

# Fostering Service Quarter 2 Report

1<sup>st</sup> July to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018

## Executive Report



Quarterly reports to the Executive Board are a requirement of the Fostering Service to meet Standard 25.7 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. They are a key part of the documentation considered by OFSTED when conducting a Service inspection.

### **Introduction**

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council's Fostering Service aims to ensure that:

- The best foster carers are recruited for our children;
- All placements receive high quality support, effectively targeted according to need;
- Children are found permanent families without delay; and
- Children and young people in foster care achieve the best possible outcomes.

### **Children in our Care in Foster Care**

The number of children in our care has fluctuated during this year; it decreased significantly in Quarter 1 but increased again in Quarter 2.

	<b>31<sup>st</sup> March 2018</b>	<b>30<sup>th</sup> June 2018</b>	<b>30<sup>th</sup> Sept 2018</b>
<b>Number of Children in our Care</b>	377	343	360
<b>Number of CioC in Foster Care</b>	215 (57%)	209 (61%)	225 (62.5%)
<b>Number of children in in-house foster care placements</b>	118 (31%)	120 (35%)	139 (38.6%)
<b>Number of children in family and friends foster care</b>	48 (13%)	45 (13%)	45 (12.5%)
<b>Number of children in independent fostering agency placements</b>	49 (13%)	44 (13%)	41 (11.4%)

The availability of foster placements both in-house and through independent agencies remains challenging, particularly for older children and sibling groups. However, the Department has been able to keep the vast majority in foster care and of the 225 in foster care, 82% are in in-house placements including family and friends placements.

### **In-House and Agency Placements**

#### **Gender breakdown**

	<b>In-house</b>	<b>Family and Friends</b>	<b>Independent Fostering Agency</b>
<b>Male</b>	86	16	27
<b>Female</b>	53	29	14

#### **Age break down**

<b>Age</b>	<b>In-house</b>	<b>Family and Friends</b>	<b>Independent Fostering Agency</b>
<b>0 to 2</b>	22	10	5
<b>3 to 6 years</b>	15	12	2
<b>7 to 10 years</b>	27	8	10
<b>11 to 15 years</b>	56	11	17
<b>16 and 17 years</b>	19	4	7
<b>Total</b>	139	45	41

### **New Referrals in Quarter 2**

	No of children	Sibling Groups	Age 0 - 5	Age 6 - 11	Age 12+	Children placed in-house	Fostering Agency	Residential placements	Children didn't come in	Waiting to be placed
<b>July</b>	21	6	7	8	6	20	0	0	1	0
<b>August</b>	6	1	2	4	0	1	0	0	1	4
<b>Sept</b>	15	3	9	3	3	7	0	0	5	3
<b>Q2 total</b>	42	10	18	15	9	28	0	0	7	7

There were 42 new referrals in Quarter 2, evenly spread across the age range. There was a significant decrease in the number of referrals during August which is not unusual. 28 children actually came into care in Quarter 2 and were all placed with in-house foster carers. The remaining 7 children were waiting to be placed at the end of the Quarter. August was challenging, despite low numbers, because a number of carers were unavailable due to holidays and short break carers were fully committed to caring for children who could not go on holiday with their main carers for various reasons (usually because holidays had been booked prior to the placement being made).

### **Matching and Ethnicity**

Two mixed black African children were placed with white British carers. Their two half siblings were already in this placement and doing well, the four siblings are now together and their cultural needs are being met.

An unaccompanied asylum seeking young person from Afghanistan was placed with an Asian foster carer.

### **Feedback from children in Foster Care**

The feedback received from children in foster care is generally positive. Their views are obtained from:

- Participation in the VOICE and Junior VOICE groups;
- The work of the Participation Champions in the service;
- The Investing in Children assessment process;
- Participation in staff recruitment (interviews) and foster carer training;
- Contributing to the Annual Review report of the foster carers looking after them;
- A support group for birth children and grandchildren; and
- Social worker feedback for foster carer reviews.

