

## **Fostering Service Quarter 2 Report**

**1<sup>st</sup> July 2016 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 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 our care has continued to increase from Quarter 1 to Quarter 2 from 346 to 365. 66% (242) of the children in our care are in foster care and 42% (153) are placed with in-house foster carers. The majority of the new admissions have been placed in foster care, an increase of 9 new foster placements from Quarter 1 and 5 who have been placed with in house foster carers. The number of family and friends placements has remained static in this Quarter. There has been a slight decrease in the number of agency placements

	<b>30<sup>th</sup> Sept 2016</b>
<b>Number of Children in our Care (CioC)</b>	365
<b>Number of CioC in Foster Care</b>	242
<b>Number of children in in-house foster care placements</b>	153
<b>Number of children in family and friends foster care</b>	39
<b>Number of children in independent fostering agency placements</b>	45
<b>Number of BwD children placed with other local authority foster carers</b>	5

## **In House Placements**

<b>Male</b>	101
<b>Female</b>	52

## **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. The majority of new admissions to in house foster care in this Quarter are younger children under 9 years old. The number of admissions of children over the age of 10 years has remained static.

## **Age Breakdown of In-house Placements**

	<b>30<sup>th</sup> Sept 2016</b>
<b>0 to 4 years</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>4 to 9 years</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>10 to 14 years</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>15 years +</b>	<b>29</b>

## **New Referrals in Quarter 2**

<b>Month</b>	<b>No Children</b>	<b>No Sibling Groups</b>	<b>Age 0 to 5</b>	<b>Age 6 to 11</b>	<b>Age 12+</b>
<b>July</b>	12	1	2	4	6
<b>August</b>	20	4	10	7	3
<b>September</b>	16	3	12	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>

Of the 48 children referred to the Fostering Service in Quarter 2, 50% were under the age of 5 years. For the first time in many months, the Service experienced some pressure on placements for this age group for which there has been a surplus of placements for some time. Nevertheless, the majority of children referred who eventually came into care were placed in house. Two children placed with an Independent Fostering Agency in August were unaccompanied asylum seekers, who arrived in Blackburn without warning. There was a significant demand for parent and child placements during the Quarter, 8 referrals in August / September. Two of these are children, who have yet to be admitted to care.

### **Placement Destinations - new referrals**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Placed in house foster care</b>	<b>Placed Independent Fostering Agency</b>	<b>In house Residential Placements</b>	<b>Didn't come in</b>
<b>July</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>August</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>September</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>19</b>

### **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:

#### **Children and young people said:**

'I can talk to C about anything, she has supported me through difficult relationships breaking down and falling out with my friends'.

'Loving me. That is what I like about her'.

'I enjoy playing with them and hugging them'.

'J tries really hard with me and never gives up. They want what's best for me.'

One child was asked whether there was anything she wanted to say about her carers for their review and responded with a 'no, keep your nose out'!

#### **Social workers said:**

'I have seen their faces light up and the children have cancelled other things to spend time with them',

'All 3 children were emotionally distressed by their experiences at home and she (the foster carer) helped them to work through these'.

'K has a loving relationship with W which is lovely to see'.

'They make him feel special and part of their family'.

'They go above and beyond'.

### **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.

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). During Quarter 2, the former SCAYT (Supporting Carers and Young People Looked After Together) Psychological Service for Looked After Children which ended in April was replaced by our own in house arrangement called Revive. A Consultant Clinical Psychologist commissioned through ELCAS has taken up the role of overseeing and coordinating existing therapeutic provision in order to provide a flexible and responsive service offer that is under the control of Children’s Services.

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. Termly briefings are held with a group of social workers, managers, designated teachers and Head teachers to consider ways to improve achievement and attainment.

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). In Quarter 2, a PEP Audit was completed examining the quality of 120 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’.

