



## Inspection Report on

**Pembrokeshire County Council Fostering Agency**

**Family Placement Team  
Pembroke Dock Customer Services  
Argyle Street  
Pembroke Dock  
SA72 6HL**

**Mae'r adroddiad hwn hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg**

**This report is also available in Welsh**

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## **Description of the service**

Pembrokeshire County Council's fostering service undertakes the recruitment and assessment of foster carers and provides foster placements for children who are looked after by the local authority. Placements may be short or long term, respite, short breaks or connected care placements. The fostering service is based in Pembroke Dock and is managed by Melany Evans. Prior to publication of this report, the service manager was nominated as responsible individual to represent the authority.

At the time of inspection the fostering service had 111 mainstream foster carers (64 households) looking after 73 children and 15 connected foster carers (8 households) looking after 11 children.

## **Summary of our findings**

### **1. Overall assessment**

Most children experience nurturing, stable placements with foster carers who understand their needs and promote their well-being. Children are able to express their views and exercise choice, though would benefit from increased opportunities to express their views about their experience of being fostered and to participate in formal consultations regarding service delivery and development. Children are encouraged and supported to participate in education and to explore their interests. Children would benefit from specialist services to enable them to improve their outcomes.

Since the previous inspection there have been management changes and an increasing demand for placements, particularly for children with complex needs and parent and child placements. Consequently, the fostering service has been placed under pressure, with a greater focus on connected persons assessments. This has impacted on recruitment activity, and some children have been inappropriately placed with foster carers who are unable to fully meet their needs. Quality assurance and governance measures are not consistently effective in ensuring service quality and improvement. However, the service is taking action to address these issues, with regional and local recruitment initiatives taking place and plans underway to address service shortfalls. The local authority needs to continue to focus on these matters to ensure that children's outcomes are improved through better matching at point of placement to avoid placement breakdowns and to ensure that carers have the skills and expertise to meet the needs of the children they are caring for.

### **2. Improvements**

- The service is working with its neighbouring local authorities to improve service delivery through regional collaboration.
- The appointment of a social worker within the fostering team with responsibility for foster carer recruitment to increase placement choice for children.

- Additional recruitment to fostering panel strengthens the range of experience and skills of its members
- Peer mentoring of foster carers is being rolled out following a successful pilot; to provide additional support to newly approved foster carers, and foster carers who are experiencing particularly challenging situations.

### **3. Requirements and recommendations**

Section four of this report sets out the areas where the registered provider is not meeting legal requirements and our recommendations to improve the service. These areas relate to the service's children's guide, foster carers' annual reviews and quality assurance arrangements.

Recommendations are made in relation to the following areas;

- Improving the matching between children and foster carers
- The provision of information to foster carers, out of hours placement and support arrangements
- Consultation with children
- The recruitment, support and training of foster carers
- Changes to the terms of approval of foster carers
- Management qualifications
- The Welsh language.

# 1. Well-being

## Summary

In the main, children experience positive relationships with foster carers who understand their needs and are able to provide a nurturing, secure and stable home environment. Children are able to express their views and exercise choice in their day to day lives, though they would benefit from greater opportunities to participate in formal consultations about their experience of foster care and regarding service delivery and development. Action should be taken to ensure that children contribute to their foster carers' annual review. Children are encouraged and supported to participate in education and to explore their interests. Some children would, however, benefit from specialist services to enable them to achieve positive outcomes. The service needs to ensure that relevant information is always provided promptly to foster carers to enable them to keep children safe.

## Our findings

Most children experience secure placements with foster carers who provide them with a nurturing, stable home environment, within which they are able to achieve positive outcomes. We met with foster carers who spoke with affection about the children in their care, wanted them to be able to fulfil their potential, and were clearly proud of their efforts and achievements; whether large or small. Within sampled records we saw the following comments:-

From foster carers

*"YY (child) is a really lovely young person.*

*"YY (child) is a kind, gentle young person"*

From children's social workers

*"YY (child) is very happy in placement, content and settled"*

*"XX (foster carers), took care of all of YY (child)'s needs, supported the plan very well and had a good relationship with mum"*

