

Fostering Service Quarter 4 Report

1st January - 31st March 2021

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.

Overview:

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, safeguarded and our foster carers well supported during 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 figures and data below will evidence this.

Children in Our Care in Foster Care

The period from Quarter 3 to Quarter 4 2020/21 saw a small decrease in the figures for Children in our Care from 377 in Quarter 3, down to 374 by the end of March. As a comparison figure, back in April 2020 there were 411 children in our care which shows a decrease of looked after children at the end of this year of 8%. There has been a decrease in the number of children and young people in independent fostering placements with the largest number being placed in-house which is positive. Over the past two years, the figure for family and friends placements has increased alongside Special Guardianship Orders made which have doubled over the past 18 months meaning that more children are exiting the care system and achieving permanence with connected carers.

Comparison Figures

	31st March 2018	31st March 2019	31st March 2020	31st March 2021
Number of Children in our Care	377	407	412	374
Number of CioC in Foster Care	215 (57%)	262 (64%)	270 (65%)	246 (65%)
Number of children in in-house foster care placements	118 (31%)	151 (37%)	142 (34%)	125 (33%)
Number of children in family and friends foster care	48 (13%)	43 (10%)	68 (16.5%)	67 (17.9%)
Number of children in independent fostering agency placements	49 (13%)	68 (16%)	60 (14.5%)	54 (14%)

Comparison figures per Quarter for 2019/20

	Q1 June 2020	Q2 Sept 2020	Q3 Dec 2020	Q4 March 2021
Number of Children in our Care	407	394	377	374
Number of CioC in Foster Care	264 (64)	269 (66.7%)	261 (65.4%)	270 (65%)
Number of children in in-house foster care placements	148 (36%)	143 (35.4%)	131 (32.8%)	142 (34%)
Number of children in family and friends foster care	50 (12%)	58 (14.3%)	67 (16.8%)	68 (16.5%)
Number of children in independent fostering agency placements	66 (16.2%)	68 (16.8%)	63 (15.8%)	60 (14.5%)

The gender ratio of children in our care remains higher for males which is a consistent pattern year on year, particularly in the 11 to 15 age group, which has been a consistent pattern. The teenage cohort remain the most challenging to place and the most costly in terms of placement commissioning. Blackburn with Darwen's short break offer alongside the therapeutic support from Revive, is key to identifying, sustaining and supporting foster placements for this group of young people if residential provision is to be reduced further. However, for some young people in the 11-15 age bracket, a residential placement is the preferable option for example those with more complex emotional and mental health/therapeutic needs, or children with complex health needs and disabilities. By the end of Quarter 4 there were 23 children and young people placed in agency residential placements which again is a largely consistent figure over the year 2020/21.

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.

Gender and Age Comparison as of 31st March 2021

	All children in foster care	In-house	Family and Friends	Independent Fostering Agency
Male	138	71	37	30
Female	108	54	30	24

Age breakdown end of Q4	
0-2	43
3-6	37
7-10	41
11-15	93
16+	32

No of BwD Foster Carers March 2021	124
No of Mainstream Foster Carers (U4, U5 and U6 placements only)	82
No of Family and Friends carers (U1 and U3 placements)	42

Ethnicity of Children in our Care:

Of the 377 children and young people in our care, 296 were from a white, British ethnic origin. There were 43 from the Asian ethnic group, 15 from mixed ethnic origin and 15 recorded as 'other' in terms of their ethnic origin according to Government recommended grouping definitions.

Children with disabilities in Foster Care

There are 9 children and young people in our care who have disabilities. This is a low figure in comparison to our North West Local Authority neighbours, and is largely due to the supportive and preventative packages that Blackburn with Darwen provide for children with complex needs and disabilities. Short breaks, both commissioned and our 'Local Offer', assists families to support their children within their own home as opposed to requiring alternative accommodation.

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. Foster carers are provided with the relevant training and support to meet the specific needs of the child they have in placement and are able to access support from the Children with Disabilities Team with aids and adaptations, Disability Links registration and information and advice where needed. Children with disabilities primarily are placed in residential placements out of Borough.

