

Fostering Service Quarter 4 Report / Annual Report

1st January to 31st March 2016



Executive Report

Quarterly reports to the Executive Board are a requirement of the Fostering Service to meet Standard 25.7 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. They are a key part of the documentation considered by OFSTED when conducting a service inspection.

Introduction

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council's Fostering Service aims to ensure that:

- The best foster carers are recruited for our children.
- All placements receive high quality support, effectively targeted according to need.
- Children are found permanent families without delay.
- Children and young people in foster care achieve the best possible outcomes.

Children in our Care in Foster Placements

The number of children in care has steadily increased over the year to 346 at the end of the year, an increase of 30 children. There has also been an increase of 30 children in foster placements; this has been dispersed evenly between in house, agency and family and friends placements.

	31st March 2015	31st March 2016
Number of Children in our Care	316	346
Number of CioC in Foster Care	213	243
Number of children in in-house foster care placements	138	147
Number of children in family and friends foster care	28	41
Number of children in independent fostering agency placements	47	55

Gender breakdown of in house fostering placements

	31st March 2015	31st March 2016
Male	130	148
Female	83	95

Age breakdown of in house fostering placements

The majority of children in foster care aged 0 to 5 years generally require short term placements as they proceed to legally permanent placements relatively quickly. Fostering for adoption and concurrent placements are also used for babies; therefore, the turnover of placements is high and the availability of foster carers for this age group is good. The older age groups require permanent placements, the throughput is slower and the need for carers greater.

	March 31st 2015	March 31st 2016
0 to 5 years	51	56
6 to 10 years	68	67
11 to 16 years	87	112
17 years +	7	8

New Referrals in Quarter 4

Month	No of children	No of sibling groups	Age 0 to 5 years	Age 6 to 11 years	Age 12+ years	Placed in house	Independent Fostering Agency	Residential Placements	Short Breaks	Didn't come in
Jan	16	4	1	8	7	3	4	0	3	6
Feb	13	1	2	6	5	8	1	0	0	4
March	27	4	12	8	7	14	1	0	2	10
Total	56	9	15	22	19	25	6	0	5	20

There was a significant increase in referrals to the Fostering Service over the Quarter which peaked in March. In Quarter 3, there were 40 referrals compared to 56 in quarter 4. The largest number of referrals came from the 6

to 11 years age group in Quarter 4 compared to Quarter 3 where the 0 to 5 years was the largest group. More than a third of children referred for a placement search did not come in either because of decisions made by the courts or because family members came forward to care for children.

Matching for long term fostering

Five fostering households were presented to the Fostering Panel and seven children have been matched long term during Quarter 4.

Feedback from children in foster care

The feedback received from children about being in foster care is positive. Their views are obtained from:

- Participation in the Voice and Junior Voice groups;
- The work of the Participation Champions in the Service;
- Participation in staff recruitment (interviews) and foster carer training;
- Contributing to the annual review report of the foster carers looking after them;
- A support group for birth children, which was recently extended to include grandchildren;
- Social worker feedback for foster carer reviews.

Children and young people made the following comments about their placements when contributing to foster carer reviews:

One child in a Family and Friends placement wrote:

'I am happy and if it was up to me I would have the Special Guardianship Order done with and then I could lawfully be the son of X and Y.'

A teenager commented:

'X was proud when I did my GCSE mocks. I like spending time at home.'

A child talked about the opportunities offered to them by their carer, which included going to Wimbledon to watch the tennis, going to Harry Potter World, the Globe Theatre and to see Matilda all of which she was very excited about.

Another related how spoiled he had been at Christmas and another said 'it is fun living in this house.'

A child, who had regular short breaks in foster carer said 'I want to live with them for my life until I am 18.'

Children's social workers are also required to complete a feedback form for foster carers reviews. Examples of some of the positive comments are:

'I have observed X's interactions with Y to be sincere, loving, understanding and mutual.'

'This at times was a challenging birth family to work with. X remained professional and shared concerns with myself and support staff.'

