

Fostering Quarter 2 Report

1st July to 30th September 2019

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;
- Children and young people in foster care achieve the best possible outcomes.

Children in our Care in Foster Care

Quarter 2 saw a slight decrease in the number of children in our care, but an increase in the number of children and young people in independent fostering agency placements. It is positive to see that there has been a consistent increase in the number of children placed with family and friends carers. The number of children placed in our own in-house foster placements remained consistent from the previous Quarter 1.

Comparison of Figures

	Q4 31st March 2019	Q1 June 2019	Q2 Sept 2019
Number of Children in our Care	407	408	403
Number of CioC in Foster Care	262 (64%)	264 (64.7%)	269 (66.7%)
Number of children in in- house foster care placements	151 (37%)	148 (36%)	143 (35.4%)
Number of children in family and friends foster care	43 (10%)	50 (12%)	58 (14.3%)
Number of children in independent fostering agency placements	68 (16%)	66 (16.2%)	68 (16.8%)

Quarter 2 continued to reflect that the highest group of children and young people in foster care are in the 11-15 year age group, with males remaining the largest gender group of children in foster care. There are 53% of children in foster carer who are male, with only 7 children with disabilities being placed in foster care. Children with disabilities continue to have more likelihood of permanence plans in long-term residential provision, as opposed to in-house or agency foster placements. Targeted recruitment and family finding for children with disabilities has taken place this Quarter, but has still maintained the outcome of residential placements for those with more significant disabilities or health needs.

The 11-15 year age group continued in this Quarter to make up the highest percentage (33%) of young people placed in agency foster placements. The 0-2 year age group also remained high in this Quarter for children placed in foster placements; the majority of this age group were placed in-

house. The figure for the ethnicity of children and young people in our care remains largely static and consistently higher for those in the white, British group at 80%.

Placement Stability

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%. Since August 2017, placement stability has been deteriorating. This is not an issue specific to the Fostering Service but reflects instability for all types of placements and is an issue for Local Authorities overall. The table below shows that placement stability has been steadily decreasing over the past three years. Disruption meetings are held for any long term matched foster placement that breaks down, and learning taken from the findings. An audit of placement stability showed that babies removed at birth or who were removed due to non-accidental injury, often have at least three placements until they secure their permanent placement. This is largely due to the emergency nature of the first placement, and recommendations from the Judiciary to request parent and child assessment placements in care proceedings prior to securing a permanent placement of adoption or Special Guardianship.

Teenagers are another high percentage group who have three or more placements, consistently due to behavioural needs and challenges for foster carers to manage in the longer term. Changes in educational placement also impact significantly upon placement stability. It can be challenging for the young person to emotionally invest in further foster placements when the first has disrupted. This is when the Service refers to REVIVE where consultations and assessments take place to support this group of young people and their carers.

Table of Performance Figures:

Performance Over time	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	To Date
CIOC per 10,000	96.00	98.00	105.28	104.25

Matching and Ethnicity

There have been two non-culturally matched placements in this Quarter, both of which have been successful and the Service has supported the foster carers where needed at an increased level. Two Nigerian, female siblings were placed with white, British foster carers and this was a very positive placement for a short period until they returned home to their parents.

There has also been a white, British female placed with Asian foster carers and again, this has been positive with support provided from the Service around her cultural needs.

Engagement with Children & Young People and the VOICE Group

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

Parenting Board also included a care leaver who was part of discussions about service delivery and new proposals. During the school summer holiday period, 15 young people trained with skills to assist with interviewing, to ensure that they are actively involved in the recruitment and selection of key personnel working with young people. The Participation Officer held an event to re-launch the VOICE group in Quarter 2, and the group will commence in January 2020.

The views of children and young people are gathered via:

- Participation in the recruitment of staff/interview process
- Support Groups for Children/Events
- Foster Carer Annual Review Feedback
- Feedback from Social Workers/Supervising Social Workers
- The Investors in Children process
- Comments fed back to the Fostering Support Officer
- Looked after Child Review meetings and consultation

Feedback from Children in Foster Care:

The following comments have been made by children and young people in foster care, over Quarter 2, and also following a successful residential trip:

“We loved going on the barge, it was a lot of fun”

“We go on lots of walks in the mud with my foster carers, which is funny!”

“I like to show my social worker my bedroom when she comes to visit”

“I would really like to see my own mum more often, this makes me sad”

Birth Children told us:

“Me and X have the same hobbies, but sometimes he can be really hard work at home”

“She is just like my sister”

“He gets to do more activities than I do, sometimes that isn’t fair”

An Independent Reviewing Officer told us “the foster carers talk so positively about the child in their care, it is really lovely to see and how they promote positive outcomes”

Promoting Children’s Health, Emotional Development, Education and Leisure:

Foster families are provided with pre and post-approval preparation 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 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 has enabled the appointment of a Specialist Nurse to work with 'hard to reach' Looked After Children and care leavers.

