

Fostering Service Quarter 1 Report

1st April to 30th June 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

The number of children in our care (CioC) decreased slightly in Quarter 1 from 375 at the end of March 2017 to 363 at the end of June. 67% (245) of children in our care are in foster care and 40% (146) are placed with in-house foster carers. Compared to the same period in 2016 there has been a decrease in the number and percentage of children in in-house foster placements and an increase in the percentage and number of children in family and friends placements. The percentage and number of children in agency placements has barely changed.

	30th June 2016	30th June 2017
Number of Children in our Care	346	363
Number of CioC in Foster Care	233 (67%)	245 (67%)
Number of children in in-house foster care placements	148 (43%)	146 (40%)
Number of children in family and friends foster care	32 (9%)	50 (14%)
Number of children in independent fostering agency placements	48 (14%)	49 (13%)
Number of children placed with other local authority carers	5(1%)	0

In House Placements

Male	88
Female	58

Age break down of children in foster placements

Age	Mainstream	Family and Friends	Independent Fostering Agency
0 to 2	23	9	6
3 to 6 years	19	16	0
7 to 10 years	31	9	13
11 to 15 years	48	13	24
16 and 17 years	25	3	6
Total	146	50	49

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 in the 11 to 15 years age group. There has been a shortage of foster placements across the region for this age group for some time. The increase in the number of children coming into the care over the last 12 months in the region has put the availability of foster placements under great pressure. Independent agency searches are frequently negative with no offer of placements even for younger children. The

effect of this is that some young people are being pushed prematurely into residential placements. Some of the pressure has been offset by the increase in the number of children cared for by family and friends.

New Referrals in Quarter 1

Month	No children	Sibling groups	0 to 5	6 to 11	12+	Placed in-house	Placed Independent Fostering Agency	Placed in Residential	Didn't come in
April	11	2	4	4	3	3	1	1	6
May	16	2	6	6	4	7	4	1	4
June	13	2	6	3	4	6	1	3	3
Total	40	6	16	13	11	16	6	5	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 1:

Children and young people said:

"I am happy about my placement; it is the one I always wanted. I get on with everyone and enjoy spending time on the farm."

"They are loving and caring but we don't see our Mum and Dad a lot and get told things that might upset us".

"I like everything. They are like my new Mum and Dad."

"People care about me no matter what".

"They treat me like their own kid and they always got time for me".

Social workers said:

"Y is too young to verbally express his views, however upon observation he appears happy and settled in his placement. He has a positive relationship with both of his carers and will seek them out for emotional warmth. Y is always observed as smiling and giggling during visits."

"J is doing really well, she is making good progress, really focused and settled. S is also amazing. She's a happy gorgeous girl. She's making good progress but more importantly her attitude to learning has improved massively. She just genuinely seems happy. A' like the girls is a lot more settled and on task a lot more at school."

"C has struggled to accept that he is not returning to his mother's care. C is presenting now as happy, able to laugh and joke with people. R provides the children with a loving, caring, stable environment. She has the children's best interest at the fore front of her mind; she is very child focussed in her approaches to caring for the children."

“C has been placed with S and D for over four years and they have provided him with a secure, settled and positive experience of family life. C has made positive progress in all areas of his development since this time, particularly in becoming more open, confident and able to express his views.”

Birth Children said:

“The last year has gone well and L has come a long way with the help and support we have given him, in particular my Mum.”

“It’s been a mix of good and bad days. Although mainly good, the bad can become very bad very quickly. It’s been an emotional year and I hope the next year isn’t as crazy.”

“The last year has gone alright, I feel supported.”

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 Street. 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) commenced in April 2017 and recently concluded. Evaluations are very positive

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 G.C.S.E. 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.

SA Letterbox Club is in place for all Children in our Care from Reception to Year 6 to encourage reading at home. Age appropriate books and games etc. are sent out on a monthly basis. Feedback has been very encouraging from the children who have stated that they enjoy receiving their parcels. Extra tuition has been offered on a Saturday morning to all Year 6 Children in our Care to prepare for SATs at the Kip McGrath Centre in Blackburn. Unfortunately take up has been poor; however, extra tuition for Year 11 Children in our Care in English and Maths was well attended. GCSE results are published on 24/08/17 and last year there was clear evidence that the extra tuition improved results. SATs results are currently in the process of being validated.

