



# EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
<b>LEAD OFFICERS:</b>	Strategic Director of Children & Education (DCS)
<b>DATE:</b>	Thursday, 14 November 2024

<b>PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:</b>	Children, Young People and Education
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	(All Wards);
<b>KEY DECISION:</b>	Y

**SUBJECT: 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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 until the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024 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.

## 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 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. Ofsted will consider it when inspecting the service.

## 4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

4.1 It remains the case that most children placed in foster placements are in our own, Blackburn with Darwen provision. The Recruitment Hub Foster with Us was launched in May 2024. The hub is focussed on the issues around foster carer recruitment with the aim of increasing recruitment activity across the cluster local authorities in the Northwest with a dedicated team who will offer a targeted marketing campaign and a timely response to fostering enquiries. It is hoped that the hub will increase our overall recruitment activity in Blackburn with Darwen, with an increase in assessment

and approval of foster carers. Currently BWD is on track to meet the plan of approving 12 fostering households in this financial year.

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 Mockingbird Family Model is well into the implementation stage with the aim of launching the first Mockingbird constellation in October. We have recruited to the role of Liaison Worker, identified the Hub Carer and are considering fostering households who wish to be satellite foster carers.

4.3 Placement stability remains positive with less placement disruptions. The Unplanned Endings and Disruption process is now live with the aim of strengthening learning around disruptions and increasing placement stability. However, there are no changes for the demand for placements for teenagers as well as large sibling groups.

4.4 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 special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), but this remains a local and national challenge.

4.5 There has been some instability across the management team across the fostering service due to sickness and a team manager leaving the local authority.

4.6 There continues to be increased assessment activity across the kinship teams with kinship carers being the priority in considering placements for children who cannot be cared for by their parents.

4.7 Quality assurance is now an area of focus across the fostering service with the aim of incorporating the service into the departmental model of quality assurance.

## **5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

No policy implications have been identified.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Both the Fostering and Commissioned Placement budgets are closely monitored throughout the year. The latest projections show the Fostering Service returning an underspend of £349k against its approved budget whilst the Commissioned Placements budget is forecasting a large overspend of £2.8m. These figures reflect the changing profile of our current placements, with fewer children placed with in-house foster carers and more with Independent Fostering Agencies. The success of both the Fostering Recruitment Hub and Mockingbird model will hopefully redress this balance.

The budget pressure on commissioned placements also reflects the increasing demand for specialised residential placements in addition to rising costs for both residential and supported accommodation places.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

It is important to comply with a – c in item 3 above as they are drawn from para 25.7 of the “Fostering Services – National Minimum Standards published by the Department for Education in 2011. These national minimum standards, together with regulations on the placement of children in foster care,

such as the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of fostering services.

## 8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The resource implications continue to be regarding 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

## 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>VERSION:</b>	<b>1</b>
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<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Louise Helm</b>
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<b>DATE:</b>	
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<b>BACKGROUND PAPER:</b>	
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