

# **Fostering Service Quarter 3 Report**

**1<sup>st</sup> October to 31<sup>st</sup> December 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 Care**

The number of children in our care (CioC) increased by 4 in Quarter 3 and by 23 in the last 6 months. The increase in the number of children coming into care across the region has put the availability of all types of placement under pressure. In Quarter 3, local authorities across the North West continued to compete for a diminished number of independent fostering agency placements which have become very difficult to secure particularly for older children.

	<b>30<sup>th</sup> September 2017</b>	<b>31<sup>st</sup> December 2017</b>
<b>Number of Children in our Care</b>	380	384
<b>Number of CioC in Foster Care</b>	240 (63%)	235 (61%)
<b>Number of children in in-house foster care placements</b>	139 (36%)	133 (35%)
<b>Number of children in family and friends foster care</b>	49 (13%)	48 (12.5%)
<b>Number of children in independent fostering agency placements</b>	52 (14%)	54 (14%)
<b>Number of children placed with other local authority carers</b>	0	0

## **In House and Agency Placements**

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

## **Age break down of children in foster placements**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Mainstream</b>	<b>Family and Friends</b>	<b>Independent Fostering Agency</b>
<b>0 to 2</b>	18	12	8
<b>3 to 6 years</b>	13	17	4
<b>7 to 10 years</b>	30	4	11
<b>11 to 15 years</b>	43	13	25
<b>16 and 17 years</b>	29	2	6
<b>Total</b>	133	48	54

## **New Referrals in Quarter 3**

47 children and young people were referred to the Fostering Service in Quarter 3 and 34 became Looked After following court decisions. Almost half of these were placed in house, principally those in the 0 to 5 years age group. The majority of older children and adolescents were placed in a mixture of agency fostering and agency residential placements. In 2017, Placements North West identified a drop of 8.1% of fostering agency households across the North West and given the increase in the number of children and young people coming into care, this continues to present a significant challenge.

	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
<b>Oct</b>	22	4	6	4	12	7	5	3		7
<b>Nov</b>	10	1	4	3	3	2	1	2		5
<b>Dec</b>	15	2	6	2	7	7	3	0		3
<b>Quarter 2 total</b>	47	7	16	9	22	16	9	5	0	15

### **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 3:

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

'I feel better when I tell my foster carers about what's bothering me'.

'I would like to move to a place where vegetables don't exist'.

'Auntie and Uncle are special people and it makes me happy when they laugh and joke'.

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

'D has a clear attachment to both his carers. I have observed him interact warmly, confident to ask questions and discuss plans. D clearly feels that this is home.'

'C likes it at B's and thrives off the attention she provides.'

'R was placed at birth but spent 10 days in hospital. C spent every day with him in hospital until he was discharged into her care. She went over and above her role and responsibilities and recognised how important this was for his early development'.

#### **Birth Children said:**

'The children are growing into funny, polite and caring people. It's been amazing to see them flourish and thrive. Another year means amazing experiences for our family by bettering a child's life. They are amazing children'.

### **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 15 Looked After Children registered as having a disability in foster care. 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. Feedback from foster carers following consultation is very positive. The Revive Service has delivered training to foster carers on self-harm and on attachment.

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 via Kip McGrath to promote G.C.S.E. improvements and this was extended to Year 10 pupils in Quarter 3. 6 young people are currently benefitting from this offer which will be extended again for Year 6 SATs pupils after Easter by way of a six week programme of booster sessions.

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.

### **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. Social workers use 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 voices are 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 are involved in the recruitment of new staff. 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 Service is reassessed annually to maintain the award and this will occur in Quarter 4.

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. The Fostering Support worker's time is split between the Fostering Service and the Adolescent Support Unit (ASU) where she ensures that young people who can benefit from ASU activities are able to access them. Some young people also enjoy short breaks at ASU.

### **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.

Some children in foster care are trained to interview as part of the staff recruitment process, giving them the skills and confidence to interview two children in foster care and two Care Leavers attend The Collaborate Project, to influence the Centre for Children & Young People's 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. In Quarter 3, 1 young person's Staying Put arrangement changed to short breaks from University and one new Staying Put arrangement commenced. The Leaving Care Service attended a number of reviews to discuss Staying Put with foster carers for young people aged 17 years, who will turn 18 in 2018. The Service has also 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 15¼ years. Caseloads have increased recently and are unlikely to reduce in the future due to the ruling that care leavers can remain open post-21 years.

