

Fostering Annual Report – 2017/18

Introduction

It gives us immense pleasure to introduce Gateshead Council's 2017/18 Fostering Service Annual Report. As Lead Member for Children and Young People in Gateshead and Strategic Director of Care, Wellbeing and Learning we hold the responsibility to ensure that children requiring fostering receive high quality services which will support them. Our Fostering Service and team of foster carers work in partnership to ensure children live in safe, nurturing family homes where they can achieve their potential and enjoy their childhood.

This Annual Report provides a summary of the performance of the Fostering Service during the past year. It also includes analysis and comparative data for 2017/18, highlighting progress made over the past year and identifying potential areas for future development in the year ahead.

The national trend shows that over the next five years between 10 and 15 percent of older foster carers will retire and therefore it is a priority for us to ensure that we recruit enough new carers to replace those retiring but also to continue to increase the overall numbers of fostering households to between 200 and 230.

This year we will focus on:

- Continuing to develop the Staying Put Scheme to allow young people to stay with their foster families, beyond the age of 18, in line with recent legislative changes.
- Undertaking targeted recruitment campaigns to increase the number of foster placements for all ages of children.
- Developing the training and support offered to foster carers who are considering caring for teenagers with complex needs.
- Ensuring the recruitment strategy is robust enough to provide a choice of appropriate placements.
- Ensuring diligent work is undertaken with regards to placement stability.
- Continuing to reduce the use of Independent Fostering Placements.
- Monitoring and evaluating the Fostering Service's activities to ensure that the best performance and outcomes possible are achieved.
- Encouraging staff to attend training to ensure their knowledge and skills are at a level to meet the demands of the service.
- Considering the structure of the team to best utilise staff to meet the needs of the service.

We are extremely proud of the work carried out by the Fostering Service which provides the best possible service and opportunities for our Looked After children in Gateshead. Our thanks are extended to our Fostering Panel, Fostering Service and our Foster Carers for their continued dedication and hard work for providing the best service they can to the children in Gateshead. commitment.

We thank you all for everything you do every day.

Councillor Gary Haley
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

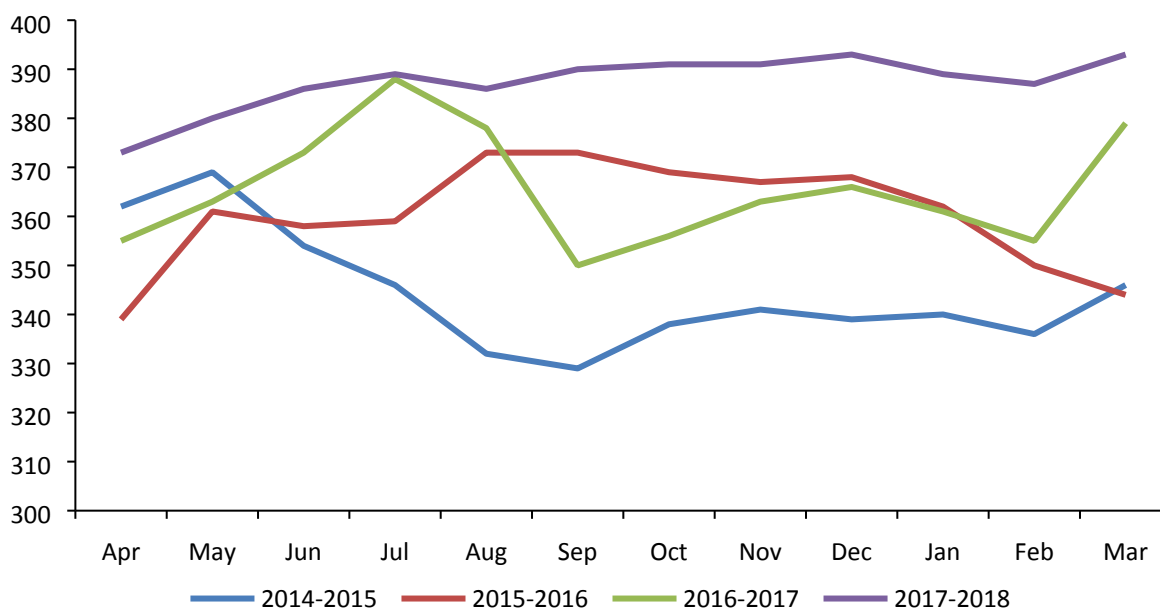
Caroline O'Neill
Strategic Director of Care, Wellbeing and Learning

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Gateshead

The Fostering Service

The Fostering Service staff team is made up of 1 Senior Practice Supervisor, 3.5 Practice Supervisors, 13 Experienced Child and Family Workers, an Education Worker who liaises with the REALAC team and schools in the area and a part time Recruitment and Marketing Officer. The team is supported by a Business Support unit with dedicated support to foster carer payments, panel and duty administration.

Number of Looked After Children: April 2014 - March 2018



Over the last year the number of Looked After Children in Gateshead has ranged from 373 to 405 with most of these children being placed with in-house foster carers.

Many of the children leaving care throughout the year are those who are already living with relatives under Fostering Regulations where other legal orders are obtained to secure their permanence with that family i.e. Special Guardianship or Residence Orders. This does not free up any fostering placements within the Service and consequently resources and placements have continued to be limited. This issue of limited placement capacity is not unique to Gateshead as the Fostering Network estimates that there is a shortfall of 8,750 fostering placements across the whole of the U.K.

Payment for Skills

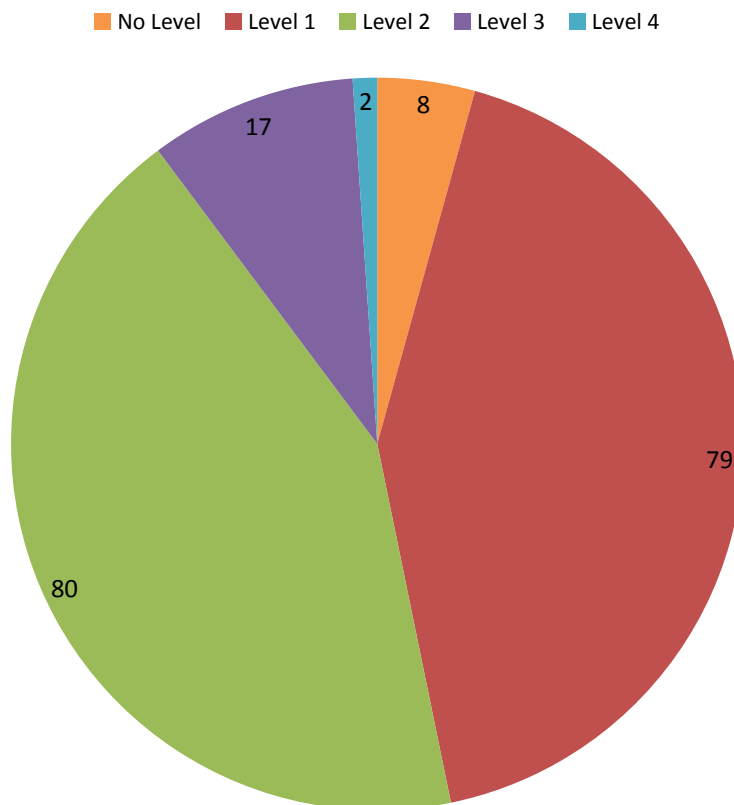
Gateshead Council seeks to continuously improve outcomes for Looked After Children to improve their life chances and opportunities. These outcomes are closely linked to the achievement of placement stability and ensuring that children have placement choice and are subsequently matched and placed with the right carers. These factors were at the heart of the Payment for Skills scheme which was developed to operate through a payment model that clearly defines the expectations and in September 2012 the scheme was approved by Cabinet for implementation within the Service.

