

Fostering Service Quarter 2 Report

1st July to 30th September 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) increased in Quarter 2 from 363 at the end of June 2017 to 380 at the end of September 2017. 63% (240) of children in our care are in foster care and 36% (139) are placed with in-house foster carers. The increase in the number of children coming into care has put the availability of all types of foster placement under pressure. In Quarter 2, local authorities across the North West region found themselves competing for independent fostering agency placements of which the availability appeared to have diminished.

	30th June 2017	30th September 2017
Number of Children in our Care	363	380
Number of CioC in Foster Care	245 (67%)	240(63%)
Number of children in in-house foster care placements	146 (40%)	139(36%)
Number of children in family and friends foster care	50 (14%)	49(13%)
Number of children in independent fostering agency placements	49 (13%)	52(14%)
Number of children placed with other local authority carers	0	0

In House and Agency Placements

	In house	Family and Friends	Independent Fostering Agency
Male	85	28	37
Female	54	21	15

Age break down of children in foster placements

Age	Mainstream	Family and Friends	Independent Fostering Agency
0 to 2	24	12	7
3 to 6 years	17	15	3
7 to 10 years	28	6	11
11 to 15 years	48	11	25
16 and 17 years	22	5	6
Total	139	49	52

New Referrals in Quarter 2

	No of children	Sibling Groups	Age 0 - 5	Age 6 - 11	Age 12+	Children placed in-house	Fostering Agency	Residential placements	Short Break	Children didn't come in
July	23	3	13	5	5	9	5	1 in-house + 1 agency		7
Aug	10	1	4	2	4	2	1	1 agency	1	5
Sept	9	1	4	2	3	5	3			1
Quarter 2 total	42	5	21	9	12	16	9	3	1	13

Half of the new referrals in Quarter 2 were in the 0 to 5 age group. The largest numbers of placements made were with in-house foster carers. A significant proportion of those that did not come in went to family and friends placements under Regulation 24.

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 2:

Children and young people said:

'I feel safe and happy'.

'...sometimes there are fights between me and the other foster kids'

'I feel sad when I make everything argumentative and when my spending money gets docked for not doing as I am told'.

'My foster carer is creative and bonkers'.

'I have got an understanding family who are caring and loving'.

Social workers said:

'The carers are happy to accept any support that is offered. An example of this is that they recently had a consultation with the Revive Service'.

'K is struggling to deal with a lot of issues. W has been a fantastic support in discussing the issues and implementing a support strategy'.

'J is fully integrated within the family – he has good relationships with their extended family'.

Birth Children said:

'It's really good having T, he is so funny he makes me smile all the time. He is like my little brother.'

'I think we should get more information about what is happening as often things come as a shock to us and we haven't been able to prepare for any upsets'.

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. 10 of these children are in in-house foster care placements, 2 are in family and friends placements and the remaining four are in independent agency 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. Revive delivers consultation to foster carers, training and direct intervention on emotional health and well-being. In Quarter 2, 13 children in our care were referred to the service, the majority of whom are in foster placements. Feedback from foster carers following a consultation is very positive. The Revive Service has delivered training to foster carers on self-harm and a new 10 week course called APP (Attachment and Positive Parenting) commenced in Quarter 1 and concluded in Quarter 2. Evaluations were 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 implements a written education policy prepared in partnership with the Education Manager for Children in Our Care. The Virtual Head's role is to ensure 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.

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.

During Quarter 2, the results for SATs and GCSE examinations were published.

Key Stage 1 - 16 children in care formed the Key Stage 1 cohort in 2017; 11 (69%) of these attended primary schools in Blackburn with Darwen. 2 schools (out of borough) have failed to provide the results for a child despite repeated requests; therefore, these children have not been included in the results. 1 child in the group (6%) has an Education, Health and Care Plan and 2 (13%) children are recorded as receiving SEN Support that is reflected in the outcomes achieved.