Children, young people and their social workers made the following comments about placements when contributing to foster carer reviews in Quarter 2:

#### **Some comments from children and young people include:**

‘They’re like my new mum and dad now, thinking about mummy makes me sad’.

‘I don’t like people saying ‘foster care’, can you say ‘my new family instead’.

‘I love the food in this family’.

‘I was happy when I went to London with Aunty and Uncle. I saw the Queen’.

‘The thought of being moved again makes me sad. I am happy here’.

‘Me and their foster daughter have grown close and become really good mates’.

‘Aunty understands me and I have a nice and funny foster sister. Aunty treats me equal but sometimes I do things wrong and then I think Aunty is too strict and gets annoyed with me when I don’t wash my bowl and when I argue.’

Some children and young people prefer not to comment but are happy to tick the boxes indicating that they are happy with their foster carers.

### **Social Workers said:**

Of family and friends foster carers:

‘Paternal grandparents take the time to spend with S and recognise that she has faced significant levels of loss, trauma and uncertainty. They provide S with the love and emotional reassurance that is needed to support this. A close and loving attachment is continuously observed from Paternal Grandparents towards S and this is certainly reciprocated by S herself.’

‘T feels confident to confide in C who has encouraged T to talk about her feelings and the court processes which has been exactly what she has needed.’

‘C and C’s needs are met to a high standard. C was a very withdrawn little girl due to the neglect she had suffered whilst living with birth parents. S and A have been very nurturing towards the children and are able to provide the emotional support needed to support the children. C is now a different little girl. She has a great relationship with her carers and is able to speak with them openly about her worries and now also speaks to myself when previously she withdrew to the point that she would not look at me.’

### **Birth Children said:**

‘The last year has been great, E in particular is such a lovely young girl and it’s always a joy to have her around. E has gotten upset a couple of times when she has been staying with us, especially feeling like no one cares about her.’

‘I love being part of a fostering family. It’s nice to see other children go from sad face to a happy one’.

### **Promoting Children’s Health, Emotional Development, Education & Leisure**

Foster families are provided with pre and post-approval preparation and training on the importance and availability of health, education and leisure services to enable them to help children achieve their potential and enhance their emotional wellbeing.

Looked After Children and young people are encouraged to participate in a variety of activities in which they can succeed and are supported in achieving better outcomes. All local looked after children and care leavers are provided with a Be Active card, which enables them to access free sport and leisure activities within the Borough. Foster carers are also provided with a MAX Card, which offers heavily discounted access to a range of leisure parks and facilities around the North West. This is funded by the Fostering Service in partnership with the Foster Carer Association.

Children in foster care have regular medicals at the statutory frequency appropriate for their age. There is a Designated Nurse for Looked After Children who takes an active role in following up health issues and assisting with health promotion work. Foster carers have a Health Passport for each child in their

care which is a record of all of the child's health details. Public Health funding for 18 months has enabled the appointment of a specialist nurse to work with 'hard to reach' looked after children and care leavers.

There are currently 11 looked after children in foster care who are registered as having a disability. Foster carers are provided with the relevant training and support to meet the specific needs of the child they have in placement.

In relation to emotional wellbeing, looked after children have access to Clinical Psychology and related services through REVIVE and the East Lancashire Child and Adolescent Service (ELCAS) also known as Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). The REVIVE Service is a partnership between Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council's Children's Services and East Lancashire Hospital Trust to provide emotional health support for children known to the Local Authority and is based at Duke Street. REVIVE delivers consultation to foster carers, training and direct intervention on emotional health and well-being. Feedback from foster carers following consultation is very positive. The REVIVE Service has delivered training to foster carers on self-harm and on attachments.

Staffing in the REVIVE team has increased over Q2, with 2 new Mental Health Practitioners; one who is seconded from ELCAS for 2 days a week, and another who started with the team full time in September. The Fostering Support worker now sits in the REVIVE Service but continues to support children in foster care and their foster carers along with other members of the Team.

