

The Independent Foster Care Panel Review

Case IPR5

Case Summary

1. IPR5 concerns Foster Carers who had fostered for NCC for 14 years and who were approved for up to 4 children over 8 years old and they also offered emergency/respite care. They had fostered around 20 children in that time.
2. The incident that led to them ceasing to be Foster Carers happened on 22nd November 2007.
3. Two sibling children, [REDACTED] were placed with the carers in August 2007.
4. Mr IPR5 explained that on the evening of 21st November 2007 Mrs IPR5 suffered [REDACTED] whilst out of the house [REDACTED] Mr IPR5 decided to collect her leaving [REDACTED] in the care of [REDACTED] who [REDACTED] was [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] 16 years [REDACTED] [REDACTED] old. Also present in the house was [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Mr IPR5 did not inform [REDACTED] that he was leaving the house
5. The record in the NCC Chronology states '22/11/07 Allegation fax from school today – [REDACTED] came to school distressed. stated that she would not return to the foster home tonight. She alleges that last night the carers went out and left her and [REDACTED] alone. Whilst they were out [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] threatened her [REDACTED] She says that this has happened before'.
6. As a result of the allegations [REDACTED] did not return to the Foster Carers.
7. The allegation was investigated [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Seems the outcome was deemed not to be Sect 47 but a serious 'standards of care issue.'
8. The NCC Chronology states, '29//11/07 Visit to [IPR5] to provide detail of the investigation into the children's allegations. They agreed for [REDACTED] [REDACTED] to be interviewed. They confirmed that the children had been left in the care of [REDACTED] [REDACTED] but they may have thought they were on their own.'
9. The NCC Chronology goes onto state that 'The outcome of the investigation was that there was no evidence to support the main allegation made by [REDACTED] However, [REDACTED] vulnerable children quite new to placement had been left with a teenage child in an emergency. [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

10. Mr IPR5 when recounting these events stated that on 22/11/07 he contacted the school to inform them of the situation & recent difficulties. He also tried to contact Social Services but could not get in touch with anyone.

11. He said that they were later contacted by Social Services and told that the children would not be returning because there was an 'allegation' but [Social Services] gave no other details.

12. Mr IPR5 recounted that two unfamiliar professionals visited the following week. The Foster Carers were not provided with any clarity about the allegation [REDACTED]

13. Mr IPR5 stated that on 18/12/2007 a worker [REDACTED] visited. She stated that she wanted to meet with [REDACTED] talk about an alleged incident when he threatened [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] From what the Independent Assessors were told Mr and Mrs IPR5 appear to have wanted the police involved in investigating the alleged offence. Social Services appear to have been reluctant to respond to this request.'

14. Mr and Mrs IPR5 were advised to contact Fostering Network.

15. [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

16. ■ & ■ never returned to the IPR5's.

17. The NCC chronology states that 'a review of the IPR5's fostering was undertaken and the conclusion was to re-approve

18. Mr IPR5 however states that they resigned in March 2008 before they were considered by Panel.

19. Mr IPR5 stated that both he and his wife were left feeling angry [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

20. In 2012 Mr and Mrs IPR5 applied to foster again firstly with an Independent Fostering Agency and then with NCC however they considered that a NCC

worker who visited conveyed negative views about the condition of their house and they felt that they were being treated like criminals.

21. In his reflections on their time fostering Mr IPR5 said they were proud of their success [REDACTED]

■ [REDACTED]

■ [REDACTED]

■ [REDACTED]

■ [REDACTED]

The Findings of the Panel

Was the welfare of the child(ren) paramount in the decisions and actions of NCC.?

22. The Panel considers the welfare of the children was foremost in the decision to remove the children in this case.

23. The allegation that was made was a serious one and there is evidence that both the children and the Foster Carers were struggling with the placement.

24. NCC took swift action to remove the children and a LAC review was held on 31/11/08 which reported that [REDACTED] were in a new placement and settling well. ■

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Were the Foster Carers treated fairly and justly?

