

Fostering Service Quarter 3 Report

1st October to 31st December 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 peaking in Quarter 3 at 388.

	31st March 2018	30th June 2018	30th Sept 2018	31st Dec 2018
Number of Children in our Care	377	343	360	388
Number of CioC in Foster Care	215 (57%)	209 (61%)	225 (62.5%)	262(67.5%)
Number of children in in-house foster care placements	118 (31%)	120 (35%)	139 (38.6%)	158(41%)
Number of children in family and friends foster care	48 (13%)	45 (13%)	45 (12.5%)	45 (11%)
Number of children in independent fostering agency placements	49 (13%)	44 (13%)	41 (11.4%)	59(15%)

The availability of foster placements both in-house and through independent agencies remains challenging, particularly for older children and sibling groups. However, the Service managed to increase the proportion of children placed in foster care in Quarter 3 by a further 5% from Quarter 2 and increase the percentage of children placed in house by 2.4%. There has been a significant increase in the percentage of children placed with independent fostering agencies as the demand for placements in December exceeded in-house availability. Currently, the demand for baby placements and siblings, including siblings in the younger age groups, has become challenging.

In-House and Agency Placements

Gender breakdown

	All children in foster care	In-house	Family and Friends	Independent Fostering Agency
Male	149	94	18	37
Female	113	64	27	22

	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
Oct	31	4	15	9	7	19	6	0	5	1
Nov	13	3	6	4	3	11	0	0	2	0
Dec	26	7	18	3	5	7	13	0	5	1
Q3 total	69	14	38	16	15	37	19	0	12	2

Age break down

Age	All children in foster care	In-house	Family and Friends	Independent Fostering Agency
0 to 2	54	33	10	11
3 to 6 years	33	16	8	9
7 to 10 years	54	30	11	13
11 to 15 years	94	62	12	20
16 and 17 years	27	17	4	6
Total	262	158	45	59

New Referrals in Quarter 3

There was a significant rise in the number of referrals to the Fostering Service from 47 in Quarter 2 to 69 in Quarter 3. Whilst the referrals were spread across the age range, there was a notable increase in the number of children aged 0 to 5 years referred, from 18 in Quarter 2 to 38 in Quarter 3. Younger children are somewhat easier to place but given that the Service placed 28 children (100% of those referred) in-house in the previous Quarter, the Service has almost reached total saturation point. However, the Service managed to place 37 children in-house in Quarter 3, 54% of the number referred in to the Service and 65% of the number that came into care.

In December, it became very difficult to place in-house meaning that 13 children needed to be placed with independent fostering agencies. During the same period 12 months ago, the number of referrals to the Service was lower (47) and the largest group of children referred were in the 12 years+ age group (22).

Matching and Ethnicity

During Quarter 3, a sibling group of three children were placed with non-culturally matched carers with the agreement of the social worker who wanted to keep the children local and with in-house foster carers. We placed one other child non-culturally because of an absence of Thai foster carers.

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 3:

Some comments from children and young people include:

‘Amazing, they take good care of me’.

‘Yeah I feel supported; they do everything my mum should have done’.

‘Not seeing enough of my mum makes me sad’.

‘I don’t like not being allowed to be on my TV all day’.

'Y supports me always and R helps me with my homework'.

'It's nice living with B because I get to have sweets, watch movies, eat popcorn and buy toys'.

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:

One social worker passed on comments from a birth parent:

'I feel lucky that the children have been placed with Mr and Mrs D who have done a good job. I wouldn't have been able to bring them up as they have. They have good manners, are polite and happy children.'

'B has demonstrated a great commitment to D by agreeing to train in DDP to help encourage his social development and ability to trust that adults can take care of him, thus allowing him to relinquish his need for control'.

'C speaks highly of the care afforded to her by J and continues to visit her twice a week even though she is now settled in her own accommodation.'

Birth Children said:

'I think the last year has gone alright because we now have foster babies'.

'The last year has been decent'.

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 13 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 positive. The REVIVE Service has delivered training to foster carers on self-harm and on attachments.

