

Fostering Service Quarter 1 Report

1st April to 30th June 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

67% of children in our care are in foster care representing 233 children. Of these, 63% are placed with in-house foster carers. The number of children in our care has steadily increased in the last 12 months and in Quarter 1, 10 children were admitted to care in the 11 to 15 years age group, which presents the Fostering Service with the challenge of identifying placements for this 'hard to place' age group. Court decision-making has also led to an increased demand for mother and baby placements.

	30th June 2016
Number of Children in our Care (CioC)	346
Number of CioC in Foster Care	233
Number of children in in-house foster care placements	148
Number of children in family and friends foster care	32
Number of children in independent fostering agency placements	48
Number of BwD children placed with other local authority foster carers	5

In House Placements

Male	95
Female	53

Age breakdown of in house fostering placements

Babies and very young children generally require short term placements as they proceed to legal permanence relatively quickly. Fostering for adoption and concurrent placements are also used for babies, therefore the turnover of placements is high and 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 is greater.

Age Breakdown of In-house Placements

	30th June 2016
0 to 4 years	33
5 to 9 years	33
10 to 14 years	53
15 years +	29

New Referrals in Quarter 1

It was a busy Quarter for referrals to the Fostering Service. June was the busiest month with 23 children referred for foster placements, although 10 of the children referred did not come in to care either because of decisions made by the Courts or because family members came forward to care for the children. The largest number of referrals came from 0 – 5 years and 12 years +. The majority of children were placed with in-house foster carers.

Month	No children	No sibling groups	Age 0 to 5	Age 6 to 11	Age 12+	In house placement	Fostering agency placement	Residential placement	Short breaks	Didn't come in
April	10	0	5	2	3	6	1	2		1
May	11	3	5	3	3	8	1			2
June	23	1	7	6	10	6	4			10
Total	44	4	17	11	16	20	6	2		13

3 children in short term placements referred for permanent placements in June were not placed until Quarter 2.

Matching for long term fostering

1 long term match was agreed at the Fostering Panel in Quarter 1 with the young person attending the Panel and verbalising his happiness. The foster carer's own child also attended and was able to say how their relationship is 'like brother and sister'.

Feedback from children in foster care

The feedback received from children 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 and grandchildren;
- Social worker feedback for foster carer reviews.

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

Two boys in long term placements with experienced carers completed the comments form but with ticks and one word answers. However, both indicated that they are very happy in placement and enjoy doing lots of different things with their carers. The social worker for the boys commented about the carers:

'They are not judgemental and take each child as they are; they have really helped R develop his self-confidence.'

One little girl drew happy pictures on her consultation form rather than express in words how she feels about her foster carers. She calculated in hours and minutes how long she has been with them. Of the same foster carers, the social worker of a child previously in placement commented:

'S loved living with W and M, she loved all the family celebrations, especially those held on the anniversary of when she moved in. She felt very much part of the family.'

One social worker wrote:

'C has made a huge difference to L (child) who has responded positively to the care, guidance and boundaries afforded by C. L has now returned home to her mother but C continues to provide support.'

3 siblings in placement had mixed views. One of the children expressed his desperation to return home whilst his siblings are very happy. One indicated that he 'wants to live with the carers 'forever'.

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.

As well as mandatory First Aid training, foster carers also 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 their educational achievements. 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 young people in Year 11 to promote GCSE improvements.

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.' Whilst a number of children sat important examinations including SATs during Quarter 1, the results of these will not be available until Quarter 2 and will be included with GCSE results in the Quarter 2 Report.

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). As from 1st April 2016, the SCAYT (Supporting Carers and Young People Looked After Together) Psychological Service for Looked After Children ended. The make-up of in-house psychological services to support the emotional and mental health of Looked After Children is about to be changed and will be outlined in the Quarter 2 Report.