*"Thanks to XX (foster carers) hard work and their welcoming nature the introductions were very positive"*

*"XX (foster carers) embraced the children into their family"*

*"YY and YY (children) taught routines and boundaries but in a fun, relaxed atmosphere"*

From looked after children

*"I enjoy living with XX (foster carers)"*

*"XX (foster carers) treat me like I'm theirs"*

*"I am happy living with XX (foster carers)"*

From annual review documentation we also saw the following comments:

*"YY and YY (children) are part of the family."*

*“YY (foster carer explains things to YY (child) in a way they understand”*

We therefore consider children to be experiencing warm, nurturing environments which provide them with the opportunity to develop attachments and create a sense of belonging.

Children are encouraged and supported to achieve their educational potential taking into account their attainment and progress from the beginning of their placement. They are provided with wider opportunities to follow interests, to develop skills and experience a sense of achievement. We saw examples of foster carers supporting children by maintaining regular contact with school staff, transporting children to and from school, supporting transition arrangements to new schools, helping with homework, and attending parents' evenings and school events. Improvements in children's educational achievements, directly related to the assistance provided by foster carers, were reported by social workers and school staff. Formal support from the local authority's educational psychology service was highly valued by foster carers, as was the support from education "learning coaches" who were able to provide additional support to children within the school or home environment. However, some foster carers had not been invited to contribute to children's personal education plans and were therefore not aware of the targets set. We were advised by the service manager that the process for drawing up personal education plans was changing from September 2018, to ensure greater participation from children and their parents or carers. Children's educational attainment was monitored on a monthly basis by the local authority using a "virtual school" model to track progress and to provide additional support where necessary, though greater detail in recordings of action taken would be beneficial. We were advised by foster carers of additional pressure on foster placements, in some instances, where children were not attending school.

Children were encouraged and supported by their foster carers to pursue their interests outside school and attend activities they enjoyed (e.g. drama, cross country running, rugby and cycling). They were also offered social opportunities through the Pembrokeshire foster care association and were able to participate in go-karting, trampolining, horse riding and trips to local attractions. Family events were also organised by the fostering team. Some children had been taken on holiday with their foster carers within the U.K and abroad. We saw evidence within children's records of their efforts and achievements and noted that a celebratory awards ceremony had taken place earlier in the year. However, positive outcomes for children could be better evidenced within foster carers' supervision records and foster carers' annual review reports. Children are able to reach their educational potential, to develop interests and have positive leisure experiences. Their attainment and progress is encouraged and supported which in turn promotes their self esteem and contributes to their overall well-being.

Foster carers generally have the information they require, in order to manage risk and keep children safe, though there are sometimes delays in receiving relevant information, particularly when children have been placed on an emergency basis, out of office hours. We found significant variations in the level and quality of information provided to foster carers prior to or when children were placed with them. Where placements had been

planned, foster carers generally received sufficient information prior to placement to enable them to make an informed decision about the proposed placement. We saw examples of good practice which included the views of the children themselves about the sort of care they wanted, and on occasion, introductory meetings between children and their future foster carers had also been arranged. Information relating to children placed on an emergency basis was more limited, and expected to be so by foster carers. However, concern was expressed by some foster carers about the arrangements for the placement of children, and support to foster carers, out of office hours. A foster carer told us about a situation where the placing social worker was only able to provide a child's first name and age. We were also provided with examples of foster carers not being provided with information regarding risky behaviours, despite children already being known to the local authority. We saw individual placement agreements within sampled records which provided foster carers with details of the children being cared for. We also saw that safer care agreements and risk assessments for individual children had been completed in a timely manner. Overall, foster carers have the information required to understand and meet the needs of children. However, further improvement is required to ensure that identified risks and guidance for carers regarding risk management, are communicated to foster carers with a minimum of delay, when children are placed on an emergency basis.

