



## Corporate Parenting Committee

**Monday 6 October 2014 at 5.00 pm**

Boardroom - Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way,  
Wembley, HA9 0FJ

### Membership:

#### Members

Councillors:

Moher (Chair)  
Conneely  
Hossain  
Thomas  
Warren

#### Substitute Members

Councillors:

S Choudhary, Colacicco, Crane  
and Dixon

Councillor:

Davidson and Ms Shaw

**For further information contact:** Anne Reid, Democratic Services  
020 8937 1359, [anne.reid@brent.gov.uk](mailto:anne.reid@brent.gov.uk)

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**[www.brent.gov.uk/committees](http://www.brent.gov.uk/committees)**

**The press and public are welcome to attend this meeting**

# Agenda

Introductions, if appropriate.

Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members.

| Item  | Page  |
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| <b>1 Minutes of previous meeting</b>              | 1 - 4 |
| <b>2 Matters arising (if any)</b>                 |       |
| <b>3 Deputations (if any)</b>                     |       |
| <b>4 Children in Care - questions and answers</b> |       |

This is an opportunity for members of the Children In Care Council (CIA) to feedback on recent activity.

## **5 Care Quality Commission report**

The Assistant Director, Out of Hospital Services, Brent Clinical Commissioning Group will give a presentation summarising the CQC review of Health Services for LAC and Safeguarding in Brent.

**Ward Affected:**  
All Wards

**Contact Officer:** Isha Coombes, Assistant  
Director Out of Hospital Services, Brent Clinical  
Commissioning Group

## **6 Adoption Annual Report** 5 - 16

The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Board about the general management of the adoption service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children. This report details the performance of Brent's adoption service for the year 1 April 2013 – 31 March 2014.

**Ward Affected:**  
All Wards

**Contact Officer:** Nigel Chapman, Head of  
Placements  
Tel: 020 8937 4456  
[nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk](mailto:nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk)

**7 Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring report - 1 April - 30 June 2014 17 - 22**

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. The report covers the first quarter of this reporting year.

**Ward Affected:** All Wards  
**Contact Officer:** Nigel Chapman, Head of Placements  
Tel: 020 8937 4456  
nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk

**8 Attainment of Looked After Children - September 2014 update**

A presentation of the latest data and trends over time from the Head of Service Inclusion and Alternative Education.

**Ward Affected:** All Wards  
**Contact Officer:** Lesley Hobbs, Head of Service Inclusion and Alternative Education  
Tel: 020 8937 3813  
lesley.hobbs@brent.gov.uk

**9 Rotherham - Child Sexual Exploitation Briefing**

This is a verbal update from the Operational Director Children's Social Care following the recent report on Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham.

**Ward Affected:** All Wards  
**Contact Officer:** Graham Genoni, Operational Director, Social Care  
Tel: 020 8927 4091  
graham.genoni@brent.gov.uk

**10 Any other urgent business**

Notice of items to be raised under this heading must be given in writing to the Democratic Services Manager or his representative before the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 64.

**Date of the next meeting: Thursday 11 December 2014**



- 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.

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## **MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE** **Monday 14 July 2014 at 6.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Moher (Chair), Councillor and Councillors Conneely and Hossain

Also present: Councillor Dixon

Apologies were received from: Councillor Thomas

### **1. Declarations of interests**

None declared.

### **2. Deputations**

None.

### **3. Welcome**

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director, Children and Young People) welcomed members to the first meeting of the council's Corporate Parenting Committee which had been preceded by an induction session. The session had outlined to members the responsibilities of a Corporate Parent and received a presentation from Care In Action (the Looked After Children Council) from representatives present at the meeting.

### **4. Terms of Reference**

The committee's terms of reference, as agreed at the Annual Meeting in June, 2014 were noted.

### **5. Corporate Parenting Scorecard**

The committee considered the Corporate Parenting Scorecard, a revised version of which was tabled at the meeting. Graham Genoni (Operational Director, Social Care) advised that the scorecard presented an opportunity for members to be assured how well the department was functioning. The authority had slightly less than the national average of children in local authority care and all were allocated to a social worker. Placements were relatively stable.

