

APPENDIX

FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17

INTRODUCTION

As Lead Member for Children and Young People in Gateshead and Chief Executive/Interim Strategic Director of Care, Wellbeing and Learning we hold the responsibility to ensure that children requiring fostering receive good 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 2016/17 Fostering Annual Report of Gateshead Council highlights the progress the Fostering Service has made over the past year. **28** new foster carers have been approved, and our carers continue to achieve success in their Level 3 Diploma qualifications and Training Support and Development Standards. This year we also celebrated an exceptionally high number of foster carers receiving long service awards, with one foster family receiving an award for forty years' service.

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:

- Further developing the Staying Put Scheme to allow young people to stay with their foster families beyond the age of 18.
- Increasing the number of foster placements for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, Teenage Placements and Sibling Group Placements.
- Ensuring the recruitment strategy is effective enough to provide a range of placements.
- Reviewing the training and support package offered to foster carers considering caring for teenagers with complex needs.
- Maintaining placement stability.
- Further reducing the number of Independent Fostering Placements we use.
- Monitoring and evaluation the Fostering Service to ensure that the best performance and outcomes possible are achieved.

We are extremely proud of the work that the whole Fostering Team does in order to provide the best possible service and opportunities for our Looked After children in Gateshead and this work will continue. We are acutely aware that children in our care deserve the very best and colleagues and foster carers alike are to be commended for, not only the work they do but for their dedication and commitment.

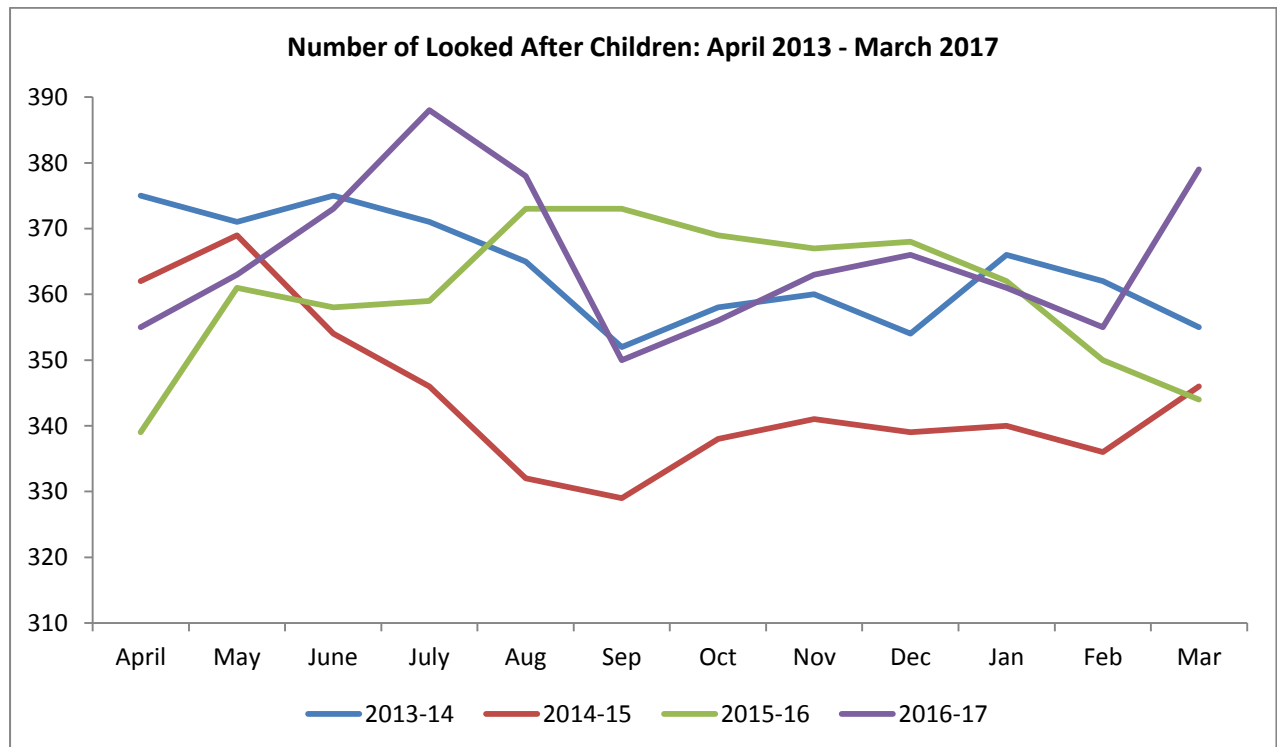
We thank you all for everything you doevery day.

Councillor Angela Douglas
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Sheena Ramsey
Chief Executive and Interim Strategic Director of Care, Wellbeing and Learning

The Fostering Service

The Fostering Service staff team is made up of the Team Manager, 2 Assistant Team Managers, 15 Supervising Social Workers, an Education Worker who liaises with the REALAC team and schools in the area, and a Recruitment and Marketing officer. The team is supported by a Business Support unit with dedicated support to foster carer payments, panel and duty administration.



Over the last year the number of Looked After Children in Gateshead has ranged from 341 to 388 with the majority of these children being placed with in-house foster carers.

