

# Foster Care Connect Limited Fostering Service

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**Type of inspection:**  
Announced (short notice)

**Completed on:**  
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**Service provided by:**  
Foster Care Connect Limited

**Service provider number:**  
SP2005007159

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CS2005086428

## About the service

Foster Care Connect Ltd is an independent company based in the Scottish Borders. It provides a fostering and family placement service for children and young people aged from 0 to 18 years who need alternative family care. The service has a linked continuing care adult placement service which has been inspected at the same time. The agency recruits and supports carer families in a wide geographic area to provide a range of fostering placements to children, including permanent, long term, interim and short break.

As of May 2024 the service has 15 approved foster carer households, caring for 26 children and young people.

The vision for the service is, "to provide safe and loving home-based care for children and young people in Scotland who are not able to live with their own family. We strive to enable them to achieve and have the confidence to develop and grow healthy relationships at home, in their communities and into adult life."

During our inspection year 2024-2025 we are inspecting against a focus area which looks at how regulated services use legislation and guidance to promote children's right to continuing care and how children and young people are being helped to understand what their right to continuing care means for them. Any requirements or areas for improvement will be highlighted in this report.

## About the inspection

This was a short notice announced inspection which took place between 9 April 2024 and 20 May 2024. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate.

To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included, previous inspection findings, registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with nine children and young people using the service and seven foster carers
- spoke with seven members of staff and management, the panel chair and the agency decision maker
- observed practice, meetings and daily lives
- reviewed documents and survey responses
- spoke with three external professionals.

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.

## Key messages

- Children and young people consistently benefitted from loving and attuned care within their caregiver families.
- Most caregiver families had very positive experiences of timely and compassionate support from a skilled staff team.
- The service worked in partnership with schools to ensure that young people had the best possible educational experiences.
- The service needs to review its complaints process to make this more robust.
- The service needs to ensure that there are clearly defined roles within the leadership team.
- Children and young people benefitted from robust risk assessment and care planning.
- The service has a clear and robust continuing care policy in place and is proactive in ensuring young people's rights in this area are championed.

## From this inspection we evaluated this service as:

In evaluating quality, we use a six point scale where 1 is unsatisfactory and 6 is excellent

How well do we support people's wellbeing?	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	4 - Good
How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good
How well is our care and support planned?	5 - Very Good

Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

## How well do we support people's wellbeing?

**5 - Very Good**

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children and young people, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Children and young people consistently benefitted from loving and attuned care within their caregiver families. Young people were given the clear message that they were loved and experienced fun and predictability. This provided young people with the security and confidence to grow, develop and get the most out of life.

These relationships were nurtured with skilled, timely and compassionate support from the professional team at Foster Care Connect. Most caregiver families were positive about the working relationships they had with staff within the service and the responsiveness of the service. One carer told us, "This has been a challenging first fostering experience, but we have not been put off because our support has been so good".

Caregiver families had a good understanding of their role in supporting young people to maintain positive relationships with family members and other important people. This was further supported by staff within the service who facilitated family time where this was appropriate. This was positive for young people who had built strong and trusting relationships with workers throughout the service.

The service is committed to working to keep brothers and sisters living together wherever possible. It is recognised that meeting the needs of larger sibling groups can be challenging for foster carers and so workers within the service offered carers and young people a responsive 'wrap around' support service at key points.

Short breaks were managed in a planned and thoughtful way with young people given the opportunity to build relationships with regular short break carers, so this time away from their caregivers was consistent and supportive. The vast majority of carers and children expressed satisfaction with the way short break support was approached by the agency.

Children and young people were effectively kept physically and emotionally safe. Any concerns or potential risks were identified at an early stage and carers were supported to put effective plans in place for children. Whilst a few relevant incidents had not been reported to the Care Inspectorate, practice in relation to child protection was robust and evidenced effective multi-agency working. The service would benefit from developing a clearer process for recording and monitoring the progress of any protection concerns.