There are four payment levels within the scheme structure; Level 1 being the lowest level of payment and Level 4 being the highest. The highest level of payment is based on the areas of greatest skills which are required to undertake the necessary care tasks. The payment levels were implemented for new and existing foster carers during 2013 and most foster carers are now on one of the four levels, linked to their

skills, knowledge and competencies. There is a small number of fostering households, primarily those approved as Connected Person foster carers, who choose not to progress onto Payment for Skills.

This evidence based approach is also being used in the assessment of new foster carers, with the Fostering Panel linking the recommendation of approval of new carers with the Payment for Skills level.

Breakdown of Foster Carers by Payment for Skills Level



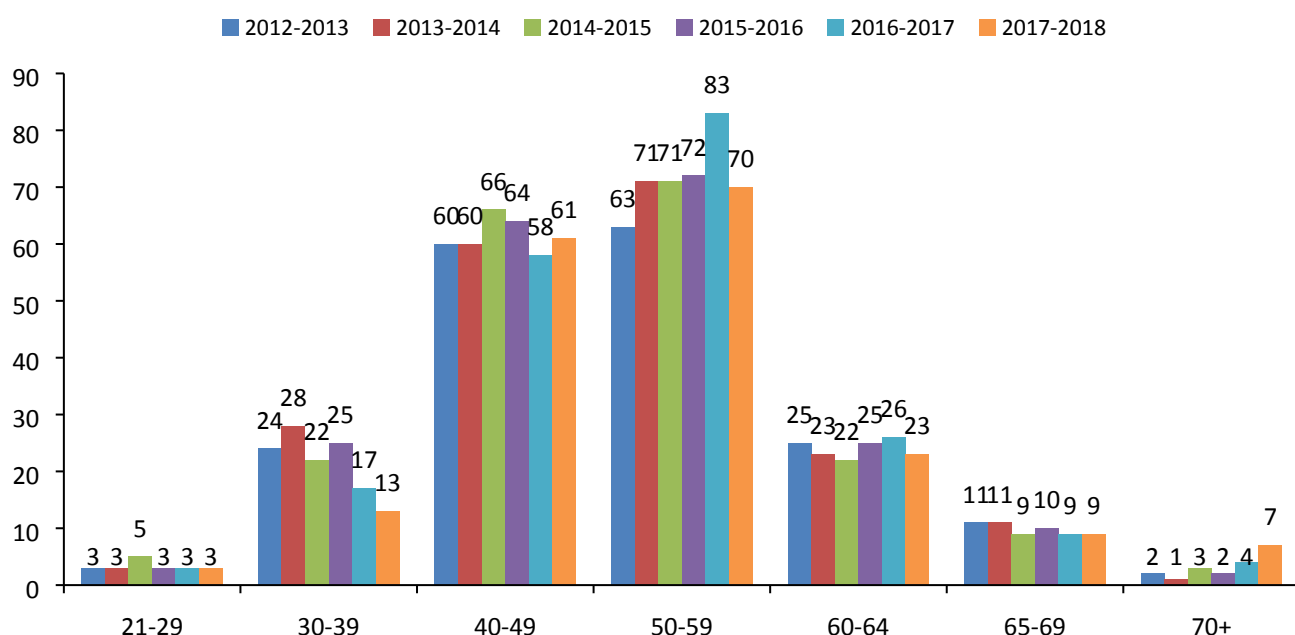
The Foster Carers

At 31st March 2018 there were 186 approved fostering households, a slight decrease on the previous year. During the year ending 31 March 2018, 23 new fostering households were approved at Fostering Panel, with 30 being deregistered. During the year ending 31 March 2018, 23 new fostering households were approved at Fostering Panel, with 30 households being deregistered.

The Fostering Service provides a wide range of resources including short break and emergency, short term, task centred and long term/permanent placements for Looked After Children and Young People. The Service also provides short breaks to families who have a child with a disability through the Home from Home scheme and we also have a growing number of foster carers who are providing placements for extended family members or connected children. Many foster carers can offer more than one type of placement, which increases the flexibility within the Service regarding the types of placements we can offer.

The majority of foster carers within Gateshead come from a White British ethnic background; however, we also have fostering households from the Pakistani and Orthodox Jewish communities. This reflects the shortage of foster carers from ethnic minorities that is experienced nationally. Though a high proportion of children in placement during the year ending March 2018 were White, our carers also provided placements for those from other ethnic groups.

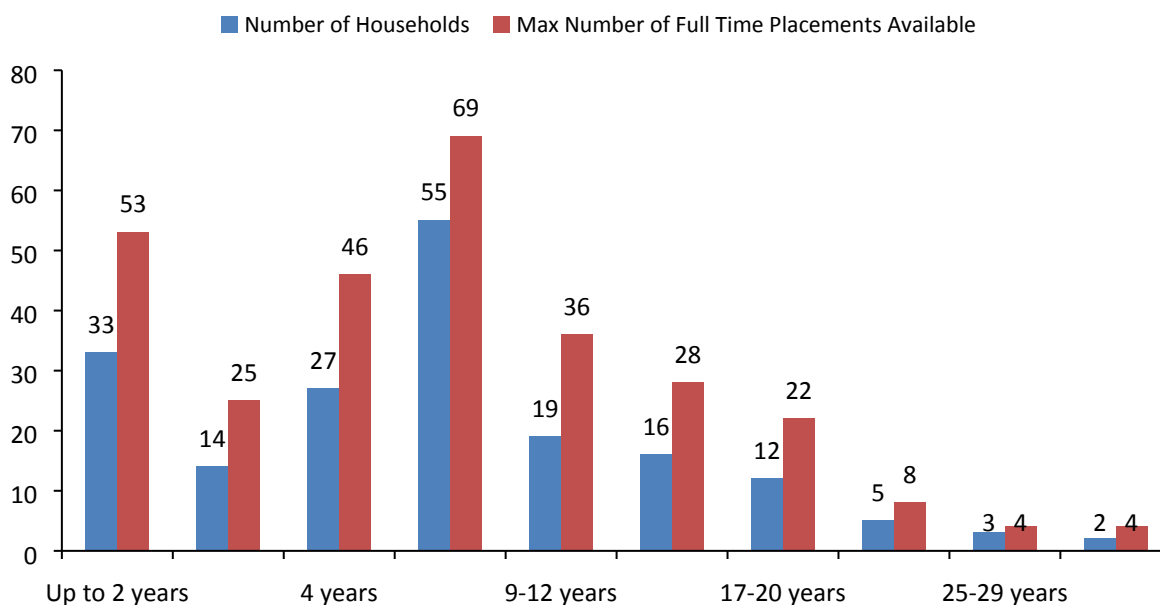
Age of Main Carer in Fostering Household



