



Corporate Parenting Committee

Tuesday 3 November 2015 at 5.00 pm

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

Membership:

Members

Councillors:

Moher (Chair)
Conneely
Hossain
Ms Shaw
Thomas

Substitute Members

Councillors:

S Choudhary, Crane and Dixon

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

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The press and public are welcome to attend this meeting

Agenda

Introductions, if appropriate.

Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members.

Item	Page
1 Minutes of the previous meeting	1 - 4

2 Exclusion of Press and Public

The following items are not for publication as they relate to the following category of exempt information as specified in the Local Government Act 1972 namely:

3 Matters arising

4 Deputations (if any)

5 Children in Care - questions and answers

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

6 Fostering service monitoring report 1 April - 30 June 2015	5 - 44
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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). The report covers the first quarter of this reporting year.

Ward Affected:
All Wards

Contact Officer: Nigel Chapman, Head of
Placements, nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk, 020
8937 4456

7 Fostering service monitoring report 1 July - 30 September 2015	45 - 60
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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). The report covers the second quarter of this reporting year.

Ward Affected:
All Wards

Contact Officer: Nigel Chapman, Head of Placements, nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk, 020 8937 4456

8 Adoption Service report 1 April - 30 September 2015

61 - 74

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. This report details the activity of Brent's adoption service from 1 April – 30 September 2015.

Ward Affected:
All Wards

Contact Officer: Nigel Chapman, Head of Placements, nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk, 020 8937 4456

9 Independent Reviewing Officer service

75 - 88

The purpose of this report is to provide the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee with the Annual Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report for 2014/15 as required by statutory regulations. The report provides both quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in Brent.

Ward Affected:
All Wards

Contact Officer: Graham Genoni, Operational Director, Social Care, graham.genoni@brent.gov.uk, 020 8927 4091

10 Virtual School update

The committee receive an update on the Virtual School exam results. A full report on the school will be presented to the next meeting in February 2016.

11 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 4 February 2016



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.



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE Tuesday 21 July 2015 at 5.00 pm

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

Also present: Paul Egunjobi and Caroline McGuinness (Care In Action))

1. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 April 2015 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

2. **Matters arising**

None.

3. **Deputations**

None.

4. **Children in Care**

The committee heard that Leilani Mensah-Manuel had stood down from the position of Chair of Care In Action and that Paul Egunjobi would be acting chair until September 2015. Paul Egunjobi reminded that there were Care In Action groups for different aged children 7-12, 13-18 and the Care Leavers Group. He updated the committee on the outcome of the Care Leavers Review meeting which had focussed on independent and semi independent living followed by a workshop on 25 June attended by foster carers, key workers and representatives from council departments including, Brent Housing Partnership and strategic commissioners. It was an opportunity to work through the process of coming into care and identify how to improve systems.

Caroline MacGuinness gave an update on plans for a fun day due to take place on 6 September 2015 with theme of health. Ideas had been submitted for possible competitions, games and stalls including some on sexual health. A planning committee would co-ordinate the event. Caroline MacGuinness also advised of plans for a summer activity to take place at Hillingdon Outdoor Activities Centre, for all ages, to promote CIA and an opportunity for foster children to meet. The date was to be confirmed.

The committee congratulated Paul Egunjobi on attaining the Amos Bursary and the opportunity to travel to Belize and shadow a Supreme Court judge.

5. **Brent Adoption Service report - 1 October 2014-31 March 2015**

The report from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People provided information about the general management of the adoption service and how it was achieving good outcomes for children. The report detailed the activity of Brent's Adoption Service from 1 October 2014 to 31 March 2015. Nigel Chapman (Head of Placements) highlighted the performance data in particular the improvement in the average time between a child entering care and moving to their adoptive family which was (positively) above the England average and the percentage of children who wait less than 18 months which was in line with the England average, on the basis of up to date Brent data. Nigel Chapman referred to the national reduction in the number of children who were subject to placement orders and the fact that there were more approved adopters than children waiting and the support given to prospective adopters while they waited. Members also heard of the Adoption Support Fund, a new initiative where Brent are to begin applications and an update will be provided at the next meeting.

Nigel Chapman referred to the work of the West London Adoption Consortium which he currently chaired and which comprised eight local authorities and voluntary organisations. He also referred to the recent Queen's Speech which encouraged the establishment of regional adoption agencies. Work would continue to see how agencies could work together more closely. The Strategic Director, Children and Young People, Gail Tolley, agreed that the West London Adoption Board was best placed for West London play a key role in pan London initiatives and proposals would be put before the London Chief Executive's meeting.

Members raised questions on the Adoption Support Fund, available throughout England to adoptive families since May 2015 and heard from the Gail Tolley that consultation had taken place with the Department for Education. The position next year was unclear. Questions were also raised on the therapies resourced by the fund and Nigel Chapman advised that most of the children in care did not meet the Child and Adolescent Mental Health threshold and so funding was used to provide supplementary services and ring fenced for Looked After Children and children with disabilities. Isha Coombes (Brent Clinical Commissioning Group) confirmed that the CCG still invested in CAMHS and that CNWL was the main provider.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

6. Brent Fostering Service quarterly monitoring report - 1 January - 31 March 2015

The report from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People provided information about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it was achieving good outcomes for children, in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011). The report covered the fourth quarter of the reporting year and a summary of the whole year position.

Nigel Chapman (Head of Placements) outlined the position on placement activity including the number of children placed with relatives or family friends. The 6% reduction in the LAC population was attributed to swifter planning and front line work with a higher number placed closer to home. Vacancy levels were consistently low at less than 10% of capacity however there was concern over a general reduction in interest and efforts were being made to target effectively. He drew

members' attention to the training and support on offer including the fostering newsletter for Spring 2015 and the introduction of a programme of social pedagogy training for selected foster carers. A report back on this could come to the next meeting. For the coming year, the challenges included increasing the quality of the pool of in-house carers and to target specialist training for some foster carers.

Members raised questions on the impact of the under-occupancy charge legislation (the 'bedroom tax') and heard that foster carers were exempt from the provisions. Nigel Chapman assured them that in the event of there being no in-house foster carer capacity, the council would approach an agency. Members also raised questions on the reasons for terminating fostering households' approval and whether it was felt that the safeguarding signals in place were sufficiently robust. The committee heard that the reasons for foster carer termination included health or relocation and that regular foster carer visits and reviews took place, including the review by the Fostering Panel every three years. Gail Tolley advised that any concerns would be reported to her and the Lead Member. In response to a question members heard that one child had been placed abroad and asked for information on foreign placements to be included in future reports.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring report for 1 January to 31 March 2015 be noted;
- (ii) that future reports contain more detail on reasons for fostering terminations and also on placements abroad.

