

## Fostering Quarter 3 Report

1<sup>st</sup> October to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019

### **Executive Report**



Quarterly reports to the Executive Board are a requirement of the Fostering Service to meet Standard 25.7 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. They are a key part of the documentation considered by OFSTED when conducting a Service inspection.

## **Introduction**

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council's Fostering Service aims to ensure that:

- The best foster carers are recruited for our children;
- All placements receive high quality support, effectively targeted according to need;
- Children are found permanent families without delay;
- Children and young people in foster care achieve the best possible outcomes.

## **Children in our Care in Foster Care**

Quarter 3 has seen a reduction in the number of children in our care, in comparison to the previous periods as outlined in the table below. There has been an increase in the number of children placed with family and friends carers, and decrease in the number of Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements.

### **Comparison of Figures**

|  | <b>Q1 June 2019</b> | <b>Q2 Sept 2019</b> | <b>Q3 Dec 2019</b> |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Number of Children in our Care</b>                                | <b>408</b>          | <b>403</b>          | <b>399</b>         |
| <b>Number of CioC in Foster Care</b>                                 | 264 (64.7%)         | 269 (66.7%)         | 261 (65.4%)        |
| <b>Number of children in in-house foster care placements</b>         | 148 (36%)           | 143 (35.4%)         | 131 (32.8%)        |
| <b>Number of children in family and friends foster care</b>          | 50 (12%)            | 58 (14.3%)          | 67 (16.8%)         |
| <b>Number of children in independent fostering agency placements</b> | 66 (16.2%)          | 68 (16.8%)          | 63 (15.8%)         |

The remodel of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub in Quarter 3, commenced as the Children's Advice and Duty Service (CADS). The objective of this remodel is to reduce the number of referrals and assessments into the service, with advice provide by skilled and experienced Social Workers and multi-agency professionals.

The number of males in our care remains the highest gender group, with a consistent pattern each Quarter of the 11-15 years age group being the most significant and more challenging in terms of sufficiency to identify long-term placements. This age group 11-15 years is the most prominent in terms of being in Local Authority foster placements with the 3-6 year old age group predominantly placed with family and friends carers. There remains in Quarter 3 a higher proportion of children in the birth to 2 year age group placed in our care as the table below demonstrates.

| Age breakdown CIOC Foster Care |    |
|--------------------------------|----|
| 0-2                            | 49 |
| 3-6                            | 48 |
| 7-10                           | 46 |
| 11-15                          | 89 |
| 16+                            | 29 |

The White British ethnic group, at 80% have a significantly higher number of children in our care as opposed to 12% from the Asian population.

There are 7 children with disabilities in our care in Quarter 3, with no placement requests for this cohort of children in Quarter 2 or 3 which is positive and demonstrates the supportive Child in Need packages in place to prevent family breakdown.

### **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%. Since August 2017, placement stability has been deteriorating. This is not an issue specific to the Fostering Service but reflects instability for all types of placements and is an issue for Local Authorities overall. The table below demonstrates the steady increase in placement instability to date, at 11.5% at the end of Quarter 3.

| Performance Over time                | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | Performance to Date |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------------------|
| <b>% Stability of LAC placements</b> | 6.4%    | 8.8%    | 11.4%   | <b>11.5%</b>        |

Reasons for placement instability includes the disruption of placements for teenagers displaying challenging behaviours and missing from home episodes, and an influx of larger sibling groups. It remains the case that babies and under 2s are placed in parent and child assessment units and in foster placements for example for the duration of care proceedings, before settling into their permanent placement and this can impact upon the above figures.

Disruption meetings are held for any long term matched foster placement that breaks down, and learning taken from the findings. Teenagers are another high percentage group who have three or more placements, consistently due to behavioural needs and challenges for foster carers to manage in the longer term. Changes in educational placement also impact significantly upon placement stability. It can be challenging for the young person to emotionally invest in further foster placements when the first has disrupted. This is when the Service refers to REVIVE where consultations and assessments take place to support this group of young people and their carers.

There is a focus on establishing a support package for teenagers at the point of a new placement commencing, to try to reduce the likelihood of disruption.