Engagement with Children & Young People

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 explore different ways of communicating with young people, gaining their wishes and feelings and ensuring 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 Foster Carers Sons and Daughters group is in place and frequent consultations are held between the Participation Champions and Sons and Daughters Champions to discuss changes and design new consultation forms for foster carer annual reviews. Communication tools have been created for the use of life story work and for reviews. Foster Carers Sons and Daughters remain involved in 'Skills to Foster' preparation training alongside members of the 'VOICE' group for applicant foster carers and their feedback from the training is incorporated within the fostering assessment.

VOICE Group

The Junior VOICE group (8 to 12 year olds) and the main VOICE group (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 consultation activities to inform and shape services. Members of the groups 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 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 15½ 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 develop their understanding of the implications. 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. The Service has started some work to develop a 'staying close' option, which may be more suitable for a number of care leavers.

In Quarter 1, the Leaving Care Service achieved an increase in the number of supported lodgings providers, which increases choice for young people leaving foster care and residential placements in favour of semi independence. The Service has worked well with training providers in the Quarter and achieved 5 Apprenticeships. Participation levels continue to be good with young people delivering the Total Respect training and training for foster carers. One young person's feedback about delivering the training was:

'There's more passion because it comes from us. We run it and we get loads of positive feedback from everyone at the end. I love doing it and I'd do it for a job if I could.'

Care Planning

The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015 provide 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. One long term match was approved in Quarter 1.

The Fostering Service

The Service comprises the Mainstream, the Family and Friends and Short Breaks Teams. A Foster Placement Support Service is in place comprising a Fostering Support Officer (principally for Family and Friends support), part time Therapeutic Family Worker, an 11 years Plus worker and 1 Foster Placement Support Officer for 7 to 11 year olds.

Foster Carer Resource

The overall number of carers has increased slightly during Quarter 1 compared to the last Quarter. The breakdown is broadly similar with 3 new approvals in the Quarter; 2 short breaks and 1 mainstream.

	Total number of foster carers	Mainstream	Short breaks carers	Family and friends carers
Quarter 4 Jan to April 2016	117	88	12	17
Quarter 1 April to June 2016	119	89	14	16

Matching and Ethnicity

2 placements were made in Quarter 1 where an ethnic match was unavailable. A child of Portuguese / Angolan heritage who experienced an Independent Fostering Agency placement disruption in Scotland was returned to Blackburn with Darwen as an emergency and placed with white British Independent Fostering Agency carers. A White British child was placed with an Asian carer in an emergency. A culturally appropriate agency placement was identified and the child was moved the following day.

Foster Carer Recruitment

Initial Enquiries

April	May	June
5	12	8

Numerous recruitment events were held in Quarter 1

- April – 2BR Radio Lancashire (2 week campaign), social media articles, Poem by Valda Creech, foster carer, published online.
- May – Foster Care Fortnight ‘Big Selfie Launch’ outside the Town Hall followed by various information events in Blackburn and Darwen. The Lancashire Evening Telegraph attended the launch and the Service received full page coverage. A fun day at the end of the first week was popular with members of the public.



- June – The Team set up a cheer point supporting members of staff participating in the Race for Life at Witton Park. A short video was produced of the event and shared on social media. The Team also attended the Flower Festival at the Cathedral.



Approvals

There was 1 new mainstream approval between April – June and 13 households were in assessment at the end of the Quarter and attending the Panel in Quarter 2 for approval.

End of Quarter 1

Enquirers at Initial Visit Stage	Applicants at Stage 1	Applicants at Stage 2
6	2	5

Regional Campaign

The regional ‘You Can Foster’ recruitment campaign idea is being developed by an agency looking at wants and needs of children and young people with the following captions:

- Josh wants to make the team
- Olivia wants to be a chef
- Maya wants to be a vet

- Zak wants to be a superhero
- Jack and Emilie want to be Rock stars
- Chloe wants to go to college

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 a 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; and
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.

