



EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
LEAD OFFICERS:	Acting Director Children's Services and Education
DATE:	Thursday, 8 December 2022

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Children's Services, Young People and Education
WARD/S AFFECTED:	(All Wards);
KEY DECISION:	N

SUBJECT: EB Fostering Quarter 1 and 2 Report 2022

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides information on the management and performance of the Local Authority's fostering service and is revised on a quarterly basis. This report, alongside Appendix 1, provides analysis of the period 1st April to 30th September 2022 and reflects upon data and service development over this period and recommendations for the next six monthly period.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board notes the Fostering six monthly report for Quarters 1 and 2 alongside Appendix 1 which provides a service progress overview and summary of service development 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;
- 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

- It is positive at the end of quarter 2 that the majority of children placed in foster placements are in our own, Blackburn with Darwen provision. The rate at which new foster carer applications is being received is another challenge, however the figures show that children

in our care are primarily placed in-house, with 187 children and young people placed in-house fostering. There are 68 foster carers for our Local Authority.

- The fostering service has had a revised 'fostering front door' offer whereby an experienced Social worker is supporting the Recruitment Officer with applications, but also coordinates placement searches both in-house and on the framework with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). This remodel has been positive in that the Social Worker has a solid overview along with the Team Manager of the placement vacancies in the team and will liaise directly with foster carers, offering at times an enhanced support offer to them at the point of placement.
- The introduction of the BBCL (BwD, Blackpool, LCC and Cumbria) collaborative sub regional framework has helped to generate some success with 'closer to home' in the Lancashire footprint placements, albeit this framework is new and the success of this in the longer term with placement sufficiency needs to be evaluated.
- It consistently remains the case that males, in the 11-16 age group and of White British ethnicity are the highest cohort of children and young people in our care. This has been a persistent trend over the years. In terms of placements and stability, consistently in quarters 1 and 2 the teenage age group are more challenging to identify placements for both fostering and residential in the current climate. Sibling groups also present a challenge in terms of identifying foster placements when the care plan is one of maintaining children together. It remains the case that children with disabilities primarily are placed in residential settings as opposed to fostering. There is an ongoing campaign to try to recruit foster carers for children with SEND but this remains a local and national challenge.
- Children in our Care have regular medicals at the statutory frequency appropriate for their age. There is a Designated Nurse, who takes an active role in following up health issues and assisting with health promotion work. Figures for Quarter 1 and 2 show that 90% of all Children in our Care have an up to date health assessment which is an increase from 2021/22. This figure is lower at 50% for Children in our Care who have had a dental check up in the last 12 months. This is a focus of attention and promotion from Health and Social Care professionals to increase this data for dental checks.
- The Limes in Darwen as stated has now reopened and has a specific play therapy room and other therapy rooms to ensure our cared for children have a calm and pleasant environment to receive support. The building has been vacant but has now had a refurbishment and is to be used as a calming 'Hub' where our children and young people, and foster carers, can make use of the facilities.
- The recruitment of foster carers remains a local and national challenge, and Blackburn with Darwen have responded by looking at branching out across our Local Authority border to target recruitment in areas such as Burnley, Accrington and other nearby towns. It is necessary to broaden our recruitment geographical area as many of our competitors have done trying to reach out to a wider audience.
- The recruitment efforts for Quarter 1 and 2 have included our Radio advertising campaigns, advertising at Blackburn Rovers, and a networking visit to Burnley Football Club to promote BwD fostering in this area. The Fostering Service have also sponsored an award at The One Voice Awards in the New Year. There is also advertising at Blackburn Hawks Ice Rink.

- Recruitment will focus upon emergency and short break foster carers and foster carers who can support teenagers, to respond to the increasing demand for urgent placements. 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. There is also a need to recruit to Remand/PACE fostering working closely with colleagues in the Youth Offending Service.

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. The latest monitoring at quarter 2 shows significant forecasted overspends across both the fostering service (£260k) and externally commissioned placements budgets (£2.5m). When we consider that the currently forecasted position for the portfolio as a whole shows an overspend of £2.8m, it is clear that placement pressures are the largest contributing factors.

This position will require a review of the Council's demand management strategies in this area including a refresh of the Children's (Placement) Sufficiency Strategy.

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. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

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. (*insert EIA link here*)

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. (*insert EIA attachment*)

10. CONSULTATIONS

Not applicable.

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.

VERSION:	1
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CONTACT OFFICER:	Jo Siddle
DATE:	17 th October 2022
BACKGROUND PAPER:	Appendix 1 Report to be considered alongside this paper.