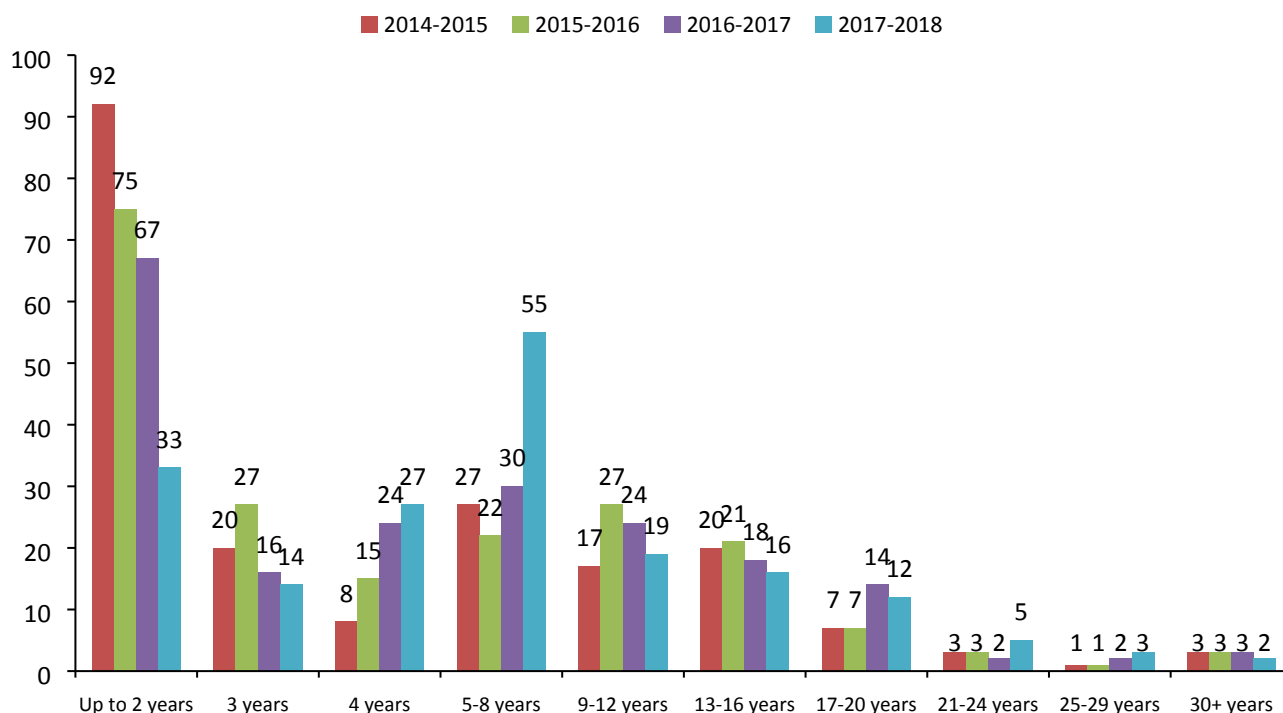
We continue to have a high proportion of older foster carers within the Service, with the average age of a foster carer being 52 years old. 58% (109) of main carers within fostering households are over the age of 50 and currently provide approximately 61% of the potential available full-time placements. This is similar to the figure of 62% reported last year.

The national trend shows that over the next 4 years between 10 - 15% of these older foster carers will retire and therefore it is a priority for us to ensure that we recruit enough new carers not only to replace those retiring but also to continue to increase the overall numbers of fostering households to between 200 and 230. This would provide a significant increase in placement choice and assist in reducing the numbers of children being placed in Independent Fostering Agencies.

Length of Approval and Available Full Time Placements 2017 - 18



Length of Approval: 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18



The Fostering Service has recruited a number of new foster carers in the last 5 years, with 17% (33) of fostering households having 2 years or less service with the Authority. This number also includes Connected Person carers for specific named children. We also have a cohort of very experienced foster carers, with 11% of our fostering households having over 16 years' service. Two households have been fostering for at least 30 years, with one household reaching 41 years in November 2017.

Connected person

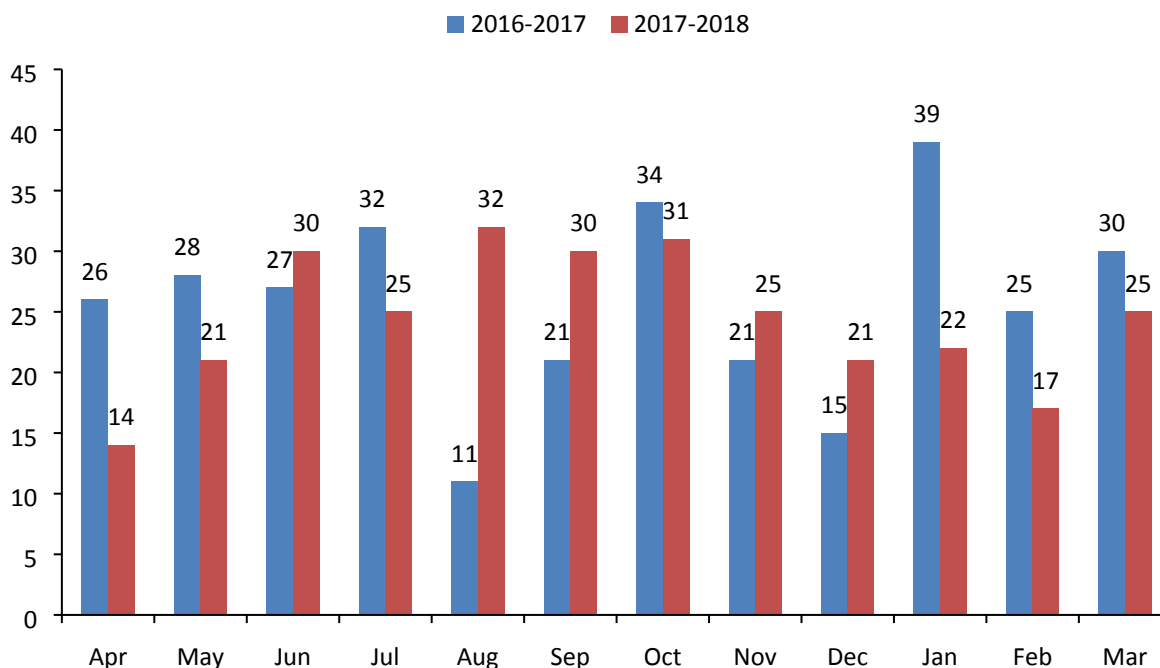
This area of work continues to increase as more children are being placed with family members, and given the tight timescales for assessments panel are monitoring these closely to ensure compliance with the regulations. To ensure compliance with regulations, this work is monitored and regularly reviewed by the practice supervisor of the long-term team. Numbers of current assessments have fluctuated between 12 and 36 and average around the 24. These assessments are also used towards court applications for Special Guardian Ship Orders and Child Arrangement Orders. This demonstrates multi agency working between the Fostering Service and the various social work teams.

The service recognises that these carers are often dealing with complex family situations and have implemented special support groups for connected person carers. We have also developed strong regional links with the national support group Grandparents Plus, with 2 of our connected person carers being regional mentors for this group.