'I have received reports from the portage team who praise X for her efforts in supporting Y to reach his full potential.'

Promoting Children's Health, Emotional Development, Education & Leisure

Foster families are provided with pre and post-approval preparation and training on the importance and availability of health, education and leisure services to enable them to help children achieve their potential and enhance their emotional wellbeing.

Looked After Children and young people are encouraged to participate in a variety of activities in which they can succeed and are supported in achieving better outcomes. All local Looked After Children and care leavers are provided with a Be Active card, which enables them to access free sport and leisure activities within the Borough.

Children in foster care have regular medicals at the statutory frequency appropriate for their age. There is a designated Nurse for Looked After Children, who takes an active role in following up health issues and assisting

with health promotion work. Foster carers have a Health Passport for each child they care for in which they or the child records all of the child's health details. Public Health funding for 18 months has enabled the appointment of a specialist nurse to work with 'hard to reach' Looked After Children and care leavers.

First Aid training is mandatory for all foster carers. Foster carers receive training on a variety of health related issues including 'Infectious Diseases in Childhood' and 'Managing Medicine.' Phase 1 of a 'Healthy Homes' training package for carers has been developed.

In line with Standard 8 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, the Department has, and implements a written education policy prepared in partnership with the Education Manager for Children in Our Care. The Virtual Head's role is to oversee that the educational needs of all Children in our Care are met and that levels of achievement and aspiration among our children and young people are raised. The Pupil Premium allowance previously paid to schools to support Children in our Care to achieve in school is now managed by the Virtual Head, and a system is in place to administer and ensure the money is spent appropriately to further the educational achievements of Children in our Care. The Virtual Head quality assures all Personal Education Plans (PEPs). The virtual school is in place and the governing body has been established. 2 hours a week of additional tuition is offered to all Year 11 young people to promote GCSE improvement.

The Education Manager sits within the Children in our Care Social Work Service and where necessary, actively intervenes with schools to promote the needs of children in foster care. As part of the preparation and assessment process and through the Foster Carer Agreement, foster carers are set a clear expectation that they will promote and support children's educational attainment. The ways in which foster carers meet children's educational needs are monitored through the foster carer review process and supervisory visits. Foster carers regularly receive training on 'The Education of Children in Care.'

In relation to emotional wellbeing, Looked After Children have access to Clinical Psychology and related services through the East Lancashire Child and Adolescent Service (ELCAS) also known as Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). A dedicated team, Supporting Carers of Children and Young People Looked After Together (SCAYT) for Looked After Children includes Clinical Psychology services. Advice is readily available to social workers and foster carers working with children in foster care.

Engagement with Children & Young People

A member of staff takes a lead role in supporting the functions of the Sons and Daughters group. There were no events held in Quarter 4 but consultations have been held to plan future events. The three Sons and Daughters Champions have been involved in planning and designing leaflets for future events and in developing a webpage. New designs are being implemented for the consultation forms for the foster carers' annual review process. Foster carers' sons and daughters are involved in 'Skills to Foster', preparation training for applicant foster carers and their feedback from the training is incorporated within the Form of fostering assessment.

Two members of staff from the Fostering Service continue to promote the participation agenda and set a number of priorities throughout the year. One member of staff attended the Leapfrog research project in conjunction with Lancaster University, which aimed to provide a range of tools to support the work and to explore different ways of communicating with young people, gaining their wishes and feelings, and ensuring that their 'Voice' is heard. Members of the 'Voice' group continue to attend foster carers' preparation training where they lead an activity with applicants and provide feedback, which contributes to the applicants' assessment.

The 'Sons and Daughters Champions' are actively involved in planning events. They play a role in supporting service development and ensure that birth children's voices are heard. Birth children are asked to provide feedback for foster carer reviews about their experience of fostering.

In Quarter 4, one wrote 'we have had two lovely children who have enjoyed living as part of my family'.

One child indicated they sometimes feel a bit left out and can struggle to cope with the foster child's temper and self-harming but added they feel well supported.

