



Corporate Parenting Committee - supplement

Thursday 28 April 2016 at 5.00 pm

Training Suite, 1st Floor, Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley HA9 0FJ

Membership:

Members

Councillors:

Moher (Chair)
Conneely
Hossain
Thomas
Warren

Substitute Members

Councillors:

S Choudhary, Crane and Dixon

Davidson and Shaw

For further information contact: Anne Reid, Democratic Services
020 8937 1359, anne.reid@brent.gov.uk

For electronic copies of minutes, reports and agendas, and to be alerted when the minutes of this meeting have been published visit:

www.brent.gov.uk/committees

The press and public are welcome to attend this meeting

Agenda – supplement

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The purpose of the report is to review the final quarter's performance (Q4 2015-16) and an overview of the full year position.

Ward Affected:
All Wards

Contact Officer: Nigel Chapman, Head of
Service – Forward Planning, Performance &
Partnerships

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The purpose of the report is to review the service performance in the 6-month period Oct 2015 – Mar 2016.

Ward Affected:
All Wards

Contact Officer: Nigel Chapman, Head of
Service – Forward Planning, Performance &
Partnerships



- Please remember to set your mobile phone to silent during the meeting.
- The meeting room is accessible by lift and seats will be provided for members of the public.

 Brent	<p>Corporate Parenting Committee 28 April 2016</p> <p>Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</p>
<p>Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report 1 January – 31 March 2016</p>	

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).
- 1.2 The report covers the fourth quarter of this reporting year.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review, comment on and question the contents of this report. This is to provide evidence that the management of the fostering service is being monitored and challenged in order to promote good outcomes for children.

3.0 Service Values

- 3.1 The in-house fostering function is positioned within the Placements Service of Children and Young People's Services. The vision for the Placements service as set out in the 2015-16 service plan is that:
- The best foster carers are recruited for our children.
 - All placements receive high quality support, effectively targeted according to need and providing good value for the Local Authority.
 - The number of children placed closer to home with our in-house foster carers' increases.

- Children are found permanent families without delay – whether within their extended family network or outside.
- Staff within the service are encouraged to become more professionally autonomous and confident.

4.0 Staffing Arrangements

- 4.1 These remain the same as those provided to the Corporate Parenting Committee in the Brent Fostering Service Quarter Three Monitoring report (October – December 2015).

5.0 Placement Activity

- 5.1 The corporate performance targets for this year relating to fostering are as follows:
- Percentage of LAC placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 35%.
 - Percentage of LAC placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15%
 - Percentage of LAC placed in Independent Fostering Agencies – annual target 25%.
 - Percentage of LAC overall within foster placements – annual target 75%
- 5.2 The overall LAC population increased during the reporting period; from 328 on 31st December 2015 to 337 on 31st March 2016.
- 5.3 As at the 31st March 2016 there were:
- 104 children placed with Brent foster carers compared to 96 children at the end of the previous quarter. This is 31% of the total.
 - 44 children placed with a relative or family friend on a fostering basis compared to 48 children at the end of the previous quarter. This is 13% of the total.
 - 88 children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) compared to 83 children at the end of the previous quarter. This is 26% of the total.
 - 71% of children lived within a fostering setting as at 31st March 2016.
- 5.4 As reported to the Corporate Parenting Committee in the Brent Fostering Service Quarter Three Monitoring report (October – December 2015), the most recent reporting period has continued to see an increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) approaching the borough for support. There were 64 UASC in the Local Authority's care as at 31st March 2016, compared to 58 at 31st December 2015. The proportion of all Looked After Children who are UASC is now 19%, compared to 14.8% in April 2015. A greater number and proportion of LAC are now residing in semi-independent accommodation - an increase of 10% to 16% from April 2015 to March 2016. This reflects the older age range of young people entering the care system within Brent.
- 5.5 The service operates with few vacancies so that the majority of available space with foster carers is maximised. As at 31st March 2016 there were 13 fostering households with at least one bed space available for fostering. This is approximately

12% of the total capacity of non-related households. The majority of carers with vacancies are approved for younger children and are therefore unsuitable to care for the older range of children becoming looked after.

- 5.6 The growth in new referrals in the older age range adversely affects our ability to provide in-house resources. However, semi-independent accommodation provides an effective option for those young people who are assessed as being able to live in a shared setting with a member of staff permanently on site.
- 5.7 The number of in-house carer resignations and terminations exceeded approvals in 2015-16, creating a net deficit of 3 households. This has had an adverse impact upon our capacity to provide placements for children in-house. To improve performance our activity has been re-focused (see section 6 below), resulting in an increase in enquiries and assessments in progress. This will result in greater capacity within the service and it is anticipated that, should the balance of LAC population move to a younger age range, the proportion of children placed in-house will rise over the next 12 months.
- 5.8 In response to the need for placements out of office hours and to ensure children and young people are less likely to be found homes at a distance from Brent the service has continued to work closely with local IFA providers to provide the details of local carers to the Emergency Duty Team should a placement be required.

6.0 Recruitment Activity

- 6.1 The fostering service carried out 14 recruitment focused activities within the reporting period with the aim of raising awareness of fostering and encouraging potential foster carers to come forward within the Brent community. For example we started the New Year with a campaign to encourage people to make a difference to the lives of other children: <https://www.brent.gov.uk/services-for-residents/children-and-family-support/fostering/make-a-difference/> and also participated in the national LGBT fostering recruitment week, with advertising across the borough.
- 6.2 Community events took place at a number of venues including St Raphael's Estate, the Pakistani Community Centre and three of our libraries. The purpose of our outreach activity is to market our brand within the local community and reinforce our campaign messages. The success of our marketing activity has been evidenced by our Fostering and Adoption campaigns being the second most remembered local authority initiatives over the last 12 months.
- 6.2 The monthly information evenings have continued to be held at the Civic Centre for members of the public to find out more about the fostering role and to enable us to determine whether an individual or family has the potential to become a carer for Brent.
- 6.3 Our improved recruitment and marketing activity has seen a significant growth in enquiries to the service this year in comparison to 2014-15. The service received 307 enquiries in 2015-16, compared to 203 in 2014-15. From our own historical data as

well as comparisons with other boroughs and IFAs on average 10% of enquiries move ahead to a formal application to foster, with approximately 5-6% of enquiries resulting in an approved fostering household. The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 75 enquiries about fostering. These enquiries resulted in 10 initial visits. As at the 31st March 2016 there were 15 formal assessments in process under the 2-stage fostering assessment process.

- 6.4 A digital advertising agency was selected in late 2015 to deliver a digital marketing strategy to assist Brent Council's Fostering and Adoption team to recruit foster carers from Brent and surrounding areas of West London. The agency was used as a result of their excellent track record in delivering fostering and adoption recruitment campaigns for other Local Authorities. Their focus is on recruiting foster carers for hard to place children, sibling groups and children with severe health needs. These are all areas which Brent has had difficulty recruiting to in the past. The first campaign with the agency was delivered between 28th December 2015 and 31 March 2016. During that period we received:

- 36 enquiries
- 3 initial visits as a direct result of those enquiries.
- 2 fostering assessments were initiated.