Graham Genoni agreed to report to a future meeting on adoption, the number of placements for which was also relatively low. He was pleased to report that the average number of days between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family had improved significantly. Data on employment and the number of

young parents would be reported to the next meeting. There was strong performance in the timeliness of reviews for children in care, with the young people being very involved. On the number of Looked After Children in custody, the numbers were low however some children then came into care after having been involved in crime.

Members, in discussion, raised questions on in and out of borough placements and breakdown of adoptions. Graham Genoni acknowledged that the authority had a strategy of placing gang affiliated children further away in an effort to break ties and help give them a fresh start.. Performance on the breakdown of adoptions was good with only one in the last five years. This was due in part to the work of the Post Adoption Team and the use of Special Guardianship Orders. The committee noted that participation of LAC at their reviews had decreased from 98% to 92% in the first quarter of 2014-15 and Graham Genoni agreed to report back in more detail to the next meeting.

The committee heard that there was no evidence of reluctance on the part of schools, including academies, in taking Looked After Children and the role of the Headteacher of the Virtual School for Looked After Children was key.

## **6. Report on placement stability**

Vernon Bamforth (Care Planning and Children in Care) introduced the report on placement stability a key area of performance of Children's Social Care. 15% of 3+ placement moves was above that of neighbouring boroughs and he drew attention to the challenges likely to result in placement breakdown particularly in middle to late teen years. Data also suggested a correlation with gang affiliation and efforts were being made to map out-of-borough placements to avoid easy access to gang involvement. Vernon Bamforth drew attention to the action plan in place to improve placement stability. Residential care was rare and mainly for children who presented extremely challenging behaviours. Support initiatives also included increasing the numbers of Brent foster carers for children who may have complex needs, presented challenging behaviours or have complex relationships with birth families. Also, a new Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service was due to start work with the council imminently.

## **7. Annual Independent Reviewing Officer report**

Sarah Alexander, Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance presented the Annual Independent Review Officer's report April 2013-March 2014. There was a legal requirement for every looked after child to have an IRO and Sarah Alexander referred to the benefits of the IRO in providing consistency and continuity in children's care planning. She drew members' attention to data on ethnicity and gender of the cohort of Looked After Children and the significant number of reviews that had taken place. Sarah Alexander drew attention to the Advocacy Service and its work in representing children unable to adequately represent themselves in care planning meetings. The committee heard that problems in the care planning process could be escalated up the management hierarchy to get a resolution.

Sarah Alexander recognised that more work was required around health assessments ensuring they took place within timescales and an action plan was in place.

Members thanked Ms Alexander for her presentation.

8. **Any other urgent business**

None.


9. **Date of next meeting**

The next meeting was due to take place on 6 October 2014.

The meeting closed at 7.00 pm

R MOHER  
Chair

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| <br><b>Brent</b> | <p><b>Corporate Parenting Board<br/>October 2014</b></p> <p><b>Report from the<br/>Director of Children and Young People</b></p> |
| <b>Report Title:</b>  | <b>Brent Adoption Service Report<br/>1st April 2013 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014</b>   |

## **1.0 Summary**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Board about the general management of the adoption service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children.

1.2 This reports details the performance of Brent's adoption service for the year April 1<sup>st</sup> 2013 - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014. The report draws upon information supplied to the Department for Education in the adoption scorecard analysis; the annual Ofsted data return and narrative detail from the adoption panel.

## **2.0 Recommendations**

2.1 The Corporate Parenting Board is requested to note and comment upon the contents of this report. This is to provide evidence that the management of the adoption service is being monitored 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 adoption Statement of Purpose highlights the key values of the service which are that:

- 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 During the year 2013-14 the adoption functions of the Placements' Service were delivered within two teams:

- The Adoption Assessment team – responsible for the recruitment, assessment and support of prospective adopters.
- The Adoption and Post-Adoption team – responsible for family finding for children with an adoption plan, supporting adoptive families and providing a counselling service for adopted adults.
- The Placements' Service has since been restructured. Adoption services from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 are being delivered through a Kinship, Fostering and Adoption Assessment team and an Adoption and Post-Permanency team. The 6-monthly report on the adoption service, to be produced by 31<sup>st</sup> October 2014, will provide detail on the impact of the reorganised teams.