49 referrals were made to the REVIVE Service in Q2, 22 of those in July. 8 of those referrals were made by the Children in our Care Team and 2 from the Fostering Team. 23 (47%) of the referrals were for children subject to a care order. 28 consultation slots were made available of which 23 were attended, and 5 were either not booked or not attended. Representatives of REVIVE attended the Foster Carers Association meeting in July. A Psychologist in clinical training joined the team in October and will be jointly facilitating a 12 session Nurturing Attachments course for foster carers starting in January.

As well as mandatory First Aid training, foster carers also receive training on a variety of health-related issues including 'Infectious Diseases in Childhood' and 'Managing Medicine.' Phase 1 of a 'Healthy Homes' training package for carers has been developed.

In line with Standard 8 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, the Department implements a written education policy prepared in partnership with the Virtual Head Teacher and the Education Manager for Children in Our Care. The Virtual Head's role is to ensure that the educational needs of all Children in our Care are being met and that levels of achievement and aspiration among our children and young people are raised. Termly briefings are held with a group of social workers, managers and Designated Teachers and Head Teachers to consider ways to improve achievement and attainment.

The Pupil Premium allowance, previously paid to schools to support Children in our Care to achieve in school, is managed by the Virtual Head who has a system in place to administer and ensure the money is spent appropriately to further their educational achievements. The Virtual Head quality assures all Personal Education Plans (PEPs).

The Education Manager sits within the Children in our Care Social Work Service and, where necessary, actively intervenes with schools to promote the needs of children in foster care. As part of the preparation and assessment process and through the Foster Carer Agreement, foster carers are set a clear expectation that they will promote and support children's educational attainment. The ways in which foster carers meet children's educational needs are monitored through the foster carer review process and supervisory visits. Foster carers regularly receive training 'Promoting Educational Achievement for Children in Our Care'. The Education Manager attended the recent Foster Carer Forum to update carers on any new developments and to answer their questions about PEPs.

## Results for 2018

At Key Stage 1, the way in which children are graded has changed as children have to score more than 100 marks in order to pass. The percentages below relate to the numbers who passed – the results in Maths were particularly positive.

Key Stage 1	Reading	Maths	Writing	WRM combined
CioC total / whole cohort	57.1%	64.3%	50.0%	50.0%
CioC total/ eligible children	66.7%	75.0%	58.3%	58.3%
BwD all	74.7%	76.0%	68.1%	64.0%
National all	75.5%	76.1%	69.9%	65.4%

At Key Stage 2 the way in which children are graded has also changed in the same way children again have to score more than 100 marks in order to pass. The percentages below relate to the numbers who passed.

Key Stage 2	Grammar, Punctuation & Spelling	Reading	Maths	Writing	WRM combined
CioC total/ whole cohort	43.8%	37.5%	43.8%	43.8%	37.5%
CioC total / eligible children	58.3%	50.0%	58.3%	58.3%	50.0%
BwD all	79.9%	74.3%	78.2%	77.0%	64.5%
National all	77.5%	75.1%	75.4%	78.2%	64.2%

Key Stage 4	GCSE Eng 4+	GCSE Maths 4+	GCSE Maths & Eng combined 4+	1 GCSE or equivalent
CioC total	30%	17%	17%	96%

39% of the Year 11 cohort had an Education Health and Care Plan and 97% are now currently identified as being in education, training or employment.

### Engagement with Children & Young People and the VOICE Group

In Quarter 2 the VOICE group met monthly at Knott Street Community Centre and the majority of children who attended are in foster care. This venue was chosen as the facilities allow part of each session to be activity-based. The members of the group have been involved in a number of consultation activities to inform and shape services.

The young people have requested 'all about me' profiles for staff and are involved in the Journey to Fostering training programme for prospective carers. It is anticipated that birth sons and daughters may also be involved in this training for prospective carers in the future. The Voice Group and 'Sons and Daughters' group have recently taken part in a consultation event regarding the looked after children website. At the end of the Quarter, the group met at Pizza Hut to say goodbye and present gifts to the Participation Officer and a social worker who had been co-leading the Voice group and were leaving

their posts. Three young people also contributed to the farewell event for Linda Clegg, DCS as she departed from Children's Services.

