

# EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



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

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

**DATE:** Thursday, 8 July 2021

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

**WARD/S AFFECTED:** (All Wards);

**KEY DECISION:** Y

## **SUBJECT:**

EB Q4 Quarterly Fostering Report 2020-21

### **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 January to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, 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. The report will reference comparisons with Quarters 1-3 of 2020.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Executive Board notes this Quarter 4 end of year 2020/21 report alongside Appendix 1 with service development updates and recommendations.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

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

- Receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the Fostering Service every 3 months;
- 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;
- 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

### **4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS**

Appendix 1 provides a detailed overview of the Fostering Service and children in our care data analysis. This report provides highlights included in Appendix 1 for Executive Board information and summarises key issues for the service.

- The period of 2020/21 has seen the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and new ways of working virtually and creatively, while continuing to ensure that children and young people in our care are seen and safeguarded, and our foster carers are well supported during such challenging times. The impact of the pandemic has been more significantly felt in Quarters 3 and 4 in terms of placement disruption and the emotional influence upon children, young people and their carers specifically. This report will provide an overview of Quarter 4 figures but with a focus and comparison over the past year. What has been evidenced is the sheer resilience and determination of our foster carers, residential staff, children, young people and Children's Services employees, to ensure 'business as usual' despite being home based and a commitment to supporting placement stability, education and health needs continuing to be met.
- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic initially in Quarters 1 and 2 showed little impact in terms of placement stability and disruption. However, Quarter 4 has highlighted this impact with an increasing number of children in both foster placements and residential placements experiencing disruption to placements, and placement moves as a result, despite attempts to stabilise and support them to remain. The impact of the pandemic cannot be underestimated in terms of the impact over a year down the line despite the resilience of our foster carers. The residential sector has also seen the impact resulting in placement disruptions for teenagers specifically.
- 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. The Independent Reviewing Officers also have had oversight and input into achieving placement stability, offering emotional support to our children and young people and working with Children's Social Care and Education to provide an enhanced support plan in this time of need. The RAG rating of children and foster carers has enabled the most vulnerable and fragile placements to be identified and continually supported, with intervention offered in a timely way.
- 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 feasibility study aims to improve the fostering offer by looking at collaborative approaches to recruitment, training and commissioning. The Consortium of BBCL have been holding regular 6 weekly Fostering Exchange Days to promote children and young people requiring long term foster placements and good quality matching processes. This involves Independent Fostering Agencies attending virtual events which BwD host to hear profiles of children and young people who are hard to place requiring foster placements. We have had some great success with this process and over the six months BwD have identified placements for five young people one of whom with disabilities being placed in a long term matched foster placement moving from residential provision.
- REVIVE delivers consultation to Foster Carers, training and direct intervention on emotional health and well-being for children and young people via therapy and also supports life story work. The Team are proactive in early intervention work and their focus is supporting placement stability alongside emotional and psychological therapy and intervention. Blackburn with Darwen have called upon the support of the team over the past year to help children in our care and their carers to feel supported throughout the pandemic and to have strategies to assist them alongside training and consultation. There were 31 new referrals made to the REVIVE Service in Quarter 4, with 11 from the Children in Our Care Team, 19 were from the Assessment and Safeguarding teams and 1 from the Fostering team. There were 71 young people or carers having direct or indirect contact with Revive in the period January 1<sup>st</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2021.
- The recruitment of mainstream foster carers has been an increasing challenge, even more so during a pandemic and this is echoed on a national scale. The Service saw 3 new approvals in Quarter 4, making an annual new fostering household total of 12 for 2020/21. This largely enabled the loss of foster carers to be replaced, with the addition of 3 new households.
- Placement sufficiency and stability will continue to be a key area of focus, with areas for learning taken from disruption meetings and case auditing. Blackburn with Darwen are 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. The aim is to form a new local commissioning framework and to continue to hold regular Exchange Days to focus on long term matching opportunities. The Exchange Days are going ahead 6 weekly and will continue to do so. The Fostering Front Door will be a key priority. An experienced fostering Social Worker will be responsible for the front door taking in foster carer enquiries, supporting

placement requests and matching. The service will develop closer working relationships with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) and will establish a more personable and enthusiastic approach.

## 5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

No Policy implications have been identified.

## 6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Fostering Budgets are closely monitored as part of the regular portfolio review.

## 7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

No legal implications identified.

## 8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

No additional resource implications.

## 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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<b>DATE:</b>	17/06/2021
<b>BACKGROUND PAPER:</b>	Appendix 1 to be considered alongside this report.