#### **4. Performance Data – Adoption Scorecard**

**4.1 Background.** Since 2012 the DfE has measured Local Authority adoption performance through a scorecard approach. Government was keen to address both the low numbers of children being adopted from public care and the length of time children waited to be placed with permanent families. The adoption scorecard covers three main areas:

- A1 – the average length of time taken from a child entering care to being placed with prospective adopters.
- A2 – the average length of time taken between the court granting authority for a child to be placed for adoption and the Local Authority agreeing upon a match.
- A3 – the percentage of children who wait less than 21 months from entering care to being placed with an adoptive family.

**4.2 Current Published Brent Performance:** the indicators are measured on an individual yearly basis but also a 3-year, rolling cycle to enable a longer-term perspective on performance to be achieved. The most recent set of scorecards were published in January 2014 – covering the 3-year period 2010-13.

- **A1.**
  - 2012 – 9 children adopted who waited an average of 955 days.
  - 2013 – 19 children adopted who waited an average of 565 days.
  - Three-year performance (2009-12): 854 days.
  - Three-year performance (2010-13): 694 days.
  - England average (2010-13): 647 days.

- **A2.**
  - 2012 – 446 days.
  - 2013 – 152 days.
  - 3-year performance (2009-12): 343 days
  - 3-year performance (2010-13): 314 days
  - England average (2010-13): 210 days.
- **A3.**
  - 2012 – 11%
  - 2013 – 70%
  - 3-year performance (2009-12): 48%
  - 3-year performance (2010-13): 52%
  - England average (2010-13): 55%

### **4.3 Analysis**

4.3.1 Performance improved significantly against all indicators to the year ending 2013, compared to the previous year.

4.3.2 The need for a better grip of the issues had been identified in 2010 which led to a change in management arrangements. A greater focus on adoption timeliness through effective case tracking and purposefulness in family finding has resulted. However the 3-year indicator is affected by performance in years 2011 and 2012 where children's cases, that had waited lengthy periods of time to be placed with their permanent families, were addressed. The recognition of Brent dealing effectively with these legacy cases was acknowledged by a diagnostic assessment of the service in 2012. It will not be until these two years fall out of the measurement cohort (the period 2013-15) that Brent's performance will rise above the national average.

4.3.3 Brent has been working both internally and within the West London Adoption consortium to tackle the challenges identified within their adoption system, the areas in need of improvement identified in the most recent adoption service Ofsted inspection (2012) and feedback from potential adopters, to enhance their adoption services. By separating the family finding from the recruitment and assessment of potential adopter teams, we have created a more focused approach. In line with recent regulatory changes we have also introduced a recruitment system that is adopter-led through the initial stages.

#### **4.4 2013-14 Scorecard Performance**

4.4.1 Data incorporating the most recent reporting year's performance has not yet been published nationally. However internal performance data is available and enables a comparison to be made with previous years.

4.4.2 There were 11 children adopted in the last financial year. This is a smaller number than the previous financial year although still higher than in 2010-11 and 2011-12.

4.4.3 Some reasons for a smaller number of adoptions last year were:

- Fewer children had been relinquished by birth parents for adoption in 2013-14 than 2012-13.
- There was a continuing high number of children leaving the court proceedings process through means of other permanent outcome – particularly Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) to family members or friends. In Brent over the last three years 50% more Special Guardianship than Adoption Orders were made. A higher proportion of SGOs are made in Brent than most statistical neighbour authorities – reflecting our approach to keep children within the kinship network wherever possible.
- There were fewer children currently within Brent with adoption plans. Those children with adoption plans are moved through the system to permanent placement more quickly. Currently there are fewer than 10 children subject of an adoption plan without a match to a permanent, adoptive family.

- **A1**

- 11 children adopted who waited an average of 382 days.
- Three-year performance (2011-14) has reduced to 600 days.
- England average (2010-13): 647 days.

