Foster Care Market Position Statement

May 2020

Version: Final

Produced with the support of the DFE Foster Care Seed Funding and in conjunction with Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool Council and Lancashire County Council.
Cumbria County Council: Foster Care Market Position Statement.

1. Introduction.

The purpose of this statement is to support the foster care market to understand the needs of Cumbria County Council. It outlines the priorities for foster care and includes information relating to the requirements in terms of volume, distribution, and capability of placements. It provides part of the narrative for the formulation of the set of commissioning intentions outlined at the end of this document.

The DFE, supported by the National Stability Forum, provided funding for local authorities and partners to carry out feasibility studies into proposals to improve foster care in their region. Cumbria County Council was party to a successful application with Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool and Lancashire County Councils (referred to as BBCL Authorities).

2. Local Area Description.

Cumbria has a population of approximately 103,000 children and young people aged 0-19 years. This is 20.7% of the total population lower than the national average of 23.7%. Of Cumbria’s six districts, Carlisle has the greatest number of young people aged 0-19 years whilst Barrow-in-Furness has the greatest proportion of residents aged 0-19 years.

Children and young people from Black and Minority Ethnic groups make up 5.3% of the population (the national average is 14%). 11.6% of pupils have SEN support (in line with the national average) and 3.1% have an EHCP or Statement (above the national average).

Cumbria performs as well or better than the national average in relation to levels of child poverty, school absence and exclusions. However, the county performance is worse than the national average in relation to the progress of reception pupils achieving a Good Level of Development, children subject of a Child Protection Plan, Children Looked After and young offenders.

3. Understanding Need.

Following a short period of decline to 2017 the number of Children Looked After has risen from 632 to 683 in March 2019 and has continued to increase to 716 (June 2019).

The rate of Children Looked After (CLA) per 10,000 children is 74, exceeding the average of the Statistical Neighbours group (61) but lower than the average of the North West Authorities (94). The statistical neighbours are Lincolnshire, Cornwall, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Suffolk, Staffordshire, Norfolk, North Lincolnshire, Worcestershire and Lancashire.
The rate of CLA per 10,000 population varies across the districts with the most deprived districts Barrow, Copeland and Allerdale having the higher rates of CLA (116, 104 and 101 respectively).

The number of children beginning to be looked after each year has fluctuated around an average of 229 since 2015, with 219 beginning to be cared for in 2019. The number ceasing to be looked after has also fluctuated since 2015 around an average of 230 children ceasing care, with 202 ceasing care in 2019.

The profile of Cumbria is markedly different to that of statistical neighbours and the national profile, in that there is a high proportion of 10-15 years old (48.5%). Children Looked After are mainly White British (94.3%) with a small and growing proportion of children of Black British and Mixed Ethnic background.

Children Looked After by Cumbria County Council are:

- Less likely to meet the expected standard in reading, writing and maths at KS2 than the statistical neighbour, regional or national averages.
- More likely to progress better in school at KS4 than the statistical neighbour, regional or national average.
- More likely to attain a higher standard than statistical neighbour, regional and national averages at KS4.
- Less likely to be excluded than the statistical neighbour, regional or national averages.
- More likely to have a SEN (Special Educational Need) with an EHCP (Education Health and Care Plan) than the statistical neighbour, regional or national averages and more likely to have a SEN without an EHCP than the regional or national averages.
- More likely to have committed an offence than the statistical neighbour, regional or national averages.
- Less likely to achieve a score on the SDQ that is a prompt for discussion than the statistical neighbour, regional or national averages.
More likely to have an identified substance misuse problem than statistical neighbour, regional or national averages.

About as less likely to have a missing incident as their statistical neighbours lower than the regional or national averages.

Less likely than the statistical neighbour, regional or national averages to have 3 or more placements in a year, in 2019 there were 50 children with 3 or more placements a reduction of 6 young people since 2018.

Less likely than the statistical neighbour, regional and national averages to have been in the same placement for 2 years. On the 31st of March 2019, 189 children and young people had been in the same placement for 2 years.

More likely to be placed more than 20 miles from home than the statistical neighbour, regional, or national averages (DFE 31st March 2019).

