

Stirling Council - Fostering Service

Fostering Service

Children's Services - Social Work
Raploch Community Campus
Drip Road
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Telephone: 01786 471 177

Type of inspection:
Announced (short notice)

Completed on:
13 March 2025

Service provided by:
Stirling Council

Service provider number:
SP2003002689

Service no:
CS2005089728

About the service

Stirling Council provides a local authority fostering service for children and young people who have been assessed as being unable to live with their own parents or family. The service recruits and supports caregiver families to provide a range of fostering placements.

The adoption service was inspected at the same time and a separate report is available for this service.

About the inspection

This was a short notice announced inspection which took place between 18 February 2025 and 13 March 2025. 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 five caregivers, and met with three young people living with them
- met with eight caregivers as part of a focus group
- spoke with seven members of staff and management
- spoke with one external professional
- spoke to the independent panel chair and the Agency Decision Maker
- reviewed documentation
- reviewed survey responses from 12 caregivers, eight members of staff, and eight external professionals.

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 areas for improvement will be highlighted in this report.

The provider of this service is a corporate parent, with statutory responsibilities to look after and accommodate children. This may mean that the duty to care for children and young people on an emergency basis, or with highly complex needs, is their highest safeguarding priority.

In these circumstances our expectations, focus on outcomes and evaluations remain identical to those of all other providers. We may, however, provide some additional narrative in the body of the report to reflect the impact of these duties, should it be relevant to this particular service.

Key messages

Children and young people experienced a high standard of care. They had developed meaningful and trusting relationships and lived in stable and predictable home environments.

Caregivers had strong relationships with staff from the service, and appreciated their knowledge, skills and experience.

Children and young people were supported to maintain meaningful relationships with extended family members, significant birth family members and were involved in the wider community.

Caregivers and staff did not have relevant and up-to-date training on safeguarding to equip them in their roles.

The safety and wellbeing of children and young people would be enhanced through the use of comprehensive matching considerations and individualised safer caring plans.

Quality assurance processes would benefit from being strengthened in order to track, monitor and evaluate caregivers' capacity to meet the needs of young people.

Young people were able to remain with their foster families beyond the age of 18 years, however, the service was operating beyond their registration and needs to strengthen information for young people and caregivers and the policies and procedures relating to continuing care.

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?	3 - Adequate
How well is our care and support planned?	3 - Adequate

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

How well do we support people's wellbeing?

3 - Adequate

We made an overall evaluation of adequate for this key question. Whilst strengths had a positive impact, key areas need to improve.

Children and young people benefitted from meaningful, affectionate and secure relationships with their caregiver families. Children living with caregiver families were experiencing improved outcomes because of the care and support they received.

Caregivers had trusting and responsive relationships with their Supervising Social Workers. One care giver

told us "We trust that they are there for us and we have the whole team looking out for us".

Caregivers and staff were being supported to participate in a range of relevant and up-to-date knowledge and training. However, attendance at mandatory training to promote safe care was often out-of-date. While it was good practice for carers to have Personal Development Plans, these were not individualised or specific enough to be truly meaningful. We identified that there was a gap in both staff and caregivers undertaking child and adult protection training. The service would benefit from improved service level oversight which would inform analysis of the training needs of staff and caregivers and inform future calendar planning. (Area for improvement 1)

Caregivers were respectful and inclusive of children and young people. Children and young people informed decision making and their views guided care plans. Caregiver families and social workers were strong advocates for children which helped promote positive outcomes.

Children and young people experienced highly personalised care and support from caregiver families who understood their needs. Carers demonstrated a knowledge of the impact of trauma on children and young people and were attuned to their needs. The short break service offers a positive support experience for families living in the community who are in crisis and undergoing significant life events.

Children and young people had opportunities to engage in community activities and they enjoyed holidays with their caregiver families. Children were active members of their local communities and benefitted from a wide range of interests, hobbies and new experiences. These promoted the development of age-appropriate independence skills and enhanced their sense of belonging within the community.

Children were well supported by their caregivers to spend time with their birth families. This included a commitment towards sibling relationships. There were positive examples of caregivers being proactive and overcoming barriers to promote and develop birth family relationships. This supported children with an understanding of their identity and life story.

Children and young people were achieving positive outcomes in education and work and had access to a range of leisure and social activities. Caregivers supported children to have fulfilling lives with high aspirations for success. The health and wellbeing of children and young people were prioritised by their carer givers and multiagency teams.

Children were supported to develop a strong sense of identity and positive mental health. This was supported by stable living situations, positive predictable relationships with caregivers and appropriate timely, supportive interventions. Young people were being supported to understand their life stories and creative ideas and good co-working with locality teams was seen in several cases. Staff were proactive in engaging with carers to support their ability to manage more challenging behaviours. The service benefitted from the support of an In-house Therapist who provided therapeutic expertise to the team and a Family Support Worker.

We saw high quality caregiver assessments that were analytical, evidence-based, and had clear recommendations. Assessments were a collaborative and transparent process based on positive working relationships between the supervising social worker and caregiver. Caregiver reviews were at times delayed and statutory checks were not always up to date. The service should improve quality assurance and oversight systems to ensure review processes are robust. (Area for improvement 2).