There are currently 7 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 in placement and they are able to access support from the Children with Disabilities Team with aids and adaptations, Disability Links registration and information and advice where needed.

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. There were 29 referrals made to the REVIVE Service in Quarter 2, with 15 being Looked After Children. The highest age range for referrals to REVIVE were in the 6-10 year and 11-15 year groups, which is typical when considering placement instability.

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 enhance educational achievements. The Virtual Head quality assures all Personal Education Plans (PEPs).

The Education Manager, 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 around 'Promoting Educational Achievement for Children in Our Care'.

Letterbox Club is available for all children in our care from Reception to Year 6 to encourage reading at home. Books and games are sent out on a monthly basis which are age appropriate. Feedback has been very encouraging from the children who have stated that they enjoy receiving their parcels and carers have stated that they are encouraging their children to read.

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 Service also 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'. The Leaving Care Service attends Reviews to discuss Staying Put with foster carers for young people aged 17 years.

The Leaving Care Service has the Investing in Children Award, and the Service was rated as 'Good' by Ofsted from the last 2017 inspection. The Service is also working hard to encourage and support care leavers into apprenticeships, of which there were three young people this Quarter. The Leaving Care Service has achieved Staying Put placements this Quarter, and also continues to offer supported lodgings and supported accommodation which increases choice for young people leaving foster care and residential placements in favour of semi-independence. The Nightsafe at St Silas project will be completed in Quarter 3 and Local Authority referrals will be managed by the Leaving Care Team. Participation levels continue to be good with young people being involved in interviewing and various training programmes.

The Leaving Care Service has eight advisors. Three advisors are working with the 16 to 18 year old age group resolving issues with accommodation, education, training and employment and Staying Put. Five advisors are providing advice and guidance to the 21 to 25 year old 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.

Children and young people with disabilities who are in our care are also referred at 17 years of age to Adult Social Care for an assessment of need prior to turning 18 years, and there is a period of twelve months for planning to be undertaken around post 18 years provision.

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 structured into three teams, including the Permanence Team, which launched on 1st July 2018. The Team completes all assessments of family members/connected persons from Child Protection to Public Law Outline pre-proceedings, and Care Proceedings, as highlighted in the Ofsted Action Plan. There are four full time Social Workers and one working four

days per week. The Special Guardianship Social Worker is part time and continues to experience capacity issues due to the increasing number of Special Guardianship applications. One Agency Social Worker has secured a full time, 12 month contact to remain within the Team to assist with the capacity of assessments.

There are currently 39 family and friends foster carers approved, with 3 approvals during this Quarter. There has been one resignation due to achieving permanence through a Special Guardianship Order. There remains a vast amount of assessments being completed, with 119 assessments in Quarter 2, which is an increase of 6 from last Quarter.

There are two mainstream Fostering Teams in the Service, who focus upon family finding, assessment and supervision of Foster Carers, alongside recruitment. There are 93 mainstream foster carers approved to provide placements for children in our care and 12 for short breaks.

Three members of the Team have reduced their hours permanently which has resulted in a full time position being recruited to and the successful candidate will commence in post in Quarter 3 due to the period of notice in her current post. One supervising social worker has returned from maternity leave, and there are two agency social workers in post until the end of January 2020. During this Quarter, the Journey to Foster training has been delivered by the Service as preparation training for potential foster carers.

Fostering Support Officer Roles:

There are two Fostering Support Officers undertaking very different roles.

One Fostering Support Worker remains located within the REVIVE Service to enable 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 develop the Saturday Club for younger children in foster care. The venue of this Club moved to Earcroft Children’s Centre last Quarter and has been a popular choice.

Another Fostering Support Officer provides direct practical and emotional support to our Family and Friends Foster Carers, while also supporting our Fostering Panel process. The Fostering Support role is invaluable to the Service and is hugely beneficial for those foster carers who have complex placements and require an enhanced level of fostering support.

Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention

The table of figures below shows a comparison of Quarter 2 over the last 3 years in terms of approval and conversion.

2017/18	Enquires	ROI	Approval	Conversion
Q2	61	6	1	10%

2018/19	Enquires	ROI	Approval	Conversion
Q2	47	10	2	21%

2019/20	Enquires	ROI	Approval	Conversion
Q2	42	6	2	14%

This Quarter has seen a lower than average number of enquiries, however this period is typically a quieter time than other months due to the summer holiday period in July and August. Out of the five Local Authorities that are supported by the ‘front door’ Service, we are currently sitting in second place when it comes to enquiries per 10,000 for Quarter 2. Enquiries and registration of interest often do not result in approvals due to examples such as housing and bedroom space, personal family circumstances, and employment commitments.