(Source LAC Outcomes 2019)

4 Placement Activity and Cost.

A detailed investigation of new entrants to care over a 6 month period (May 2019) identified a high proportion of entrants were part of sibling groups (44%); 40% were aged 10 plus; 27% were accommodated under s20, but at the district level this varied from 8 to 58%. Barrow and South Lakeland had the highest rate of accommodation under s20; placed the greater percentage of children in residential (29%) and the smallest percentage in foster care of any type, including Independent Foster Agency (IFA) placements.

There was a decline in the proportion of children placed with foster carers, with 71% (483) placed in foster care in 2019 compared with 74% (489) in 2018. As at the 31st March 2019 the internal service provided 209 placements and the IFA sector 202. There were children placed in residential care. The age profile of children placed in year shows an increased reliance on purchased provision (residential and foster care) as the age of the children increases.

An analysis of all non-connected foster placements as at end September 2019 identified district-based disparity between the demand and supply of foster placements and this will be the focus of additional activity over the next year.

The average cost of IFA placements by age group is detailed in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average of Price</th>
<th>Last year</th>
<th>All Placements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGE Band 1 0 to 4</td>
<td>£857.69</td>
<td>£807.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE Band 2 5 to 10</td>
<td>£814.83</td>
<td>£792.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE Band 3 11 to 15</td>
<td>£850.39</td>
<td>£799.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE Band 4 16+</td>
<td>£928.77</td>
<td>£837.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARENT &amp; Child</td>
<td>£1,312.00</td>
<td>£1,312.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td><strong>£872.56</strong></td>
<td><strong>£808.94</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Commissioners have reflected on the price of foster placements and recognise that there is a perceived increase of need through the age bands and the impact of inflation particularly on new placements.
5 Local Authority Summary Position

Cumbria operates its own Fostering Framework it is a flexible framework which new providers can join every 6 months. It is also party to the North West Fostering FPS. Referrals are made to providers on the Cumbrian framework and those on the regional framework who are not on the Cumbrian framework whenever a placement is required from the independent sector. This arrangement provides access to all of the IFA’s with placements that are local or close to Cumbria. The Council’s own service provides most of the foster placements made. As of the 31st of March 2020 Cumbria, had 190 mainstream fostering households. By the end of May 2020 this had risen to 207. The service achieved net growth of 42 fostering households from 1st April 2018 to the May 2020. The service had 258 children in placement as of the 31st March 2020.

The service operates an emergency placement scheme using 4 dedicated carers and is working to increase the capacity; the service is establishing the Adolescent Care Team (recruiting carers for 10-18 year olds) and continues to improve support offered to carers using a carer led model.
It responds promptly to enquiries and deliver assessments to timescale and is keen to see how collaboration BBCL partners can assist in delivering improvements.

The following are informing Cumbria’s planning:
- An increasing number of Looked After Children and the distribution of those children.
- The increase in the proportion (and number) of adolescent entrants to care.
- An increasing difficulty in securing placements for children aged 8 and over with more challenging issues.
- The need for a small number of specialist placements for children with disabilities and complex health needs.

Cumbria County Council will continue to recruit across all ages utilising digital, broadcast and community approaches. There has been progress in recent years with the net recruitment of 25 fostering households in the last two years to 31st March 2020, a 7.5% annual growth rate compared with the national average of 0%. However, the reliance on IFA placements (185) will continue especially in the context of an increasing CLA population and the numbers of children in residential care.
The service is proposing specific recruitment activity focussing on BAME Carers and children aged over 11, alongside the recruitment of homestay carers.

Cumbria has committed to the following:
- The improvement and enhancement of the Emergency Placements and Adolescent Care Team.
- The review and improvement of the support offered to foster carers, in order to increase capability in respect of older children.
- The continuation of the Placement Decision Tree pilot in order to make better use of local IFA placements.
- Engaging in regular Exchange days with IFA’s as ‘promising practice’.
- Working at a sub-regional level to address specific issues.
6 Sub -Regional Position.

Cumbria County Council, other BBCL Authorities and the sub-region has an increasing population of Children Looked After and sits within a region which is experiencing similar increases in the numbers of CLA.