Overall the campaign has been successful in producing enquiries that match our recruitment needs, for example potential foster carers with 1 spare bedroom or more to look after sibling groups or older children. We also had the opportunity to deliver targeted campaigns based on geography and demographic data. We were also able to track and monitor campaigns and optimise the advertisements which were more popular.

- 6.5 The target for the service in 2016-17 is to recruit fifteen non-related foster carers during the reporting year; with a net growth of 5 fostering households once carer resignations and terminations of approval are taken into account. There continue to be some ongoing delays in recruitment of foster carers due to the slow return of information from the Disclosure and Barring Service. This is a systemic issue affecting all fostering agencies within London and has been signalled as a priority area to resolve by the Metropolitan Police.
- 6.6 Our analysis of current foster carer views and those of carers who have ended their fostering role is helping the service to respond to carer needs quickly with the intended outcome that there are greater levels of retention.

7.0 Fostering Panel

- 7.1 The fostering service has a Fostering Panel constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The service maintains a central list of Panel members that includes an elected member. The panel chair and vice chair are independent people with professional experience of fostering. Recent demand has risen and three panels have been held every two months.

- 7.2 The functions of the Fostering Panel are to consider:
- Each application and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a Foster Carer, Connected Person(s) (Family and Friends Foster Carer) and the terms of their approval.
 - The first annual review of each approved carer and any other review as requested by the fostering service.
 - The termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a Foster Carer.
- 7.3 The panel has a quality assurance role and monitors the standard of reports presented to it and relays any issues or concerns to the relevant manager. The panel makes recommendations to the fostering service and these recommendations are referred to the Agency Decision Maker who is the Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes.
- 7.4 During the period 1st January 2016 – 31st March 2016 4 panels were held with 23 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:
- 4 new fostering households and 2 new 'Family and Friends' foster carer households were recommended for approval.
 - 9 fostering and 1 family and friends households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review.
 - 1 foster carer's approval terms were changed from short to long term to provide permanency for a child in placement.
 - 2 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following allegations.
 - 1 fostering household's approval was recommended for termination - due to concerns relating to the carer's limited insight into the impact fostering had on their own family and the carer's adult children not being in support of the task continuing.
 - 1 'Family and Friends' fostering household's approval was terminated following the placement breakdown;
 - 2 fostering households resigned from their fostering role.

All of the recommendations made to the Agency Decision Maker were ratified.

- 7.5 The feedback from the fostering panel chair has been constructive to the service as it develops. Discussions have been held with the chair about how the service could more effectively deal with the issue of allegations against carers to support the reintegration of the household to fostering. The issue of inconsistent children's social worker attendance at panels has been noted. As a result the panel advisor is providing a regular report to the Head of Service for Care Planning to ensure there is a regular presence, whether in the form of a written report or verbal presentation. At the next panel training day a mock panel will be created, where supervising social workers will be invited to take the roles of panel members. This will improve both panel members and social workers' understanding of the role and what is expected of them in presenting their assessments and reports.

8.0 Training and Support to Foster Carers.

- 8.1 All of Brent's foster carers are allocated to a Supervising Social Worker who carries out monthly supervision and support visits, ensures carers provide a good standard of care and creates an important link between the child's social worker and the foster carer.
- 8.2 As part of foster carers' commitment to Brent and reinforced within their foster care agreement is a requirement to attend mandatory and identified training courses. During the period January 1st – March 31st 2016 16 training courses were held, attended by 132 carers. Unfortunately a number of courses were cancelled due to poor sign ups. This is an area that is being looked at for the forthcoming training year.
- 8.3 Every month a foster carers' support group is held, facilitated by Supervising Social Workers but informed by the needs of carers. The groups are generally attended by a small group of carers and the Fostering Support Team are working to improve attendance as they provide an important communication link between carers and the Placements' Service.
- 8.4 As mentioned in the Q3 2015-16 Fostering Monitoring Report, Patrice Thomas, one of our longest serving foster carers, was recognised nationally through the award of the MBE in the New Year Honours' List.
- 8.5 A continuation of social pedagogy development through a bridging project to embed the learning of foster carers and social care staff is taking place between October 2015 and April 2016. Meetings have been held with other Local Authorities using a similar approach in order to share practice.

9.0 Monitoring Arrangements

- 9.1 During the reporting period there were no formal allegations made against a fostering household. There was one standards of care meeting held to discuss inappropriate correspondence from a foster carer to the department – this was resolved appropriately.
- 9.2 There were no formal complaints received from Brent foster carers during the reporting period.
- 9.3 All foster carers, regardless of the length of their approval with Brent must have an annual review of their arrangements. The Fostering Reviewing Officer completed 24 annual reviews out of a possible 32 during this period. Of those uncompleted, 5 were at the request of the foster carer and 3 were due to supervising social worker delays. These have all been re-scheduled and will be completed within timescales.

10.0 Future Developments

- 10.1 As described above, a social pedagogy bridging programme is in operation between October 2015 until April 2016 to support those who have completed the programme and to share and embed the learning and knowledge more broadly across Children's

Social Care. A project plan has been developed with the intention to deliver a second training cohort in 2016.

- 10.2 Collaborative work with other west London authorities has continued with joint foster carer preparation training now in place. An agreement was reached from 1st April 2016 for all 8 West London Alliance authorities to offer the same carer benefits' package to foster carers – delivered through the Fostering Network.
- 10.3 The main activities for the fostering teams within the newly formed LAC & Permanency Service from April 2016 are as follows:
- To use the opportunity from a newly formed service to listen effectively to the voice of children and young people and embed their views into improving the quality and consistency of our fostering service.
 - To ensure that the recruitment of in-house carers continues to improve and that the impact of the digital campaign is evaluated.
 - To finalise the survey of current foster carers and to compare this with exit interviews completed in December 2015 to identify trends and to support service planning.
 - To ensure the foster carer training offer is monitored and the impact reflected within foster carer supervision and care of children.
 - To ensure feedback from fostering panel is embedded into quality assurance work and development areas are progressed by team managers.

Appendices / Links

- (i) Brent's 'Make a Difference' Fostering Campaign:
<https://www.brent.gov.uk/services-for-residents/children-and-family-support/fostering/make-a-difference/>
- (ii) Fostering Newsletter Winter 2016.

Contact Officer

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GAIL TOLLEY
Strategic Director Of Children And Young People

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Fostering Newsletter

Winter 2016

Featured in this issue

- Children's Christmas Party
- Brent resident awarded MBE for fostering for 31 years
- Brent Foster Carers – a champion's story
- LGBT Fostering and Adoption Week
- Resignation of Foster Carers

A night of celebration for Brent's hardworking fostering community

Brent's talented and hardworking foster carers enjoyed a night of celebration at the council's annual Foster Carers' Ball held at The Crown Moran Hotel, Cricklewood on Saturday 5 December 2015.

