

Fostering Service Quarter 3 Report

1st October to 31st December 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 continued to increase in Quarter 3 reaching 370 at the end of December. 65% (242) of children in our care are in foster care and 41% (150) are placed with in-house foster carers. The majority of new admissions were placed in foster care which is an increase of 17 new foster placements from Quarter 2. 14 of these were placed with in house foster carers. The number of Family and Friends placements increased from 39 in Quarter 2 to 47 in Quarter 3.

At the end of Quarter 3 12 months ago, there were 335 children in care; 54% of whom were in foster care and 39% in house. There were 36 Family and Friends carers. The increase in numbers is putting great pressure on placements but is largely being absorbed by Family and Friends.

	31st Dec 2016
Number of Children in our Care (CioC)	370
Number of CioC in Foster Care	242
Number of children in in-house foster care placements	150
Number of children in family and friends foster care	47
Number of children in independent fostering agency placements	41
Number of BwD children placed with other local authority foster carers	4

In House Placements

Male	99
Female	51

Age break down of children in in-house foster placements

Age	Number
Under 12 months	10
1 to 5 years	25
5 to 10 years	32
10 to 15 years	62
16 and 17 years	21

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. During Quarter 3 there was a fairly even spread of age groups referred though the largest group were aged 12 years and above where the demand for placements is already under the greatest pressure.

New Referrals in Quarter 3

Month	No Children	No Sibling Groups	Age 0 to 5	Age 6 to 11	Age 12+	Didn't come in
October	11	2	4	6	1	0
November	17	1	4	3	10	8
December	13	2	5	4	4	6
Total	41	5	13	13	15	14

Referral Outcomes

Of the 41 referrals to the fostering service in Quarter 3, 14 children did not come into care largely due to court decisions. 14 children were placed in a combination of in house fostering and residential, compared to 5 in commissioned placements. A small number of referrals were for long term placements for children already in emergency or short term arrangements. Some of these placements have yet to be identified as there continues to be a shortage of long term carers for older children. The service has also struggled to place 2 children with complex health needs and disabilities; the need for property adaptations to accommodate equipment and mobility needs makes this particularly difficult.

	Children placed	Placed in house	Placed in Agency Fostering	Agency Residential Placements	Other
October	11	10	0	1	0
November	8	2	2	1	3
December	8	2	1	0	5
Total for Quarter	27	14	3	2	8

- Other = children still waiting,

Feedback from children in foster care

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

- Participation in the Voice and Junior Voice groups;
- The work of the Participation Champions in the Service;
- The Investing in Children assessment process;
- 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 in Quarter 3:

Children and young people said:

'I wouldn't change a thing about my placement as where I stay is OUR home and is where I am most happiest. There is never a dull day at J's, we're all like a family.'

'I feel safe, K makes me laugh and cooks nice food.'

'It is good living with D and G'.

'I can talk to B if I have a problem or I am finding things difficult'.

Social workers said:

'I have found G and W to be a hard working couple who devote their time and effort in ensuring the needs of children remain paramount at all times'.

'B attends all meetings relating to T's education and has actively supported him by taking him to college open days etc.'.

'I have a good working relationship with the carer, he is professional at all times'.

Foster carers' birth children are also consulted as part of the foster carer's annual review.

Birth Children said:

'The last year has been a bit of a rollercoaster because of S's moods. She has been unsettled since leaving school but things should improve now that she has started college'.

'The last year has been brilliant. The kids have changed so much in confidence and behaviour and become much more sociable'.

'I am very happy to be part of a family who foster. It is an amazing job which holds wonderful experiences'.

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. Foster carers are also provided with a MAX Card which offers heavily discounted access to a range of leisure parks and facilities around the North West. This is funded by the fostering service in partnership with the Foster Carer Association.

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.

There are currently 29 Looked After Children who are registered as having a disability. 20 of these children are in foster care and 3 in family and friends placements. Foster carers are provided with the relevant training and support to meet the specific needs of the child they have in placement.

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). The new Revive Service developed well during Quarter 3 with a number of referrals accepted and assessed to determine the most suitable interventions.

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 and 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).

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'.