BBCL CLA Numbers and rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rate</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Rate</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>1660</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackburn with Darwen</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackpool</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBCL Total</td>
<td>3132</td>
<td>3367</td>
<td>3523</td>
<td>3770</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The balance between internal and independently sourced foster placements is described in the Table below. This highlights the differing contexts between the county and unitary authorities - the former having a greater reliance of the independent sector:

**BBCL Non-connected foster carer placement location (Snapshot September 2019)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLA placed by the Local Authority</th>
<th>BwD</th>
<th>Blackpool</th>
<th>Cumbria</th>
<th>Lancashire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LA in-house foster care placement</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFA placements - in area</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFA placements - out of area / in BBCL</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFA placements - out of BBCL</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total non-connected foster placements</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>1065</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ofsted identified that nationally IFAs provide 39% of fostering places (Fostering in England 2019).
The following table shows the relationship between placements from the Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, Cumbria and Lancashire (BBCL) Authorities along the top of the Table and the host authority for that placement on the vertical. Cumbria had 185 children and young people in an IFA foster placement and 75 of those were placed in Cumbria, 5 in BwD, 1 in Blackpool, 29 in Lancashire and 75 outside of the BBCL boundaries.

The supply of foster care is summarised in this table

Cumbria had 179 non-connected foster care households on the 30th of September, 150 of these had children in place and provided placements for 235 children and young people. The placements per household is calculated by dividing the number of children in placement by the number of households offering a placement.

Local Authorities that apply an occupancy rate within the KPI’s of the internal service construct it in different ways, but an 85% occupancy target seems common – and Cumbria achieves an 83% occupancy.
Stakeholder Consultation

A cross section of Fostering Agencies, internal fostering services within BBCL, and exemplar local authorities were engaged by the project to explore how fostering sufficiency across BBCL and within each Authority could be optimised and developed.

Issues were raised which will be explored through future procurement processes:

- The focus of growth through social media and recommendation tends to result in growth with similar population and within areas where there is a foster carer population.
- Recruitment activity is costly and competitive – and segmentation of the prospective foster care market is still in the proof of concept stage.
- IFAs were clear that there was a commitment to recruitment.
- IFAs recognised the issues within BBCL, the need to address the availability of local placements and to prepare for increased demand.
- There was an appetite to engage with BBCL and each of the Local Authorities. IFAs identified that foster carers preferred taking placements from some of the authorities more than others. This was tempered with a recognition that there is significant demand for placements and foster carers want to have children in placement.

The consultation identified common issues related to sufficiency across fostering agencies, Council and independent, as well as the commitment, through better relationships, smarter processes, and a shared understanding of the placement pipeline, to improve sufficiency.

Summary Position

Each Authority has a different fostering sufficiency picture requiring a local solution that includes complementary approaches to the internal and independent sector.

The BBCL Authorities have identified that the work with the independent sector to develop capacity for hard to place cohorts of children and young people or in providing capacity in under-served areas might be better addressed at a sub-regional level. This includes improving access to local capacity at the point of need for local children; the distribution of local capacity in relation to hard to place areas within BBCL; the availability of placements for children with a specific need profile – some shared across BBCL and some specific to an authority.

Authorities within BBCL have relationships with the market through a variety of contractual arrangements shaped by local demand and local capacity. The Authorities have assessed that acting as BBCL will strengthen the commissioner’s role in influencing local capacity and shaping capability. It will also afford opportunities to aggregate some specialist needs and engage the market in sub-regional solutions.

The approach will be about building on the current relationships between the Authorities and IFAs, unifying processes and minimising any administrative burden of the market.
Further work will be carried out across BBCL Authorities and with IFAs to develop this area. The following therefore are draft intentions and are not presented in an order of priority. The delivery of these is dependent on the capacity of the Authorities, securing additional resource and the response of partners.

a) Consideration of the development of a Sub-Regional Placement Provider Arrangement

The BBCL Authorities are party to one or more contractual arrangements for the provision of foster care. As detailed above the current arrangements are not providing the quality of relationship with the market for the specificity of local requirements to influence access to and development of local foster care capacity. National research highlights that successful Dynamic Purchasing Vehicles (DPV) and Frameworks need robust placement practice and effective contract management.

BBCL will explore the replacement of all or part of the current arrangements by:
- Building on local IFA partnerships.
- Increasing ‘local’ utilisation of placements through placement management activity.
- Increasing capability and specialism.
- Encouraging local recruitment activity especially within the ‘hard to place’ areas.