7. Ade Adepitan Short Break Centre Annual Report 2014/15

Nigel Chapman (Head of Placements) introduced the report which provided information about the general management of the Ade Adepitan Short Break Centre (SBC) opened in February 2013 and how it was providing good services for disabled children within the borough, accessed by 68 children and young people. The report detailed the activity of the SBC from April 1 2014 – 30 March 2015. In introducing the report, he drew attention to the occupancy levels including the 23% increase in overnight stays and the achievements of the service particularly in helping to develop life skills and Nigel Chapman drew attention to the findings of the stakeholder survey which were very positive. He also acknowledged concerns expressed by parents (all of which had been satisfactorily resolved), referred to the outcome of Ofsted inspections which were good and outlined challenges for 2015/2016.

Members welcomed the report and raised questions on the staffing composition. They heard that there were 20 permanent and five regular agency staff. They suggested that, as an indication of support, consideration be given in future to holding meetings at the centre or The Village School which was on the same site.

RESOLVED:

that the report be noted.

8. Annual Corporate Parenting report 2014-2015

The Strategic Director, Children and Young People introduced the report on the outcomes for Looked After Children (LAC) as required by the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2011). Gail Tolley drew attention to the work of the committee over 2014-2015, the profile of the LAC and care leavers and progress on care proceedings. She also referred to the number of children who went missing from care over the period and plans in place to help keep them safe and minimise risks. The Director also outlined the authority's work with the Child Sexual Exploitation Sub-Group of Brent's Safeguarding Children's Board. She was pleased to report on education and training and Brent's achievement in having a higher proportion of care leavers in higher education than neighbouring boroughs. Priorities for 2015-16 included improving placement choice and supporting vulnerable groups.

Members welcomed the achievements outlined in the report and asked questions about the work of the Safer London worker provided through funding from the London Mayor's office and requested more information on support for young women affected by Child Sexual Exploitation from the Barnardos Young Women's Project. Graham Genoni (Operational Director) emphasised the need to find ways to engage with young people who were at risk to help improve their safety and to promote the support available to them. Tribute was also paid to educational support from the Virtual School and the positive Key Stage 2 results.

RESOLVED:

that the Annual Corporate Parenting report 2014-15 be noted.

9. **Forward Plan 2015**

The committee noted that the Fostering reports for quarters 1 and 2 would be discussed at the November meeting and then the next submitted after 31 March 2016. A report on IRO service would come to the November meeting.

10. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 6.35 pm

R MOHER
Chair

 <p>Brent</p>	<p>Corporate Parenting Committee 3 November 2015</p> <p>Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</p>
<p>Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report 1 April – 30 June 2015</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 first 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 The primary in-house fostering functions are distributed across two teams:
- The recruitment and assessment of foster carers is completed within the Placements Assessment and Recruitment Team.
 - The ongoing support and supervision of foster carers is the responsibility of the Fostering Support Team.
- 4.2 The Fostering Panel Advisor, Fostering Reviewing Officer and Fostering Development Co-ordinator roles are also managed within the Placements' Service and are line managed separately from the two operational teams in order to provide appropriate challenge within the service.

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 As at the 30th June 2015 there were:
- 107 children placed with Brent foster carers compared to 109 children at the end of the previous quarter. This is 33% of the total.
 - 48 children placed with a relative or family friend on a fostering basis compared to 50 children at the end of the previous quarter. This is 15% of the total.
 - 84 children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) compared to 84 children at the end of the previous quarter. This is 26% of the total.
 - 74% of children lived within a fostering setting as at 30th June 2015.
- 5.3 The overall LAC population decreased during the reporting period; from 328 on 31st March 2015 to 323 on 30th June 2015. The overall percentage of children placed with a Brent foster carer (including family and friends) has remained stable over the course of the last 12 months.
- 5.5 The service operates with few vacancies so that the majority of available space with foster carers is maximised. As at 30th June 2015 there were 12 fostering households with spaces available, this is 10% of the total capacity of non-related households, a figure that has remained consistent throughout the last year.
- 5.6 One of the service priorities is to ensure children are placed as close to home as possible, which will usually involve placement with a suitable in-house foster carer. To counter the difficulties in recruiting carers with the capacity to accommodate a

sibling group or teenager a refreshed marketing and recruitment strategy has been produced (see appendix 1).

- 5.7 Where placements are made with IFAs in an emergency, often out of hours, the in-house fostering team work closely with the child's Social Worker 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 9 recruitment focused activities within the reporting period with the aim of raising awareness of fostering and encouraging potential foster carers to come forward. The service held a week long recruitment drive within a Harrow shopping centre and also held a fostering fun day at Willesden Sports Centre that resulted in 68 families attending.

- 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 The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 113 enquiries about fostering. These enquiries resulted in 14 initial visits. As at the 30th June 2015 there were 11 formal assessments in process under the 2-stage fostering assessment process. As described above, the marketing and recruitment strategy for 2015-16 has been refreshed to better target resources with the outcome that 10% of enquiries result in a fostering application.

- 6.4 The target for the service 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. The service is now running stage 1 and 2 of the fostering assessment process concurrently to prevent delay and is in line with other west London boroughs. There is no set target for the number of family and friends fostering approvals as these arrangements the Local Authority has less control over. Where family and friends carers make a decision, endorsed within the child's care plan, to continue to foster this arrangement will then be taken to the fostering panel for consideration.

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. The Panel meets on the first Friday of every month and more regularly where there is service demand.

- 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 who is the Operational Director, Children's Social Care.

7.4 During the period 1st April – 30th June 2015 3 panels were held with 14 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group 1 new fostering household and 2 new 'Family and Friends' foster carer households were recommended for approval. 6 fostering and 1 family and friends households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review. 1 family and friends foster carers' approval was recommended for termination due to the young person turning 18 (although remaining with the carers under 'Staying Put' arrangements) and 1 fostering household's approval was recommended for termination due to their many indications that they did not wish to continue fostering and had not taken a new placement for some time. 2 fostering households' resignations were noted at panel – 1 due to the birth of their twins and 1 due to wishing to work with adults rather than children. 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. One of the key areas of challenge has been in relation to the presentation of foster carer reviews. Whilst these are usually carried out within timescales there has at times been a delay in these then being presented to Panel, which has led to information being out of date. This issue was raised with the service by the chair and processes have been put in place to minimise this in future.

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. The training and development strategy for foster carers can be found at appendix 2.

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 1st April – 30th June 2015 12 training courses were held, attended by 76 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. A foster carers' focus group was held in April between carers and managers within the Placements' Service to discuss issues of concern and service development.

- 8.4 The programme to support the introduction of social pedagogy to fostering continued throughout the reporting period with 2-day sessions held in May and June. The final training couplet was due to be held in July with an overall evaluation that will be reported upon in the next quarterly report.

9.0 Monitoring Arrangements

- 9.1 During the reporting period there were 3 allegations made against Brent foster carers. In two cases no formal action was taken. The remaining case is currently subject to a formal child protection process.
- 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 29 annual reviews out of a possible 35 during this period. Of those uncompleted, 3 were due to staff or foster carer illness and 3 due to supervising social worker delays. These were all re-scheduled and completed at a later date, within timescales.

