



Inspection Report on

Flintshire Fostering Services

**Flintshire County Council
County Offices
Chapel Street
Flint
CH6 5BD**

Date Inspection Completed

27 November 2023 – 1 December 2023.

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About Flintshire Fostering Services

Type of care provided	Local Authority Fostering Service
Registered Provider	Flintshire County Council
Language of the service	English
Previous Care Inspectorate Wales inspection	2 February 2015.
Does this service promote Welsh language and culture?	The service can provide an 'Active Offer' of the Welsh language. It does demonstrate a significant effort to promote the use of the Welsh language and culture.

Summary

The local authority fostering service is provided with sufficient care, competence, and skill, having regard to the statement of purpose. The fostering service provides foster placements for children who are looked after by the local authority and provides on-going support to foster carers. The fostering service provides the assessment of general foster carers and connected foster carers. A designated manager and a senior manager who is also the Responsible Individual oversees the fostering service.

The fostering service has a staff team who are competent, committed and have the skills and knowledge to meet the requirements of the service. Staff retention is good, and staff feel supported. The local authority targets the recruitment of foster carers appropriately and is committed to increasing the number of foster carers.

Children receive care from foster carers who are supported by the fostering service to promote and improve well-being outcomes. Children's health and educational needs are prioritised, they have access to a wide range of resources. Foster carers have access to the Mockingbird initiative for support, advice, and guidance. External agencies provide advice and support to children and foster carers to develop relationships and attachments.

Well-being

Children are consulted about their care and can make their views known through their Child Looked After (CLA) review meetings, consultations with their social workers, education professionals, health professionals and access to an advocacy service. The CLA review takes into account the views of children, parents, foster carers, and professionals working with children to assess their care and support needs. In addition, supervising social workers consider the views of children at visits to foster carers homes and these are captured in review records.

Children have access to physiological and emotional health care support services. They are registered with primary and specialist health and social care support services in the locality of foster carers homes. Foster carers have an understanding of children's emotional needs and have access to external professional advice to support the trauma informed approach to their care. External agencies and therapists offer Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) to children and their foster carers. This supports children to focus on healthy attachments and relationships to trust and feel safe. Furthermore, therapists offer Repatriation and Preventative (RaP) work with children and their foster carers. This supports children to focus on building emotional resilience, relationships, and strategies to improve well-being outcomes. RaP is also focussed on repatriating children back to Flintshire or prevent them from being placed out of county. Foster carers attached to the Mockingbird initiative, can receive advice, support and guidance from the hub carer and their peers.

Children attend education provisions such as schools, colleges, and alternative facilities to support their individual education plan. Foster carers are actively engaged in children's education and support them to accomplish their educational outcomes. Foster carers confirmed they take an active interest in children's education, so children understand learning and education is important. Children have a Personal Education Plan (PEP), which forms part of the overall care plan and is reviewed annually or when the need arises to ensure the right educational support is provided.

Children are involved in their foster carers family life which provides them with a secure, stable home environment to support them to develop, flourish, trust and feel secure. The fostering service is supportive of the 'When I am Ready scheme,' which allows a child to continue living with their foster carers after the age of eighteen. Children are encouraged to follow interests and have opportunities to engage in activities to support a healthy active lifestyle.

Children are supported by foster carers to spend time with those who are important to them and have a positive influence on their lives. Foster carers recognise the importance of

encouraging positive relationships to promote positive well-being outcomes. Foster carers understand their responsibilities in supporting children to maintain contact with key people in children's lives, and their responsibilities to uphold children's emotional health and safeguarding needs. Children are safe, foster carers understand their safeguarding responsibilities and have access to advice and support from their supervising social workers, Mockingbird hub carers and peers, and therapists attached to the external agencies providing DDP and RaP.

Care and Support

The fostering service has a process for the recruitment, approval, and ongoing performance review to ensure foster carers are competent. The quality of Form F approval assessments are good, and contain the required information and checks to ensure potential foster carers are suitable to provide care to vulnerable children. Form F assessments are completed by supervising social workers, and following completion are ratified by the team manager. Due to the increase in Special Guardianship Orders the fostering service has two supervising social workers allocated to this specific area of fostering. A pre-approval training programme which includes face to face and online training, focussing on developing potential foster carers provides an understanding of a child's journey.

