



# Inspection Report on

**Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Fostering Services**

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Ebbw Vale  
NP23 5LH**

**Date of Publication**

**Monday, 4 June 2018**

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## **Description of the service**

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council fostering service provides foster placements for children who are looked after by the local authority. Services provided include short / long term placements, respite, short breaks and connected care placements. There is a nominated individual to represent the authority. The team manager is Kevin Munroe. At the time of the inspection there were 71 children in placement with 57 local authority carers, and 45 children placed in connected placements.

## **Summary of our findings**

### **1. Overall assessment**

Children in stable placements are cared for by foster carers who provide children with good experiences and opportunities and are committed to supporting them achieve positive outcomes. Foster carers generally reported receiving a good level of support from their supervising social workers. We found a very positive and enthusiastic culture within the fostering service; this included the foster carers, staff within the fostering team, manager and senior managers. We received very positive comments from children about their carers.

The implementation of the revised Public Law Outline has placed an expectation upon the local authority to conclude care applications with the 26 week timescale. There has also been an increase in the number of looked after children and an increasing demand for 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 on the arrangements for the ongoing support provided to foster carers. However, the service is taking action to address these issues, with regional initiatives underway and additional resources for foster carer recruitment. Further action is required to ensure the effectiveness of the service's quality assurance arrangements in order to drive forward evidence-based, outcome focused service improvements.

### **2. Improvements**

- The service is working with neighbouring local authorities to improve service delivery through regional collaboration.
- The service has developed and is beginning to implement a new recruitment and retention strategy. A recruitment officer had been appointed to the team and there are plans to appoint additional professional carers to care for children with complex needs and provide parent and child placements.

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

Section four of this report sets out our recommendations to improve the service and the areas where the registered provider is not meeting legal requirements. These areas relate to quality assurance arrangements, including the role and responsibilities of fostering panel, monitoring arrangements for children's educational progress and foster carers' training. Recommendations are made in relation to the matching of children and foster carers, risk management and safe care arrangements, foster carer supervision, guidance, training and annual reviews, children's participation, fostering panel and the Welsh language.

# 1. Well-being

## Summary

In the main, children are able to develop positive attachments to foster carers who understand their needs and aim to provide a caring and nurturing environment. They are encouraged and supported to participate in a range of educational, social and leisure activities to promote their overall well-being and achieve positive well-being outcomes.

However, we found that improvements could be made in the documentation that carers received in order to further promote safe, individualised care to children.

## Our findings

Children are able to develop secure placements with foster carers who provide a caring and nurturing environment. We saw evidence of this through viewing a range of documentation and from talking to children, foster carers and staff. From sampling documentation we saw the following comments from children's social workers:

- *"X (foster carer) has had a positive relationship with Y's parents.... worked well with the GP. X has been amazing. X has been so supportive to Y's adopters and welcomed them into their home. Due to the care and love Y received from X, Y (the child) has moved on very quickly and easily."*
- *"A very warm and nurturing relationship."*
- *"The nurturing environment they have provided and their warm approach has been fundamental in supporting (the child) to develop relationships."*
- *"An extremely settled placement which equipped (the child) with all necessary skills to move on to adulthood."*

We also saw from viewing a foster carer's annual review documentation:

- An example of where a foster carer had contributed to life story work to help the child move on successfully.
- An example of photos of prospective adopters on display in a foster carer's home to familiarise children and facilitate the transition.
- Foster carers spending time at hospital before a baby was placed with them, to enable a bond to develop.
- Evidence of foster carers accommodating child's cultural needs in relation to food and language.

Children we spoke with were extremely positive about their carers. Examples of children's comments include:

- *“They are always there for me.”*
- *“If I have any worries, they will be there to help me.”*
- *“I can turn to my foster carer if I need anything.”*
- *“I have loads of activities and family time.”*
- *“They set boundaries and are fair.”*

We judge that children experience warmth, attachment and belonging.

