



EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
LEAD OFFICERS:	Strategic Director of Children & Education (DCS)
DATE:	Thursday, 7 September 2023

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

SUBJECT: EB: Q1 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 1, provides analysis of the period 1st April 2023 until the 30th June 2023 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 1, 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 remains the case 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, continues to remain an ongoing challenge. The current trends for the largest cohort of placements are the same as in previous reports.

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

4.2 The Fostering Transformation Action Plan in regards to digital transformation has made significant progress, the financial forms for foster carers are now digital and in use. The application form and enquiry form are to be launched digitally in July. There are two Meet and Greet sessions planned in July for foster carers to meet with the digital transformation team, to look at the plans for digital transformation across the service and to provide feedback on this.

4.3 The staffing review of both the Mainstream and Permanence Team has now been agreed. There is now a Supervision and Support Team as well as an Assessment Team on the Mainstream Fostering Team. There are now two teams on the Permanence Team. There are now two permanent Team Manager posts, plus two Advanced Practitioner posts that will be recruited to. This will provide greater management oversight and drive priorities and actions necessary on each team to meet the demands of the service.

4.4 Placement stability remains a positive picture in the main. However, there are no changes for the demand for placements for teenagers as well as large sibling groups.

4.5 It continues to remain the case that children with disabilities primarily are placed in residential settings as opposed to fostering. As such, there remains an ongoing campaign to try to recruit foster carers for children with SEND but this remains a local and national challenge.

4.6 Children in our Care continue to have regular medicals at the statutory frequency appropriate for their age. Figures for Quarter 1 show that 88% of all Children in our Care have an up to date health assessment which remains consistent. Significant progress has been made with regards to dental checks rising to 85% of children and young people.

4.6 The launch of fostering fortnight in May was particularly successful with a collaboration of BwD employees, the fostering service, senior managers and the Elected Member all being present with drummers from the local community to create a big bang. A number of events took place over the fortnight ranging from a fun day, family friendly walks, competitions and activity on local newspapers and the radio station. It is hoped that activity generated from this event will aid fostering recruitment.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

No Policy Implications have been identified.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Recognising the importance of recruiting and retaining in-house foster carers, the medium term financial plan allocated an additional £500,000 of funding from 2023/24 onwards in order to enable a review of the financial offer made to our foster carers. The hope is that an improved and restructured

offer will enable us to remain competitive with our neighbouring authorities with regards to attracting potential new carers. The review of the fostering payments forms part of the wider Fostering Transformation Project and work on this continued throughout quarter 1.

Due to the uncertainty surrounding the financial offer to foster carers, the latest projections at quarter 1 predict a break even position on foster care payments, as any improved offer will be backdated to the 1st April. The projections for externally commissioned placements show a forecasted overspend of £230,000 at quarter 1, however there remains uncertainty around the levels of expenditure on this budget due to the receipt from numerous providers of requests for inflationary uplifts to their weekly rates for existing placements. Negotiations are ongoing with providers in order to arrive at satisfactory outcomes for all parties. Once the outcomes are known, any new rates will be applied to the budget monitoring forecasts.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications.

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

N/A

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

CONTACT OFFICER: Amy Brooks, Louise Helm, Suzanne Kinder

DATE: 14th August 2023

**BACKGROUND
PAPER:**