

# EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



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

**LEAD OFFICERS:** Strategic Director of Children's and Education (DCS)

**DATE:** 11<sup>th</sup> March 2021

**PORTFOLIO(S) AFFECTED:** All

**WARD/S AFFECTED:** All

**KEY DECISION:** N

## **SUBJECT:**

Fostering Service Report for Quarter 3 period 1<sup>st</sup> October to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020

### **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report provides information on the management and performance of the Local Authority's Fostering Service and is revised each quarter. This report alongside Appendix 1, provides analysis of the period October to December 2020, and reflects upon data and any patterns within the Service to determine development and progress. This report also outlines how the Service has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

That the Executive Board notes the Fostering Service Report for Quarter 3, alongside the Appendix 1 report for further Service delivery information. The Board to also note the detail in relation to the Fostering Friendly Employer programme.

### **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.

## 2. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

This report and Appendix 1 outlines how the Fostering Service has continued to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of Service delivery and implementing new, virtual methods of working with foster carers, while supporting placements at this vulnerable time.

- Children in our Care Teams, Fostering and Safeguarding Teams have continued to work collaboratively to 'RAG' rate placements in order of priority throughout Quarters 1, 2 and 3. The aim is to identify additional support needs and to offer enhanced communication with foster carers to promote placement stability during the pandemic. Priority risk assessments for children, young people, foster carers and residential carers has continued throughout the pandemic.
- Placement visits and assessment visits continued throughout the Tier 4 period and continue to be undertaken for the most vulnerable placements, alongside additional support from REVIVE from a therapeutic and emotional well-being perspective. A large proportion of virtual support visits and calls were maintained certainly for those foster carers who were shielding or at higher risk. The Fostering Service increased support calls for those who requested this, or were risk assessed as requiring this.
- 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. Teenage placements of both genders, as last Quarter, remain the most consistent in terms of challenging to place young people, and the most difficult to identify such placements within fostering both in-house and on a national scale. This has been a constant trend over the past 12 to 18 months.
- There has also been some more frequent movement for a number of teenagers with mental health needs over Quarter 3, having seen several foster placement moves before they have perhaps moved into residential care due to their high level of need. The Service works closely with our Psychologists and Mental Health Practitioner from REVIVE in order to assess and offer therapeutic support in a timely manner to this teenage cohort, and supporting foster carers and our in-house residential staff at the same time with practical strategies to try to prevent placement disruption. Having the support and intervention of REVIVE, with two newly appointed Psychologists, has been beneficial when accessing priority assessments and therapeutic support for teenagers without delay.
- Almost a year into the Covid-19 pandemic, it is more evident that placements are harder to identify for certain age groups. Our foster carers in the main have shown resilience and have been proactive in asking for, and accepting help, over the past 9 months.
- 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 for emotional health and well-being. There were a total of 31 recorded referrals to the Revive team received in the third quarter; 5 in October; 17 November; 9 in December and 11 of these were from the Assessment and Safeguarding Teams, 20 were referred from social workers working with Children in Our Care. Over this period Revive offered 37 consultations to professionals and carers.
- The main event during this Quarter was the Celebration of Achievement of Children in our Care and Care Leavers. Considering this was the first time the event was held virtually, it was proven to be very successful. Attendance was high and there were performances from 2 young people. All students received a £20 voucher and also meal vouchers to celebrate their successes. The event albeit different this year, was equally as well received and enjoyed by all.
- In December 2020, Leaving Care launched Christmas gift hampers for care leavers, requesting donations from Council employees and partner agencies to donate to this group of young people. The response was overwhelming and the hampers were extremely well received. Likewise, in partnership with Witton Park School, Christmas food parcels were also donated and gratefully received and enjoyed. The Care Leavers Forum was also attended this Quarter by Councillor Gunn and our Head of Service for Corporate Parenting and this was well-attended virtually encouraging young people to share their views and contribute towards service development.

- This Quarter saw the new Nightsafe at Whalley New Rd commission commence, offering greater placement choice in the Borough for young people over 16 years who require semi-independent living. There still remains a considerable number of our Looked after Children cohort placed within in-house foster placements at 129, with 50 placed with agency foster carers.
- The Fostering Network host a programme to encourage employers to support fostering, in particular, foster carers and their rights. The scheme supports employers to put in place a HR policy which includes flexible working, paid leave for training and panel attendance, and paid leave for settling a child into placement for example. Blackburn with Darwen Fostering Service are enthusiastic to apply for this initiative and roll this out across the Council. There is a HR policy which needs to be adopted in order to be signed up to the initiative, and going forward, Chief Executive and Council-wide sign up to this programme is the aim to promote fostering, and to encourage more of our employees to consider becoming foster carers. This process is in the early stages at present but is a key focus for 2021/22 to achieve this status.
- Blackburn with Darwen are working collaboratively with the DfE and Outcomes UK, with Lancashire, Cumbria and Blackpool as part of a 'SEED' funding bid for which a second grant has been awarded. The objective is to work as a North West cohort to address issues of recruitment, retention, how placements are commissioned in our area and also digital recruitment campaigns. This is an exciting opportunity and one which aims to enhance the number of in-house foster carers in the Borough.

### 3. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

No Policy implications have been identified.

### 4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Fostering Budgets are closely monitored as part of the regular portfolio review. The financial pressures facing the service have been recognised by the Council and a cash limit increase of £1.8m has been approved by Executive Board in order to address the predicted overspend.

### LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

No legal implications identified.

### 5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

No additional resource implications.

### 6. 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.

## 7. CONSULTATIONS

None

## 8. 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.

## 9. 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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<b>DATE:</b>	26/02/2021
<b>BACKGROUND PAPER:</b>	Appendix 1 Fostering Report