Referrals for Placements

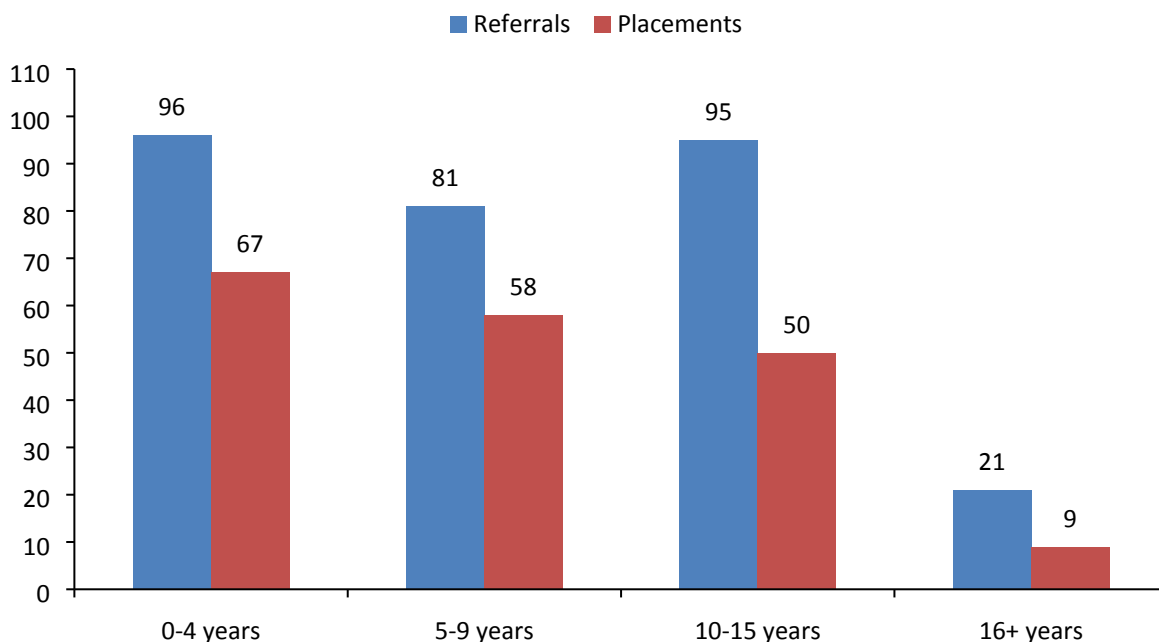
Gateshead's social work teams made 293 referrals to the Fostering Service for placements between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018. This is a decrease of 5% on the previous year. Of these referrals, 184 (63%) placements were subsequently made and 109 (37%) were withdrawn by social workers as alternative arrangements were made for the children in question including placements with family or friends.

Number of Referrals for Placements 2016-17 and 2017-18



In contrast to the previous year, the highest numbers of referrals during 2017-18 were received in August, September and October 2017. The highest demands for placements during the year were on the 0-4 and 5-9 years range.

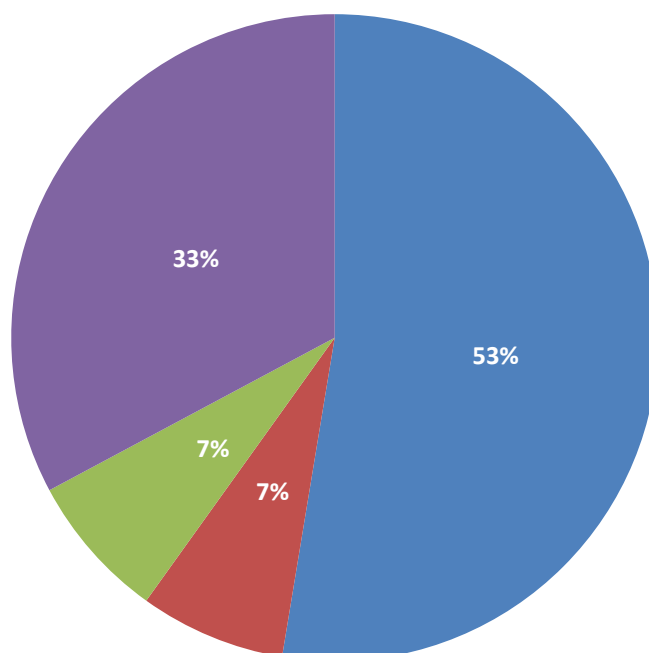
Number of Referrals and Placements Made, by Age Group 2017-2018



The majority of placement referrals from social work teams are for emergency requests where 53% of placements are needed within one working day of the referral being submitted. 14% are needed within 2-5 days and 33% of referrals were needed after six days.

Placement Identification Timescales

■ Same day ■ Next day ■ 3-5 days ■ 6+ days



Over the year 43 sibling groups were referred to the Service for a total of 97 children, a decrease of 15% compared to last year. Of those 43 groups, 29 were placed together. In general requests are primarily to keep siblings together. This is often difficult to achieve given the size of sibling groups referred and has resulted in a number of sibling groups being placed in Independent Fostering placements. However, in the last year the Service has worked on reducing the number of sibling groups having to be split and as a result, there have only been 2 groups placed separately.

Size of Sibling Group	Number Referred and Placed	Number of Groups Placed Together	Number of Groups Split	Total Children
2	24	23	1	48
3	3	2	1	9
4	2	2	0	8

Independent Fostering Placements

Occasionally, due to the type of placements requested and the availability of our own foster carers we are unable to place children in house. In this event the Service commissions placements through external independent fostering agencies, which are more expensive than placing a child with our own foster carers.

All Independent Fostering placements are approved and monitored by the regular External Placements Panel which is chaired by Elaine Devaney, Service Director – Social Work. Every effort is made to keep the use of these placements to a minimum, and to return children to our own foster placements as soon as possible. However, if there are ongoing care proceedings the Service is often directed by Court to leave the children in their placements until these proceedings are concluded.

As of 31st March 2018, Gateshead had 18 Independent Fostering Placements for children between 6-17 years. Of the 18 placements commissioned during the last financial year, the majority placements were needed for teenagers aged 14 years and older with complex and challenging behaviour where there were no in house foster carers with the necessary skills or space to accommodate them.

Several sibling groups were also placed in Independent placements where the requirement from social workers was to keep the children together and it was not possible to do this within the Service.

To the period 1 April to 31 March 2018 Independent placements ended for a total of 13 children which helped the Service's aim of reducing Independent placements.

Recruitment

The marketing plan for 2017/2018 focussed on providing a presence across a wide range of media channels with the aim of promoting fostering to those living within the Gateshead area and surrounding 20-mile radius.

Promotional activities were mainly generic, but focussed specifically on fostering to reach out to as many potential foster carers as possible throughout the year. The key messaging throughout the year was focussed around the following two core messages:

- Is caring for sisters' worth it? Absolutely...
- Is caring for a teenager worth it? Absolutely...

With both adverts giving the same message that Fostering is caring for life...fostering is a career for life. These messages were consistently applied across all advertising formats.

Promotional Activity

Promotional activity throughout the year has been ongoing and included the use of wider Council resources to target all Gateshead residents. The following outlines the main activity undertaken throughout the year.