VOICE members and care leavers continue to attend Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee and Corporate Parenting Specialist Advisory Group, when appropriate.

### **Transitions**

Children and young people in foster care are supported to make a positive transition to adult life so foster carers attend training on 'Transitions' which focuses on their role in developing young people's skills to live independently as they progress towards adulthood. The Children in Our Care Team and the Fostering Team encourage carers and young people to consider 'staying put' and the Leaving Care Service also delivers courses for foster carers to develop their understanding of this. The training has been positively evaluated by carers and most indicate a willingness to work with 'staying put'. Although finance causes carers the most concern, some are willing to receive housing benefit as part of their financial package and will consider changing their status to landlord. The Leaving Care Service attends Reviews to discuss Staying Put with foster carers for young people aged 17 years, who will turn 18 in 2018. The Service has also started some work to develop a 'staying close' option, which may be more suitable for a number of care leavers.

The Leaving Care Service is currently in the process of being reassessed for the Investing in Children award. The Service is also working hard to encourage and support care leavers into apprenticeships. A recent session at the library about apprenticeships was attended by 15 young people who all expressed an interest. The Service is also working in partnership with the Blackburn Rovers Community Trust to develop a 'Get Ready for Work' course aimed specifically at care leavers. From the training several young people were offered apprenticeships.

The Leaving Care Service has achieved an increase in the number of supported lodgings providers this year, which increases choice for young people leaving foster care and residential placements in favour of semi-independence. Participation levels continue to be good with young people delivering the Total Respect training and training for foster carers.

Some Care Leavers over the summer took part in the North West Leaving Care Football Tournament - we had a couple of young people taking part that are in foster care – Blackburn with Darwen did not win but as this is now becoming a younger team it is looking positive for the future.

The Leaving Care Service has 8 advisors who have now moved to Duke Street. 3 advisors are working with the 16 to 18 years age group resolving issues with accommodation, education, training and employment and staying put. 5 advisors are providing advice and guidance to the 21 to 25 years age group and in addition all advisors have a caseload of at least 20 18 to 21 year olds for whom they provide general support.

### **Care Planning**

The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015 provide a revised definition of 'permanence' for Children Looked After, including for the first time the definition of a long term foster placement. The responsibilities of the Local Authority in assessing the ability of the foster carer to meet the needs of the child now and in the future, and identifying any support services needed to achieve this are also set out. Local Authorities are required to achieve long term matching within reasonable timescales. The Regulations introduce new duties for ceasing to look after a child.

### **The Fostering Service**

During Quarter 2 the Fostering Service restructured into 3 teams including a new Permanence Team which was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> July. The Permanence Team now completes all Special Guardianship assessments, all viability and combined assessments and Regulation 24 assessments. The number of referrals for this work far exceeded expectations in Quarter 2 and social workers from the other two fostering teams were allocated work on top of their mainstream work. This has caused some pressure in the Service as family and friends work has to be prioritised to meet court timescales and as a result some mainstream fostering assessments were delayed. Given the pressures on the commissioning budget, the need for prospective carers to be assessed and approved within statutory timescales is critical so that more children can be placed with in-house carers.

### **Foster Carer Resource**

	<b>Total number of foster carers</b>	<b>Mainstream</b>	<b>Short breaks carers</b>	<b>Family and Friends carers</b>
<b>Quarter 1</b>	123	82	14	27
<b>Quarter 2</b>	123	81	14	28

### **Foster Carer Recruitment**

During Quarter 2 there were 47 enquires, 10 registrations of interest (ROI's) and 2 approvals.

<b>2018/19</b>				
<b>Month</b>	<b>Enquiries</b>	<b>*ROI</b>	<b>Approvals</b>	<b>Conversion</b>
Jul-18	23	4	1	17%
Aug-18	9	4	0	44%
Sep-18	15	2	1	13%

<b>2018/19</b>	<b>Enquiries</b>	<b>*ROI</b>	<b>Approvals</b>	<b>Conversion</b>
Quarter 1	35	10	5	29%
Quarter 2	47	10	2	21%

- ROI = Registration of Interest

At the end of Quarter 2 there were 2 prospective carer households at Stage 2 of assessment and 3 at Stage 1. In addition 7 potential applicants were booked to attend Journey to Foster training and a number of initial visits were also arranged and awaiting completion.