Children’s physical and emotional health needs are supported and promoted effectively by the service. We saw from our review of documentation that supervising social workers ensured that health needs were addressed. We saw positive feedback from children’s social workers in relation to the support foster carers provided regarding health needs. For example one social worker had commented as part of a foster carer review that the foster carer was *“meeting X’s health and development needs on a daily basis”*. Another social worker had commented that the foster carer *“has always prioritised (the child’s) health”*. We received feedback from foster carers about the long waiting time for children to receive support from Child and Mental Health Services (CAMHS). However, it was evident that foster carers were strong advocates for children in this regard. Overall, we conclude that children’s health needs are met.

Children are encouraged and supported to achieve their educational potential taking into account their attainment and progress from the beginning of their placement. They experience well-being and a sense of achievement because they are able to access opportunities, follow interests and develop skills. We saw documentary evidence of children achieving well academically and of good school attendance. We learnt of a child who had gained a place at University. We saw feedback from an education coordinator who commented *“x has made a successful transition to mainstream education with the foster carers’ support”* and that the foster carers were *“working well with x’s teachers.”* It was evident that generally foster carers encourage attendance and engagement with education. A social worker told us that they thought a child’s foster carers were *“fabulous”* in terms of supporting a child educationally as they were undertaking GCSE exams. The fostering services reported good links with the looked after children education coordinator.

We saw a multitude of examples regarding children taking part in activities; such as attending youth club, swimming, kickboxing, attending scouts and young explorer groups. One foster carer told us about trips where they had taken children abroad on holiday. A child told us about how they enjoyed going away regularly at weekends with their foster carers to their holiday home. Another child told us how they enjoyed developing their interest in horse-riding and attending horse-shows at weekends. A foster carer told us that a child placed with them had been able to participate in the Special Olympics. We also saw that one child had undertaken a week long course to gain an NVQ qualification with the Fire and Rescue Service. Foster carers told us that the local authority held celebratory events

for children's achievements that these were generally for academic achievements, but that that foster carers themselves did not have the opportunity to nominate children for their achievements and that they would like to be able to do this. We found that the service could better evidence these positive outcomes for children, both in the supervision documentation they utilise with foster carers and in the annual reviews presented to panel. Children are supported to reach their educational potential, to develop interests and have positive leisure experiences, which in turn promotes their self esteem and contributes to their overall well-being.

Children do not always receive care from foster carers who are equipped with all they need to manage risk proportionately. Generally foster carers told us that they were provided with sufficient information about children prior to placement to enable them to make an informed decision about whether to accept a new child, unless children were placed on an emergency basis. However, we learnt that some foster carers did not receive written documentation that fully outlined a child's needs. One foster carer told us that they had the paperwork, but it was not completed comprehensively, although other foster carers told us that they did receive this. However, we found that foster carers did not routinely receive individualised risk assessments or safer care agreements for children placed. When the need for a placement was identified, the placement officer from the placement team generally discussed the placement request form with the potential foster carer at point of matching; but the foster carer did not necessarily receive documentation in relation to this. Safer care agreements were not put in place in relation to specific placements. A foster carer told us about a situation where they had provided a placement on an emergency basis and although the authority was aware of risks associated with the child's behaviour, the carers were not provided with this information prior to the child being placed. On a positive note, we saw that delegated authority agreements were generally in place so that foster carers could ensure that children had timely decisions about the activities that they could be involved in and so that foster carers could be clear about what permissions they were able to give, although one foster carer commented that they had to chase this. However, safer care plans / risk assessments need to be developed in tandem with these to support children and their foster carers. Foster carers should receive documentation that constitutes a foster placement agreement from the placing social worker which sets out their needs. Response was variable about whether foster carers received this in a timely manner. We conclude that the service cannot fully demonstrate that it promotes the safety and welfare of children at all times because of the lack of these documents, which would identify known risks to children and provide clear guidance and strategies for carers regarding individual risk management.

Children and young people are protected from abuse. There was a safeguarding policy and we saw that where safeguarding issues were raised, these were referred appropriately. Where it had been necessary to review a foster carer's approval, this had been presented to the service's foster panel for consideration. We conclude that children are protected. However, safeguarding could be further strengthened by ensuring safer care guidelines and risk assessments are established for each child placed, the service ensures that up to date

training in relation to safeguarding is undertaken by all foster carers and that quality assurance mechanisms are strengthened by the service, including the panel. Further information in relation to training and quality assurance can be found in subsequent sections of this report.