The evening encompassed a 3 course dinner and drinks, entertainment from Mr. Cee, dancing and raffle prizes from the Tricycle Theatre and Reed Recruitment. Each fostering household also received a free ice skating ticket courtesy of Wembley Park. It was certainly an evening to remember for six of our fantastic foster carers who received awards for 'going the extra mile' in their fostering role. A special long service

award was given to Patrice Thomas, who has fostered for Brent for an exceptional 31 years and is still going strong.

Councillor Ruth Moher, Lead Member for Children and Young People, said:

"This evening honours all the extraordinary people who work hard to make sure that children who are unable to live with their birth families have the stability, love and support that they deserve. At Brent we strongly believe in supporting our foster carers so they can provide the best possible care to our children and young people in need."



From left to right; Cllr. Jones (Brent Mayor), Joy Gibbs (foster carer), Nigel Chapman (Head of Service)



From left to right; Cllr. Moher (Lead Member for Children and Young People), Nadia Christie (foster carer), Nigel Chapman (Head of Service)



Children's Christmas party

Varghese Thekkan (Social Worker)



Message from Head of Service

Dear Foster Carers,

A happy new year to you all from everyone here in Placements. I hope that you have had a positive start to the New Year and are full of energy and enthusiasm for the year ahead. We are always looking to recruit new foster carers and have started January with our 'Make a Difference' campaign that aims to encourage people to come forward and foster. We know from our research that people take months if not years to think about fostering and sometimes they need a little bit of encouragement to take that step. We have had some encouraging signs in the first few weeks of the campaign and hope this continues. Also don't forget that we are still offering £500 referral reward scheme for those of you that refer someone who goes on to become an approved foster carer.

It was great to see so many of you at the annual foster carer awards and celebration evening in December. It was a great night and our chance to say thank you for the work you put in on our behalf day in and out. A special mention must go to Patrice Thomas who was singled out for an MBE in the New Years' Honours List. Patrice has been such a great servant to Brent's children over so many years and it was so lovely to see this recognised.

Please remember that we offer a varied and interesting range of training for your benefit. I must remind carers that it is an expectation of your role that you commit to complete training agreed with your Supervising Social Worker – we have had really positive feedback about the courses so do take advantage of what is on offer.

I hope to see many of you at the various events and training courses over the coming months, with very best wishes, **Nigel**

Foster carers and children alike all had a great time at the recent children's Christmas party held on Saturday 12 December 2015 at Poplar Grove Youth Centre. There was plenty of food and games for everyone with gifts for the children donated generously by Brent Council staff. Thank you to everyone who helped on the day.

Staff Updates

The New Year has brought some changes for the team. We sadly say goodbye to social workers Giselle Phillips and Trude Adewoyin and welcome social workers Rebecca Beazley, Alisa Goldstein and Sonia Bello.

We are also happy to announce that Lorea Boneke and Serifat Bakare have both welcomed beautiful, healthy babies to their families at the end of 2015.

Foster Carers Support Group

The foster carers support group is your opportunity to meet other foster carers and share your experiences and support one another in your fostering role. The sessions are held at Brent Civic Centre, on the first floor training suite area on the following dates. Please note the time/theme will be confirmed nearer the time and an invitation will be sent to all carers via email before the session.

- Tuesday 9 February 2016 (Evening)
- Tuesday 8 March 2016 (Day)

Training and Support Update January 2016

Please see the list of training courses with spaces in February and March 2016. If you are interested in attending any of these courses please speak to your supervising social worker or contact me directly. Please note some courses have limited spaces.

Zak Darwood - Fostering Development Coordinator
0208 937 4458 or 07788 335717 (also on whatsapp)
zak.darwood@brent.gov.uk

28th January	10-1pm	Adolescent Development - Puberty and Hygiene
2nd Feb	10-3pm	Re-Parenting Attachment Disordered Traumatized Children and Young People
9th Feb	1-4pm	First Aid for Carers
9th Feb	6-9pm	First Aid for Carers
17th Feb	10-1pm	TSDS
17th Feb	1-4pm	Administration of Medication
18th Feb	1-4pm	Attachment
19th Feb	1-4pm	Professional Boundaries
22nd Feb	6-8pm	Comments and Complaints
25th Feb	10-1pm	Working with LGBT Young People
2nd March	10-2pm	Communication and Managing Conflict 0-12
5th March	2:15 - 5pm	Level 1 Safeguarding
10th March	10-1pm	Delegated Authority
10th March	1-4pm	Safer Caring
15th March	10-1pm	Aim Higher: Education for Looked after Children
15th March	1-4pm	Child Protection - Advanced for Carers
16th March	10-3pm	Working with Young People towards Independence
16th March	6 - 9pm	Working with Sexually Active Young People
18th March	10-1pm	Introduction to Working with Children with Disabilities
18th March	1-4pm	TSDS
23rd March	10-3pm	Working with Violent and Aggressive Young People

**Further information on each of the courses can be found in the Course Overviews Brochure.*

Fostering Network to support Brent foster carers

From the 1st April 2016 we will be changing our providers from Foster Talk to Fostering Network. All fostering households will receive a welcome pack and contact details around this date. Full information regarding benefits and how to access these will be included in the April edition of the Foster Carers newsletter.

ID Badges for Brent foster carers

We are rolling out I.D. Badges for all our foster carers. To make sure you get yours, please send a 'selfie' (a picture of yourself) to Zak Darwood on **07788 335717** with your name and contact details. If you don't have access to a mobile phone, please email a photo to Zak.Darwood@brent.gov.uk

We need long term foster parents... Can you help?

In Brent we have several children in need of long term placements. We need families who can provide long term stability and commitment. If you would like to discuss the profiles below or have any questions please call 0778 838 9531 or email Tanika.buchanan@brent.gov.uk

Amir

Amir is aged 9 and is of British Pakistani origin. He has been in the care of Brent since 2014 due to his mother not being able to look after him. Amir is a charming and energetic young person who can be very polite to others and well behaved. Amir is interested in sports and music, in particular cricket, which he plays at school and says he enjoys "more than anything".

Amir was diagnosed with a form of ADHD in 2012. This is managed without medication. Amir's behaviour can be challenging and unpredictable at times, however, CAMHS is working with Amir to help him manage his emotional and behavioural issues. He is also receiving art therapy once a week and 1-1 mentoring support at his school.

Amir has experienced severe instability and insecurity under his mother's care during the early stages of his life. This is why it's important for Amir to have a permanent family who can provide him with a safe, secure and stable environment so he can develop well into adulthood.

Rebecca

Rebecca is aged 8 and of British White Irish origin. Rebecca is a very friendly, talkative child who enjoys the company of other children and 1:1 attention from adults. She loves reading, swimming and attends Irish dance classes.

