

Safehouses Fostering

Safehouses North Limited

The Fleece, 41 Oldham Road, Denshaw, Oldham OL3 5SS

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Safehouses Fostering is a small fostering agency that recruits, approves and supports a range of carers who provide short-, medium- and long-term care for children of all ages.

The agency is owned by Five Rivers Child Care Limited. This is a national independent childcare agency providing integrated care packages of fostering, residential, education and assessment and therapy services across England.

At the time of this inspection, there were 29 approved fostering households with 52 children living with foster carers.

The manager registered with Ofsted in May 2025.

Inspection dates: 2 to 4 February 2026

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 1 August 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children, foster carers and staff feel well supported and valued in the agency. They speak positively about being part of the Safehouses community and consistently report a strong family feel. Communication across the agency is effective and inclusive, helping everyone stay informed and connected with the wider organisation. Staff know foster carers and children well, enabling them to provide timely, responsive support that meets their individual needs.

Children are encouraged to share their views and experiences with support from a dedicated participation worker. Agency staff, with foster carers' support, help children have a voice in their day-to-day lives and the agency's development. Children speak positively about the care they receive.

There are a high number of children living in long term foster care with the agency's foster carers, many living with their siblings. There has been an elevated number of children moving on from the care of the agency's foster carers, which includes both planned and unplanned endings. These ends have occurred for a range of reasons. The agency has strengthened its processes for analysing the causes of unplanned placement ends. However, it is not always clear how these disruptions affect children or how the learning is evaluated and understood.

Children are encouraged to maintain relationships with the people who are important to them. Foster carers are proactive in building relationships with children's families; they support family time arrangements and ensure that families are kept informed about their children's lives. One child's social worker said, 'The foster carers go above and beyond to make sure they can keep in touch with their family.'

Foster carers and agency staff have a thorough understanding of children's health needs. Foster carers ensure that children with additional health needs receive the right support at the right time. The agency is proactive and proportionate in escalating any concerns to external health professionals, ensuring that children's needs are addressed promptly and effectively.

Assessments of new foster carers are comprehensive, providing a clear understanding of carers' strengths and areas for development. However, processes for carers transferring to the agency from the wider organisation are not fully aligned with regulatory requirements. In addition, records do not clearly indicate when transferring carers formally begin fostering for the agency. This reduces the clarity of oversight.

Children make progress in their education. They have access to tutors and additional support when needed, which helps them remain engaged in learning. The agency benefits from the expertise of its in-house teacher, who is well known and highly valued by children and foster carers. They provide effective support during education

meetings and advocate robustly on behalf of children to ensure that their learning needs are understood and met.

Children and their foster families receive effective and well-coordinated support. Additional provisions, such as school transport, after-school activities and holiday support, are consistently available and highly valued by foster carers. This practical help enables carers to attend appointments and maintain children's routines with minimal disruption.

The agency offers a broad and engaging programme of activities and events that promote children's interests, social development and participation in shaping the service. Breakfast meetings, activity sessions, children's groups and foster carer support groups are well attended and contribute positively to children's experiences and build carers' confidence.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

Foster carers and agency staff understand their responsibilities to keep children safe. They work with professionals and support referrals to external agencies to help further develop their own and children's understanding of risks. Safeguarding concerns are shared promptly to ensure that appropriate action is taken to promote children's safety.

Children's plans are individualised and reflect their current and emerging risks. Staff ensure that foster carers have the skills they need to promote positive behaviours. Children rarely go missing from their foster homes; however, when they do, the agency takes swift action to provide support, and children have individualised risk plans that include clear, detailed actions for carers to take.

The agency has clear processes in place to manage any allegations, and they are well understood by agency staff. Leaders and managers liaise with relevant professionals to ensure that foster carers continue to access support and children are kept safe.

Children can talk to adults about any worries or concerns. They know how to make complaints when they are unhappy about the care they receive. The agency has received one complaint in the last 12 months, which the manager promptly responded to and ensured that the child understood the action taken and outcome of the complaint.

There are clear and safe recruitment processes in place for prospective carers. The agency's recruitment officer is enthusiastic and has a strong understanding of their role and the expectations of prospective foster carers. There is a focus on getting the right foster carers for children rather than a drive to increase foster carer numbers. Prospective carers feel valued and well supported. One prospective carer said, 'The assessment process has been explained well, and I feel well informed about what is expected of me and what support will be available once approved.'

Foster carer annual reviews are carried out in line with requirements. When concerns arise about carers' practice, the agency provides targeted support through regularly reviewed action plans to monitor progress. When significant concerns are identified, a standard of care review is carried out. However, there have been missed opportunities to identify and recommend changes to foster carers' approval terms. The manager is taking immediate action to address this.

