

Fostering Service Quarter 4 Report

1st January to 31st March 2017

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; and
- 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 4 reaching 375 at the end of March 2017 and is the highest it has been in three years. 66% (248) of children in our care are in foster care and 41% (152) are placed with in-house foster carers. Since Quarter 3, the overall percentage of children in foster care has dropped slightly and of those children in foster care, slightly fewer are in mainstream placements. More children are in family and friends placements and the number of children in independent agency placements has also fallen slightly.

	31st March 2015	31st March 2016	31st March 2017
Number of Children in our Care	316	346	375
Number of CioC in Foster Care	213 (67%)	243 (70%)	248 (66%)
Number of children in in-house foster care placements	138 (44%)	147 (42%)	152 (41%)
Number of children in family and friends foster care	28(9%)	41 (12%)	49 (13%)
Number of children in independent fostering agency placements	47(15%)	55(16%)	46(12%)

In House Placements

Male	96
Female	56

Age break down of children in in-house foster placements

Age	Number
0 to 2	24
3 to 6 years	19
7 to 10 years	33
11 to 15 years	52
16 and 17 years	24

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 largest group of children we currently have in care are the hardest to place in foster care which makes fostering placement stability critical.

The total number of children referred to the Fostering Service in Quarter 4 increased to 51 compared to 41 in the previous Quarter. 56 children and young people were referred in Quarter 4 12 months ago.

New Referrals in Quarter 4

Month	No. Children	No. Sibling Groups	Age 0 - 5	Age 6 - 11	Age 12+	placed in-house	Children placed Agency	Children didn't come in
January	13	3	6	5	2	4	2	7
February	17	4	8	5	4	10	0	5
Two children are awaiting court decisions.								
March	21	3	6	3	12	10	1	1
Nine children are awaiting court decisions								
Total	51	10	20	13	18	24	3	13

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; and
- 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 4:

Children and young people said:

'It seems like different rules apply to children / youths in care compared to those that are not. Social Services in general are only thinking about what is the best for them and not for us when it should be our choice because we deserve a normal life. Just because a few parents can't look after their children doesn't mean that we should be treated any different'.

'It is perfect, I love it. I am sometimes angry but turn it around.'

'I think everyone is amazing and I love all of them.'

'I feel supported and know that I can ask for help' – mother and baby placement

What makes you sad in placement? 'nowt'

Social workers said:

'M has been observed with J and he is very confident and comfortable in her care. He is openly affectionate towards her and was able to make his needs clearly known to her.'

'Foster carer has struggled to manage young person's behaviours when she returns from contact. As the young person can display some challenging behaviours, however, the carer has tried to manage this best way she can'.

Birth Children said:

'This year has been good but also tough because a baby we had was adopted '

'E scratches all the time and lies. She plays with the naughty children in school. She is always in trouble and embarrasses me.'

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 16 Looked After Children registered as having a disability in foster care. 12 of these children are in in-house foster care 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 is a partnership between Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council's Children's Services and East Lancashire Hospital Trust to provide emotional health support for children known to the local authority and is based at Duke St. It has been up and running for 6 months and delivers consultation to foster carers, training and direct intervention on emotional health and well-being. The Service has worked with 46 children in our care since its inception with many of the interventions ongoing. Feedback from foster carers following a consultation is very positive. The Team has delivered training to foster carers on self-harm and a new 10 week course delivered by the Team called APP (Attachment and Positive Parenting) is to commence in April 2017.

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 being 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 with a system 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. 10 young people are accessing this support currently.

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 'Promoting Educational Achievement for Children in Our Care' and this course was delivered in January 2017.

School attendance by children in foster care is very good, in Quarter 4, the attendance rate was 97%.

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 the Investing in Children Award in December 2016 and the report made the following recommendations that the Service is now considering:

- That the Service should establish an urgent support offer for foster carers when needed – this is in place via the Fostering Support service;
- That young people have more input in setting rules – this is an issue for individual foster carers but the Service can issue guidance and consider how to incorporate rule-setting into relevant training programmes;
- That the Service establishes a VOICE group for the birth children of foster carers – the Sons and Daughters group effectively operates as a VOICE group but the development of this forum can be revisited; and
- When children in foster care have a sibling who is being adopted, they are allowed to meet the adopters – this is not always appropriate but where it is possible and in the interests of all the children, it is considered.

