



An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service

Non-Statutory Foster Care Agency

Monitoring ID: 03

Year: 2026

Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service
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Monitoring Report

Year:	2026
Name of Agency:	Five Rivers Ireland
Dates of audit:	12th, 13th and 14th January 2026
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1. Foreword

The Child and Family Agency is responsible for providing services for children who require care outside of their families of origin. This care is provided in a variety of settings, and TUSLA is responsible for ensuring that this care is of a high standard for the protection and support of these children. Tusla may also commission the provision of foster care placements by non-statutory, voluntary or private, fostering agencies. The non-statutory foster care agency is required to adhere to the legislation, regulations and standards in respect of the provision of foster care within the state and demonstrate adequate knowledge of same.

Tusla- Child and Family Agency was established on the 1st January 2014, legislated under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, and is now the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children. The Child and Family Agency is overseen by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

Tusla has responsibility for a range of services including provision of alternative care placements for children requiring protection and support including statutory foster care services. For both statutory and non-statutory foster care services Tusla retain their statutory responsibilities to children placed with these services. The approval of foster carers is the responsibility of the Tusla Foster Care Committee. Tusla and non-statutory foster care agencies are accountable for the provision of safe and effective care to these children.

The internal responsibility for governance is the ultimate responsibility of the non-statutory agency providing the foster care service. The non-statutory foster care agency will, however, be subject to the normal monitoring and inspection arrangements as outlined in the regulations and legislation, undertaken by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency and where appropriate by HIQA.

The monitoring of non-statutory foster care agencies by Tusla, Child and Family Agency is required by the “National Standards for Foster Care, 2003” Standard 24.6 to ensure compliance with the Placement of Children in Foster Care Regulations, 1995. The objective of the monitoring process is to provide assurance about the quality of care, challenge poor performance and promote improvement and safeguard the rights of young people in care.

This duty is undertaken by the Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service as part of the Children’s Services Regulation which is a sub directorate of the Quality and Regulation Directorate within TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency. The service is committed to carry out its duties in an even handed, fair and rigorous manner.

As part of the Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring services schedule of monitoring visits of private foster care agencies in 2026, a thematic review of Standard 10 – Safeguarding and Child Protection, is being completed from Q1 onwards.

This monitoring visit will set out to determine if the agency works to ensure that children and young people in foster care are protected from abuse and neglect in line with Standard 10, Safeguarding and Child Protection, National Standards for Foster Care (2003).

Information was gathered through reviews of the foster carer files, interviews with relevant people and through a review of questionnaires returned by active foster carers within the agency.

Acknowledgements

The monitoring officers would like to acknowledge the staff and management of Five Rivers Ireland fostering agency and the foster carers who took the time to complete questionnaires and participate in interviews, for their co-operation during the monitoring process.

1.1 Profile of the Foster Care Agency

Five Rivers Ireland is a non-statutory foster care agency and has been in operation in Ireland since 2002. This foster care agency currently provides nationwide foster care services and offers respite, short, long term and emergency place of safety (EPS) placements to children in statutory care on behalf of Tusla. Five Rivers Ireland operates from three offices in Dublin, Cork and Donegal each with oversight from a principal social worker (PSW). There is a fourth PSW to manage the duty and EPS service. The managing director is located in the Dublin office. The organogram of this agency is represented under Figure 1 in this section of the report. The agency has an established multi-disciplinary team to support the foster carers, their children and the children placed in their care. This team comprises of psychologists, social care workers, speech and language therapists, play therapists and is directly managed by the clinical lead.