Children have a voice within the local authority. However; we found that the fostering service could strengthen its consultation processes with children. The National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) has been commissioned regionally to provide an advocacy and independent visitor service and the local authority has also commissioned the organisation to conduct a young people's survey, in relation to an action plan that they have developed. Although the views of children were being represented by their participation in their looked after children reviews, we found that children's views about their care could be captured more fully by the service. Foster care reviews are an ideal opportunity to gather children's views about their care; when we sampled case files we found that there was little evidence of these views being proactively gathered by the placement team. We also saw that social work views were not always obtained in foster carer reviews. We conclude that children who are placed with foster carers should be encouraged more proactively by the service to 'have a say' as part of the annual review of carers as these reviews are an important mechanism for improving the quality of foster care.



## **2. Care and Support**

### **Summary**

We found that children are placed with foster carers who are enthusiastic and proud of their work. They are motivated and want to make a positive difference to the lives of children. Action is being taken to recruit additional foster carers to meet the needs of children with increasingly complex needs. Foster carers have been robustly recruited and they generally spoke positively about the support they receive from the placement team. However, the decision making process regarding the frequency of supervision needs to be better evidenced. Access to training is variable, and in some instances does not meet legislative requirements. Further action is required to ensure that foster carers are suitably trained to meet the needs of children. The support and training of connected foster carers needs to be reviewed.

### **Our findings**

The recruitment and assessment of foster carers is thorough. The increase in court directed assessments of connected persons has impacted on service delivery and development. Recruitment activity has therefore been low over recent years with only three generic foster carers recruited in the previous twelve months, despite an increase in the number of looked after children with increasingly complex needs. The recruitment of additional foster carers, able to meet the needs of these children, was recognised to be a priority and we saw that a recruitment strategy had been developed; action points included the appointment of a part time recruitment officer to the placement team (from January 2018).

We saw that prospective generic foster carers were invited to attend “skills to foster” training prior to making an application to foster. The training was delivered by the staff team (or by a neighbouring authority, if necessary, to avoid delay), with input from experienced foster carers, and aimed to provide a realistic picture of fostering. Although connected persons were not invited to attend the pre-approval training, the subsequent assessment process for both groups was seen to be robust. The majority of assessments were undertaken by the placement team and sampled reports (Form F’s) were detailed, well analysed and well presented. We were informed by the panel chair that the quality of assessment reports was generally high. There had occasionally been issues with the standard of assessments produced by independent social workers, but this had been raised through panel’s quality assurance process. We found that children’s well-being is promoted through safe recruitment and assessment processes.

Foster carers are supervised and supported by the service. The foster carers’ handbook made reference to the monthly supervision of foster carers, though this was not consistently evidenced at inspection. We were told that foster carers’ views had been sought regarding the proposed change to less frequent supervision on an assessed basis and some

experienced foster carers told us that they did not mind having less frequent supervision. However, we did not know whether this view was shared by all foster carers. There were no records which documented the rationale for the reduction being made in relation to individual foster carers, or how the effectiveness of the new arrangements would be monitored. We were informed by the team manager that there was some delay in supervision notes being added to the service's electronic records and we recommended that records should be promptly made available to foster carers, to ensure clarity regarding agreed actions. Sampled supervision records showed that foster carers were able to discuss the progress of the children being cared for, and that they were provided with guidance and support from their supervising social workers. Foster carers told us that they generally felt well supported by the staff team. One carer told us: *"I would not leave Blaenau Gwent because of the support and help they give me. They show they care. They are interested in the child's well-being. Also my link worker cares about our well-being. We feel valued. We had positive feedback in our annual review and we appreciate that"*. Additional advice and information was provided to foster carers by the fostering team in bi-monthly information sessions, together with a new newsletter. Generic foster carers had also set up their own independently run support group, which also met on a bi-monthly basis. Children are cared for by foster carers who feel adequately supported and supervised by the service.