Examples of 'you said – we did' in the Fostering Service

- We would like a foster carers' Sons and Daughters group - lunch was organised at Pizza Hut for foster carers' sons and daughters, which took place on 13/02/2017. Further group sessions are to be held.
- I would like to do an activity without my brother – the young person spoke to his social worker about this at the end of December 2016 and as a result, she involved him in interviewing for staff which he really enjoyed. He is now attending the VOICE group.
- I would like my support officer to support me to have family contact in London - the Support Worker supported him in a visit to London where he met his Aunt.

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 in 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, recently presenting 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. The Children in Our Care Team and the Fostering Team encourage carers and young people to consider 'staying put' and the Leaving Care Service also delivers courses for foster carers to develop their understanding of this. The training has been positively evaluated by carers and most indicate a willingness to work with 'staying put'. No courses were delivered in Quarter 4 but a course is scheduled for the next Quarter. 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.

Young people are allocated a Leaving Care Worker at the age of 15¾ years. In Quarter 4, 6 newly referred young people were allocated a Leaving Care P.A. whose role includes compiling the Post 16 PEP, exploring Staying Put and other accommodation options, and completing a Pathway Plan. 8 young people were referred to Leaving Care during the full year.

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. 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 4 three new members of staff took up positions. One of these is a newly qualified social worker, who is assigned to the Advanced Practitioner for supervision and support in her first year. All three are settling in well and developing knowledge and skills across all functions of the Service.

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.

The Fostering Strategy Officer post and the Recruitment Officer post were both disestablished in Quarter 4 with a view to replacing the two roles with a Marketing and Recruitment Officer role to take the lead on all aspects of foster carer recruitment. The deadline for applications is 24th April 2017 with interviewing to take place in May 2017.

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
Quarter 4	136	90	13	33

The number of family and friends carers has almost doubled from the start of the year which accounts for the overall increase in the number of foster carers.

Matching and Ethnicity

In January 2017, a cultural match was not achieved for a Polish parent and child as the Service has no Polish carers currently. As a result, an Independent Fostering Agency placement was made.

Foster Carer Recruitment

Initial Enquiries

April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March
5	12	8	9	14	13	41	33	11	23	11	17

A total of 51 enquiries were made in Quarter 4 through a range of sources with the largest number via the website. This is significantly fewer than Quarter 3 when the Service commissioned a digital campaign via Net Natives that covered the entire Quarter.

There have been 6 initial visits undertaken in the Quarter with three of these progressing to Skills to Foster Training and Stage 1 assessment.

In Quarter 4 there was one mainstream fostering approval and 7 family and Friends approvals. Over the year, there have been 7 mainstream approvals and 19 family and friends approvals which demonstrates the significant shift in the work of the Service from assessing, supervising and supporting mainstream carers to the same work with family and friends carers.

An information evening was held on 23rd March 2017 with three couples and two single people in attendance. This was really positive with good interest from the people who attended and one is currently progressing to an initial visit.

The Fostering Service had a stand at the Disability Event held at Audley Community Centre in February 2017. There was a low attendance and very little interest in fostering.

Skills to Foster training was held in February 2017. Four households attended but one has withdrawn due to personal reasons.

Foster Carer Retention

Foster carer retention 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 is high and there are regular meetings between the Director, Executive Member for Children's Services and the Foster Carer Association committee where issues can be raised. In addition, a Fostering Forum is held twice a year where foster carers are consulted about what they feel is working well and what is not.

Two resignations were noted retrospectively at the Fostering Panel in Quarter 4 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.

Regional Campaign

The regional 'You Can Foster' recruitment campaign has been live since September 2016 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. The campaign is prioritising recruitment at a local level through targeting of PR, 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; and
5. Children with complex/additional needs including behaviour that challenges.