Young people are enabled to engage with education and to reach positive educational outcomes. All school aged children were attending school full time. The service responded quickly and creatively when young people needed support with aspects of their learning. The service has developed a trauma informed schools programme, which has been delivered in educational settings to help teaching staff better understand the needs of care experienced young people. This has had a significant positive impact on the educational experiences of children and young people within the service.

This commitment to learning is replicated in the service's thorough, well organised and responsive approach to carer learning. All carers have a Personal Development Plan which is reviewed twice a year. One carer told us that, "The learning is specific to our need as carers and the children we look after".

Caregivers and staff work well together and with other agencies to ensure that all children's health care needs are met. Where young people required mental health or life story support, the service worked alongside the team around the child to ensure this was provided. This was enhanced by the service's development of an SCQF accredited course for carers on supporting children and young people who have experienced trauma. This enhanced caregivers' skills and confidence, better enabling them to respond therapeutically to the young people in their care.

Caregiver families were comprehensively assessed to ensure that they had the capacity to meet the needs of children, young people and adults. Assessing social workers had a strong understanding of the strengths and potential areas for development of caregiver families. Ongoing assessment of carers continues to be thorough and responsive to changing situations and emerging challenges. We identified that for both foster carer approval and review panels, written assessments could have been more concise and that the service should ensure that assessing social worker's recommendations for approval, always reflect the analysis and assessment within the body of the report.

Although the service does not use any specific matching documentation, we found that young people benefitted from robust matching practices when they were referred to the service. Initial risk assessments were undertaken and planning meetings usually took place in advance of children moving to live with foster carers.

Some children were impacted by delays in long-term planning due to resource issues within placing local authorities but there were also several families where legal permanence was secured without delay. The service ensured that carer's observations and children's experiences were clearly communicated with the placing local authority. This positively influenced planning and ongoing assessment.

The service has a detailed continuing care policy, which reflects legislation and best practice guidance in this area. When one young person was feeling under some pressure to consider 'moving on', the service ensured that they were aware of their rights and the young person was helped to seek guidance and support from Clan Child Law with positive results.

## How good is our leadership?

4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and young people and clearly outweighed areas for improvement identified.

The service effectively and continuously reviews and monitors outcomes and experiences for young people using a number of tools. This includes, monthly My Journey updates, which are usually completed by foster carers writing in a child centred 'letter to the young person' style.

The service makes use of several useful quality assurance mechanisms, including a statutory check matrix and an overview of carer training. There is a good awareness of the statutory and good practice obligations of the service and a robust overview of where each worker and caregiver is in relation to these.

There is a service development plan in place. However, we noted that there was not always a clear link between the evaluative narrative and the identified action points. The service could benefit from using the Care Inspectorate's quality framework as a basis for self evaluation, to ensure that any future action plans are explicitly linked to an area of practice.

There were strengths and some identified areas for future development in relation to the performance and function of the fostering panel. Panel members are drawn from a diverse range of personal and professional backgrounds. Panel member induction and appraisals are in place and panel development days have taken place over the past year. The service has, when appropriate, recently made use of an independent panel advisor which has enhanced the robustness of the panel. An experienced and knowledgeable independent agency decision maker is in place. However, workers within the service expressed frustration that some practice issues highlighted in reports were not fully explored during the panel process. This has been recognised by the service who have reviewed panel processes to reflect some of these concerns. More concise social worker assessments, with salient points clearly highlighted, would also help to signpost panel members to the key areas for discussion at the panel.