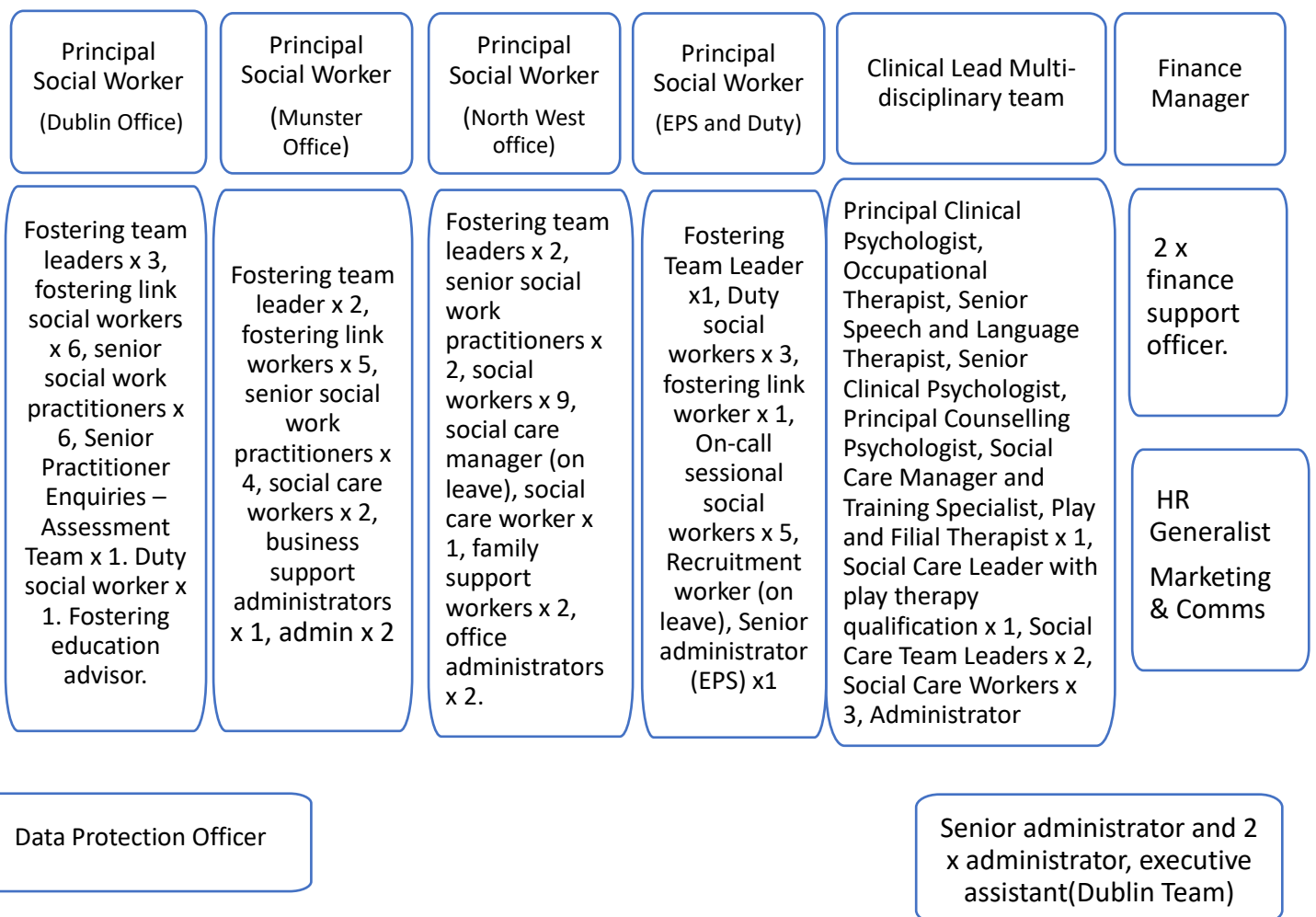
Data returned by Five Rivers Ireland showed the service had 217 active foster carer households, providing placements to children in the care of Tusla, Child and Family Agency, at the time of the monitoring visit on the 12th January 2026. The provision of placements was contractually agreed between Five Rivers Ireland and Tusla, Child and Family Agency. A separate contract specific to the provision of Emergency Place of Safety placements accessed by the Tusla Crisis Intervention Service was also in place. As a result of the provision of EPS placements, the number of children placed was subject to change daily.