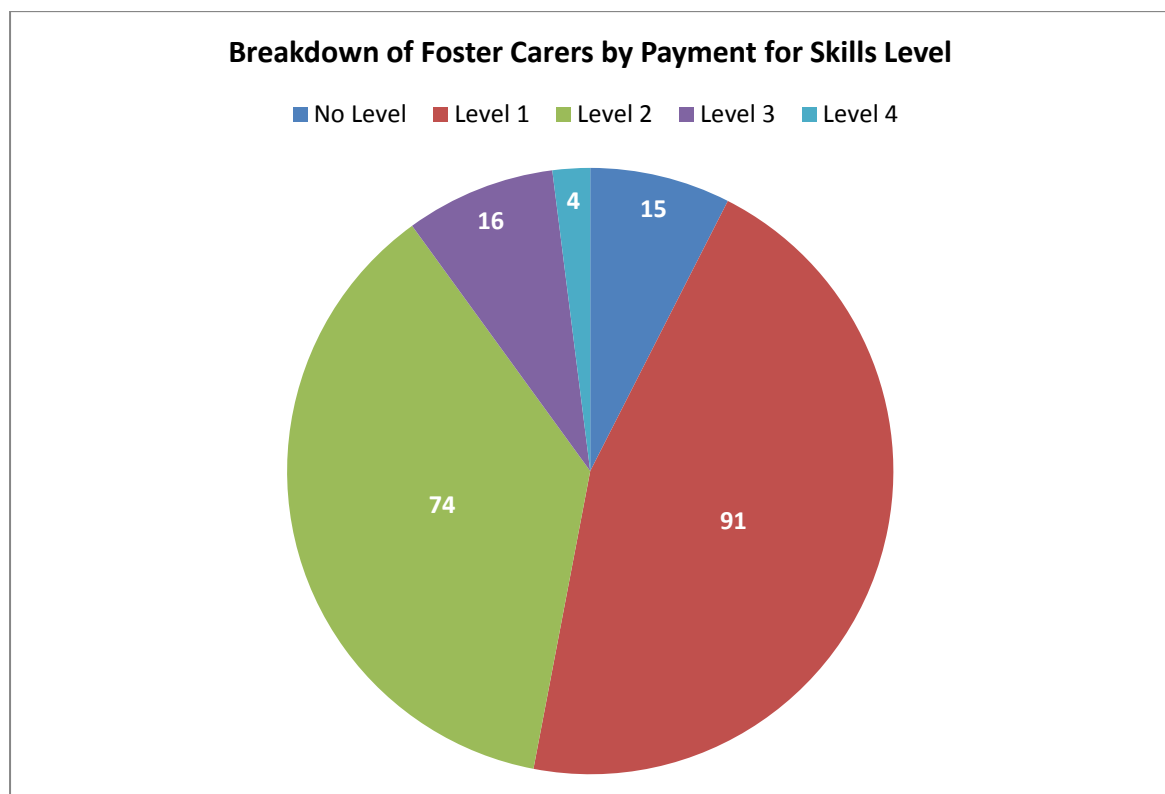
Many of the children leaving care throughout the year are those who are already living with relatives under Fostering Regulations where other legal orders are obtained to secure their permanence with that family i.e. Special Guardianship or Residence Orders. This does not free up any fostering placements 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 in order 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 in order to undertake the necessary care tasks. The payment levels were implemented for new and existing foster carers during 2013 and the majority of 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.



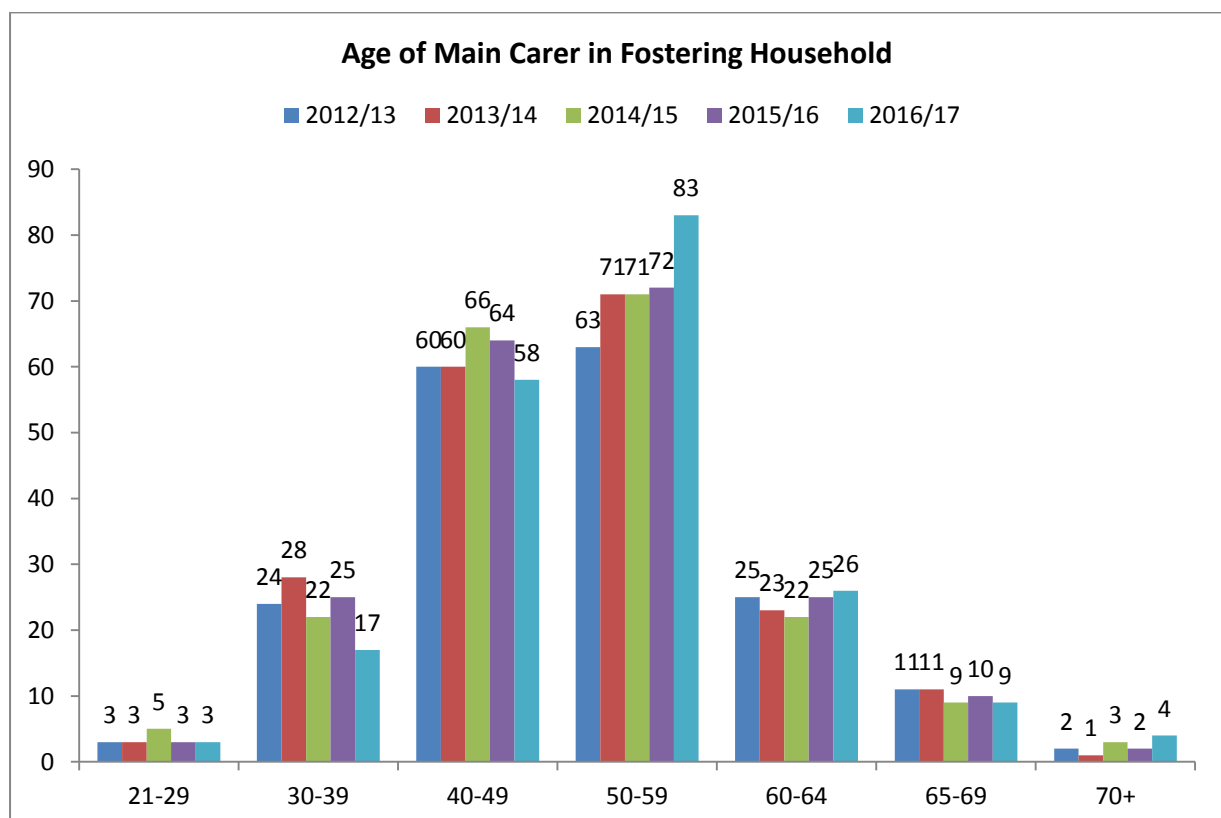
The Foster Carers

At 31st March 2017 there were 200 approved fostering households comprising 349 foster carers, a slight decrease on the previous year. During the year ending 31 March 2017, 28 new fostering households were approved at Fostering Panel, with 26 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.