VOICE Group

The Junior VOICE group (for 8 to 12 year olds) and the main Voice Group (for 12 to 16 year olds) now meet monthly at Knott Street Community Centre and the majority of children who attend are in foster care. This venue was chosen as the facilities allow part of each session to be activity-based. Both groups have been involved in a number of consultations activities to inform and shape services. Members of the group have been involved with a

research project with Lancaster University to design tools to improve how adults communicate with children and young people.

There is also a Care Leavers Forum, which is well attended. A number of young people have undertaken Peer Mentoring training and are mentoring others through the 'Getting Ready for Adult Life' pack. Additionally, a Young Advisors Group which a number of care leavers attend has been working on a project on the impact of social media on young people. Members of the group have delivered Total Respect training to a multiagency audience of practitioners, councillors and foster carers. Two of the care leavers recently received awards for their campaign work to improve the lives of children in care and care leavers.

Transitions

Children and young people in foster care are supported to make a positive transition to adult life and foster carers attend training on 'Transitions' which focusses on their role in developing young people's skills to live independently as they progress towards adulthood. They are allocated a Leaving Care Worker at the age of 15 ½ years, who supports their decision making about post-16 education, training and employment and their future accommodation needs and wishes. The Children in Our Care Team and the Fostering Team encourage carers and young people to consider 'staying put' and the Leaving Care Service has delivered 5 courses for foster carers in recent months about this to help develop their understanding of the implications. To date, 68 carers have attended and more courses are planned for the next financial year. The training has been positively evaluated by carers and most indicate a willingness to work with 'staying put'. Although finance causes carers the most concern, some are willing to receive Housing Benefit as part of their financial package and will consider changing their status to landlord.

Care Planning

The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015 provides a revised definition of 'permanence' for Children Looked After including for the first time the definition of a long term foster placement. The responsibilities of the local authority in assessing the ability of the foster carer to meet the needs of the child now and in the future, and identifying any support services needed to achieve this are also set out. Local authorities are required to achieve long term matching within reasonable timescales. The Regulations introduce new duties for ceasing to look after a child. 2 long term matches were approved in Quarter 4.

The Fostering Service

The Service comprises the Mainstream Team, the Family and Friends and Short Breaks Team, and the Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO) Team formerly known as Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC).

All 3 Teams were fully staffed in Quarter 4. At the end of the Quarter, the TFCO Programme closed and staff moved into different posts. A small number of specialist staff were retained by the Fostering Service to form part of the developing support services to children and young people in foster placements and their carers.

Foster Carer Resource

At the end of Quarter 4, there were 117 foster carers compared to 113 in Quarter 3. This compares with 129 carers at the end of March 2015 and 140 in 2014. Numbers have decreased significantly over the last 2 years and this is largely due to the Service refraining from assessing prospective carers, who are only willing to offer baby placements. This is because there is a sufficient supply of baby carers and the Service is unable to continue assessing and supervising carers in line with statutory requirements, who have vacant placements.

Total number of foster carers	Mainstream	Short breaks carers	Family and friends carers
117	88	12	17
Placements	187	20	26

Matching and Ethnicity

5 placements were made in Quarter 4 where a cultural match was not available. 2 of these were emergency short term placements.

In March, a placement was made for a Latvian child with white British carers and a non-culturally matched placement was also made for an Asian Pakistani child with white British carers. The Service ensures that carers are

provided with training and support in meeting the religious and cultural needs of children, who are not in culturally matched placements.