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' assessments. Young people have been involved in the recruitment of new staff during the Quarter. A new care leaver currently sits on the Fostering Panel.

The Fostering Service was awarded the Investing in Children Award in December 2016 and the report made a number of recommendations that the Service is taking forward.

During Quarter 1, a 'sons and daughters' group was arranged. An activity was scheduled to take place at Energy Trampoline Park in Preston on the 26th April but due to no uptake, this activity was cancelled. The support offer to 'sons and daughters' will be reviewed in light of this.

The Fostering Support service continues to deliver the Saturday morning club, which is held every fortnight at The Limes. The support group is aimed at 8-12 year olds in foster care and the young people are offered the opportunity to choose group activities. During Quarter 1, the group met on a fortnightly basis incorporating a craft morning, movie theme and popcorn event, games morning and a teddy bear picnic. 10 young people regularly attend.

Children in care have also been involved in several staff recruitment interviews including social workers, Advanced Practitioners and a Team Manager post.

VOICE Group

The Junior VOICE group (8 to 12 year olds) and the main VOICE group (12 to 16 year olds) now meet every month 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 Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee, recently presenting the Leapfrog Tools project and Young Advisors Social Media Research. However, this is currently being reviewed to see how it can be made more inclusive, possibly using video technology.

The new Participation Strategic Framework has been published, which covers all young people, not just vulnerable children and young people. The priorities are linked to the Looked After Children Strategy.

The Revive Consultant Psychologist met with the Voice group in Quarter 1 to discuss how the team can improve their services for looked after children. He is going to do some further work with them.

There is 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'. 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 1, 12 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. All accommodation is monitored and there is a referral system in place to evidence placement decisions.

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

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.

A new Marketing and Recruitment Officer was recruited in Quarter 1. Unfortunately, they have needed to work a three month notice in their current role and will not be able to join the team until the end of Quarter 2. The recruitment task in Quarter 1 has therefore fallen to the two managers and team members, which has presented challenges given other workload pressures particularly around Family and Friends assessments.

Foster Carer Resource

	Total number of foster carers	Mainstream	Short breaks carers	Family and Friends carers
Quarter 1 2016/17	136	102	14	20
Quarter 1 2017/18	131	81	15	35

In the last 12 months, the overall number of carers has fallen with a significant decrease in the number of mainstream carers partly offset by the increase in the number of family and friends carers. The profile of the work of the Fostering Service is gradually changing due to the increase in the number of Family and Friends assessments and the requirement to support and supervise the growing number of Family and Friends carers.

Matching and Ethnicity

A White British brother and sister were placed together with Asian foster carers because the only other option was to place them separately with separate agencies. The children who are aged 16 and 14 years were consulted and agreed to the placement. They have since returned home but commended the foster carers, who made every effort to ensure their cultural needs were met including arranging a prom dress and a Limosine for the 16 year old's prom night.

Foster Carer Recruitment

A new fostering recruitment campaign was launched on 8 May 2017 at the start of national Fostering Fortnight. The aim was to target new carers for hard-to-place children with complex needs, teenagers and siblings. At the end of Quarter 1, there were 5 prospective foster carer assessments in progress, one of which has since withdrawn.

Local radio 2BR was used as the main platform to raise awareness of the need for more carers with an on air and online campaign running throughout two weeks. This activity was supported with local events, press opportunities and ongoing social media activity.

There were 72 enquiries in Quarter 1, 12 of which converted to expressions of interest.

Activities included:

- Fostering family walk event around Entwistle Reservoir;
- Press release and photo-call;
- Information stands in the Mall on both Mondays of the Fortnight;
- A Team Talk article was posted on the Council's intranet to share the information with Council staff to widen the pool of potential foster carers; and
- The two events generated a total of nine direct positive enquiries on the days.
- The Lancashire Telegraph was invited along to the first Mall event. A photographer came along to take pictures and create a buzz;
- Information and the photo-call at the second Mall event were sent to the Lancashire Telegraph telling the story of a foster carer. This resulted in a full-page news article in the Lancashire Telegraph;
- 2BR Radio and Facebook campaign;

- Adverts created using real foster carers' voices to highlight their own experiences on the local radiostation 2BR that were aired to listeners across East Lancashire;
- Images posted throughout the Fortnight via social media;
- Regular online, social media activity on Facebook and Twitter using the hashtags; and
- a Health and Community Guide Advert was placed.