The service has received no direct complaints over the inspection period. However, in recent months three complaints have been made to the Care Inspectorate. Two of these complaints related to the same situation and have been upheld. On review, we noted that the agency's internal complaints policy would benefit from review, to ensure that people can have confidence that any complaints will be approached transparently and fairly. We have made an area for improvement in relation to this. **(See Area for improvement 1)**

We noted that due to the small size of the service, there was sometimes a lack of clarity in relation to roles within the service. At times, members of the leadership team undertook the supervising social worker role without professional supervision in place to promote a culture of reflection and accountability. We have made an area for improvement in relation to this. **(See Area for improvement 2)**

## Areas for improvement

1. To enable all caregivers and people using the service to have confidence in the organisation that supports them, the provider should ensure that a robust and sufficiently independent internal complaints policy is in place.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state: 'If I have a concern or complaint, this will be discussed with me and acted on without negative consequence for me' (HSCS 4.21).

2. To ensure all caregivers and people benefit from a service that promotes a culture of reflection and accountability, the provider must ensure that there are clearly defined roles for the leadership team and clear lines of professional supervision for all staff undertaking a social work task.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state:

'I use a service and organisation that are well led and managed' (HSCS 4.23); and

'I have confidence in people because they are trained, competent and skilled, are able to reflect on their practice and follow their professional and organisational codes' (HSCS 3.14).

**How good is our staff team?****5 - Very Good**

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children and young people, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

The staff team's practice strongly reflects the values of the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) and the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) codes of conduct. Staff within the agency skilfully built effective working relationships with caregiver families and with children and young people. It was clear that the young people we spoke to knew the staff team well and had a good understanding of the role of the service. The staff team were able to challenge caregiver families where necessary, exploring any areas of conflict whilst keeping the experiences of children and young people at the centre. The service made good use of supervision, action plans, carer personal development plans and the fostering panel to review and support the practice of carers.

The staff team are enabled to respond to any emerging needs or times of crisis in caregiver families in a tailored and supportive way, showing great commitment and investment in relationship-based practice. One carer told us, "We feel fully supported by all at FCC, the staff are helpful, approachable and knowledgeable. We enjoy working with them".

All members of staff benefit from a personal development plan which is reviewed annually, with a midpoint check led by the learning and development team. The staff team can access high-quality learning and development opportunities and external training, where this is in line with the agency's priorities. Weekly team meetings were used for reflection, planning and information updates and team development days were planned regularly.

Staff benefitted from regular professional supervision where there was always a focus on reflection and discussion of individual wellbeing. In addition to formal supervision, staff were easily able to access support and guidance from the leadership team and from colleagues. The exception to this was where some members of the senior management team were involved in a supervision social worker capacity and did not have arrangements in place for professional supervision.

The small team has experienced a turnover of staff over the past year and we heard that a lack of hybrid working opportunities may have contributed to this. However, we also noted that most of the current staff team have been with the service for four or more years, including two members of staff who had undertaken social work training whilst employed as social work assistants within the service.

**How well is our care and support planned?****5 - Very Good**

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children and young people, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

The care and support of all children and young people within the service was enhanced by the implementation of high quality, SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) planning. The service uses a range of planning tools to support children's care and young people's views are well reflected.

Caregivers and staff within the service also actively contribute to local authority planning and statutory reviews of children's care. Placing social workers commented favorably on the frequent and clear communication from the service and there were several examples where this had impacted positively on local authority plans made for children.

Caregivers and workers within the service were skilled and effective advocates for children and young people. This ensured that young people's voices were heard and their rights were upheld. We saw examples of this influencing planning in a wide range of areas including, family time, funding applications and plans for continuing care.

The safety and wellbeing of all young people is supported by high quality individualised risk assessment and safer caring plans. Staff within the service know children well and take a trauma enhanced approach to understanding children's needs and planning their care. The service uses a modified version of the national risk assessment framework to inform discussion around matching when children are referred to the service and these are regularly updated throughout young people's time with the service. These risk assessments underpin all care planning. This proactive and thorough approach led to very good outcomes for children and young people in all areas of life.

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

### Requirements

#### Requirement 1

By 1 May 2024, the provider should ensure that panels effectively support quality assurance within the service.