10.0 Future Developments

- 10.1 As described above, the innovative training programme to introduce social pedagogy to foster carers and social care staff has almost completed with encouraging early signs of progress. Subsequent monitoring reports will detail programme evaluation and future direction of the programme.
- 10.2 Collaborative work has continued with other boroughs within the West London Alliance (WLA) that aims to strengthen working arrangements and improve our fostering services as set out in the January-March 2015 quarterly monitoring report to the Corporate Parenting Committee. The action plan for West London fostering has been taken forward with a focus this quarter on agreeing an approach to joint marketing & recruitment; to support boroughs through comparisons of carer recruitment activity and to agree a co-ordinated package of foster carer benefits. Joint preparation training for foster carers has been established to enable prospective foster carers to move through the approval system more quickly.
- 10.3 The service's key fostering related challenges in 2015-16 are twofold:
- To increase the quality & range of our in house pool of carers that will enable more children to live closer to or within Brent. To achieve this we need households with space and capacity to accommodate sibling groups and adolescents.
 - To improve placement stability for children in care.

- 10.5 In order to meet these challenges the main activities will be:
- To focus upon recruitment both in-house and within the WLA so that targets are met for the service as set out within the Placements' Service annual plan.
 - To ensure that targeted and specialist training is available to foster carers with the interest in further developing their role.

Appendices

- (i) Fostering and Adoption Marketing and Recruitment Strategy 2015-16
- (ii) Foster Carers Learning and Development Strategy 2015-17

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GAIL TOLLEY

STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



Fostering and Adoption Marketing & Recruitment Strategy

2015 – 16

Page 11

Author: Anjumara Hussain

Date for review - April 2016

Introduction

When children cannot be cared for by their own family, the London Borough of Brent's Placements service enables them to move to alternative families who will care for them throughout childhood and beyond. The London borough of Brent aims to recruit and assess foster carers and adopters of the highest calibre who will be able to provide a home environment that promotes the development of children and young people.

According to the 2011 census, the population in Brent has increased from 263,464 in 2001 to 311,215. This represents an increase of 47,751 (18%). Brent has seen a rise in the number of migrants from the European Union, which has impacted, on both; the types of children coming into care and the ethnic mix of carers now required to meet and reflect the diverse needs and cultures of our children. In 2001 the number of 'White; other' self-categorised residents in Brent stood at 24,072. This had risen to 44,353 in 2011, representing an increase of 53.6%.

Black (African/Caribbean/British) looked after children still continue to represent the majority of children in our care at 36%; however White (European/British) children are close behind at 28%, followed by Asian and dual heritage children, both respectively at 16%. In terms of our carers, Black (African & Caribbean) carers represent the majority, followed by White (European/British) carers at 20%. There is a need to recruit foster carers from our wider White (British/European) community. There is also a need to recruit more carers with space and capacity to accommodate sibling groups and adolescents.

There have been a number of significant developments to adoption legislation and adoption services over the past couple of years with changes in court rulings and an increase in the number of special guardianship orders granted. As a result, nationally, and in Brent, there has been a decrease in the number of children suitable for adoption placements. Therefore, all adoption marketing activity during the course of this year will be primarily aimed at raising awareness of adoption and progressing enquiries where potential adopters express an interest in children we often find more difficult to place.

Overview

At the start of April 2015 there were 326 looked after children in Brent with an in-house provision of 173 foster carers. During the last financial year (April 2014 - March 2015), there were 203 initial enquiries from new prospective fostering households and 15 applications from prospective foster carers received. The figures for April 2014 – March 2015 shows a net decrease in the number of Brent foster carers recruited because six foster carers were approved during the year and 14 existing foster carers were de-registered. Exit interviews with former foster carers are in progress to determine the cause of de-registration.

New Adopter approvals for the same period indicate 43.75% decrease from April 2014 to March 2015. There were 32 individuals approved in 2013/14 and 18 individuals approved in 2014/15. This reflects the reduction in children with court ordered adoption plans and has been part of the service strategy.

Background

A report produced by the Department for Education (Scott and Duncan, 2013)¹ suggests that ‘there could be up to 6.3 million people (or 20% of the adult population) who would say they are ‘fairly likely, ‘very likely’ or ‘certain to’ consider’ adoption or fostering. This finding suggests that there is a significant audience available to target in any recruitment campaigns for potential foster carers or adopters. However, the report goes to suggest that there are many myths and assumptions about adoption and foster carer, such as age, single status and other lifestyle concerns, which prevent many individuals from pursuing an enquiry. Therefore any marketing strategy must clearly debunk the myths associated with fostering and adoption and be transparent about the eligibility criteria. Our current marketing literature reflects this and states from the onset what the requirements are for potential foster carers – a message which is reiterated at every stage of the application process. There is research by the Department of Education (2013) to also suggest the value of positioning fostering as a formal profession, because the qualities expected of a foster carer is similar to that of someone in a childcare profession. This is something which can be taken forward by forming partnerships with the employment and recruitment agencies in Brent and the West London region.

¹ Understanding attitudes, motivations and barriers to adoption and fostering - A marketing proposal for the Department for Education
Anastasia Scott & Chris Duncan, Kindred. March 2013

Competitors/ External forces analysis

Recruitment and retention of foster carers is a challenge for all local authorities in London and the United Kingdom. Neighbouring local authorities are often competing with each other to recruit from the same pool of people and are in constant competition with independent fostering agencies that work both regionally and nationally. Independent agencies are more commercially focussed, are working solely from a fostering perspective and in some cases can offer a more attractive support/finance package.

As a result, priorities for Brent when seeking to recruit foster carers include focusing on:

- Promoting the quality, support and knowledge our staff provide. This includes the following:

Regular contact with a qualified supervising social worker

A range of learning, development and training opportunities

Start up equipment (where applicable)

Advice from our Education of Looked After Children Team Service and advice from our health and well being services – including CAMHS

Regular newsletters

Foster carers' support group

Social events for both foster carers and Looked after Children

- Continuing to respond in a timely manner to enquiries and assessments to increase the pool of in-house foster carers and adopters.

Recruiting more in house foster carers is a priority for Brent, as each IFA placement costs £700-800 weekly in comparison to a Brent in-house placement which, when on-costs are taken into account, is approximately £500 per week. Residential costs are considerably higher. More in-house foster carers also provides more opportunities for siblings groups to remain together, teenagers to remain closer to home, for children to be given choice and to improve our placement stability. However any marketing strategy must acknowledge the fact that London as a whole is unique in comparison to other regions across the country because it faces an acute shortage of housing and lack of spare bedrooms. This issue is not something which we can fully address as part of this marketing strategy.

West London Alliance (WLA)

Brent Council and other neighbouring London boroughs (including Hillingdon, Hounslow, Harrow, Ealing and tri-borough) are now working with the West London Alliance on a collaborative marketing strategy that aims to deliver a regional marketing campaign for the recruitment of foster carers. The initiative is at the preliminary stage, however, future marketing activities include a regional WLA website and advertising campaigns with TFL and Mayor of London.