Assessment

Statutory guidance for fostering assessments is that they should be completed within 8 months, which 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.

Training completed 2016 / 17

	Date of training	Sessions covered	Places offered	Places utilised
Paediatric First Aid	13th Sept 2016	Paediatric First Aid	12	8
Foster Carer Support Group	14th Sept 2016	Foster Carer Support Group	25	Attendance sheet not received
Paediatric First Aid Update	16th Sept 2016	Paediatric First Aid Update	12	8
Conference 1	21st Sept 2016	Staying put & Moving to independence	40	20
Foster Carer Support Group	7th Dec 2016	Foster Carer Support Group	25	Attendance sheet not received
Conference 2	11th Jan 2017	Promoting education and achievement of CIOC Moving children on Legal framework	60	50
Paediatric First Aid Update	22nd Feb 2017	Paediatric First Aid Update	12	8
Paediatric First Aid	11th March 2017	Paediatric First Aid	24	12
Foster Carer Support Group	15th March 2017	Foster Carer Support Group	25	14
On track conference	21st March 2017	CSE Children and young people displaying sexualised behaviour Self-harm	40	39

Comments from Carers

- All topics were covered well
- Good insight into equality and diversity
- All very good
- Excellent course
- It is always helpful to refresh your memory, you always take away something extra
- Leaving care team, especially good especially Becky
- I found all of the course very useful and informative
- Excellent course, well delivered!
- Better awareness of the support available
- I will be able to better plan and look after young children in line with current procedures
- All of the conference was very informative
- A good sound overview of all areas covered throughout the day
- All was informative
- Everything was interesting

Training still to be delivered in the 2016/17 training calendar includes

- Effects of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome;
- Paediatric First Aid – 3 separate courses including an update course;
- Conference 3 which includes Allegations Management, Positive Care and Control and Risk Assessment; and
- Foster Carer Support Group.

Training Proposal 2017/18

This proposal will be presented at the Fostering Forum on 25th April 2017 for discussion along with the outcome of a short survey conducted recently to obtain the views of all carers about training needs, timings etc.

Specialist Disability Conference	Thursday 28/09/2017	Disability awareness Profound and multiple learning difficulties Autism	60 places available
Conference 4	Wednesday 08/11/2017	Foetal alcohol syndrome Substance misuse Restorative justice	60 places available
Conference 5	Tuesday 09/01/2018	Emotional needs of children in care Sex and sexuality Personality disorder	60 places available
0 – 8 Conference	Thursday 22/03/2018	To be determined	60 places available
Conference 6	Wednesday 16/05/2018	Total respect Working with young people who self-harm Working together to safeguard children	60 places available
Repeat of Conference 1 from 2016	Tuesday 26/06/2018	Staying put & Moving to independence Delegated authority Equality and diversity	60 places available

Fostering Panel

The new Panel Chair and Advisor are both developing well in these roles. The Panel has continued to function effectively.

Panel Business

Six Family and Friends assessments were presented to the January 2017 Fostering Panel. One of these was not approved, a unanimous decision of the Panel. The young person remained in placement short term whilst other family members were assessed.

The February 2017 Fostering Panel was cancelled as there were no agenda items.

Six Fostering Assessments were presented to the March 2017 Panel. These consisted of one mainstream assessment for an agency transfer and a long term match. 3 Regulation 24 Fostering Assessments were also presented of which 2 were approved and one was deferred for the carers to present their verbal responses to the Panel in April 2017.

Two Family and Friends Assessments were also presented to the Fostering Panel and a unanimous decision was given to recommend approval.

Review Panel

A new Review Panel Chair and a new Panel Advisor both took up their roles in Quarter 4. The transition has been smooth and the Panel has continued to operate effectively.

Review Panel Business

	Long Term Matches	De-registrations	Exemptions	Annual Reviews
Quarter 4	1	5	3	8
2016/17 (full year)	5	14	8	22

Of the 14 foster carer households deregistered in 2016/17, 7 were due to Special Guardianship Orders being achieved, 2 were due to placement disruptions, 1 due to the foster carer's health, 1 as the result of an allegation following which the carers resigned, and one set of carers resigned but now wish to retract this.