### **Matching and Ethnicity**

There have been two non-culturally matched placements in this Quarter, both of which have been successful and the Service has supported the foster carers where needed at an increased level. Two Nigerian, female siblings were placed with white, British foster carers and this was a very positive placement for a short period until they returned home to their parents.

There has also been a white, British female placed with Asian foster carers and again, this has been positive with support provided from the Service around her cultural needs.

### **Engagement with Children & Young People and the VOICE Group**

Children in our care and care leavers continue to attend the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee and Corporate Parenting Specialist Advisory Group, when appropriate. The Corporate Parenting Board also included a care leaver who was part of discussions about service delivery and new proposals. The Participation Officer held an event to re-launch the VOICE group, and the group will now commence on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2020.

The views of children and young people are gathered via:

- Participation in the recruitment of staff/interview process
- Support Groups for Children/Events
- Foster Carer Annual Review Feedback
- Feedback from Social Workers/Supervising Social Workers
- The Investors in Children process
- Comments fed back to the Fostering Support Officer
- Looked after Child Review meetings and consultation

### **Feedback from Children in Foster Care:**

Children and young people, and foster carers, have made the following comments over Quarter 3:

'K is like a Mum to me'

'I enjoy going to visit friends and doing fun things at the weekend'

'I would like to visit my friends more often'

'I have had a number of Social Workers over the past year'

### **Birth Children and Birth Parents told us:**

'B has been really welcoming and I am grateful for the care my children received'

'We go to snooker together at the weekend'

'She talks to me about her worries'

'My child has had a lot of different social workers'

### **Promoting Children's Health, Emotional Development, Education and Leisure:**

Foster families are provided with pre and post-approval preparation 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 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 in their care, which is a record of all of the child's health details.

There are 7 Looked After Children in foster care, who are registered as having a disability. Foster carers are provided with the relevant training and support to meet the specific needs of the child in placement and they are able to access support from the Children with Disabilities Team with aids and adaptations, Disability Links registration and information and advice where needed.

In relation to emotional wellbeing, Looked After Children have access to Clinical Psychology and related services through REVIVE and the East Lancashire Child and Adolescent Service (ELCAS) also known as Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). The 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. There were 49 referrals received in Quarter 3, all of which were offered an initial consultation. In total, 31 of those referrals were children and young people subject to a Care Order, and 3 were subject to a Special Guardianship Order. There were 9 children referred from the Children in Our Care team, 2 from Fostering, and 2 from Adoption. The remainder came from Assessment and Safeguarding teams. The Clinical Psychologist from Revive will leave the service in Quarter 4, and therefore recruitment to this post has commenced. A review of Revive will take place to ensure that children and young people in our care and those on the edge of care, continue to receive prompt therapeutic support to prevent placement breakdown and to support foster carers with strategies.

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 Virtual Head Teacher and 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 managed by the Virtual Head who has a system in place to administer and ensure the money is spent appropriately to enhance educational achievements. The Virtual Head quality assures all Personal Education Plans (PEPs).

The Education Manager, 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 around 'Promoting Educational Achievement for Children in Our Care'.

Letterbox Club is available for all children in our care from Reception to Year 6 to encourage reading at home. Books and games are sent out on a monthly basis which are age appropriate. Feedback has been very encouraging from the children who have stated that they enjoy receiving their parcels and carers have stated that they are encouraging the children to read.

### **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 Service also 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'. The Leaving Care Service attends Reviews to discuss Staying Put with foster carers for young people aged 17 years.

The Leaving Care Service has the Investing in Children Award, and the Service was rated as 'Good' by Ofsted from the last 2017 inspection. The Service is also working hard to encourage and support care leavers into apprenticeships, of which there were three young people this Quarter. The Leaving Care Service has achieved Staying Put placements this Quarter, and also continues to offer supported lodgings and supported accommodation which increases choice for young people leaving foster care and residential placements in favour of semi-independence. The Nightsafe at St Silas project was completed in Quarter 3 and Local Authority referrals are now managed by the Leaving Care Team. There has already been a positive and swift take up of beds at St Silas for young people aged 16 years plus, in a homely environment with support on site for the young people. Participation levels continue to be good with young people being involved in interviewing and various training programmes.