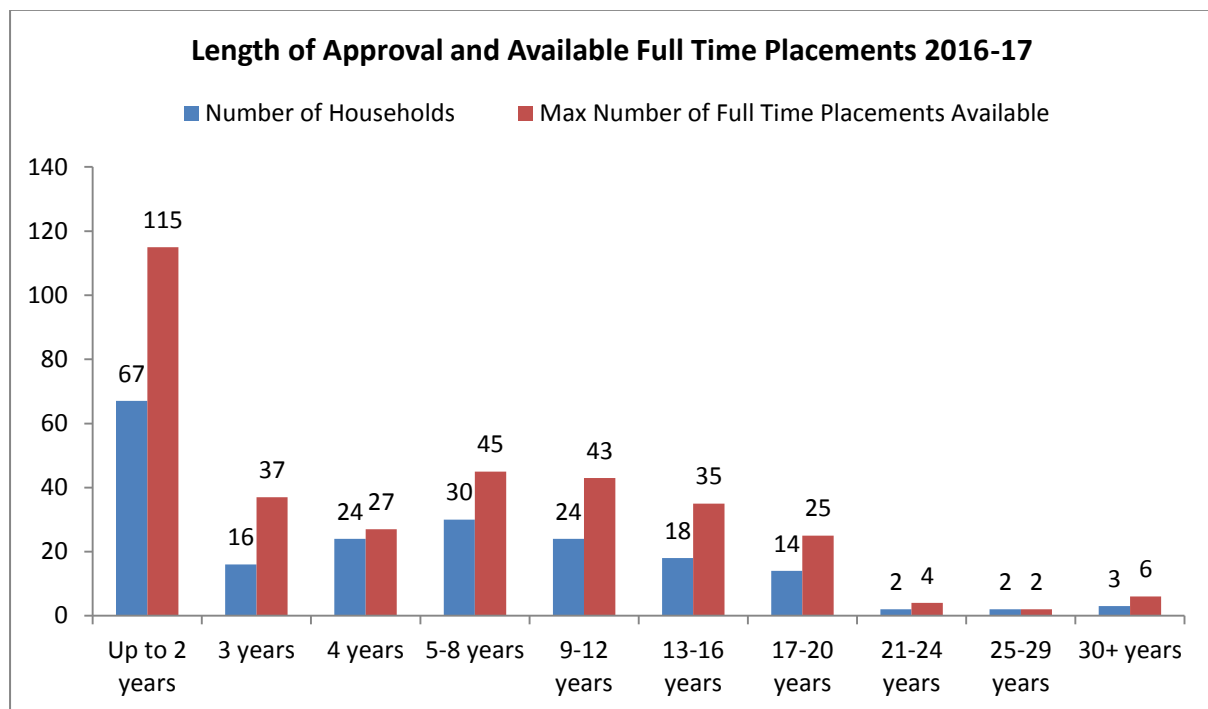
Main Type of Care	Number of Households
Short Break and Respite	2
Short Term and Task Centred	64
Long Term/Permanent	94
Home from Home	11
Connected Person	29

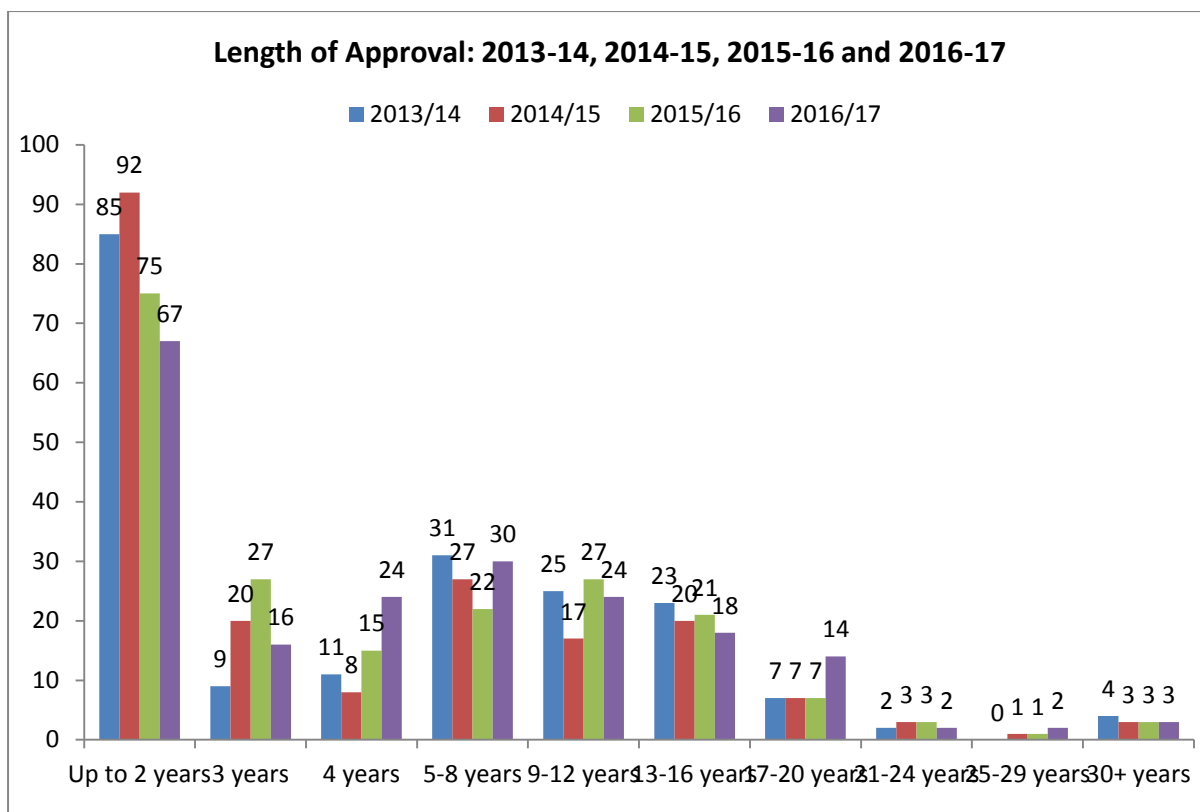
The majority of foster carers (98%) within Gateshead come from a White British ethnic background; however we also have fostering households from the Pakistani and Orthodox Jewish communities. This reflects the shortage of foster carers from ethnic minorities that is experienced nationally. Though a high proportion (91%) of children in placement during the year ending March 2016 were White, our carers also provided placements for those from other ethnic groups.



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. 61% (122) of main carers within fostering households are over the age of 50 and currently provide approximately 62% of the potential available full time placements. This is a sharp increase on the figures last year where 56% of available placements were offered by older fostering households.

The national trend shows that over the next 5 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.





The Fostering Service has recruited a number of new foster carers in the last 5 years, with 33% (67) 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 15% of our fostering households having over 15 years service. Three households have been fostering for at least 30 years, with one household reaching 40 years in November 2016.