Gateshead Council activity:

- Up to date information on the website
- Regular use of council TV screens in the Civic Centre and leisure facilities
- Regular adverts and features in Council News and Council Info
- Civic centre railing banners
- Banners in the civic centre foyer
- Gateshead Now – direct email to Gateshead residents
- Promotional stand during foster care fortnight in Gateshead Civic Centre

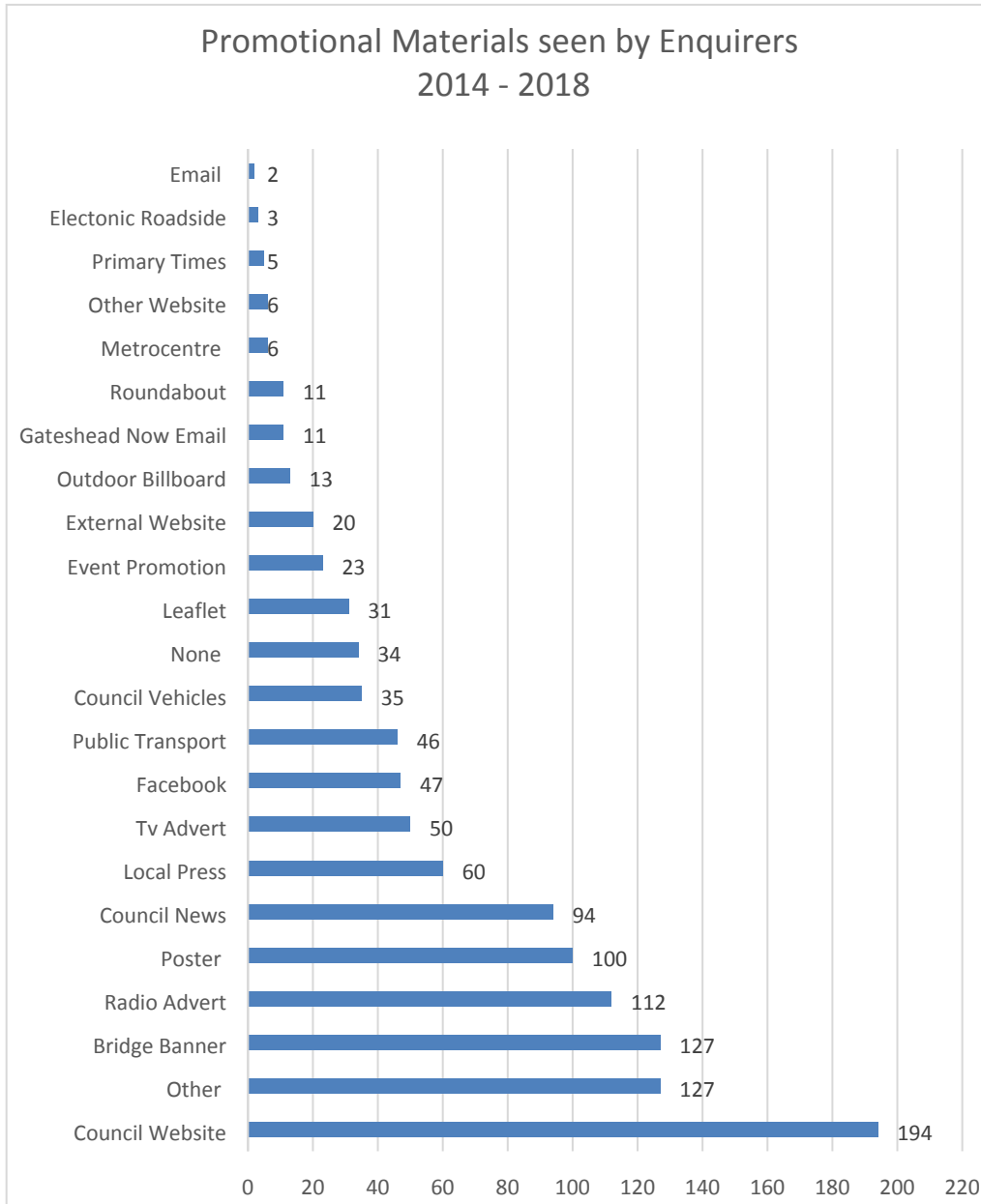
Other external activity:

This focussed on promoting fostering throughout the local region using radio, public transport, outdoor large format poster/digital sites, social media, poster/business card circulation to the local community and businesses.

The logo features the word "foster" in a large, bold, lowercase, purple font. To the right of "foster", the words "for Gateshead" are written in a smaller, purple font, with "for" positioned above "Gateshead".

So which channels are working for us?

The graph below shows the channels that our enquirers have said they have seen. This information details the responses collected between April 2014 and March 2018 and therefore captures advertising channels used during that period.



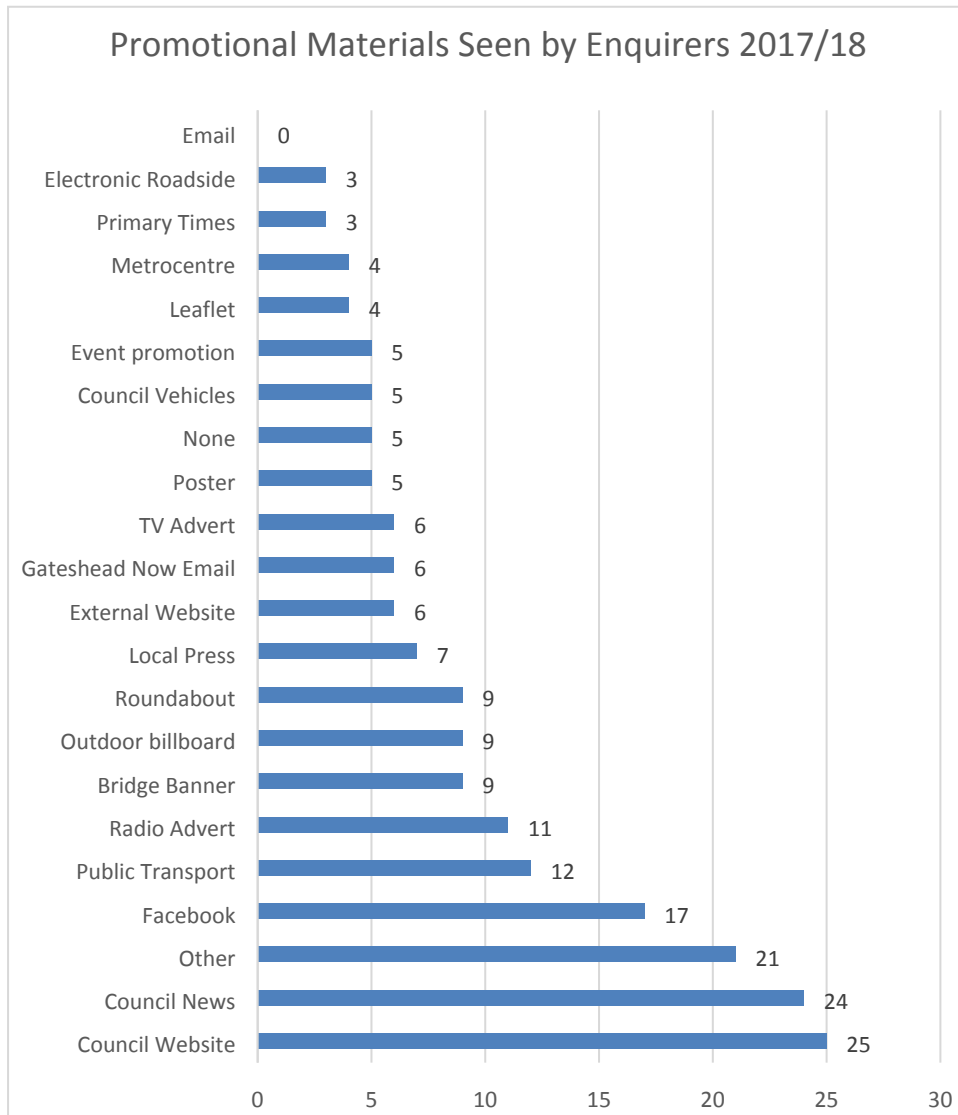
The top six channels cited overall are:

- Council Website
- Bridge Banner
- Radio Advert
- Poster
- Council News

- Local Press

Important note – Bridge banner display is no longer an option available to us as this ceased to be permitted from January 2017.