The Leaving Care Service has eight advisors. Three advisors are working with the 16 to 18 year old age group resolving issues with accommodation, education, training and employment and Staying Put. Five advisors are providing advice and guidance to the 21 to 25 year old age group, and in addition, all advisors have a caseload of at least twenty 18 to 21 year olds for whom they provide general support.

Children and young people with disabilities who are in our care are also referred at 17 years of age to Adult Social Care for an assessment of need prior to turning 18 years, and there is a period of twelve months for planning to be undertaken around post 18 years provision.

### **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 Fostering Service is structured into three teams, including the Permanence Team, which launched on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018. The Team completes all assessments of family members/connected persons from Child Protection to Public Law Outline pre-proceedings, and Care Proceedings, as highlighted in the Ofsted Action Plan. There are four full time Social Workers and one working four days per week. The Special Guardianship Social Worker is part time and continues to experience capacity issues due to the increasing number of Special Guardianship applications.

There are currently 39 family and friends foster carers approved, with 2 approvals during this Quarter.

There are two mainstream Fostering Teams in the Service, who focus upon family finding, assessment and supervision of Foster Carers, alongside recruitment. There are 88 mainstream foster carers approved to provide placements for children in our care and 12 for short breaks.

Three members of the Team have reduced their hours permanently which has resulted in a full time position being recruited to and the successful candidate will commence in post in Quarter 4 due to the period of notice in her current post. One supervising social worker has returned from maternity leave, and there are two agency social workers in post until the end of January 2020.

### **Fostering Support Officer Roles:**

There are two Fostering Support Officers undertaking very different roles.

One Fostering Support Worker remains located within the REVIVE Service to enable a more cohesive approach to supporting children, young people and foster carers, and to achieve improvements in placement stability rates. Fostering Support will continue to develop the Saturday Club for younger children in foster care. The venue of this Club moved to Earcroft Children's Centre during the last Quarter and has been a popular choice.

Another Fostering Support Officer provides direct practical and emotional support to our Family and Friends Foster Carers, while also supporting our Fostering Panel process. The Fostering Support role is invaluable to the Service and is hugely beneficial for those foster carers who have complex placements and require an enhanced level of fostering support.

### **Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention**

| 2019/20         | Enquires | ROI | Approval | Conversion |
|-----------------|----------|-----|----------|------------|
| Q1              | 39       | 6   | 0        | 15%        |
| Q2              | 42       | 6   | 2        | 14%        |
| Q3              | 44       | 9   | 3        | 20%        |
| Q4              |          |     |          |            |
| Total           | 125      | 21  | 5        | 17%        |
| YCF Approvals = |          |     |          |            |

The service has a Recruitment and Retention Strategy which is updated annually. In Quarter 3 planning has taken place for a bus stop campaign in the Borough, to ensure greater visibility in the community.

Bus stop adverts will be launched in Quarter 4 and the aim is to maintain a focus on community advertising alongside our digital campaigns.

In December, a new advert on Heart Radio North West started on their DAX platform which means all smart speakers asked to 'play Heart' would play this advert before the music started. In Quarter 4 a new and updated Heart North West radio campaign for Blackburn with Darwen Fostering will commence which is an exciting opportunity and sees advertising transfer from Capital Radio.

The impact of Google Ads has increased registrations of interest overall, alongside the continued advertising on Twitter, Facebook and the Let's Foster website.

Our foster carers have been visible in the community supporting our recruitment. The Telegraph and The Shuttle ran a story about several foster carers who received their long service awards at the Foster Carer Forum in November. They also enjoyed refreshments in the Mayor's Parlour as a celebration of their commitment and dedication to fostering. The photograph below was taken at the Forum with long service foster carers.





### **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. During this Quarter we have been informed that the 'You Can Foster' service will end in 2020 for all Local Authorities who have currently signed up to this contract. The 'front door' service of accepting enquiries and being the initial point of contact for five North West Authorities, will cease in March 2020. Planning and discussion about this going forward has already commenced.

### **Foster Carer Training**

The following training has taken place in Quarter 3:

Essentials of Fostering – 23 Foster Carers in attendance.

Diversity Conference – 20 Foster Carers in attendance.

Support Group for Prevent and Radicalisation – 9 Foster Carers attended.