Proudly, our social media activity won the campaign praise nationally. We were highlighted as an example of good practice on GovUK – a social media channel highlighting what it describes as 'the best social media data from government communications across the UK' cited as: 'great government communication'.

Fostering Fortnight analytics

Let's Foster Facebook

34 Facebook posts created and posted,
33 shares,
162 likes,
5 comments,
27,000 impressions - the number of people reached, and
85 link clicks through to the website.

Twitter @blackburndarwen

11 tweets,
71 retweets,
72 likes, and
7,052 people reached.

Let's Foster website

Over the two week period from 8-22 May, there were 512 page views (people directly visiting the website to view information). This is a comparatively large upturn in visitor numbers – compared to a normal weekly average of just 7 page views per week.

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 P.R., 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.

Foster Carer Retention

During Quarter 1, the Service received 7 Family and Friends foster carers resignations. Five of these were successful in obtaining a Special Guardianship Order (SGO), one was a short break carer for a connected person which was no longer required and another was a disruption where the family made a decision that fostering was impacting too much on their own family.

Two mainstream foster carers resigned following allegations. In each case, the foster carer's review was presented to the Fostering Panel with the recommendation to deregister the carers. This was endorsed by the Agency Decision Maker. The loss of the two carers represents the loss of 4 placements overall.

Five Family and Friends assessments were presented to the Fostering Panel over the Quarter, four of which were approved. One assessment was not completed due to the applicant not complying with having a medical.

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 2017 / 18

Training completed April – June 2017

Training name	Sessions to be covered	Places offered	Places utilised
Foetal Alcohol Training	Foetal Alcohol Training	25	14
Conference 3	Managing allegations Positive care and control Risk assessment	60	45
Paediatric First Aid	Paediatric First Aid	13	13
Paediatric First Aid	Paediatric First Aid	12	12
Foster Carer Support Group	Foster Carer Support Group	7	Information awaited

Comments from Carers

- It is always helpful to refresh your memory, you always take away something extra
- I found all of the course very useful and informative
- Excellent course, well delivered!
- Better awareness of the support available
- All of the conference was very informative
- All was informative
- Everything was interesting
- All topics were covered well

In 2017 / 18 the training proposal is to hold six conferences which includes a specialist disability conference.

Fostering Panel

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

Panel Business

In April, the Panel heard 5 Family and Friends fostering assessments including 2 Regulation 24 assessments, 1 first annual review and 3 review reports of carers following allegations. In May, the Panel heard 2 reviews and 2 resignations, and in June another 3 reviews. 4 Exemptions were noted and reviewed over the Quarter. One new exemption has been made this Quarter.

The Panel Chair report card indicates that:

Both Panels operate very well; the administration has continued to be excellent for both the main Fostering and Review Panels. All papers required beforehand are received in a timely fashion, as are the minutes that are created afterwards.

The Fostering Panel advisor has continued to provide very secure and confident information and agency advice. The Fostering Panel is well attended. Panel members are well prepared for their duties on the day(s) and contribute very well to the discussions. Children and young people are continuing to attend matches, at least for some of the matches, and this remains positive and working well.

Panel Advisors have worked well to improve the quality of paperwork presented to both Panels. The working environment at the Livesey All Age Centre also remains very suitable.

The quality assurance feedback from the Fostering Panel has been extremely positive. Panel members commented on a number of excellent examples of detailed, analytical and well-presented reports by social workers.

Annual appraisals of Panel Members were completed in Quarter 1 by the Panel Chair and Panel Advisor.

The Annual Fostering Panel Training day took place in June. This was well attended by Panel members as well as the fostering team social workers. The training covered a variety of topics from the role of a Panel member, Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards, presentations by guest speakers on Domestic Violence, Safeguarding, legal updates and trends and psychological support to children and foster carers.

