



Inspection Report on

Foster Wales, Neath Port Talbot Local Authority Fostering Service

**Neath Civic Centre
Neath
SA11 3QZ**

Date Inspection Completed

16th, 17th and 18th July 2024

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About Neath Port Talbot CBC Fostering Service

Type of care provided	LA Fostering Service
Registered Provider	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Registered places	Not applicable
Language of the service	English
Previous Care Inspectorate Wales inspection	This is the first inspection carried out since the introduction of RISCA
Does this service promote Welsh language and culture?	This service is working towards providing an 'Active Offer' of the Welsh language and demonstrates a significant effort to promoting the use of the Welsh language and culture.

Summary

Foster Wales Neath Port Talbot is a regulated service provided by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.

The fostering team staff and managers are suitably qualified and experienced and registered with Social Care Wales.

All evidence gathered at this inspection indicates the fostering service is well developed and effective in fulfilling its role in safeguarding children and promoting their well-being.

Children are suitably placed and matched with foster carers who are trained, supported and committed to their roles. They are supported to be healthy, to attend school, to have fun, to develop relationships and to prepare for their futures.

The adequacy of the arrangements for the staffing, management and oversight of the service is very good. Staff retention and staff motivation is very good, and all evidence indicates the staff and managers are skilled and effective in their roles.

Systems to oversee the delivery and the ongoing development of the service are good.

Some systems need to be better aligned with regulations and guidance and some improvements are necessary to capture and understand the voice and the views of children and others, within written records to inform the ongoing development of the service.

Well-being

Children are involved in planned introductions to foster carers, where possible and receive information about their rights and what they can expect in their placements.

They are safeguarded and encouraged to share their views and their feelings about anything they wish to discuss. They have opportunities to take part in rights focussed discussion groups, experiential activities, and to contribute their views within local authority forums and wider. Records show all foster carers receive safeguarding training and mainstream and kinship carers, confirm they understand their responsibility to speak out and report any concerns about the safety of children. Where safeguarding concerns have arisen, records show that appropriate action has been taken to mitigate risk and reduce the likelihood of reoccurrence.

Children's voices are heard and listened to. Regular supervisory visits are made to foster carers and records show that children are routinely asked about their well-being and the care and support they receive. They are also consulted within their own review meetings and their foster carers' annual reviews. Foster carers, fostering team social workers, children's social workers and independent reviewing officers (IROs) demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of individual children's individual needs and circumstances.

Children take part in a range of social and leisure activities to keep them fit and healthy, to have fun and to make friends with other children. Many attend activity clubs and enjoy holiday breaks with their foster carers in the UK and abroad.

Children attend school or training placements, and foster carers told us how they advocate for them to ensure their needs are understood at school so they can get the right support to meet their needs.

Children are supported when preparing for adulthood and when leaving their placements. They have opportunities to have driving lessons and are supported to compile photograph albums of memorable occasions and certificates of their achievements. Feedback from children's family members we consulted with indicates the support their children receive from their foster carers is excellent.

Care and Support

Children are placed with foster carers with the necessary skills, experience and guidance to provide care and support in line with their care and support plans. The rationale to determine and confirm matching between children and foster carers is clear in most cases we reviewed but not in all instances.

Children have access to general and specialist services to promote and maintain their physical and mental health. Foster carers have access to training and advice, including specialist clinical advice to help them provide children the right care to achieve their personal goals and outcomes.

We saw that care and support plans are suitably detailed and include assessments of children's needs and any associated risks or vulnerabilities.

Children are encouraged to contribute to their review meetings and IROs meet and consult with them, prior to their reviews to discuss their well-being, the quality of the care and support they receive and if they need support or advocacy to express their wishes and feelings at their meetings.

Children are supported to maintain and develop family relationships, in line with their care and support plans. Foster carers conveyed a clear understanding of the importance of understanding children's family dynamics and relationships, prior to and during their placements. Feedback from children's family members indicates that foster carers develop effective partnership relationships with them, which they value and appreciate.

Considerable effort is made to achieve consistency for children through the implementation of a trauma informed ethos, within the fostering service, the wider local authority and local schools.