A Mockingbird foster carer initiative provides sustainable foster care for children structured around the support and relationships an extended family provides. For example, children can be cared for by other foster carers within a constellation as would be provided by parents of their peers. Foster carers attached to Mockingbird told us they value peer advice and practical support which provides continuity of care, flexibility, stability, and improved outcomes for children.

Foster carers are committed to develop and underpin their knowledge by completing mandatory and additional training to ensure they are equipped with the skills and capacity to respond to children's needs and behaviours safely. Foster carers confirmed they can access additional training to further develop their knowledge in a specific area to respond to children's individual needs. Foster carers confirmed the training provided by the fostering service is valuable and they can apply theory to practice which in turn, benefits children in their care.

Foster carers receive support, advice, and a review of their performance via supervision and visits to the home by supervising social workers. Foster carers confirmed they receive excellent support and advice from supervising social workers with face-to-face supervision, telephone, and email contact which is essential when responding to children's fluctuating needs and behaviours. Foster carers supervision records demonstrated they are valued by supervising social workers in the care and support provided to children. Foster carers confirmed supervising social workers are approachable and contactable for advice and support.

Environment

The office premises for the fostering service is suitable and fit for purpose. The building is secure, the main front door is locked and accessible via a card access control system. The local authority ensures regular health and safety, fire safety checks and fire drills are completed within timescales. Confidential records relating to children, foster carers and staff are electronic and are stored securely.

Foster carers supervisions and performance reviews are completed in the home to ensure supervising social workers assess the home environment. Furthermore, announced, and unannounced visits are completed to foster carer's homes to ensure children have opportunities to share their views.

Leadership and Management

The leadership and management of the fostering service is good, performance is monitored and there is clear strategic direction of where the fostering service would like to develop. The statement of purpose provides information about the fostering service's aims and objectives, policies, procedures, and quality assurance process. There is good retention of staff and staff feel supported. Supervising social workers have a manageable caseload, which means foster carers receive the support they need to ensure children are safe and well cared for. The fostering service monitors children's progress and provides additional support to children and foster carers when needed.

The fostering service appropriately targets the recruitment of foster carers and is committed to increasing their numbers. There are many methods to recruit and assess prospective foster carers, such as 'Foster Bear' initiative, the local authority's website, social media, and the use of the external fostering network resourcefulness. The foster carer handbook provides information to commence the journey as a foster carer. The assessments of foster carers and connected foster carers are completed by supervising social workers. The assessments are quality assured by the fostering team manager to ensure the quality and robustness of assessments.

The fostering service considers placement referrals from the local authority children's services. The matching process of children's care and support needs with foster carers skills and knowledge is good. Foster carers are involved in the matching process to ensure they are confident they can provide safe care and support to children. Placements for children are stable, as a result the low number of breakdowns and moves demonstrates matching is good. The authority makes use of independent fostering agencies when a suitable placement and matching cannot be made internally. The number of placements made with independent fostering agencies demonstrates the commitment of the local authority fostering service to ensure appropriate foster placements are identified.

The fostering panel is fulfilling their role in the oversight of the assessment process of foster carers. The panel chair is diligent; decision making is robust and panel records demonstrate careful consideration of information presented within assessments. The annual review of foster carer's following approval takes place within required timescales, and reviews of foster carers are submitted to panel if there is a change to the approval status or if there are concerns in relation to performance.

Summary of Non-Compliance

Status	What each means
New	This non-compliance was identified at this inspection.
Reviewed	Compliance was reviewed at this inspection and was not achieved. The target date for compliance is in the future and will be tested at next inspection.
Not Achieved	Compliance was tested at this inspection and was not achieved.
Achieved	Compliance was tested at this inspection and was achieved.

We respond to non-compliance with regulations where poor outcomes for people, and / or risk to people’s well-being are identified by issuing Priority Action Notice (s).

The provider must take immediate steps to address this and make improvements. Where providers fail to take priority action by the target date we may escalate the matter to an Improvement and Enforcement Panel.

Priority Action Notice(s)

Regulation	Summary	Status
N/A	No non-compliance of this type was identified at this inspection	N/A

Where we find non-compliance with regulations but no immediate or significant risk for people using the service is identified we highlight these as Areas for Improvement.

We expect the provider to take action to rectify this and we will follow this up at the next inspection. Where the provider has failed to make the necessary improvements we will escalate the matter by issuing a Priority Action Notice.

Area(s) for Improvement

Regulation	Summary	Status
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N/A	No non-compliance of this type was identified at this inspection	N/A
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