Review Panel

During Quarter 1, 17 foster carer reviews were presented to the Annual Review Panel and 11 carers attended. 6 carers returned evaluation forms indicating that their experience of attending Panel was positive.

One foster carer commented in relation to the support they received from their supervising social worker; "Excellent, when required she is there and always friendly." Whilst another carer stated that; "Our Supervising Social Worker has been an excellent support and we hope to continue this support as long as possible".

Complaints

Within this Quarter, there were 2 complaints.

The first complaint was received from a young person in relation to two social workers. The young person complained that two social workers made false allegations about her and shared them with the Police. The complaint was forwarded on to Customer Care and is still being investigated.

A further complaint received was from a Headteacher raising concerns in respect of a foster carer. The Fostering Team Manager responded to the complaint in writing. Issues were raised with the carer and direct work is to commence imminently.

Compliments

During Quarter 1, 3 compliments were received. One compliment was received from a Leaving Care Social Worker commending foster carers on the care afforded to a young person and the values instilled in the young person.

A further compliment was received from the Leaving Care Service commending foster carers for their support with 2 vulnerable young people.

In June, a further compliment was received from foster carers commending the support received from their Supervising Social Worker. The foster carers stated that their 'social worker was very good with us and she explained everything and always kept us informed. She was very supportive and was always at the end of the phone if we needed her. A credit to your team'.

Allegations

During Quarter 1, there were three allegations. All three allegations were fully investigated and the correct procedures followed involving full strategy meetings led by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

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

There were 2 serious illness and accidents reported during Quarter 1.

There was a minor accident involving a young child, who tripped over a toy. The foster carer noticed that the child was struggling to weight bear and made the decision to seek further medical advice. The child attended A&E and was x-rayed and no injuries were noted. The following day, the child was fine and no further treatment was required.

There were no incidences of bullying during Quarter 1.

There was a further A&E attendance following a young person appearing unwell and disclosing to their foster carer that they had taken an overdose. The foster carers sought medical advice and accompanied the young person to the A&E department. The young person was admitted to hospital, provided with treatment and remained there for a period of 2 days.

Offending by Children and Young People in Foster Care

One young person in foster care has been involved with the courts in Quarter 1 having pleaded guilty to an offence. He was sentenced to a Youth Rehabilitation Order and continues to live in foster care having made good progress.

Missing From Home

8 young people (16 incidences of missing from home) were reported during Quarter 1. 10 of these incidents relate to one young person. In all cases the correct missing from home procedures were followed and all young people returned to their placements safe and well. Procedures for young people who go missing include 'return home' interviews which are conducted by the Engage Service. This allows young people to talk to someone independent about why they have been missing and for the service to identify issues of concern.

Exemptions

Exemptions have to be made when 4 or more children reside in the same foster placement. There were 3 exemptions in place during Quarter 1. Two of these remain in place within separate fostering households that continue to support sibling placements of four children. The third exemption supported a parent and child placement and ended recently.

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

Family and Friends Foster Care

At the end of Quarter 1, there were 22 Family and Friends foster carers. There were 3 new approvals and 7 resignations. 4 resignations were due to obtaining Special Guardianship Orders, one carer ended their placement, one was a short break placement that was no longer required and one resigned due to the level of risk from the parents. This has meant a decrease of 4 Family and Friends households overall.

11 viability assessments were completed with the support of the Advanced Practitioner. This is a similar number to the previous Quarter.

There have been 7 ongoing full Family and Friends assessments from the previous Quarter including 3 Regulation 24 assessments and 2 full Family and Friends assessments. 3 Regulation 24 assessments went on to be approved. The 2 full Family and Friends assessments are due to attend Fostering Panel in July with recommendations for approval. In Quarter 1, a further 3 Regulation 24 assessments were requested, which remain ongoing. 2 full Family and Friends assessments were also requested and remain ongoing. In summary, the Fostering Team managed a total of 15 assessments.

Short Break Foster Care

15 short break carers provided 25 placements during Quarter 1. Short breaks carers provide support to parents, other placements and emergency placements. Carers are matched to children, who have a wide range of additional and complex needs. A support group is in place for short breaks carers and met in Quarter 1.