SWOT Analysis (Internal / micro environment)

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foster carers receive a fortnightly allowance and fee, which is increased annually. Adopters receive some financial support at the start of a placement and may receive an allowance (means tested). A diverse mix of children requiring placements. Access to an excellent variety of training courses. Good quality support from qualified professionals. Regular support groups and social activities. Quarterly newsletters encouraging carer participation. Continued outreach activities in local authority area and surrounding boroughs. Regular advertising campaigns for recruitment. Targeted advertising for children/sibling groups requiring permanency and adoption. Availability of information online via the council website and social media pages. 	<p>Weaknesses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approval process can take up to six months. Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) generally pay their carers 10 – 15% higher than local authorities in West London. Drop out rate after initial enquiry is high (although similar to IFA/other local authorities). Budget limitations to dramatically enhance allowances. Lack of White (British/Irish/European) foster carers. Lack of carers for sibling group, and teenagers. Lack of placements for children requiring permanency.
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to mosaic data to help analyse the target audience. Knowledge and experience of foster carers already recruited. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased competition from independent fostering agencies and adoption agencies like PACT.

Reaching people who are looking for a career change – e.g. public sector (job losses), and those whose children have left home.
Digital technology – utilising our own website more efficiently by establishing links with other departments.
Maximizing our presence on social networking platforms.
Closer collaboration with other west London boroughs as part of the West London Alliance may lead to broader marketing opportunities.

Changing legislation enforcing stricter guidelines on local authorities and the way assessments are carried out.
Greater budgetary pressures.

PEST Analysis (External / macro environment)

Political factors	<p>Small marketing budget – may decrease further with the implementation of the WLA strategy.</p> <p>Financial uncertainty – council and customers.</p> <p>Change in housing benefit regulations regarding spare bedrooms. However, this is being addressed by WLA.</p> <p>New legislation changes in dealing with looked after children.</p> <p>New Adoption legislation.</p> <p>Panel process and criteria changes.</p>
Economic factors	<p>Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) generally pay their carers 10 – 15% higher than other local authorities in West London pay. It is challenging to compete with private agencies.</p> <p>Lack of suitable housing is a major issue in London which cannot be addressed directly by one local authority.</p> <p>People concerned they may not manage financially if they become foster carers.</p> <p>Working hours for prospective foster carer.</p>
Social factors	<p>Stereo-typical view of looked after children leading to negative attitudes and feelings about fostering & adoption.</p> <p>Awareness of safeguarding children – people want to help.</p> <p>People don't think they can do it / on the flip side people think they can do it, but after the initial visit realise it's not really for them.</p>
Technological factors	<p>All fostering agencies have online presence – competition.</p> <p>Increasing use of internet to research aspects of fostering and adoption, resulting in comparisons being made between agencies and local authorities more easily.</p> <p>Online marketing methods are very targeted and easy to evaluate.</p> <p>Social media tools allow the local authority to talk directly to customers instantly and establishes engagement on a broader level.</p>

Target Audience

To help effectively recruit the right carers for Brent's Fostering and Adoption Service an analysis has been done on the ethnicity, age and postcode location of our current foster carers and Looked After Children. All statistics shown are based on data collected by Brent Council from 2014-15 ([DFE Report 29/06/15](#)), ([Brent Foster Carers Data](#)), and [Brent 2011 census profile](#). The information will be used to create a profile of our prospective foster carer.

- **Ethnicity**

The information in *Appendix 1* suggests Brent has a high proportion of Black (African/Caribbean/British) foster carers and are lacking mixed heritage and White (European/British) carers. According to the census 2011, Brent has the largest count (12,320) and proportion (4.0%) of White: Irish group and has seen the largest increase (85.6%) of White: Other (2001 definition - i.e. including Gypsy or Irish Traveller). This is a significant proportion of the population which will need to be addressed as part of our marketing objectives.

In terms of adoption, we are not actively recruiting this financial year and are taking enquiries on a case by case basis. There is, however, more of a demand for Black (African/Caribbean/British) adopters (please refer to *Appendix 1*).

- **Age**

The information in *Appendix 2* shows that the majority of Brent foster carers are 41 – 60 years of age. This data suggests that we will be more successful in recruiting foster carers if we target this age range. Census 2011 information will be used to map the areas which have a higher density of households in the 41 – 60 years age bracket.

- **Location**

The information in *Appendix 3* suggests that current Brent foster carers reside all across Brent and the immediate surrounding areas. Therefore for the purposes of this marketing strategy we will target areas which have a higher proportion of residents aged 41 – 60 years and are of a White (European/British) background. In addition we use statements such as the following from the census 2011 to achieve our marketing objectives:

- Irish born residents are most numerous in Mapesbury and least numerous in Alperton.
- Residents who were born in the recent EU accession countries are most numerous in Dudden Hill, and least numerous in Queens' Park.

- **Other Factors**

Having a spare bedroom is crucial to successfully becoming a Brent foster carer for children over the age two. It is because of this factor we are looking at properties that are larger in size and therefore have potentially more room to take in a Looked After Child. This includes properties in the following wards; Queen's Park ward, Fryent Ward and Kenton Ward. We will be using geographical mapping data to achieve this task and a sample mailshot will be deployed to test the potential of this market.

In addition, we are also looking to distribute marketing information to households affected by the 'empty nest' syndrome. 'Empty nest' syndrome can be described as the moment when a child leaves a parents' home for the first time, such as to live on their own or to attend a college or university (Wikipedia). According to Mosaic, there are 18, 000 households in Brent who can be categorised under this banner as they either are a 'mature family with no children under 18' and 'older families with no children under 18'. A sample mailshot will be carried out to test the potential reach of this new audience.

Objectives /Targets

To raise awareness of fostering recruitment to the Eastern European community residing in Brent and surrounding areas by March 2016.

To raise awareness of fostering recruitment to the Irish community residing in Brent and surrounding areas by March 2016.

To raise awareness of fostering recruitment to Brent Council staff.

To increase the overall number of fostering enquiries to 20 - 25 a month by the end of March 2016.

To increase the number of overall applications by the end of March 2016 (target of 2-3)

Strategy and Tactics

- Ensure that information about fostering and adoption for Brent is clear and accessible through all platforms, including print, advertising, outreach and digital media.
- Deliver three specific events in the year to target fostering communities; White (European), White (Irish), Brent Council Staff.
- Launch a new fostering recruitment campaign in January 2016 for internal staff members. The new campaign will capitalise on the 'New Year' theme which suggests a time of new beginnings and fresh opportunities.
- Contact all foster carers that have left Brent in 2015 and produce a report by November 2015, with subsequent monitoring confirming enhanced retention of foster carers
- Engage innovatively with other service areas, build partnerships and exploit our internal communications network to promote fostering. For example, tap into the council's volunteer strategy and employment strategy for further marketing opportunities.
- Ensure all council buildings display information about fostering and adoption.