Enquiries	Tameside	Liverpool	Bolton	Rochdale	BWD
Total	2.28	3.61	3.64	6.85	3.99

There has been a focus this Quarter upon recruitment, new technology and different approaches alongside regular events such as weekly Costa Coffee drop in sessions. The photograph on the front page of this report shows two of the Service’s skilled and experienced foster carers who are supporting our recruitment events. The focus is to have foster carers fronting drop in sessions and events from a peer support approach.

Our Recruitment and Marketing Officer has secured advertising for the Service at Blackburn Rovers for the 2019/20 season on the Jack Walker Stand. The aim has been to use technology teamed with being visible in the community.

One approach was enabling an increase in the spending on Google Advertising, keeping Blackburn with Darwen Fostering Service visible online and nearer to the top agencies when potential foster carers are searching online. This aims to make the Service more competitive and increases our presence on Google to attract new applicants.

Quarter 2 has also seen the introduction of corporate rate gym membership in the Borough for currently approved foster carers. This is a new incentive in terms of foster carer benefits and supports their mental health and physical well-being.

The Fostering Service has a positive retention record and this Quarter saw only four fostering households resign but with largely positive outcomes for the children. This was due to reasons such as having a successful Special Guardianship Order granted, Adoption, a change in personal circumstances and retirement.

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. During this Quarter we have been informed that the ‘You Can Foster’ service will end in 2020 for all Local Authorities who have currently signed up to this contract. The ‘front door’ service of accepting enquiries and being the initial point of contact for five North West Authorities, will also cease in 2020. Planning and discussion about this going forward has commenced.

Foster Carer Training

There has not been any training during this Quarter, which is typical of this time of year over the summer period and school holidays. This will commence again in Quarter 3.

Fostering Panel and Review Panel

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. Evaluation questionnaires for

applicants and carers attending the Fostering Panel are offered at the end of the Panel. During Quarter 2, there has been an increase in the number of foster carers attending the Panel for their annual review and making a verbal and written contribution. There were 25 annual reviews held in Quarter 2. The main Fostering Panel saw 3 mainstream approvals this Quarter.

Complaints

There was one complaint received in this Quarter from a mainstream foster carer, about limited contact with the Service due to the sickness absence of the supervising social worker. This matter was promptly addressed by a visit from the Team Manager to the foster carers.

Compliments

There were five compliments received in Quarter 2. One from an Independent Reviewing Officer who stated 'I just wanted to acknowledge the outstanding love and care provided by carers for the young person in their care. Their input has benefited the young person immeasurably. The progression and future outcomes are huge.'

A further two compliments have been received from foster carers for the support provided by the fostering support workers on the Fostering Team and REVIVE Team, whilst their supervising social worker was on sickness absence.

A compliment was received from the Adoption Manager who stated, 'I have just finished reading the carers report for the child written by the foster carer. I have to say that it is one of the best in terms of detail and giving insight into a child that I have read'.

Another compliment received was from an applicant at a fostering information evening, thanking the Fostering Service for their communication and information received. They went on to state, 'I would firstly like to thank the two staff who delivered and facilitated the presentation. It was delivered professionally and with transparency, extremely informative and all questions and concerns were accommodated with etiquette and with due diligence'.

Allegations

There has been one allegation against a mainstream foster carer, which resulted in LADO involvement and a Strategy Discussion. The outcome was advice provided to the foster carer, and no further action taken.

Serious Illnesses and Accidents

There have been 13 accidents over Quarter 2, which included hospital visits in relation to low-level illness, asthma and one minor injury. There have been four minor falls recorded which were treated appropriately by the foster carers.

Bullying Reports

There have been no reports of bullying this Quarter.

Specific Incidents and Restraints

There has been recording in relation to one young person who had four incidents, which related to their mental health. The REVIVE Team and ELCAS have been involved and a risk management plan was put in place.

Missing From Home

There have been 16 reported missing from home occasions this Quarter, which involved 6 young people all in agency foster placements. All have been reported to the Engage Team.

Exemptions

There have been 3 exemptions made this Quarter, all noted at the main Fostering Panel, and they 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. The Chair of the FCA sits on the Corporate Parenting Specialist Advisory Group. The FCA has its own website, which is used to communicate messages and news updates about events. The foster carer support group also meets regularly and is attended by the Children's Services Elected Member.

At the request of foster carers, membership of the Fostering Network moved in Quarter 1 to Foster Talk, which 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 and the next is planned for November. 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.