The Children in our Care Celebration of Achievement Award Ceremony is an annual event which provides an opportunity to meet each together to celebrate the achievements of our young people. This year's event took place on the 11th October 2016 at the Windsor Suite, King George's Hall. It was attended by 250 people including 58 children and young people in care and care leavers who were available to be presented with their awards along with foster carers, parents, Councillors, the Mayor and Mayoress, Chief Executive, Director of Children's Services and a range of officers from the Children's Services and Education department. Our special guest for the evening was Ella Shaw, a local singer song writer who achieved national recognition on the 'Britain's Got Talent' TV show reaching the 2015 live semi-final. Ella released her debut album in September 2016 and performed two songs from it during the evening as well as presenting awards.

Children and young people were nominated for awards by their carers, schools and Children's Services and Education staff in the categories of, academic achievement/progress, attendance, behaviour, sport, music/the arts and making a positive contribution. In addition, there were a number of special awards sponsored by OSMIS Education Limited for those who had particularly excelled in these areas. There were also performances of poetry, keyboards and singing from our talented young people all of which helped to make the celebration a wonderful evening for all involved.

There is a Corporate Parenting Specialist Advisory Group that meets quarterly and regularly receives education and health reports in relation to Looked After Children. The group monitors the work of the local authority and partner agencies in relation to Children in our Care. The group met on 26th October 2016 when there was an update on the work of the Looked After Children governors, a report from the Virtual Headteacher and an update from the Head of Service for Permanence.

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. Young people have been involved in the recruitment of new staff during the Quarter.

The Fostering Service was awarded with Investing in Children 12 months ago having been through the assessment process with the Children in our Care Team as a joint award. In December 2016, the Service was reassessed in its own right as a sole service. 11 young people participated in the process of assessment and considered the evidence submitted as young people are responsible for making the award. The report author was delighted with the response from young people who he found to be 'very used to expressing their opinions, offering criticism and compliments in equal measure'. The report summarises a long list of 'you said....we did' evidence and concludes that the Service be awarded Investing in Children status as it was clear that the Service is willing to involve young people in decision making, learn from criticism and improve. It makes the following 4 recommendations and progress against these will form part of the Fostering Service's reassessment in 12 months' time:

- That the Service should establish an urgent support offer for foster carers when needed;
- That young people have more input in setting rules;
- That the Service establishes a VOICE group for the birth children of foster carers;
- When children in foster care have a sibling who is being adopted, they are allowed to meet the adopters.

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.

VOICE members continue to attend C & YP Scrutiny Committee and recently presented the Leapfrog Tools project and Young Advisors Social Media Research. Children in care have also been involved in several staff recruitment interviews including 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 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.

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.

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.

The Fostering Service

During Quarter 3, one of the 2 Team Managers retired and the Deputy Manager was promoted into the Team Manager role. The Deputy Manager role was disestablished as a saving.

The Advanced Practitioner continues to work across mainstream and Friends and Family providing support and advice to the Team and has been an invaluable support with consultations across services for Friends and Family as well as holding some complex cases.

Three full-time and one part time Supervising Social Workers have left the Fostering Team; one moving to the Children in our Care Team, one retiring and two taking up positions outside of the authority. The Service has successfully recruited to three positions and is currently waiting for these members to take up their positions over the next few weeks. The part time position is likely to be disestablished as an additional saving. Two students have been on placement in the Fostering Team over the Quarter.

Foster Carer Resource

	Total number of foster carers	Mainstream	Short breaks carers	Family and friends carers
Quarter 1	119	89	14	16
Quarter 2	126	93	15	18
Quarter 3	125	89	13	23

The overall number of carers has barely changed since Quarter 2. As the number of mainstream carers dipped, the number of Family and Friends carers increased levelling out the total. One mainstream approval was deferred to Quarter 4 as his medical was delayed.

Two resignations were noted at the Fostering Panel retrospectively with one carer resigning the previous Quarter.

Three resignations for Family and Friends were also noted at the Fostering Panel; two retrospectively from the last Quarter following a Special Guardianship Order (S.G.O.) being granted.

Matching and Ethnicity

All children placed this Quarter have been appropriately matched with their carers in respect of their ethnicity.

Foster Carer Recruitment

Initial Enquiries

April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
5	12	8	9	14	13	41	33	11

Foster carer recruitment is a very competitive market. There are a large number of Independent Fostering Agencies operating and recruiting in the area and Lancashire County Council is currently advertising a significant increase in the rates they now pay.

Numerous recruitment events were held in Quarter 3.

October – Parent & Child Fostering (Facebook Campaign launched). This resulted in a significant increase in the number of initial enquiries in both October and November.