Figure 1: Organisational structure of Five Rivers Ireland Fostering Service

Board of Directors

Managing Director, Chairperson, CEO - FRCCUK, Non-Executive Director, Chief Financial Officer

Managing Director



1.2 Methodology

This monitoring report sets out the findings of an announced monitoring visit carried out over three days in January 2026, to assess the agency's compliance with Standard 10 of the National Standards for Foster Care, 2003. The agency was notified of the intention to conduct this monitoring visit on the 15th December 2025.

The following documents, data sets and information was requested:

1. Organisational chart for the agency

Documents

2. Most recent HIQA report if one completed since the last ACIMS monitoring visit
3. Policies on child protection and safeguarding, including safe care (if applicable)
4. Policy on the management of allegations and welfare concerns against foster carers.
5. Policy on training including mandatory training.
6. Policy on foster carer reviews

Data sets

7. Data set: Number of active carers with the agency as of the 15th December 2025.
8. Data set: Number of foster carers subject to CASP from the 15th December 2024 to the 15th December 2025.
9. Data set: Number of carers subject to allegations of abuse and / or welfare concerns (not subject to CASP) from the 15th December 2024 to the 15th December 2025.
10. Data set: Training statistics on child protection, safeguarding and mandatory training completed by foster carers from the 15th December 2024 to the 15th December 2025.
11. Data set: Number of additional foster carer reviews undertaken following outcome of allegation / welfare concern from the 15th December 2024 to the 15th December 2025.
12. Data set: Number of carers where there is an ongoing assessment following allegation / welfare concern as of the 15th December 2025.
13. Data set: Number of carers subject to an ongoing safety plan due to allegation / welfare concern against any member of the foster carer household as of the 15th December 2025.
14. Data set: Any internal trackers of allegations / concerns against foster carers to evidence management oversight.
15. Data set: Number of child protection and welfare report forms (CPWRF) submitted to Tusla by Five Rivers Ireland from the 15th December 2024 to the 15th December 2025.

This report is based on a range of monitoring activities including review of the following information on the 12th, 13th and 14th January 2026:

- ◆ A sample of foster carer household records. Monitors reviewed 32 foster carer household records- this equated to 14.7% of the active foster carers within the agency.
- ◆ Relevant policies, procedures, audits and trackers.
- ◆ Foster carer questionnaires completed and submitted during the timeframe of the monitoring visit. All foster carers were afforded the opportunity to submit a questionnaire and return via post or email. A total of 42 completed questionnaires were returned and reviewed. This equated to a sampling of 19% of foster carers.

Interviews with relevant persons that were deemed by the monitoring team as to having a bona fide interest in the operation of the service;

- ◆ Managing director
- ◆ Principal social worker x 1
- ◆ Fostering link worker x 3 (group interview)
- ◆ Business support officer x 1
- ◆ Foster carers x 3
- ◆ Tusla Child and Family Agency child in care social worker x 1

1.3 Summary of Monitoring Findings

In summary, the monitors found that Five Rivers Ireland were operating in compliance with standard 10 of the National Standards for Foster Care 2003. This was evidenced in foster carer records such as training provision, supervision records, foster carer reviews, and in foster carer questionnaires returned. Monitors found that there were robust oversight and governance arrangements in place to ensure agency compliance with safeguarding procedures and assessment of allegations and concerns. Monitors found that the agency was operating in line with good practice and relevant standards.

2. Analysis of Findings

2.1 Safeguarding and Child Protection

Standard 10

Children and young people in foster care are protected from abuse and neglect.

Safeguarding.