Key messages

Promoting the rewarding aspect of fostering and the long term impact it can have on a child's life:

- Make a difference today and help one of our 300 child in need achieve their full potential in life.
- Foster carers help children to achieve their full potential in life through support, encouragement and understanding.
- What's the most rewarding thing about fostering? Changing a child's life for good.

Promoting the inclusive nature of fostering:

- To foster for Brent you must have a spare bedroom, be over the age of 21 and have indefinite leave to remain in the UK.
- What's the most important thing about being a foster carer? Love.
- Anyone can be a foster carer. As long as you have a spare bedroom, are over the age of 21, and have childcare experience.
- All children are different and they all need different families; do not rule yourself out without talking to us first.

Positioning fostering as a professional career:

- Start your childcare career with Brent and be a foster carer to one of our 300 children in need.
- Start your childcare career as a Brent foster carer.
- Help children and young people in our community and start your rewarding career as a Brent Foster Carer.
- Can you demonstrate the skills, experience, motivation and commitment to caring for a child? If so, you could be the perfect candidate to foster a child in need.
- If you are looking for a change in career that's rewarding and fulfilling at the same time, then foster for Brent and change a child's life.

Raising awareness of Adoption:

- Adoption offers children an excellent way to get a loving, stable and secure family home.
- All children are different and they all need different families; do not rule yourself out without talking to us first.

Tactical Grid

Audience	Key messages	Media type	Channel/tactic	Date	By	Cost
White European (Polish)	Promoting the inclusive nature of fostering. Promoting the rewarding aspect of fostering and the long term impact it can have on a child's life.	Information event specifically for the Polish community.	Interpersonal communication and news media (press release promoting event)	Oct/Nov 2015	AH/KE/TW	TBC
		Fostering recruitment posters and leaflets distributed in key locations including local churches, medical surgeries, council buildings and Polish newsagents.	Advertising/promotional media	Oct/Nov 2015	AH/Design Team	TBC
		Case study of a foster carer with a Polish background.	News media/Organisational media	Oct/Nov 2015	AH/CG	TBC
		Leaflet drop to areas where there is a high density of residents with Polish background (Census 2011).	Organisational media	Oct/Nov 2015	AH/WH	TBC
		Fostering recruitment advertisement on social media platforms	Organisational media Advertising/promotional media	Oct/Nov 2015	AH	TBC
		Email advertisement of event to all current foster carers.	Organisational media (Dotmailer)	Oct/Nov 2015	AH	£0
		Brent Council Staff	Positioning fostering as a professional career. Promoting the inclusive nature of fostering.	Information event specifically for Brent Council staff.	Interpersonal communication	Jan/Feb 2016
Case study/article about fostering.	Organisational media (E-sight Lite, Chief Executive's Blog, Members Bulletin, News item on the			Jan/Feb 2016	AH/NC/AS	£0

			Intranet, BCC Screens, Yammer)			
White British/Irish	Promoting the inclusive nature of fostering.	Information event specifically for the Irish community and households affected by the 'empty nest' syndrome.	Interpersonal communication and news media (press release promoting event)	March 2016		TBC
	Promoting the rewarding aspect of fostering and the long term impact it can have on a child's life.	Fostering recruitment posters and leaflets distributed in key locations including local churches, medical surgeries, council buildings and libraries.	Advertising/promotional media	March 2016	AH/Design Team	TBC
		Case study of a foster carer with an Irish background.	News media/Organisational media (council website and social media platform)	March 2016	AH/CG	TBC
		Leaflet drop to areas where there is a high density of residents with Irish background (Census 2011).	Organisational media	March 2016	AH/WH	TBC
		Fostering recruitment advertisement on social media platforms	Organisational media Advertising/promotional media	March 2016	AH	£0
		Email advertisement of event to current carers.	Organisational media (Dotmailer)	March 2016	AH	£0
		Borough Wide	Promoting the rewarding aspect of fostering and the long term impact it can have on a child's life.	Fostering recruitment outreach at key locations across the borough and surrounding locations.	Interpersonal communication	All year
Positioning fostering as a professional career.	Fostering recruitment advertisement in local papers including Brent Kilburn Times		Advertising/promotional media	Sept and Dec 2015 Mar 2016	AH/KE	TBC

		and The Brent Magazine				
		Fostering recruitment advertisement on websites and social media platforms.	Advertising/ promotional media	TBC	AH/KE	TBC
		Fostering recruitment advertisement on local streets and council buildings.	JCDecaux	Sept and Dec 2015 Mar 2016	AH/KE	TBC
		Leaflet drop to areas which have larger properties.	Advertising/ promotional media	Mar 2016	AH/WH	TBC
		Leaflet drop to areas which have higher density of households affected by the 'empty nest' syndrome.	Advertising/ promotional media	Mar 2016	AH/WH	TBC
		Raising awareness of LGBT Fostering and Adoption Week	Advertising/ promotional media	7 – 13 Mar 2016	AH/TW/KE	TBC
Black African/ Caribbean	Raising awareness of adoption.	Special information event during National Adoption Week	Interpersonal communication	19 – 25 October 2015	AH/TW/ KE/MS	£0
		Promotion of National Adoption Week	Advertising/ promotional media (Brent Civic Centre Screens) Organisational media (E-sight Lite, Chief Executive's Blog, Members Bulletin, News item on the Intranet, BCC Screens, Yammer)	19 – 25 October 2015	AH	£0
		Raising awareness of adoption during Black History Month events at Brent	Interpersonal communication	29 October 2015	AH/TW	£0

Evaluation

Tackling the drop out rate – on average 10% of initial enquiries result in an application and 5% of enquiries go on to produce an approved foster carer. Whilst this data is in line with other West London boroughs we are determined to understand and improve our performance.

Although the communications and marketing campaigns generate enquiries, there is a significant drop out rate after the first enquiry which can be for a variety of reasons. Initial ideas around challenging this are:

Keeping people interested – sending them something after enquiry to keep them ‘warm’ e.g. copy of information booklet or a promotional item and providing call backs where necessary. If they are not pursuing fostering, find out the reason why and use it to inform next year’s marketing strategy.

In order to meet all of the outlined objectives for both fostering and adoption, the following evaluation methods will be carried out to assess and analyse the success of our activities:

- Evaluation forms after events/workshops
- Media monitoring (press office and web team to evaluate all press coverage featuring fostering and adoption)
- Distribution/pick up rate of newsletters and marketing materials
- Level of participation/numbers attending at fostering and adoption events
- Profile of event attendees (giving the ability to measure if we are reaching out to the right groups)
- Bespoke surveys to find out people’s awareness of fostering and adoption
- Anecdotal feedback from staff and partners
- Monitoring data figures for fostering and adoption
- Enquiry rate
- Transferral and resignation rates
- Assessments
- Web analytics to monitor website usage and social media influence.