Placement Stability and Sufficiency.

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 with the average figure for England being 11% and North West average at 9%. The percentage for Blackburn with Darwen at the end of Quarter 4 is 8% so this is positive when compared to average figures for the region and nationally.

The placement framework is competitive for both fostering and residential provision, with Local Authorities competing for placements and both foster carers and Independent providers being able to 'take their pick' of referrals which is a challenge, especially when placing children who are in their teenage years with significant emotional or mental health needs.

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.

Disruption meetings are held in order to identify learning and inform future planning for any child whose placement has been disrupted.

Engagement with Children & Young People and the VOICE Group

The impact of Covid-19 has had a significant impact upon the more typical methods of engagement and participation, towards virtual methods with children and young people. While this works for many, there is still a cohort of children and young people who prefer face to face interaction and feel virtual or telephone communication does not work for them. The VOICE group is continuing to take place virtually with some small group face to face meetings where possible. Young People met this year with senior leaders and discussions around corporate parenting took place, and they also discussed the Corporate Looked after Children's pledge offering views and feedback which has been collated into a LAC strategy. The VOICE group members have also been consulted about The Limes Hub project in Darwen which is being renovated to offer therapy sessions from Revive, direct work, family time base and independence skills for care leavers.

Feedback from Children in Foster Care:

The views of children and young people are gathered via:

- The Voice Group
- 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

The following comments have been made by children and young people in Foster Care:

'I love living with my foster carers they make me feel included'

'I can talk to my foster carers when I feel sad, they always listen'

'She talks to me when I feel sad about my family'

'I wish I could stay up later at bedtime!'

'I haven't missed being in school, I have enjoyed doing fun things like going for walks and baking'

'I feel safe with them even though I have felt scared about Covid'

'I wish I could see my family more in person'

Social Workers said:

'The feedback about the young person was lovely to hear'

'The foster carers have really embraced home tuition this year and she has made progress'

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

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, albeit this has been largely suspended during the pandemic. 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. LAC Medicals were impacted initially due to Covid-19 with some delay in Quarters 1 and 2, but there has been regular communication around this and in Quarter 3 this has started to see improvement. The impact on all medical appointments nationally has been affected. The Health Sub-Group meets bi-monthly and this enables both Health and Social Care professionals to discuss pathways and how to resolve any health related issues for looked after children and care leavers, as well as issues of concern for foster carers and also adopters. In Quarter 4 there were two foster carer representative identified to participate in the Health Sub-Group and they have already attended two sessions.

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 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 were 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 Fostering team. There were 71 young people or carers having direct or indirect contact with Revive in the period Jan 1st to March 31st 2021.

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. The working relationship between Children's Social Care and Education staff specifically has shown real commitment to ensuring that our children in care continue to receive education and meet their attainment targets. Children in our care and vulnerable learners were ensured school places during lockdown as a priority group. Quarter 3 saw 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. The roll out of laptops for children in our care was also a priority over 2020/21 to ensure that home education could be accessible for all. A proportion of Pupil Premium funding was also paid directly to foster carers to enable

home based learning to be achieved back at the very start of the pandemic in Quarter 1 and this was greatly received.

Transitions

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 Leaving Care Service has achieved one Staying Put placement 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 continues to be a valuable resource for young people and referrals continue to be managed by the Leaving Care Team. The joint commission between Nightsafe and the Local Authority commenced in Quarter 3 with a post 16 provision being established at Whalley New Road to create further supported accommodation placements for this age group 16 plus. At the end of this Quarter there were three young people in placement and they had settled in well. This is another much needed provision for our post 16 group of looked after young people, with a commitment to keeping them in the Borough with a mix of independence and support in placement.

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. This process prevents any delay in identifying post 18 provision for young people with specific care needs and/or specific needs for their physical living arrangements with adaptations required.

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 Permanence Tracking Panel meets frequently to discuss and monitor progress for Care Orders at Home, Special Guardianship Orders, Section 20 Accommodated and both non-matched and long term matched placements. There is an emphasis given to achieving a formal matching decision for those children and young people in long-term foster placements, to promote their emotional stability and achieve a permanence plan.