Monitors found that prior to approval to become foster carers, applicants underwent both an assessment process and the “Foundations for Fostering” training programme. In interview, foster carers referenced how both of these processes provided them with guidance and support on caring for children who have experienced neglect or abuse and were confident in the training to prepare them to recognise and report signs of abuse. Monitors reviewed the training programme for Foundations for Fostering implemented by Five Rivers Ireland and found dedicated session plans to support applicants in understanding the behaviour of children, educating applicants about the different categories of abuse and neglect, vulnerability of children in care to bullying and how to provide safe care within their homes. These issues including bullying, victimisation and managing absences were also covered in the agency’s child protection and safeguarding training “Protecting Children, Protecting Ourselves” (PCPO) training designated as mandatory by the agency for all foster carers to attend. In interview, foster carers were aware of the appropriate use of sanctions and voiced that where dysregulated behaviours were present, they were encouraged by their link workers to view the behaviours from a needs perspective. All contracts signed by foster carers to provide placements for Five Rivers Ireland stipulated that physical punishment of children was not allowed.

Monitors reviewed the training log for all approved foster carers, a total of 381 carers, and found that the Children First e-learning programme (based on the Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children and the Children First Act 2015) was noted as being completed by all foster carers either prior to approval or prior to the first child being placed with them. Monitors reviewed 32 foster carer records and found up-to-date certificates for the Children First e-learning programme on file. This was further supported in individual interview with three foster carers who confirmed they were reminded by their link workers to refresh this training every three years. The agency’s child protection and safeguarding training, PCPO is a mandatory training for all foster carers to complete within their first-year post approval. Monitors found that other than eight individual carers, all active carers, had completed this initial training. Out of the 13 carers whose training was out

of date, four were booked in to complete it in the four weeks post monitoring visit, the remaining nine carers did not have a date scheduled but there was evidence that this was discussed and encouraged in link work supervision with the carers. There were eight individual carers who had not undertaken the PCPO training- all eight of these carers were in their first-year post approval and were still within the timeframes for completion. The initial social media training was completed by 365 individual carers. Of the remaining 16 carers, seven were booked in with an identified date and of the remaining nine carers, one was inactive and the remaining eight were within their first year of approval and within identified timeframes for completing the training. Monitors found adherence of mandatory training to ensure safe care was prioritised by the agency.

There were 96 staff members in Five Rivers Ireland at the time of the monitoring visit. Monitors reviewed the training log and found that the Children First e-learning programme was completed and refreshers undertaken in a timely manner for all staff members. In interview, fostering link workers stated that there was an expectation for all link workers to complete the safeguarding and child protection training that foster carers were mandated to complete. Individual fostering link workers facilitated and delivered PCPO training to foster carers on a rotational basis, and where required, on a one-to-one basis with foster carers. Monitors found that all staff were provided with child protection and safeguarding training. With the recent implementation of the Child Abuse Substantiation Procedure (Version 2) (CASP V2), additional training was carried out for all staff advising of updated procedures. Evidence of this training was provided to monitors and verified in interview with the fostering link workers.

Five Rivers Ireland maintained a tracker of Garda vetting applications and disclosures for all active foster carers. Monitors found that Garda vetting disclosures were up to date for all foster carers except one. This was in the process of being finalised and submitted for processing. The tracker was used to identify those foster carers with an approaching date for renewal of Garda vetting. On receipt of vetting disclosures, the tracker was updated. This was confirmed in interview with the business support officer. On review of one foster carer record, monitors found that the required international police check was not on record. While the process was initiated, the final submission was not received by the agency. On discovery, a new international check was commenced and the agency subsequently undertook a self-audit to ensure that relevant international police clearances were recorded as appropriate. Monitors were provided with evidence of a new tracker which was generated to ensure that, moving forward, all international police checks are tracked from start to finish.

The agency appointed three principal social workers as the relevant designated liaison persons (DLP) for their respective geographical area. The agency displayed their Child Safeguarding Statement (CSS) in a public waiting area in the entrance to their offices. Monitors found this to be comprehensive in addressing potential child safeguarding concerns and identifying the relevant person and designated liaison persons (DLP). In interview fostering link workers were familiar with the content of the CSS and relevant risks. They were aware of the identity of the three DLP's for the agency and were confident in approaching the DLP's for support and guidance.

