

West Lothian Council - Fostering Service

Fostering Service

Family Placement Team
Strathbrock Partnership Centre
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Type of inspection: Announced (short notice)
Inspection completed on: 21 December 2016

Service provided by:
West Lothian Council

Service provider number:
SP2003002601

Care service number:
CS2004083345

About the service

West Lothian Council Fostering Service, has been registered since 17 November 2005, and transferred its registration to the Care Inspectorate on 1 April 2011.

The Council provides a Fostering Service for children and young people aged 0-18 years and their families who are assessed as in need of the service, and who live or have connections with West Lothian. The agency recruits and supports carer families to provide a range of fostering services.

The service is delivered by the Family Placement Team based in Broxburn, West Lothian. The Group Manager for Looked After Children's Services has the overall responsibility for the Family Placement Team and is the registered manager of the service.

At the time of the inspection, there were 76 active foster carer households providing full-time foster care for 131 children. Three children were receiving short breaks placements.

The aims and objectives of the service are to provide for the recruitment, assessment, approval and training and ongoing support for foster carers to meet identified needs of looked after and accommodated children.

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 single child receiving a service.

What people told us

For this inspection, we received completed care staff questionnaires from five members of staff. We also spoke to the majority members of staff in post individually. They informed us that they had generally good opportunities for training and development, and that they felt confident that after a period where management support was limited, appropriate management arrangements were now in place.

Three foster carers returned completed questionnaires sent out prior to the Inspection. We spoke to a further four foster carers by phone and carried out a home visit. A children's participation event 'having your song' was also held during the Inspection. We attended and met with nine foster carers, ten children and young people including birth children of foster carers. Children and young people clearly enjoyed this event, and were noted to be interacting well with each other, and they engaged enthusiastically in musical activities.

The very young children we observed during a home visit presented as healthy and meeting developmental milestones. The children interacted in a manner that would indicate that they had developed secure attachments. We also found foster carers to be emotionally warm and nurturing in their approach to the children in their care. The majority of carers spoke highly about the staff that supported them, and informed us that the organisation as a whole was child-centred.

Comments from Foster Carers Included:

'The participation events are really good opportunities for children, and foster carers can get together and have a catch up'

'I have an excellent relationship with my social worker, and she helps me keep things in perspective'

'I think staff have felt under pressure, due to a lot of staff changes but they have done their best to keep us updated'

'It would be better if we could have more communication between our supervising social worker and the child's social worker'

'I attended particularly interesting training about children and trauma. It really helped me to understand about the emotional state of children and how to help them build relationships'

'It would be great if the service could get the support groups up and running again, we find these have not been held regularly recently'

'The children have made great progress since being here, their physical health has improved, and they are registered with our GP and see the LAAC nurse'

Suggestions about improvements received from Foster Carer's 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.

Self assessment

The Care Inspectorate received a fully completed self-assessment from the provider.

The provider identified what it thought the service did well and gave examples of areas where they thought they could improve, and showed how the service intended to do this. The document informed the basis of the inspection.

From this inspection we graded this service as:

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

What the service does well

Children and young people were encouraged to maximise their potential, and their aspirations were supported by their carers and the service. We found some very good outcomes for young people in terms of securing employment, achieving at school and in some cases successful rehabilitation enabling children to return to their birth family. We saw an example of successful advocacy work on behalf of a child, and this had led to a very good outcome in terms of the young person receiving advice about their right to information.

Children and young people benefited from embedded multi-agency working at both organisational and individual care planning levels. A good example of this being the introduction of a screening group to offer efficient and targeted responses to children and young people experiencing mental wellbeing issues.

Children in care were prioritised within these systems, and it was clear from one case we tracked, that an intervention of this type had been beneficial and was helping to sustain young people in placement.

Annual foster carer assessments being presented to panel for their consideration were well written, and we were impressed by the contributions gathered from all individuals involved in the child's plan. In the cases we tracked, all placing social workers, foster carers and young people commented positively on the care and support they received, and this provided evidence in terms of the foster carers on-going competency.

A placing social worker commented:

'The foster carer has gone above and beyond any expectation and the commitment shown to the child is the reason for a successful rehabilitation home'

Where appropriate children and young people maintained contact with their birth family and siblings, and in some cases, plans had been put in place prior to the placement beginning. A number of foster carers told us that they had very good communication with birth parents and this included facilitating contact when this had been agreed. This collaborative approach helped to enable children to maintain important family links whilst in placement and to form a positive identity.