Parent & Child Video produced/published to YouTube and shared on the website, Facebook & Twitter. This involved a Blackburn with Darwen foster carer talking about her family’s experiences of parent and child fostering.

The Great Big Fostering Bake Off in The Mall Blackburn

Foster carers and staff brought in their creations to raise funds for East Lancashire Hospice. Members of the public ate and made a donation. The purpose of the event was to provide an opportunity to raise funds for a good cause and put something fresh on the website and Facebook.



November - Milestone of 1000 page likes achieved on our Fostering Facebook page.

Cake Sale

The Team organised a 'Cake Sale' raising £60 for Children in Need at Duke Street.

November/December – Facebook Campaign switched to target carers for Mainstream Fostering.

December – Gift wrapping in the Mall, Blackburn

The Let's Foster team and foster carers were in The Mall Blackburn offering a gift-wrapping service and raising awareness of the need for foster carers. Gift tags designed by our children in care were available to purchase on the day and a total of £291 was raised by staff and foster carers. The money was used by the FCA to support the Christmas Party for children in our care.

Approvals

Quarter 1

1 new mainstream approval

Quarter 2

July – 4 households; 9 placements

August – 1 household; 2 placements

September – No approvals

Quarter 3

November - one household was due to attend Panel but was deferred as waiting for medicals.

Total approvals to date in 2016/17 = **6** households **12** placements

End of Quarter 3

Enquirers at Initial Visit Stage	Applicants at Stage 1	Applicants at Stage 2
4	4	2

Regional Campaign

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

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. Discussions are currently taking place to further develop this campaign depending on collaborative funding and working from Local Authorities.

Regional 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.

2 resignations have taken place this Quarter, both friends and family foster carers who have obtained SGOs.

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 is delivering more focussed learning for carers which is specifically tailored to their requirements and allows them to attend one training day and cover multiple topics. It is anticipated that this will increase attendance and improve evaluation feedback whilst offering a more time-efficient option for Carers.

In Quarter 3, 49 foster carers attended the second Conference in this year's programme covering Deprivation of Liberty, Moving Children onto Permanence and Educational Achievement of Children in Our Care.

Feedback from the day was overwhelmingly positive:

- 'Better awareness of the support available'
- 'Being more knowledgeable of how to deal if a situation occurs'
- 'Good refresher course'
- 'Brought up to speed with the high school grading system changes'
- 'Well presented'
- 'The legal presentation was very interesting as it was new'
- 'The education grading system was informative'
- 'The update on DOL was the most important thing I learnt'
- 'All of the conference was very informative'
- 'Interesting to get information on school performances'.

One conference date remains in the current programme and places are fully booked.

Conference	Topics covered	Date	Time	Places booked to date
Conference 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Managing allegations• Positive care and control• Risk assessment	Wed 17 th May 2017	9.30am – 2.45pm	40 of 40 (maximum numbers to be increased to 60 to allow more carers to access).

Planning is now taking place for future conferences and a 're-run' of the previous two conferences for those who were unable to attend.

There have been a number of meetings over this Quarter to look at the KEEP and Nurturing Attachment training and how these can be sustained within budget constraints. There were no courses in the last Quarter and it is anticipated that the Service will run one course per year of this kind. Work is ongoing to develop a course that combines elements of both in one course.

Fostering Panel

The Fostering Team Manager who was Panel Advisor retired in Quarter 3 and has been replaced by another manager. The transition has been positive.

During the past 6 months a number of young people have attended the main Panel for their permanence matching. This has been positive with some very articulate young people who have enjoyed the experience. Some young people decided at the last minute they did not wish to come in to the Panel but have spoken individually to the Chair. Foster carers also bring their young people to their annual review if appropriate.

There were 2 observers at the main Panel in the Quarter. The Panel Chair retired in December and the Chair of the Annual Review Panel, who is stepping into the role in January, has shadowed the Chair a number of times during the Quarter.

The main Fostering Panel is also due to lose an independent member.

Panel Business

Over the Quarter there were 6 family and friends approvals for a total of 8 children.

There were 2 changes of approval over the Quarter, one now providing parent and child arrangement and another providing short term care from short break for one child.

Three foster carer reviews following allegations were presented to the Fostering Panel over this review period with the recommendation of continued approval.

Three matches for children with their foster carers have also taken place this Quarter with the children attending the majority of these.