### **Recruitment Activity**

The Service presented a stand at the Royal Lancashire Show in July, working alongside 2BR Radio for the weekend. Face-painting and a bubble machine drew people to the stand and 7 good enquiries were made as a result.





The number of enquiries dropped off in August as expected due to the summer holidays. However the Service continued to receive enquiries and a campaign (10,000 people targeted on Facebook and Instagram) aimed at existing foster carers who foster with other local authorities and independent fostering agencies brought in 5 enquiries. 4 of these are now in the process of transferring to Blackburn with Darwen.

The Fostering Information Evening in Quarter 2 was attended by 6 people whose interest was followed up after the event.

The Let's Foster website continues to be the main place for people to get their information and submit an enquiry. It will take 6 months for the new website to settle with Google's algorithms and start to move forward on the search pages. The Service should then start to see more traffic returning to the site. Work on information pages, news articles and events is ongoing.

The plan over the next 12 months is to put events on the Let's Foster website, You Can Foster website and FosterTalk website as well as on social media.

In Quarter 2 a number of adverts were placed to find placements for specific children. One advert aimed at finding foster carers for 3 siblings reached nearly 2000 people.

**Regional Campaign**

The regional 'You Can Foster' recruitment campaign has been live since September 2016 and has helped generate enquiries via the You Can Foster website.

Fostering Service Managers and the new Recruitment and Marketing Officer have been involved in the development of this campaign to ensure that Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council derives full benefit from it. The campaign is prioritising recruitment at a local level through the targeting of P.R, digital marketing and additional local activity.

**Foster Carer Retention**

Month	Resignations	Deregistrations
<i>July</i>	0	0
<i>August</i>	2 (family and friends)	0
<i>September</i>	1 (family and friends)	1

**Assessment**

Statutory guidance for fostering assessments is that they should be completed within 8 months, a timescale that is generally achieved. The quality of assessments remains good and is monitored by the Fostering Panel.

### **Foster Carer Training**

During this Quarter, a new 2 year foster carer training programme was launched. The launch of the new online booking system and training booklet was provided to all carers. Three sessions to explain the new programme were delivered on the 5th September with a total of 85 carers in attendance throughout the day.

Courses available to carers during Quarter 2 included Paediatric First Aid (2 day course) and a Paediatric First Aid update.

### **Fostering Panel**

Four Fostering Panels were held in Quarter 2 including an additional Panel to accommodate long term matchings.

July's Fostering Panel considered two long term matches, two 1st Annual Reviews for connected families and one mainstream assessment that was deferred from June as the applicants needed to complete additional safety work on their home. This work had been completed and they were approved at Panel.

August's Fostering Panel considered two long term matchings both of which were independent agency foster placements. The Panel also considered two reviews following allegations, three connected persons assessments and a mainstream 1st annual review.

September's Fostering Panel considered two connected persons assessments and a first review for a connected person. Two mainstream foster carer reviews following concerns were also presented. The Panel recommended continued approval of the first but did not recommend continued approval of the second. A review following an allegation was presented, as well as a mainstream assessment and the Panel felt able to recommend continued approval of both.

An extra permanence and matching panel was held at the end of September where three matching , and two mainstream and one independent agency placements were presented. Two young people attended their matching and this was a really positive experience for them.

Quality assurance reports are completed at the Fostering Panel by the panel advisor, chair and panel members and are then sent to the social workers and their managers. In the main the reports presented to the Fostering Panel have been of a good or outstanding standard. Where areas of service development are identified they are discussed at team meetings and taken forward by the service managers.

Evaluation questionnaires for applicants and carers attending the Fostering Panel are completed at the end of the Panel. All those completed have been positive and this has been fed back to the Panel.

