

HIQA reports raise concerns over foster care services

Tusla and Care Visions both say they have begun to implement action plans in response to the reports

NEWS



Two new HIQA reports have raised concerns about the quality of inspected foster care services.

Tusla's Dublin South Central foster care service met only one of 26 standards assessed by the health watchdog.

A report, which followed an announced inspection, on Tusla's foster service in the region outlines five significant risks.

The high risk areas include - safeguarding and child protection; assessment and reviews of foster carers; and training and qualifications of staff.

It also judged that management was "crisis led rather than delivered in a planned manner".

The report found there was no system in place to ensure all staff were vetted in line with national guidelines or Tusla's own recruitment policy.

It also shows that while all children had a social worker, a number had been through several changes of social worker in a short time which affected their relationships with them.

Assessments of foster parents were done to a high standard, but were taking too long to complete.

"Some children have been placed since as far back as 2012 without a decision being reached," the report notes.

Separately, an assessment of the Care Visions fostering service found that management and monitoring services need to improve to ensure the safety of kids.

It added that although the service told HIQA there were no child protection issues in the past two years, four were found after reviewing files.

HIQA says that none of those incidents had been referred to the relevant social worker departments.

"A matter of urgency"

In a statement, Jim Gibson - Chief Operations Officer at Tusla - said: "Every child in foster care in Dublin South Central has an allocated social worker to ensure they are safe and well cared for in their placement.

"However, Tusla remains committed to improving the care and safeguarding of children in foster care in Dublin South Central and all children in our care.

"In conjunction with HIQA, we have created and begun to implement an action plan in Dublin South Central to address those areas identified as requiring improvement and have put in place a governance and oversight group to track progress on the action plan."

Tusla says it is now prioritising reviews for all foster carers "where allegations or serious welfare concerns exist".

The organisation has also audited all its own HR files, and says Garda vetting has been applied for in cases where it is not on file.

Care Visions, meanwhile, said it fully accepts the findings of the HIQA report on its services, and says they have implemented an action plan to address the concerns raised.

Cathy Jamieson, Managing Director at Care Visions Group, said her organisation "regrets that it did not fully adhere to the national standards in a number of categories."

She added: "In response, Care Visions has taken immediate steps to enhance the resources of the organisation and follow through on each of requirements as highlighted by HIQA in its report."

ISPCC Chief Executive Grainia Long expressed concern over the issues highlighted by the inspections, saying: "All children require robust systems for their protection – systems that are resourced, and that are followed.

"There is a need for a significant focus in this area, as a matter of urgency. There must be comprehensive assessments and ongoing monitoring of foster placements."

Terry Dignan - CEO of EPIC, which works with people in care - says the situation is completely unacceptable.

Additional reporting by Sean Defoe



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Stephen McNeice *1 day ago*

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