To do this the provider must, as a minimum:

- a) Ensure panels operate with appropriate independence.
- b) Ensure panel chairs and members are clear on their roles and responsibilities, removing the risk of conflicts of interest.
- c) Ensure that panel processes include appropriate levels of scrutiny and challenge.
- d) Ensure panel functioning is supported by the provision of high-quality documentation which has been quality assured in advance by management within the service.
- e) Ensure people's views, including fostered children, birth children and others living within caring households, are sought and presented to panel for consideration.

This is to comply with Regulation 4(1)(a) (welfare of users) of the Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for care services) regulations 2011 (SS1 2011/210).



This is to ensure care and support is consistent with Health and Social Care Standard 4.7: 'I am actively encouraged to be involved in improving the service I use, in a spirit of genuine partnership'.

**This requirement was made on 14 May 2024.**

#### Action taken on previous requirement

It is too soon to fully evaluate action taken in relation to this requirement, which was made in response to a complaints inspection whilst the service inspection was ongoing. However, we did observe significant consideration being given to further strengthening the role of the fostering panel.

**Not assessed at this inspection**

### Requirement 2

By 1 May 2024, the provider must provide high quality support which consistently meets the needs of caring households.

To do this the provider must, as a minimum:

- a) identify vulnerabilities and support needs at an early juncture
- b) ensure support is provided in a timely manner
- c) ensure the provision of regular high-quality supervision to caring households which is well recorded.

This is to comply with Regulation 4(1)(a) (welfare of users) of the Social Care and Social Work improvement Scotland (Requirements for care services) regulations 2011 (SS1 2011/210).

This is to ensure care and support is consistent with Health and Social Care Standard 4.8: 'I am supported to give regular feedback on how I experience my care and support and the organisation uses learning from this to improve'.

**This requirement was made on 14 May 2024.**

#### Action taken on previous requirement

It is too soon to fully evaluate action taken in relation to this requirement, which was made in response to a complaints inspection whilst the service inspection was ongoing. However, we did assess that the general practice within the agency in relation to carer support was strong.

**Not assessed at this inspection**

### Requirement 3

By 1 May 2024, the provider must ensure that the service undertake foster care agreements in line with best practice guidance and statutory requirement.

To do this the provider must, at a minimum ensure:

- a) Records and documents of foster care agreements are accessible, updated and reviewed.

b) Carer handbook which supports the carer agreement is clear, informative and accessible to carers.

This is to ensure care and support is consistent with Health and Social Care Standard 1.9: 'I am recognised as an expert in my own experiences, needs and wishes'.

This is in order to comply with: Regulation 3 of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210).

**This requirement was made on 14 May 2024.**

### Action taken on previous requirement

It is too soon to fully evaluate action taken in relation to this requirement, which was made in response to a complaints inspection whilst the service inspection was ongoing. However, we can confirm that all of the foster carer households we tracked as part of this inspection had a signed foster care agreement in place and access to the foster carer handbook.

**Not assessed at this inspection**

## Complaints

Please see Care Inspectorate website ([www.careinspectorate.com](http://www.careinspectorate.com)) for details of complaints about the service which have been upheld.

## Detailed evaluations

How well do we support people's wellbeing?	5 - Very Good
1.1 Children, young people, adults and their caregiver families experience compassion, dignity and respect	5 - Very Good
1.2 Children, young people and adults get the most out of life	5 - Very Good
1.3 Children, young people and adults' health and wellbeing benefits from the care and support they experience	5 - Very Good
1.4 Children, young people, adults and their caregiver families get the service that is right for them	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	4 - Good
2.2 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	4 - Good
How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good
3.2 Staff have the right knowledge, competence and development to support children, young people, adults and their caregiver families	5 - Very Good
How well is our care and support planned?	5 - Very Good
5.1 Assessment and care planning reflects the outcomes and wishes of children, young people and adults	5 - Very Good

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