

Midlothian Council Fostering Service Fostering Service

Family Placement Team
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Telephone: 0131 270 5678

Type of inspection:

Announced (short notice)

Completed on:

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Service provided by:

Midlothian Council

Service provider number:

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About the service

Midlothian Council Fostering Service has been registered with the Care Inspectorate since the Care Inspectorate was formed in 2011. It was previously registered with the Care Commission.

Midlothian Council provides a fostering and family placement service for children and young people aged from 0 to 18 year and their families, who are assessed as in need of this. The service is responsible for the recruitment, assessment and support of carer families to provide a fostering service to a range of children throughout the area of Midlothian. It is co-located with other children's services.

Managers told us that the service was emerging from a period of transition following a service review. There had been significant staffing changes within the family placement team, including changes of team manager since our last inspection visit.

Midlothian Council Fostering Service aims and objectives state that the service:

- aims to recruit, train and support a range of foster carers who are committed, empathic and knowledgeable and who can provide placements for children and young people in Midlothian.
- are committed to finding safe, secure and stable homes for children who are not able to remain with their own family, and to provide opportunities for looked after and accommodated children and young people to have access to a range of experiences which enable them to achieve their full potential and live happy and fulfilling lives.

They advise their mission statement is as follows:

'Our vision is to work in partnership with carers within an environment of learning and compassion, to keep safe and nurture our most vulnerable children, and enable them to reach their potential.'

What people told us

We examined feedback from a number of sources, including email questionnaire responses from four foster carers. We met with five foster carers and seven children and young people at their homes during the course of the inspection and also observed a foster carer support group, meeting with attendees. Children and young people we visited were seen to have close, loving relationships with their carers and we identified many positive outcomes through our observations and interactions with them.

Most foster carers spoke of the significant challenges in relation to the family placement team since the time of the last inspection but were optimistic about recent positive changes being sustained. Some comments from foster carers are provided below:

"It's been quite a positive change, they're trying really hard."

"I feel like I don't really know her (supervising social worker) that well. Because she's new to it as well.....I feel like we're learning together."

"I feel the service does well with matching young people to carers and I also feel communication between supervising and placement social workers is good."

"I feel the service does ensure the health, education and well-being needs of the young people are met."

"I feel very listened to as a foster carer and in almost all my encounters, my views have been taken into consideration."

"I know going forward the family placement team are trying their hardest to get things right. I fully appreciate this is a big task and won't happen overnight."

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

An inspection of the adoption service took place at the same time as this inspection and a separate report for that service is available.

Self assessment

The service had not been asked to complete a self-assessment in advance of the inspection. We looked at the annual return for the year January to December 2018 which was submitted during the inspection visit. We also looked at the service improvement plan, as well as quality monitoring information in relation to children's plans and an annual report produced by the permanence and adoption panel.

From this inspection we graded this service as:

Quality of care and support	4 - Good
Quality of staffing	3 - Adequate
Quality of management and leadership	3 - Adequate

Quality of care and support

Findings from the inspection

An increasing number of children and young people who were assessed as being in need of permanent alternative care were experiencing this without unnecessary delay. Children and young people we met with were offered a strong sense of security and were in permanent/long term placements with carers, some having been there for a significant number of years. We observed close, loving and trusting relationships between children, young people and their carers. This was clearly supported by the stable, legally secure and enduring nature of their placements.

We were aware that disruptions had taken place within the service which will have a negative impact on young people's experiences and outcomes. However, systems are in place to have an overview of these and scrutinise information to inform learning and service and practice development. We would encourage the service to continue this.

Full assessments, including appropriate checks, supported the agency to make decisions about the capacity and

skills of the carers in meeting children's needs. Through assessments we sampled and feedback from the panel chair, panel members and agency decision makers, we were reassured as to improvement in the quality of assessments since the last inspection.

Carers spoke positively about their recruitment and preparation experiences, expressing that it offered them valuable insight into their role as carers. In the main, carers spoke positively about how the information they received, prior to any placement, gave them important information about children and young people and supported them to meet their needs.

We found some good examples of carers being consistently and positively involved with birth family of young people through supporting contact, establishing good relationships, having appropriate, sensitive and helpful conversations. This, in turn, assisted children to retain positive relationships and contact experiences within a safe and supportive context of people working together respectfully.

In the main, children and young people were seen to have good support from their placing social workers. It appeared that some had benefited from consistent and positive relationships with these workers over time, affording an additional level of support to the family as a whole. In circumstances where there has been limited contact with the family placement team worker, this supportive relationship has been seen as invaluable by the carers. Children and young people we met with were generally experiencing care and support which was consistent and stable because people were working well together; for example, we saw that multi-agency meetings were regularly taking place.

