

# EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



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

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

**DATE:** Thursday, 11 November 2021

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

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

**KEY DECISION:** Y

## **SUBJECT:**

EB Quarter 1 2021-22 Fostering Report

### **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 1 April to 30 June 2021, and reflects upon data and any patterns within the Service to determine development and progress. This report also outlines how the Service continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Executive Board notes this Quarter 1 of 2021-22 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:

- 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.

## 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 already 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 was felt in Quarters 3 and 4 of 2020/21 in terms of placement disruption and the emotional influence upon children, young people and their carers specifically. This has continued to present as a challenge during Quarter 1 of 2021/22. We continue to try to ensure 'business as usual' whilst we are working in a 'blended manner' and have a commitment to supporting placement stability and that education and health needs continue to be met.
- Quarter 1 2021/22 has continued on the trajectory whereby there has been 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. There is also competitive demand for fostering and residential placements with other Local Authorities which increases the pressure that can be placed on placements that are already disrupting given a bridging plan can be difficult to prepare for.
- Children in our Care Teams, Fostering and Safeguarding Teams have continued to work collaboratively to risk assess placements in order of priority. These dynamic assessments 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 is a feasibility study aiming 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 a total of 30 referrals to the REVIVE team received in the first quarter April to June 2021; 14 in April; 7 in May and 9 in June.
- 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. During Quarter 1 there were a total of 29 enquiries and 16 Initial Visits (IV) which is a solid conversation of 55% for the quarter. We had fostering fortnight during weeks commencing 10 and 17 May 2021. The theme this year was #WhyWeCare and we had photos and posts from across children's services from staff and carers giving their reasons why they do the job they do. May was the best performing May over the last 4 years. Although the overall enquiries are down for the quarter the number of Registrations of Interest (ROI)/IVs have increased, suggesting a much more productive conversion.
- Placement sufficiency and stability will continue to be a key area of focus. 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 IFA's and will establish a more personable and enthusiastic approach.

- In promoting placement stability there are pre disruption meetings held and the expertise of the Fostering Support Worker and REVIVE colleagues are drawn upon.

## **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.

At the end of quarter 1 the Fostering Service is reporting a budget pressure in the region of £236,000 with the Commissioned Placements budget forecasting a breakeven position.

## **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**

Feedback received and shared from the Junior and Senior Voice groups noted in this report.

## **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.

<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	Helen Kane, , helen.kane@blackburn.gov.uk
<b>DATE:</b>	8 October 2021
<b>BACKGROUND PAPER:</b>	Appendix 1 to be considered alongside this report. EB Quarter 1 2021-22 Fostering Report