The Fostering Service:

Quarter 4 saw all vacant posts recruited to in both the mainstream and permanence teams. There has also been a much needed addition of a Special Guardianship Support Worker, supporting SGO planning, permanence and post SGO support given that numbers of SGO's achieve continues to rise with double the figures granted over the past 18 months. The focus of the service is foster carer recruitment, retention of our carers, the addition of Exchange Days for family finding which has been facilitated by Blackburn with Darwen and Lancashire County Council and has been a huge success, even though held via a virtual platform. The focus over Quarter 4 has been implementing the Fostering Service Development Plan, focusing upon increasing enquiries for potential foster carers and working towards a more robust fostering front door.

Foster Carer Recruitment

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.

The bus stop campaign was revisited in Quarters 3 and 4 and did see enquiries received from this campaign, alongside the Heart North West Radio advertising and Google ads as our main source of interest from the public.

The focus upon social media due to the pandemic has been the primary method over 2020/21 and learning has been taken from the research undertaken as part of the SEED funding project. An enhanced drive on social media with a 'constant presence' is the focus teamed with digital marketing and refreshing campaigns more frequently.



Foster For Blackburn with Darwen

Psychological Support

Supplimentary Allowances

Transfer Bonus for Existing Carers

Great Local Offers for Foster Carers



Heart Radio North West advertising has been renewed as with people working from home and on furlough the target audience has grown. Reaching out to potential applicants with a new radio campaign and increased air time has been one strategy, with online recruitment events being held monthly. There has been a steady stream comparable to 2019/20 of enquiries, which is encouraging but the conversion into approvals rate has been moderate.

A remand fostering campaign was also initiated in Quarter 4 to look towards sufficiency of PACE and remand beds for young people when placed in custody or awaiting trial. This form of recruitment is challenging and needs to be an ongoing and consistent appeal for specialist carers.

COULD YOU BE A REMAND FOSTER CARER?

BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN IS
LOOKING FOR REMAND FOSTER CARERS.

Remand fostering offers young people who are remanded by the courts with a remand foster carer while they await court proceedings. A remand placement is usually a short term arrangement and involves a foster carer working closely with youth justice officials.

TO FIND OUT MORE VISIT

LETSFOSTER.CO.UK
OR CALL US 0800 328 6919



The overall brand of 'Lets Foster' which is used by Blackburn with Darwen will be reviewed to look towards a more personalised 'BwD' brand which identifies us as a Local Authority. Research has told us that 'Let's Foster' could be confused with IFA branding so this is an area of focus for 2021/22.

Foster Carer Retention, Fostering Panel and Short Breaks:

During Quarter 4, there have been a total of 6 resignations presented to the fostering panel. Two resignations received were a result of carers making the decision to retire from the fostering service due to considerable length of service. A further 2 resignations received were due to connected carers being granted Special Guardianship Orders and were no longer required to remain as connected carers. A further resignation was received due to approved carers making the decision that they no longer wished to remain as foster carers following their terms of approval being reconsidered at panel within the first annual review.

As stated 12 fostering households have been recruited in 2020/21 overall, which with the loss of 6 households and 3 short breaks carers has seen an increase by 3 fostering households overall this year.

Short breaks over 2020/21 were suspended due to the pandemic and the health needs or personal circumstances of many of our short breaks carers. Quarter 3 and 4 saw risk assessments being undertaken to reintroduce short breaks packages, however the service did see the loss of 3 short break carers due to personal circumstances or ill health. A short breaks carer recruitment campaign commenced in Quarter 4 and will run into Quarter 1 of 2021/22.

Foster Carer Training

During this Quarter period, there have not been face to face foster carer training sessions provided due to the pandemic and the restrictions with indoor meetings. The Service liaised with work- force development and also responded to what the foster carers themselves have asked for in respect of specific subject training. This was opened up on a virtual platform and made available through 'Me Learning' for all foster carers to access, in order to offer a variety of mandatory and bespoke training courses to be accessed online.