### **Care Planning**

The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015 provide a revised definition of ‘permanence’ for Children Looked After including for the first time the definition of a long term foster placement. The responsibilities of the Local Authority in assessing the ability of the foster carer to meet the needs of the child now and in the future, and identifying any support services needed to achieve this are also set out. Local Authorities are required to achieve long term matching within reasonable timescales. The Regulations introduce new duties for ceasing to look after a child.

### **The Fostering Service**

During Quarter 3, one manager went off for planned surgery, followed by the second manager, who has yet to return to work. The Advanced Practitioner stepped up to Team Manager to cover the role and remains in situ. This has meant that during Quarter 3 there was no Advanced Practitioner to provide advice and support for social workers completing viability assessments, family and friends assessments and Special Guardianship assessments, which has an impact on social workers in other teams.

### **Foster Carer Resource**

	<b>Total number of foster carers</b>	<b>Mainstream</b>	<b>Short breaks carers</b>	<b>Family and Friends carers</b>
<b>Quarter 1 2017/18</b>	131	81	15	35
<b>Quarter 2 2017/18</b>	112	78	14	20
<b>Quarter 3 2017/18</b>	139	80	12	47

The number of mainstream foster carers increased slightly as a result of 2 new approvals during the Quarter. The number of family and friends carers increased significantly and boosted the overall number of foster carers. This is a continuing trend, which has implications for the nature of the work of the Service and the Fostering Panel. The capacity of the Service to absorb this increase has become very stretched.

### **Matching and Ethnicity**

The only non-cultural placement made over Quarter 3 was a sibling group of 5 white British children, who were placed with two separate Asian fostering households.

### **Foster Carer Recruitment**

In November, the Service started some low level Google Ads to ensure consistent visibility when people search for fostering services in the area. Social media posts included one about fostering myths, covering the top reasons people believe they cannot foster.

Adverts were placed in 2 publications that were chosen due to their audience having more of a propensity to foster (according to research), namely Police Life Magazine and the Caravan Club Magazine for the North West. This is a full page glossy advert that will run throughout the year but will change each quarter to keep the advert fresh whilst retaining the identity of it to maintain trust with the reader. Police Life Magazine ran in December 2017 and was available online as well as in print.

An advert placed in Quarter 3 is still on air with 2BR radio.

The Let's Foster website saw an increase of 53% page views from the previous quarter and an increase of 90% new sessions. Social media has seen an increase of 21 likes/followers on the Facebook page. Twitter saw an increase of 19 followers with 709 page visits and 7981 impressions.

Sharing positive messages from trusted sources proved popular with followers. An article from the Guardian gave the page 64 new website visits.

### **Initial enquiries**

In Quarter 3, the Service had 67 enquiries leading to 14 expressions of interest. 16 of these enquiries were from the You Can Foster campaign with the remaining 51 from social media and Google ads. An increase in the use of social media advertising and content has been driving traffic to the Let's Foster and You Can Foster websites leading to 16 You Can Foster enquiries.

### **Assessments and Approvals**

At the end of Quarter 3, there were 11 sets of prospective carers in assessment of which 8 families were at Stage 1 and 3 families at Stage 2. 2 carers have also been approved this Quarter.

### **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 Quarter 3, there were 9 resignations including five mainstream carers and four family and friends. There was 1 deregistration of a family and friends foster carer.

Reasons for resignation include 2 placement breakdowns (family and friends), an allegation, the making of SGOs, an emigration, a young person becoming 18, a placement no longer being required, illness, and one carer resigned due to a lack of baby placements (approved for baby placements only).

### **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**

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 focused learning for carers, which is specifically tailored to their requirements and allows them to attend one training day and cover multiple topics.

In Quarter 3, one conference and one support group session were arranged. The conference was unfortunately cancelled at short notice because of an unavoidable issue with the trainer, this is to be rearranged. The support group was reasonably well attended.

There are a number of training conferences scheduled for Quarter 4 and a Fostering Forum in March 2018 when carers have the opportunity to feedback on the content and quality of training courses. In addition, Paediatric First Aid will be delivered a number of times to ensure that all carers can attend.

### **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**

The Panel continues to be presented with highly complex family and friends assessments. The assessments have continued to be robust despite the very short timescales required by the courts. Quality assurance by the Panel indicates that social workers present well to the Fostering Panel in terms of both their verbal and written submissions.