Appendix 1: Ethnicity of Brent Foster Carers²

Ethnicity	Ethnicity of our current foster carers (%)	Ethnicity of our current adopters waiting for placement (%)	Ethnicity of our Looked After Children (%)	Ethnic breakdown of Brent population
Black British	56%	10%	36%	18%
White (European/British)	20%	45%	28%	36%
Asian British	17%	45%	16%	33%
Mixed Heritage	5%	0%	16%	5%
Other	2%	0%	4%	6%

Appendix 2: Age of Brent Foster Carers³

Age	Age of our current foster carers in %
21-30	3%
31-40	10%
41-50	26%
51-60	43%
61-70	17%
70+	1%

² [Brent Foster Carer Analysis 31.03.15](#)

³ [Brent Foster Carer Analysis 31.03.15](#)

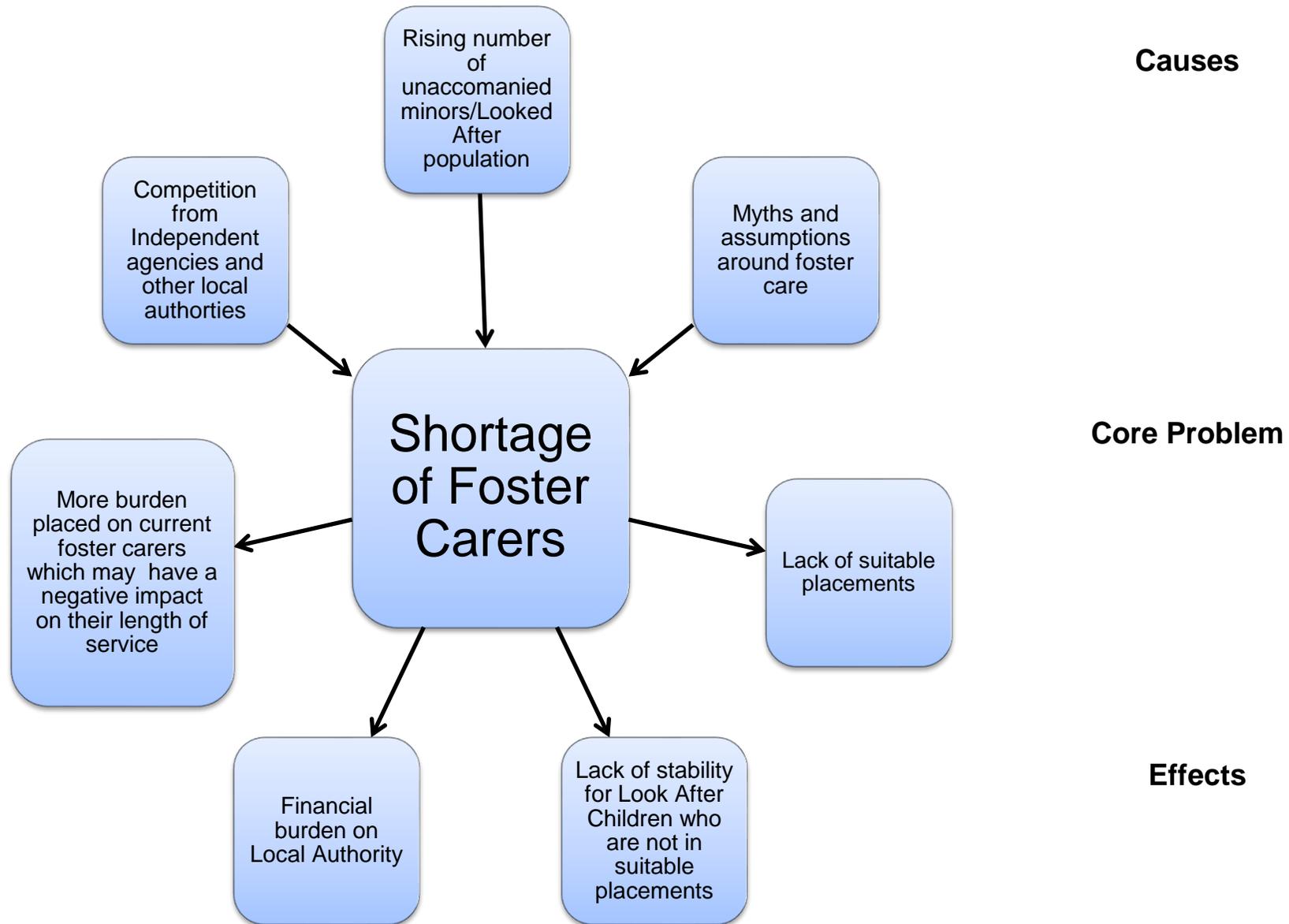
Appendix 3: Where Brent Foster Carers Live:

WARD	% Foster Carers
Alperton	3%
Barnhill	7%
Belsize	1%
Brentford	1%
Brondesbury Park	1%
Burnt Oak	1%
Bush Hill Park	1%
Camberwell Green	1%
Central	1%
Childs Hill	1%
Colindale	1%
Colliers Wood	1%
Copers Cope	1%
Coppetts	1%
Dollis Hill	2%
Dudden Hill	2%
East Acton	1%
Enfield Lock	1%
Fortune Green	1%
Glyndon	1%
Golders Green	1%
Greenford Green	1%