Young people experienced good access to primary health care, ensuring regular monitoring and review of their health needs. Some children and young people we met with experienced additional health needs, some complex in nature. We found that, in most cases, these were being met robustly through carers' expertise and extensive knowledge of the young people and close liaison and working relationships with the team around the child.

Young people we met with were seen to be enjoying and succeeding in their early and further education and training experiences. There was evidence of positive working relationships between carers and these services which supported this. Similarly, evidence of some good inter-agency working was noted which supported these placements and young people reaching their potential.

We saw various examples of children and young people leading an active life and being encouraged and supported to engage in activities of their choice. This was seen to promote their physical health and well-being, social development, confidence, sense of achievement and opportunities for fun.

Children and young people were seen to be gaining increasing confidence and an understanding of personal responsibility through the development of age and stage appropriate independence skills. These were seen to be supported and promoted by carers and professionals.

Young people's views were regularly sought and the development of the MOMO (Mind of my Own) tool was a further attempt to make this process more accessible and meaningful. While there are no existing support groups for children and young people using the service, the Champions Group and Mini Champs offered opportunities for older young people to participate in the service.

Areas for development

It appears that, while some carers' training was up to date and they were seen to be consistently very involved in training, this was not the case for all. In particular, some areas of mandatory training, including child protection, were seen to be inconsistently attended and very out of date for some carers. It was also noted on the

information provided to us that no adult support and protection training was recorded as being undertaken. This will be crucial in meeting the needs of older young people currently living with previous foster carers and also moving forward the continuing care agenda. (See requirement 1)

Some risk assessments and safer caring policies were not found to incorporate all information available and were not always being updated at regular intervals or timeously when new information became available. To ensure the safety and wellbeing of young people and inform robust care planning and support, we encouraged the service to address these issues. (See recommendation 1)

In conclusion, we saw that there were a number of important strengths in this agency which, taken together, clearly outweighed the areas for improvement in terms of the impact on people who used the service. We noted the good plans in place to drive improvement and acknowledged that the agency was emerging from a period of transition. In order to ensure continued and sustainable improvements in experiences and outcomes for children and families, we have asked the service to take action to improve in a number of important areas, including protection training for foster carers, care planning and risk management. This has informed our evaluation of quality as being good for the theme of care and support.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 1

1. Midlothian Council must ensure that the health and well-being of children is always appropriately managed. In order to achieve this, the service must ensure foster carers receive sufficient and regular child and adult protection training.

This is necessary in order to comply with The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 - Regulation 4(1)(a) - 'A provider must make proper provision for the health, welfare and safety of service users'.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state "I am protected from harm abuse, neglect, bullying and exploitation by people who have a clear understanding of their responsibilities" (HSCS 3.20) and "I have confidence in people because they are trained, competent and skilled and are able to reflect on their practice and follow their professional and organisational codes". (HSCS 3.24)

Timescale: This must be achieved by 27 May 2019.

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 1

1. Midlothian Council should ensure a joined up approach to care planning and risk management, where relevant documents are produced and updated timeously and interface effectively. This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state "I experience high quality care and support because people have the necessary information and resources". (HSCS 4.27)

Grade: 4 - good

Quality of staffing

Findings from the inspection

Staff were enthusiastic and motivated to establish positive working relationships with carers and to consolidate the team following significant staff changes since the time of the last inspection. We sampled staff files which showed that safer recruitment practice and checks were completed for permanent staff members before employment.

Staff told us that they were motivated and committed to providing a quality service. They received regular supervision and annual appraisal from the manager of the service. This provided opportunity for them to seek advice and to reflect on practice and learning. Training needs were also being discussed and noted within supervision and appraisal records.

We found that there was a breadth of skills and experience within the team in relation to child care, assessment and social work; however, some staff members had limited experience of fostering work and the service acknowledged that staff confidence in this area needed to grow. This was being supported by regular team meetings, team development sessions and consultation sessions in relation to case work.

Discussion with social workers within the children and families practice teams identified very positive working relationships and examples of good joint working practices supporting positive outcomes for children and young people, carers and birth families. Discussions with carers also confirmed that workers were operating well together to meet the needs of young people in placement.

Areas for development

Although we were able to see safer recruitment processes were in place in the staff records we sampled, we were unable to see that records were being held by the Human Resources department in relation to locum members of staff or in relation to the internal appointment of the manager of the service. In addition to this, we found that there were no cyclical PVG checks in place for staff members. Although the agency PVG policy indicated that retrospective checks should be undertaken, we did not see that this had been implemented.