Children and foster carers do not consistently receive the support and guidance they require to ensure that children's emotional health needs are addressed and to maintain placement stability. We did not see evidence of a coherent system in place to address the support needs of children and foster carers when placements became unstable and at risk of breakdown. Although we were advised by the team manager that additional support (which was seen to be valued by foster carers) could be accessed e.g. from the fostering team's support workers, the family intervention team, inclusion and educational psychology services and health, resources were seen to be limited, particularly in relation to therapeutic intervention. We saw evidence in documentation viewed, therefore, of children with highly complex needs and behaviours, including self-harm and physical aggression experiencing repeat placement moves. Prior to our last inspection, steps had been taken by the local authority to establish a looked after children psychology service, which provided the services of a clinical psychologist, assistant psychologist and educational psychologist. Unfortunately, however, the local authority had been unable to recruit to the post of clinical psychologist in the intervening period. The issue remained unresolved, as although a consultation service (to professionals only) had been introduced by CAMHS earlier in 2018, this did not fill the gap in provision in respect of direct work with children and their foster carers. We were advised by foster carers that the previous therapeutic support to children and foster carers was much missed. Children do not consistently receive the therapeutic support and guidance they require to promote and enhance their emotional well-being and provide them with a stable home environment.

Within their daily lives, children are encouraged to express their views and exercise choice. They contribute to decision-making about their care and have access to an advocate with an active offer being made. However, they are not provided with written information about

the fostering service, before or when becoming looked after. There are not effective systems in place to consult with children outside the LAC reviewing process. We were advised by foster carers that children had not been provided with a children's guide, and the fostering team manager confirmed that the children's guide was not being routinely provided to children, as it needed to be revised and updated. We were informed that a new children's guide was currently in draft. Discussions with children and records viewed, evidenced that children were able to express their views and exercise choice within their foster placements, supported by delegated authority arrangements which were seen to be generally in place. Children were able to speak to their social workers during visits (though children told us that they were unhappy that they had so many changes of social workers). They did not always feel that social workers listened to them, but one child told us that their current social worker was "*very good at their job*" and had helped them to achieve their goals. Children's care and support plans were seen to be regularly reviewed within their LAC review meetings. It was expected that all children would be seen by their IRO in advance of their review, to ensure that their views were known. However, the extent to which children attended their reviews, and actively participated in decision-making about their care was not clear from records viewed. Tros Gynnal had been commissioned regionally to provide an advocacy and independent visitor service and we were informed that children received an "active offer" of advocacy support. Children who spoke to us were aware of the advocacy service, and those who had been supported by the service felt that their advocate's involvement had been helpful.

It was disappointing to see that additional opportunities for children to express their views about their care, and more broadly about the fostering service had not been progressed since our last inspection. Previous arrangements in place to support and to consult informally with children had not been continued. We did not see evidence of children's "end of placement" views being sought; nor did they contribute to foster carers' annual reviews despite our previous inspection recommendation that their views should form part of the review process. The fostering service's latest quality of care review report did not demonstrate that children had been properly consulted. We did see that a survey of looked after children's experiences had been undertaken (report dated April 2018, University of Bristol and Coram Voice). Although only 21% of children responded, it was positive to see that the local authority's corporate parenting board was seeking further information regarding the findings and subsequent action being taken, particularly in respect of children's understanding of reason why they were in care, whether they felt safe where they lived and the number of changes of social workers that children had experienced. Children's voices are heard within their day to day lives and within the care planning process. However, their participation in consultation processes, including foster carers' reviews and the service's quality of care review should be strengthened, as these are important mechanisms for improving the quality of foster care.



## **2. Care and Support**

### **Summary**

The recruitment and assessment of foster carers is generally robust, and most children placed with foster carers subsequently experience care and support within stable placements. However, matching documentation does not evidence sound decision-making and some children are inappropriately placed with foster carers or in alternative placements where their needs are not fully met. Decisions regarding any exemption or variation in respect of foster carers' terms of approval should be presented to fostering panel in a timely manner. In general, foster carers receive consistent, timely supervision and support to enable them to make a positive difference to children's lives. However, they also need to be able to maximise their learning and development to further improve outcomes for children.