The graph below highlights which promotional materials have been seen by prospective foster carers between April 2017 and March 2018 and therefore captures advertising channels used during that period.



The top six channels cited in this specific this year are:

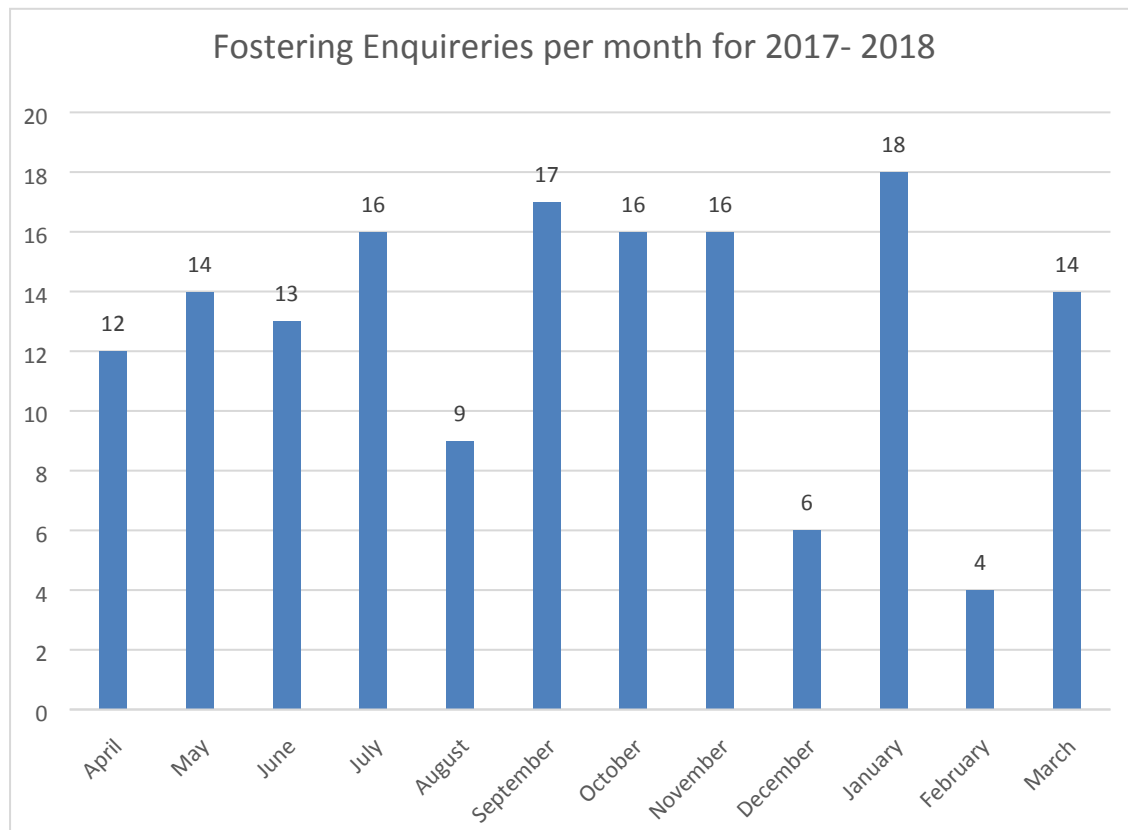
- Council Website
- Council News
- Facebook
- Public Transport
- Radio
- Bridge Banner/Outdoor Billboard/Roundabout Advertising

So, what does this tell us?

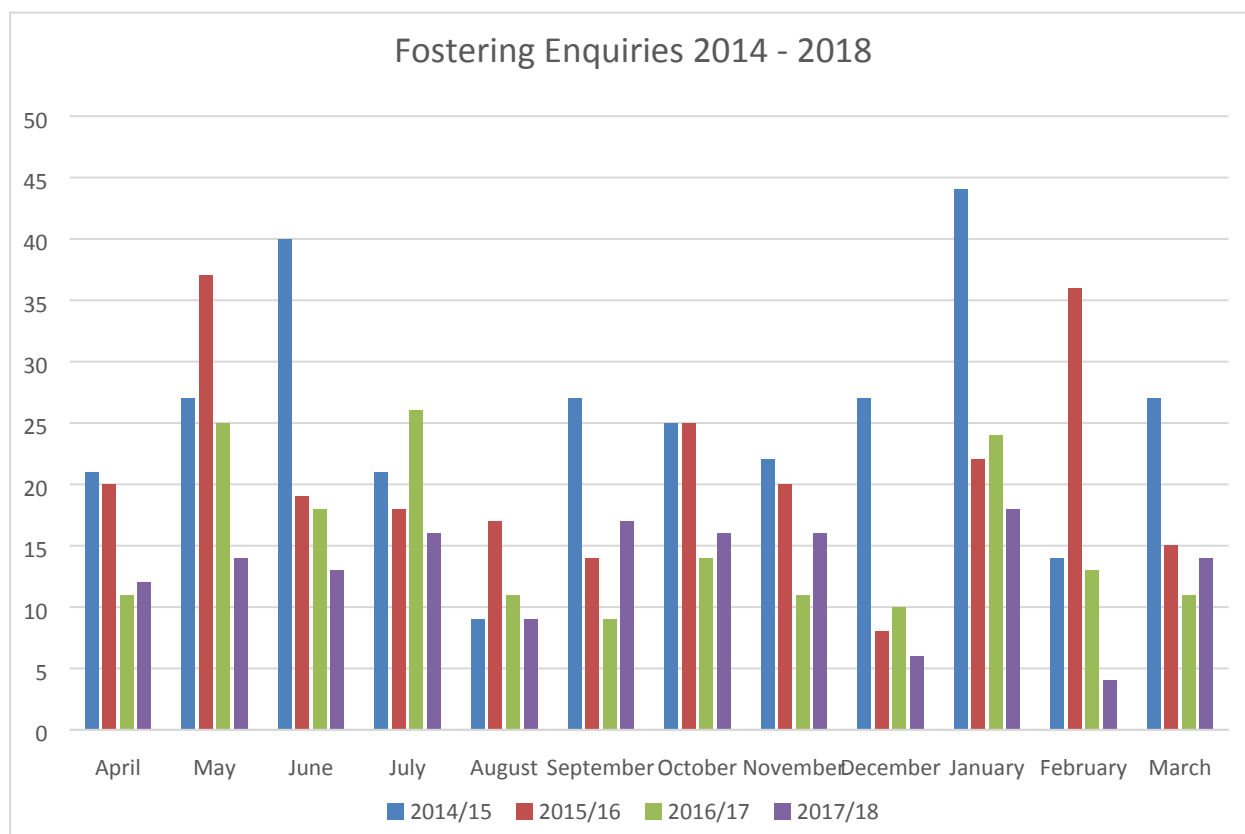
The service is making increased use of digital channels and we are starting to see an increase in enquiries via these channels. Enquirers are consistently using the website to find their information and the residents magazine is also consistently performs well and should continue to be used in a creative way. Other “paid for advertising fluctuates” in terms of effectiveness so this will be reviewed. This information will be analysed further to inform the marketing strategy for 2017/18 and beyond.