### **Results 2016 – Key Stage 1**

We had 21 young children in care who formed the KS1 cohort in 2016, 13 (62%) attended primary schools in Blackburn with Darwen. Of these, 3 were dis-applied from the assessment in reading and writing and 4 dis-applied in maths. 1 school (out of borough) has failed to provide the results for a child despite repeated requests; therefore, the child has not been included in the results. 4 children in the group (20%) had either a Statement of Special Educational Needs or an Education Health and Care Plan. Also included is one asylum seeker, who had only been in the country a few months.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>BwD 2016 CioC Expected Standard +</b>	<b>BwD 2016 All Expected Standard +</b>	<b>National 2016 Expected Standard +</b>
Reading	47%	75%	74%
Writing	29%	67%	66%
Maths	25%	74%	73%

### **Key Stage 2**

We had 24 children in care who formed the KS2 cohort in 2016; 23 of these sat the end of Key Stage tests with 1 child being dis-applied from the tests. 67% of the cohort was educated in BwD primary schools at the time of

taking the tests. 4 children in the group (18%) had either a Statement of Special Educational Needs or an Education Health and Care Plan.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>BwD 2016 CioC Expected Standard +</b>	<b>BwD 2016 All Expected Standard +</b>	<b>National 2016 Expected Standard +</b>
Reading	47.8%	61.5%	66%
Writing	47.8%	73.5%	74%
Maths	34.8%	72.7%	70%
Overall	26.0%	50.6%	53%

### **GCSE Results**

	5 A* to C Maths and English	At least 1 A* to C	At least 1 A* to G	Achieving 1 or more GCSE or national qualification
2016	9%	70%	87%	91%
2016 students with statements/ EHCP	0%	13%	22%	83%

In 2016, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council had 23 CIOC eligible to take GCSE and other public examinations. 61% of these young people received their education within the Borough. Of the Year 11 cohort, 6 (26%) had a Statement of Special Educational Needs or Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

### **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.

Following a number of recruitment activities, there has been an increase in attendance at the monthly VOICE group sessions from children in both foster care and residential placements. A wider group of staff have also been identified to support the sessions.

Towards the end of Quarter 2, a Corporate Parenting Conference was held at Darwen Vale High School. It was attended by 30 children in our care and care leavers supported by a number of foster carers. The purpose of this two-yearly event is to raise awareness amongst corporate parents, which includes elected members and professionals, of the issues faced by children and young people in care and leaving care. The event is designed and led by children, and young people also being participative and interactive.

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 has been busy meeting with the 'Sons and Daughters Champions' and also several young people from the 'VOICE' group to gain their feedback on the new consultation forms for foster carers' annual reviews and staff appraisal feedback forms. These forms have been developed with the help and support of the young people, and will actively support and transform the service area.

### **VOICE Group**

The Junior VOICE group (8 to 12 year olds) and the main VOICE group (12 to 16 year olds) now meet on a monthly basis 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.

VOICE members continue to attend the Children & Young People's Scrutiny Committee and recently presented the Leapfrog Tools project and Young Advisors Social Media Research to the Committee. Children in care have also been involved in several staff recruitment interviews including those for social workers, Advanced Practitioners and a Team Manager post.

There is also a Care Leavers Forum that 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 multi-agency 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.

The Leaving Care Service has achieved an increase in the number of supported lodgings providers this year, 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. Training was also delivered to foster carers on the 21st September including Staying Put.

### **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**

During Quarter 2, the Deputy Manager role was disestablished. One of the Team Managers took voluntary redundancy and the Deputy Manager was moved into her role as a 'bump redundancy'. This has meant that the Deputy Manager responsibilities have been shared between the two Managers and the Advanced Practitioner.

The increase in Family and Friends work has continued and this function of the Fostering Service is now undertaken by all team members alongside their mainstream fostering role. All team members have an increased workload and are expected to work flexibly across all functions of the Service in order to achieve greater efficiency and meet the statutory functions of the Service with a reduced team.

### **Foster Carer Resource**

The overall number of foster carers has increased slightly compared to the last Quarter.

There have been 5 mainstream approvals, 4 being short term. The 5<sup>th</sup> is an approval of a carer transferring from an independent fostering agency and will provide long term, PACE and remand placements.

Overall, the new approvals create 10 additional placements.

	Total number of foster carers	Mainstream	Short breaks carers	Family and friends carers
Quarter 1 April to 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2016	119	89	14	16
Quarter 1 <sup>st</sup> July to 30 <sup>th</sup> September	126	93	15	18

### **Matching and Ethnicity**

The majority of placements made during Quarter 2 were a suitable ethnic match.