Review Panel

The Annual Review Panel has operated effectively. There will be a change to the Annual Review Panel Chair in January 2017 as the current Chair is due to transfer to the main Panel. A new Chair has been appointed as part of the current commission. The new Fostering Manager has also taken up the Panel Advisor role.

One of the common themes of the Review Panel has been carers' attendance at training, especially carers who work. The new conference style training should address some of the issues and online training is also available.

In general, Panel members have commented that the standard of paperwork has significantly improved. The Panel has also commented that the Fostering Support Service is clearly benefitting children and foster carers.

Complaints

There were no complaints in Quarter 3.

Compliments

1 compliment was recorded during Quarter 3 that was received from a foster carer complimenting their Supervising Social worker for their support, time spent making themselves available and for their expertise.

Allegations

There were two allegations in Quarter 3.

The first was an anonymous online allegation via the NSPCC about a child placed with approved Friends and Family foster carers. The allegation related to cannabis use in the household. It was also alleged that the child was heard to scream and shout in the property. A joint home visit was undertaken by the child's social worker and the foster carers' supervising social worker and the female foster carer admitted that she had smoked cannabis but never within the home environment or in the presence of the child for whom she has caring responsibility. This information was corroborated by the carer's partner who was shocked and oblivious to any cannabis use. The

child was found to be very settled and happy in placement. A review of the circumstances was presented to the main Fostering Panel. After due consideration the carers' approval was renewed and it was acknowledged that this continues to be a very positive placement for this child. The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) was notified and agreed with the outcome.

The second allegation was from a school advising that the child in a foster placement had disclosed that the female carer had physically assaulted her. This allegation was investigated but unsubstantiated. However it resulted in the young person moving to an alternative foster placement and an earlier review being presented to the main Fostering Panel.

Specific Incidents and Restraints

There were 12 specific incidences reported within Quarter 3 with 10 of these involving the same young people. The incidents involved 5 Missing from Home reports and 3 reports of damage and aggression towards carers and property. There was one incident of a young person disclosing a historic sexual assault and another of a young person suffering minor injuries following a fall at the local park. There was a young person involved in a motorcycle accident and the final incident related to the threatening behaviour of the parents of a child in placement.

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 was no Police involvement with any children and young people in foster care during Quarter 3.

Serious Illnesses and Accidents

There were 2 accidents reported during Quarter 3 including a minor accident where a young person fell off a wall whilst at a local park causing bruising. The young person refused medical treatment but the carer was able to provide healing creams to the grazes and bruises. There was one A & E attendance following a young person being involved in a motorcycle collision. Initially the young person refused to seek medical treatment or advice but later attended hospital. The young person was seen by a Triage nurse but refused to be seen by a Doctor. The young person has been monitored by his carer and recovered well.

Bullying

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

Missing From Home

2 young people (4 incidents) were reported during Quarter 3.

During October, one young person was reported missing when they failed to return to placement at the agreed time. The young person returned to the placement the following day and explained that he had spent time with his friends.

In November, the same young person was reported missing when he failed to return home from school. The foster carer followed missing from home procedures and the young person returned to placement the following day.

In December, two missing from home episodes were reported involving the same young person. The young person failed to return home and was known to be associating with inappropriate adults known for substance misuse and suspected child sexual exploitation. This was reported to the Police and further investigations were made to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the young person. The young person returned to placement the following day on both occasions. A risk management meeting is scheduled for January 2017 to agree a risk management plan.

Exemptions

Three exemptions were in place during Quarter 3. The first of these was to support a parent and child placement, the second to support a sibling placement of 4 children and the third to support a further parent and child placement that remains in place.

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.

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 Carers

	Quarter 2	Quarter 3
No. Family and Friends carers	18	23
No. new approvals	2	6
No. Viability assessments	12	23
No. Family and Friends assessments	8	8
No. SGO assessments	6	2
No. Regulation 24 assessments	8	10

There were 23 Family and Friends fostering households in Quarter 3, 5 more than in Quarter 2. Of the 6 approvals during this Quarter, two fostering households obtained SGOs and one household was de-registered.

During this Quarter, there have been a total of 23 viabilities that have been supported by the Advanced Practitioner. This is a significant increase from the last Quarter when 12 viabilities were completed. 9 of these were ruled out, 8 did not require any further action, 2 are ongoing and 4 were positive having now moved onto other assessments.

From the previous Quarter, there were 8 ongoing assessments; 2 of these did not require any further actions and the other six were approved.