In 2015, the Service developed a strategy for children aged 11 years plus, which enhances support for foster carers looking after young people in this age group. Research about foster carer recruitment indicates that support is a key issue and a factor in their ability to maintain placements and continue to foster when things become challenging.

A telephone-based on call service is in place and the 11 years 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. On 1st April 2016, this support offer was extended to support placements from aged 7 years and over as the Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care Programme ended and a number of staff became part of the fostering support offer. Fostered children in this age group will be able to access activities and support offered by the 'Challenge to Care' Team, which is to be based at the Limes. Placements needing short breaks will be referred to short break foster care.

During this Quarter, one mainstream fostering couple have retired after fostering for 37 years. They have cared for many children during this time and are a significant loss to the Fostering Service. There have been three friends and family carers who have resigned in this period - two have gone on to gain Special Guardianship Orders and one has resigned following a placement break down.

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 covering the Mandatory Fostering Standards, specialist training on relevant topics, safeguarding training, Health and Safety training and Support Groups for Carers. In the last Quarter, courses have included KEEP Refresh, Life Story Work, Managing Allegations, Moving Children On, Paediatric First Aid, Positive Care and Control and Risk Assessment.

New proposals for training 2016 – 17

In response to feedback from Carers and to ensure maximum utilisation of training places, a Conference Model for training where several topics are covered on one day is to be introduced in September. Three conferences will

take place each year and have been designed to ensure the Mandatory Standards are met. It will be mandatory for carers to attend at least two conferences depending on their training needs and record. An additional optional conference will also be developed around adolescence and placement stability issues. 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 168 places commissioned on various courses over the Quarter, 62 places were booked but only 48 places utilised, which was a utilisation rate of 35%, which is a significant reduction from the previous Quarter and a concern for the Service. However, attendance at KEEP and Nurturing Attachments is excellent and is not factored into this percentage. It is expected that moving to mandatory conferences in September will improve this rate significantly. The draft programme is due to go out to carers before the end of July with the first conference scheduled for September. Attendance at training is monitored by the Review Panel and can affect carers' band payments should they not comply.

The 6th Programme of KEEP ends on Wednesday 20th July 2016. The group has been the biggest so far with 12 carers including 3 carers from Wigan and Leigh Borough Council, who purchased places on the Programme. Whilst logistics have been challenging for a variety of reasons, the group settled successfully and feedback has been positive. The 12 carers represent 11 children and come from 11 different households. 54 carers have now completed KEEP training. There is a provisional list of 13 carers pencilled in for future sessions.

The Nurturing Attachments course ran from January to May 2016 over 14 weeks with 16 carers attending, 14 local and 2 from a neighbouring authority (Stockport). There were 2 carers, who dropped out due to health and a change in personal circumstances. The course aims to aid carers' understanding around attachment theory and how developmental trauma can affect behaviour and relationships. The course provides carers with a therapeutic approach to parenting that builds relationships and feelings of safety as well as providing an approach to behaviour management.

Overall, the course was very well attended and the carers felt the content met their needs providing better understanding and supported placement stability. Feedback from the course states:-

"This course needs to be available to all carers."

"It was the most useful and relevant training I have completed in 6 years of fostering. It should be mandatory".

"Facilitators very knowledgeable and informative."

"I can see improvements already in the way I deal with ** . I cannot praise this course enough"

Fostering Panel

Two Panels were held in Quarter 1; there was no Panel in May. The Panel was quorate on both occasions.

The Panel Advisor has continued to recruit members to the central list now joined by two retired male social workers.

Panel Business

4 friends and family approvals

2 temporary noting of friends and family, one subsequently was in Court and a Section 38.6 order was made

3 reviews following concerns

2 first reviews

2 exemptions

1 match for long term

4 resignations (1 retired after 30 plus years of fostering; 2 Special Guardianship Orders and one disrupted friends and family placement).

Overall, the Panel paperwork presented continues to be of a good standard and Panel attendees' feedback is largely positive.