### **Review Panel**

During Quarter 2, 24 foster carer reviews were presented to the Annual Review Panel and 12 sets of carers attended. A total of 8 evaluation forms were received which all indicated that the carers' attendance at the Panel was positive. One evaluation form suggested that it would be nice to be provided with coffee whilst waiting for the Panel, and this will be fed back to Panel members to look at how this can be approved for carers.

### **Complaints**

There were no complaints in Quarter 2.

### **Compliments**

There were no compliments received during Quarter 2.

### **Allegations**

During Quarter 2, there were 3 allegations. The first allegation was made by a foster carer's neighbour raising concerns in respect of the carer and ability to meet the needs of the child placed. This allegation was fully investigated and overseen by the LADO and it was deemed that the allegation was unfounded.

An allegation was made by a young person in relation to previous carers and their birth child. Section 47 enquiries were carried out resulting in a strategy meeting. The outcome of the allegation was unsubstantiated with a recommendation for the carers to return to main Panel for a full review.

The third allegation was made by a child's social worker following a placement move. During a statutory visit, a young person disclosed a number of concerns which resulted in a full investigation and LADO strategy meeting.

### **Specific Incidents and Restraints (including Bullying, Serious Illnesses and Accidents)**

During Quarter 2 there was one specific incident report about a sibling group absconding from placement. The foster carers reported this to EDT (Emergency Duty Team) and notified the police. The two young people were later returned home by the police. There were 2 minor incidents in relation to the same child biting another whilst at nursery.

There was one incident of bullying reported by a foster carer because the older sibling in placement had verbally threatened the younger one. A care planning meeting was held with a recommendation for a referral to the REVIVE with ongoing work being carried out with the children to explore the issues.

### **Missing From Home**

14 young people and 29 missing from home reports were made during Quarter 2. 12 reports involved one young person, a further 7 involved another young person and the remaining reports involved several different young people.

In all cases the correct missing from home procedures were followed and all young people returned to their placements safe and well. Procedures for young people who go missing include 'return home' interviews which are conducted by the Engage Service. This allows young people to talk to someone independent about why they have been missing and for the service to identify issues of concern.

### **Exemptions**

Four exemptions were approved in Quarter 2. One was made for a sibling group of four and noted at the July Fostering Panel. It remains in place. A further exemption was made in August for an emergency placement which continues although a move is planned. A further short break exemption was made in August to allow two siblings to be placed whilst their main foster carers were managing a bereavement and to support the placement. A further exemption was made in September to accommodate a baby and this continues.

All exemptions have been noted at the Fostering Panel and are monitored closely by the supervising social worker. The Fostering Support Worker provides additional support and ensures that the children's views are heard and taken into account.

### **Engagement with Foster Carers**

Blackburn with Darwen has a Foster Carer Association (FCA), which meets regularly and has an Elected Committee. Members of the Committee meet senior managers and the Executive Member on a quarterly basis. The Chair of the FCA sits on the Corporate Parenting Specialist Advisory Group. The FCA has its own website, which has been increasingly used to communicate messages and news.

At the request of foster carers, membership of the Fostering Network moved to Foster Talk that provides similar services to support foster carers. Foster carers also have access to independent support commissioned from the Fostering Network to provide support and advocacy services in the event of complaints or allegations.

A small group of foster carers are recruitment champions, who help drive recruitment forward and are involved with planning events, Skills to Foster preparation training, and manning recruitment stands and events.

The Fostering Service holds a foster carer forum every six months. The event offers carers the opportunity to present their views about a range of issues related to fostering and to be involved in the future development of the Service. The event takes place in October and will be reported on in Quarter 3.

### **Family and Friends Foster Care**

During Quarter 2 the Permanence Team was launched. Two full time social workers were recruited to the Team along with the three supervising social workers already in post. The SGO Social worker moved from the CIOC team to the Permanence Team. The work of this Team is to complete all family and friends assessments including viabilities, Regulation 24 placements and combined assessments with an outcome of either family and friends fostering or Special Guardianship. This is from the Public Law Outline (PLO) pre-proceedings process through to care proceedings.