- **A2**

- 10/11 children were subject of Placement Orders.
- These children waited an average of 133 days from the making of the Placement Order to match with the adoptive family.
- Three-year performance (2011-14) has reduced to 254 days.
- England average (2010-13): 210 days.

- **A3**

- Of the 11 children adopted in the most recent financial year 82% waited less than 21 months from entering care to being placed with adopters.
- The 3-year performance (2011-14) improved to 56%.

- Statistical neighbour average (2010-13): 51%.

4.4.4 Improved performance has been sustained in the most recent reporting year due to continued effective tracking of children's cases through panel processes which leads to swift matching to in-house or external families. The Adoption and Permanency panel provides an effective quality assurance mechanism for the service and provides feedback on both quality and timeliness of work.

## **5. Performance Data – Ofsted Data Return**

**5.1** Each Local Authority is required to submit an annual adoption data return to Ofsted by 30<sup>th</sup> June that provides performance information on the previous financial year's activity. This information ranges across a broad range of fields, is greater in scope than the adoption scorecard and is a key reference point during inspections. The detailed dataset can be found at appendix B.

### **5.2 Child related data**

- At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 there were 16 Looked After Children with an adoption plan. Of these children, 6 were already placed with adopters, seven were subject to Placement Orders but not yet matched to an adoptive family and 3 had not yet had Placement Orders made.
- Of the 16 children with an adoption plan 5 were from a white background, 3 were of mixed heritage and 8 were of black ethnicity. This breakdown is reflective of Brent's general Looked After Child population.
- There were 11 children adopted during the year. Of these, 8 were made with Brent recruited adopters and three with other agencies.

### **5.3 Adopter Recruitment**

- At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 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 was fewer than the number of approved adopters. This has enabled professionals to choose from a good range of adopters when determining the most suitable match.
- Over the course of the year the service received 139 enquiries about adoption. Many people following this enquiry were signposted to our monthly information evenings. The enquiries resulted in 18 adoptive households being approved during the year. The level of initial enquiry and overall approvals are comparable to the previous year. There were no referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism, which regulates decision making by adoption agencies.

This suggests adopters were satisfied with the service they received and that our adoption panel activity is sufficiently robust.

- During the year the service initiated the new, 2-stage adopter recruitment process. This process is led by the adopter in stage one and is completed within a 2-month period. The second stage is formed around the social worker assessment and should be concluded and presented to panel within 4 months.
- In terms of measuring the length of time taken for adopters to be matched to children, 80% of the cohort was matched with a child within 6 months of approval. This positive performance is in line with that achieved in 2012-13. Performance has improved regarding the time taken for adopters to be approved following their initial application – with 83% of applications being dealt with within 9 months, compared to 65% last year.
- Brent continues to attract adopters from a diversity of backgrounds in order to best meet the variety of needs of our Looked After Children. The largest ethnic group of adopters are people of black Caribbean or black African background which reflect the work we have undertaken to recruit from black and minority ethnic communities.

#### **5.4 Adoption Support**

- At 31<sup>st</sup> March there were 95 families receiving an adoption support package from the Local Authority. This support was primarily provided through financial allowances which are reviewed and means tested. This figure has remained stable, as new adoption support packages are balanced by those ending as children reach the age of 18.
- A further 198 families were in receipt of other post-adoption support services within the financial year. These support services ranged from therapeutic services for families to birth records counselling and tracing services for adopted adults.

### **6. The Adoption and Permanence Panel**

**6.1** Brent has one Adoption and Permanence panel constituted in accordance with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (amended 2011) and Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011. The panel plays a central role in assisting the Agency Decision Maker (who in Brent is the Operational Director, Children's Social Care) to reach the best possible decision in relation to:

- whether a child should be placed for adoption;
- the suitability of prospective adopters and concurrent carers;
- whether a child should be placed with a specific prospective adopter;
- and

- whether a child should be matched for long term fostering with a specific carer.

**6.2** The panel also advises the service on matters relating to contact arrangements; whether an application for a placement order should be made in certain circumstances; the profile of children the prospective adopter(s) may be suitable to adopt; and the provision of adoption support.