Complaints

There was one complaint received this Quarter from a carer feeling unsupported following a request for respite care for 2 weeks. A meeting was held with the carer, Service Leader and Fostering Team Manager to resolve the matter. The circumstances were complex and it was evident that there had been some miscommunication. The complaint led to the young person being moved to an alternative placement and the carer was able to have a two week holiday with her mother who has deteriorating health.

Over the year there were 4 complaints in total. In addition to those in Quarter 4, there was one in May 2016, which was made by an advocate on behalf of a child who wanted a change of placement. The child complained that she was bored and unhappy and wanted a number of material things that had been refused. The outcome of the complaint was that a referral was made to the Fostering Support Service for short breaks and outreach support and a new placement search was undertaken. In August 2016, a family and friends carer complained about his Supervising Social Worker 'we don't get each other; she doesn't listen to us' so now has a different worker allocated.

Compliments

12 compliments were received during the Quarter 4 period.

The majority of compliments were about the support received from foster carers' allocated Supervising Social Workers (SSWs). One carer stated that their 'SSW is fantastic, she listens to our views. She always treats us as professional, she understands the complex needs of our looked after child, and she is very professional and always helps us to find best solutions to any issues.'

A further compliment was received from a child's allocated social worker following feedback provided to her from the child's foster carers, stating that they liked their new worker and felt supported by her.

An additional compliment was received from an Emergency Duty Team worker commending the carers for accepting an emergency placement. She found the carers to be respectful and supportive to the child's parents and put them at ease providing reassurance that they would be caring for their child.

Over the full year, there were 22 compliments in total. All but one express that Supervising Social Workers provide good support to carers and are very professional in their approach. The other one was made by a local Head teacher expressing how impressed she was by the Advanced Practitioner's input into the school's Careers Evening.

Allegations

In Quarter 4, there were 2 allegations; one of which alleged emotional abuse. The carers were under a great deal of pressure due to a sudden health issue and did not cope well. The investigation was dealt with by Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) processes, was substantiated and is due to be heard by the Fostering Panel in May 2017. The other was an allegation relating to physical abuse and alcohol use by family and friends carers but was unsubstantiated. The outcome led to a single assessment of the child in placement and a referral to Incredible Years training for the carers.

During the year there have been 9 allegations in total:

- 3 were deemed to be unfounded following investigation;
- 4 were deemed to be unsubstantiated following investigation;
- 2 were substantiated following investigation; and
- 1 of these led to de-registration of the carers.

Specific Incidents and Restraints (including Bullying, Serious Illnesses and Accidents)

In Quarter 4, there were 6 serious incidents:

- 3 of these were minor accidents;
- 2 were incidents of aggression from a young person towards their carer; and
- 1 was a report of a foster carer using a young relative to care for a child new to her care, which was inappropriate.

Throughout the year, there have been 39 recorded serious incidents. There were on average 3 a month with 2 exceptional months when there were 5 recorded incidents and December 2016 had 8. 6 of these incidents relate to one young person, who went missing a number of times and was known to be associating with unsuitable adults and using illicit substances. This unsettled period culminated in a major incident on Christmas Day involving a knife and also resulted in Police involvement, although no formal action was taken.

8 incidents involved visits to Accident and Emergency Departments because of minor accidents, injuries or ailments. Foster carers have all acted appropriately in taking children to hospital or GP to be checked but in the majority of cases the ailments or injuries have been very minor and children have not required treatment. 2 children were taken to hospital because of illness but required advice rather than treatment.

12 incidents involved some form of violence or aggression either by young people towards their foster carers or their property. Half of these incidents involved one young person and involved the Police, who were called to help bring situations under control.

There has been no reported bullying within this Quarter.

Offending by Children and Young People in Foster Care

There was no Police involvement with any young people in Quarter 4. Over the year they were called to 5 different incidents all involving the same young person, who used violence and aggression towards his carers and other young people in placement. He caused extensive damage to the carers' property and at times became out of control. Although the Police attended the incidents to remove the young person until he calmed down, no formal Police action was taken.