Two asylum seeking unaccompanied Afghani Muslim brothers aged 8 and 9 years were placed with agency Muslim foster carers following a short emergency placement with in-house foster carers, who were unable to meet the complex emotional needs of the children compounded by language difficulties.

A Muslim parent and child placement was made with agency foster carers, who are a White British and Asian couple.

### **Foster Carer Recruitment**

#### **Initial Enquiries**

April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept
5	12	8	9	14	13

Numerous recruitment events were held in Quarter 2

- July – Foster Carer interviewed by Radio Lancashire about her family’s experience of fostering for the Borough, which was shared on our social media platforms.
- The Ream attended an Eid in the Park family event at Witton Park.
- August – Google ads campaign launched.
- September - Children with Disabilities campaign launched online via Facebook supported by a short video of carers talking about their experiences of fostering. The video went viral with lots of views and positive comments (see below).

The Fostering Service’s longest serving carers celebrated their diamond wedding anniversary with the Lancashire Telegraph covering the story in the paper. The article was shared on the Let’s Foster Facebook page and twitter receiving many positive comments (see below).

Many of our foster carers received long service awards, which were presented by the Mayor and Cllr Bateson at the Foster Carer Forum.



### **Approvals**

#### **Quarter 1**

1 new mainstream approval

### **Quarter 2**

July – 4 households; 9 placements

August – 1 household; 2 placements

September – No approvals

Total approvals to date = 6 households; 12 placements

### **End of Quarter 2**

<b>Enquirers at Initial Visit Stage</b>	<b>Applicants at Stage 1</b>	<b>Applicants at Stage 2</b>
6	2	0

### **Regional Campaign**

The regional 'You Can Foster' recruitment campaign has been running since September and has helped generate enquiries via the You Can Foster website.

- 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;
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.

Research about foster carer retention indicates that support is a key issue and a factor in carers' abilities to maintain placements and continue to foster when things become challenging.

The 11 years plus support offer was extended to support placements from aged 7 years earlier in the year. Fostered children in the 7 to 11 years age group are able to access activities and support offered by the Limes Project Team based at the Limes in Darwen. Children in this age group needing short breaks are referred to short break foster care.

A telephone on call service is in place and the 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. A number of foster carers have benefitted from one to one support and advice during the Quarter.



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 training courses covering the Mandatory Fostering Standards, specialist training on relevant topics, safeguarding training, Health and Safety training and Support Groups for Carers.

The new conference style training will deliver more focussed learning for carers, which is specifically tailored to their requirements and will allow them to attend one training day and cover multiple topics. We anticipate that this will increase attendance and evaluation feedback whilst offering a more time-efficient option for carers.

The first new Foster Carer Conference has taken place covering Staying Put, Moving to Independence, Delegated Authority and Equality and Diversity. 22 Carers attended and feedback from the day was overwhelmingly positive;

- Good insight into equality and diversity
- Good up to date refresher
- Will help to do my job better with more up to date information
- It is always helpful to refresh your memory; you always take away something extra
- All very good
- Leaving care team especially good
- All topics were well covered

Future conference dates are planned and bookings are looking very positive so far –

Conference	Topics covered	Date	Places booked to date
Conference 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting education and achievement of CIOC</li> <li>• Moving children on</li> <li>• Legal Framework</li> </ul>	January 2017	29 of 40
Conference 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing allegations</li> <li>• Positive care and control</li> <li>• Risk assessment</li> </ul>	May 2017	31 of 40

There were no KEEP or Nurturing Attachment courses during this Quarter but they will be run again in the next financial year. The plan is to run one of each course every year in future.

### **Fostering Panel**

At the end of Quarter 2, the main Panel Advisor retired and the role transferred to the Review Panel Advisor. The retired Advisor has been in role for many years and is a loss to the Panel.

However, the Panel has continued to operate effectively and there have been no adverse comments received via Service evaluations. There were 3 Panel member appraisals in the Quarter and the feedback received in all 3 has been positive about the Panel's effectiveness and way the Panel members work together.