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

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 the end of 2016/17, 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%. At the end of Quarter 1, placement stability was marginally better than it was at the same time last year.

	April	May	June
LAC with 3 or more placements	0	0	8
Total number of LAC	367	370	363
% Stability of LAC placements Quarter 1	0%	0%	2.2%
%Stability of LAC placements 2016/17	1.4%	1.4%	2.3%

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.

Fostering Support

The Fostering Support Service is now well established. The Service has been supporting a number of fragile placements and 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 Street and Adolescent Support Unit (ASU) 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

During Quarter 1, there were four new referrals for emergency support for young people in foster placements. These were requests for a mixture of short breaks through the ASU at Lytham Road, outreach support and positive activities.

The Saturday Morning Club has been running every fortnight since 1st April. This is open to young people aged 7-11 years, who are in a foster placement; currently, we have 10 young people that have been attending regularly. Some of the activities have included arts & crafts, baking, cooking, outdoor play, and movie mornings. These have been requested by the young people and actioned by the staff.

Feedback from Foster Carers:

'The Fostering Support is supportive for both us as foster carers and the young person.'

'His Keyworker has a good understanding of the young person.'

Feedback from Young People:

'I get given choices when I am at Lytham Road.'

'It is a nurturing and caring place'.

'If I ask for something my keyworker will put everything into getting it.'

Commissioned Placements

The number of commissioned placements, fostering and residential increased in Quarter 1 compared to the previous Quarter. As the numbers of children coming into the care system across the North West region has increased, there is a significant pressure on the availability of all types of placement. There is a particular shortage of fostering placements as local authorities are all struggling to recruit carers for priority groups causing an over reliance on independent fostering agencies. The availability of placements via independent agencies in both the fostering and residential sectors is also under great pressure with some agencies reporting that they are receiving around 100 referrals a day, a demand which is impossible to meet. Some older children are being placed through necessity in the residential sector when a foster placement would better meet their needs.

Budget

Current placement pressures in-house and across the independent fostering agency landscape is placing the commissioning budget under great pressure as increasingly adolescents are pushed into costly residential placements due to the lack of foster placements across the region.

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.

Quarter 1 update – The new Recruitment and Marketing Officer has been appointed and will take up the post in September.

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.

Quarter 1 Update – A new team development plan is in place. A team development day is planned for Quarter 2.

3. Engaging with foster carers – whilst the FCA is an active body, there are a large number of additional carers with whom the Service needs to engage and communicate. 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 with the Service. This will include the further development of the regular Fostering Forum.

Quarter 1 Update – The Director of Children’s Services, Executive Member and Service Leader met with the FCA Committee during Quarter 1 and a Fostering Forum was held in May. Issues raised are in the process of being addressed.

4. To continue to meet the training needs of all foster carers ensuring that all carers attend mandatory training in particular.

Quarter 1 Update – The 2017/18 conference plan is outlined in the main body of this report. Carer attendance continues to be monitored by the Service.

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.

Quarter 1 Update - The Fostering Support service continues to support fragile placements with activities and short breaks for a number of young people, and consultation and advice for carers via Revive, ASU, supervising social workers and other professionals. The Saturday morning club is well attended. The on-call service tends to be under-used and the Service needs to ensure that placements facing difficulties and challenges are identified early.

6. Link fostering into the Adolescent Strategy alongside residential services and consider creative ways to improve placement sufficiency for adolescents.

Quarter 1 Update – The Adolescent Strategy is being developed. A letter went out to foster carers in Quarter 1 asking for expressions of interest by adolescent foster carers, who may want to join the residential peripatetic list. The idea is to allow foster carers to learn from residential staff, form relationships with young people in residential care and enter into shared care arrangements for some of those in our own children’s homes. The hope is that some young people may ultimately be able to return to full time foster care. A response from foster carers is awaited.

7. Continue to monitor compliance with Fostering Regulations and Standards.

Quarter 1 Update – Monthly auditing of case files continues and the Fostering Service managers quality assure Panel reports, assessments and reviews.

**Alyson Hanson
Service Leader, Placement Services
1st August 2017**