Foster Carer Recruitment

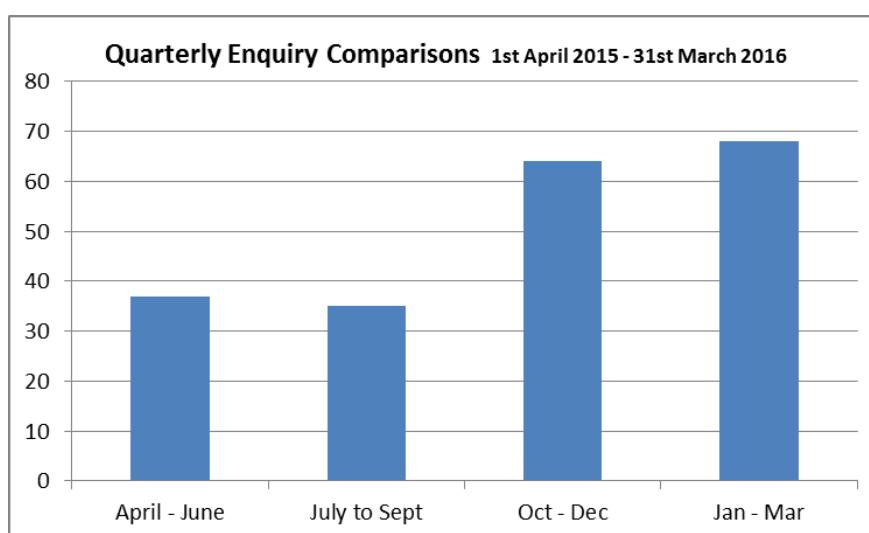
Initial Enquiries

Source of enquiries

Press	Facebook	Website	Search engine	Radio	Info event	Other	Total
1	15	38	2	2	1	9	68

During Quarter 4, the Service created a Google Plus page and added a listing on Google Places for Businesses providing priority on the Google search engine for prospective carers. An advert went out in Quarter 4 to recruit carers for children with disabilities. The website is continually refreshed with video clips about foster carer stories. Stands are regularly placed at locations with good footfall.

The Letsfoster website, which is promoted by social media, continues to generate the majority of enquiries. However, whilst the number of enquiries has almost doubled during the year, the number of enquiries that progress to application stage does not reflect this. This is partly due to the number of enquirers wishing to foster babies and small children. It also appears that those who complete the contact form on Facebook are either not serious about fostering and quickly change their minds or do not want to be pursued by the Service and fail to respond to attempts to engage them. The Service is considering a more targeted social media campaign for the coming year. Agencies right across the North West are experiencing the same difficulties in recruiting carers wishing to offer permanence for children aged 8 years and above.



End of Quarter 4

Enquirers at Initial Visit Stage	Applicants at Stage	Applicants at Stage
8	2	2

Annual Recruitment Figures

2015-16	April – June	July – Sept	Oct – Dec	Jan – March	TOTAL IN YEAR
Households	3	1	1	4	9
Placements	3	1	2	4	10

The number of carers recruited over the year dropped from 12 in 2014/15 to 9 in the last 12 months. It is of concern to the Service that the number of placements offered by new carers dropped from 24 to 10. It is clear that

carers willing to care for older children are reluctant to consider sibling groups or multiple placements. Only one carer has agreed to more than one placement in the entire year.

Regional Campaign

A decision has been made regionally to re-launch the 'You Can Foster' recruitment campaign. Fostering Service Managers and the Strategy Officer have been involved in the development of this campaign to ensure that Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council derives full benefit from it.

The campaign is prioritising recruitment at local level through targeting of PR and digital marketing and additional local activity. Universal priorities include:

1. Brothers and sisters – including sibling groups of 3 or more children/young people;
2. Older children/young people – over half of all Looked After Children are now aged 10 years or older;
3. Children from BME communities, in particular black children and increasingly those from new migrant communities;
4. Long term foster carers;
5. Children with complex/additional needs including behaviour that challenges.

Foster Carer Retention

Retention of foster carers remains good based on a strategy of good support, including a financial allowance scheme, and a wide and varied programme of training. Foster carer satisfaction with the Service appears high and there are regular meetings with foster carers via the Foster Care Association (FCA) where issues can be raised.

During Quarter 4, 3 sets of foster carers resigned. 1 couple were approved as adopters for the children they were fostering, 1 set were granted a Special Guardianship Order, and 1 couple separated resulting in one of them resigning and the other being deregistered.