Foster carers are encouraged and supported to gain relevant qualifications. However, the quality of foster carer training is variable. Foster carers' access to and attendance at training is also variable. We saw that foster carer payments were based on a three tier banding system, with all band three foster carers holding a relevant Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) diploma. We were advised by the team manager, however, that although foster carers would continue to be encouraged and supported to gain relevant qualifications, arrangements were underway to respond with more flexibility to new foster carers who might have different qualifications or specific knowledge and experience.

The service's statement of purpose outlined the core training programme for foster carers, post approval. This included training on understanding attachment and trauma, child protection, safer caring and first aid. Training was delivered in partnership with a neighbouring local authority, and whilst some of the courses were seen to have value, foster carers told us that the content of courses was not always directly relevant, for example training on record keeping was not suited to the local authority's recording system. Foster carers told us that they were expected to attend the core training modules every three years to refresh and reinforce their knowledge. However, experienced foster carers told us that repeating the same courses was not beneficial, and felt that greater emphasis should be placed on extending their learning and development. We saw that some foster carers had accessed further training, with the national "confidence in care" course attended by twenty four carers. Very positive feedback was received, with a number of foster carers commenting on the training having had a direct impact on their day to day practice of caring for children. However, we also noted that some foster carers had not attended any training within the previous twelve months. One annual review showed that a foster carer had not

attended any training since 2014. Although some mitigating circumstances were reported, there was little evidence of this issue having been robustly addressed, as the same recommendation, i.e. to repeat core training modules had been made in consecutive reviews. Attendance at training was clearly difficult for some foster carers, particularly if they were caring for young children or in employment outside the home. We were advised by one foster carer that they had taken leave to attend a particular course which was subsequently cancelled. Travelling times and distances to venues was also an issue for some foster carers. We noted that a variety of on-line training was available; comments from foster carers regarding this format were mixed.

In discussion with the team manager, we were told that training for foster carers was organised by the training department. It was evident that the service did not have a clear overview of training undertaken by foster carers or a training profile for individual carers. When asked for specific information, the team manager ascertained that only twenty three foster carers had up to date safeguarding training. An action plan was therefore drawn up to address this issue and was underway prior to publication of this report. It was also evident in discussion that the expectations with regards to training in respect of 'couples' who foster were unclear. Foster carers would benefit from increased opportunities to maximise their learning and development, in order to further improve outcomes for children in their care. In order to provide the most appropriate opportunities, the service needs to increase its understanding of foster carers' training needs. We have judged that the service does not meet legal requirements in relation to safeguarding training.

Connected person foster carers have limited opportunities to access training and support appropriate to their circumstances. Prospective connected foster carers were generally subject to a court directed unified assessment, to determine whether they could care for a child already known to them. These assessments were considered by panel and the agency decision maker (ADM), as were generic foster carers. However, they were not expected, or invited, to attend the pre-approval "skills to foster" training. If approved as foster carers, they were provided with supervision and also an annual review, they were not expected to attend scheduled training courses, and there was no bespoke training being offered for that group. Although they were able to attend the existing information sharing group, few attended. Therefore we found that children are not always cared for by foster carers who access regular learning and development opportunities. Connected foster carers would benefit from increased opportunities to maximise their learning and development, in order to further improve outcomes for children in their care.

We found that children are generally placed with suitable foster carers who are identified through a prescribed matching process which contributes to the stability of their foster placements. However, matching information does not always provide sufficient detail to fully evidence appropriate matching. We saw one example where the minutes of a matching meeting had stated that a child should not be placed with other children, but the child was subsequently placed on an emergency basis with foster carers who were already caring for other children. The child was also seen to have had three foster placements within the first

six weeks of becoming looked after. Nevertheless, we also saw, from records viewed, that a number of very successful placements had been made, with children remaining with their foster carers throughout their childhood, and in some cases beyond, under 'When I am Ready' arrangements. This was confirmed in our discussions with foster carers, with a number of examples given of ongoing relationships maintained with children previously looked after, well into their adult lives.