SGO (Special Guardianship Order) reports are now also presented to the Fostering rather than Adoption Panel to continue to provide a robust approach to these assessments. The Adoption Service which is now part of the Regional Adoption Agency does not deal with SGOs.

The Fostering Panel central membership list needs to increase due to the loss of the health representative and a number of social workers. Requests have gone out to social work teams to increase social work representation for both the Fostering Panel and Annual Review Panel.

### **Review Panel**

During Quarter 3, 21 foster carer reviews were presented to the Panel. 11 of these were attended by foster carers and 7 carers completed evaluation forms. 6 carers made positive comments though 1 indicated that they were disappointed that the invitation and paperwork arrived late.

### **Complaints**

There have been no complaints reported in the Quarter though one foster carer raised concerns about contact, which is presently being explored.

### **Compliments**

Supervising social workers continue to receive positive feedback in the foster carer's feedback form for reviews. A letter provided by a family and friends foster carer praised and complimented the supervising social worker and fostering support worker.

### **Allegations**

There were three allegations in Quarter 3.

The first involved concerns about a child witnessing extreme religious beliefs. The allegation was dealt with in line with fostering procedures and was unsubstantiated. A number of recommendations were agreed to support the young person and the carers. The carers review will be presented to the January 2018 Fostering Panel.

The second occurred when a Children's Guardian reported concerns about inappropriate contact and the carers' alcohol intake. The concerns were followed up and the foster carers review was presented to the December 2018 Fostering Panel with a recommendation of de-registration, which was unanimously agreed by the Fostering Panel.

The final allegation involved a carer providing incorrect information about the child's medication to a short break provider. This was fully investigated and a strategy meeting held. The allegation was substantiated and a number of safeguarding measures were agreed. The carer's review is to be presented to the February 2018 Fostering Panel.



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

7 Specific Incidents were noted in Quarter 3. One of these was a minor contact situation that was managed and resolved. Another incident involved the police because of risks to the children in placement posed by the birth family and resulted in a placement move out of the area. There were two missing from home incidents by the same young person that were managed and resulted in them returning to placement safe and well. Additionally, a minor accident led to a visit to Accident and Emergency and an incident occurred where a young person had been drinking and became very challenging. The last incident was caused by a birth mother turning up at the foster carers' address and resulted in the children and carers having to move to alternative accommodation until the children moved to their adoptive placement.

### **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 3.

### **Missing From Home**

There were 8 missing from home incidents involving 5 young people in foster care in Quarter 3.

Three incidents involving 3 separate young people were managed in line with procedures with no further missing from home incidents and no further risks identified.

Three incidents involved a young adult, who disengaged from his foster placement and began to abscond to his birth family. Assessments were undertaken and it was agreed for this young man to move to a supported lodgings placement which was more appropriate to his needs. No concerns were raised over the foster carers and placement.

The remaining two incidents involved a young person, who was in a placement that was on the brink of disruption. The young person had disengaged from the placement and started absconding and placing herself at risk. A decision was made for her to move to an alternative placement, which is expected to happen imminently. There are no concerns with the foster carers' management of the missing from home incidents; however, a disruption meeting will be held to determine what can be learnt from these events.

### **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 have been four exemptions over the Quarter including one new exemption from an independent agency with a carer residing in Blackburn with Darwen. Three exemptions have continued from the previous Quarter and been reviewed at the Fostering Panel.

### **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. A forum was scheduled in Quarter 3 but unfortunately had to be cancelled due to sickness. This is now scheduled for March 2018.

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 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**

During Quarter 3, there were 7 new approvals of family and friends foster carers. However, 2 of these households resigned fairly quickly after obtaining SGOs and one was de-registered due to concerns around the placement.

There has been a steady increase in the number of family and friends assessments completed by the Service. During the Quarter, the Service completed 17 Regulation 24 placements compared to 12 in the previous Quarter and 14 combined SGO and family and friends assessments, one more than in the last Quarter. In total, 31 assessments were completed in the Quarter, an increase of 6 assessments in total. The continuing increase in family and friends assessment work has increased pressure on the Service with all staff working to full or over capacity.

There has been an increase in the number of assessments being presented to the Panel with a negative recommendation. This is a concern given service pressures and there has been some discussion about shifting some additional social work resource into the Fostering Service so that viability assessment work currently completed by safeguarding social workers becomes the responsibility of the Fostering Service where there is more expertise in this area of work.