Prior to placement, foster carers were given relevant verbal information to support them in determining whether they felt they could safely provide a care arrangement to the child. Monitors found evidence to support this supposition both from questionnaires submitted by foster carers and in case notes on foster carer records. In some instances, foster carers noted that there were aspects of the child's presentation that were not known or were not made known to them at the time of placement. In general, this was accepted as a progression in the child's presentation or information that was not known to the fostering link worker at the time of placement. In interviews with foster carers, they were aware of their right to refuse to accept a placement and noted that their right to say no was upheld and supported when they declined. Following the placement of a child, monitors found that foster carers were provided with written information about the children they were caring for. Foster carers were facilitated to attend the child in care reviews for children placed and were provided with a copy of the child's care plan when completed. Monitors found that all foster carers were made aware of the importance of storing this information securely and confidentially as part of the Foundations for Fostering initial training. There was an optional training course titled "Practical issues" training available for foster carers which also covered the storage of confidential information.

Foster carers contracted to Five Rivers Ireland have access to respite care, counselling and out-of-hours consultation and advice services as part of their contract. The out-of-hours consultation service provides foster carers with advice and support on what to do if a child in their care goes missing. Monitors found that from the sample of 32 foster carer records reviewed, there were absence management plans in place for 14 of the children placed, a further six records did not require absence management plans as the foster carer did not have a child placed with them and there were twelve records where there were no absence management plans on file. Monitors acknowledge that the responsibility for devising and updating an absence management plan remains with the placing agency- Tusla, Child and Family Agency and there was evidence on five of these records of the fostering link worker

requesting an absence management plan from the allocated child in care social worker. Monitors did find that the training programme, PCPO, referenced procedures to follow should a child in your care be identified as missing and in interview foster carers highlighted that they would contact the out-of-hours service as their first point of call should they experience a child going missing.

Monitors found that there was one occurrence of a sibling group being placed with another child in foster care and there was evidence on the foster carers record that this was approved by the foster care committee.

Child Protection.

Monitors found that all allegations of abuse or neglect, or suspected abuse or neglect in relation to children in foster care in this agency, were dealt with in line with procedures devised and managed by Tusla Child and Family Agency, in line with Children First, the National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children.

Monitors found that from the point of application right through assessment and beyond, foster carers were advised of their role as mandated persons. Where children in their care made disclosures of abuse or neglect, foster carers were facilitated to submit child protection and welfare report forms (CPWRF) through the Tusla portal. In interview, foster carers stated that they were confident to submit a CPWRF on their own or where support was required, they availed of support from their allocated fostering link worker or the DLP for their area. In interview the fostering link workers were aware of their role as mandated persons and the responsibilities that accompanied that title.

In October 2024, Tusla launched CASP V2. This procedure amended and updated how allegations and welfare concerns against foster carers were processed. Monitors found that all fostering link workers and clinical support staff for this agency were provided with training on this new procedure and in interview fostering link workers were familiar with the process to be followed and their role as advocates for the foster carers concerned. To provide clarity regarding the new process, a booklet “Foster Carers – A Guide to Allegations” was produced by Tusla Child and Family Agency in October 2025 and provided to all statutory and non-statutory foster care providers with the understanding that a copy of this booklet was to be given to each foster carer and discussed with them within one year from its implementation date. Monitors found that this booklet was distributed via email to each foster carer on the 17th December 2025. From the sample of foster carer records reviewed,

monitors found that fostering link workers were in the process of raising and discussing this booklet with carers in their monthly or three-monthly supervision meetings. A review of 42 questionnaires returned to monitors found that the majority of responding carers were familiar with the process should an allegation or complaint be made against them. Thirty eight stated they were aware and four carers indicated that they were not familiar with the process. In interviews with three foster carers, all responded that they understood the new process, they had received the booklet, and they had discussed it with their link worker.

The dataset returned by the agency stated that in the timeframe under review, there were 23 carers subject to allegations of abuse or welfare concern. The DLP's for the agency maintained a dynamic tracker of all concerns and allegations both those subject to CASP and those following the "Responding to Child Protection and Welfare Concerns" (November 2024) Tusla Child and Family Agency, protocol. One allegation was processed through the CASP procedure, with the remaining 22 allegations and concerns being managed under the Responding to Child Protection and Welfare Concerns protocol.