The matching of children and foster carers is constrained by the limited number of foster placements. However, we saw examples where the authority did not hesitate to look outside its own service in order to commission an appropriate match for children, even where there were in-house vacancies. Discussions with the manager and staff within the fostering team demonstrated that they knew their foster carers well, and had a good understanding of their knowledge and skills. However, it was recognised by the service that the number of foster carers was insufficient to meet the demand for foster placements, particularly for older children and those with complex needs. We were told by the team manager that they initially met with the placement officer and children's social workers to discuss potential matches, with a subsequent discussion undertaken with foster carers considered to be an appropriate match. Minutes of matching meetings evidenced discussions with regard to the needs of children requiring placements and the ability of available foster carers to meet those needs, though placement choice was often limited. The minutes did not consistently document the particular skills and experience of foster carers, and consequently, it was not always clear why a particular match was being made. For example, the matching of one young person with additional health needs did not evidence that the foster carers had the skills and experience to meet those needs or whether additional training or support might be required. The minutes did not clearly evidence that the impact on children living in the foster home (fostered or birth children) of a new child being placed with their foster carers had been considered. We saw that any exemption to approval, in order to make a match, was considered very carefully in the light of recommendations received from the Independent Review Mechanism. A majority of children experience stable placements through appropriate matching. However, matching information, including the minutes of matching meetings should provide sufficient detail to evidence that matches are appropriate.

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

#### **Summary**

The fostering service benefits from a committed staff group, which is motivated to achieve positive outcomes for children. However, the implementation of the revised Public Law Outline has placed pressure on the service, resulting in an increased focus on the assessment of connected foster carers. There has also been an overall increase in numbers of looked after children, without the service, to date, being able to recruit sufficient foster carers to meet demand in house. There is evidence of action being taken by the service to better meet the needs of children requiring foster placements, including regional initiatives with neighbouring authorities and additional resources being targeted on foster carer recruitment. The service generally operates according to its statement of purpose, and there is evidence of children experiencing stable placements and achieving good outcomes. However, the quality of the service is not being effectively monitored and assured. Consequently, information about service delivery and outcomes for children is not analysed, and cannot, then, be used to drive forward evidence-based, outcome-focused service improvements.

#### **Our findings**

Children, families and foster carers experience a service which generally operates in accordance with its statement of purpose, though additional information about the service still needs to be updated and made available. The service's statement of purpose was updated in January 2018. The document outlined the ethos, aim, and objectives of the service, together with information about the management and staff team, becoming a foster carer 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 provided an accurate account of the day to day operation of the service. However, additional service information, including policies, procedures and the foster carers' handbook did not provide up to date information and guidance. The foster carers' handbook was dated 2013 and did not therefore reflect subsequent changes in legislation and statutory guidance. We were told by the team manager that, with an increasing focus on regional collaboration, a new foster carers' handbook was being developed in partnership with a neighbouring authority. Policies and procedures were also being revised on a regional basis. Children generally receive the service described in the statement of purpose, which promotes their well-being. 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 should be provided.

Quality assurance mechanisms are in place for the service, however, these are not utilised effectively to ensure quality and inform service improvement. For example, in order to provide the most appropriate opportunities, the service needs to increase its understanding of foster carers' training needs. The service had access to a range of quality assurance

measures which could be used to collect and analyse information, in order to determine and to improve outcomes for children being fostered. These measures included foster carer records, looked after children review minutes, foster carers' annual reviews, minutes of pre-disruption meetings, feedback from fostering panel and the service's annual quality of care review. However, although there was evidence, at inspection, of some historical data collection, for example a 2014 analysis of pre-disruption data, a 2016 survey of a small group of foster carers and an annual quality of care review completed in April 2017, recent performance information was not available. Therefore, we found, that although there had been 29 unplanned endings of foster placement within the previous twelve months, the information had not been collated and analysed, to inform future placement planning and improve outcomes for children. The latest quality of care report did not evidence that the views had been sought of children placed, any foster parent or prospective foster parent, the local authority and persons working for the agency. Discussion with the team manager demonstrated that the service did not have a clear overview of foster carers' training profiles and current training needs. We also noted that a potential safeguarding matter had not been identified prior to our inspection, although the assessment report had been considered by the team manager, panel and the appointed agency decision maker. We were so concerned about the lack of interrogation regarding this matter that we have deemed that the service had not fully met legal requirements in relation to this.