### **Our findings**

The recruitment and assessment process for both mainstream and kinship carers is generally thorough. We were advised by the team manager that the increase in court directed assessments of connected persons had impacted on the fostering team's capacity to focus on recruitment activity. We were informed by foster carers of long delays, at times, between their initial enquiry and a response being received from the team. The recruitment of additional foster carers, able to meet the particular, often complex, needs of children becoming looked after had been recognised as a service priority and included within the children's services plan for 2018/19. Alongside ongoing regional collaboration in respect of fostering practice, recruitment and training, an additional appointment had been made within the fostering team of a full-time social worker with responsibility for recruitment. In discussion with this staff member, their energy and enthusiasm was evident as they described the range of recruitment activity undertaken since their appointment at the end of April 2018. We were advised that there had consequently been a significant increase in the number of enquiries made (last year 40 enquiries; last four months, 43 enquiries). A system had also been introduced to track the recruitment process in order to ensure prompt follow up and prevent drift throughout the recruitment and assessment process.

Prospective mainstream foster carers were invited to attend "skills to foster" training before making a decision whether to continue with the assessment process. The training was delivered by the staff team, with input from experienced foster carers and aimed to provide a realistic portrayal of fostering. Foster carers advised us that they considered the training to be of a good standard. Recently completed assessments, in respect of both prospective mainstream and connected foster carers were well-presented, with the required checks completed and providing evidence based analysis and recommendations. We noted that additional arrangements had been put in place to address previous variations in the quality of reports, with monthly "clinics" organised by the team manager to enable staff to discuss their current assessments and a formal mid point review undertaken to maintain a

consistent level of quality. We were advised by the chair of the fostering panel that assessment reports currently presented to panel were of a good standard. Children's well-being is promoted by foster carers who have undergone a robust recruitment and assessment process.

Most children experience care and support within stable placements. However, some children are not appropriately placed and matching documentation does not always evidence sound decision-making. We saw that a number of successful placements had been made by the service, with children remaining with their foster carers throughout their childhood and occasionally beyond, under "when I'm ready" arrangements. It was evident that some foster carers had maintained contact with children they had previously fostered, and continued to consider them to be part of the family. Our observation of the fostering team's allocation meeting demonstrated that they knew their foster carers well, and had a good understanding of their knowledge and skills. However, it was evident that the matching of foster carers to children, particularly older children and those with complex needs was constrained by the limited number of available, appropriate foster placements. Consequently, the needs of some children were not being fully met.

Matching records were not seen to have been fully completed by the fostering team, and did not evidence a robust matching process. Although information about children's needs was obtained via a referral request to the team, this information was not available within the matching record. Foster carers' skills, experience and training had not been recorded or whether any additional support or training might be required, and if so, how this would be provided. We found no evidence that the impact of the new placement on children already living in the home and vice versa had been considered. As records did not evidence the appropriateness of the match nor the decision-making process, it was difficult to ascertain in records to what extent the actual matches made were not appropriate and to what extent matching information was just not well recorded. However, some children had experienced a high number of placement moves, resulting in significant levels of instability and exacerbating difficulties in developing positive attachments. Children told us that they had spent significant life events such as birthdays and Christmas in emergency placements and on occasion in unregistered and unregulated settings.

We saw that some children had been placed with foster carers outside their terms of approval. We were advised by staff that decisions to vary the terms of approval or to agree exemptions were initially made by the Head of Children's Services, pending the decision of fostering panel. However, records did not clearly evidence that these matters were subsequently brought promptly to fostering panel. We were advised by the service manager, that arrangements were in place at the time of inspection for requests from social workers for exemption or variations to be sent to the head of service via the service manager, who was then able to track progress and ensure that decisions were made by panel in a timely fashion. There also appeared to be some confusion within the team regarding the circumstances in which a variation should be sought. We were advised by the team manager prior to the conclusion of our inspection that this issue had been addressed,

and guidance provided to staff. Overall, children are provided with care, support and stability when placed with foster carers who are able to fully meet their needs. However, some children are placed with foster carers who are unable to meet their needs, and action is required to ensure that all looked after children experience stable, secure home environments. Documentation needs to clearly evidence matching and where shortfalls are identified, should provide details of the action taken to address these shortfalls. Decisions regarding the exemption or variation in respect of foster carers' terms of approval should be presented to fostering panel in a timely manner.

