



EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

REPORT OF: Executive Member for Children's Services, Young People & Education

LEAD OFFICERS: Director of Children's Services

DATE: 14th March 2019

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED: Children's Services, Young People & Education

WARD/S AFFECTED: All

KEY DECISION: YES NO

SUBJECT: Fostering Service Quarter 3 Report 1st October to 31st December 2018

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides information on the management and performance of the Local Authority's Fostering Service.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

Notes the Quarterly Report which is available on the Council's website.

3. BACKGROUND

The Fostering Service Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services requires that the Council Executive:

- a) Receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the Fostering Service every 3 months;
- b) 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;
- c) Satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with the conditions of registration.

The report has been written to address the issues identified above. It will be taken into account by OFSTED in inspecting the service.

The report is for the third quarter of 2018 – 19, covering the period from 1st October to 31st December 2018 and provides an overview of the service.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

1. There was a significant increase in the number of children in care (CioC) in Quarter 3. It rose by 28 children and 21 of these were referred to the fostering service. The capacity of the fostering service to provide placements for these children was already under great pressure at the end of Quarter 2 and the availability of placements in Quarter 3 is currently very low. Independent fostering agencies are also under pressure as the number of CioC has increased both regionally and nationally so keeping children in a fostering rather than residential environment has been a challenge. Despite the challenge the proportion of looked after children in foster placements increased by 5 % in Quarter 3 and the proportion in in-house placements increased by 2.4%. The service continues to take care to match children with placements appropriately to avoid early disruption. In Quarter 3 the pressure to identify suitable placements for sibling groups and older children has continued and there has also been a significant demand for baby placements, parent and child placements and for short breaks.
2. Placement pressures have resulted in an increase in the use of commissioned foster placements. The number of independent fostering agency placements increased from 33 in Quarter 2 to 52 in Quarter 3 However, the use of agency residential placements fell slightly.
3. The demand for Regulation 24, Viability and Combined assessments of family friends was high in Quarter 3 with 69 referrals in total. This has created a pressure for the service as the Permanence Team has limited capacity to manage this number of assessments. The number of approved family and friends carers has however remained constant as the majority of assessments have led to Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs).
4. The overall number of foster carers managed by the fostering service fell by 2 in Quarter 3. This is because there were 9 resignations, six of these by family and friends foster carers who progressed to SGOs for the children in their care. Recruitment activities generated good interest and at the end of the Quarter, there were 7 prospective households in assessment. Unfortunately, 4 households withdrew from assessment in Quarter 3 due to changes in personal circumstances which means that the target of 15 new households for the year will not be met.
5. The feedback from children and young people when contributing to foster carer reviews is generally positive. However, since the Participation Officer left Blackburn with Darwen in August, the VOICE Group has not met which has limited the level of feedback from children and young people in care. There has not been sufficient staffing capacity to maintain the VOICE in recent months but the group will be re-launched in February with two care leavers helping to keep it going. It will be launched at the 'Make a Noise' event planned for February half-term.
6. Placement stability dipped by 0.9% compared to the same Quarter last year, which means that slightly more children in care have had 3 or more placements since they entered care. The Revive Service, Children in our Care Service and Fostering Service work well together to minimise the number of placement disruptions going forward.
7. Participation work has been limited in Quarter 3 following the departure of the Participation Officer. The VOICE group has not met for some time and a number of Investing in Children awards, including that of the Fostering Service are due to be reviewed. There has been no spare capacity to drive this work forward but the VOICE group is to be re-established in Quarter 4 co-led by two care leavers. A consultation event for children in our care 'Make a Noise' will take place in February to re-launch the participation work and recruit new members to the VOICE.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

No policy implications identified

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The fostering budgets are closely monitored as part of the regular portfolio budget review. The financial implications of the increased pressures outlined above lie within the commissioned placements budget.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

This report is required to meet statutory requirements as set out in the 'National Minimum Standards for Fostering.'

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

No resource implications have been identified.

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

None.

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: 1.0

CONTACT OFFICER: Alyson Hanson - Service Leader, Placement Services

DATE:	30 th January 2019
BACKGROUND PAPER:	Fostering Service Quarterly Report 1 st October to 31 st December 2018 - Quarter 3