The local authority undertakes monitoring and analysis of educational outcomes in relation to looked after children generally. Although we have reported good educational outcomes for children placed, it would be positive for the fostering service itself to establish a procedure for monitoring the school attendance, progress and educational attainment of children placed with foster carers as part of improving its overall quality assurance monitoring and analysis; with the aim of further improving the educational outcomes of children placed with foster carers.

The placement team had experienced a challenging period over the previous twelve months, with personnel changes at team and senior management level. However, the appointment of the current service manager in April 2017 and the team manager in September 2017 had provided more stability at management level and was creating an opportunity for the team to move forward. We were told by the team manager that an action plan had been drawn up to address some of the identified service difficulties and identify areas requiring further development, for example, management of connected persons' assessments and foster carer recruitment. Emphasis had been placed on collaborative working with neighbouring local authorities and with the national fostering framework (NFF). This work was being supported through the appointment of a regional manager through the NFF, to explore regional ways of working in order to improve service delivery, with Blaenau Gwent as the host authority. These planned improvements were positive, but could not be seen as a substitute for the analysis of current performance data, and the collection of the views of children and other stakeholders. The panel quality assurance arrangements require clarity regarding the formal mechanisms in place for feedback to and from panel, and how information is collated and analysed to drive forward service (including panel)

improvement. Quality assurance mechanisms are not used to drive forward evidence-based, outcome-focused service improvements and we have judged that legal requirements have not been met in relation to this.

In general, the fostering panel promotes safe, secure placements through robust decision making and quality assurance. However, panel membership needs to be strengthened and formal appraisal undertaken. We attended the fostering panel during our inspection, and also viewed previous fostering panel minutes. Information provided for inspection demonstrated that the panel chair had substantial experience of local authority children's services including fostering services. However, there had been changes in relation to the membership of panel, and at the time of our inspection, its membership did not comply with legislation. We advised, therefore, that steps should be taken by the service to identify an additional member of panel who would meet the criterion in respect of foster carer expertise. We were informed by the team manager prior to publication of this report that a suitable member had been appointed; also that the current panel member would continue to serve as an independent member so that their expertise could be retained. We advised that, to accord with national minimum standards, members of panel should be appointed who had expertise in education, health and one member who had previously been placed with foster carers or whose child had been placed with foster carers.

Our examination of panel minutes and observation of discussions between panel members, prospective foster carers and attending social workers generally evidenced robust scrutiny of agenda items, the active participation of panel members and sound decision-making. We did note, however, that on occasion, minutes would benefit from greater detail regarding panel discussions, with comments attributable to individual panel members. We viewed a sample of panel minutes which demonstrated that the recommendations of panel had not been accepted by the agency decision maker (ADM) on two occasions. On balance, in these instances, we regarded this to be an effective demonstration of the effectiveness of the role of ADM within the approval process. However, management acknowledged that there were broader lessons to be learnt relating to one court directed connected persons' assessment and subsequent panel approval where there were safeguarding issues. Senior managers were in the process of addressing this at the time of the inspection with a view to having a dialogue with their legal team and the judiciary in relation to the court directed connected persons' assessment process.

We saw that attendees at panel were asked to provide feedback regarding their experience, and panel was seen to have taken action to improve its function, for example, in relation to assessing the competencies of connected carers. The chair told us that work was being undertaken on a regional basis in respect of developing performance indicators for fostering panels. We also saw that the fostering panel chair provided written feedback (in consultation with panel members) to the service after each meeting, though it was not clear how, or if this information was being used to inform and improve service delivery. The panel had undertaken joint training sessions with the placement team, focusing on a range of topics including the experience of a care leaver and connected persons'

assessments, with further training planned for April 2018. However, appraisals had not been completed within the previous twelve months. The panel chair told us that this matter had been discussed with the team manager, with a view to appraisals being undertaken shortly. These appraisals would help to identify panel's training and development needs. In general, the fostering panel promotes safe, secure placements through robust decision making and quality assurance. However, the lack of panel identifying and interrogating a potential safeguarding matter is a concern and we have deemed that the service has not fully met legal requirements in relation to this.