Writing has been the strongest area for our CIOC with Maths the weakest when compared to all children in BwD and those nationally. Overall performance is relatively strong for this cohort.

Subject	BwD 2017* EXS+ (CIOC)	National CIOC 2016	BwD 2017* EXS+ (All)	National 2017* EXS+ (All)
Reading	71% (10)	50%	74%	76%
Writing	71% (10)	37%	67%	68%
Maths	64% (9)	46%	74%	75%
Overall	64% (9)	-	-	-

At Key Stage 2 - 22 children in care formed the Key Stage 2 cohort in 2017; 17 of these sat the end of Key Stage tests with 5 children being dis-applied or not eligible to take the tests. 15 (68%) of the cohort were educated in BwD primary schools at the time of taking the tests. 8 children in the group (36%) had either a Statement of Special Educational Needs or an Education, Health and Care Plan and a further 6 (27%) are recorded as receiving SEN Support that is reflected in the outcomes achieved. Data to compare BwD CIOC with their CIOC peers nationally is not yet available.

- Writing has been shown as the weakest subject area for our CIOC when compared to all children in BwD.
- Maths has been shown to be the strongest area for our CIOC when compared to all children in BwD and therefore is a strength within the borough.

Subject	BwD 2017* EXS+ (CIOC)	National CIOC 2016	BwD 2017* EXS+ (All)	National 2017* EXS+ (All)
Reading	50% (9)	41%	67%	71%
Writing	44% (8)	46%	76%	76%
Maths	67% (12)	41%	76%	75%
Overall	33% (6)	25%	59%	61%

At the time of taking their GCSE examinations, 3 (10%) young people in care achieved at least 5 A*- C GCSEs, including Maths and English. One of these young people achieved 10 GCSEs at Grade 4/C and above, another achieved 8 and a third achieved 7 GCSEs. 7 young people regularly attended GCSE revision sessions run by the Virtual School at the Kip McGrath centre. 3 achieved grade 4 or above in English and /or Maths. 17.39% (4) met the new GCSE threshold measure for GCSE in English and Maths at Grade C or above. 24% (8 young people) achieved a Grade 4 or higher in English and 30% (10) achieved this in Maths. 15% (5 young people) achieved the new measure of Grade 4 or higher in both English and Maths.

	Maths and English 9-4 2017		CIOC Nat Ave A*- C inc. Maths and English 2016	5 A*-C /9-4 inc. Maths and English 2017		At least 1 A*-C/9-4 2017		Achieving 1 or more GCSE or national qualification 2017	
2017	5	15%	17.5%	3	10%	17	52%	28	85%
2017 Students with statement/ EHCP	0	0	-	0	0	0	0	3	50%

Engagement with Children & Young People

During Quarter 2, a 'Sons and Daughters' group was scheduled. The activity took place at Blackburn Tenpin Bowling and 6 children attended the group. The purpose of the event was to make the children understand that they are valued and recognised for their contribution to the fostering role. Overall, the activity was a fun day for all the children who were able to establish friendships, played two games of bowling and had something to eat. Each of the young people completed a consultation form. They were able to talk about their fostering households and share with each other the highs and lows of fostering.

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 continues to take forward.

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.

VOICE Group

The VOICE group meets 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. The members of the group have been involved in a number of consultation activities to inform and shape services. They have also 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 and Corporate Parenting Specialist Advisory Group, when appropriate.

The 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.

In Quarter 2, some children in Foster Care attended 'Interviewing Skills' training, giving them the skills and confidence to interview social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers. Two Children in Foster Care and two Care Leavers attend The Collaborate Project, to influence the Centre for Children & Young Peoples Participation Seminar Series.

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.

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 focuses 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.

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.

Young people are allocated a Leaving Care Worker at the age of 15¾ years. In Quarter 2, caseloads increased and are not likely to reduce in the future due to the ruling that care leavers can remain open post-21. In Quarter 2, several young people aged 16 years and 16 years plus came into care.

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 2, the Advanced Practitioner continued 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.