23 new referrals were made to the REVIVE Service in Quarter 3. 4 were made by the Children in our Care Team and 1 from the Fostering Team. 8 of the referrals were for children subject to either a full or interim care order with the remainder being made by the Assessment and Safeguarding Teams. Each referral is provided with a full consultation meeting. 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.

Blackburn Rovers kindly donated 100 tickets for their match on 3rd November 2018, and many children in foster care and their carers benefitted from this kind gesture. On 7th November, the Celebration of Achievement for CIOC was held at Ewood Park where over 60 children in our care and care leavers received their awards from special guest Jake Quickenden.

Tuition sessions held at the Kip McGrath Centre started in October 2018 for Year 11 children in our care; however, there has been very poor take up of the sessions with only 2 attending on a regular basis.

Engagement with Children & Young People and the VOICE Group

Unfortunately the VOICE Group has not met since October 2018 due to the departure of the Participation Officer from Children's Services. There has been very little capacity across the relevant services to lead on this area of work but efforts are now being made to reinstate the group and hold regular meetings once again. The recruitment process to replace the Participation Officer (part time post) is under way and it is anticipated that the successful applicant will oversee the Voice going forward.

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

The Sons and Daughters Group were taken to the pantomime in December and fed back that they thoroughly enjoyed it. A large number, 90 children and 15 babies also attended the FCA Christmas Party and enjoyed an excellent children's entertainer who kept them engaged all afternoon. Examples of children's voices being heard included birth children being consulted about matching considerations for their family. They demonstrated great maturity and insight when they indicated that children under 5 years would fit best with their family.

Transitions

Children and young people in foster care are supported to make a positive transition to adult life and 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 years 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 has recently been reassessed for the Investing in Children award, and has got confirmation that the service is 'Good'. The Service is also working hard to encourage and support care leavers into apprenticeships. There are currently several young people on apprenticeships across the workforce.

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.

The Service continues to run the Leaving Care Football Team and has an older young person supporting this along with a PA. A couple of young people who are taking part are in foster care and this is now becoming a younger team which 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 twenty 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

The Fostering Service is now structured into 3 teams including a relatively new Permanence Team, which was launched on 1st July 2018. 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 has continued to be greater than anticipated due to the continued increase in the number of children in care proceedings. This demand has caused some pressure in the Service as family and friends work has to be prioritised to meet court timescales. In Quarter 3, mainstream workers have been allocated family and friends work in addition to their usual workload and allocating new work is now very challenging as everyone is working at full capacity and beyond. Whilst the Service is working hard to limit delays to mainstream assessments, this is becoming more and more difficult to achieve. 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

	Total number of foster carers	Mainstream	Short breaks carers	Family and Friends carers
Quarter 1	123	82	14	27
Quarter 2	123	81	14	28
Quarter 3	121	81	12	28

Foster Carer Recruitment

2018/19	Enquires	ROI	Approval	Conversion
Q1	35	10	5	29%
Q2	47	10	2	21%
Q3	36	10	2	28%
Total	118	30	9	26%

Oct-18	14	4	1	29%
Nov-18	10	2	1	20%
Dec-18	12	4	0	33%

ROI = Registration of Interest

There were 36 enquiries and 10 ROIs during Quarter 3 including 4 ROIs over the Christmas period which is unusual. The number of enquiries coming through with no real spare rooms is a concern and messages to reflect this will be reinforced over social media over the next couple of weeks. 19 enquiries came through the Let's Foster website, 3 from events, and 7 from You Can Foster.

2 households approved in Quarter 3, both of which had placements lined up ahead of approval, are now making good progress.

The foster carers portal of the website is now finished and due to go live. The portal will improve communication between the Service and foster carers and will also provide a message board so that they can communicate with each other. Staff and managers will create profiles ahead of inviting foster

carers to join. A FCA meeting and the next Fostering Forum will be used to launch the portal and answer questions.

Fostering Information events are held monthly and although November was very quiet, a good number attended in October and December.