**6.3** The Panel meets once a month in respect of all matters concerning adoption. A joint annual training day for adoption panel members and the adoption team staff is held and was delivered last year by the British Agency for Adoption and Fostering.

**6.4** Following each panel presentation those attending are asked for feedback. People asked for feedback include prospective and approved adopters, Brent social care staff and social workers from other adoption agencies within England and Wales. The consistent message received is that the panel is robust in nature and that attendees felt able to express their views and opinions.

**6.5** 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, various independent members including a birth mother with experience of adoption, 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 as well as an elected member. 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.

## **7. Service narrative**

**7.1** As the data has highlighted, Brent's adoption service ensures adoptive placements are provided to meet children's needs through a number of means:

- By effective recruitment activity that targets specific groups within the community and identifies carers with skills to meet the needs of harder to place children.
- Through close working relationships with the West London Adoption consortium that encourages the sharing of children's and adopters' profiles to increase the opportunities of successful matching.
- By regular and effective use of the adoption register and other adopter exchange initiatives for our hard to place children and to support successful placements of our own adopters.

- By ensuring that adoption support plans are robust, agreed with adopters and reflect the needs of individual children.
- Through regular tracking activity of children for whom adoption is the plan and of adopters progressing through the 2-stage process and those awaiting a match.

**7.2** The service has improved outcomes for children with adoption plans during 2013-14 in the following ways:

- Through effective tracking of timescales at monthly permanency planning meetings and quarterly tracking meetings for children with an adoption plan. This activity contributes to a reduction in the period of time from a child becoming Looked After to being placed for adoption.
- By commissioning concurrent planning support via Coram for our adopters where there is the assessed capacity for them to take on this role.
- Through working creatively and openly with other London boroughs to share children's profiles to enhance the pool of prospective placements.
- By identifying opportunities for children to be placed together with siblings wherever possible. In one case example specific adopters have been recruited, assessed and trained to parent a family of three children.
- Through regular feedback from the adoption panel on quality assurance issues which are fed back to the Head of Service and Operational Director. These are incorporated into appraisals and service plans.

**7.3 Recruitment & Assessment Initiatives.** Our marketing and advertising approach has been refreshed in order to attract adopters from different social groups and there has been advertising in a variety of online and print based media. The local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service has provided advice in cases where adopters under assessment expressed concerns about managing specific types of behaviour. Coram was commissioned to support the training of prospective adopters as concurrent carers to enable the swifter placement of children with adoption plans. The adoption service has worked with four other London boroughs to share preparation training of adopters and to ensure there is no delay in providing appropriate training for them.

**7.4 Adoption Support.** Workers provide a birth parent counselling service, which includes siblings who are separated from adopted children and other birth relatives, such as grandparents. On occasions, and when more appropriate, birth parent counselling sessions are arranged at the Post Adoption Centre, which are funded by Brent.

- A birth record counselling service is offered by a dedicated team of adoption support workers for all adults (over 18) living in Brent affected by adoption. This includes adopted adults requiring information about their adoption, birth relatives wanting to make contact with their adopted children and all adults,

regardless of where they live, who were adopted through Brent or their birth relatives. In addition, Brent holds all the adoption records of the National Adoption Society (approximately 17,000) and those of the Western National Adoption Society and is responsible for birth records counselling if the enquirer lives in Brent or for file vetting and sending the relevant information to the local authority who is providing a birth record counselling service to the enquirer living in their area.

- The Adoption Support Team provides a range of activities for adoptive families and adopted children. These include bimonthly support groups for adopters, held on a Saturday and where a crèche is provided for the children staffed by adoption social workers; two social events each year (a summer picnic and a festive party in December) which are very well received and attended and a quarterly adoption newsletter. An informal buddy system is routinely set up for most Brent adopters whereby they are linked with other similar adopters caring for children of the same age and this has been very successful in terms of adopters supporting each other and for adopted children making friendships with other adopted children.

**7.5 Involving Adopters.** Adopters are involved closely in matching and linking and subsequent planning in a variety of ways.