The Service has developed a strategy for children aged 11 years plus, which enhances support for foster carers looking after young people in this age group. A telephone-based on call service is in place and the 11 plus Fostering Support Officer has a caseload of carers and young people requiring additional support. The initiative is based at the Adolescent Support Unit (ASU) and those young people participating are able to join groups and activities and / or enjoy one-to-one sessions. In addition, a monthly multi-agency drop-in has been introduced to give carers the opportunity to seek advice from specialist workers including those from Leaving Care, Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Education, Crime Reduction Initiatives (CRI), Inspire (drugs and alcohol support), Young People's Services and Health.

Assessment

Statutory guidance for fostering assessments is that they should be completed within 8 months and this is generally achieved. The quality of assessments remains good and is monitored by the Fostering Panel.

Foster Carer Training

The foster carer training programme currently provides a range of short training courses, which cover the mandatory Fostering Standards, specialist training on relevant topics, safeguarding training, Health and Safety training and support groups for carers.

In this latest Quarter, a popular session (20 carers attended) has been the 8 plus Fostering Conference which covered:

- Missing from Home & Child Sexual Exploitation
- Internet Safety
- Speech and Language
- Legal Highs

Feedback from carers was positive though there were a number of negative comments about the venue, which is under consideration for future training.

New proposals for training 2016 - 17

In response to feedback from carers and also to ensure maximum utilisation of training places, we propose offering a Conference Model for training, where several topics are covered on one day. Three Conferences will be taking place each year and have been designed to ensure the Mandatory Standards are met.

The Paediatric First Aid course has been updated and support groups continue to be offered and facilitated from within the Service.

Attendance at training continues to be an issue for the Service. Of the 254 places commissioned on various courses over the Quarter, 169 places were booked but only 122 (48%) were actually attended. A Foster Carer Forum was held in March to consult carers about training. The proposal to deliver most courses via the conference model was well received and will be trialled in Quarter 1.

Nurturing Attachments has now been condensed into a 14 week course covering 3 modules. The interest and up take for the course has been positive with low drop out and excellent attendance. Over all the feedback remains positive and carers feel that the course has helped them to better understand the children they care for and the behaviour they have to manage. The course provides an understanding of how early childhood experiences can impact on future relationships and attachments. The second part of the course looks at ways of offering therapeutic parenting and providing carers with the skills to manage complex needs.

KEEP has successfully rolled out Programme five; 12 carers started this Programme, which has also included three carers from another local authority. This has been really successful and the feedback so far has been positive.

Fostering Panel

During Quarter 4, the main Panel considered:

- 7 – Friends and Family approvals
- 4 – Mainstream approvals
- 3 – Changes of approval
- 2 – Reviews
- 1 – Exemption
- 2 – Long Term Matches

The Review Panel heard 24 reviews, which took place with 10 carers in attendance. Feedback from those attending Panel is generally positive.

Compliance

Complaints

One complaint was received during Quarter 4. This was a low level concern reported by a child's Social Worker following a letter received from the child's father. The letter detailed concerns about the care of his daughter whilst in foster care. This was investigated but there was no evidence to substantiate the concerns raised and no further action was taken. There have been 4 complaints throughout the year.

Compliments

There have been 4 compliments received during Quarter 4.

A compliment was made on behalf of a foster carer in relation to the support received from the ASU; 'the staff are brilliant'. A further compliment was received from the Team Manager at the ASU for the design of a leaflet and for the promotion of the 11+ training conference for foster carers.

There were two further compliments received from two different sources in respect of the Fostering Support Officer, who participated in the delivery of the Total Respect training course. The member of staff was complimented for the training delivery, the success of the event and for the rapport developed with the young people. The second compliment indicated that it was the best training a member of Council staff had attended throughout the years of being an employee of the Council. The young people were also praised for being strong and brave.

There have been 15 compliments throughout the year.

Allegations

There have been 5 allegations recorded during the Quarter and 10 throughout the year. The nature of these allegations were physical assault, aggressive behaviour displayed on behalf of a foster carer, physical chastisement and neglect.

The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) was notified in all cases. 2 cases were fully investigated and resulted in no further action being taken. Two of the allegations are ongoing and both allegations resulted in the children moving to alternative foster placements. The outcome of the 5th allegation was concluded by a joint visit by the Supervising Social Worker and the child's Social Worker and no further action is to be taken. This has been overseen by the Head of Service for Permanence.