Rebecca was born with Noonan's Syndrome, a genetic disorder, which means

she is smaller than her peers and struggles with some physical tasks. Rebecca does have a good understanding of rules and does not have any difficulty listening and following instructions.

We are looking for patient, nurturing carers who can promote Rebecca's emotional, social, cultural and emotional needs until she is 18. This includes accompanying Rebecca to church and living within commutable distance of her current school in Perivale. Rebecca finds it difficult to express her feelings, so the carer must be willing to emotionally support her and help her to find ways of expressing her thoughts and feelings. Rebecca said she would like to live somewhere with other children and animals.

Xander

Xander is aged 7 and is of Black British Caribbean origin. He was placed from birth in foster care due to the risk of neglect.

Xander is a very likeable, humorous and loving child with a lot to give. He is fun loving and responds well to patient care and support. He loves being in a family unit and relates to his current carers as being his family. Due to his autism he has some difficulties picking up on the social clues from other children of his age, however he relates well to older children and young people. He is creative and loves art. He has a great memory and was recently awarded a certificate for kindness to another child in class.

Xander needs carers who are patient and supportive of his needs. We feel that he may benefit from a two parent family, where he has a full time carer who has knowledge and experience of supporting children with autism. Xander needs a family where he can grow to become a member of the household and experience a home life that offers stability, love and commitment.

Message from Cecilia Gabriel, Fostering Team Manager:

Foster carers who are thinking about resigning from fostering

Over the last year we have seen some of our foster carers resign from fostering for a variety of reasons. Some carers have resigned because they feel that their fostering career has come to a natural end and now wish to retire. Other carers have had a new addition to their families and can no longer foster whilst some carers have had started a new job or moved to a neighbouring borough and wish to pursue other opportunities.

We know that fostering can be a challenging task, which takes a lot of patience, dedication and commitment. However, we would like to ask you to take your time when you are making the decision on whether you wish to continue to foster as the process of terminating your approval has changed.

If you decide to stop fostering and you formally resign in writing, the Local Authority has to accept your resignation. This period lasts for 28 days and automatically once the 28 days have expired, you are no longer a foster carer. We have found that a lot of foster carers are not aware of this and have tried to re-trace their resignation. However, this is no longer allowed under the current legislation.

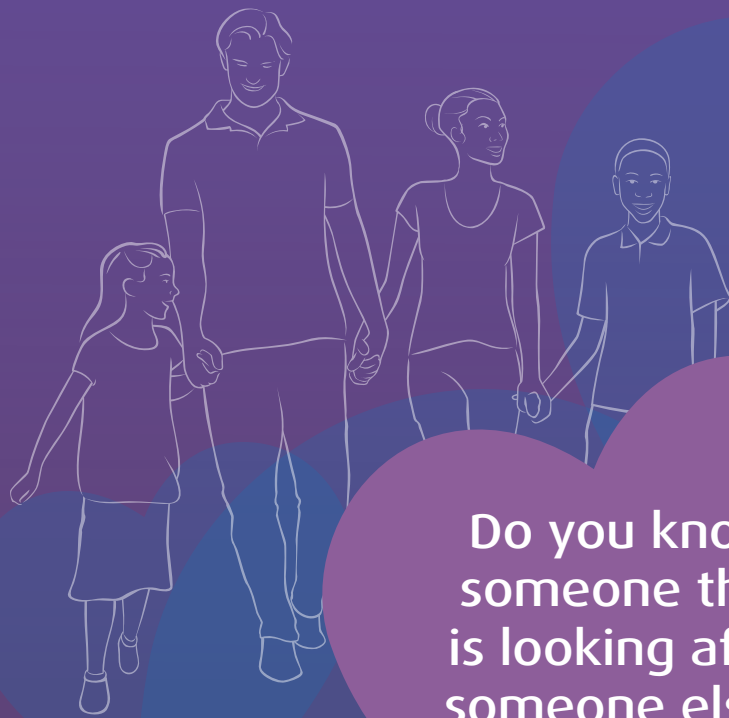
What does this mean for you?

This means that should you decide to continue with fostering, you will have to be completely reassessed and presented back to the Fostering panel for approval.

What should I do if I am thinking of leaving?

I would encourage all foster carers who are thinking of resigning or leaving the profession, to have a discussion with your Supervising Social Worker in the first instance. Alternatively, if you want to wish to speak to myself or Diana, we will be more than happy to arrange a time to talk with you and answer any questions that you may have.

**EARN
£500
IN CASH**



**Do you know
someone that
is looking after
someone else's
child?**

Did you know that looking after a child that is not a close relative for over 28 consecutive days is called private fostering?

Private fostering is when a child under 16 (18 if they have additional, complex or severe needs) is cared for and provided with accommodation for more than 28 days by an adult who is not an immediate relative. This is a private arrangement made between the parent and carer.

Brent Council have a responsibility to ensure that all children in Brent are being cared for properly and carers are supported. If you know of a child who is being privately fostered please let us know.

www.brent.gov.uk/privatefostering

020 8937 2749

Points of contact

Fostering Duty Support – new duty number
Tel: **020 8937 3881**

Fostering Development Co-ordinator
Zak Darwood
Tel: **020 8937 4458**

LAC Nurses
Tel: **020 8795 6342**

LAC Participation Officer
Tel: **020 8937 4173**

LAC Education Team
Tel: **020 8937 4907**

Youth Offending Team
Tel: **020 8937 3832**

Brent Sexual Health Advisor
Tel: **020 8937 3083**

Brent Youth and Connexions Service
Tel: **020 8937 3680**

Wembley Centre for Health and Care
Tel: **020 8795 6000**

Referral Reward Scheme

As a Brent foster carer you are eligible to take part in our Referral Reward Scheme.

The Brent Placement Service will pay a "Referral Reward" to any Brent approved foster carer who successfully recommends a friend or family member to the Service. An initial £250 is paid when the referred person is approved at panel and a further £250 following their first placement.

Referrals can be made to our recruitment number **020 8937 4538** or email **fostering@brent.gov.uk** – quoting 'Referral Reward'.

Terms and Conditions

1: To qualify for the scheme; the prospective applicant must quote the Foster Carers name during the initial enquiry stage on the telephone or first home visit with assessing social worker.

This will be cross referenced to confirm connection.

2: Each 'Referral Reward' is based on one household.

Household

= A single applicant

= Joint applicants living in the same household making one application.

3: Payment will be authorised after the referred person has been approved at panel and could take up to 14 days to reach you.

4: Payments will be made by payment card.

5: Foster carers can make as many introductions as they wish. However there is no reward payable for general enquiries. Payments will **ONLY** be made at the following times; **after successful approval** of a referred applicant and **after placement of first child**.

6: The foster carer can receive up to £500 upon the referred person being approved and subsequently taking a placement.

