

Cuffe And Lacey Fostering

Burnley Business Centre, 2 Empire Way, Liverpool Road, Burnley, Lancashire BB12 6HH

Assurance visit

Information about this independent fostering agency

Cuffe and Lacey Fostering is a privately-owned fostering agency. The agency was registered in June 2020. At the time of this visit, no children were placed and no foster carers were approved. Two sets of foster carers are undergoing the assessment process.

The agency will provide emergency, short-term, long-term and parent and child placements. The agency is part of a wider organisation that offers other services including specialist therapeutic life story work, children's rights work, play therapy and support for family contact.

The registered manager has been in post since the agency was registered.

Visit dates: 1 to 2 December 2020

Previous inspection date: Not previously inspected

Previous inspection judgement: Not previously inspected

Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the visit

The care of children

Having been registered earlier than anticipated, the agency is at the very early stages of operation. Therefore, the agency is assessing foster carers at this point, with a view to the first fostering panel to take place in May 2021, to consider foster carer applications for approval.

The quality of the assessment and training provided so far indicates that children's needs and views are central to this agency's work. Foster carers spoken to are happy and confident in the assessment process and commented on the professionalism and expertise of the assessor.

One set of experienced carers have been given bespoke training on skills to foster as part of their assessment process which they referred to as 'excellent'. Their family member has also received therapeutic life story training. This reflects the agency's ethos of supporting children to understand their background and maintain links with birth family where possible and appropriate.

When children are placed with carers in the future, the manager described plans to ensure that both birth and foster children are seen regularly on their own, where possible, by supervising social workers. Young people will also be able input their views directly on the agency's electronic recording system. The electronic recording system is being developed so that the manager can gather the views and wishes of children and monitor outcomes collectively.

The agency has signed up to professional fostering memberships and also to an initiative called the 'Care Leavers and Care Experienced Pledge' to demonstrate their commitment to meeting the needs of looked after children.

The safety of children

Fostering assessment work so far indicates that children's emotional and physical safety is taken seriously. One assessment is in its late stages of completion and demonstrates that processes are adhered to in a thorough manner. The manager responds to feedback from staff and potential carers and fine tunes procedures or makes necessary changes. For example, the application form had a question missing in relation to applicants' birth children not living at home which has now been addressed.

There have been no safeguarding notifications submitted since the agency's registration. There are clear policies and procedures in place in relation to safeguarding and children going missing for staff to follow.

The registered manager is the designated safeguarding lead for the agency and is seeking to identify suitable training for this role.

Leaders and managers

Leaders and managers have set up this agency with a strong ethos of placing children's needs at the centre. They are highly experienced professionals in their field and are keen to use their knowledge and skills to improve outcomes for looked after children. Staffing wise, there has been little change since the registration began. As the agency grows in line with their current foster carer recruitment strategy, the manager seeks to appoint supervising social workers.

Managers are progressing the agency slowly and carefully, in accordance with the business development plan. A panel with diverse membership is in place, although recruitment is on-going to expand membership further, ready for the anticipated start date.

Two commissioning partnerships have included the agency within their procurement contract framework and are pleased with the responses to their queries so far.

The impact of COVID-19 and associated restrictions has been significant, particularly in relation to in-person visiting which is always the agency's preferred option. The agency has adapted to undertaking virtual visits where necessary. When face-to-face visits have taken place, appropriate precautions are taken such as the wearing of face masks or outside meetings, to ensure everybody's safety.

The manager has demonstrated robust quality assurance and oversight of assessment work. Currently this work is undertaken by the agency's director and the registered manager, both of whom are highly experienced and qualified social workers. While regular and informal consultation and supervision occurs outside of the quality assurance process, planned formal supervision is not yet fully in place.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Each fostering service has a designated person, who is a senior manager, responsible for managing allegations. The designated person has responsibility for liaising with the LADO and for keeping the subject of the allegation informed of progress during and after the investigation. (NMS 22.5)

In particular, for the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) to attend DSL training.

- Staff have access to support and advice and are provided with regular supervision by appropriately qualified and experienced staff. (NMS 24.4)

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: 2592566

Registered provider: Cuffe And Lacey Associates Limited

Registered provider address: Keenan Chartered Accountants, 43 Derbe Road, Lytham St. Annes, Lancashire FY8 1NJ

Responsible individual: Felicity Lacey

Registered manager: Chelsea-Anne Stanworth

Inspector

Sarah Canto, Social Care Inspector

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