

## **Preparing for the meeting with ofsted 11/7/25**

### **Quick recap**

The main focus was on regulatory concerns regarding child placement addresses, communication challenges with Ofsted, and the management of out-of-hours fostering services, including the roles of qualified social workers and support staff. The conversation ended with discussions about upcoming events, including a joint meeting with Ofsted in September, and plans for addressing staffing challenges during the summer months through peer support surgeries.

### **Next steps**

- Catherine to raise with Ofsted the issue of using non-qualified social workers for out-of-hours support and seek clarification on acceptable practices.
- Catherine to ask Ofsted about their expectations for capturing stability in fostering homes.
- Catherine to inquire about Ofsted's plans to inspect local authority fostering services to the same standard as independent fostering agencies.
- Catherine to ask Ofsted about their expectations for agencies capturing efforts to chase care plans, documents, and escalate issues with local authorities.
- Catherine to inquire about Ofsted's expectations for supporting foster carer well-being outside of supervision.
- Catherine to raise the issue of conflicting DBS check requirements between fostering regulations and DBS guidelines.
- Catherine to seek clarification from Ofsted on their expectations regarding the level of DBS checks required for agency staff.
- Catherine to ask Ofsted about their view on fostering households with separate living dwellings in their gardens.
- Catherine to follow up on getting feedback about peripatetic foster care from Ofsted.
- Catherine to request an organizational chart of Ofsted's regional champions.
- Fostering agencies to prepare for the joint meeting with Ofsted on September 30th at 9:30 AM.

### **Summary**

## **Child Address Regulation Discussion**

concerns about the regulatory requirement to obtain a child's address upon leaving their family placement, which some participants found problematic due to GDPR restrictions. There was a suggestion that providing a general description of the new arrangement, such as "moved to a fostering arrangement," could be sufficient. Members shared their experiences in obtaining addresses from local authorities, noting that the issue might not be strictly related to GDPR. Marie questioned the purpose of the regulation, suggesting it may stem from historical assumptions about local authority involvement in fostering services.

## **Ofsted Communication Challenges**

Catherine discussed communication issues with Ofsted, noting that members have requested conversations about dissatisfaction but haven't received responses. A member shared their experience of submitting detailed concerns to Ofsted after an inspection last August, but no follow-up was provided despite initial interest. A member highlighted ongoing issues with Ofsted's response to a change of business address, mentioning multiple unaddressed emails and phone calls. Catherine asked for clarification on the email address being used to contact Ofsted.

## **Ofsted Inspection Communication Challenges**

The group discussed communication issues with Ofsted, particularly regarding address changes and the departure of a named inspector who left without informing the organization. They addressed inconsistencies in how Ofsted evaluates outcomes versus progress, with some inspectors focusing on children's progress while others emphasized outcomes. The team also noted that while some members experienced different inspection approaches, they had received materials from NAFP and members about outcomes for children from the DfE, which were shared during a previous meeting.

## **Challenges in Social Work Staffing**

Catherine discussed the need for qualified social workers as per regulations, highlighting challenges faced by small agencies in managing time off and decision-making in the absence of qualified staff. She expressed caution about relying on AI for research and legislation, emphasizing the importance of human expertise. A member shared their agency's practice of having a social work assistant

on the out-of-hours rota with management backup, discussion regarding potential criticism from inspections for using non-qualified staff to prop up services, though a member reported no issues during a recent inspection. (was this because the inspector did not look at this area, or did not question it if seen)

## **Out-of-Hours Foster Care Management**

The group discussed management of out-of-hours situations in fostering services. A member explained that she, as the registered manager, would handle out-of-hours cases, with their RI (experienced and skilled but not a social worker) as backup, and noted they have independent social workers available if needed. A member shared that her organization uses registered social workers for out-of-hours coverage, with RM herself on call, and emphasized the importance of experienced staff making decisions within their role boundaries. A member clarified that social assistance staff would escalate serious decisions to management for final approval.

## **Support Workers' Role in Social Work**

The group discussed the role of support workers in out-of-hours social work, particularly in fostering and residential care. Is there a need to protect unqualified staff from potential consequences of making decisions beyond their grade / role. noted that support workers, unlike qualified social workers, could provide training and advice during out of -hours. A member shared an incident where a clinical lead, though qualified, missed a safeguarding issue, highlighting the importance of qualified social worker supervision. Another member described their agency's experience using support staff effectively, but noted that some new carers questioned the practice, expressing a preference for qualified social worker involvement.

The group discussed the use of support workers and other non-social worker staff for out-of-hours duties in fostering agencies. A member shared that while Ofsted hasn't raised concerns about this practice, it has come up in foster carer reviews. A discussion followed highlighting that local authorities often use call handlers to screen urgent calls before connecting with social workers. An RM expressed concern about covering out-of-hours duties alone as her agency's social workers are leaving, and sought input on using ISWs for this purpose. There was a discussion on the importance of clearly articulating policies and procedures regarding out-of-hours

duties in job descriptions and discussed their small agency's practice of rotating duty staff without additional pay.

### **Ofsted Fostering Inspection Framework Review**

Catherine agreed to raise several questions with Ofsted, including members query about expectations for capturing stability in fostering homes, concern about regulatory inconsistency, question about inspecting local authority fostering services to the same standard as independent fostering agencies, and questions about capturing care plans and staff wellbeing. Members highlighted the need for consistency in DBS check requirements, and it raised concerns about Ofsted's perspective on separate living dwellings within fostering households. Catherine mentioned that Ofsted is currently reviewing the Scif framework and will discuss potential updates in September at the joint meeting

### **Ofsted Meeting and Foster Care Updates**

Catherine discussed upcoming meetings and events, including a joint meeting with Ofsted on September 30th at 9:30. She mentioned the need for more feedback on peripatetic foster care , so could members please forward examples of how this works well

Catherine explained the process of how information is fed back through champions in each region.

Catherine also provided information about Big Listen results and upcoming topics for future meetings, including managing compliance while fostering and preparing for summer. She announced that August would feature a peer support surgery to address potential staffing challenges during the summer months.