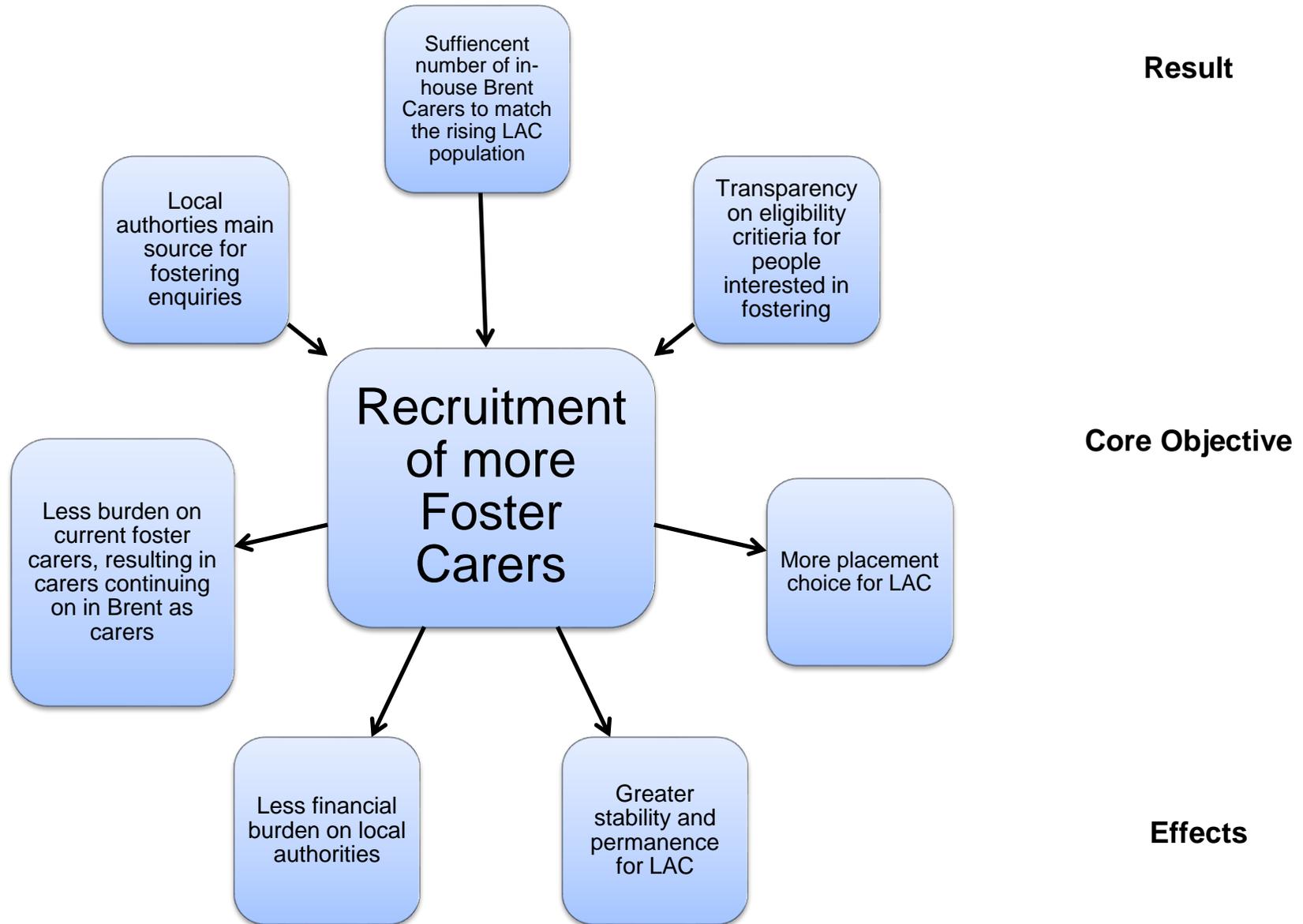
Greenhill	2%
Hale	1%
Hanger Hill	1%
Harlesden	4%
Harrow on the Hill	1%
Harrow Road	1%
Haverstock	1%
Headstone South	1%
HEMMINGWELL	1%
JAMAICA	1%
Kensal Green	2%
Kenton	1%
Kenton West	1%
Kilburn	4%
King's Park	1%
Long Ditton	1%
Manor	1%
Mapesbury	2%
Northolt West End	1%
Northwick Park	4%
Perivale	1%
Preston	5%
Queens Park	1%
Queensbury	1%
Rayners Lane	1%

Roxbourne	1%
Shadwell	1%
St Katharine's & Wapping	1%
St Marys	1%
Stanmore Park	2%
Stonebridge	7%
Sudbury	1%
The Risboroughs	1%
Tokynghon	5%
TOWCESTER	1%
UNKNOWN	3%
Waltham Cross	1%
Wealdstone	1%
Welsh Harp	1%
Wembley Central	4%
West Harrow	1%
West Hendon	2%
White Hart Lane	1%
Willesden Green	2%
Witham South	1%
Yiewsley	1%
(blank)	1%

Appendix 4 – Problem Tree: A problem tree provides an overview of all the known causes and effect to an identified problem and it establishes the context for this marketing strategy.



Appendix 4 – Objectives Tree: The Objectives tree provides the results and effects of the issues raised in the problem tree.



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Carers Learning and Development Strategy

Fostering and Adoption Services Placements

Zak Darwood, Fostering Development Coordinator - Placements

February 2015

Approved: Confirmed 20/04/15

Nigel Chapman, Head of Service - Placements

23/03/2015

To be reviewed: February/March 2017.



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Abbreviations Index:

ASW: Assessing Social Worker

SSW: Supervising Social Worker

ADM: Agency Decision Maker

TM: Team Manager

DTM: Deputy Team Manager

FDC: Fostering Development Coordinator

TSDS: Training, Support and Development Standards

KAFA Team: Kinship, Adoption and Fostering Assessment Team

FST: Fostering Support Team

**Staff roles in regards to this strategy are explored at the end of this document.*

Position

Brent Placements Service Development Team have developed this strategy in line with the Placements Service Plan 2014-2015 with a core focus on Objective 3 "To ensure that all Looked After Children achieve their potential" through the development of high quality support and training packages for Foster Carers. Furthermore this strategy complies with the Learning and Development Strategy for the Children and Young Peoples Department.

Introduction

Brent Placements Service Development Team is committed to ensuring that all carers receive an adequate level of training and support to enable the delivery of their role as a foster carer. Being a carer is a demanding role; and preparation plus continued professional development including professional qualifications ensure that the workforce is adequately confident and competent in order to provide the quality care that children require.

Training should therefore be basic requirement for all foster carers, and there should be an expectation that they attend and participate as fully and as constructively as possible. The Learning and Development of Carers is underpinned by the Fostering Regulations and the National Minimum Standards as detailed throughout this Strategy.

Aims and Objectives:

Brent Placements Service Development Team have set out the following aims and objectives for carers, this includes those within the assessment process, who are newly approved as a carer by the Fostering Panel and ADM and those who have been fostering for a number of years.

- All carers who are being recommended to Panel will complete both stages of the Preparation Training as part of their assessment,
- All carers will complete an initial level of safeguarding and first aid training during stage 2 of the assessment process,
- All carers at point of approval will agree a personal development plan and profile of previously recognised training with their SSW,
- Within Year 1 of approval Carers will attend Module 1 of the core training offer,
- All carers will work towards the Training, Support and Development Standards within the agreed timescales dependant on their approval type¹,
- Modules 2 and 3, which can run concurrently but are also optional, are offered within Year 2 of approval. Module 3 is undertaken dependant on the individual carers, their needs, and the needs of the children in placement,
- All carers show a commitment to on-going developmental training to enhance their skills as carers

¹ Training and Development Standards Workbook should be completed within 12 months for task centred, short term and long term carers. Kinship and Connected Persons Carers have up to 18 months to complete the Training and Development Standards Workbook.

The Strategy

Brent Placements is committed to providing high quality foster care provisions for children and young people in the Brent. The Council widely accepts the crucial role that foster carers play in promoting good outcomes for children in care and should be given appropriate and structured opportunities to develop skills essential to their roles.

Training and development is an essential part of being a foster carer. Brent Placements Service Development Team has a clear expectation that all Carers will participate in the training offered by the Service as fully as possible. This requirement to engage in ongoing training is contained in the Foster Carer Agreement, that is agreed and signed by all Brent Council approved foster carers.

The Training Plan

The Training Plan is designed to address the requirements of all carers which include:-

- Preparation of applicants in assessment. This course can also be used as a refresher for carer's who are on hold or have taken a break from fostering. Repetition of this course is at the discretion of the Team Manager and Fostering Development Coordinator
- Pathway module of core training at a introductory level for all carers
- Training Support and Development Standards Programme of courses and support
- Developmental general courses available to all carers
- Specific training arranged for particular age/child needs
- Specific training arranged to develop specialist resource carers
- National formal qualification/s
- Workshop / Short information sessions

Preparation/Pre-Approval Training:

The National Minimum Standards for Foster Care dictate that

"13.3: Prospective foster carers are prepared to become foster carers in a way which addresses, and gives practical techniques to manage, the issues they are likely to encounter and identifies the competencies and strengths they have or need to develop."