At the end of Quarter 2, one of the service managers commenced a period of planned sickness absence and the Advanced Practitioner stepped into this role to provide temporary cover.

The new Recruitment and Marketing Officer took up post in Quarter 2.

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
Quarter 2 2016/17	126	93	15	18
Quarter 2 2017/18	112	78	14	20

The number of mainstream foster carers reduced slightly compared to Quarter 1, although it is a significant reduction compared to the same period 12 months ago. There have been a number of retirements and

resignations which account for the reduction. The number of new carers recruited has been insufficient to offset this drop, something that is a concern for the Service. The difficulty recruiting new carers is replicated by local authorities across the region and was a particular challenge for Blackburn with Darwen in Quarter 2 as there was some delay in the new Recruitment and Marketing Officer taking up his post.

Despite a significant increase in the demand for family and friends assessments, the number of family and friends carers has remained fairly static. This is due to the significant number of Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) made following assessment. The surge in demand for family and friends assessments with tight court timescales has compromised the ability of the Service to prioritise assessments for potential mainstream carers due to limited staff resources.

Matching and Ethnicity

All placements made in Quarter 2 were an ethnic and cultural match.

Foster Carer Recruitment

Recruitment activity was limited in Quarter 2, partly due to the school holidays and also because of the delay in the new Recruitment and Marketing Officer taking up his post and completing his induction to the role.

The main event for the Summer was the Radio 2BR Uganda appeal that was social media driven where the Service linked in with 2BR and QEGS. Over 13 days, there were 28 social media posts with varying results.

Date	Posts	Likes	Reach	Comments	Video Views	Shares
Total	28	73	9614	3	5500	1

Despite limited activity, there was an increase in the number of enquiries for August due to an email that was sent out to people who previously made an enquiry expressing an interest in fostering babies. Recruiting carers for babies has been on hold for some time but new carers to replace a number of those retiring are now needed.

In September, the Fostering Service made a change in directing people to the website 'contact us' page on the You Can Foster Blackburn with Darwen page. This meant the customer journey is now simpler and potential applicants find it easier to enquire.

Numbers of assessments and approvals

	Enquiries	Record of Interest	Number in Assessment	Approvals
July	17	1	11	0
August	29	1	10	1
September	14	4	10	0

The pressures on the fostering service to complete Family and Friends assessments within very exacting court timescales has compromised the capacity of the Service to prioritise mainstream foster carer assessments. This is a concern given the need to replace carers resigning and retiring. The new Recruitment and Marketing Officer is already generating interest and this will place the Service under increased pressure to undertake assessments.

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 new Recruitment and Marketing 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 the targeting of P.R., digital marketing and additional

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

Foster Carer Retention

During this Quarter, there has been one resignation which meant the loss of one placement, however there has been one approval with the gain of three placements meaning an increase of 2 placements.

Assessment

Statutory guidance for fostering assessments is that they should be completed within 8 months, a timescale that 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 of specialist training on relevant topics, safeguarding training, Health and Safety training and Support Groups for carers.

The new conference style training is delivering more focused learning for carers, which is specifically tailored to their requirements and allows them to attend one training day and cover multiple topics.

A specialist disability training conference was held in Quarter 2. Conferences planned for the next 12 months include:

- Foetal Alcohol Syndrome and Substance Misuse in November 2017;
- Emotional Health and Well-being and Sex and Sexuality in January 2018;
- Child Development conference focusing on adverse childhood experiences and the Voice of the Child in March 2018;
- Total Respect training as part of the conference in May 2018.

In addition Paediatric First Aid will be delivered a number of times to ensure that all carers can attend. Between conferences, a number of support groups and Fostering Fora will be held.

Fostering Panel

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

Panel Business

During the absence of one of the Fostering Team Managers, the Advanced Practitioner has stepped into the role of Panel Advisor for the main Panel. The Panel met every month during the Quarter and was quorate each time. Panel paperwork was generally evaluated as 'good'.