From December 2020 (Q3), foster carers started to access a more varied training programme. This included examples such as Safeguarding, Equality and Diversity, LGBT Awareness, Disability Awareness, Autism Awareness, Epilepsy Awareness, Diabetes Awareness, Understanding the Behaviours of Children and Young People, Eating disorders, Effective communication with Children and Families, Loss and Bereavement, Substance Misuse, Suicide prevention and Managing Continence.

Feedback received has been that foster carers are accessing these training programmes and finding the content useful, and this continues to be explored during their supervision. Foster carers have stated they are missing the face to face group sessions and completing training alongside others. Some foster carers continue to have anxieties around attending direct face to face training and prefer at this time to complete online training. The courses can be accessed at any time and are flexible.

In response to this, and for Quarter 4, the Service is offering virtual workshops and training sessions through MS Teams, which include; Attachment and Trauma delivered by the Psychologist from Revive, Pathway Plans; The role of a Leaving Care worker, PACE/Child Sexual Exploitation. Allegation training and a Tax workshop with The Fostering Network is also to be offered, alongside Education 'Question & Answer' sessions with the Virtual Schools Team being planned. The Fostering Service is also offering group support sessions which will take place on a monthly basis.

The Permanence Team are holding monthly support groups also for Special Guardians and family and friends carers, and the mainstream Fostering Team have also commenced virtual support groups in Quarter 4 for foster carers in the evenings.

There has been an online fostering forum held in 2020/21 with guest speakers covering subjects requested by foster carers. It is hoped that these 6 monthly forums will be able to take place once again face to face subject to Government restrictions easing and the number of Covid cases in the Borough reducing.

Fostering Managers meet monthly with the Foster Carer Association to discuss issues and feedback and to promote service development.

Review Panel

Annual Review Panel was resumed and saw 24 reviews in Quarter 4. For the majority of 2020/21 Annual Reviews were undertaken by Agency Decision Maker and Team Manager, but Quarter 4 saw these resume once more and on a virtual platform. Foster Carers are asked to provide their feedback to be considered as part of their review paperwork.

Complaints

There have been no complaints during Quarter 4.

Compliments

During Quarter 4, there has been 1 compliment received from a foster carer regarding the support that she received from the Deputy Team Manager in Fostering.

Allegations

During this quarter period there has been no allegations received within the service however, a previous allegation has been concluded and is due to be presented to the next fostering panel to consider carers approval.

Specific Incidents and Restraints

During Quarter 4, there were 22 Specific Incidents received within the service. 5 of which were classified as serious illness or accidents a further 5 were correlated to missing from home incident reports. During this quarter there were 2 disclosures made regarding young people where strategy discussions and investigations were appropriately convened. The mental health needs of children and young people have also seen an increase during this Quarter and referrals made to Revive for emotional support have been made. All incidents are recorded with manager oversight.

Serious Illness and Accidents

Within this quarter period, there were 5 accident and illness reports received all of which resulted in appropriate A&E attendance. Two reports were regarding young people's mental health needs.

Missing from Home

During this quarter period, there have been 19 reports of missing from home. Of all the reported incidents of missing from home involved a total of 14 young people. Missing from Home protocol is followed and return interviews offered and/or carried out.

Bullying:

There have been no reports of bullying this Quarter.

Exemptions

There have been no new exemptions made and none that remain in place at the end of March 2021.

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 the senior managers and since the pandemic this has been at least a monthly basis. The Chair of the FCA sits on the Corporate Parenting Specialist Advisory Group. 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 the team to drive recruitment forward and are involved with planning events.

The Fostering Service usually holds a Foster Carer Forum every six months as an opportunity to have guest speakers and interaction between foster carers and staff. This is usually held in April and November annually. Since the restrictions due to the pandemic, an online virtual forum was held with speakers from LAC Education, Revive and the Permanence Team. This was held in Quarter 3.

Both mainstream and permanence teams have coordinated support group meetings for carers which are held 4-6 weekly and these are facilitated by staff.