Foster carers are supervised and supported by the service. We saw examples within supervision records of good quality supervision being provided, with discussions about children's progress, guidance offered and attention given to the welfare and learning needs of foster carers. However, the quality of supervision records was variable, with some records very brief and with little variation in content, month by month. A new supervision template had been recently introduced, to reflect the "signs of safety" practice model used by the local authority, which would hopefully support more uniformity in respect of recordings. We saw that foster carers generally received regular supervision, in accordance with the service's statement of purpose, though alternative arrangements were not consistently put in place when their supervising social workers were absent from work. We did see, however, that efforts were made by the fostering team to maintain contact, and to visit foster carers, if needed, when their allocated supervising social workers were not available.

We were advised by foster carers that they felt well supported on a day to day basis by their supervising social workers and the team's two support workers, who undertook some direct work with children and provided practical assistance to foster carers. They also felt the daytime duty system operated by the team worked well. The out of hours (EDT) arrangements were not, however, seen by foster carers to provide sufficient assistance and support. The fostering team had established a support group for foster carers who were looking after children transitioning to adoption, and we were advised by one staff member that they were planning to set up a group for connected foster carers, to meet their particular support needs. Following a successful pilot, plans were also underway to introduce a peer mentoring scheme, whereby an experienced foster carer would provide additional advice and support to new foster carers and to foster carers experiencing particularly challenging situations. Additional advice, support and representation was also provided to foster carers from the local, independently established, Pembrokeshire foster care association, which met on a monthly basis. We saw evidence of partnership working between the fostering team and this association, with social activities taking place and foster carers supporting recruitment events. In documentation viewed and from our discussions with the fostering team manager and service manager, it was clear that the retention of committed, experienced carers was seen to be important, and we saw that they had met regularly with the foster care association throughout 2018, to improve communication and to consult on specific issues, e.g. training for foster carers. We were advised by foster carers during our inspection that they felt that the support provided to

them was not sufficient when allegations or complaints had been made against them. Foster carers had raised this issue with the fostering team manager and service manager and we saw that they had subsequently been consulted, to ascertain how best this support could be provided. Additional written guidance for foster carers, outlining these support arrangements, was seen to have been drawn up following the consultation meeting. Feedback from foster carers was positive regarding the current management arrangements, with foster carers feeling “*hopeful*” regarding future service improvements. We were also provided with a copy of the fostering team’s July 2018 newsletter, which provided a further means of communicating with foster carers, particularly for those who did not want to engage in the organised social activities or support groups.

Discussions with the fostering team manager and staff showed that foster carers were supported by a knowledgeable and experienced staff team, who were able to progress their own learning and development. The team manager held a Post Graduate Certificate in Management Practice and Social Care and was working towards the QCF level 5 management qualification. Staff generally received regular supervision, though delays were noted, on occasion, when supervisors sought to cover for absent colleagues. Staff felt that they were encouraged to reflect on their practice and that their ideas were valued e.g. staff had contributed to the “when I’m ready” policy, and the new supervision policy being introduced within the department. We were advised that caseloads were considered to be generally manageable, though connected persons’ assessments created pressure on the team. They felt well-supported by each other, their team manager and service manager. Supervision and support arrangements help foster carers to meet the needs of children and promote their overall well-being.

The service offers a range of training. However, foster carers’ attendance is variable, and is not consistently linked to individual learning and development plans. The foster carer’s handbook was seen to provide information with regard to attendance at training, including the additional fostering allowance paid to foster carers who attended six training courses over a twelve month period. It would, however, benefit from greater clarity regarding the training expectations of connected foster carers and of each individual for couples who foster. Training records showed significant variations between individual foster carers in relation to levels of training attended, with some foster carers having attended no training within the previous twelve months and sometimes longer. The fostering team manager told us that experienced foster carers had considered some training on offer to be repetitive, though positive feedback had been received in respect of life story work, and the national “confidence in care” courses. Clearly attendance at training was difficult to achieve for some foster carers; they told us that they had spoken to the team manager and service manager about difficulties in attending courses beyond the school day, and during evenings and weekends, without childcare provision being offered. Efforts had been made by the service to take a more flexible approach to training requirements and following a consultation day with foster carers in January 2018, foster carer development files had recently been developed which included self-directed reading, one to one sessions with supervising social workers, online and face to face daytime and evening training. The learning and