Review Panel

16 foster carer reviews have been presented to the Annual Review Panel during this Quarter with 8 carers attending their review. The quality assurance for the reports has been consistently good and social workers are now more consistent in providing comments.

Complaints

There was one complaint in Quarter 1. This was from an advocate on behalf of a young person, who was not happy in foster placement and was requesting a move. This young person is placed with his sibling. A meeting was held resulting in further support for the young person as well as support for the foster carers. A sibling assessment was completed and the Single Assessment updated. The young person was offered short breaks with another carer.

Compliments

Four compliments have been made during the Quarter.

The Advanced Practitioner was complimented by a school Head of Careers for her attendance at a careers evening. Two Supervising Social Workers have been complimented on their roles as Supervising Social Workers from the foster carers they supervise. A compliment was also received from an Independent Reviewing Officer for the foster carers' commitment to and attitude in their role.

Allegations

2 allegations were recorded in Quarter 1. Both were allegations of physical abuse.

The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) was notified in both cases. The first allegation was fully investigated by the child's Social Worker and the child in placement was consulted; the investigation concluded that the allegation was unfounded and no further action was taken. The second was fully investigated and strategy discussions were held that included the Local Authority designated Officer (LADO). The allegation was agreed to be unfounded but it highlighted how the carers were struggling with the child's needs arising from his ADHD and Foetal Alcohol Syndrome. A referral was made to the Fostering Support Service for assessment and the provision of additional support. A number of actions were agreed in relation to the carers including training and development of their record keeping.

Specific Incidents and Restraints

There have been 10 specific incidents involving 6 young people reported in Quarter 1. The incidents included a hospital admission for treatment, a missing from home episode, one of challenging behaviour towards a foster carer by a young person, one incidents of fire starting, one of threatened fire starting. The fire starting incident occurred when a child stole the carers lighter from a pocket and hid it in his bedroom. When he went to bed he lit some paper and his headboard. He put the fire out himself immediately but the carers smelt smoke and responded quickly. A smoke alarm has now been installed in his bedroom.

Serious Illnesses and Accidents

There were 5 serious illnesses and accidents reported during the Quarter. There were 2 attendances at A&E, which involved two young people. One young person was suffering from a panic attack and medical advice was provided, and the second young person was affected by use of legal highs and was admitted for further observation and treatment. One child was suffering from a throat infection, and medication was prescribed and administered by the foster carer. A further two incidents of superficial cuts caused by razor blades were reported in relation to two young people. The carers sought appropriate advice from their Supervising Social Worker, which resulted in their safer care policies being updated and they were advised about appropriate storage of razors within the home.

Bullying

There have been no reported incidences of bullying within this Quarter.

Missing From Home

5 young people (8 incidents) were reported missing in Quarter 1.

In April, there was one young person that was reported missing from home whilst receiving short breaks from the Adolescent Support Unit. The young person went missing with two other young people, and was later returned to their placement by the police.

One young person was reported missing in June, following a disagreement during contact with their parent. The young person later returned to their placement, and the carer provided support and reassurance. During July, one young person went missing on four separate occasions; one involved the young person going to a family member without permission, and there were three further incidents when the young person went missing from placement and failed to maintain contact with the carers.

Exemptions

Five exemptions were in place during Quarter 1; four of these continued from the previous Quarter. The first exemption supports a mother and baby placement, the second a sibling placement of 4 children, the third a short-term placement that was made in an emergency and the fourth a further mother and baby placement. There was one new exemption to support a respite placement, which has since 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 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.

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 are currently 16 friends and family carers, who look after 25 children. There has been one new approval of grandparents looking after their 4 grandchildren. In Quarter 1, there were 4 approvals and 3 resignations at the Fostering Panel. The Team continues to attend care planning meetings and offer advice and support to child care social workers. Temporary approvals have been extremely complex this Quarter with one set of grandparents living and working overseas. The grandmother travelled to Blackburn to be assessed; unfortunately, after a substantial piece of work, this did not progress to approval because of the Grandfather's health. Assessments of other family members are still being completed. Three other substantial reports have been completed with different plans other than foster carer approval.