In Quarter 3, the Advanced Practitioner covered the Team Manager role the impact of which is that there has been less support for social workers completing viability assessments resulting in negative and unnecessary assessments being undertaken. There has been less collaborative work with the Assessment and Safeguarding Team, which has impacted on the quality of assessment work.

### **Short Break Foster Care**

There are currently 12 short break foster carers providing short breaks to 13 children, who are either living at home or in long term foster placements. Two short break carers currently have no children in placement, one of these carers is being considered to support the Adolescent Support Unit.

During the Quarter, 5 new referrals were made for short breaks. Three siblings who needed to be placed outside of the area accessed short breaks foster care as an emergency. Another placement was used for one night until the young person moved to an independent unit and another offer of regular short breaks was declined by a parent as they no longer needed this support.

### **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%. During Quarter 3, placement stability dipped compared to the same period 12 months ago; however, placement stability continues to be better than the national average for England.

	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
<b>LAC with 3 or more placements</b>	0	0	8	9	16	16	22	26	24
<b>Total number of LAC</b>	367	370	363	375	371	380	394	395	384
<b>% Stability of LAC placements 2017/18</b>	0%	0%	2.2%	2.4%	4.3%	4.2%	5.6%	6.6%	6.3%
<b>% Stability of LAC placements 2016/17</b>	1.4%	1.4%	2.3%	2.6%	3.1%	3.3%	3.8%	4.1%	4.4%

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 3 but emergency short break support at Lytham Road was requested for a young person whose long term foster placement had broken down.

Three Young People closed to Fostering Support in Quarter 3. A sibling group of two closed due to lack of engagement. One young person closed when they moved to an agency residential placement.

The Saturday Club for 8 to 12 year olds has recently changed venue and continued to receive positive feedback from the children who attend. 10 children attend regularly. Sessions in Quarter 3 included Christmas arts and crafts, Christmas baking, breakfast with Santa and making Chinese lanterns to celebrate Chinese New Year.

Feedback from Foster Carers and Young People:

'The activities and outings she does with B are fantastic for his confidence and self-esteem as he struggles greatly in making friends'. (Foster carer)

'Having the support from L and the ASU is helping us as a fostering family but most of all it helps B'. (Foster carer)

'I really enjoyed the group we did, I liked all the young people that came, I would like to do some more of this'. (Young person)

### **Commissioned Placements**

The number of fostering and residential commissioned placements increased overall by 1 placement from Quarter 2 to Quarter 3. However, as there was a significant increase during Quarter 2 compared to Quarter 1, the numbers remain high.

<b>End of Quarter 1</b>	<b>End of Quarter 2</b>	<b>End of Quarter 3</b>
Independent Agency Residential Placements - 18	Independent Agency Residential Placements - 25	Independent Agency Residential Placements – 24
Independent Agency Fostering Placements - 49	Independent Agency Fostering Placements - 52	Independent Agency Fostering Placements – 54

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, who faced a reduction of 8.1% of households in 2017. 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 3 update – The work of the appointee is now beginning to take effect. Public interest in the Service’s social media activity has increased and the number progressing to initial enquiry stage has improved.**
  
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.  
**Quarter 3 Update – the Team Development day scheduled for Quarter 2 was delayed and will now take place later in the year. 2 newly qualified social workers have a protected caseload to enable them to develop their knowledge and skills. Skills in family and friends assessments are developing across the whole Service.**
  
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 3 Update – The Director of Children’s Services, Executive Member and Service Leader met with the FCA Committee during Quarter 3 but a Fostering Forum scheduled for November 2017 had to be cancelled due to sickness in the fostering management team. This is now scheduled for March 2018. The Service is increasingly using e mail to communicate with carers on a range of issues. There is more work to do on this priority.**
  
4. Continue to meet the training needs of all foster carers ensuring that all carers attend mandatory training in particular.  
**Quarter 3 Update – In Quarter 3, it was agreed to review mandatory training and further develop e learning programmes for foster carers. It was agreed to re-establish the foster carer training steering group to support changes to the programme for 2018/19. This work is ongoing.**
  
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 3 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. Recruitment of short breaks carers is ongoing.**
  
6. Link fostering into the Adolescent Strategy alongside residential services and consider creative ways to improve placement sufficiency for adolescents.  
**Quarter 3 Update – A review of adolescent services is under way.**
  
7. Continue to monitor compliance with Fostering Regulations and Standards.  
**Quarter 3 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  
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