

EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



REPORT OF: Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education

LEAD OFFICERS: Director of Children's Services & Education

DATE: Thursday, 10 September 2020

PORTFOLIO(S) AFFECTED: Children, Young People and Education

WARD/S AFFECTED: (All Wards);

KEY DECISION: N

SUBJECT:

Fostering Service Quarter 4/End of Year Report 2019/20

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report provides information on the management and performance of the Local Authority's Fostering Service and is revised each Quarter. The Quarter 4 Report includes analysis of the past year's data.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board notes the Quarter 4 Fostering Service Report which is available on the Council's website along with supporting paper, Appendix 1.

3. BACKGROUND

The Fostering Service Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services requires that the Council Executive:

- a) Receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the Fostering Service every 3 months;
- b) Monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children;
- c) Satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with the conditions of registration.

The Report has been written to address the areas identified above. It will be taken into account by OFSTED when inspecting the Service.

The Report is for the fourth Quarter of 2019/20 covering the period from 1st January to 31st March 2020, and provides a comprehensive overview of the Service.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

The Appendix 1 paper provides a comprehensive overview of the Fostering Service, issues and risks with recommendations for Service development. The key areas are as follows:

1. The annual figures show an increase in children in our care in Quarter 4, but 2019/20 has seen a consistent reduction in children in our care in each Quarter, evidenced in the comparison chart. There have been a number of Mother and Baby placement requests in Quarter 4, which have been the outcome of Care Proceedings due to Court decision making. There have been no new Agency placements made since October 2019, which is a huge success.

2. There has been a 58% increase in the number of children and young people placed in family and friends foster placements over the past year, the highest number of such placements at 68 in Quarter 4 2020 in comparison to the last three years which has enabled children to remain within their birth families and with connected carers.

3. It remains a continual challenge for the Service to identify in-house or Independent Fostering Agency placements for children with disabilities specifically; largely due to the more complex needs of young people being referred for placements but also the practical and environmental factors impacting upon potential Foster Carers, where adaptations to accommodate the young person may be required.

4. Blackburn with Darwen have been involved in the DfE fostering Seed-funding partnership with Blackpool, Cumbria and Lancashire (Consortium known as BBCL), a partnership working together with Outcomes UK to improve commissioning and sufficiency planning. This is a feasibility study which aims to improve the fostering offer by looking at collaborative approaches to recruitment, training and commissioning. The Market Position Statement outlined that the number of children beginning to be looked after each year in BwD has increased from 93 in 2015 to 171 children in 2019, however the number of children in Local Authority Care stabilised in the first 6 months of 2019-2020. This coincides with the remodel of MASH at the front door, becoming the Children's Advice and Duty Service (CADS).

6. The recruitment of mainstream foster carers was an increasing challenge over 2019/20 and this has led to looking at new ideas in terms of recruitment campaigns which are outlined in Appendix 1 (Recruitment Section pages 7-8.)

7. The 'Fostering Front Door' offer from the You Can Foster pilot involving North West Authorities came to an end at short notice during Quarter 4, and resulted in the loss of a Social Work presence as the first point of contact at the enquiry stage. While losing 'You Can Foster' involvement was not significant, the loss of the 'Front Door' offer was a challenge. Long-term plans are being considered, and at present the Fostering Service are managing enquiries and registrations directly.

8. In Quarter 4, the pressure and challenge upon the Local Authority to identify foster placements and in-house residential provision has remained significant. The requests for commissioned residential placements in Quarter 3 and Quarter 4 have seen some reduction from October 2019 to March 2020. The service continues to be as creative as possible and is offering short breaks to maintain existing placements and prevent disruption where this is achievable, albeit the impact of Covid-19 will be reported regarding the impact upon placement stability and sufficiency in Quarter 1 of 2020.

9. There is an evident peak in children and young people placed at home on Care Orders or Supervision Orders increasing from 62 in Quarter 1 to 70 in Quarter 4. Requests for parent and child placements and assessment units, placing sibling groups and the age group 11-15 years, remain the most challenging for the service.

10. The newly established Nightsafe at St Silas for post 16 provision has been well utilised and young people placed by the Local Authority have had positive placement opportunities. The provision referrals for Local Authority funded placements of which there are 3, are managed by the Leaving Care Team, and overseen by the Commissioning Panel.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

No policy implications identified.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Any increase in demand within the Fostering Service has the potential to have a significant impact on the financial position of the portfolio, due to the costs of externally commissioned placements. As a result, both the fostering and commissioned placements budgets are closely monitored throughout the year. The commissioned placements budget remains a concern due to demand and costly placements both in the independent residential and fostering sectors. In 2019/2020 the commissioned placements budget saw expenditure of £8.753m against an annual budget of £4.739m, an overspend of £4.014m.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

This report is required to meet statutory requirements as set out in the 'National Minimum Standards for Fostering.'

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

None identified.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision.

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision.

10. CONSULTATIONS

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The

recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

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DATE:	14/08/20
BACKGROUND PAPER:	Appendix 1 to be considered alongside this report.