Enquiries

In the year to 31 March 2018 the service received a total of **155** enquiries, a decrease in 15% on the previous year, but not as high as the previous decrease. Going forward however, enquiry levels still need to increase further as this will ultimately lead to more foster carers joining Gateshead Council, thus enabling us to have more placements for children who need them. A more robust and specific approach to recruitment will aim to deliver an increase in enquiries.



The graph below shows the level of enquiries over the last four years.



Conversion Rate

The Local Authority Fostering Service benchmark for 2015 showed that nationally 11% of enquiries proceed to approved carers.

The conversion rate for the service during 2017/18 has remained steady at 14.8% (based on the number of approvals this year compared to the number of enquiries received).

The next steps

The recruitment strategy will be reviewed with input from Corporate Communications to ensure it is robust enough to deliver its objectives. The marketing plan will then be developed outlining how we will achieve the objectives.

Our priority will be to increase the number of foster placements for all children. A plan will have developed for the year to utilise the “free of charge” marketing tools as well as deliver “paid for” campaigns to ensure that the Gateshead Council’s Fostering Service receives our fair share of the market.

We are hoping to embrace the Fostering Network's findings from their report "Why Foster Care – The values and motivations profile of newly approved foster carers" - published in 2015, which identified the following key findings which can help us to understand the current thinking of newly approved adopters.

- 81% of newly approved foster carers share a common set of "Pioneer" values.
- At a time when the proportion of the UK population with Pioneer values is decreasing, the opposite is true of the foster carer cohort.
- Support available and peer recommendations are two of the primary motivators for selecting a fostering service.
- 41% of assessments are taking longer than eight months.

This research is up to date and therefore extremely important in helping us to achieve our objectives.

Retention

Retention of existing foster carers continues to be a high priority for the Fostering Service and foster carers are provided with extensive support and training.

Each fostering household is reviewed on an annual basis, chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). This process uses feedback from the foster carers, children in placement and children within the fostering family, as well as the carers' supervising social worker and social workers for children who are and who have been placed with the foster carers. This feedback is valued by the service and is used to develop and improve service delivery.

Retention of our current foster carers is pivotal in ensuring that we maintain our numbers of in-house foster carers. This will ultimately aid the service in respect of placement choice which then leads to greater placement stability for looked after children. This work is managed and overseen by the Practice Supervisor of the short-term team who will meet with foster carers who indicate that they no longer wish to foster. Exit interviews with foster carers who resign will also be undertaken to establish what the service could do to reduce the number of foster carers leaving.

Training

The service continues to develop the training offered to all approved foster carers. These include specialist subjects such as Attachment, Child Protection Awareness, Equality and Diversity, Emergency First Aid, Level 1 Food Hygiene, Life Story Work, Promoting Positive Behaviour, Recording Skills and Safer Caring Training. Full time foster carers are expected to complete these courses within the first 12 months of their approval, and Home from Home and respite carers are given 18 months to complete these. Foster carers are also encouraged to attend further training through their fostering career. These courses, as well as any refresher training they require, are identified through discussions with their supervising social worker and forms their professional development plan. This is also linked to the payment for skills criteria and levels.

Following feedback from approved foster carers the service has begun to deliver four of the mandatory training courses for people currently in the assessment process and there is an expectation of any prospective foster carer that they will have completed all four courses by the time their assessment is presented to Fostering Panel.

All foster carers under the Fostering regulations must complete their Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards for Foster Carers within 12 months of approval. Preparation training and regular workshops are provided for foster carers to help them with the information they need to be able to

complete their portfolio, along with giving them practical hints and tips on gathering evidence and information.

The service also requires all foster carers on Payment for Skills level 2 or above to complete their Level 3 Diploma for the Children and Young People's Workforce. 5

All the carers who completed their TSD or Diploma were presented with certificates for their achievements at the Foster Carer Awards Ceremony.

The training offered and taken up by Gateshead's carers is monitored and evaluated to ensure we are providing our carers with the skills and knowledge they need to support young people and help them achieve the best possible outcomes.

Support Groups

Regular support groups for foster carers have continued to take place covering a wide range of relevant topics including Early Years, Advocacy, Sexual Exploitation, Long Term Training and Delegated Authority, with speakers regularly invited to attend. They have proven to be very successful with positive feedback from both foster carers and invited speakers.

A consultation with foster carers takes place annually to help develop the support groups and to find out what carers would like from future support groups. This information has been used by the service to shape the format and frequency of the groups. Non-attendance at support groups is also monitored by the service with foster carers being regularly reminded by their supervising social workers of the importance of attendance to their professional development along with the expectations of the Payment for Skills model.

Email updates

Regular emails to carers about the Service and its recruitment activity have continued throughout the year as well as updates via the Facebook page.

Christmas Party and Summer Family Fun Day

A fantastic Family Fun Day took place in July at Cardinal Hume School. Children could take part in a range of activities including face painting, bouncy castles, dancing, sport, craft and there was the opportunity to see a range of insects and small reptiles with the 'Bug Man' and be entranced by a magician!

This year there were also sessions in drumming, cheerleading, spray painting and jewellery making. Feedback from the carers and young people in attendance continued to be very positive and they welcome the opportunity to spend "quality time" with their families and fellow foster families, as well as colleagues from across the service.

Children enjoyed a visit from Santa at the annual Christmas Party, and carers met for a Christmas coffee morning, complete with mince pies and Christmas raffle. We also held a coffee morning for Foster Care Fortnight to acknowledge the excellent work foster carers do.

Foster Carer Awards Ceremony 2018 – Foster 4 Life

The annual Foster Carer Awards were held on 24 April 2018, at the Lancastrian Suite in Gateshead, recognising the dedication and hard work of all the Council's foster carers. In Gateshead there are 395 children placed in short term and long-term foster placements, including those placed with relative and friend foster carers.

The theme of our annual event, which sees the Council acknowledge the fantastic job our foster carers do looking after the children in their care, was "VIP". The "VIP" theme was chosen to demonstrate to our foster carers how important they are to Gateshead Council and more importantly to the children in their care.

Caroline O'Neill, Strategic Director - Care, Wellbeing & Learning was warmly welcomed, for the first time, to this event. Caroline explained what a privilege it was to spend an evening with so many foster families and hear about the work of the fostering service and, moreover, the achievements of Gateshead Council's Foster Carers.

Councillor Gary Haley formally opened the event introducing the theme for the evening and thanking foster carers for the invaluable work they do.

The evening saw the acknowledgement of the following:

- 17 sets of new foster carers welcomed to the service,
- 6 sets of foster carers achieving their certificates for Department of Education, Training, Support & Development Standards,
- 11 foster carers achieving a Bridging Unit, Level 2 or Level 3 Diploma for the Children and Young People's workforce, and
- Long Service awards were presented to 24 sets of foster carers for achieving their 5, 10 and 15-year anniversaries.

In addition to these achievements we presented three categories of awards that were nominated by colleagues and other professionals and a set of awards nominated by our looked after children.

