



EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

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| REPORT OF: | Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education |
| LEAD OFFICERS: | Acting Director Children's Services and Education |
| DATE: | Thursday, 9 March 2023 |

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

SUBJECT:

EB Q 3 Fostering report

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides information on the management and performance of the Local Authority's fostering service which is revised on a quarterly basis. This report, alongside Appendix 3, provides analysis of the period 1st October 2022 until the 31st December 2022 and reflects upon data and service development over this period and recommendations for the next three monthly period.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board notes the Fostering three monthly report for Quarter 3, 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

4.1 It is positive at the end of quarter 3 that the majority of children placed in foster placements are in our own, Blackburn with Darwen provision. However, the rate at which new foster carer applications are being received and subsequently follow through to approval, remains an ongoing challenge. The current trends for the largest cohort of placements are –

- a) Males aged 11 – 16 years – this also includes Children and Young People who are seeking unaccompanied asylum.
- b) Large sibling groups.
- c) Children with a Disability
- d) PACE/Remand Beds.

As such, the Recruitment Strategy focuses on picking up pace and targeting households who have the ability to become carers for the above children and young people, with the offer of REVIVE Team support and specific training followed by appropriate allowances that match this level of care and support need.

4.2 The ‘fostering front door’ offer whereby an experienced Social Worker is supporting the Recruitment Officer with fostering applications, but also coordinates placement searches both in-house and on the framework with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA’s) has been positive and we have placed 17 children and young people locally, although further work is necessary to strengthen and truly embed a culture of success by forming close collaborative relationships to ensure we place children and young people locally when we are unable to place in house.

There are risks associated with the imminent % uplift for BBCL providers, which is yet to be announced and will impact on the Commissioning Budget.

As such, there are monthly meetings with IFAs to build relationships in order to be more visible and ensure BwD are given higher priority for placements within the Blackburn with Darwen area. This will be reviewed in six months with BBCL so that data can be collated and evidence is sought around placement being made as local as possible through the framework. In addition, collaborative meetings are taking place with LCC who are the main lead for BBCL, to identify and plan for the % uplift so that the Finance Team can be informed as soon as possible so that predicted spend can be considered.

4.3 It is positive that most of the children and young people in our care, are in stable placements. However, for the teenage age group as well as large sibling groups, placement stability continues to remain a challenge.

As such, there are specific areas of support in regards to referrals into the REVIVE Service for therapeutic support which includes support and guidance to strengthen carers understanding of trauma and impact. To add to this support is a high level of training including – attachment and trauma training. There continues to be support provided to carers and the children and young people from the Support, Experiences, Enjoy, Develop, Succeed (SEEDS) Service.

4.4 It remains the case that children with disabilities primarily are placed in residential settings as opposed to fostering.

As such, there is an ongoing campaign to try to recruit foster carers for children with SEND but this remains a local and national challenge.

4.5 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 3 show that 87% 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 69% for Children in our Care who have had a dental check up in the last 12 months. This is slightly higher than the last 2 quarters which demonstrates that this has been a focus of work undertaken by practitioners and health professionals.

As such, this is a continued focus of attention and promotion from Health and Social Care professionals to increase this data for dental checks.

4.6 Although it is positive that there have been some Long-term matches and discharge of Care Orders over the last quarter, this continues to remain a priority to prevent drift and delay in children and young people's permanence plans.

As such, there is Strategic Oversight at a Permanence Tracker to monitor timescales for achieving permanence, to add to this, the CIOC Team are now in a more stable staffing position and are able to prioritise the work required to achieve permanence plans for children and young people.

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 monitoring position at quarter 3 showed significant forecasted overspends across both the fostering service (£371k) and externally commissioned placements budgets (£3.315m).

When we consider that the forecasted position for the portfolio as a whole showed an overspend of £3.688m at the end of quarter 3, it is clear that placement pressures are the predominant 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

The resource implications continue to be in regards to be in relation to the associated pressures of the Commissioning Budget.

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.

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| CONTACT OFFICER: | Amy Brooks, Suzanne Kinder/ Louise Helm |
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| DATE: | 22 nd February 2023 |
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| BACKGROUND PAPER: | |
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