25. The Panel considers that the Foster Carers have not been treated fairly and justly through these circumstances.

26. There is sketchy information on the file about the 'investigation' into the allegation. It is not clear from the records why the decision was made not to involve the police and how it was decided that this was dealt with as an issue of 'standards of care rather than following a Section 47 process.

27. In the case of such a serious allegation as this, Foster Carers deserve to know that a proper and thorough investigation was carried out and documented and that the content and findings of that investigation are communicated effectively to them. The information that is contained in the files should be reliable and thorough. This is not the case for these carers.

28. There was, however, face to face contact with Mr and Mrs IPR5 to tell them of the allegation within the week following the initial allegation and permission was sought to interview [REDACTED] as part of the investigation.

29. In the interview notes with Mr IPR5 and chronology provided by NCC there is a lack of reference to any ongoing relationship with either the Foster Carers Supervising Social Worker or the Social Worker for the children who were subsequently removed.

Were the Council's policies and procedures followed properly?

30. There is evidence in the records of this case to indicate that following the allegation, which was of a serious nature, that consideration was given whether this should be considered as a Section 47 issue.

31. The children were moved to another placement.

32. The decision was made not to treat this as a Section 47 investigation but to pursue it as a 'Serious Standards of Care' issue. We would have expected to see clear evidence on file as to how and why this decision was arrived at and who actually made it but we have not been able to find such records.

33. In our understanding of Norfolk County Council Procedures the 'Serious Standard of Care' issue should then have been raised as a concern with the carers and the NCC Concerns Procedure followed. Again we could find no evidence of this having happened..

34. A LAC Review took place for the Children at the end of January and a review of the fostering of Mr and Mrs IPR5 was to be considered by Panel in April 2008. They submitted their resignation, however in March before this happened.

35. The view of the Panel is that the right key processes were set in place but there are serious shortcomings in the way they were followed through and recorded. The Panel has seen no evidence of the Concerns Procedure being followed once the issue was determined as a 'Serious Standards of Care issue'.

Were the decisions and actions taken consistent with good Social Work practice?

36. An allegation against Foster Carers or their family is one of the most difficult and stressful situations that a Foster Carer can have to face. It is clear that Mr and Mrs IPR5 found this situation very stressful.

37. It is also the case that it is impossible to be prescriptive about how and when the details of an allegation can be shared with Foster Carers as this needs to be balanced against the need to carry out an investigation.

38. In a situation of this nature it is vital that Social Work practice is of a high quality firstly to protect the children under the care of the Local Authority but secondly to ensure that Foster Carers and their families are treated fairly and offered support.

39. In this case it appears that poor practice has resulted in decisions that lack clarity and accountability and that communication with the carers has consequently been poor.

40. The view of the Panel is that there have been serious shortcomings in the standard of Social Work practice in this case which have contributed to the negative experience of the Foster Carers concerned.
41. There is no way that an allegation and subsequent and necessary investigation of this nature can be stress free for Foster Carers. However, in this case, the Panel consider that this stress could have been reduced by the provision of clearer information regarding the process of the investigation and support offered throughout it.
42. There is some evidence that the Support Worker did show appreciation to the carers in a final visit in June 2008. They were thanked for their and given a gift by the Support Worker. Their residual bitterness about the way the allegation was dealt with was also recorded at that time.

Suggestions for Remedies, Learning Points and Further Actions

43. The Panel has not considered the interest expressed by the Foster Carers to recommence fostering in 2012.

Case Remedies

44. The Panel consider that the Director of Children's Services should apologise to the carers Mr and Mrs IPR5 for the failures in respect of the way this allegation was dealt with and the poor recording that remains.

Learning Points

45. The Panel consider that the key point that arises from this case is that even when what appear to be the right actions and processes are set in motion that a lack of rigour in gathering and documenting evidence, failure to follow procedures through, poor recording and inadequate communication can lead to Foster Carers being treated unfairly.
46. The Panel therefore recommend that the Director of Children's Services need to ensure that procedures are followed and followed through and if there is a reason why that cannot happen then the decision must be made at an appropriate level and properly recorded.
47. The Panel also recommend that NCC need to ensure that the standard of recording is fit for purpose and consistent with good Social Work practice.


6th July 2016