development needs of foster carers were not consistently considered within their annual reviews, as a significant number of foster carers' reviews were not being completed within the required timescales. We could not be sure, therefore, that foster carers' individual learning and development needs were identified and met. The service is developing its training provision to enable foster carers to access a broader range of learning and development opportunities. Outcomes for children could be further improved by foster carers maximising their learning and development, in line with their individual plans.

### **3. Leadership and Management**

#### **Summary**

The service generally operates in accordance with its statement of purpose, which enables most children to experience stable placements and positive outcomes. However, we cannot be fully assured that quality assurance and governance measures are consistently effective in ensuring service quality, as the service does not consistently meet legal requirements. It is recognised that recent improvements have been made in respect of both monitoring arrangements and service delivery.

Foster carers understand their role and responsibilities regarding the service though foster carer agreements should be promptly updated following changes in approval status.

#### **Our findings**

Children, families and foster carers experience a service which generally operates in accordance with its statement of purpose. However, additional service documentation needs to be updated and made available. The service's statement of purpose was reviewed in August 2018. The document outlined the aim, objectives and planned outcomes of the service, together with information about becoming a foster carer, staffing arrangements and the service provided. It did not, however, refer to the service's position regarding the active offer of the Welsh language. In general, we found that the statement of purpose provided an accurate account of the day to day operation of the service, though we saw areas where day to day practice did not consistently reflect service objectives or meet legal requirements (as outlined in this report). Information about the service in the form of a children's guide was not seen to have been routinely provided to children who were looked after, and additional service information, including policies, procedures and the foster carers' handbook required revision in order to provide up to date information. We noted that some areas of foster carers' practice required additional guidance e.g. in respect of financial matters relating to children. In general, children's experience of the fostering service is as described in the statement of purpose, and their well-being is promoted. However, information regarding the Welsh language active offer should be made available, together with additional guidance to foster carers, in the form of a handbook, and up to date policies and procedures.

Foster carers generally have an understanding of their commitments in respect of the fostering service. We saw that foster carer agreements had been completed following approval, with evidence of some foster carer agreements being subsequently updated. However, we could not be certain from records seen, whether foster carer agreements were consistently and promptly updated following changes in foster carers' terms of approval. Foster carers understand their commitments to the fostering service. However, action

should be taken to ensure that foster care agreements consistently reflect the current terms of approval of all foster carers.

The fostering panel operates in line with regulations and provides effective scrutiny of the assessment of new, and the review of existing foster carers. Panel processes had changed in a number of respects over the previous year, which the chair and panel members felt had, or would, lead to the panel being more efficient in future; some aspects had only been introduced at the time of inspection and therefore were yet to become embedded. Changes included:

- Quality assurance of assessments prior to panel. This had led to less time spent at panel seeking missing information or deferring recommendations.
- Improved communication between panel chair and responsible local authority senior managers.
- Electronic copies of panel papers.
- ‘Open panels’. The panel we observed was the first in which the applicants/foster carers remained present for the panel members’ discussions and deliberations. Panel members told us that they had raised reservations about certain situations where they felt it would not be appropriate for the prospective carers to remain present for the discussions. This had been accepted by the responsible senior manager and changes to the policy agreed in such circumstances.
- A more robust system for considering annual reviews. Until recently annual reviews had not been undertaken consistently. The responsible senior manager had sought to bring these back into line by presenting every foster carer’s annual review to panel over the course of 2018, with an expectation in future that the first annual review would be presented to panel and at three yearly intervals thereafter.