Specific Incidents and Restraints

There have been 14 specific incidents reported within this Quarter and 35 throughout the year. The nature of these involved physical violence towards foster carers, missing from home, minor injuries and hospital admissions that resulted in treatment being provided. There was a further specific incident completed in relation to a young person being arrested on suspicion of sexual assault, the investigation remains ongoing and the young person has been bailed.

Serious Illnesses and Accidents

There have been 6 episodes of serious illnesses and accidents reported during this Quarter and 20 throughout the year. There was one minor fall which led to medicine being provided within the home, a minor sprain that occurred during activity in Judo and a hand injury whilst at School.

There were three separate reports that involved the same young person, which resulted in attendance at A&E due to a sprained wrist, an incident of self-harm which resulted in treatment of superficial wounds and an admission for surgery to remove his appendix.

Bullying

There were two reported bullying incidents within Quarter 4 and a total of 3 recorded for the year. The first involved a young person at school being hit with a board rubber by another young person at school. This incident was managed by the school.

The second was disclosed by the child's Social Worker when the child reported feeling bullied by another child in the same placement. This continues to be managed and an alternative placement is being sought for the young person that will support their needs long-term.

Missing From Home

Over the year there have been 10 young people who have gone missing on a total of 27 occasions. In Quarter 4, there were 7 missing from home reports involving three young people.

One incident involved a young person, who had recently been placed in foster care having had a lengthy period in agency residential care out of the area followed by a period in secure accommodation. The young person has an extensive history of going missing from placements and was reported three times in January despite being on a curfew and an electronic tag. The order was breached and the young person reoffended resulting in a 2 year custodial sentence.

A 14 year old was reported missing twice in January and once in February. The young person is vulnerable and at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation and substance misuse. On the first occasion, they were found in the company of a small group of young people all reported to be missing and on the second at another child's grandmother's home. In February, they were found quickly and returned home saying that she had just wanted to stay out late with friends. There have been no further reports regarding this young person.

In February, a 14 year old young person went missing straight from school because their carer challenged them about smoking in the home. The young person maintained text contact all the time they were missing and were returned home by the police at 3.30 am having been at a friend's home. This is a stable placement, which settled down very quickly.

There were no missing from home reports in March.

Throughout the year, there were 29 missing from home reports relating to in-house fostering placements for 6 young people. 1 young person has been reported 12 times but has not been reported since December and has gone from 8 reports in Quarter 1 to no reports in Quarter 4, which is indicative of his positive progress in placement. Return home interviews are conducted by the Engage Service, which identifies reasons why the young people go missing to inform plans to prevent further episodes and keep young people safe.

Exemptions

Four exemptions have been in place during this Quarter and three remain in place. The first is a short break weekend placement every six weeks, the second supports a mother and baby placement, and the third supports a short-term placement that was made in an emergency. There was a further exemption made to support a sibling placement of 4 children, which has now ended.

Engagement with Foster Carers

Blackburn with Darwen has a Foster Carer Association (FCA), which meets regularly and has an Elected Committee. Members of the Committee meet with senior managers and the Executive Member on a quarterly basis. The Chair of the FCA sits on the Corporate Parenting Specialist Advisory Group. The FCA has its own website, which has been increasingly used to communicate messages and news. It was recently agreed that the Chair and Secretary will meet every quarter with the Service Leader and Service Managers to discuss operational issues. A forum to consult foster carers on a range of issues is held at least once a year. The committee meets with the Director of Children's Services and Elected Member for Children's Services every quarter to discuss issues and concerns.

All foster carers are provided with membership of the Fostering Network and foster carers also have access to independent support commissioned from the Fostering Network to provide support and advocacy services in the event of complaints or allegations.

Foster carers have been involved with the development of a training course for permanence; this is to be delivered to foster carers, who are either looking at becoming long term foster carers or currently providing long term foster care.