Budget

Current placement pressures in-house and across the independent fostering agency landscape continue to place budgets under pressure, as increasingly adolescents and children with disabilities are placed in costly residential placements due to the lack of foster placements across the region and at a national level. There is an increase in the number of children and young people placed in-house and this is positive. However, there are still complex young people who require specific, therapeutic and residential provision and this understandably proves more costly and impacts upon the commissioning budget. A step-down approach is always considered for such placements, and the success of the fostering exchange days has assisted in placing 5 children in long term placements, one of whom moved from a costly residential provision into a foster family.

The Special Guardianship figures impact upon the budget overall, but on a positive note the increase in achieving SGO' is a reflection upon securing permanence for our looked after children in the longer term.

The increasing numbers of Special Guardianship placements is reflected in the financial position for 2020-21, which saw an overspend of £777k against a budget of £1.7M.

The foster care service returned a combined overspend of £319k across both the staffing and payments budgets in 2020-21.

Whilst demand pressures remain in relation to the commissioned placements budget, 2020-21 saw a reduction in net expenditure of over £3M compared with the previous year. This was a reflection of both the reduced numbers in external placements and additional contributions from Health following work to establish a joint commissioning framework.

Commissioned Placements

In Quarter 4, the pressure and challenge upon the Local Authority to identify foster placements and in-house residential provision has remained significant. The disruption of placements for teenagers for example both in fostering and residential has been seen and it is almost as though the impact of the pandemic is just being felt in terms of placement stability. The service continues to be as creative as possible and offering short breaks to maintain existing placements and prevent disruption where this is achievable, albeit the impact of Covid-19 on the availability of short break carers and the availability of foster placements has been seen greatly this year. The Local Authority are privileged to have our own Revive Psychology Team for looked after children and children on the edge of care and this is utilised as early as possible to try to reduce placement disruption and to ensure early assessment and intervention both for foster placements and our in-house Lytham Rd and Seeds provision.

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. Lytham Road Residential Children's Home (BwD) has remained at full capacity with 4 young people in placement consistently. Nightsafe at St Silas has also been well utilised for post 16 young people and the referral process overseen by Leaving Care Manager and the Commissioning Panel, and the newly commissioned Gatehouse at Whalley New Rd (Nightsafe) has also been frequently accessed for post 16 placements.

Going forward, the BBCL Seed funding project will assist us to establish a sub-regional framework to promote local placements for local children, maintaining BwD children within the footprint of Lancashire as opposed to being placed out of Borough. The table below offers a breakdown of the current placements in March 2021 at the end of this

Placement Type
Adoptive Placements - 16
Foster Placements (in-house) - 125
Foster Placements (agency) - 54
Friends & Family - 67
Placed with Parents - 61
Independent Living - 0
Children's Homes (in-house) - 5
Children's Homes (agency) - 23
Secure - 1
Prison/HMYOI - 1
NHS - 1
Residential Accom Not Subject to CH Regulations - 13
Other - 7
Residential School - 0

New Service Priorities for 2021/22 going forward:

1. The Service has a target of recruiting 20 new fostering households over the coming year.
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.
3. Foster Carer training will continue to develop, led by a Fostering Team/Deputy Manager. The Service will focus on the continued development of online training in the current climate, and the overall training offer in line with Foster Carer requests and Minimum Standards. Nurturing Attachment sessions will continue to be delivered by Revive with the aim to enable all newly approved foster carers to access this early in their fostering journey.
4. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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 IFA's and will establish a more personable and enthusiastic approach.
8. Recruitment will focus upon emergency and short break foster carers, alongside general recruitment for foster carers to respond to the increasing demand for urgent placements for teenagers. This will also enable a support package of short breaks to be considered for those young people who are more challenging to place and/or in fragile placements currently and will seek to assist with placement stability alongside our Revive offer.
9. The recruitment of foster carers will become a team and service approach; recruitment will be promoted by fostering staff and foster carers alike with more robust campaigns taking on board recommendations from the DfE Seed funding research and reviewing our fostering 'brand' of 'Let's Foster' making this more Blackburn with Darwen Council focused.

Pamela Price
Service Lead, Placements