A meeting took place in this Quarter between Senior Management and the FCA to promote a positive working relationship and to allow communication of issues and areas for development.

Short Break Foster Care

There are 12 short break foster carers approved. Short break carers attended a support group, held on 17 July 2019. Carers enjoy attending and are able to explore and share experiences about their role and this is a positive form of support.

Commissioned Placements

The request for commissioned placements in Quarter 2 remains high in respect of both independent fostering agency placements and increasingly costly residential placements required for adolescents. One particular trend continuing into Quarter 2 has been the request for parent and child assessment placements through care proceedings. Such placements are independent, and the weekly costing is significant.

Sibling group placements remain an additional pressure on the availability of any in-house placement and the budget.

The table below gives an overview of the types of placements for children in our care, but primarily the number of agency foster care and independent residential provisions funded from the commissioning budget.

Placement Type	
Adoptive Placements	14
Foster Placements (in-house)	143
Foster Placements (agency)	68
Friends & Family	58
Placed with Parents	49
Independent Living	0
Children's Homes (in-house)	4
Children's Homes (agency)	28
Secure	0
Prison/HMYOI	1
NHS	1
Residential Accom Not Subject to CH Regulations	16
Other	19
Residential School	2

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 could be brought back to in-house provision. The financial position across both of these areas is closely monitored throughout the year, with an overspend already confirmed for this financial year due to the demands of the Service with the numbers of children in our care, placement sufficiency and stability.

New Service Priorities and Updates for 2019/20:

1. The Service has a target of recruiting between 25 and 30 new sets of foster carers in 2019/20. **Quarter 2 update. Monthly recruitment meetings are taking place and new approaches are being used such as Google Advertising and foster carers taking more of a leading role at recruitment stands. There have been three foster carer households approved this Quarter. Recruitment initiatives remain a priority for the Service.**
2. A Team Development Day will be an annual event to value and support the staff, and ensure specific training and development areas are actioned. **Quarter 2 update: A Team Development Day will take place in January/February 2020 when new staff members have commenced in post. Staffing issues have meant that this day has been arranged for this timescale.**
3. The Fostering Service will further consider the staffing ratio in the Permanence Team, to ensure the increase in referrals and demand for connected persons and SGO assessments can be met to avoid drift and delay. This will also include a review of the workload and capacity of the SGO Social

Worker role in offering post-SGO support to families and carers. **Quarter 2 update: A Business Case is being prepared for executive decision making around workforce issues within the Fostering Service and Children's Services as a whole. The proposal is to request an additional full time, SGO Social Worker.**

4. The Revive Team will be reviewed in terms of staffing, workload capacity and developing a review process for evidencing that outcomes are being met and the impact of their therapeutic involvement. This will enable the Service to manage the referrals and to identify when their involvement can cease as outcomes and objectives are met. **Quarter 2 update: A Revive Team Development Day took place in Quarter 1 and staffing, capacity and development was key to discussions on the day. There will be decision making between CSC and CAHMS management to ensure that any currently unfilled posts are recruited to, and that the Team is fully staffed to be able to respond to demand.**

5. Foster Carer training will continue to develop, led by a Fostering Team Manager. The Service will focus on the development of online training, and the overall training offer in line with Foster Carer feedback such as the addition of Parent and Child Training, and more specialist courses that will enhance carer skills. The objective is to increase engagement and attendance.

Quarter 2 update: Training will recommence in October 2019. Planning will take place with Child Action North West around a joint training offer.

6. 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. 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. The IT Data Workshop was attended during this Quarter with plans commencing for greater digitalisation of the Service and online fostering application forms. A review of social worker caseloads to assist the update of the foster carer register has also taken place.

7. Fostering Panel development – 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 – Recruitment and training has already taken place for new panel membership and we now have a larger cohort of members to ensure approvals can be considered without delay, and more panels held where necessary. Although this action has been addressed, the recruitment of panel members is an ongoing area of focus for the Service.

8. A new Participation Officer will be recruited and interviews will take place in May 2019. It is proposed that this part time position will be in place no later than July 2019. Recommencing the VOICE Group will also be part of this specific role and will be re-launched.

Quarter 2 update: The new Participation Officer commenced in role this Quarter. A re-launch of the VOICE group event has taken place and groups will take place from January 2020.

9. Placement sufficiency and stability will be a key area of focus, with areas for learning taken from disruption meetings and case auditing. The support offer for foster carers will be reviewed, with recommendations made about service development going forward about how to preserve vulnerable placements and support an increase with in-house placements.

10. Planning will commence to look at a new proposal for the end of the commissioned fostering front door service, and how this will be replaced and replicated where possible, within the Service.

Pamela Price
Service Lead, Placements