This Quarter has seen five mainstream and one short break approvals, 5 Regulation 24 placements were noted and there were 2 friends and family approvals.

A mainstream foster carer review was presented to the Panel in July following an allegation and the carers' continued approval was agreed.

The first reviews of two friends and family foster carers were presented during the Quarter.

Two exemptions were noted, one for the placement of a parent and child and the other with an Independent Fostering Agency in the area.

### **Review Panel**

The Annual Review Panel operated effectively and feedback received has been positive. There will be a change to the Annual Review Panel Chair from January 2017 due to the retirement of the main Fostering Panel Chair at the end of the year.

This Quarter, 27 foster carer reviews were presented to the Annual Review Panel with 16 of these being attended by the foster carers. Social worker comments are received, and the quality of these has improved and is continuing to be monitored.

### **Complaints**

One complaint was made in Quarter 2 by an approved friends and family foster carer. The carer requested a change in Supervising Social Worker because they did not get on with them. This has resulted in the worker continuing the work with the carers and joint visits will be undertaken with an alternative Supervising Social Worker. The complaint is being managed on behalf of the Customer Service Team and consideration is being given to mediation.

### **Compliments**

3 Compliments were recorded within this Quarter.

One compliment was received from a foster carer complimenting the Team on the service and support provided to all foster carers, which was fed back during a Fostering Forum.

A further compliment was received from a foster carer complimenting the work and support received in respect of three different professionals, who had been involved with the carers and their family.

A further compliment was made by foster carers commending the support they had received from their Supervising Social Worker, which was fed back in the foster carers' comments section of their annual review report.

### **Allegations**

Two allegations were reported during Quarter 2 the first of which was a historic allegation. The nature of this was physical and verbal abuse by the male foster carer. The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) was notified and the management of the allegation was overseen by the Service Leader. The young person and their sibling were spoken to and maintained their account. The foster carers were also spoken to and recalled an incidence similar to that described by the child but a differing account. A strategy meeting was convened and the outcome of the allegation was that it was unsubstantiated with no further action to be taken.

The second allegation was one of physical abuse reported by a child in placement in respect of the male foster carer. Following investigation, this allegation was also found to be unsubstantiated though there were several actions agreed including a review being presented to the main Fostering Panel and an updated assessment to be completed in respect of the child, who remained in placement.

### **Specific Incidents and Restraints**

There were 9 specific incidences reported in Quarter 2, 6 of which involved two of the same young people.

The incidents reported involved 2 A&E attendances, a number of behavioural incidents and several incidents of significant damage caused to foster carers' property and vehicles. One of the incidents involved the police.

The issues have been dealt with by referrals to fostering support and risk management plans being reviewed and implemented within these fostering households.

### **Offending by Children and Young People in Foster Care**

This is a new section for this report as it has been agreed that the Protocol that exists between Children's Services, the Youth Justice Service and the police should be monitored to ensure that it is appropriately implemented. The Protocol applies to children and young people in fostering and residential placements.

The Protocol aims to ensure that children and young people in care in Blackburn with Darwen are not inappropriately criminalised for behaviours that are likely to be a response to their adverse life experiences. Recent national research highlights failings at various levels of the system, including the unnecessary criminalisation of some children in care for minor offences, which would not have led to police involvement for children living at home with their own parents.

There has been one incident of a child in foster care involving the police during Quarter 2. This was an incident that occurred in an out-of-borough foster placement where a young person had become very distressed and was causing significant damage to the property with the potential to also harm other young people in placement. The carer contacted the local police (Rochdale) who attended, calmed the situation down and left indicating that no further action was required thus avoiding the criminalisation of this child.

### **Serious Illnesses and Accidents**

There were 3 episodes of serious illness and accidents reported during Quarter 2.

There was an accident report of a young child tripping and falling leading to bruising and swelling to their eye. The carers provided cream and cuddles to the young child, and no further treatment was required.

There were 2 A&E attendances. The first was the result of an ankle injury and suspected fracture, which was later confirmed to be significant swelling and bruising. The other A&E attendance was due to a young person experiencing stomach pains. Tests were carried out for suspected constipation and medication prescribed.