Some foster carers are Welsh speaking so can provide a service in Welsh where required. Placement sustainability is good, and some foster carers told us about the continuing support they provide for children after they have left their foster placements.

Environment

The local authority has suitable premises and facilities for the effective operation of the fostering service.

Fostering service staff and managers have easy access to meet with children's social workers, IROs and other relevant teams, who are based in the same offices.

Their offices provide suitable arrangements for the safe storage of records and a range of meeting rooms.

We confirmed that any necessary premises and safety checks are carried out by the fostering service, within foster carer assessments, supervisory visits, and foster carer reviews.

Leadership and Management

The leadership, management and governance of the fostering service is very good. The fostering staff team has considerable relevant experience, and all staff are registered with Social Care Wales.

The statement of purpose provides a range of information about the fostering service and provides additional information in separate guides for children and foster carers respectively. It does not include all of the information required by the regulations and needs to be revised accordingly. For instance, it does not make clear any arrangements in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity or how children are to be consulted about the operation of the fostering service. It refers to various policies with cross reference to relevant regulations, but this does not include reference to Welsh Government guidance (Reducing restrictive practices framework) applicable in childcare, education, health and social care settings.

Systems are in place to monitor, review and inform the ongoing improvement of the service but these need further development. The most recent quality of care review report is generally comprehensive and reflects the context of the fostering service alongside other services which are provided and or commissioned by the local authority for children. It includes updates on progress in relation to areas identified as needing further development within previous reviews and evidence of monitoring the performance of the fostering service in achieving an aim of the local authority to reduce number of children who are looked after. It also includes an evaluation of the need for additional services including residential services for children.

Whilst emphasising the importance of listening to the views and voice of children in this and other documents, there are just two quotations from children in the quality-of-care review. Various systems have been created for seeking feedback about the fostering service from children and or other stakeholders, but there is little evidence in the review of any systematic collation and analysis of what they have to say, to inform the ongoing development of the service.

It does not provide evidence of the educational attendance and attainment of children placed within the fostering service. There is no direct referencing in the review about the extent to which the operational objectives set out in the statement of purpose have been achieved. It does not include reference to the findings of other reviews required by regulation, including reviews of the adequacy of resources to provide the fostering service or of records in relation to concerns, complaints, safeguarding, and inspection findings.

Assessments of prospective foster carers are suitably detailed, thorough and insightful.

We confirmed that supervisory visits, including unannounced visits to foster carers take place as and when necessary.

Feedback from kinship and mainstream foster carers about being part of Foster Wales Neath Port Talbot is very positive. They told us they have good support and training, and they value the quality and the continuity of support they receive from their supervising social workers. Several made particular reference to staff providing training and specialist guidance, saying they are creative and flexible in how they fulfil their roles. They also told us the support networks they have developed with other foster carers are invaluable.

Foster carer reviews take place as necessary and include the views of children and consideration of the ongoing suitability of their placements. We discussed the benefit of foster carer reviews being carried out by an independent social worker and managers told us this is something they are considering. Some foster carers told us they are expected to support children when completing review forms about their placements and suggested they should have independent support to do this.

Some leisure activities are arranged by the local authority and foster carers have free access to local authority sports and leisure clubs and swimming pools. Some foster carers told us about particular challenges which include providing social and leisure opportunities for children in school holiday periods. They said the allowances they receive could be better and in particular if they take children on holidays. Some suggested that arrangements could be made to help transport children to leisure activities.

The chair of the fostering panel brings considerable experience to their role. Records of panel meetings confirm quoracy at each meeting and include the reasons for its recommendations. Feedback from reviewing social workers confirm that effort is made at panel to value the effort made by foster carers when they are attending. Records show that the panel membership is in line with regulations, although the panel chair told us they plan to improve diversity of panel membership and to recruit a panel member with care experience. Annual appraisal has been carried out in relation to some but not all panel members.

Managers responsible for the delivery and oversight of the service are suitably qualified and experienced and effective in their roles. Foster carers and fostering team members told us their managers are always available to provide advice and support and they have confidence in their ability and integrity. Feedback about the fostering service, from children's social workers and IROs is also very positive.

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.

Area(s) for Improvement

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

	inspection	
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