In July, the Fostering Panel agreed two approvals of Family and Friends carers. There was also a foster carer's first review and 4 de-registrations, 3 of which were for Family and Friends foster carers and one for mainstream carers. In August, the Fostering Panel agreed an approval of one mainstream fostering household and two changes of approval for two mainstream fostering households providing a further 2 placements. There was one foster carer review following an allegation, the outcome of which was to continue the approval. There were 6 resignations including 5 Family and Friends foster carers with 4 of these due to the making of SGOs and one due to a placement disruption. The further resignation was from a short break carer.

In September, the Fostering Panel made one recommendation for approval and one recommendation for non-approval; these were both Family and Friends assessments. There were three foster carers reviews presented to the Panel including a first review which was approved and a review following a change of circumstances which was

approved. The third was following an allegation and these foster carers resigned with the Panel noting they would have made a recommendation to de-register them anyway.

Review Panel

24 foster carer reviews were presented to the Annual Review Panel during Quarter 2 and 12 sets of carers attended. 1 evaluation form was returned which indicated that the experience of attending Panel was positive. Three allegations were also presented to the Panel.

Complaints

There was one complaint in Quarter 2. This was from a foster carer who raised concerns about her experience of a home visit. The complaint was forwarded to Customer Care and to the Service Leader, who provided a written response to the complaint and support was put in place by the Fostering Network. The carer decided she did not wish to pursue the complaint further.

Compliments

One compliment was recorded by the Review Panel during Quarter 2 by a foster carer who commented on the support they receive from their Supervising Social Worker:

“Second to none, always responds to calls, emails, and goes out of her way to ensure we have outcomes to any issues. She is very good at following up on matters and makes sure our needs are met with prompt attention to detail.”

Allegations

During Quarter 2, there were three allegations that were fully investigated and procedures were 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 3 specific incidents reported in Quarter 2 which involved:

- A young person experimenting with lighters and paper. Support and advice was provided to the carers and relevant professionals were notified.
- An incident involving a young person in a contact session where a mother removed a child from the carer's car without warning. Support was put in place for the carers and staff at the children's centre diffused the situation and took care of the child.
- An incident involving a young person with illicit pictures on a mobile phone. The young person disclosed that she had been having a sexual relationship with her boyfriend. The matter was reported to the Police and support was put in place for the carers and young person by their social worker.

There were 3 serious illnesses and accidents reported during Quarter 2 including:

- A minor accident that occurred during a fight between two young people in placement.
- An incident which resulted in a young person punching out causing a minor injury to their finger.
- An incident which involved a young person receiving a small bite to their leg from a dog. This resulted in the young person attending A&E, the bite was cleaned and a bandage was applied.

There were no incidences of bullying during Quarter 2.

Offending by Children and Young People in Foster Care

No young people in foster care were involved with the police or Criminal Courts in Quarter 2.

Missing From Home

15 episodes of missing from home were reported during Quarter 2. 7 incidents involved one young person and a further 5 involved another young person. The 3 remaining incidents involved individual young people.

In all cases, 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. They are overseen by the Service Leader and by the Fostering Panel.

There were 4 exemptions in place during Quarter 2. Three of these remain in place within separate fostering households that continue to support sibling placements of 4 children. The fourth exemption supports a parent and child 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. 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

There were 20 Family and Friends foster carers at the end of Quarter 2. There were 4 new approvals during the Quarter and 7 resignations. 5 resignations were due to obtaining SGOs, 1 was a rehabilitation plan back to the child's parents and 1 was a disruption. This has meant a decrease in 3 overall Family and Friends households. It is of note that without successful permanence planning in relation to SGOs, the amount of family and friends foster carers would be significantly larger.