The number of viability and combined assessments referred through to the Team has been unprecedented with 30 viabilities being referred within 24 hours. In a period of 8 weeks there were 98 referrals for either viability, Reg 24 or combined assessments. 7 of these pieces of work have been referred from the CIOC Team and 91 of these assessments have been referred from the AST/RAST teams. This volume of referrals has put the Fostering Service under great pressure during this Quarter. There are currently 28 family and friends foster carers which is a low number compared to the number of SGOs that are being assessed and issued.

A Permanence Panel is now in place that sits every 2 weeks and ratifies SGOs. This Panel also oversees placements that are waiting to be matched long term to avoid drift and delay in achieving permanence plans. In addition the Panel tracks adoption cases, children on Care Orders at home and Section 20 matters.

There have been 42 combined assessments (some that have moved on from viabilities) and 76 viability assessments completed during this time period. When considering viabilities, there have been 19 that have progressed to combined assessments and there remain 28 ongoing. It is worth noting that there have been 29 viability assessments with an outcome of no further action due to the applicants withdrawing or their assessments being negative. This remains an area of development due to the significant amount of work being carried out on assessments that are not then utilised. This development work will be considered through the PLO pre-proceedings process and through Family Group Conferences in an effort to reduce the amount of viability assessments that need not be undertaken. Due to the high number of referrals in a very short time, the Team has very quickly reached capacity, meaning that social workers from the mainstream Fostering Team were allocated assessment work in order for the Permanence Team to deal with the demand and to ensure that all assessments were allocated without delay. There have been 13 pieces of work completed by the mainstream team, 9 of which were combined assessments and 4 have been viability assessments. This

pressure is compromising the ability of the Service to complete the assessment and approval of much needed mainstream foster carers in a timely fashion as court-ordered assessments have to be prioritised.

During this Quarter, a team member has returned from long term sick leave but a team member who was on long term sick left. This post is currently being covered by an agency worker and out to advert.

### **Short Break Foster Care**

There are presently 14 short break carers, who have provided 31 short break placements. Short break carers provide support to parents, other placements and emergency placements. Carers are matched to children, who have a wide range of additional and complex needs. A support group is in place for short breaks carers and they met during Quarter 2.

A meeting was also held with short break carers, managers in the Fostering Service and the Adolescent Support Unit (ASU) to discuss working more innovatively together around emergency placements particularly mid-week when ASU is not resourced to open for overnight stays. A number of carers were interested in helping with this and work to start developing support systems is due to start.

### **Training / Staff**

All staff members have individual training and a development plan, which is linked to their annual appraisal and monitored during monthly supervision.

### **Placement Stability Table**

The Department uses a definition of placement stability based on 3 or more placements in a 12 month period that is calculated on a cumulative basis over the year. The average for England is measured against the figures for 2013/14 when it was 10.7%; the comparable authority percentage for the same year was 10.1%. In Quarter 2, performance was 1.4% better than performance in the same period 12 months ago.

	<b>April</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>June</b>	<b>July</b>	<b>Aug</b>	<b>Sept</b>
<b>LAC with 3 or more placements</b>	0	1	2	4	8	10
<b>Total number of LAC</b>	361	357	343	352	355	360
<b>% Stability of LAC placements 2018/19</b>	0%	0.3%	0.6%	1.1%	2.3%	2.8%
<b>% Stability of LAC placements 2017/18</b>	0%	0%	2.2%	2.4%	4.3%	4.2%

Disruption meetings are held in order to identify learning and inform future planning for any child whose placement has been disrupted. A number of managers across Children's Services have been trained to chair these meetings.

### **Commissioned Placements**

There was a significant decrease in the number of children in independent agency foster placements in Quarter 2. A number of placements ended and all new referrals were placed in house which accounts for this reduction. The number of agency residential placements is unchanged.

End of Quarter 1 2018/19	End of Quarter 2 2018/19
Independent Agency Residential Placements 28	Independent Agency Residential Placements 28
Independent Agency Fostering Placements 42	Independent Agency Fostering Placements 33

### **Budget**

Current placement pressures in-house and across the independent fostering agency landscape continue to place the commissioning budget under pressure. The Case Tracking and Commissioning Panel monitors placements and ensures that there are robust plans for those that can be brought back to in-house provision without delay. The currently forecasted overspend on the commissioned placements budget is being offset to a degree by a corresponding underspend on the foster care payments budget. The financial position across both of these areas is closely monitored throughout the year.