### **Bullying**

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

### **Missing From Home**

4 young people (8 incidents) were reported during this Quarter.

In July, one young person had been reported missing from home as they had failed to return to their placement at the agreed time following a visit to relatives. Eventually, the young person returned to the placement address in the early hours of the morning. Another young person was reported 3 times because they failed to return home and maintain contact with the foster carer as previously agreed.

In September, one young person under the supervision of the Youth Offending Team was reported missing three times. The young person breached their court order and as a result, was made the subject of a court ordered curfew.

Another young person was reported because they refused to return home wishing to remain with friends. The incident was reported to the police and the young person returned to their placement address in the early hours.

### **Exemptions**

Four exemptions were in place during Quarter 2 of which three remain in place. The first supported a mother and baby placement, which has now ended. The second supported a sibling placement of 4 children and the third

continues to support a short break weekend placement every six weeks. The fourth is a further mother and baby placement, which remains in place.

### **Engagement with Foster Carers**

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council 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 18 family and friends fostering households. There have been two approvals during this Quarter and no resignations.

During this Quarter, there have been a total of 12 viability assessments completed by the Assessment and Social Work Team supported by the Advanced Practitioner in the Fostering Service. Six of these were ruled out, four are ongoing, and 2 are positive and have moved on to further assessment.

There have been eight full Family and Friends fostering assessments. Two of these are on hold, two have withdrawn from the assessment, one was ruled out of the assessment, one was approved and two are ongoing.

There have been eight Regulation 24 assessments. One was approved, two went on to become section 38.6 assessments and five are currently ongoing.

There have been six Special Guardianship Order (SGO) assessments of which 2 have ended with no further action, one was withdrawn, one ruled out, one was positive and completed, one was still ongoing.

Overall, the service completed 24 assessments in Quarter 2, which represents a significant increase from previous quarters.

### **Short Break Foster Care**

There are currently 14 carers, who have provided 21 short break placements during this Quarter. Carers provide support to parents, other placements and emergency placements. The majority of carers are matched to children, who have a wide range of additional and complex needs.

A support group is available to all short breaks carers. 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. A number of staff are in the process of undertaking 'practice education' training, which will enable them to support student placements in future.

### **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 stability has increased in comparison with the same time last year. By the end of Quarter 2, 3.3% of Looked After Children had 3 or more placements, which was an improvement compared to 5.1% for the same period in 2015.

<b>Year to date</b>	<b>July</b>	<b>August</b>	<b>September</b>
LAC with 3 or more placements	9	11	12
Total number of LAC	350	354	364
% Stability of LAC placements 2016/17	2.6 %	3.1%	3.3%
%Stability of LAC placements 2015/16	2.1%	2.7%	5.1%

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.

The Fostering Support Service is now well established for the 11 years plus age group and has been extended to children aged 7 years and over. The Service has been supporting a number of fragile placements, which has contributed to the improvement in placement stability performance.

### **Commissioned Placements**

In Quarter 2, 7 new placements were commissioned. 3 of these were parent/child placements. We have an acute shortage of these type of placements in house currently and our October online recruitment campaign focussed on it as there is likely to be increased demand in future. One placement was required for two unaccompanied asylum seeking siblings, which was required in an emergency as the in house carers initially allocated were unable to manage their complex needs. One placement was a secure one required for a teenage girl, who had been putting herself at very high levels of risk. Two placements were long term foster placements for teenagers as placements could not be identified in house.

During Quarter 2, 5 commissioned placements ended. One of these was a concurrent placement that ended in September as the Court allowed the baby to return home. However, this was not successful and the placement recommenced in October.

### **Budget**

The Fostering Service is on target to be within budget for the year. This has required the Service to make a number of efficiencies including the way that foster carer training is provided, the loss of a Fostering Support Officer post and the loss of the Deputy Manager role, plus the loss of a social work post.

The demand for foster placements for older children, for children with disabilities and in recent months for parent and child 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 2 as described in the body of this Report. A targeted digital campaign started in September. There have been a number of enquiries through the events and via the website.**

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. Support for children aged 11 years + is 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 commenced in September with positive feedback from the first conference held.**
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 November 2016**