Monitors reviewed all 23 foster carer records and found that there was adherence to the corresponding assessment process with screening meetings and safety planning taking place for all concerns and allegations as per protocol. The agency had developed a template letter for issuing to foster carers where an allegation was made or a concern was notified, that was not subject to the CASP procedure. This letter advised carers of the supports available to them including the name of their fostering link worker, the team leader and the DLP for that area, the role and contact details of the Irish Foster Carers Association (IFCA) and the availability of the psychology service from within the agency and the access route for that service should it be required. Monitors found that the majority of foster carers were issued such a letter (20 carers) and these letters were recorded on the foster carer records. Despite two carers not having evidence of letters being forwarded to them, monitors reviewed foster carers records for that time period and were satisfied that the information was provided to the foster carers through fostering link work visits, telephone calls and minutes of formal meetings.

Monitors found that safety planning was an integral feature of the assessment of allegations and concerns. There were safety plans generated for 13 foster carer households who were undergoing an assessment. Safety plans were not deemed as a requirement for nine of the foster carer families for a variety of reasons, which were noted in the professional minutes of the initial meeting. Monitors found that the review of safety plans was not evidenced

robustly in the foster carers records and recommend that the agency reviews how they evidence and record the review of safety plans.

In all instances where foster carers were subject to an assessment process for an allegation or welfare concern, monitors found evidence that foster carers were treated fairly and with dignity and supported by their fostering link worker. This was evidenced in foster carer case notes, in supervision sessions between the fostering link worker and the foster carer and it was reiterated in one foster carer interview where they were subject to such an assessment stating that *“they definitely supported me, there were lots of check-ins and chats”*. This foster carer stated that they and their family were offered services to support them through the process and they could determine what if any they required. Referencing support in general, from 42 questionnaires returned, 41 foster carers indicated that they felt very supported by their link worker with comments such as *“very much so, especially during a difficult period”* and *“available on the phone and stand in contact is always available when (link worker) is off”*.

Monitors found that outcome letters were issued to all carers where the assessment had concluded. At the time of this monitoring visit there were still four assessments that were ongoing.

For the timeframe referenced in the dataset, there were no notifications of allegation or welfare concern that warranted immediate notification to the Foster Care Committee (FCC) as per criteria set out in the amendment to the Policy, Procedure and Best Practice Guidance document made in March 2023. Monitors reviewed foster carer review documents submitted to the FCC in line with statutory requirements for foster carer reviews and found that where appropriate, reference was made to the allegation or welfare concern noting the training required and provided to ensure best practice and care moving forward. Monitors recommend that the agency consider adding the aspect of training required following an allegation or concern to their tracker to ensure that all relevant training is provided when identified.

Foster Carer Questionnaires

A total of 42 foster carer families completed and returned the questionnaire to the monitoring team. This represented a total of 19% of all active foster carer families in the agency. These carers ranged from those who were newly approved to those who were fostering for extended periods of time up to 20 years, across all areas of care provision from emergency place of safety placements, to those providing short term, long term and respite

care. Carers were provided with an opportunity to reflect on their experience of being supported by the agency, their experience of training within the agency, the positives they experience from fostering as well as the challenges being a foster carer placed on them and their families. Monitors found that overall, foster carers felt very supported by the agency, had access to regular support and training and were provided with the information they needed to provide safe care for the children they cared for and for their families. Universally all foster carers noted that despite the challenges, the joy and positive rewards they experienced from fostering made the journey invaluable. One carer noted that *“our experience of foster care has been an amazing journey and one which we are committed to continuing into the future”*.

2.2 Recommendations for service improvement

- Monitors recommend that the agency reviews how they evidence and record the review of safety plans in foster carer records.
- Monitors recommend that the agency consider adding the aspect of training required following an allegation or concern to their tracker to ensure that all relevant training is provided when identified.

2.3. Actions Required to be compliant with the standard

- None identified.