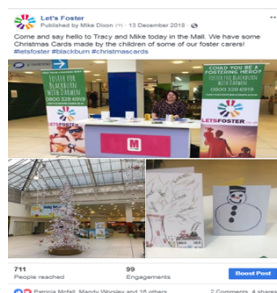
The Service had a stand in the Mall in December following the children’s Christmas card competition. Cards were sold on the stand, via Facebook and to foster carers and it was positive to recognise the winners by sending them thank you cards with their designs from the team.

Social media saw 386 unique users and 11 messages received over the Quarter. Most of these were in response to baby posts and spare rooms after one of the better performing posts reached 5642 people, had 420 engagements and 46 shares.

Google ads sent 576 people to the website and saw 13.1K impressions. This is slightly better performance on the previous Quarter of 564 clicks to the website.

The Let’s Foster website is performing well; 1793 page views in the Quarter and 689 new users. Mobile is still the main device category; 73% of our users access the site via mobile phones.

December saw a lot of Facebook and Instagram activity from Elf on the Shelf; these were popular and went out daily until Christmas Eve. Team photos were posted for Children in Need and Christmas Jumper day and generated some interest.



Unfortunately, 4 households in assessment withdrew over the Christmas period; 1 due to family commitments, 2 due to lack of bedroom space and a further household due to family circumstances. There are 7 households currently in assessment.

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 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	De-registrations
October	0	0
November	2 (family and friends) 1 mainstream	0

<i>December</i>	4 (family and friends) 2 (short breaks)	0
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Reasons for resignations include children returning home, carers retirement, illness, and making of Special Guardianship Orders.

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

4 courses additional to the online training catalogue were offered to all approved foster carers.

Name of course:	Course date:	Total number of attendees:
Essential of Fostering conference	11.10.2018	25
REVIVE conference	22.11.2018	23
Foster carer support group- Finance and pocket money guidance	12.12.2018	3
Paediatric first aid 3 day training course	23.10.2018	27

The Essential of Fostering conference is the new revised one day mandatory training conference, which enables foster carers to complete all of the mandatory training requirements to comply with Fostering Regulations. This training day remains valid for 3 years and covers; Equality & Diversity, Delegation of Authority, Preventing and Supporting Allegations, Staying Put, Moving to Independence and Voice and Rights of the child. The REVIVE conference focussed on providing a brief summary of Attachment Theory, Developmental Trauma, Fundamental of therapeutic parenting and practical strategies to meet the child's needs within a foster care placement.

Fostering Panel

October's Fostering Panel approved one mainstream assessment for two foster carers transferring from Lancashire and one Family and Friends assessment. A review of foster carers following an allegation was presented where the recommendation was to continue their approval, though Panel requested this return to the following month as further information had come to light just prior to the Fostering Panel and further enquires were therefore required.

Four exemptions were presented to the Panel to allow carers' households to be exempt from regulations for more than three children to be placed with foster carers. No more than four children were placed in any of the exempted households, one being a sibling group of four.

November's Fostering Panel approved a mainstream assessment for a couple providing two placements. A further re-assessment of a mainstream carer was approved for a single carer providing a long term placement. A Family and Friends assessment was also approved. A child was matched long term with their foster carer. The young person attended Panel and this was a really positive experience for all concerned.

In December, 3 carers were presented to the Panel for their 1st annual review. A connected person's assessment for a family and friends carer was not recommended for approval following the concerns outlined in the assessment and verbal presentation at the Panel. The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) agreed with the recommendation of Panel. A Regulation 24 assessment was approved at the Fostering Panel for a Family and Friends placement. Two siblings were also matched with their foster carer long term, affording the children permanence. The children attended Panel with the foster carer and gave really good verbal responses to the Panel.

Additional Panel business also included a review of concerns and notifications of a number of Regulation 24 assessments.

The Fostering Panel is now reviewing questionnaires completed by all who attend Fostering Panel so there is more overall scrutiny of views and experiences of attending the Panel. These have all been very positive.

During Quarter 3, two care leavers joined the Panel and will be attending bi monthly, which will provide two further independent members who have had fostering experiences. An additional legal representative is also due to join the Panel. The Independent Panel Vice Chair resigned in November and a new Vice Chair has been recruited and is due to start her induction and training.