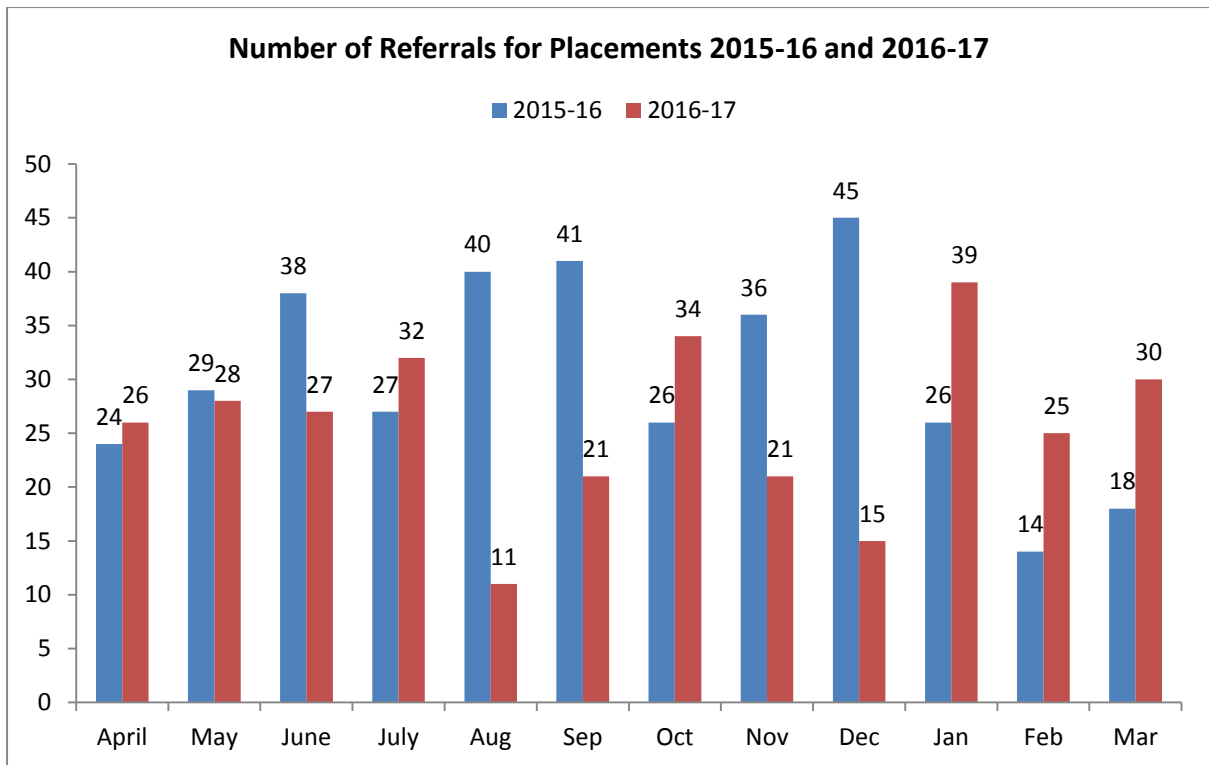
Connected person

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 Assistant Team Manager of the long term team.

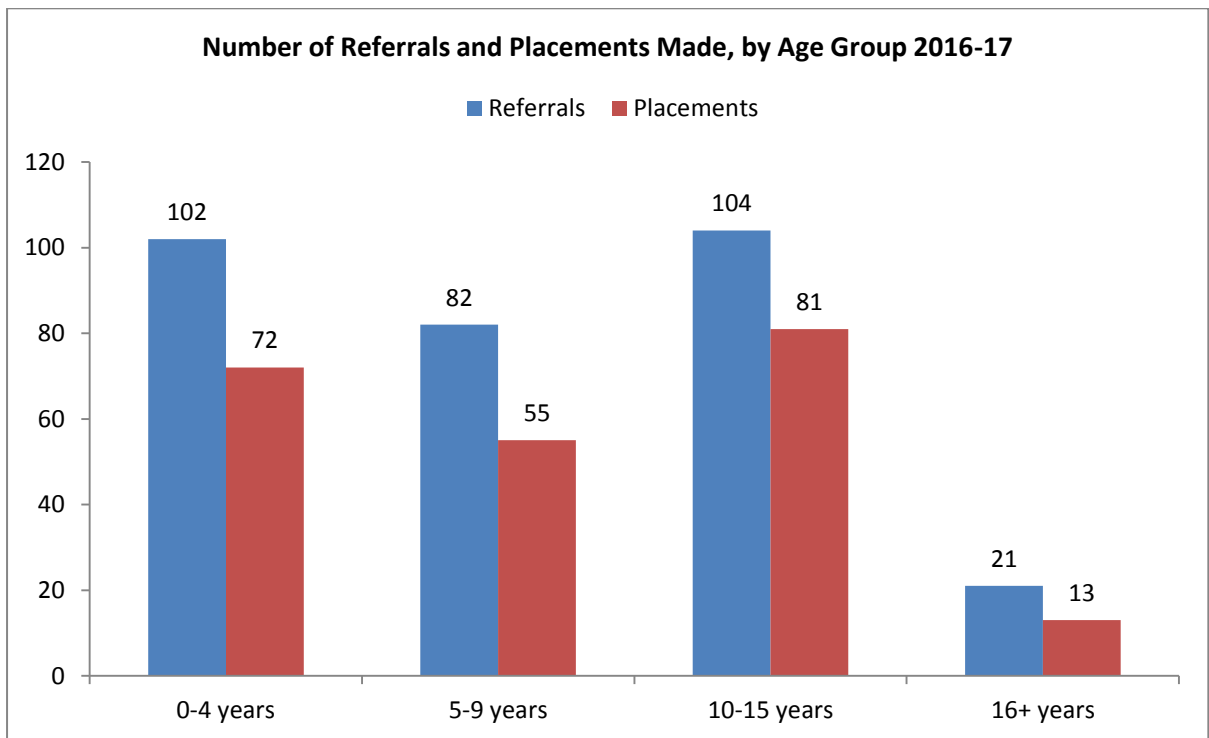
The service recognises that these carers are often dealing with complex family situations and have implemented special support groups for connected person carers. We have also developed strong regional links with the national support group Grandparents Plus, with two of our connected person carers being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