During this Quarter, there have been 8 full Family and Friends fostering assessments. One was ruled out of further assessment, one went to become a SGO. assessment and the remaining assessments are ongoing.

There have also been 10 Regulation 24 assessments in this Quarter that are ongoing.

2 SGOs have been obtained during this Quarter and a further SGO assessment is ongoing.

When considering the ongoing assessments from the previous Quarter and the new assessments this Quarter, a total of 26 full assessments were completed by the Fostering Team.

Short Break Foster Care

There are currently 14 carers who provided 31 placements during Quarter 3. The 14 carers are varied in terms of their approval. Some provide support to parents and offer short term emergency placements. Carers are matched to children who have a wide range of additional and complex needs. A support group has been delivered to all short breaks carers during the Quarter. Other training is available through Newfield School and Appletrees short-break provision.

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. Placement stability has improved in comparison with the same time last year. By the end of Quarter 3, 4.4% of Looked After Children had 3 or more placements compared to 8.3% for the same period in 2015 (lower is better).

	October	November	December
LAC with 3 or more placements	14	15	16
Total number of LAC	365	370	366
% Stability of LAC placements 2016/17	3.8%	4.1%	4.4%
%Stability of LAC placements 2015/16	6.7%	7.0%	8.3%

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

Fostering Support

The Fostering Support Service is now well established. The Service has been supporting a number of fragile placements which has contributed to the improvement in placement stability performance. The Service offers an out of hours telephone support service, a monthly drop in for foster carers, short breaks where placements are at risk of disruption and outreach support to carers and young people.

There were two new referrals in Quarter 3, one male and one female. Lytham Road staff are currently working with fourteen young people within a variety of foster placement settings. Ten of these young people are allocated to the fostering support officer. In this Quarter, five young people accessed short breaks through the Adolescent Support Unit and will continue to access regular short breaks on a planned basis as part of their individual support package.

The Service worked with 14 young people in Quarter 3 involving them in a wide range of activities including:

- Badminton sessions, improving health and well being
- Swimming Lessons
- Anger Management
- Friendships and relationships
- Internet safety sessions
- Health and well-being sessions (range of physical exercises)
- Baking sessions, cooking for the family and making home-made pizzas of their choice.
- Consultations
- Devising 'News Flash' for the Fostering Forum

Feedback from young people and carers:

“I asked about swimming because I had never learned to swim. Now I am learning to swim”.

“We only did little short walks, now I go to the Lake District and do the three peaks”.

“Lytham Road have worked really hard to get my very reluctant young man to attend. He went to a boys group on 5th Dec 2016 and said he loved it. Well done. “

“I find the staff friendly and good to talk to”

Commissioned Placements

In Quarter 2, 5 new placements were commissioned of which 1 was a parent-child placement. One was an Independent Fostering Agency placement for a child whose in house placement ended as a result of allegations she made against the carer. Although these were not substantiated, the child refused to return to the placement following investigation.

The remaining three were all independent agency residential placements for children and young people with very complex needs that could not be met in-house. One young person has mental health problems, one has numerous allegations of a sexual nature against him and the last was displaying very challenging behaviours.

During Quarter 3, 4 commissioned placements ended including a parent-child placement that was resolved by the court, a young person whose foster placement became a ‘Staying Put’ placement, another young person moved to Supported Lodgings and one was a placement disruption.

Breakdown of Current Commissioned Placements

Placement Type	Independent Agency Residential Placements	Independent Fostering Agency Placements	Secure Accommodation	Other local authority
Number	13 including 5 children with disabilities	39 including 6 sibling groups and 1 mother and baby	1	3 including 1 sibling pair

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 increase in the number of Family and Friends foster placements has required the whole team to work more flexibly across all functions of the Service.

The demand for foster placements for older children with complex needs and behaviours, 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 3 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 some of which have begun to convert to actual applications.

2. Placement stability has improved over the year with a reduction in the number of placement disruptions overall. The placement stability measure takes account of children across all placement types, not just fostering but it is clear that the Fostering Support Service has had a positive impact.
Update – support services for foster placements are now in place across the full age range. Take up of the service has improved and those young people involved have given positive feedback.

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 Quarter 3 with positive feedback from the first two conferences which were both well attended.

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 – the reassessment of the Service in December outlined in the main body of this Report was successful and the Service will maintain its own accreditation for another 12 months.

Alyson Hanson
Service Leader, Placement Services
23rd January 2017