The panel is chaired by an independent person with experience of fostering and social care. The panel had representation as required with a good balance of skills, experience and diversity of backgrounds. We observed a fostering panel which considered annual reviews and a combined assessment of connected persons. The panel was well conducted with the chair ensuring that all panel members contributed in the discussions. We saw that panel members were confident to address difficult issues. Opportunities were provided to foster carers to make suggestions or observations regarding the assessment process or their experience of the panel or of being a foster carer for Pembrokeshire. We met with the panel chair and panel members separately who confirmed that annual appraisals routinely took place and that they had been offered a number of training opportunities over the previous two years. These included roles and responsibilities of a panel member, an overview of the ‘skills to foster course’ for prospective foster carers, open panels and working with refugees. Panel members told us that they felt the panel provided for a “solid, robust system” for good quality decisions regarding the approval of foster carers. Overall the

fostering panel promotes safe, secure placements through robust decision making and quality assurance.

A structure is in place for management oversight of the service. Quality assurance and governance mechanisms are in place but are not consistently effective in ensuring quality. However, action is being taken by the service to improve quality assurance arrangements and service delivery. Formal arrangements were in place throughout children's services to ensure management oversight and to quality assure the services being provided. These included regular audits of compliance and practice standards. However, it was evident that, for much of the period since our last inspection in 2016, there had been little progress made in addressing where there were regulatory breaches or in progressing recommendations made at that time. For example, it was noted at our previous inspection that a number of foster carer annual reviews were outstanding from 2014 onwards. We therefore required that the team manager and service manager, in post at that time should ensure that overdue foster carer annual reviews were completed as a matter of urgency, with future reviews to be completed within timescale. We found, however, that very limited progress had been made for most of the intervening period, with approximately 75% of reviews up to three years out of date prior to the appointment of the current service manager in October 2017. We were pleased, therefore, to see that action had subsequently been taken by the service manager to address the backlog. We were advised that assistance had been sought from the IRO service in the short term, with a view to completing outstanding reviews by the end of 2018. However, given the pressure on the capacity of the fostering service, we considered that close scrutiny through the service's quality assurance arrangements would be required to ensure that future reviews remained within timescale. We found that the review process did not meet legal requirements, as the views of foster carers and looked after children had not been consistently sought and taken account of. Although the shortfalls had been recognised by the team manager and service manager, further work was needed to fully address this matter.

We found that the changes of personnel at all levels had impacted on service delivery and improvement, and although the fostering service had access to a range of quality assurance measures, performance information appeared to be limited. For example, records showed that although 9% of children (figures as at 31/01/18) had experienced three or more unplanned placement endings (and some children had experienced considerably more), arrangements were not in place to collate and analyse these findings to determine and improve outcomes for children being fostered. The latest quality of care review was also seen to have lacked analysis. Neither did the report evidence that the views of children and foster carers had informed the report. It was positive to see, therefore, that the development and delivery of an improvement plan to achieve compliance with legislation had been included within the children's services 2018/19 plan and we saw that action was being taken, to address the identified service shortfalls. From our discussions with the fostering team manager and from documentation viewed, it was evident that management oversight of the service had increased, with new arrangements in place including additional checks on the quality of assessments, increased oversight of the progression of children's



care and support plans by the IRO service, a timescale within which to address the backlog of foster carer reviews, changes to fostering panel, and arrangements in place to consult regularly with foster carers. We noted that foster carers had informed managers of the service that they did not feel sufficiently supported in the event of an allegation or complaint being made against them. We saw that the team manager had consulted with foster carers and subsequently drawn up draft guidance which included several options for foster carers regarding support arrangements. Further improvement is required to ensure that the service is able to demonstrate that managers consistently have a clear line of sight on service delivery and that quality assurance and governance arrangements are robust. However, there is evidence of an improving service.

## **4. Improvements required and recommended following this inspection**

### **4.1 Areas of non compliance from previous inspections**

The following recommendations were made at our last inspection in respect of areas where the service did not meet legal requirements:

- The team manager and service manager should ensure that overdue foster carer annual reviews are completed as a matter of urgency, with future reviews to be completed within timescale
- The voice of the child should be consistently and clearly presented within the foster carer annual review process.

### **4.2 Recommendations for improvement**

During this inspection, we advised the registered person that improvements are needed in order to fully meet the legal requirements in relation to:

- Regulation 3(4); a copy of the children's guide should be provided to each child.
- Regulation 42 (1); 42(2) the establishment and maintenance of a system to monitor and improve the quality of the service; consultation with the full range of stakeholders and resulting analysis.
- Regulation 29 (2); 29(3)b Annual reviews of approval; an annual review of foster carers approval should be completed; To seek and take account of children, foster carers and placing authority representatives.