These awards were:

- **Extra Mile Award** – Acknowledges foster carers who regularly go above and beyond what is expected of them in delivering an exceptional standard of care. Eight sets of carers received awards in this category. Some of the nominations were for the following:
 - Providing stability to three children via a long-term placement arrangement.
 - Ensuring adoption introductions went smoothly.
 - Managing three complex placements and being excellent advocates.
 - Showing resilience and commitment to young people.
 - Never losing focus of the child's needs whilst facing own health issues.
 - Always putting the best interests of the young person first.
- **Unsung Hero Award** – For foster carers who epitomise dedication and drive and always deliver on their promises in an unassuming way. Nineteen sets of carers received awards in this category. Some of the nominations were for the following:
 - Exceptional support to the training programme.
 - Being respected in the local community as a foster carer and for being a brilliant role model.

foster for Gateshead

- Providing respite care to two children in addition to their two long term placements.
 - Providing exceptional mother and baby placements.
 - Displaying an amazing insight into the needs of children.
- **Outstanding Newcomer of the Year Award** – For foster cares who have joined the organisation since 1 April 2016, who show real drive, exceptional performance, enthusiasm and motivation. Five sets of carers awards in this category. The nominations were for:
 - Accepting placements outside their age range and providing excellent care to children with very complex needs.
 - Providing a long-term placement, rather than their preference for short term, and establishing a wonderful relationship with the children.
 - Showing significant insight into the needs of Looked After Children as well as being extremely flexible.
 - Providing a supportive, child centred placement for a young person whilst demonstrating their confidence, motivation and passion for their role.
 - Accepting a sibling placement within two weeks of approval and working hard to enable the children to meet their developmental milestones.
 - **Most Amazing Carer** – Nominated by our Looked After Children. Seven sets of carers received awards in this category.

The event was inspiring for all who attended and the following quotes from children in foster care demonstrate the real difference foster carers in Gateshead make to the children in our care.

- *“They are always kind to us and when the dark times strike and we say they give us hope and make us happy. When we’re all happy it brings joy to my heart. They are my light at the end of the tunnel. Together we can make anything happen.”*
- *“My carers are amazing because through everything they have for themselves they always seem to put us as foster children first. They have stuck by us and helped us through the tough times and got us to where we are. Through the four years that I have been here I don’t think that I would have been able to have a life the way I have.”*
- *“You are amazing because you are very supportive. They helped me get the correct support in school which helped me pass my exams. They have done everything for me for the past 7 years and I couldn’t ask for anyone better. They helped me boost my confidence up and joined me in cadets and I am really happy that they did because I’ve been there for nearly 4 years and I want to join the navy when I finish my course at Newcastle College.”*

Fostering Panel

In broad terms the role of the Fostering Panel provides an independent perspective on the business of the Fostering Service, informed by a range of expertise to monitor and quality assure social work practice in the best interests of children and young people in foster care. It provides recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker that accurately reflects the facts of the cases presented.

Service Director Elaine Devaney was appointed as Agency Decision Maker in 2016.

There is a need for Fostering Services to maintain a Central List of panel members consisting of a multidisciplinary membership of experienced professionals. No business can be conducted by panel unless at least the following people are present:

- The Chair or one of the Vice-Chairs
- One member who is a social worker (who may or may not be employed by the Fostering Service) with at least 3 years relevant post-qualifying experience
- Three other members from the Central List
- At least one member of the panel must be independent (this can be the Chair or Vice-Chair) – Regulation 24 (1)

The UK National Standards for Foster Care 2011 (14.8) recommends that:

“...the number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for”

Gateshead’s fostering service continues to operate 2 panels per month, with membership being made up from the central list. Each panel has a consistent membership and is chaired by the same panel chair to ensure consistency and continuity when dealing with all panel business.

All panel members have an annual panel review, where they are consulted about their views, discuss how they are developing their role on panel, identify any areas of development and make suggestions on how panel can be improved. The review is carried out by Kim Leighton – panel chair and the Senior Practice Supervisor who acts as agency advisor at panel.

All new Panel members are given induction training, which is held over a half day and covers Panel’s statutory function and business as well as the expectations of Panel members. This ensures people are fully aware of the legislation relating to panel, the function and running of panel and the expectations on panel members. People who have attended this training have given positive feedback and feel that it has helped them in their role as a panel member

Training is also provided to all Panel members on a bi-annual basis. This year, the training has primarily focused on the implementation of the new Regulations, the Form F assessment process and analysis, Foster Carer Review paperwork and the long-term matching process.

The panel met nineteen times during the year to meet the increasing needs of the service.

Activity	2017-18
Form F assessments	13
Connected person	10
De-registrations of foster carers	20
De-registrations of connected persons	10

Foster carer reviews	46
Matching children and carers	16
Non-progression of Form F assessments	0
Extension to Regulation 24 - 16-week temporary approval period	27

Number of placements

The Service has acquired 13 new sets of non-connected person foster carers who can potentially offer up to 28 full time placements, if siblings can share a room. Panel have been flexible with their approval categories in relation to the age range and have tried to approve people up to the age of 18 if they agree with this. They have recommended preferences in relation to the age range rather than being specific, which ensures carers do not need to come back to panel if they take a slightly older or younger child than their preference. In addition, 10 new sets of connected persons foster carers were approved throughout the year, for a total of 15 children.

De-registrations

The 'Local Authority Fostering Services in England performance benchmark report 2013/14' shows that nationally 12% of foster carers left their service. In Gateshead 30 sets of foster carers were de-registered at panel, equating to 15%. The figure is slightly higher than the national average but, as we can see from the table below, there is a higher level of retiring carers which has contributed to this higher rate the number of de-registrations in Gateshead has remained at a similar level to the last financial year.

REASON	NUMBER
Resignation	7
Retirement	10
Change of personal circumstances e.g. return to work, new partner	1
Allegations/concerns	1
Child Arrangement Order or Special Guardianship Order for carer	4
Connected person – rehabilitation home	6
Impact on Family/Unable to manage fostering task	1

Panel Feedback Forms

The agency has implemented feedback forms for everyone attending panel. This includes all social workers, prospective foster carers and approved foster carers. This feedback is monitored by the Fostering Team Manager and used to improve panel. The feedback forms have largely identified that

people attending panel have a positive experience, they feel that they are made to feel welcome and the questions they are asked are relevant.

Service Development

In addition to working to implement any proposed new governmental reforms to fostering practice, the key areas for development within the Fostering service are:

- Increase the number of Care Leavers Staying Put with their foster carers as this improves their outcomes and gives them support from a family that knows them.
- Promote placement choice and stability by undertaking targeted recruitment campaigns to increase the number of foster placements for all ages of children as identified in the sufficiency strategy.
- Promote placement stability by developing and implementing further training and support offered to foster carers who are considering caring for teenagers with complex needs.
- Provide tailored placements for children with complex needs by targeted recruitment, specialist training for foster carers, bespoke support packages and reviewing the payments for carers who take the most challenging and complex placements.
- Promote children being placed in or close to Gateshead by recruiting in house fostering provision and working with external provision to manage demand.
- Ensure there are robust quality assurance mechanisms in place that monitor timescales for assessments, permanence planning, quality of work, children's voices and placement stability.
- Ensure the service can meet service delivery in the most effective way by reviewing the structure and the service delivery model.
- Strengthen the management and coordination of the child's journey by developing fostering and residential provision through a placement team.