



HSE placed children with unapproved foster carers after ‘ending’ the practice

By Catherine Shanahan

SIX weeks after the Health Service Executive (HSE) declared it had ended the dangerous custom of placing children with unapproved and unassessed foster carers, evidence has emerged to show that the unsafe practice actually continued.

On October 5 last, the HSE sent a draft action plan to the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), outlining how it proposed to improve the safety of fostering services after the independent health watchdog raised a number of concerns.

In the document, obtained by the Irish Examiner under the Freedom of Information Act, the HSE said there were 225 unapproved relative carers in the Dublin North West and North Central area "where a comprehensive assessment of their ability to care for a child has not been formally approved". It also said there were approximately 30 non-relative carers given "emergency approval".

The HSE told HIQA on October 5 that both practices had ceased "with immediate effect".

However, correspondence from HIQA to the HSE on November 17, shows HIQA had been advised that "five or six children may have been placed with non-assessed and non-approved foster cares in the [Dublin North West/North Central] area in the past five weeks".

HIQA said it was also told that a young child was placed for weekend respite with a non-relative carer "whom we understand is a non-approved, non-assessed relative carer for the area".

The correspondence also reveals HIQA identified a number of possible child protection concerns, mainly relating to children "without allocated social workers". Children in care continue to be without allocated social workers despite a commitment to ensure all children in care have a link worker.

The HSE action plan also reveals 320 children (180 in Dublin North West and 140 in Dublin North Central) had "not been placed with carers chosen for their capacity to meet the assessed needs of children".

On December 21, the HSE emailed HIQA detailing 11 child protection cases and advising that the health office in Dublin North West has been instructed to undertake a thorough investigation of the cases "as a matter of urgency".

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