Missing From Home

6 young people (13 incidences) were reported missing within this Quarter.

In January 2017, one young person was reported missing on 4 occasions and refused to return to her placement, placing herself at risk. Another young person was reported missing during January 2017 on 4 occasions as she refused to return home because she wanted a change of placement. Concerns were raised in respect of the young person being at risk of CSE and work was completed with her by the Engage team. An alternative placement was sought.

Two young people were reported missing in February 2017. One young person failed to return to the placement and was not contactable for some time but then later returned to the placement of their own accord. The other young person had attended Youth Zone and went missing with another young person but was later found by relatives at a local McDonalds.

During March 2017, 3 incidences of missing from home were reported, two of which involved the same young person.

Over the year, 20 young people were reported missing from home on 41 occasions between them. Foster carers followed procedures for reporting and the Engage Team followed up by undertaking the Return Home interviews.

Exemptions

Exemptions have to be made when 4 or more children reside in the same foster placement.

There were 4 exemptions in place during Quarter 4. There have been 11 exemptions over the year.

All these exemptions remain in place. 2 exemptions support a sibling placement of 4 children whilst the third supports a mother and baby placement alongside other placements. The fourth exemption supports an emergency placement of a sibling group of 3 alongside a short-term placement.

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 twice a year, generally in April and October.

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, who are involved with the planning of events, Skills to Foster preparation training, recruitment stands and events.

Family and Friends Foster Care

	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
No. Family and Friends carers	18	23	33
No. new approvals	2	6	8
No. Viability assessments	12	23	10
No. Family and Friends assessments	8	8	8
No. SGO assessments	6	2	0
No. Regulation 24 assessments	8	10	4

There were 3 resignations of Family and Friends carers in Quarter 4 due to Special Guardianship Orders being obtained. In addition to the assessments outlined in the table above, there were 15 ongoing assessments from the previous Quarter made up of 9 Regulation 24 assessments and 6 full Family and Friends assessments. This is nearly double the previous Quarter. The Regulation 24 assessment outcomes included 5 which progressed to approval, 1 assessment became a SGO, 2 withdrew from the process and one remained ongoing. When considering the 6 full Family and Friends assessments, 3 were approved, 1 withdrew, 1 was ruled out as negative and 1 remained ongoing.

In this Quarter, a further 4 Regulation 24 assessments have been completed. 1 has withdrawn, 1 has been ruled out as negative and 2 remain ongoing. There have also been 8 full Family and Friends assessments, 1 of which became an SGO assessment, 2 were ruled out as negative, 1 became a Section 38(6) assessment and 4 remain ongoing.

Family and Friends Assessments

	2013 / 2014	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017
No of Family and Friends assessments	9	8	28	27

The increase in Family and Friends work that commenced in 2015/16 has continued and is now consistently much higher than it was two years ago.

Short Break Foster Care

On 31st March 2017, there were 16 carers, who provided 25 placements during Quarter 4. The 16 carers provide short breaks in order to provide support to parents where there is a risk of children coming into care, support to other placements and 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 this Quarter period.

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 Educator' 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 4, 6.4% of Looked After Children had 3 or more placements compared to 9.8% for the same period in 2015 (lower is better). The average for England is measured against the figures for 2013/14 when it was 10.7%; the comparable authority percentage for the same year was 10.1%

	January	February	March
LAC with 3 or more placements	14	15	16
Total number of LAC	359	371	375
% Stability of LAC placements 2016/17	5.6%	5.9%	6.4%
%Stability of LAC placements 2015/16	8.0%	9.7%	9.8%

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.

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. The Fostering Support worker is based between Duke St and ASU (Adolescent Support Unit) where young people enjoy spending time, and there is a strong link to the Revive Team where a part time post is linked to the Fostering Support Service

Since April 2016, there have been ten referrals for Fostering Support, nine male and one female. In Quarter 4, there was one new referral and five cases closed. The young people referred have benefitted from one to one intervention and support, and group interventions and activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award, Boys Group and a Mindfulness Programme. Some have attended football sessions and / or swimming lessons.