Referrals for Placements

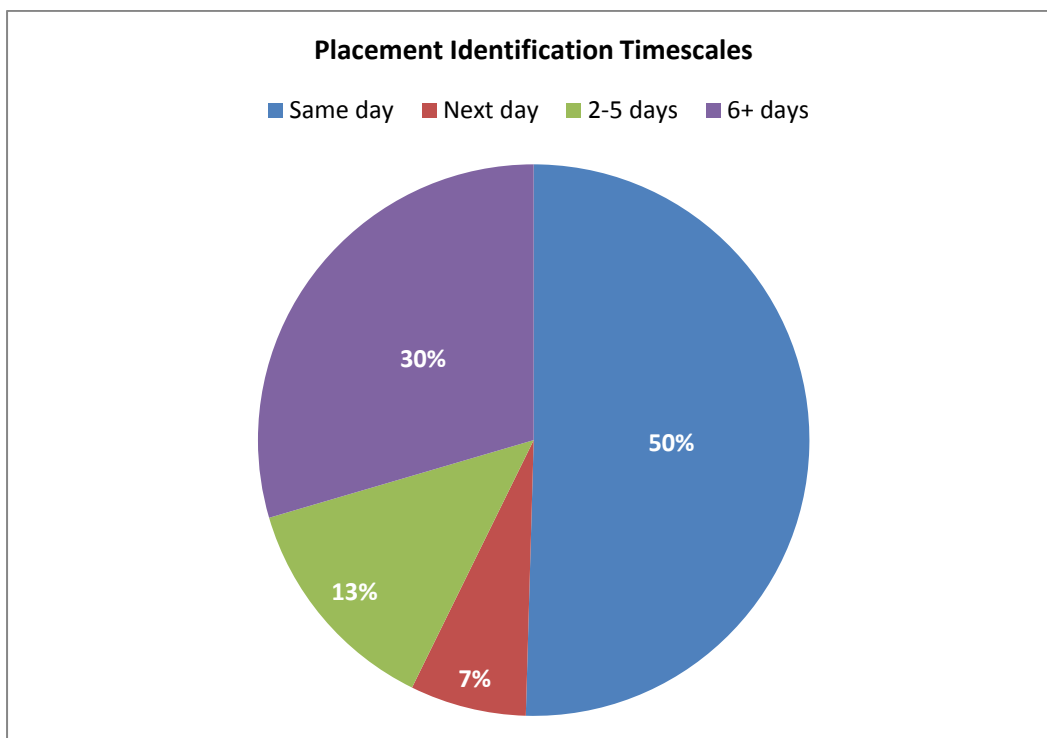
Gateshead's social work teams made 309 referrals to the Fostering Service for placements between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017. This is a decrease of 15% on the previous year. Of these referrals, 221 (72%) placements were subsequently made and 88 (28%) were withdrawn by social workers as alternative arrangements were made for the children in question including placements with family or friends.



In contrast to the previous year, the highest numbers of referrals during 2016-17 were received in the first months of 2017. The highest demands for placements during the year continues to be on the 0-4 and 10-15 years range, which continues to influence the marketing campaign to attract more carers for older children in particular teenagers.



The majority of placement referrals from social work teams are for emergency requests where 57% of placements are needed within one working day of the referral being submitted. 7% are needed within 2-5 days and 30% of referrals were needed after six days.



Over the year 49 sibling groups were referred to the Service for a total of 114 children, an increase of 16% on last year. 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 5 groups placed separately.

Size of Sibling Group	Number Referred and Placed	Number of Groups Placed Together	Number of Groups Split	Total Children
2	30	30	0	60
3	5	0	5	15
4	1	1	0	4

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 also 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 2017, Gateshead had commissioned Independent Fostering Placements for 26 children. Of the 22 new 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.

However, out of the 22 new Independent Placements commissioned between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2017, 11 of these also ended during same period. Targeted recruitment has continued to take place over the year in an attempt to increase the number of teenage placements Gateshead can offer and this will continue into the next financial year.

To the period 31 March 2017 Independent placements ended for a total of 20 children which helped the Service's aim of reducing Independent placements.

Reasons for Placement Endings:

	Number of Children
Rehabilitated Home	5
Moved to Supported Lodgings/Independent Living/Staying Put	5
Carers transferred to Gateshead Fostering	1
Moved to In-house Placement	6
Absconded from placement (on bail)	1
Adopted	2

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Recruitment Strategy

The service has in place a recruitment strategy spanning the three year period to the end of March 2018 with a target of recruiting at least 30 new foster carer units each year. The marketing plan for 2016/2017 focussed on providing a constant presence across a wide range of media channels with the aim of promoting fostering and adoption jointly, where appropriate, to maximise exposure. Promotional activities were mainly generic in order to reach out to as many potential foster carers as possible throughout the year rather than campaigns aimed at attracting foster carers for specific groups of children, which had previously been unsuccessful.

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
- Bridge banner promotion and civic centre railings
- Banners in the civic centre foyer
- Gateshead Now – direct email to Gateshead residents

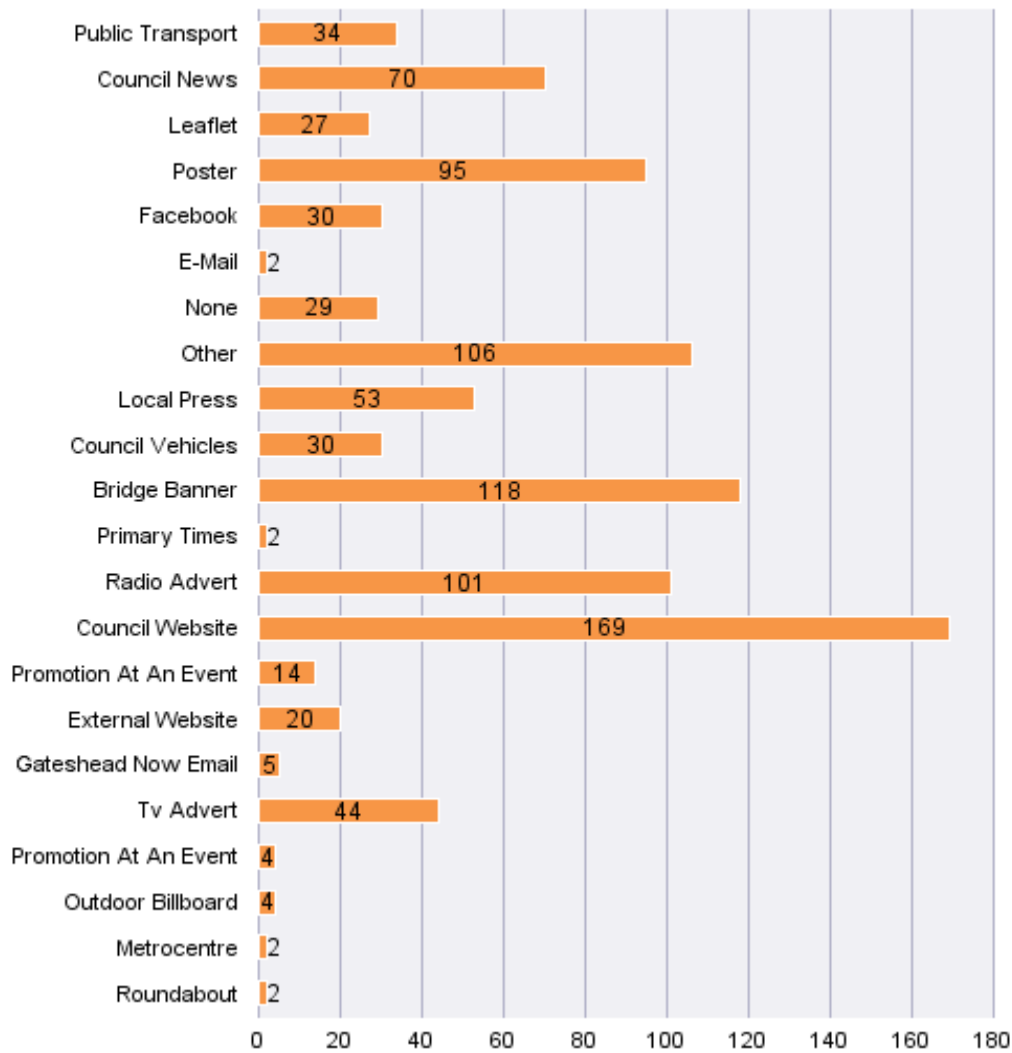
Other external activity:

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

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 2017 and therefore captures advertising channels used during that period.

Which of Gateshead Council's Fostering Promotional Materials has been seen by the enquirer?



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 the enquirers have seen between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017 split into the three years.

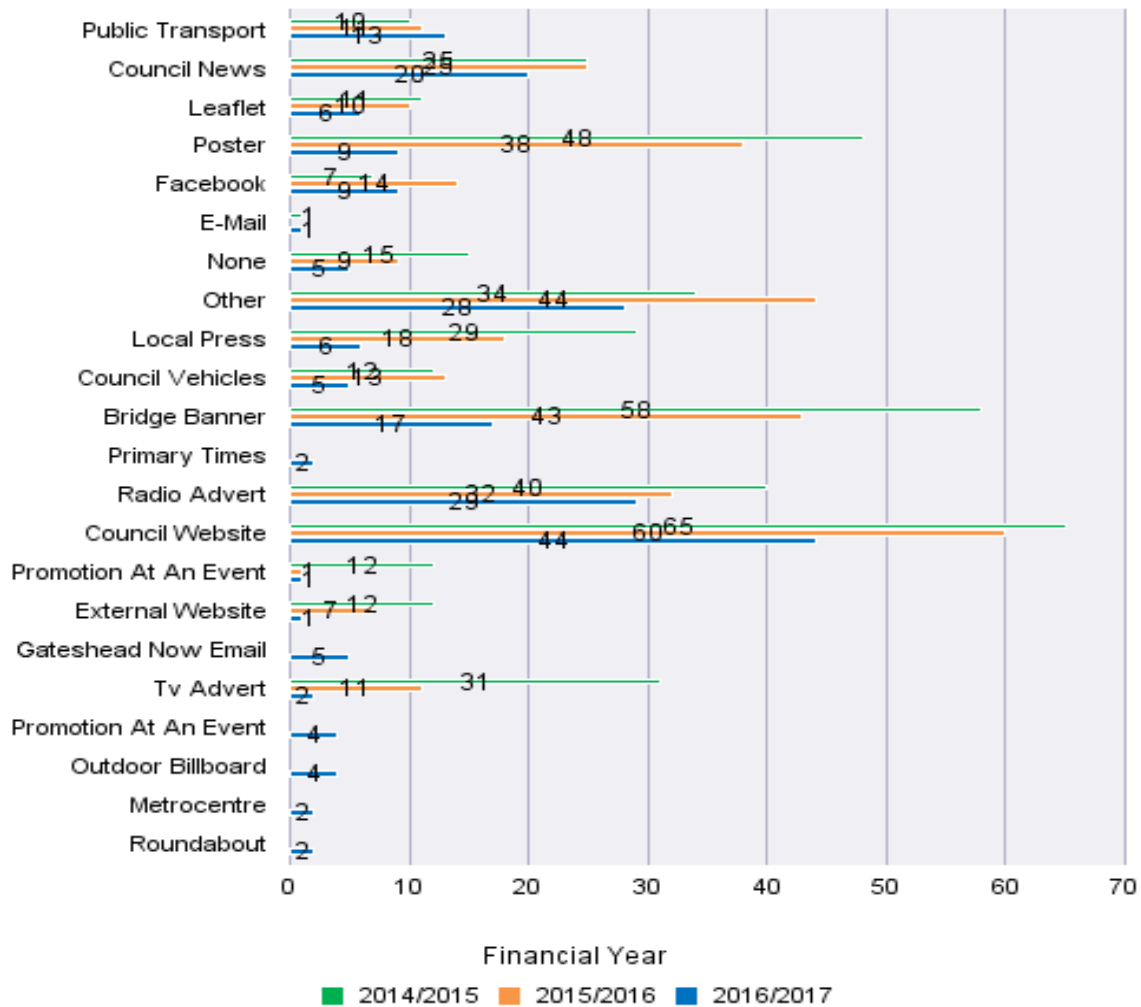
The top six channels cited this year are:

- Council Website
- Radio Advert
- Council News

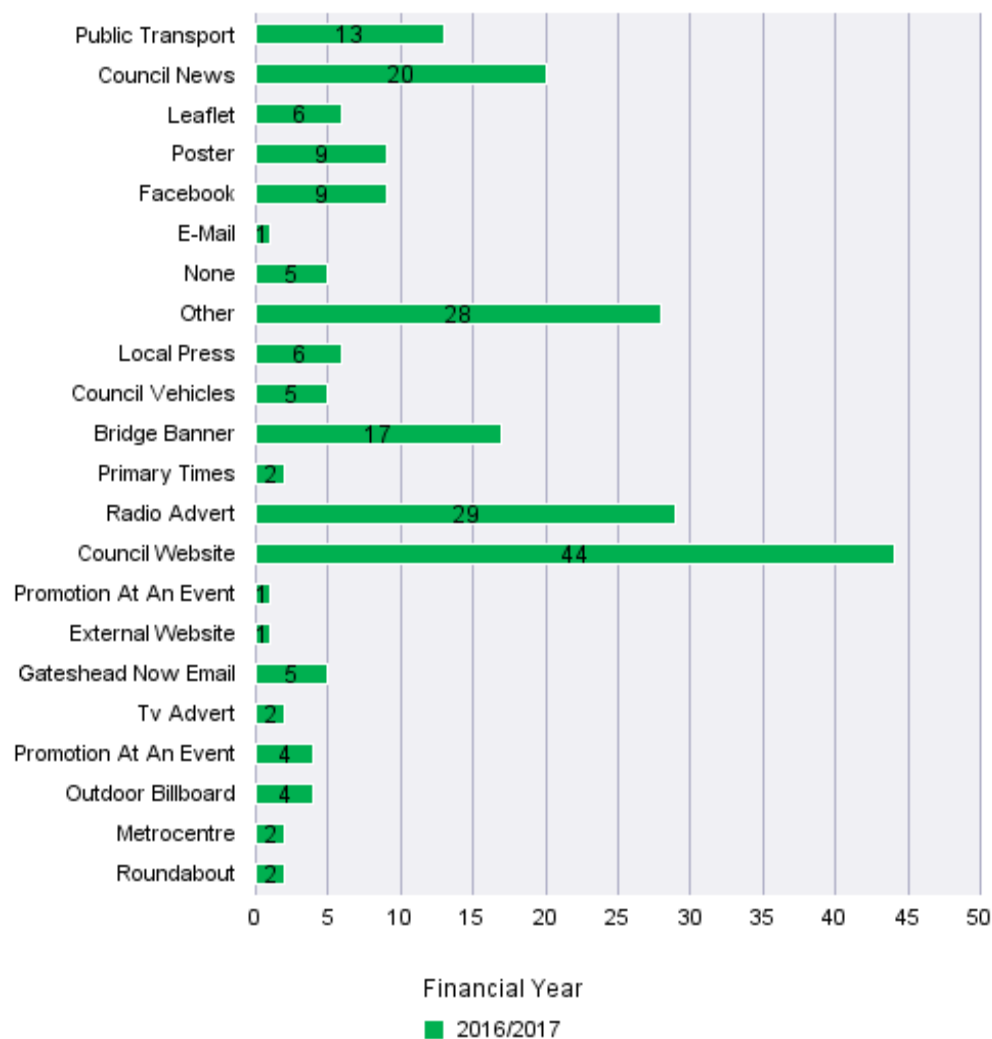
- Bridge Banner
- Public Transport
- Facebook & Poster

The service is making increased use of digital channels and we are starting to see an increase in enquiries via these channels. The radio advertising has been successful this year and we will continue to build awareness via this channel. Public transport advertising is also producing results so should be considered going forward. This information will be analysed further to inform the marketing strategy for 2017/18 and beyond.

Which of Gateshead Council's Fostering Promotional Materials has been seen by the enquirer?

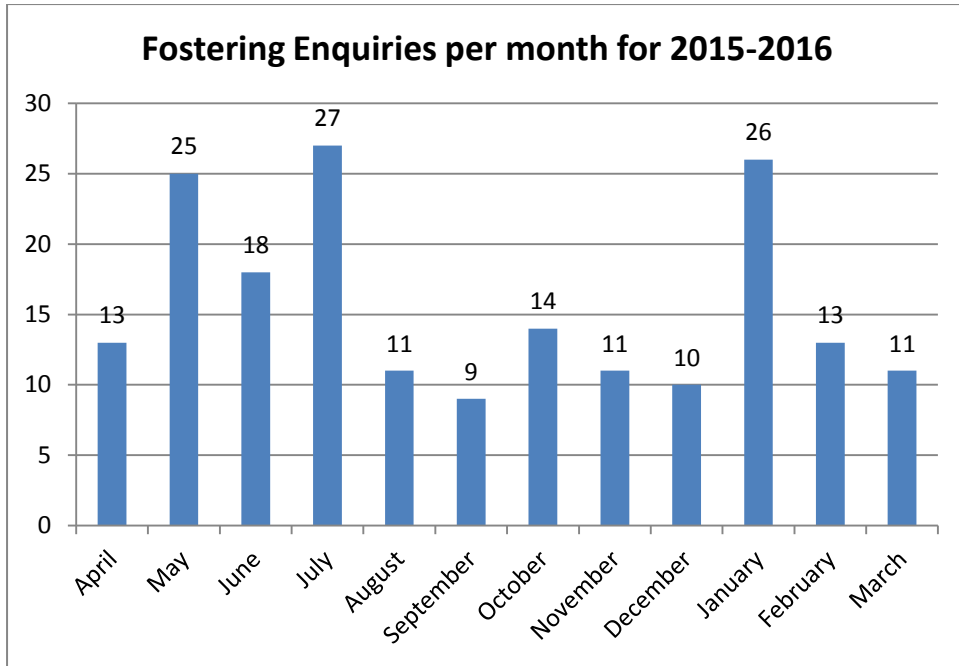


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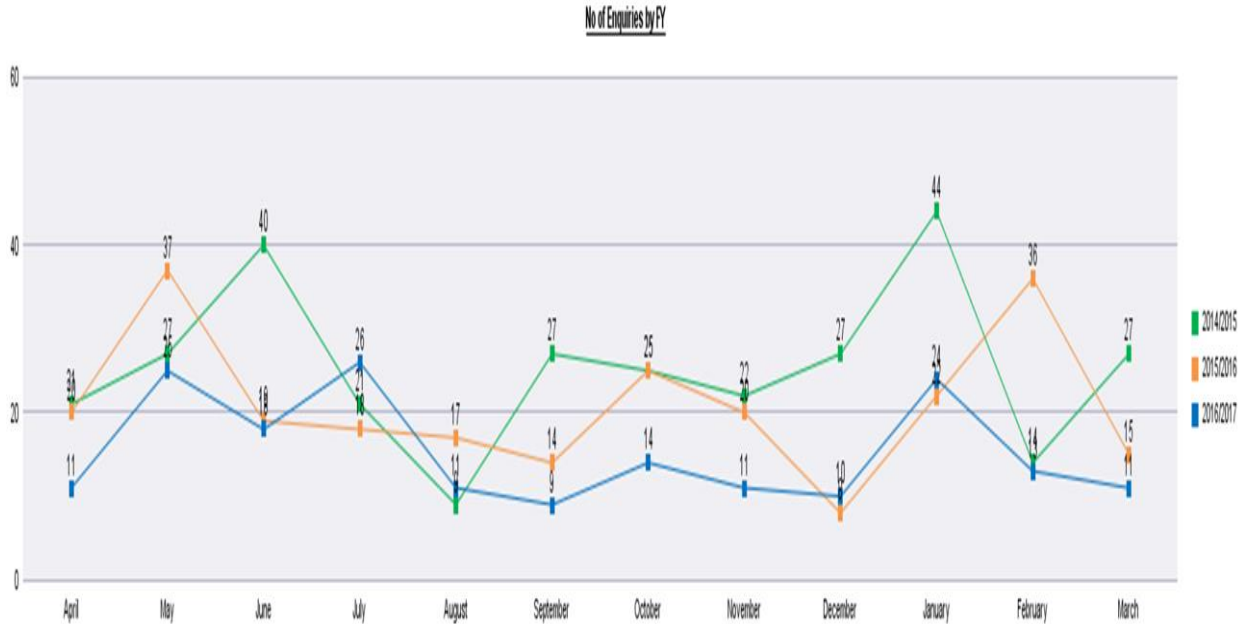
Enquiries

In the year to 31 March 2017 the service received 188 enquiries, a decrease in 27% on the previous year. However, the overall number of fostering households approved at panel increased from 21 in (2015-16) to 28 in (2016-17), though only 16 of these were approved as non-connected person households. The service was therefore extremely close to achieving its target this year despite the decrease in overall enquiries. Going forward however, enquiry levels still need to increase 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 approach to recruitment will aim to deliver an increase in enquiries.