Evaluation has taken place with foster carers about the future training they would like to see being provided by the Service, which includes areas such as County Lines, self-harm, mental health and making Nurturing and Attachment training mandatory for all new foster carers. This has been noted, and plans are being put in place to ensure these training offers are delivered. The Service aims to respond to foster carer demand with regard to their training; it is paramount to keep the training offer varied and current.

### **Fostering Panel and Review Panel**

The Review Panel has seen 16 fostering households presented, with an increase in the number of foster carers in attendance, alongside more Social Worker comments. The table below evidences the approvals for Quarter 3 for both family and friends and mainstream foster carers.

| <b><u>Main Fostering Panel</u></b> | October | November | December |
|------------------------------------|---------|----------|----------|
| Mainstream Assessments             | 2       | 0        | 2        |
| Regulation 24 Assessments          | 0       | 1        | 0        |
| Family And Friends Assessments     | 0       | 0        | 1        |
| Resignations                       | 2       | 3        | 1        |

### **Complaints**

There have been no complaints received in this period.

### **Compliments**

There were four compliments received in Quarter 3. A foster carer has received a compliment from an Independent Reviewing Officer about their skills and expertise, and a recommendation that they would be a positive mentor for other foster carers. Other compliments received have been regarding a young person making exceptional academic progress in their foster placement, positive comments for another foster carer made to the Director of Children's Services by their Supervising Social Worker, and a compliment from the Fostering Panel.

### **Allegations**

One allegation has been made in Quarter 3, in respect of a family and friends foster carer and an incident involving the child falling into a bath. This progressed to an investigation with LADO and Police involvement.

### **Serious Illnesses and Accidents**

There have been six reports of serious illness and accidents in Quarter 3. This related to minor falls, two young person with an infection, and accidents during sporting activities. All have been reported and appropriately managed.

### **Bullying Reports**

There have been no reports of bullying this Quarter.

### **Specific Incidents and Restraints**

There have been 12 reports in this Quarter and all have been appropriately managed and reported, some with further actions put in place where necessary.

### **Missing From Home**

There has been 1 missing from home notification this Quarter, and this was reported to the Engage Team.

### **Exemptions**

There has been 1 exemption in place which has continued from Quarter 2.

### Engagement with Foster Carers

Blackburn with Darwen has a Foster Carer Association (FCA), which meets regularly and has an Elected Committee. The Chair of the FCA sits on the Corporate Parenting Specialist Advisory Group. The FCA has its own website, which is used to communicate messages and news updates about events. The foster carer support group also meets regularly and is attended by the Children's Services Elected Member.

At the request of foster carers, membership of the Fostering Network moved in Quarter 1 to Foster Talk, which provides similar services to support foster carers. 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, who help drive recruitment forward and are involved with planning events, Skills to Foster preparation training, and manning recruitment stands and events.

The Fostering Service holds a bi-annual foster carer forum which took place in November 2019 and the next is planned for April 2020. The event offered carers the opportunity to present their views about a range of issues related to fostering and to be involved in the future development of the Service. The Forum was very well attended, planned with the FCA and held at Livesey Children's Centre. Councillor Bateson was also in attendance at the Forum.

### Short Break Foster Care

There continue to be 12 short break foster carers approved. Short break carers attend support groups every 3 months and the next one is planned for February 2020. Carers enjoy attending and are able to explore and share experiences about their role as short break foster carers.

### Commissioned Placements

The requests for commissioned placements in Quarter 3 has seen some reduction from October to December 2019. The service continues to be as creative as possible and offers short breaks to maintain existing placements and prevent disruption where this is achievable. The number of requests for parent and child assessment unit placements, which saw an increase in Quarter 2, has decreased this Quarter. There is an evident peak in children and young people placed at home on Care Orders or Supervision Orders. The table below gives an overview of the types of placements for children in our care, primarily the number of agency foster care and independent residential provisions funded from the commissioning budget.

| <b>Placement Type</b>               |            |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| Adoptive Placements                 | 14         |
| <b>Foster Placements (in-house)</b> | <b>143</b> |
| <b>Foster Placements (agency)</b>   | <b>68</b>  |
| <b>Friends &amp; Family</b>         | <b>58</b>  |
| Placed with Parents                 | 49         |
| Independent Living                  | 0          |
| Children's Homes (in-house)         | 4          |
| <b>Children's Homes (agency)</b>    | <b>28</b>  |
| Secure                              | 0          |
| Prison/HMYOI                        | 1          |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| NHS  | 1         |
| <b>Residential Accom Not Subject to CH Regulations</b> | <b>16</b> |
| Other  | 19        |
| Residential School                                     | 2         |