For younger children, there is a Saturday morning club, which is regularly attended by 8 children in the 7 to 11 years age group at The Limes in Darwen.

The feedback from children and young people is positive:

‘My thoughts are always listened to and considered’;
 ‘It is a good place to go; I have met new friends there’; and
 ‘We do good activities.’.

Four young people have utilised short breaks support at Lytham Road in the last Quarter. Two young people have a support package in place which includes regular short breaks. The feedback included ‘We were very happy for all the support we received from yourself and the staff from Lytham Road.’

Support is also provided to foster carers and the feedback from them is very positive:

‘Communication was very good between us and yourself’;
 ‘Always there to transport SA when needed’; and
 ‘All in all we were happy with the support we received from everybody at the ASU and Fostering Support.’

Commissioned Placements

In Quarter 4, 11 new placements were commissioned. 5 Independent Fostering Agency placements were made because there was no in-house provision available at the time placements were needed. Two specialist mental health placements were made for young people being discharged from hospital and two concurrent placements were made for small babies with a care plan of adoption. The remaining 2 were independent agency residential placements for young people with very complex needs that could not be met in-house.

During Quarter 4, 7 commissioned placements ended. This included a young person who was sent to custody, a young person who went to live with his father, a baby and her mother who were able to move back to their own home, a young person who moved from one independent fostering agency placement to another, a child with complex health needs who moved from an agency placement to an in-house fostering placement. One commissioned placement ended because the foster carers transferred to Blackburn with Darwen and another due to the young person turning 18 years when Commissioning funding ended, being taken over by Adults.

Commissioned Placements on 31st March 2017

Placement Type	Independent Agency Residential Placements	Independent Fostering Agency Placements	Secure Accommodation	Other local authority
Number	12 including 2 children with disabilities and 3 young people in specialist mental health provision	33 including 5 sibling groups and 3 concurrent placements	1	3 placements including 2 sibling pair placements

Budget

The Fostering Service operated within budget for the year; however, the number of new foster carers recruited has not been sufficient to meet the growing demand for placements caused by the increase in the number of children coming into the care system. This has put the commissioning budget under increased pressure, particularly in relation to the number of independent fostering agency placements that the Service has needed particularly for older children and children with complex needs.

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 – despite high levels of recruitment activity outlined in the main body of this report, the number of carers approved during the year has been low. This will continue to be a priority for the Service.
2. Improve placement stability.
Update – 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 on this priority.
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 has been fully implemented with just one remaining conference for the year to be delivered in May 2017. Feedback is positive.
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 2016 outlined in the main body of this Report was successful and the Service will maintain its own accreditation for another 12 months.

Priorities for 2017/18

1. To recruit to the new Marketing and Recruitment Officer role and develop a new recruitment strategy for the year ahead. The recruitment of carers for older children, complex needs and parent-child placements remains the priority.
2. Team development – the Team has a number of new Supervising Social Workers. The nature of the work in Fostering has changed significantly from that of assessing and supervising mainstream carers to family and friends work. A team development plan is required that takes account of both.
3. Engaging with foster carers – whilst the FCA is an active body, there are a large number of carers who the Service needs to engage and communicate with in different ways. The Service needs to develop a more effective communication strategy for ensuring that all carers can be kept up to date with developments, messages and opportunities to be more involved. This will include the further development of the regular Fostering Forum.
4. To continue to meet the training needs of all foster carers ensuring that all carers attend mandatory training in particular.
5. To continue to develop the Fostering Support Service to help maintain good placement stability rates. This will include the recruitment of additional short breaks foster carers who can also contribute to keeping the number of children and young people entering the care system as low as possible.
6. Link fostering into the Adolescent Strategy alongside residential services and consider creative ways to improve placement sufficiency for adolescents.
7. Continue to monitor compliance with Fostering Regulations and Standards.

Alyson Hanson
Service Leader, Placement Services
3rd May 2017