When children and young people were in need of permanent care, we saw some good practice with prompt decision making and associated positive outcomes, however, we also found examples of significant drift and

delay in permanence planning that impacted negatively on children's outcomes.

We saw that a number of young people were supported to remain within their care giver families past the age of 18. However, the provider has only recently submitted an application to register an adult placement service therefore there were several young people being cared for in households who were not assessed and approved to do so.

Continuing care policies and procedures did not support a seamless transition into adulthood for young people who chose to remain living with their foster carer. This had created confusion and anxiety for some carers we spoke to and had the potential to be unsettling for young people. Young people and their caregivers did not have clear information about their rights. (Area for improvement 3)

When children were moving to live with caregiver families there was not always a consistent approach to matching their needs to carer skills or the needs of other children within the household and the rationale and basis for decision-making was not formally captured. Some caregivers had children and young people living with them that resulted in them being out with their approval. Processes for this were not robust and reports provided to the agency decision maker lacked detail. This has the potential to impact negatively on outcomes for children and young people. (Requirement 1)

Requirements

1. By 30 June 2025, the provider must ensure that there is clear identification of a fostering family's ability to meet the needs of the child before the child joins this family. To do this the provider must, at a minimum:

- a) Ensure there is a clear referral process which outlines the needs to children needing alternative care.
- b) Identify caregivers' strengths and vulnerabilities in relation to meeting the needs of a specific child and outlining any additional support required to ensure that children's needs are fully met.
- c) Ensure that this process fully considers the needs of existing children in the fostering family.
- d) Out with approval documentation is comprehensive and details the assessment of the request.
- e) Ensure that the fostering panel are appropriately notified if care arrangements are made that are outside of carers approval and that reviews are held timeously when required.

This is to comply with Regulation 4(1)(a) of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210).

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'My care and support meets my needs and is right for me.' (HSCS 1.19).

Areas for improvement

1. To keep children and young people safe the service should ensure that staff and caregivers have access to and complete training specific to the needs of those in their care. Improved service level oversight would be supportive of staff and caregiver development in promoting improved outcomes for young people and would inform analysis of the training needs of staff and caregivers and inform future calendar planning.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I experience high quality care and support based on relevant evidence, guidance and best practice.' (HSCS 4:1).

2. To promote the safety and wellbeing of children and young people the service should ensure that there is robust oversight and consideration of the comprehensive assessment of caregiver's capacity to meet the needs of young people. This should include oversight of statutory checks, quality of reports and frequency of caregiver reviews and panels.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'My care and support meets my needs and is right for me.' (HSCS 1.19).

3. The service should ensure that all young people over the age of 18 years are being cared for by caregivers who are assessed and approved to do so. To do this the provider must as a minimum:

- a) The service registers an adult placement service for the purpose of continuing care.
- b) Ensure that the processes regarding continuing care are clear and concise.
- b) Assess and approve carers looking after this age group as adult placement carers.
- c) Carer registration must accurately reflect the carers assessment and approval.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'My future care and support needs are anticipated as part of my assessment' (HSCS 1:14) and 'I experience high quality care and support based on relevant evidence, guidance and best practice.' (HSCS 4:1).

How well is our care and support planned?

3 - Adequate

We made an overall evaluation of adequate for this key question. Whilst strengths had a positive impact, key areas need to improve.

The quality of children's assessments and multi-agency planning and review was good. Young people were able to express their views in relation to care planning. Meetings were conducted in a young person friendly manner.

Children had plans which were reviewed in multi-agency forums. The service worked with other agencies including health, social work, and education to promote child-centred planning. Supervising social workers spent time getting to know children and played a key part in statutory reviews. We received positive feedback from placing social workers about the contributions made by supervising social workers. A collaborative approach helped to progress planning for children.

The service advocated for children to support their plans, particularly in relation to decisions relating to family time and permanence. Independent advocacy had been accessed by the wider service where needed. We were pleased to hear of the local authority's plan to extend the remit of independent advocacy to ensure all children and young people have strong voices in relation to their plans.

Individual risk assessments and safer caring plans were not undertaken by the service. Therefore, caregivers

were not provided with child specific risk management plans which would assist them to identify and manage risk at home and in the community. The care to children and young people would be enhanced by having individual plans which are dynamic tools to help enable caregiver families to provide high standards of care and support. (Requirement 2).

Requirements

1. By 30 June 2025, the provider must ensure that robust plans are in place to support children in caregiver families. To do this the provider must as a minimum:

- a) ensure that individual safer caring plans are in place for all children
- b) ensure that risk assessments are in place and that these are regularly reviewed when circumstances change.

This is to comply with Regulation 4(1)(a) and (d) (Welfare of users) of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210).

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: "My personal plan (sometimes referred to as my care plan) is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met as well as my choices and wishes." (HSCS 1.15).

Complaints

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

Detailed evaluations

How well do we support people's wellbeing?	3 - Adequate
1.1 Children, young people, adults and their caregiver families experience compassion, dignity and respect	4 - Good
1.2 Children, young people and adults get the most out of life	4 - 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	3 - Adequate
How well is our care and support planned?	3 - Adequate
5.1 Assessment and care planning reflects the outcomes and wishes of children, young people and adults	3 - Adequate

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