Brent Foster Carer - a champion's story



Community champions Andres Crespo (left) and Gayle Morris (right) with Brent Mayor (middle)

Local Brent foster carers, Gayle Morris and Andres Crespo, have been recognised for their hard work at the Community Champions Awards on the 5 November 2015. The awards, held annually every year, reward individuals who go above and beyond the call of duty in their voluntary work.

Gayle and Andres started fostering in April 2012 as short term Brent Foster Carers. From the beginning Andres and Gayle have worked really hard to provide a loving and stable home for the young person in their care, despite a number of difficulties which they have managed very positively. They have

worked well with all agencies and have really worked hard to develop their own skills so that they can make a difference to this young person.

Here's what Andres had to say about fostering for Brent:

"Fostering for Brent has changed our lives in so many ways. It has helped us to grow as individuals and be more patient and tolerant. It's even got me singing on my way to work! Our entire household has now come alive with lots of laughter and noise in the background."

When we received the Community Champions Award in November 2015 it brought about a mixture of feelings. On the one hand, we were so overwhelmed and pleased that there were people out there who believed we were doing a great job in fostering. Hurray! On the other hand there was also the acknowledgment that all foster carers in Brent are in fact Community Champions because we all strive for the same thing, to provide a child in need with a loving and supportive home."



Brent resident awarded MBE for fostering for 31 years

Kingsbury resident, Patrice Thomas, has been awarded an MBE in the Queen's New Year's Honours List for her outstanding contribution to children's services in Brent.

Patrice was originally approved as a foster carer in November 1984 and has since provided 155 vulnerable children with love, security and a place to call home. She is a highly experienced foster carer. Some of the young people she fostered had fled war or conflict in their home countries before arriving in the UK whilst others had come from troubling backgrounds locally.

Fostering Recruitment news



Social Worker Rebecca Beazely
recruiting foster carers at
Ealing Road Library
www.brent.gov.uk/fostering
020 8937 4538

- 4 February 2016
- 10 March 2016 – a special Information Evening to mark LGBT Fostering and Adoption Week
- 7 April 2016

If you would like more information; email or call the team on **020 8937 4538**, fostering@brent.gov.uk / adoption@brent.gov.uk

LGBT Adoption and Fostering Week

Brent will be hosting a series of outreach events to mark LGBT Adoption and Fostering Week during the 7 – 13 March 2016. A special information evening will be held on the 10 March to dispel myths around fostering and adoption and encourage prospective parents from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community to come forward and provide a loving home for a child in need. We especially need more foster carers for teenagers and siblings, who often have to wait the longest for a place to call home.

LGBT Week is supported by New Family Social, the UK support group for LGBT adopters and foster carers.



A new year means a new wave of recruitment events to promote fostering in the community. This year there are over 300 children in care and we still need more people to come forward and help look after some of our most vulnerable children and young people. Please encourage your friends and family who may be interested in fostering to attend one of our outreach sessions. We will be here to answer all your questions and more.

- Harrow Leisure Centre, Friday 5 February, 10am – 2pm
- Brent Civic Centre Foyer, Wednesday 3 February, 11am – 2pm
- ASDA Park Royal, Thursday 11 February, 10am – 4pm
- Harlesden Library, 18 February, 1pm – 5pm
- Kingsbury Library, 7 March, 10am – 1pm

- Willesden Green Library, 7 March, 2pm – 6pm
- ASDA Park Royal, Thursday 10 March, 10am – 4pm
- Brent Civic Centre Foyer, Wednesday 9 March – 11am – 2pm
- Harrow Leisure Centre, Friday 18 March, 10am – 2pm

Fostering and adoption information evenings

The Placements Assessment and Recruitment team hosts information evenings each month for those who are thinking about fostering or possibly adoption. Sessions provide an insight into the assessment processes and are held on the first Thursday of the month Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way, London HA9 0FJ at 5.45pm. Tea/Coffee and refreshments are available.

Patrice said: “I honestly didn’t expect this! I am so excited and happy to be receiving the MBE. It is a great honour to be recognised as a Brent foster carer, not just for myself but for all the other Brent foster carers who work hard to provide a loving home for children and young people in care.

“One of my foster children arrived with me when she was 12 and stayed with me until she was 18. We have a great relationship and keep in touch now. She says that I am like a mother to her. My own two children enjoyed growing up with extra siblings in the home.

“Fostering is an incredibly rewarding experience and I would encourage anyone who has given fostering even half a thought to make the call and get some more information. For these children, there is simply no better way to help than fostering.”

February Half term activities



Maggie the Dragon and Friends Snap Happy Healthy Teeth Workshops

Join Maggie the Dragon, Al the Alligator and Flossie the Flossisaurus and find out how they keep their breath, teeth and mouth fresh by brushing in these dental health events at Bookstart Story and Rhyme Time under 5s sessions. Includes a film screening of Harry Takes a Trip to the Zoo where the animals tell him all about healthy eating and taking better care of your teeth.

- Monday 15 February, 10 - 10.30am at The Library at Willesden Green
- Tuesday 16 February, 11.15am - 12noon at Ealing Road Library
- Wednesday 17 February 2.15 - 3pm at Kingsbury Library
- Friday 19 February 10.30 - 11.30am at Wembley Library

Book Villains and Heroes

Create a book villain who wants to eat all the books and a hero who will try and stop them. For children aged 5 - 11. At the following libraries from 2.30pm - 3.30pm.

- Tuesday 16 February, Kingsbury Library and Kilburn Library
- Wednesday 17 February, Ealing Road Library and Harlesden Library Plus
- Thursday 18 February, The Library at Willesden Green and Wembley Library

To see what else is going at Brent Libraries visit www.brent.gov.uk/libraries

Care in Action Update (Brent Children in Care Council)

Bowling Trip

During the October half term, members and other looked after children and young people attended a trip to Tenpin in Acton. All who attended had a great time competing in their teams and catching up over lunch.

Director for Children and Young People Visit to Junior Care in Action

On 14th November, the Strategic Director for Children and Young People, Gail Tolley, visited Junior Care in Action at their monthly meeting. The children had the opportunity to share their 'flags for care' designs, ideas for a film project to support foster carers training and development as well as make pitta pizzas together.

Corporate Parenting Committee

The Vice-Chair and a member of Care in Action (CIA) attended the Corporate Parenting Committee in October where they met with the Strategic Director and Lead Member for Children and Young People, senior managers and elected members. The young people presented an update on their work and achievements as well as future plans.

JOIN US!

Junior Care in Action (7-12), Care in Action (13-17) and Care Leavers in Action (18+) are constantly looking to recruitment new members. If your foster child would be interested in becoming a change maker or you would like to have more information about what we do, please contact Shirley Ricketts on 07867 184047/ shirley.ricketts@brent.gov.uk or Natasha Thomson on 07825573021 / natasha.thomson@brent.gov.uk

Make 'n' bake corner

Slice-and-bake Valentine's biscuits



Keep the kids busy this Valentine's month with a delicious and easy to make biscuits that everyone will enjoy.