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 2016/17 has increased to 14.9 % (based on the number of approvals this year compared to the number of enquiries received). The graph below shows the level of enquiries over the last three years.



The graph shows that we see peak levels of enquiries in May, July and January but that the remaining months have been consistently below the level of previous years.

The next steps

The recruitment strategy requires a full review to ensure it is aligned to the current business goals and robust enough to deliver its objectives. The marketing plan will then be developed outlining how we will achieve the objectives.

The Fostering Service has widened the responsibility for the recruitment and retention of foster carers by involving the senior members of the Fostering Team directly with planning, delivery and reviewing activities. These roles commenced in April 2017 and will ensure we remain clearly focussed on our objectives, which will be more closely monitored and adjusted as necessary. This marketing plan will then be a document which is continuously reviewed.

Our priority will be to increase the number of foster placements for all children but in particular focus will be the need for placements for sibling groups, teenagers and unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

A plan will be developed for the year in order 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 followings key findings which can help us to understand the current thinking of newly approved foster carers.

- 81% of newly approved foster carer 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.

As part of the marketing and recruitment strategy, retention of our current foster carers is pivotal in ensuring that we are able to keep our numbers of in-house foster carers to at least a minimum level of 200 households. 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 Assistant Team Manager in 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 have to complete their Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards for Foster Carers within 12 months of approval. This year 26 foster carer households achieved this. 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 of 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 in order 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 bulletins 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 Family Fun Day took place in July at Cardinal Hume School. Children were able to take part in a range of activities including face painting, bouncy castles and football shoot outs, and there was the opportunity to see a range of insects and small reptiles and be entranced by a magician! This year there were also stilt walking, craft activities and guest appearances from Spider man and Cinderella. 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 2017 – Foster 4 Life

The annual Foster Carer Awards were held on 25 April 2017, at the Lancastrian Suite in Gateshead, recognising the dedication and hard work of all the Council's foster carers. In Gateshead there are 303 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 "Foster4 Life". "Foster 4 life" has a dual meaning; not only does it suggest that fostering is a career for life but it also reflects that it enhances the lives of the children and young people we look after.

This year we celebrated the fact that an exceptionally high number of foster carers reached a significant milestone in the number of years they have been foster carers with Gateshead Council.

We acknowledged that:

- **20** foster families received their 5, 50 or 15 year award,
- **5** foster families received their 20 year award,
- **1** foster family received their 25 year award,
- **2** foster families received their 35 year award, and
- **1** foster family received an award for 40 years' service.

The presentation of the 40 year long service award to Moira and Les Martin was the highlight of the evening for everyone, as caring for children for forty years is a massive achievement. Gateshead Council is immensely proud of all of our foster carers but Moira and Les Martin received a special mention for their dedication and commitment to fostering services. Moira and Les received their award surrounded by their family and children they have, and currently, look after.

In addition to the above Long Service awards the evening acknowledged the following achievements:

- 20 sets of new foster carers welcomed to the service,
- 19 Sets of foster carers achieving their certificates for Department of Education, Training, Support and Development Standards,

- 12 foster carers achieving a level 3 Diploma for the Children and Young People’s workforce,
- 1 foster carer successfully completing the Bridging Units for the Level 3 Diploma.

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.
 - 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 a fantastic experience for all who attended and the following quotes, from children in foster care who nominated their carers demonstrate the real difference foster carers in Gateshead make to the children in our care.

- “ Being the best cook and the best mam ever, helping us with our homework and washing our faces, loving us and keeping us safe, driving us to school every day and taking us to hospital appointments even when you feel poorly.”
- “They are my family who deal with my problems, buy me clothes, holidays, give me love, teach me manners and spend each and every day of their lives ensuring I am the happiest child in the word. When I am down one hug can say a thousand words.”
- “My foster carer always gives me good advice and helps me move into my future. My carer is amazing because she loves me and wants me to have a good life, a better life and a happy

life because my childhood has not been easy until I came to live with my carer and I appreciate it so much.

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.

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 Sue Holton – panel chair and Alan Clark – agency advisor.

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.

In April 2016 new Service Director Elaine Devaney was appointed as Agency Decision Maker, following the departure of Debra Patterson.

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

Activity	2016-17
Form F assessments	16
Connected person	12
De-registrations of foster carers	21
De-registrations of connected persons	5
Foster carer reviews	47
Matching children and carers	18
Non-progression of Form F assessments	3
Extension to Regulation 24 sixteen week temporary approval period	19

Number of placements

The Service has acquired 16 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 are in agreement 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, 12 new sets of connected person foster carers were approved throughout the year, for a total of 16 children. This is a significant increase of 140% on the previous year.

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 26 sets of foster carers were de-registered at panel, equating to 13%, which is roughly equivalent to this figure. The number of de-registrations in Gateshead has remained at a similar level to the last financial year.

REASON	NUMBER
Resignation	3
Retirement	1
Change of personal circumstances e.g. return to work, new partner	8

Change in family circumstances e.g birth of child, adopted child	1
Allegations/concerns	6
Child Arrangement Order or Special Guardianship Order for carer	2
Connected person – rehabilitation home	1
Impact on Family/Unable to manage fostering task	2
Transferred to another Fostering Agency	2

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:

- Continue to develop the Staying Put Scheme which allows young people to remain in their foster placements beyond the age of 18.
- Undertake targeted recruitment campaigns to increase the number of foster placements specifically around Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, Teenage Placements and Sibling Group Placements.
- Develop the training and support offered to foster carers who are considering caring for teenagers with complex needs.
- Ensure the recruitment strategy is robust and that there is evidence we are providing a choice of appropriate placements.
- Ensure the excellent work undertaken with regards to placement stability continues.
- Continue in the reduction of the use of Independent Fostering Placements.
- Continue to monitor the Fostering Service and evaluate all activities to ensure that the best performance and outcomes possible are achieved.