Foster carers are not always able to have a full understanding of their commitments to the agency. This is because connected carers did not have written contracts with the service. We did not see any 'foster care agreements' on file and the manager confirmed that these agreements were not in place for connected carers and it was not clear whether they were being put in place any longer for generic foster carers. Also, where they were in place, these had not been updated as changes had taken place in relation to foster carers' terms of approval. We conclude that the provider has not met the legal requirements in relation to this.



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

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

### **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:

- Quality assurance arrangements – the establishment and maintenance of a system to monitor and improve the quality of the service (Regulation 42 (1)) and consultation with the full range of stakeholders and resulting analysis and full analysis and action in relation to placement endings (Regulation 42 (2)).
- Training for foster carers: (Regulation 17 (1)).
- The fostering panel must consider and take into account all of the information passed to it to ensure that children are safeguarded. (Regulation 21 (1A) (a)).
- The fostering service should establish a procedure for monitoring the school attendance, progress and educational attainment of children placed with foster carers. (Regulation 16 (2) (a)).

### **Further recommendations:**

- Ensure that children's views and social workers' views are captured and considered at foster carer reviews.
- Review the support, and training arrangements for connected carers to ensure that their needs are appropriately met.
- Review risk assessment and safe caring processes and ensure that foster carers promptly have necessary documentation to reinforce discussions in relation to strategies to provide safe care.
- Where two adults in one household are approved as joint carers, both should successfully complete training
- The record of matching meetings should provide sufficient detail to evidence sound decision-making. To include the potential impact of the placement on any existing children. 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.
- Expedite the implementation of up to date policies and procedures.
- Expedite the production of the foster carer handbook so that carers have all information regarding policies and procedures.
- The service should be able to clearly evidence that the level of supervision and support matches the needs of individual foster carers. Arrangements should be put in place for the appraisal of fostering panel members.

- Action should be taken to increase the breadth of experience of fostering panel members.
- The minutes of panel discussions should consistently evidence the process of decision making.
- 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 five days in February 2018. This inspection was undertaken concurrently with an inspection undertaken by Care Inspectorate Wales of Blaenau Gwent 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 three foster carers individually.
- We spoke with a group of children and a group of care leavers.
- We spoke with the fostering service manager.
- We attended case tracking interviews with the social worker of one children placed and their team managers.
- We sampled the files of nine children.
- We sampled the files of ten foster carers.
- We read four foster carers' form F assessment
- We read the records of the last three fostering panel meetings.
- We attended the approval panel.
- We attended interviews with the advocacy service.
- We attended an interview with the local authority education safeguarding manager and the lead officer - inclusion.
- We viewed a sample of the agency's paperwork including the statement of purpose, quality review reports, foster carer assessment and review reports, a sample of staff files and supervision records.
- We viewed information in relation to the Independent Review Mechanism.

We issued questionnaires to:

- 24 foster carer households, none were returned.
- 9 Panel members, none were returned.

Further information about what we do can be found on our website [www.cssiw.org.uk](http://www.cssiw.org.uk)



## About the service

Type of care provided	Local Authority Fostering Service
Date of previous CSSIW inspection	10 February 2016
Dates of this Inspection visits	20, 21 February and 6, 7 and 8 March 2018. Feedback meeting on 27 March 2018.
Operating Language of the service	English
Does this service provide the Welsh Language active offer?	No
<b>Additional Information:</b>  This is a service that does not provide an 'Active Offer' of the Welsh language. It does not anticipate, identify or meet the Welsh language needs of people /children who use, or intend to use their service. We recommend that the service provider considers Welsh Government's ' <i>More Than Just Words follow on strategic guidance for Welsh language in social care</i> '.  	