Annual Review Panel

During Quarter 3, 19 foster carer reviews were presented to the Annual Review Panel and a total of 12 fostering households attended. 2 evaluation forms were received which were positive.

Complaints

There were no complaints in Quarter 3.

Compliments

During Quarter 3, a compliment was received from a short break foster carer about their Supervising Social Worker regarding the support they have received whilst she had been their allocated worker. The carers made the decision to retire so provided the worker with a small gift and thankyou card.

Allegations

Two allegations were received in Quarter 3. The first was made by a young person who alleged that the carer had smacked her. The allegation was fully investigated and overseen by the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) but the young person did not make the same disclosure to her social worker. Further visits were carried out by the child's Social Worker and the Supervising Social Worker for the carers. It was agreed that no further action was to be taken.

An allegation was made when a young person reported that their foster carer had forcibly pushed him during an altercation, which caused him to fall and sustain bruises to his back due to falling against a door. A LADO meeting was convened and the allegation was substantiated. However, a decision was made, based on the circumstances of the incident, to allow the children in placement to remain with the carers. The case is to be presented at the main Panel. Support from REVIVE is in place and relevant training will be provided to the carers.

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

Specific incidents and restraints:

During Quarter 3, 4 specific incident reports were received by the Service. The first followed police attendance at a carer's address to highlight concerns about a young person's behaviour and to provide additional support to the foster carers. This resulted in the Police referring the young person to a diversion panel in relation to his anti-social behaviour.

A further incident related to a young person not attending school and then being reluctant to return to her placement. With additional support, she later returned.

The third incident involved a sibling group caught shoplifting in a local supermarket. Sanctions were put in place to manage these behaviours and a professionals meeting was arranged to assist with placement stability.

The final incident reported was following a police letter sent to the foster carers notifying them of a recent assault involving the young person in placement. The Log of the incident was provided with no further follow up.

Serious illnesses and accidents:

During Quarter 3, two accidents were reported as serious incidents. The first accident involved a young person being involved in a fight at school and there was concern that the young person had suffered a broken nose. The foster carers attended A&E to seek further treatment where it was established that the young person had not broken their nose.

A further minor incident was reported when a young person displayed an angry outburst; in his fit of temper, he hit his hand. The foster carers sought medical advice from their G.P. but no treatment was required.

No bullying incidents were reported in Quarter 3.

Missing From Home

4 young people (5 incidences of missing from home) were reported during Quarter 3 of which 3 incidences involve the same young person; the remaining episodes involved a further 2 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

During Quarter 3, there were 6 exemptions in place of which 3 have continued into Quarter 4. They are closely monitored with extra visits by the Supervising Social Worker or Child Support Officer.

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 the DCS, 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 and there was an event in October that was very well attended.

Family and Friends Foster Care

There are currently 28 family and friends foster carers. There have been three approvals this Quarter and three resignations, two of which were due to Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) being made. The number of family and friends fostering households remains stable due to the number of combined assessments ending with a recommendation for a SGO rather than fostering.

There have been 69 new referrals for viabilities, Combined and Regulation 24 assessments in this Quarter. Whilst this is a small reduction on the previous Quarter, the amount of work being referred to the Permanence Team is a source of pressure for the Service and the team.

Combined / SGO assessments carried over from Q2	31
Viability assessments carried over from Q2	23
New referrals Q3 Combined / SGO assessments	17
New referrals viability assessments	63
Total number of assessments	134

During Quarter 3, one full time member of the team began a period of long term sickness and another full time member of the team handed in her notice to leave employment and cannot be allocated new work that she will be unable to complete. The remaining two full time team members and the part time team member have quickly reached capacity.

Short Break Foster Care

There are currently 12 approved short break carers, some of whom provide short term / long-term placements alongside providing short break support.

Short break placements help to provide stability for children and sustain placements for young people, who have a variety of additional needs. They also provide emergency short breaks, support for mainstream placements, emergency short term placements for unaccompanied asylum seekers and regular planned short breaks.

