	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	4 - Good Not assessed 3 - Adequate Not assessed
30 Sep 2009	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	4 - Good Not assessed 4 - Good 4 - Good
20 Feb 2009	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	4 - Good Not assessed 4 - Good 4 - Good

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