The service had continued to support and engage with foster carers and young people very well, despite operating under capacity due to staff turnover. At times this had reduced staff availability and sometimes limited opportunities to carry out operational tasks. However, despite these problems positive relationships with staff, foster carers and children appear to have been maintained throughout this period. Overall we discovered a high level of peer and managerial support and morale had remained good within the staff team.

Foster carers commented:

'I have regular meetings with my supervising social worker, and can contact any of the staff if needed. I know I will get a response that day'

Supervising social workers commented:

'Now that we are almost fully staffed, I feel we have a team who embrace change and we have the capacity to continue to improve our service'

Staff and managers presented to us as reflective in their approach which helped to promote child centred decision making. From discussion with members of staff, carers and other professionals it was clear that the service was made up of an experienced and knowledgeable staff group. The majority of carers who contributed to the Inspection informed us that they thought their supervising social workers were professional and skilled in their work, and as a result they felt well supported to carry out their role. Please see comments above in section 'what people told us'.

The service had worked hard to ensure that carer recruitment remained a key priority since the last Inspection. Nine foster carer households had been approved as a result, and the service should be commended for this. An inclusive approach was taken to enabling foster carers and young people to be part of this process and give comment on the suitability of applicants from their unique perspective. The service were taking positive action to include foster carers and young people during the recruitment of staff members, we welcomed this approach.

It was also clear that the very good work carried out by the business support team within the service helped foster carers and staff to carry out their work effectively.

What the service could do better

The service have new staffing and management arrangements in place. There now appears to be a genuine commitment to re-establish important areas of very good practice that had weakened since the last Inspection. To mitigate some of these difficulties, an experienced member of staff had been recruited to 'act up' as manager during times when there had been gaps in leadership. As a result, direct support offered to carers and children remained a priority during this period.

Despite these improvements, the fostering and adoption service still need to implement a robust strategy for service development in partnership with staff, carers and young people who use the service. The service are now in a better position to continue with improvement plans set out in their self assessment, and take forward the necessary improvements suggested to managers during feedback. This will form **Recommendation 1**.

The following issues identified at this inspection should be considered.

Staff appointed to the service since the last Inspection were skilled and able practitioners. However, there was a lack of suitable Induction, and regular supervision to enhance the professional development of new staff did not always take place. As a result some staff were unaware of important practice guidance.

'Bite Sized' training had been offered to foster carers and this had been helpful for some carers we spoke with. However, both foster carers and staff informed us that staff shortages had impacted on the delivery of regular and important training to enhance carer development.

We advised managers about the importance of ensuring that all foster carer assessments were quality assured by the manager prior to being presented to panel for their consideration. This process would ensure that panel members had all relevant information prior to decision making.

In one case we tracked we were advised of poor communication between the fostering and adoption team and the placing social worker regarding the child's plan. Managers assured us that all efforts had been made to rectify this situation prior to the Inspection taking place. In addition this particular case was being discussed with senior management.

Managers acknowledged that issues above raised by Inspectors required attention, and we were confident that our advice about how improvements should be achieved were understood and taken seriously. We will examine these areas during the next service Inspection.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 1

1. West Lothian Council should implement a robust strategic plan for the development of the fostering and adoption service, in partnership with staff, carers and young people who use the service.

National Care Standards: Foster Care and Family Placement

Management and Staffing, Standard 13.

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
26 Jan 2015	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 5 - Very good Environment Not assessed Staffing 5 - Very good Management and leadership 5 - Very good
12 Mar 2014	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 5 - Very good Environment Not assessed Staffing 5 - Very good Management and leadership 4 - Good
12 Mar 2013	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 5 - Very good

Date	Type	Gradings	
		Environment Staffing Management and leadership	Not assessed 5 - Very good 4 - Good
6 Aug 2012	Re-grade	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	4 - Good Not assessed Not assessed 3 - Adequate
8 Dec 2011	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	5 - Very good Not assessed Not assessed 5 - Very good
3 Mar 2011	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	5 - Very good Not assessed Not assessed Not assessed
26 Jan 2010	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	5 - Very good Not assessed 5 - Very good Not assessed
6 Feb 2009	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	4 - Good Not assessed 5 - Very good 4 - Good

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