The number of Family and Friends full assessments ordered by the courts has continued to rise. During Quarter 2, there were 12 Regulation 24 placements progressing to full Family and Friends assessments, 8 Family and Friends fostering assessments and 5 SGO assessments. 3 further assessments commenced but did not progress to completion due to the unsuitability of the applicants. Of these assessments, 3 were presented to the Panel with recommendations for non-approval due to concerns highlighted during the assessments. The Fostering Panel agreed with all of these recommendations; however, one was overturned by the Agency Decision Maker.

The demand for full Family and Friends fostering assessments has placed a significant strain on the Fostering Team to manage the increased workload. Mainstream assessments have needed to take a back seat in order to

prioritise court and Panel timescales for Family and Friends assessments. This has been further exacerbated with the courts' current expectation that fostering assessments are completed within 8 weeks or less. Consideration is being given to how this increased workload can be managed going forward.

Short Break Foster Care

12 short break carers provided 17 placements during Quarter 2. Short break 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 they met during Quarter 2.

Training / Staff

All staff members have individual training and a development plan, which is linked to their annual appraisal and monitored during monthly supervision.

Placement Stability

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. 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. However, at the end of Quarter 2 performance dipped slightly compared to the same period 12 months ago due to a surge in placement disruptions during August. Placement stability continues to be better than the national average for England.

	April	May	June	July	August	September
LAC with 3 or more placements	0	0	8	9	16	16
Total number of LAC	367	370	363	375	371	380
% Stability of LAC placements 2017/18	0%	0%	2.2%	2.4%	4.3%	4.2%
% Stability of LAC placements 2016/17	1.4%	1.4%	2.3%	2.6%	3.1%	3.3%

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

There were no new referrals in Quarter 2 though emergency support was requested for one young person. There were no case closures in Quarter 2. The majority of open cases require long term support and the level of support can vary from very intensive to involvement in activities only depending on how stable the young person's placement is at any one time.

Feedback from young people and carers:

'I feel like I have friends at Lytham Road, I feel comfortable when I am here and I feel like I belong.'

'It is good to know other Young People might have the same problems as me.'

'The support received from Fostering Support has made a big difference to both us and our foster child. I feel like he is more confident, he recently said during an appointment that the only place he feels comfortable is at Lytham Road. This is because the staff don't look at him like he is weird like the people at school do.'

The Saturday Morning Club continues to run every fortnight with ten children aged between 7 and 11 years accessing the service. Activities have included a 'Farm to Fork' educational visit through Tesco, arts & crafts, baking, Autumn Crafts, and Halloween activities. The Saturday Morning Club continues to be positive, providing opportunities for younger children in foster care to engage positively.

Fostering Support held a Macmillan Coffee Morning in September raising £172. Internet Safety sessions have been delivered on a one-to-one basis.

Commissioned Placements

The number of fostering and residential commissioned placements increased in Quarter 2 compared to the previous Quarter.

End of Quarter 1	End of Quarter 2
Independent Agency Residential Placements - 18	Independent Agency Residential Placements - 25
Independent Agency Fostering Placements - 49	Independent Agency Fostering Placements - 52

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 2 update – The new Recruitment and Marketing Officer is now in post and implementing the recruitment strategy for the year. The pressure on the Service to meet very exacting court timescales for Family and Friends assessments has compromised mainstream recruitment activity.

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 2 Update – the Team Development day scheduled for Quarter 2 has been delayed to ensure that new starters in the service are able to participate. This will now take place later in the year.

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 2 Update – The Director of Children’s Services, Executive Member and Service Leader met with the FCA Committee during Quarter 2 and a Fostering Forum is scheduled for November 2017. 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 2 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 2 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 increase in placement disruptions during August needs to be explored to determine whether anything could have been done to prevent placement breakdown.

6. Link fostering into the Adolescent Strategy alongside residential services and consider creative ways to improve placement sufficiency for adolescents.
Quarter 2 Update – A review of adolescent services is to be undertaken imminently.

7. Continue to monitor compliance with Fostering Regulations and Standards.
Quarter 2 Update – Monthly auditing of case files continues and the Fostering Service managers quality assure Panel reports, assessments and reviews.

Alyson Hanson
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