### **4.3 Further recommendations**

- Matching records should provide sufficient detail to evidence sound decision making; to include the potential impact of the placement on any existing children and vice versa. Also where gaps are identified in terms of matching, the fostering service should record how it intends to address these, for example, by way of training or support. (This recommendation was also made at our last inspection).
- Decisions regarding the exemption or variation in respect of foster carers' terms of approval should be presented to fostering panel in a timely manner.
- Foster carer agreements should be promptly updated following any change of approval status.

- Foster carers should be provided with the information they require so that identified risks and guidance regarding risk management, are communicated with a minimum of delay, when children are placed on an emergency basis
- The arrangements for out of hours support to foster carers to be reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose. (This recommendation was also made at our last inspection).
- Arrangements for children's participation in consultation processes regarding their experience of being fostered and in broader service matters should be strengthened.
- Additional advice and support for foster carers to continue to be sought by the service to help them to promote children's emotional well-being and placement stability.
- The service needs to continue to build on recruitment activity to improve the choice of placements for children and to ensure that they are well-matched with foster carers who are able to meet their needs.
- The expectations of the fostering service regarding training should be clearly set out in the foster carers' handbook and within the service's training policy. Training attended should accord with the expectations set out in these documents.
- Foster carers should have up to date individual learning and development plans which are based on their agreed learning needs and which inform their training activity for the forthcoming year.
- Foster carers to be provided with policies and procedures, which have been updated where necessary, to include current legislation, statutory guidance and good practice.
- The foster carers' handbook should be revised to ensure that foster carers have up to date information regarding legislation, statutory guidance, policies and procedures. Additional guidance to be included in respect of financial matters relating to children including the service's position on record keeping and the setting up of children's bank accounts.
- The team manager to continue to work towards the QCF 5 Management qualification, and to advise CIW on completion.
- The fostering service should consider Welsh Government's More Than Just Words' follow on strategic guidance for Welsh language in social care. All social care providers should include information on their level of Welsh language service provision in the statement of purpose and young person's guide and reflected in the annual review of the quality of care.

## 5. How we undertook this inspection

This was a full announced inspection and all three quality areas were considered. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors and took place over six days in September 2018. This inspection was undertaken concurrently with an inspection undertaken by Care Inspectorate Wales of Pembrokeshire County Council Children's Services.

The information used for this inspection was obtained by the following methods:

- We spoke with foster carers in focus groups and also four foster carers individually
- We spoke with a group of children who were looked after, and care leavers
- We spoke with the fostering team manager
- We spoke with the service manager
- We spoke with members of the fostering staff team
- We attended a presentation by the Head of Children's Services
- We sampled the files of fifteen children.
- We sampled the files of twelve foster carer households.
- We read the records of three placement / resource panel meetings
- We read the records of the last three fostering panel meetings
- We attended fostering panel
- We received six questionnaires from panel members
- We viewed a sample of the fostering service's paperwork including the statement of purpose, service plans, policies and procedures, information regarding complaints, quality of care review reports, quality assurance documents, foster carer assessment and annual review reports, a sample of staff files, training and supervision records.

Further information about what we do can be found on our website:

[www.careinspectorate.wales](http://www.careinspectorate.wales)

## About the service

Type of care provided	LA Fostering Service
Date of previous Care Inspectorate Wales inspection	14/01/2016; 26/01/2016; 27/01/2016; 28/01/2016
Dates of this Inspection visit(s)	03/09/2018; 05/09/2018; 06/09/2018; 14/09/2018; 19/09/2018; 16/09/2018
Operating Language of the service	English
Does this service provide the Welsh Language active offer?	This is a service that is working toward providing an 'Active Offer' of the Welsh language. The fostering team includes Welsh speaking staff, and some foster carers are also Welsh speaking. Staff are encouraged to speak Welsh within the workplace.
Additional Information:	