Ingredients:

300g plain flour, plus a little extra for dusting
200g salted butter, diced
120g golden caster sugar
2 large egg yolks
2 tsp vanilla extract
½ tsp rosewater, or 25g/1oz freeze-dried raspberries, whizzed to a powder
Red or pink food colouring

Preparation method:

1. Tip the flour and butter into a food processor and whizz to fine crumbs. Add the sugar and yolks then whizz to a smooth dough. Remove one-third of the dough, add vanilla to what's left and pulse to whizz in. Wrap this dough in cling film and leave at room temperature.
2. Put the reserved dough back in the processor with the rosewater or dried raspberries, if using, and a drop of food colouring. Pulse and add more colouring to achieve an intense colour. If the dough has become too soft, pulse in a few spoonfuls more flour until a similar consistency to the vanilla dough. Put the dough in the fridge, remembering to remove it 30

minutes before you need to roll it out.

3. Thickly roll out the coloured dough between baking parchment. Use a small 3-4cm heart cutter to stamp out hearts. Keep re-rolling and stamping until all the dough is used. Line up hearts on top of each other and press to form a cylinder, taking care to retain the heart shape. Wrap in cling film and freeze for 3 hrs until solid.

4. When the heart dough is hard, roll the vanilla dough, using your hands, into 3 cylinders the length of the heart stack. Stick one to each 'side' of the hearts, pat together to form a fat cylinder, then gently roll on your work surface until it completely encircles the coloured dough, with the frozen heart dough hidden in the centre. Chill for 2 hours.

5. Heat oven to 180C/160C fan/gas 4. Use a sharp knife to slice the log into 1cm-thick discs. Place on trays lined with baking parchment, allowing space for spreading, and bake for 20 minutes. Cool on wire racks. Will keep for up to 4 days in an airtight container.

Recipe courtesy of <http://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/slice-and-bake-valentines-biscuits>

Useful contacts

NHS Brent Sexual Health and Substance Misuse Service



At NHS Brent improving sexual health and providing effective substance misuse services are a huge priority.

We want to help you with any questions, worries or problems you may have by offering a range of services that provide personal advice and helpful pointers.

There are many highly trained professionals who are a visit or phone call away. Use our website to find out more about national and regional organisations that offer counselling whenever you need it.

<http://www.sexualhealthbrent.org.uk/>

Brent Local Safeguarding Children Board – launch online training



Brent LSCB is very pleased to announce the launch of their new E Learning zone. Here you will find a range of online courses and learning materials designed to meet your individual needs and priorities.


To get started visit:
<http://brentlscb.learningpool.com/>

Produced January 2016

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 Brent	<p>Corporate Parenting Committee 28 April 2016</p> <p>Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</p>
<p>Brent Adoption Service Report 1 October 2015 – 31 March 2016</p>	

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the adoption service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children.
- 1.2 This report details the activity of Brent's adoption service from October 1st 2015 – 31st March 2016.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review, comment on and question the contents of this report. This is to provide evidence that the management of the adoption service is being monitored and challenged in order to promote good outcomes for children. This is in line with standard 25.6 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards (2014).

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Our 2015-16 Adoption Statement of Purpose highlights the outcomes that the service aims to support:
- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.
 - Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
 - Children, birth parents/guardians and families, and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.

3.2 In Brent adoption services are delivered through two teams:

- A Placements Assessment and Recruitment Team – responsible for the recruitment, assessment and training of prospective adopters, as well as family finding and support for them post approval up until Adoption Order.
- An Adoption and Post Permanency team – responsible for family finding for children with an adoption plan; statutory social work responsibility for children subject to a Placement Order up until Adoption Order; supporting adoptive families, Special Guardians and birth families and providing a counselling and intermediary service for adopted adults and their birth relatives.

4. Performance Data

4.1 The most recent set of national adoption scorecards were published in March 2016, covering the 3-year period 2013-15¹.

4.2 Brent performance against the two most significant indicators has continued to improve:

- **A1** (The time taken from a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 544 days. This is a 9% improvement against the previous reporting period and compares against a national average of 593 days.
- **A2** (The time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 194 days². This is a 37% improvement against the previous reporting period and compares against a national average of 223 days.

4.3 Internal projections for the next 3-year average (2013-14 to 2015-16) have been produced. This updated adoption timeliness data shows the following continued performance improvements. As at 30th September 2015 the indicators were as follows:

- **A1:** 494 days.
- **A2:** 184 days.

4.4 Child related data – 1st October 2015 – 31st March 2016

- In the second six months of this reporting year 5 children were adopted. There were six children adopted in total this reporting year.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-scorecards>

² The DfE confirmed the published scorecard did not reflect the accurate A2 position for Brent (194 days). This anomaly is captured within the scorecard.

- At the 31st March there were 9 Looked After Children with an adoption plan who had not yet been adopted. The details of these children's cases are as follows:
 - Four children are placed for adoption.
 - Three children are due to be matched at the Adoption Panel in June 2016 with a view to being placed for adoption during the same month.
 - Two children have not yet been made subject of Placement Orders – in these cases there is background family finding from the adoption team.
- One child's plans changed away from adoption during this period. This was a child whose mother initially wanted to relinquish her for adoption, but later changed her mind. The child has been successfully rehabilitated into her parents' care.
- As stated in previous reports, all Local Authorities continue to report a reduction in the number of children being made subject to placement orders. A placement order is the court authorisation that a child can be formally placed with approved adopters. Brent has also seen a reduction in numbers of children with placement orders and as a result our projection of the number of adoptions for this reporting year was correct.

4.5 Adopter Recruitment

- At 31st March 2016 Brent had 12 approved adoptive households for children where a child had not yet been matched or placed. The number of children requiring adoption and not yet matched or placed continues to be lower than the number of approved adopters.
- During the reporting period the service received 60 enquiries about adoption. Many people following this enquiry were signposted to our monthly information evenings. The enquiries received have resulted in 5 ongoing adoption assessments (1 being a step-parent assessment) and 2 adoptive households being approved during the reporting period. Of the 4 on-going adoption assessments all are in stage two of the process.
- Three Brent approved adoptive households were matched to children within the reporting period. Two of the families waited between 3-6 months after approval. In the other case the adopters waited more than 12 months for a suitable match, although there had been extensive support offered to assist with family finding.

- Brent continues to attract adopters from a diversity of backgrounds in order to best meet the variety of needs of our Looked After Children. However, in line with the general profile of adopters nationally, the majority of Brent adopters currently waiting to be linked or matched to children are of white British or Asian heritage.

4.6 Adoption Support

- In 2015-16, 74 families received a post-adoption support package (not one-off advice). This support was primarily provided through financial allowances which are reviewed and means tested but also includes lifestory work, strategies for managing difficult behaviour and advice on managing emotional issues within families brought about through contact with birth families.
- In the six months between 1st October 2015 and 31st March 2016, 10 new families have requested adoption support. Of these families three have had successful applications to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) following an assessment. Five further ASF assessments are in process. One of the ASF applications in progress is a collaboration with a local school. Brent is trying to obtain continued funding for their therapeutic nurture group, which supports nine adopted children.
- Seventy-one adopted adults also received adoption support. This was in the form of provision of access to their records, linking them with members of their birth family, and providing counselling support around issues related to adoption.