Currently, the small team of three assessors and an Advanced Practitioner (AP) are working on 7 SGO reports. The Team provided statements to Court and during Quarter 1 provided advice and written support on thirty cases and travelled to Somerset. There are currently three temporary approvals in progress plus work on four other assessments. The Advanced Practitioner has a full programme of workshops, which are conducted with other APs. The existing friends and family carers have access to training and have an allocated Supervising Social Worker, who is skilled in this area of work. It is acknowledged that friends and family placements are an area of growth, in that family is the first option in care proceedings if an alternative to parental care is required.

Short Break Foster Care

There are currently 14 carers, who have offered 18 placements this Quarter. The 14 carers are a mix of recruited short break carers and mainstream carers, who offer support to parents, other placements and emergencies. Carers are matched to children, who have a wide range of additional and complex needs. The Service is currently campaigning to recruit carers, who could offer a placement for a child in a wheelchair, as this is a service need. There has recently been a support group with training on autism. Other training is available through Newfield School and Appletrees.

Training / Staff

All staff members have individual training and a development plan, which is 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 that is calculated on a cumulative basis over the year. At this stage in the year, the percentage stability figures are low but it is clear that placement instability has increased in comparison with the same time last year. By the end of the Quarter, 2.3% of Looked After Children had 3 or more placements compared to 1.8% for the same period in 2015.

Year to date	April	May	June
LAC with 3 or more placements	5	5	8
Total number of LAC	351	353	349
% Stability of LAC placements 2016/17	1.4%	1.4%	2.3%
%Stability of LAC placements 2015/16	0.3%	0.9%	1.8%

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 completes an analysis of disruption meetings on a six monthly basis in order to identify themes or trends, and learning for the Service.

In order to improve placement stability, the Fostering Service developed an 11 Plus Strategy in 2014, which has now been extended to provide support for all children in foster care aged 6 years and over. This initiative is described in an earlier section of this Report.

Commissioned

There were 9 new placements in Quarter 1 and a number of placements ended, meaning 66 children were in commissioned placements at the end of June. The majority of these are Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements. Of the 9 new placements, 3 were residential of which one was a very short term arrangement for 28 days. The remainder were IFA placements including one concurrent placement for a baby, who is likely to be adopted. 2 of the 6 IFA placements were moves from one IFA to another as a result of placement disruption.

Budget

Although it is early in the year, the Fostering Service is on target to be within budget for the year. This has required the Service to make a number of efficiencies, which include the way that foster carer training is provided, the loss of a Fostering Support Officer post and the loss of the Deputy Manager role, although this will not come to fruition until the end of Quarter 2.

The demand for foster placements for older children, for children with disabilities and in recent months for mother and baby placements, which have not been available in house, continues to place the commissioning budget under great pressure. The recruitment budget, which is shared with the Adoption Service, is also under considerable pressure.

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 and sibling groups.
Update – there has been significant recruitment activity during Quarter 1 as described in the body of this Report. A targeted digital campaign is due to start in September. There have been a number of enquiries through the events and via the website outlined in the body of this Report.
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.

Update – support services for foster placements are now in place across the full age range, although carers of children in the 0 to 5 years age group rarely require additional support. Support for children aged 11 years + is now well embedded and in the last 12 months, 13 placements have been maintained as a result of the support provided.

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.

Update – the new conference style training programme commences in September.

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

Update – Service Managers are continually auditing compliance with Standards and Regulations.

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.

Update – participation work is ongoing. Investing in Children status will be reassessed by December when the current accreditation expires.

**Alyson Hanson
Service Leader, Placement Services
1st August 2016**