A small group of foster carers meet on a monthly basis; they are recruitment champions helping to drive recruitment forward. They are involved with the planning of events, skills to foster preparation training, recruitment stands and events.

Family and Friends Foster Care

There has been a steady increase in referrals for family and friends assessments in Quarter 4 from 14 in Quarter 3 to 26. The number of full assessments including emergency Regulation 24 placements has also risen once more from 22 to 28. Eight family and friends households were approved this Quarter, one moved to a Special Guardianship Order, one resigned and the remainder are being supported and supervised by the Service. There continue to be targeted support groups for family and friends foster carers, who are also supported to attend training.

There continues to be joint working with social work teams around identifying family members at the earliest opportunity. The Advanced Practitioner has completed support sessions and workshops with newly qualified social workers and student social workers. Assessments completed by the Family and Friends Fostering Team are being highlighted in the court arena as being of a very high standard.

Short Break Foster Care

During Quarter 4, there was one approval of a short break carer for the 11 plus scheme and another set of carers have made the transition from TFCO to the mainstream short break service, with another pending the Fostering Panel. Some carers also have mainstream placements but offer additional support to other foster carers or birth families. There are currently 14 carers, who have offered 20 placements this Quarter, some on an emergency overnight or others like a birth mother, who is having cancer treatment and has requested support because she has no family. Carers offer care to children across a wide range of disability and additional need spectrum. There has recently been some joint training with the sitting service on communication tools. Training is available on line, through Newfield School and Apple Trees.

Treatment Foster Care Oregon (T.F.C.O.) formerly known as Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care

Towards the end of 2015, it became clear that in the current financial climate the TFCO Programme was unsustainable particularly in the light of difficulties in recruiting carers to improve placement capacity. A decision to close the Programme was agreed at the Local Joint Negotiating Consulting Committee meeting on 8th March. At this time, all children on the Programme had moved on to long term placements. All staff have been offered alternative employment and the majority of foster carers on the Programme have moved to mainstream fostering.

Given the need to improve placement stability and reduce the numbers of children requiring expensive independent agency provision, it was agreed that a third of the TFCO budget could be retained by the Fostering Service to develop a placement support service for the 6 to 11 year old age group. Three TFCO staff have

transferred into this Service, which is now accepting referrals. The Service will run alongside the 11 Plus Service running from ASU and will share the Limes with the Challenge to Care Team.

Training / Staff Development

All staff members have an individual training and development plan linked to their annual appraisal and monitored during monthly supervision.

Placement Stability

Currently, the Department uses a definition of placement stability based on 3 or more placements in a 12 month period and this is calculated on a cumulative basis over the year. The placement stability rate at the end of March was 2.5 % higher than it was at the same time last year, 9.8% compared to 7.3%.

Disruption meetings are held in order to identify learning and inform future planning for any child whose placement has been disrupted. A number of managers across Children’s Services have been trained to chair these meetings. The Head of Service for Permanence completed an analysis of disruption meetings during Quarter 2 in order to identify themes or trends and learning for the Service. The learning has supported the development of a Placement Stability Action Plan, which involves all relevant social work teams and is due to be implemented in Quarter 1 2016/17.

The 11 Plus Programme strategy has continued to develop and is currently at full capacity with the aim of improving placement stability. Over the year, 17 referrals have been made to the Programme. 4 young people have had short breaks at the Adolescent Support Unit. 3 of the young people supported are in Family and Friends placements and the support has helped to sustain these placements which had become fragile. 3 placements in receipt of support had been identified as presenting a high risk of disruption and the support provided has enabled them to stabilise. The majority of young people have benefitted from one to one support but 8 young people have participated in group activities and programmes. The 11 Plus multi agency drop-in has also continued to develop and by the end of Quarter 4 was well attended by foster carers. 11 Plus delivered a conference in March focussing on issues that often arise with adolescents in care such as substance misuse, missing from home and sexual exploitation. 21 carers attended and the feedback was positive.