5. The Adoption and Permanence Panel

The Adoption and Permanence Panel

- 5.1** The purpose and role of the Adoption and Permanence panel was set out in detail within a previous Brent Adoption Service Report (1st April - 30th September 2014) to the Corporate Parenting Committee.
- 5.2** The Panel continues to meet once a month in respect of all matters concerning adoption.
- 5.3** The next joint panel training day has been scheduled for May 2016, the focus of which is effective linking and matching in order to prevent placement disruption.
- 5.4** In line with statutory guidance, a central list of panel members is used on a rotating basis to ensure members maintain regular links with Brent and current issues in adoption. The central list consists of an independent chair,

an independent vice chair, other independent members including a birth mother with experience of adoption, an elected member, an adopted person, a former Looked After Child and a foster carer from another Local Authority. There are also panel members employed by Brent, including representatives from education, health, the probation service and Children's Centres. All panel members contribute to an annual appraisal and have the opportunity to attend any additional relevant training provided by Brent and the West London Adoption Consortium.

5.5 Panel feedback from prospective and approved adopters and presenting social workers has remained consistent in confirming good or excellent comments regarding the panel process and conduct. Feedback concerning the performance of the social work casework is provided to the Agency Decision Maker who ensures this is given to the Head of Service, Placements, for follow up with individual staff or, should the issues be more systemic, broader service improvement.

5.6 During the period 1st October 2015 – 31st March 2016 four panels were held with thirteen specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:

- Three households were recommended as suitable to adopt.
- Two children were recommended to be placed for adoption with specific carers
- The long-term fostering matches of three children were discussed.
- One prospective adopter resigned.

All of the recommendations made to the Agency Decision Maker were ratified.

6. Service Improvement

6.1 Over the last six months, the service has continued to improve outcomes for children with adoption plans in the following ways:

- Through effective tracking of timescales at initial and monthly permanency planning meetings at a team manager level, supplemented by quarterly tracking at Head of Service level for children with an adoption plan. This effective oversight continues to contribute to a reduction in the period of time from a child becoming Looked After to being placed for adoption.
- By ensuring that adoptive families have been assessed and then enabled to access the ASF. This has provided families with targeted therapeutic support when it has been most needed.

- By refining and improving the preparation training for prospective adopters in conjunction with other West London Local Authorities.
- By providing our adopters waiting for a suitable child with a regular support group whereby they can meet with other families to discuss concerns, hear other experiences and ensure we provide services appropriate to individual families' needs.

6.2 Adoption Support. A summary of the general activity undertaken in this area was provided within the Brent Adoption Service Report (1st April - 30th September 2014) to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

As described earlier in this report, a number of successful applications have been made to the Adoption Support Fund in order to support families requiring help with their parenting.

6.3 Involving Adopters. Many adopters continue to remain closely involved with the service.

- Approved adopters are involved in speaking to prospective adopters at information evenings and preparation groups.
- Adopters are invited to attend relevant training for foster carers where there are crossover issues.
- As described above, in response to the expressed need for adopters waiting for a match we established our 'Next Steps' support group. This takes place bi-monthly and covers a range of issues relevant to the adoption process.
- A bi-monthly Adopters' Support Group for families with children is well established and feedback is positive about the supportive nature of the group. A crèche is provided for this group. Many of the participants in the group attended and enjoyed our annual festive party in December 2015.

6.4 Adopter Feedback. One formal complaint was received from a Brent approved adopter during this reporting period. This related to dissatisfaction with the process of approving an adoption allowance. The adopter took the matter to Stage Two of the corporate complaints' process and subsequently to the Local Government Ombudsman. The finding was that Brent had no case to answer and had acted appropriately in its dealings with the adopter.

There have been no new complaints in the second half of this reporting year.

6.5 Staff Engagement. Staff continue to take responsibility for the delivery of adoption preparation courses across other West London authorities.

Two staff members attended a four day training course run by the West London Alliance on 'direct, therapeutic work' with children. Other staff are now booked to attend the same training in the coming year.

Staff have continued to deliver a regular programme of Life Story Work training to foster carers and also a regular, separate Life Story Work training to social work colleagues across Children's Social Care. Managers have also delivered the first of a regular training workshop on 'Permanency Planning' to social work colleagues in the Locality and Care Planning Teams

7. Ofsted Inspection

- 7.1** The Ofsted single inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers took place between 14th September and 8th October 2015. The final report was published on 30th November 2015.
- 7.2** The inspection of adoption services was judged as 'good'. There were a number of positive findings:
- Adoption is considered early for all children. A well-reasoned rationale is clearly recorded to explain decisions where adoption is not the most appropriate plan to meet children's needs.
 - Regular permanence planning meetings are routinely attended by the placements service, ensuring that key staff are aware of all children who may require adoption. Parallel planning is well established.
 - Timeliness of adoption work has significantly improved and this trend is continuing in 2015–16.
 - Adopter assessments are of good quality, identifying the strengths and vulnerabilities of adopters, which assists in the matching of children with adopters.
 - The adoption and permanence panel has a suitably independent chair with a sufficiently wide range of members who are knowledgeable about adoption and permanence. This includes adopted adults, adopters and consistent elected member attendance. Panel administration is effective. The agency adviser provides robust quality assurance on the papers presented to panel, identifying deficits early, so that these can be rectified before panel and avoid delay.
 - Adoption and post-permanence support is provided to all those who have had experience of adoption
- 7.3** There were no specific recommendations made within the report regarding the performance of the adoption service.

8. Broader adoption issues and the future

- 8.1** During this reporting period the Education and Adoption Act was passed. Full details regarding the implications of this piece of legislation were

presented to the Scrutiny Committee on 5th April 2016 and this is attached as an appendix to this report.

Appendix – Scrutiny Committee Report, 'National Adoption Reform Proposals', 5th April 2016


Contact Officer

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GAIL TOLLEY
Strategic Director of Children and Young People

 Brent	<p style="text-align: center;">Scrutiny Committee 5th April 2016</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</p>
Report Title:	<p style="text-align: center;">National Adoption Reform Proposals</p>

1.0 Summary

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Scrutiny Committee, as requested, about the proposals for adoption reform contained within the government's Education and Adoption Bill 2015 and how the local authority is responding to these proposals.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1** The Scrutiny Committee is requested to review, comment on and question the contents of this report to ensure it is satisfied with current progress in reforming adoption services.

3.0 Background

- 3.1** In June 2015 the Department for Education published 'Regionalising Adoption'ⁱ. This was followed the same month by the introduction of the Education and Adoption Bill. Government's view is that structural change will help to:

- Speed up the process and markedly improve the life chances of neglected and damaged children.
- Improve adopter recruitment and adoption support.
- Reduce costs.