- Adopters are closely supported by their social worker and profiles of children in-house, within the West London consortium and through the adoption register are discussed at regular intervals. Adopters are able to access the adoption gateway and a new matching agency (Adoption Link) in order to increase their opportunities of effective matching. Within the assessment and approval process prospective adopters are involved in discussions about matching opportunities and how processes operate. Our adopters' profiles are shared regularly with the West London Consortium and their preferences discussed with them.
- We are keen to involve adopters in the development of the service and achieve this through their annual review which provides opportunities for feedback on service development. Adopters are also asked for their feedback on the assessment, approval and review process following adoption panel. Our recruitment and marketing co-ordinator uses the perspective of adopters to help form the content within the regular newsletter which is the preferred method of keeping in touch and encouraging participation.

**7.6 Adopter Feedback.** Adopters are generally positive about the service they receive from Brent. This is evidenced through feedback to the adoption panel about adopter experiences of the assessment process and within their annual review. Adopters are also very positive about the support they receive from their assessing social worker. Some adopters have felt that they have waited some time for a match but this is not generally directed as a criticism of the agency, rather a frustration at

the system as it operates. There is good attendance from adopters at our annual summer picnic and Christmas party which evidences our ongoing positive engagement with families. Many adults contacting our service with queries about post-adoption queries have given positive feedback about the helpful responses they have received.

**7.7 Staff Engagement.** Staff are engaged to help the adoption service develop in a number of different ways. One of the most significant examples is through the sharing of key development tasks on a Local Authority, consortium or London-wide basis. Examples of this in the last financial year has included recruitment events, preparation training and activity days. Staff contributed to the rebranding of the adoption marketing information and provide articles and ideas for inclusion in the regular newsletter. Staff were consulted and involved in the restructure of the Placements' service which took place towards the end of the financial year and have been encouraged to adapt the service plan at an individual level within team meetings. Training opportunities for staff in the borough and within West London have been provided in areas such as concurrency.

## **8. Broader adoption issues and the future**

**8.1** The national context for adoption is rapidly changing with Local Authorities and other adoption agencies being challenged to improve their performance and seek innovative solutions to structural problems. Brent's adoption service has been restructured for the beginning of the 2014-15 financial years in order to be better placed to adapt to local and national challenges and to continue to build on the improved performance delivered in the last twelve months.

**8.2** Brent has taken over the chairing of the West London Adoption Consortium since April 2014 which has provided an opportunity to shape services across the region. A number of current initiatives are in progress to enhance co-operation in order to share information to reduce waiting times for children with adoption plans.

**8.3** Jointly run adoption preparation training days for potential adopters have been established with other West London boroughs to ensure there is an event every month which will reduce time delays within the system.

**8.4** Examples of collaborative working including a joint event with seven boroughs to give potential adopters the opportunity to look at the profiles of children awaiting a placement. Brent has also actively participated in the first London-wide adoption activity day and a further event of this kind is planned in 2014.

**8.5** We have partnered with Coram in order to encourage the recruitment of adopters who have the particular interest and skills to foster a child who may go on to require an adoptive home. This initiative aims to reduce further in-built delay within the system.

**8.6** Post-adoption support is an area of increasing development and effective co-ordination is instrumental in encouraging the adoption of traditionally hard to place children. Brent has been actively involved in commissioning services across the West London Consortium and has a well-developed post-adoption service that has ensured there have been no adoption breakdowns in the last three years.

**8.7** Our advertising and recruitment activity aimed at adopters is innovative and creative. We use a variety of web and print based media and as well as individual advertising have run joint campaigns with the West London Consortium.

### **Background Papers**

- i) Adoption statement of purpose 2014/15
- ii) Ofsted adoption data return 2013/14

### **Contact Officer**

Nigel Chapman, Head of Service, Placements.


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**STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**  
**GAIL TOLLEY**

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| <br><b>Brent</b> | <b>Corporate Parenting Committee<br/>October 2014</b><br><br><b>Report from the Strategic<br/>Director of Children and Young People</b> |
| <b>Report Title:</b>  | <b>Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring<br/>Report 1st April - 30th June 2014</b>   |

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## 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 first quarter of this reporting year. An appendix is attached for comparison purposes that provides statistical data regarding the reporting year 2013-14.