In addition, we noted that the agency safer recruitment policy had not been reviewed to take into account more recent changes to the law including GDPR. To promote the safety and well-being of children and young people and to ensure appropriate record keeping, we encouraged the agency to make improvements in all of the areas highlighted, taking into account the 'Safer Recruitment through Better Recruitment Guidance'. (See recommendation 1)

While staff recognised the importance of, and were prioritising relationships with carers, we would encourage the service to actively develop relationships with children and young people alongside this to more effectively support caring households. It would ensure that they are clear about the needs, choices and wishes of children and that they know them when involved in making decisions about their current or future care and support. (See recommendation 2)

Staff were not always confident in their expertise in certain areas and relied upon guidance from their manager and support from experienced previous team members. The implementation of regular, specific targeted training/workshops to ensure a shared level of knowledge within the team would act to enhance staff confidence and practice. We also found no evidence of any staff adult support and protection training having taken place, which was inconsistent with the training development plan. To ensure the safety and wellbeing of

children and young people, we asked the service to ensure that all staff members and the manager undertake appropriate child and adult support and protection training in line with the agency policy. (See requirement 1)

When we looked at staff training records, we found that these were being maintained within different systems including within an online portal and within individual staff supervision records. This meant that the management team did not yet have a clear overview of staff training undertaken or of training needs. In order to ensure children and families can be confident in the service provided to them, we asked the service to carry out a training needs analysis and to ensure that staff are provided with all relevant training, including carrying out assessments of foster carers and in report writing in relation to those assessments. (See also requirement 1)

In conclusion, we saw that there were strengths in this agency, however these just outweighed the areas for improvement in terms of the impact on people who used the service. We noted the good plans in place to drive improvement and acknowledged that the agency was emerging from a period of transition. In order to ensure continued and sustainable improvements in experiences and outcomes for children and families, we have asked the service to take action to improve in a number of important areas including in training of staff, safer recruitment and ongoing development of relationships with children and young people in caring households. This has informed our evaluation of quality as being adequate for the theme of staffing.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 1

1. Midlothian Council must ensure that all family placement team staff members and the manager undertake appropriate child and adult support and protection training in line with the agency policy to ensure the safety and well-being of children and young people. In addition, a training needs analysis should be undertaken to identify areas of professional development for the team.

This is necessary in order to comply with The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 - Regulation 4(1)(a) - A provider must make proper provision for the health, welfare and safety of service users.'

This is to ensure that staffing is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standard which states "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) and "I am protected from harm abuse, neglect, bullying and exploitation by people who have a clear understanding of their responsibilities" (HSCS 3.20).

Timescale: This must be achieved by 27 May 2019.

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 2

1. To promote the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, Midlothian Council should ensure appropriate recruitment record keeping. This is to ensure that staffing is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state "I am confident that the people who support me have been appropriately and safely recruited." (HSCS 4.24)

2. Midlothian Council should ensure that the consolidation of positive, supportive relationships between staff and foster caring households includes children and young people living there. This is to ensure that staffing is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state "My care and support is provided by people who know my needs, choices and wishes, even if there are changes in the service or organisation". (HSCS 4.15)

Grade: 3 – adequate

Quality of management and leadership

Findings from the inspection

The service have experienced a number of significant challenges and changes since the time of the last inspection, including staff absence (front line and senior management), staffing changes, operating within an environment of uncertainty and changes in leadership style and practice. The subsequent impact of these issues on the team, service delivery and capacity for improvement over this period was discussed with the management team during the course of the inspection and at feedback.

In recent months, further changes have offered the opportunity to identify the areas required to drive forward improvements and start to address the negative impact of these events. There is a clear drive to re-establish positive, trusting relationships between the service and their carers and also to consolidate the team itself.

Overall, we saw that panel processes were being carried out well and in a way which supported quality monitoring of practice and reporting. Panel members and social workers we spoke to and records we looked at demonstrated that the panel were sufficiently independent to robustly challenge staff when further information or detail was needed. Panel members told us that more recently there had been improvement in the quality of information being provided to the panel and that this was reducing the need for panels to be postponed.

Areas for development

We considered that management systems should be used more effectively and that new systems could be developed to provide more of an overview of the agency. This would act to support improvements; for example, relating to outwith approval procedures being followed, frequency of carer reviews and ensuring foster carer agreements are in place. There should also be more consistent and effective use of file auditing (for children, foster carers and for staff) and accuracy in recording for incident and accident reporting and of child protection records. This will additionally inform better notification reporting to the Care Inspectorate. (See requirement 1).