What does this mean?
Current thinking is that May 2022 is an achievable target date for a sub-regional contract – subject to BBCL receiving the necessary infrastructure support. BBCL will test the components of a sub-regional contract jointly with foster care providers including:
- Flexing the current contract management to include a recruitment activity KPI.
- Increasing pipeline management based on practice of some of the Authorities and the learning from current pilot activity.
- Capturing the learning from the promising Exchange days - and exploring how to involve more of the market.
- Reviewing the placement trajectory of young people to see if placement stability could be improved by delaying entry to care or providing time-limited care placements based on an understanding of the provider pipeline.

b) Enhanced Foster Care Placements

The local authorities have identified a cohort of children and young people aged from 9 to 15 years of age who enter care with complex needs. This group have previously been described as the ‘hard to place’, but their behaviours are not entrenched, and their best interests would be served by a well-supported foster placement. Some of the young people in this cohort benefit from a carer that had the confidence to offer a placement and the capability of dealing with ‘bumps in the road’.

Lancashire County Council have looked at the cohort and identified the following characteristics.
- Most have productive interests and pastimes.
- Most have a teacher and or another adult that describes them positively.
• Most are aged between 11 and 15 years of age.
• The majority are eventually placed with a foster carer – although around 10% are placed in residential.
• They might verbally abuse (30%), be challenging or negative (55%), have been a victim or have an emotional support / attachment issue (27%).
• They are unlikely to have an alcohol or substance misuse issue, to exhibit criminal or anti-social behaviours or engage in risk taking.
• We sometimes need a placement in a specific location so that they stay close to their school or family.

**What does this mean?**
The commissioners are keen to explore how this group of children and young people might be better served, whether this is through additional support offered to the placement or by a more defined project/ therapeutical approach. The commissioners recognise that the solution might share characteristics with other elements of this market engagement process. The current thinking is that the service should be provided on a time limited basis – to a plan that is co-produced with the young person; is actively managed by the provider/ commissioner; includes a support package that reflects the young person’s needs, provides placement stability and develops the social / familial networks that accelerate transition.

c) **'Same Day' and 'Short Notice' Placements**

A cohort of children and young people enter care with limited time for planning and a lack of clarity about the length of time they will remain in care. This impacts on the stability of their placement as more detail of their needs becomes apparent during the placement. The intention is to provide a short-term time limited placement allowing the exploration of alternatives.

This will combine with the Pilots, Exchange Days and the Placement Decision Tree, to provide more time for matching and make more efficient use of resources.

**What does this mean?**

Current thinking is that the service would provide short, time limited placements that provide care for children and young people with an immediate need for care but whose best interest beyond that is not clear. These will be children across the age range and will not be characterised by specific behaviours or necessarily provide a challenge to care.

The commissioners are aware of the challenge the arrangements might present and that the solution would need to be co-produced with providers.

d) **Specialist Foster Placements for Children with Disabilities**

Our analysis has found proportionally fewer children with disabilities placed in foster care than in similar areas. The Authorities are interested in creating additional local fostering capacity for the small cohort of children with disabilities whose best interests lie in foster care. The picture of demand and supply is emerging as we establish common definitions. It seems that about 100 children with disabilities are placed in foster care, about half of these in IFA placements and that around 10 children with disabilities enter care each year.
In our discussions with providers we identified that timely access to foster care placements at the point of entry to care or at case review is a key issue. Work nationally has recognised approaches have to address the linear nature of the care planning process, parental reticence and a lack of detailed need information. We are looking for providers view on how a service would be arranged to deliver increased foster placements for children with disabilities.

**What does this mean?**
The current view of commissioners is that this project will require the provider to: undertake specific foster carer recruitment and training; establish a support supply chain; and to work in tandem with the BBCL placement finding functions.

Local Authorities are keen to discuss good practice in our region and in the wider IFA organisations also to consider the various potential models of service. Commissioners will be exploring the potential support in kind or with finance to support the project – with any funding being recouped through placement fee discounts.

**Exploring Opportunities**

We will be applying transparent and fair processes in the selection of partners to work on the various intentions and in the procurement of services. Current providers will be included in market engagement and the Council will use the flexibilities allowed in procurement legislation to support the development of services that improve the outcomes of our young people.

**This document is issued as part of a market engagement exercise. You can comment on the content by submitting a BBCL Market Engagement Response document by email to cypcommissioningadmin@lancashire.gov.uk before 11am on Friday the 24th of July.**