Matching processes are child focused, and the needs of other children already living in the home are considered. Consultation takes place with social workers of other children placed in the foster home when considering new placements. However, records do not clearly reflect these discussions. Foster carers are confident that only children whose needs they can meet are placed in their care.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Since the last inspection, the previous manager left, and a new manager has been appointed, who is suitably experienced and registered with Ofsted. The new manager is currently working towards the required qualification. The manager has a clear vision for the agency and demonstrates high aspirations for children, foster carers and staff.

Children, foster carers and staff speak positively about the manager. They value their approachability and feel confident that they can contact them should any concerns arise. This contributes to a culture of openness and support. One foster carer said, '[Name of manager] is bringing back the awareness that as an agency, they care about carers.'

There has been a lack of clarity in the agency's exemption processes, resulting in a small number of foster carers caring for children outside their terms of approval. The agency has now taken appropriate action to address the issue and strengthen its oversight of exemptions.

Foster carers benefit from access to a wide range of training programmes that are tailored to the needs and risks of the children in their care. Foster carers say they enjoy training, can reflect on their learning and find it useful in helping them meet children's needs. As a result, foster carers are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to provide safe and nurturing care. Additionally, agency staff receive appropriate levels of training to ensure that they can support foster carers and children effectively.

The agency's statement of purpose provides an overview of the aim and objectives of fostering service and the types of fostering available. It is reviewed and amended with updated staffing changes as appropriate. However, the statement of purpose is not sent to the regulator as required in legislation.

Fostering panel members bring a broad range of experience to their roles and receive regular training to support their effective contributions. Panel processes are well established, consistently followed and timely. Panel members can express their

views and contribute to discussions. However, panel minutes do not always demonstrate the depth of scrutiny applied or clearly reflect panel members' understanding of their role, which reduces the transparency of decision-making.

The manager has internal monitoring systems in place; however, these systems sometimes fail to identify when processes are not followed correctly. Foster carers are not consistently provided with verbal feedback on agency decisions, and records do not always accurately reflect the circumstances or rationale underpinning these decisions. This limits the transparency and effectiveness of oversight.

There is strong and effective partnership working between the manager and other agencies. The manager meets regularly with partner agencies and appropriately raises concerns. Commissioners speak highly of the agency, especially the manager, who takes a child-centred, collaborative approach to identifying suitable carers for children.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

| Requirement | Due date |
|---|------------------------|
| <p>A fostering service provider must not approve a person who has been approved as a foster parent by another fostering service provider where that approval has not been terminated.</p> <p>A fostering service provider must not approve X as a foster parent unless—</p> <p>they have completed their assessment of X’s suitability, and the fostering panel has considered the application.</p> <p>A fostering service provider must, in deciding whether to approve X as a foster parent and as to the terms of any approval, take into account the recommendation of the fostering panel.</p> <p>No member of the fostering panel may take part in any decision made by a fostering service provider under paragraph (3).</p> <p>If a fostering service provider decide to approve X as a foster parent they must—</p> <p>give X notice in writing specifying any terms on which the approval is given, and</p> <p>enter into a written agreement with X covering the matters specified in Schedule 5 (the “foster care agreement”). (Regulation 27 (1) (2)(a)(b) (3) (4) (5)(a)(b))</p> <p>The registered person must ensure that there is a clear transfer process in place for transferring carers in from different agencies and that it is in line with legislation.</p> <p>Additionally, the registered person must ensure that foster carers transferring from another agency are approved only if</p> | <p>4 February 2026</p> |

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| they have formally resigned from their previous fostering agency and that their records reflect the date on which this agency approved them. | |
| The fostering service provider must provide a copy of the statement of purpose to the Chief Inspector. (Regulation 3 (2)) | 2 April 2026 |

Recommendations

- The registered person, along with the panel chair should ensure that the written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and that the panel members understand their role in making recommendations. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 14.7)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers or prospective foster carers are provided verbal feedback about agency decisions within two working days and written confirmation is sent to them within five working days. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 14.10)
- The registered person should ensure that the terms of approval of foster carers are compatible with the number of children they provide care for, specifically carers who are assessed as being able to provide care outside of the usual fostering limits of 3 children. (Assessment and approval of foster carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services July 2013 Page 16)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the social care common inspection framework. This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards.

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: SC066668

Registered provider: Safehouses North Limited

Registered provider address: 47 Bedwin Street, Salisbury SP1 3UT

Responsible individual: Jacob Strydom

Registered manager: Jessica Mawdesley

Telephone number: 01457 829 111

Email address: fostering@safehousesnorth.org.uk

Inspectors

Sarah Probert, Social Care Inspector

Caroline Bertram, Social Care Inspector

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