Whilst, overall, we saw that panel processes were being carried out well and in a way which supported quality monitoring of practice and reporting, we noted that annual reviews and training plans should be introduced to ensure that learning and development is appropriate for the role of being a panel member and chair. (See recommendation 1)

We would encourage the service to undertake some policy review and update work. In addition to this, the draft continuing care policy requires further development and structures for implementation required to be progressed to ensure the service develops in line with the continuing care agenda. (See recommendation 2)

In conclusion, we saw that there were strengths in this agency; however, these just outweighed the areas for improvement in terms of the impact on people who used the service. We noted the good plans in place to drive

improvement and acknowledged that the agency was emerging from a period of transition. In order to ensure continued and sustainable improvements in experiences and outcomes for children and families, we have asked the service to take action to improve in a number of important areas, including quality assurance systems and notifications to the Care Inspectorate, learning and development of foster panel members and chair and policy review and updates. This has informed our evaluation of quality as being adequate for the theme of management and leadership.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 1

1. Midlothian Council must ensure that quality assurance systems are robust and used effectively in order to identify areas for improvement. In addition they must notify the care inspectorate as detailed in the document: "Records that all registered care services (except childminding) must keep and guidance on notification reporting (2012)."

This is necessary in order to comply with The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 - Regulation 4(1)(a) - 'A provider must make proper provision for the health, welfare and safety of service users.'

This is to ensure that management and leadership is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state "I benefit from different organisations working together and sharing information about me promptly where appropriate, and I understand how my privacy and confidentiality are respected." HSCS 4.18) and "I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes." (HSCS 4.19)

Timescale: This must be achieved by 27 May 2019.

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 2

1. Midlothian Council should implement annual reviews and a learning and development programme for foster panel members and chair. This is to ensure that the quality of management and leadership is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state "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)
2. Midlothian Council should undertake appropriate policy updates within the context of the Family Placement Team to ensure continuous improvement. This should include the progression of policy development and practice implementation in respect of continuing care. This is to ensure the quality of management and leadership is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state, "I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes." (HSCS 4.19) and "I experience high quality care and support based on relevant evidence, guidance and best practice." (HSCS4.11)

Grade: 3 - adequate

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

Previous requirements

There are no outstanding requirements.

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

Previous recommendations

Recommendation 1

To ensure that children and young people are being looked after by carers who feel well supported the service should review the provision of support groups and properly implement supervision of carers in line with their own policy.

National Care standards, Standard 2(3) and Standard 5(8).

This recommendation was made on 17 November 2017.

Action taken on previous recommendation

Support Groups: These are due to be progressed and work has been undertaken or is being undertaken to finalise plans for this and commence groups imminently. Carers are aware of these developments and welcome them. **Met.**

Supervision of Carers: there have been some barriers to this being achieved at particular points over the last year (staff absence and changes) and therefore not all carers were in receipt of regular contact or supervision from a supervising social worker. However, it was noted that supervision of carers was more recently found to be taking place more regularly again following a period of stability in the team. **Met.**

Complaints

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

Enforcement

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

Inspection and grading history

Date	Type	Gradings	
17 Nov 2017	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	3 - Adequate Not assessed Not assessed 4 - Good
18 Nov 2015	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	4 - Good Not assessed 5 - Very good 4 - Good
26 Aug 2014	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing	4 - Good Not assessed 4 - Good

Date	Type	Gradings	
		Management and leadership	4 - Good
16 May 2014	Announced	Care and support	2 - Weak
		Environment	Not assessed
		Staffing	4 - Good
		Management and leadership	3 - Adequate
27 May 2013	Announced (short notice)	Care and support	5 - Very good
		Environment	Not assessed
		Staffing	5 - Very good
		Management and leadership	4 - Good
22 May 2012	Announced (short notice)	Care and support	4 - Good
		Environment	Not assessed
		Staffing	4 - Good
		Management and leadership	4 - Good
23 Feb 2011	Announced	Care and support	4 - Good
		Environment	Not assessed
		Staffing	Not assessed
		Management and leadership	3 - Adequate
15 Mar 2010	Announced	Care and support	4 - Good
		Environment	Not assessed
		Staffing	4 - Good
		Management and leadership	4 - Good
5 Mar 2009	Announced	Care and support	2 - Weak
		Environment	Not assessed
		Staffing	3 - Adequate
		Management and leadership	3 - Adequate

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