There is a demand for more short breaks carers. Recruitment is ongoing and during information events, the need for short break carers continues to be highlighted. Starting with short breaks is a good way of beginning the journey into fostering for some applicants.

Specialist training continues to be provided to short break carers. It has been a very busy period, during this Quarter and this influx of short breaks has been a growing concern since July 2018.

During this Quarter period, a total of 10 new short break placements were made in addition to the long standing short break placements already in situ.

Training / Staff

All staff members have individual training and a development plan, which is linked to their annual appraisal and monitored during monthly supervision. In Quarter 3, all staff in fostering attended two days of assessment training delivered by Coram BAAF. Staff feedback was very positive. Staff particularly valued the manuals provided which serve as good reference material and reminders of what they learned.

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 3, performance dipped in comparison with performance in 2017/18 by 0.9%

	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
LAC with 3 or more placements	0	1	2	4	8	13	22	26	28
Total number of LAC	361	357	343	352	355	360	370	378	388
% Stability of LAC placements 2018/19	0%	0.3%	0.6%	1.1%	2.3%	3.6%	5.9%	6.9%	7.2%
% Stability of LAC placements 2017/18	0%	0%	2.2%	2.4%	4.3%	4.2%	5.6%	6.6%	6.3%

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

In Quarter 3, the number of independent fostering agency placements increased significantly due to the lack of availability of in-house foster carers. Identifying foster placements for sibling groups has been a particular problem that has led to this increase as the 52 children in IFA placements at the end of December included a concurrent baby placement, a parent and child placement, a sibling group of 4 placement, 4 sibling groups of 3 and 5 sibling groups of 2.

The number of agency residential placements reduced and included one secure unit placement and one family unit placement. It also includes two placements for two 16/17 year olds placed on the North West post-16 framework.

End of Quarter 1 2018/19	End of Quarter 2 2018/19	End of Quarter 3 2018/19
Independent Agency Residential Placements 28	Independent Agency Residential Placements 28	Independent Agency Residential Placements 25
Independent Agency Fostering Placements 42	Independent Agency Fostering Placements 33	Independent Agency Fostering Placements 52

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.

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 3 Update – Unfortunately 4 sets of prospective carers withdrew from assessment in Quarter 3 for various personal reasons. Although there is a good number in assessment currently, it will only be possible to get one more household through Fostering Panel in this financial year bringing the total to 10 households, missing the target by a significant margin.

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

Quarter 3 Update – A team development day is planned for Quarter 4.

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

Quarter 3 Update – The Service has restructured and the two additional social workers are in place. The acting manager has yet to be confirmed in post. The number of referrals for family and friends assessments has exceeded expectations and is placing this team under great pressure. The mainstream teams are helping out as much as capacity will allow.

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 3 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 3 Update – Work to develop the Let's Foster website with a foster carers' portal is complete and ready for testing. It will be launched in Quarter 4.

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 3 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 3 Update – The monitoring of compliance is ongoing and is central to the Team Manager role. Protocol has been updated to reflect the needs of the Service and all aspects of fostering can now be recorded on the database which will help the completion of the dataset in coming months.

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 3 Update – A decision was made in Quarter 3 to end the lease car scheme as it is no longer affordable given organisational pressures. Foster carers have been informed and arrangements have been made to meet with them individually to consider their needs going forward. Foster carer payments are reviewed at the end of each financial year for the year ahead and will be considered in March 2019.

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 3 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. The Vice Chair recently resigned and her replacement has been identified. Maintaining a healthy central list which can meet the demand for additional Panels is a challenge but the list is operating effectively at present.

10. An additional priority has been agreed in this quarter to re-establish the participation work undertaken by the Fostering Team and other services . This will involve starting up the VOICE group once again. The work will start with a launch event in February (make a Noise) to consult with children in our care and will be used to publicise the VOICE and attract young people to join the group. A new participation Officer is to be recruited in Quarter 4.

**Alyson Hanson
Service Leader, Placement Services
25th January 2019**