### **Budget**

Current placement pressures in-house and across the independent fostering agency landscape continue to place the commissioning budget under pressure. The Case Tracking and Commissioning Panel monitors placements and ensures that there are robust plans for those that could be brought back to in-house provision. The financial position across both of these areas is closely monitored throughout the year, with an overspend confirmed for this financial year due to the demands on the Service with the numbers of children in our care, placement sufficiency and stability. Placements for teenagers and those with complex needs are the most costly, and largely in residential or therapeutic placements. This Quarter saw one young person brought back in-house from an independent residential placement.

### **New Service Priorities and Updates for 2019/20:**

1. The Service has a target of recruiting between 25 and 30 new sets of foster carers in 2019/20. **Quarter 3 update.** Monthly recruitment meetings are taking place and new approaches are being used such as Google Advertising and foster carers taking more of a leading role at recruitment stands. Recruitment initiatives remain a priority for the Service.

2. A Team Development Day will be an annual event to value and support the staff, and ensure specific training and development areas are actioned. **Quarter 3 update:** A Team Development Day will take place in January/February 2020 when new staff members have commenced in post. Staffing issues have meant that this day has been arranged for this specific timescale.

3. The Revive Team will be reviewed in terms of staffing, workload capacity and developing a review process for evidencing that outcomes are being met and the impact of their therapeutic involvement. This will enable the Service to manage the referrals and to identify when their involvement can cease as outcomes and objectives are met. **Quarter 3 update:** The Clinical Psychologist for Revive will leave their post in Quarter 4, and recruitment planning for this post and a remodel of Revive has commenced.

4. Foster Carer training will continue to develop, led by a Fostering Team Manager. The Service will focus on the development of online training, and the overall training offer in line with Foster Carer feedback such as the addition of Parent and Child Training, and more specialist courses that will enhance carer skills. The objective is to increase engagement and attendance.

**Quarter 3 update:** Training recommenced in October 2019. A joint training offer with Child Action North West (CANW) has been completed and Skills to Foster will now be undertaken in Quarter 4 as a collaborative effort. Further training offers have also been explored with CANW and initial planning and preparation has been positive.

5. The management team will continue to monitor compliance with Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards and will increase the number of case file audits completed each month to support this.

**Quarter 3 Update** – The monitoring of compliance is ongoing and is central to the Team Manager role. Protocol has been updated to reflect the needs of the Service and all aspects of fostering can now be recorded on the database which will help the completion of the dataset.

6. Fostering Panel development – The membership list will be developed to address difficulties in sustaining the pool of independent and social work members. A Panel Member training day will be held with a focus on family and friends fostering.

**Quarter 3 Update** – Recruitment and training has already taken place for new panel membership and we now have a larger cohort of members to ensure approvals can be considered without delay, and more panels held where necessary. Although this action has been addressed, the recruitment of panel members is an ongoing area of focus for the Service.

7. Recommending the VOICE Group will be part of the Participation Officer role and will be re-launched.

**Quarter 3 update:** The new Participation Officer commenced in role this Quarter. A re-launch of the VOICE group event has taken place and groups will take place on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2020.

8. Placement sufficiency and stability will be a key area of focus, with areas for learning taken from disruption meetings and case auditing. The support offer for foster carers will be reviewed, with recommendations made about service development going forward about how to preserve vulnerable placements and support an increase with in-house placements. **Quarter 3 update: Blackburn with Darwen is part of the cohort of North West Authorities collaboration for the DfE SEED Funding and research project, which looks specifically at recruitment, retention, sufficiency and producing a Market Position Statement.**

10. Planning will commence to look at a new proposal for the end of the commissioned fostering front door service, and how this will be replaced and replicated where possible, within the Service. **Quarter 3 update: The Fostering Front Door service will end in March 2020. The interim plan is for this service to be brought back in-house and managed via the Fostering Service and Business Support. This will be reviewed as part of the Fostering Service remodel.**

Pamela Price  
Service Lead, Placements