

# Anchor Foster Care Services

Anchor Foster Care Services Limited

69A Maidstone Road, Chatham ME4 6DP

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This organisation is a family-run, not-for-profit independent fostering agency covering a wide geographical area. It has a head office based in Medway and another office in the north of England. The organisation offers a range of fostering placements, including emergency, parent-and-child, and short- and long-term placements. The agency uses 'Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Families' methodology to underpin its work. The agency currently supports 74 fostering households, providing care for 99 children.

### Inspection dates: 9 to 13 January 2023

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **requires improvement to be good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of last inspection:** 8 October 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

Children continue to make good progress, with some children making excellent progress from their starting points. The relationships between children and their foster carers are built on trust and understanding. Children are happy and settled, many in long-term placements. Some children have expressed a wish to remain with their carers once they reach independence and beyond.

The role of the placements team is a strength in this agency. Thorough and continued communication from the outset has enabled a consistent approach. The matching of children and foster carers is thorough. Positive relationships with local authorities support the longevity and stability of placements.

The ethos of the agency is that children come first. This commitment is well respected and supported by foster carers. The statement of purpose supports the therapeutic model of care provided by the agency and foster carers.

Children enjoy a wide range of activities and outings with their foster carers and events facilitated by the agency. These opportunities help children to keep active, increase their confidence and learn new skills. All children are welcomed into the agency's youth forum, which is well attended. Children presented as confident, socially aware and accepting of other children and adults.

Staff and managers know the children and foster carers well. Foster carers told inspectors that they feel supported and have a good working relationship with their supervising social workers. Staff rarely miss a meeting in relation to the children's care planning and progress. Children say that they are happy and feel safe in their placements.

Supervising social workers and managers are creative in supporting children and carers from varying ethnicities, cultures and religious backgrounds. Interpreters are available to support children or carers if required, for example, if they use sign language. This ensures that all children and foster carers are heard, understood and included.

Children travelling to the United Kingdom to seek asylum have been well received and supported. Some have engaged positively in education and are making good progress towards independence. Supervising social workers and managers are proactive in assisting children to locate birth relatives when possible. This offers children a sense of belonging and reflects the leaders and managers' stance of providing a family-feel within the agency.

## **How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good**

Generally, children are appropriately safeguarded. However, a risk strategy for safeguarding a child at risk of child sexual exploitation was not effective. The child was left at risk of harm as the foster carer did not seek timely action to manage risk in the community. The carer also failed to get the necessary medical attention knowing a child was under the influence of a controlled substance.

When children have not returned to their foster carers at an agreed time, appropriate action is taken. Foster carers and staff follow the procedure and work closely with agencies, such as the police, to ensure their safe return. However, the inspectors did find that a foster carer failed to report a child at risk of criminal exploitation as missing to the police or the agency. This prevented immediate action being taken to ensure that the child was safe.

Managers and staff have strong working relationships with foster carers, professionals and stakeholders. Proactive engagement by support staff and supervising social workers reduced one child's risk-taking behaviour and identified the lack of reporting by one foster carer when a child sustained an injury.

When a complaint or allegation is made by children or professionals, the agency manages these effectively. Recording is concise. The agency response to any learning is positive, and changes are readily introduced. This supports the practice seen throughout the inspection.

Children are supported by proactive staff to learn about topics that could pose a risk or influence negative responses. For example, the youth forum meets to discuss how to keep safe online and to reflect on popular news articles. This allows children to actively debate issues and increase their curiosity.

The registered manager has failed to notify the regulator of some incidents considered serious. This prevents the regulator from having full oversight of the safeguarding responsibilities within the agency.

## **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The leadership team is accessible, visible and a positive role model to all staff. Progress, commitment and inspiration provide direction. Leaders and managers have a clear vision for the agency and support the ethos in their statement of purpose. The overarching family feel is a strength of the agency.

The staff team is cohesive and well established. This offers continuity to foster carers, who describe supervising social workers as committed and supportive. The registered manager has enabled the efficient and effective induction of new staff. Staff said they feel supported, encouraged and have opportunities to develop. A learning culture in the organisation is supported by a strong leadership team.

Monitoring systems are effective, and when concerns are brought to the attention of the registered manager, they are dealt with swiftly and efficiently. Many aspects of learning and underpinning themes have been identified through the registered manager's own quality assurance process. For example, placement planning processes for all regions in the agency have been updated following her input.

When staff are not performing to the high expectations of the leadership team, this is dealt with sensitively, robustly and in line with the appropriate and necessary procedures. This ensures that children and foster carers receive the high level of support expected by the leadership team.

All staff and foster carers receive regular supervision. Staff say that they value the opportunity to reflect and feel valued by the whole staff team.

Allegations and complaints are fully investigated, and recording is detailed. The registered manager completes investigations in a timely manner and shares the outcomes and learning with the whole organisation. However, a lack of curiosity by some staff prevents opportunities to ensure that foster carers fully understand their responsibilities. Supervising social workers do not consistently challenge foster carers when they fail to follow procedures. Examples include foster carers not taking the correct action when there was a concern about a child known to be at risk of child sexual exploitation, when a child was missing from home, and when daily logs noted a child sustained an injury.

The agency provides a wide range of training opportunities. However, in some cases, the training undertaken is not sufficient to meet the specific needs of children, in particular, those at risk of child sexual or criminal exploitation.

Leaders and managers share research-based information with supervising social workers to upskill and inform their practice even further. However, this learning is not routinely incorporated into daily practice. Therefore, there is very limited evidence as to the impact of this on children's progress.

The registered manager actively reviews processes and care planning for children. She has successfully identified themes for improvement, which are shared via training events. As a result, there has been a significant improvement in consistency throughout the agency.

The fostering panel is organised and effective, offering good-quality support to new and experienced foster carers. It is chaired by a knowledgeable and independent person. Panel members actively seek input from education and health professionals on a case-by-case basis. Well-informed decisions and outcomes are recorded and thorough.

The agency's decision-maker offers clarity and scrutiny to decision-making. Information and reports from supervising social workers and managers are received promptly. This enables decision-making to be informed. Any recommendations are

unquestionably in line with the agency’s overriding objective to promote the welfare of children in foster care.

## What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

<b>Requirement</b>	<b>Due date</b>
<p>The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that—</p> <p>the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11(a))</p> <p>In particular, foster carers must take the necessary action to safeguard children, including following the agency’s own policy and procedures. Including seeking medical attention or advice for a child under the influence of a controlled substance, reporting children missing and when a child sustains an injury.</p>	30 July 2023
<p>The fostering service provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that foster parents are familiar with, and act in accordance with the policies established in accordance with regulations 12 (1) and 13 (1) and (3).</p> <p>The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17 (1) (2))</p> <p>In particular, provide specialist training for foster carers looking after children at risk of criminal and/or sexual exploitation.</p>	31 August 2023
<p>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36 (1))</p>	31 August 2023

## **Recommendation**

- The registered person should ensure that care and support provided to children minimise the risk that they will go missing and reduce the risk of harm should the child go missing. In particular, consider the known risks in relation to child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 5.1)

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the social care common inspection framework. This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards.

## **Independent fostering agency details**

**Unique reference number:** SC036598

**Registered provider:** Anchor Foster Care Services Limited

**Registered provider address:** 69A Maidstone Road, Chatham ME4 6DP

**Responsible individual:** Alistair Sutherland

**Registered manager:** Linda Shephard

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## **Inspector**

Jill Sephton-Wright, Social Care Inspector (Lead)  
Stephen Collett, Social Care Inspector

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