### **Service Priorities for 2018/19**

1. The Service has set a target of recruiting 15 new sets of foster carers in 2018/19. The Service will also undertake some targeted recruitment for individual children in need of long term placements. The Service will in addition undertake some innovative recruitment including some specialist carers to work alongside residential units and some short breaks carers to work alongside ASU in offering emergency placements.

**Quarter 2 Update – There were two approvals in Quarter 2 bringing the total number of mainstream approvals to 7 in the first half of the year. The numbers in assessment currently indicate that the Service is on track to meet the target number of 15 though the pressure on the Service to prioritise court ordered family and friends assessments is a concern as it may cause some delay in the completion of mainstream assessments.**

2. A team development day will be held in July 2018 once the 2 new social workers for viability assessments are in post.

**Quarter 2 Update – The team development day has been delayed due to the summer holidays and the pressure of work in Family and Friends. It will now take place in November.**

3. The Fostering Service will restructure to take account of increased demand from family and friends, SGO and viability assessments.

**Quarter 2 Update – The Service has restructured and the two additional social workers are in place. The acting manager has yet to be confirmed in post.**

4. The Fostering Support Worker will work more closely with the REVIVE Service in the coming year in order to develop a more cohesive approach to supporting children, young people and foster carers, and to achieve improvements in placement stability rates. Fostering Support will continue to work closely with the Adolescent Support Unit so that young people can access short breaks and a wide range of activities. Fostering Support will continue to develop the Saturday Club for younger children in foster care.

**Quarter 2 Update – The REVIVE Service continues to provide therapeutic and other support and consultations to carers and children in foster care as one of its main priorities.**

5. The Service will develop a communication and engagement strategy using the FCA website as a focal point for communication. A focus group will be developed including foster carers to consider the potential for innovation as outlined above.  
**Quarter 2 Update – Carers have been consulted about communication and discussions have been held with the Team. It is felt that the FCA website is not suitable as a tool to meet the communication needs of the Service. It is hoped that the Let's Foster website can instead be developed with a foster carer log in area. This is under consideration at present.**
6. Foster carer training will continue to develop but with less input from the Workforce Development Team. The Service will focus on the development of online training.  
**Quarter 2 Update – work to develop online training is ongoing. The team manager responsible for foster carer training is exploring numerous ways of improving access and the quality of foster carer training.**
7. The management team will continue to monitor compliance with Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards and will increase the number of case file audits completed each month to support this.  
**Quarter 2 Update – The monitoring of compliance is ongoing and is central to the team manager role. The Service has not been able to record all areas of compliance on Protocol until very recently and new compliance forms and staff training have been provided in recent weeks to ensure that all areas are properly recorded on the system.**
8. The Fostering Service will review the foster carer payment package by June 2018 and submit a report for consideration by the Senior Leadership Team. The review will consider whether the current level of payments is able to compete with that offered by neighbouring authorities and independent agencies based in the locality. The foster carer lease car scheme will form part of this review.  
**Quarter 2 Update – Proposals about the future of the car lease scheme are under consideration. Research work to compare foster carer payments with the Service's main competitors has been undertaken and is also being considered.**
9. Panel development – The independent Panel Chair contract will go out to tender. This will take account of the need for the Panel to sit more frequently (every 3 weeks instead of monthly). The membership list will be developed to address difficulties in sustaining the pool of independent and social work members. A Panel Member training day will be held with a focus on family and friends fostering.  
**Quarter 2 Update – The Panel Chair contract has been awarded. It takes account of the need for additional Panels and provides Chairs for the main and annual review Panels. Maintaining a healthy central list which can meet the demand for additional Panels is a challenge but the list is operating effectively at present.**

**Alyson Hanson**  
**Service Leader, Placement Services**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> October 2018**