When the decision was taken to close TFCO, it was agreed that part of the budget could be retained to develop a similar foster placement service for younger children aged 6 to 11 years retaining a small number of the TFCO staff, who have specialist skills and knowledge. It is anticipated that the 11 Plus Programme and this new service will ultimately merge to provide one comprehensive foster placement support service across the full age range.

Commissioned Placements

	April 15	May 15	June 15	July 15	Aug 15	Sept 15	Oct 15	Nov 15	Dec 15	Jan 16	Feb 16	Mar 16
New commissioned placements	2	1	8	3	2	0	2	2	2	2	2	2
Total Commissioned	63	59	63	65	65	62	59	58	60	64	68	71

The total number of commissioned placements was higher at the end of March than it had been all year despite the fact that the number of new placements month on month was consistent at 2 for the last 6 months. The numbers leaving commissioned placements has not been sufficient to offset the longer term impact of the peak in demand experienced in June 2015.

Budget

The Fostering Service managed to operate within budget for the year. However, the demand for placements for older children and for children with disabilities, which have not been available in house, has placed the commissioning budget under great pressure. Resources from elsewhere have been deployed to reduce the significant overspend of this budget.

Progress of Priorities for 2015 / 16

1. Recruit foster carers for older children and young people and for Treatment Foster Care Oregon Programme

Update – the ‘Picture Your selfie Fostering’ campaign which has been driven by social media has been successful in generating interest and directing prospective applicants to the Lets Foster website as outlined in the recruitment section of this report. This has not generated sufficient applications to foster however and remains a priority for the Service.

2. Develop the 11 plus Strategy with the aim of improving placement stability

Update – The initiative has continued to develop the multi-agency drop-in, out of hours telephone support, short breaks for some young people at the ASU and outreach support from the 11 plus Fostering Support Officer. 17 children and young people and their carers have been supported over the year. The Service will expand across the full 6 years plus age range in the next 12 months and placement stability will continue to be a priority.

3. Improve foster carer attendance at training

Update – Both KEEP and the Nurturing Attachment courses have been fully subscribed and despite the extended period of delivery (16 and 18 weeks respectively), there has been virtually no drop out. Attendance at other courses has been less consistent and following a review of the training offer, a proposal to deliver the majority of future courses via a conference model has been put to carers during the annual Fostering Forum.

4. Aim to achieve Investing in Children status by continuing to develop participation and by ensuring that the voice of the child is central to the work of the fostering service.

Update – Investing in Children status was achieved by the Fostering Service alongside the Children in our Care Service in August 2015. Accreditation lasts 12 months and is then reassessed. It was recommended in 2015 that the two services be assessed separately next time. Participation will continue to be a key priority for fostering.

5. Continue to monitor compliance with Fostering Service Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011.

Update - Monthly case file audits are undertaken by all three managers, the Deputy Manager and the Advanced Practitioner to monitor compliance with Fostering Regulations and Standards. The audit process is overseen by the Policy, Planning and Performance Team, which analyses the findings to identify themes for improvement.

6. Ensure compliance with new statutory guidance introduced on 1st April 2015 to amend the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.

Update - A series of meetings have been held and an action plan prepared to ensure compliance with the guidance being developed. There is now a process in place for ceasing to look after a child, which is overseen by the Director of Children’s Services, who has to sign the decision and support plan. A continuous programme of matching children long term has taken place throughout the year and will continue to be a priority for the Service.

Priorities for 2016/17

1. To continue to develop the campaign to recruit foster carers for older children in need of permanent placements, children with disabilities, mother and baby placements and sibling groups.
2. To implement the Placement Stability Action Plan to reduce the percentage of Looked After Children, who experience disruption and have more than 3 placements during their time in care. This includes the continued development of fostering placement support services across the full age range.
3. To implement foster carer training proposals with the aim of improving attendance rates and delivering valuable courses that meet the needs of foster carers.
4. Continue to monitor compliance with Fostering Service Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011.
5. Maintain the Investing in Children status of the Service and ensure that children and young people’s participation remains central to the work of the Service.

Alyson Hanson

Service Leader, Placement Services

1st May 2016