## 2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to note and comment upon the contents of this report. This is to provide evidence that the management of the fostering service is being monitored 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 service plan is that:
  - The best foster carers are recruited for our children.
  - All placements receive high quality support, effectively targeted according to need.
  - There is an increase in the number of children placed closer to home with our in-house foster carers.

- 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.

3.2 The Placements' Service is committed to provide a range of safe and secure foster placements to help children to develop and enjoy stable relationships with significant adults who can best meet their needs.

3.3 The Service aims to provide placements that promote stability and positive outcomes for children and young people by working in partnership with young people, carers, birth families, other professionals and the community.

#### **4.0 Staffing Arrangements**

4.1 The Placements' Service was restructured during the reporting year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014, with a revised service structure operational from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014.

4.2 The in-house fostering functions are now distributed across two teams, as opposed to the three that were previously in place. This was achieved in order to improve efficiency and ensure a more consistent approach is applied to all foster carers.

- The recruitment and assessment of foster carers is now completed within the Kinship, Fostering and Adoption Assessment Team.
- The ongoing support and supervision of foster carers is the responsibility of the Fostering Support Team.

4.4 The revised service structure enabled a realignment of existing resource and the creation of a Fostering Development Co-ordinator and a Fostering Reviewing Officer role. Both posts were successfully appointed to within the reporting period. The Fostering Development Co-ordinator leads on improving the capacity and skills of our in-house foster carers by identifying learning needs and providing training where required. The Fostering Reviewing Officer is responsible for undertaking annual reviews of foster carer households in order to promote a consistent quality of service to our Looked After Children.

#### **5.0 Placement Activity**

5.1 One of the service priorities is that the proportion of Looked After Children placed closer to home with in-house foster carers increases. Between 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 there was a 25% increase in the number of in-house placements as a result of improved recruitment activity and better use being made of in-house capacity.

5.2 As at the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2014 there were:

- 129 children placed with Brent foster carers compared to 130 children at the end of the previous quarter.
- 42 children placed with a relative or family friend on a fostering basis compared to 41 children at the end of the previous quarter.

- 94 children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) compared to 97 children at the end of the previous quarter.

- 5.3 As at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2014 the proportion of children placed with an in-house foster carer or relative/friend, as a proportion of the total LAC population was 50%. When IFA placements are included 78% of our LAC population was living in a family setting as at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2014, compared to 68% at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012. There has been a significant improvement over the last two years in enabling more children to be brought up within a family setting, often close to their home communities. This promotes contact with children and young people's social networks, their families and schools which are important elements in improving overall outcomes for children in care.
- 5.4 The overall LAC population has remained relatively stable during the reporting period. As at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2014 340 children were in care, compared to 348 on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014.
- 5.5 Every effort is made to find a suitable in-house placement for children when a request is made to the service. However there are occasions when an alternative arrangement is required. For example this could be due to the child or young person's profile necessitating a living arrangement further away from Brent or a larger sibling group of three or more children that can be difficult to accommodate in an emergency due to capacity issues.
- 5.6 Where placements are made with IFAs in an emergency the in-house fostering team work closely with other colleagues to consider whether a move to an in-house carer is possible and in the child's best interests.

## 6.0 Recruitment Activity

- 6.1 The fostering service carried out a number of recruitment focused activities within the reporting period with the aim of raising awareness of fostering and encouraging potential foster carers to come forward. There were 26 specific activities ranging from stalls at shopping centres such as IKEA to a regular presence within local libraries and schools. Fostering fortnight was held in May and our key activity was a fostering fun day held at Stonebridge Leisure Centre. An article providing more detail of this event can be found at appendix 2. Alongside our presence at local events the service ensures regular advertising in local media, transport services and advertising boards in Brent and neighbouring boroughs. The Brent fostering and adoption brand has been updated and this provides a fresh and vibrant offer to local people considering the fostering role.
- 6.2 A monthly information evening is 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 The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 54 enquiries about fostering. These enquiries resulted in a number of initial visits. As at the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2014 there were 11 formal assessments in process under the new 2-stage fostering assessment process. As part of the assessment and preparation process a number of professionals speak to prospective carers about the fostering task, including the involvement of young people that have been within the care system.