- 3.2** Lords' amendments to the Bill are currently being considered by the House of Commons with Royal Assent likely within the next few months.

3.3 The issues that the government is seeking to address within adoption reform are as follows:

- *Inefficiencies.* The current system is fragmented with around 180 agencies, both Local Authority and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA), recruiting and matching adopters for only 5000 children per year. The majority of agencies are operating at a very small scale and this hinders strategic planning and economies of scale.
- *Timeliness of placing children.* Whilst there has been significant improvement in the performance of Local Authorities in placing children swiftly with adoptive families there is further progress that can be made. This is particularly the case with harder to place children, often older, within a sibling group or with a disability.
- *Adopter recruitment.* Again there has been improvement in both the number of adopters recruited and the timescales to achieve this. However, whilst the number of approved adopters nationally is now greater than the number of children waiting, many of these adopters are less willing to consider those children who are harder to place.
- *Adoption support.* The help that is offered to families after adoption is the responsibility of Local Authorities. However it is currently fragmented and characterised by a combination of in-house and spot-purchased arrangements with often significant variations between local authority areas.

3.4 The specific proposal within the Education and Adoption Bill 2015, as it relates to adoption reform, is to support the creation of regional adoption agencies, as the preferred delivery structure to ensure the issues identified above are resolved. Government has asked the sector to propose the most suitable method of scale and scope for these regional agencies and has provided funding to achieve this. It is the intention that by the end of the current parliament there will be a regional adoption agency in place for every part of England. There are powers within the Bill to force a Local Authority or VAA to join a regional agency if no action is taken.

3.5 It is likely that there will be either one large regional adoption agency created for London or a smaller collection of sub-regional agencies. These will bring together all adoption services that are currently being delivered by Local Authorities and VAAs.

3.6 Brent's adoption management and performance is monitored at 6-monthly intervals by the Corporate Parenting Committee. The most recent report is attached at appendix 1, for those Members who wish to understand further detail about current arrangements.

4.0 The London Position

- 4.1** Under the previous government a National Adoption Leadership Board was created to oversee improvements across the sector. Adoption reform work across London is co-ordinated by the London Adoption Board (LAB), which is accountable to the Association of London Directors of Children's Services. The LAB is made up of representatives from the London sub-regions and includes both Local Authorities and VAAs. Brent is represented at the LAB by the London Borough of Ealing, who represent all of the authorities within the West London Adoption Consortium.
- 4.2** The LAB is taking the lead in responding to the regionalisation agenda and ensuring there is a co-ordinated response from all agencies. The vision for adoption work within London, as expressed by the LAB is to ensure that children and adopters are at the heart of service change. The 'Regionalising Adoption, Vision for London' document can be found at appendix 2. For agencies the vision is to recognise existing expertise and that change must aim to minimise complexity whilst promoting a flexibility of approach.
- 4.3** The key design criteria for a London model are to ensure it is child focused, to reduce inconsistencies of support offered, to consider the options to pool resources and to maintain good links to Local Authorities who will remain responsible for the child's journey through to adoption.

5.0 Progress Update

- 5.1** The LAB is currently within a 'scope and define' period, as agreed by the DfE that is seeking to identify the most suitable delivery model for a regionalised adoption service for London. There have been a number of engagement and consultation events with adopters and staff working within adoption services across London over the last 3 months. These have included the Brent Strategic Director for Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services.
- 5.2** A proposal will be presented to London Directors of Children's Services in April that will, if agreed, be given to the DfE to consider funding a delivery stage of the regionalisation programme. Whilst it is not possible to fully predict at this stage the likely move to a regionalised approach, current indications suggest this will not be until December 2017. London is a more complex regionalisation project than other areas, primarily due to the number of agencies involved. The Minister of State for Children and Families wrote to all Adoption Agencies in February 2016 to request that time was taken to ensure that the arrangements were not rushed and would lead to transformative change.

- 5.3** The type of regional adoption agency currently under main consideration is a London-wide agency with some services being delivered locally. Should this not be achievable then smaller sub-regional groupings will be considered.

6.0 Financial Implications

- 6.1** One of the likely benefits of the regionalised approach will be the realisation of economies of scale. The management of Brent's adoption responsibilities are likely to require fewer resources once the regional agency is established. Although regionalisation will lead to a financial saving from 2017/18, Children and Young People's Services had already offered a saving of £108,000 as part of its 2015/16 savings package on the assumption that adoption reform would have taken place sooner. These savings were however delivered through alternative efficiencies delivered within the Placements' budget. The forecast savings will be clarified during the 2016/17 financial year once the identified model is confirmed and implementation plans are enacted.

7.0 Legal Implications

- 7.1** The Education and Adoption Bill intends to make provision about joint arrangements for carrying out local authority adoption functions in England, with the aim, amongst other things, of increasing the performance of adoption services.
- 7.2** Clause 13 of the Bill would give the Secretary of State a new power to direct one or more local authorities to make arrangements for any or all of their specified adoption functions to be carried out on their behalf by one of the local authorities named or by another adoption agency. The Secretary of State can either name which adoption agency should carry out these functions, or instruct the local authorities to determine who should carry out the functions. This means that if the Bill is passed by Parliament the government will have the power to remove the adoption function from a local authority it considers failing within its adoption duties and to pass these responsibilities to another agency.
- 7.3** In May 2015 Government Minister Edward Timpson stated that the new powers, "will require councils to combine their adoption functions if they fail to join together services under their own steam within the next 2 years." However within the current Bill there is no reference to a waiting period. The possibility remains that in the final Act of Parliament a time limit may be imposed upon local authorities. The position will have to be revisited once the Bill receives royal assent and becomes legally binding.

8.0 Diversity Implications

- 8.1** The proposals for adoption regionalisation aim to improve services to children most in need of adoption and the families who care for them. To this end, those children most in need of adoption and currently least likely to find a permanent home through this route will benefit most from these proposed changes.

- 8.2** Any proposed changes must ensure that current progress to achieve adoption more quickly for children is not delayed due to the structural changes that will be required.

9.0 Staffing Implications

- 9.1** It is highly likely that the regionalisation approach will require a restructuring of children's social work services as they relate to adoption. This will be a complex and detailed undertaking as it would involve the co-ordination of approximately forty separate adoption agencies. The DfE has indicated that funding will be available to support the transition from current to future service delivery models.
- 9.2** Staff within the service have been kept regularly informed regarding progress towards regionalisation and some have taken part in the current consultation. Regular communication from the LAB is planned over the coming months to ensure a consistent approach and understanding for staff at all levels.

Appendices

1. Corporate Parenting Committee November 2015: Brent Adoption Service Report, 1st April – 30th September 2015.
2. London Adoption Board Vision Statement

Contact Officer

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STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
GAIL TOLLEY

ⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regional-adoption-agencies-programme>

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