- 6.4 The service aims to recruit fifteen non-related foster carers between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 with a net growth of between 5-7 fostering households once carer resignations and terminations of approval are taken into account. There were 2 approvals within the first quarter of this reporting period, with some delays being experienced in stage one of the new 2-stage assessment process which is led by the foster carer. There are 11 carers currently within the 2-stage assessment process and, should these continue to progress positively, will result in the overall target being met.
- 6.5 The fostering service benefits from a group of approved carers from a diverse background, enabling many placements of children to be made with carers that reflect their ethnicity and culture. Evidence of this can be found at section B2 of the Fostering Ofsted Data Return, April 2013-March 2014.

## **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. The panel chair and vice chair are independent people with professional experience of fostering. A new panel chair began in role within the reporting period and is a very experienced social work practitioner with a great deal of experience in fostering and related fields. Other panel members on the central list include a Social Worker with more than three years relevant post-qualifying experience, a Brent councillor, independent members and the agency medical advisor. The Panel meets on the first Friday of every month. Detailed minutes are kept of all panel meetings.
- 7.2 The functions of the Fostering Panel are to consider:
- Each application and 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 Registered Manager. The panel makes recommendations to the fostering service and these recommendations are referred to the Agency Decision Maker.
- 7.4 During the period 1<sup>st</sup> April – 30<sup>th</sup> June 2014 three panels were held with twenty specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group two new fostering households were approved and two households' approval was recommended for termination as a result of a number of concerns raised about their suitability. All of the recommendations made to the Agency Decision Maker were confirmed.
- 7.5 The Fostering Panel has requested more regular attendance from children's Social Workers when cases are presented. This matter is being taken up by the Heads of Service for Placements and Care Planning to ensure greater consistency of attendance and to enhance the child's voice within discussions.

## **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 April – June 2014 a number of training courses were held, attended by 54 foster carers.
- 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 well attended and provide an important communication link between carers and the Placements' Service.
- 8.4 The Head of Service (Placements) met with carers during this period to discuss changes to the fostering allowance and to receive feedback on the planned implementation arrangements.

## **9.0 Monitoring Arrangements**

- 9.1 During the reporting period there was one formal allegation made against a Brent foster carer that was subject to the appropriate investigation but not found to be substantiated. There was also one formal complaint received about the fostering service from a Brent foster carer. This related to dissatisfaction with the child's Social Worker and the Supervising Social Worker regarding arrangements to move a child to an alternative foster home.
- 9.2 All foster carers, regardless of the length of their approval with Brent must have an annual review of their arrangements. As stated in paragraph 4.4 above a new post was created on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 to protect this function and an experienced Social Worker was recruited to the role. During the reporting period 34 annual reviews were held.

## **10.0 Service Development**

- 10.1 As discussed in section 4 above the functions of the fostering service have been consolidated into two teams in order to provide a more consistent service to carers.
- 10.2 All active fostering households have produced child-friendly profiles of their family in collaboration with their Supervising Social Workers to ensure children have an opportunity to learn more about the home they will be moving into.
- 10.3 The system of foster care allowance payments has been revised with the new arrangements introduced from April 2014. These changes were introduced as previous arrangements were not competitive when compared to other London boroughs; had many different categories which made it difficult for carers to understand; and did not differentiate between an allowance provided for the child's needs from any fee or reward

for the foster carer. A recent judicial ruling in relation to the support to Family & Friends foster carers was also incorporated into the revised support arrangements.

- 10.4 Within the West London Alliance early discussions have taken place about improving opportunities for joint working within fostering services. These discussions are at an early stage and have initially focused on the production of benchmarking data to establish the strengths and development areas for each borough. Opportunities for sharing placement vacancies across boroughs and training spaces for foster carers are likely to be implemented once parameters are established. The WLA will be producing a work plan for Children's Services Directors' consideration on this area in October.

### **Background Papers**

- i) Fostering Ofsted Data Return April 2013-March 2014.
- ii) Foster Carers' Newsletter Summer 2014.

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**STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**  
**GAIL TOLLEY**