Brent Placements Service recognise that the most effective and universally accepted manner in meeting this standard is through the participation of the carer in a Preparation Group training session; this is 3 days split into 2 parts. Part 1 is completed during the initial stage of the assessment and part 2 during the latter part of the assessment process.

The undertaking of this preparation training forms part of the assessment process and as such a report on each attendee is generated and forms part of the Form F approval.

Additionally, it is an expectation that all carers are given the opportunity as part of the preparation training to attend appropriate safeguarding children and first aid training, the focus of the training (babies and toddlers, first aid for carers) will be dictated by the terms of approval sought by the carer and in agreement with the ASW.

Short Term/Long Term/Respite/Enhanced Carers

All foster carers approved by Brent are required to attend the preparation course commonly known as 'Skills to Foster'. This course is mandatory for all carers, including those transferring from another agency prior to their approval. Generally an intake of this course is offered 6 times per year by the KAFA Team, however as part of increased working together arrangements potential carers may be asked to attend in a neighbouring borough.

If the KAFA Team are not able to provide availability to complete the preparation course, a request can be made to the Fostering Panel that approval is recommended subject to:-

- The course is attended within three months of approval
- The applicant be provided with basic appreciation of the role of a carer
- Carers are only offered short pieces of care (respite) with close supervision by the allocated ASW/SSW.

All Carers in Stage Two of the assessment process are expected to attend (subject to the Council providing the learning opportunity) the following training before a placement of a child is made:

- Relevant first aid training, the content of which is determined by the approval sought.
- Safeguarding Children Level 1 Training²

Kinship and Connected Persons Carers

All kinship and connected persons carers are managed under the same regulations as Short Term/Long Term/Respite/Enhanced Carers however there is a slightly different approach to the preparation of Kinship and Connected Persons Carers. Kinship and Connected Persons Carers have the opportunity to attend the Preparation Training detailed above (this is recommended however not a mandatory requirement) however there is an expectation of mandatory attendance at an additional session that details the specific expectations of being a Kinship and Connected Persons Carer.

As with the expectation for Short Term/Long Term/Respite and Enhanced Carers all Kinship and Connected Persons Carers are expected to attend relevant first aid training, the content

² This is currently arranged and delivered by the Local Safeguarding Children's Board. Further details on accessing the training can be provided by the FDC.

of which is determined by the approval sought/children in placement/children planned to be placed and also the Safeguarding Children Level 1 Training³

Carers Personal Development Plan

During the approval process a Personal Development Plan (PDP) will be developed for each carer and it is recommended that a PDP is also developed for each adult child within the fostering household. This initial PDP will include an overview of relevant training to date, and a plan for the first year of training with due dates for completion of the courses.

All PDP's will be updated on a yearly basis by the SSW who will identify learning areas in partnership with the carer before the annual review with the Fostering Reviewing Officer. The Fostering Reviewing Officer will ratify the PDP reflecting on placements made within the carers' home to promote further development. The Fostering Reviewing Officer will include the planned training for the coming year as part of the recommendation to continue as a Short Term/Long Term/Respite Carer/Enhanced or as a Kinship and Connected Persons Carer.

Additionally Foster Carers will receive individual work/advice during the monthly visits by their SSW. They will also identify ongoing training required by the carer to meet the PDP and any specific needs of a child in placement.

Carers who do not meet the minimum requirement to attend 4⁴ training sessions per year will have this issue addressed at the Annual Review. The reasons for this, plus a plan to remedy the situation will be noted on the Annual Review Report. Repeated non-compliance may lead to a change of approval terms, reduction in fostering fees and in some cases may lead to deregistration of a Carer.

Post Approval Training:

Brent Placements Service coordinate the delivery of an extensive training programme, this is developed in accordance with Regulation 17 of The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 which states:

" 17. (1) The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them."

Brent Placements Service Development Team undertake a regular review of training opportunities provided to carers to ensure they are appropriately matched to the needs of

³ This is currently arranged and delivered by the Local Safeguarding Children's Board. Further details on accessing the training can be provided by the FDC.

⁴ The minimum requirement can include an element of online learning however it is the expectation that all carers attend classroom based learning activities.

the children in placement. An annual training needs analysis is undertaken utilising feedback from; carers, trainers, ASW, SSW, TM, DTM and of crucial importance with looked after children. The information gathered forms part of the wider Learning and Development Plan for the Children's and Young Peoples Department.⁵

The Training Programme is delivered on a rolling basis therefore giving all Carers the opportunity to attend a range of training opportunities and additionally ensures that each carer has the opportunity to fulfil the requirements of their on-going approval.

Module 1: First Year of Approval – Core Training Offer

Brent Placements Service Development Team have agreed a collection of courses that are mandatory⁶ for all Carers and it is the expectation that **50%** of these are completed within the first year of approval.

Training, Support and Development Standards

In addition to the courses where attendance is expected within the first year of approval all Carers are expected to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards.

All activities delivered as part of the Training Strategy are linked with the Training, Support and Development Standards and the National Minimum standards for Fostering. Each training session/programme delivered is linked with the TSDS and will support carers in building the required evidence.

All approved Short Term/Long Term/Respite/Enhanced Carers are expected to complete the Training Support and Development Standards within 12months. Kinship and Connected Persons Carers should complete the Training Support and Development standards within 18 months. An extension may be granted by the Fostering Support Team Manager in exceptional circumstances. Specific workshops are delivered as part of the Training Strategy to support Carers in meeting the requirements of the TSDS.

Foster Carers

Training Supporting and Development Standards

1. Understand the principles and values essential for working with children and young people
2. Understand your role as a carer
3. Understand health and safety and healthy care
4. Know how to communicate effectively
5. Understand the development of children and young people

⁵ This can be found within the Learning and Development section of the staff intranet.

⁶ See Mandatory Course Document.

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Keep children and young people safe from harm7. Develop yourself |
|--|

Kinship and Connected Persons Carers

<p><i>Training Supporting and Development Standards</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understand your role as a carer2. Provide a safe environment and healthy care3. Know how to communicate effectively4. Understand the development of children and young people5. Keep children and young people safe from harm6. Develop yourself
--

Module 2: Second Year of Approval – Core Training Offer / On-going Refreshers

During the second year of approval all Carers are expected to complete the remaining mandatory core training that they were unable to complete in the first year of approval. This would be approximately 40% of the Core Training offer.

➤ Refresher Training

It should be noted that a range of training courses have a validity period and therefore will require regular renewal. Renewals should be booked so that there is no period between one validity ending and the next beginning.

Module 3: Second and Third Year of Approval - Optional Training Sessions and Optional Specialist Training Pathways

During the second year of approval and on-going from that period Carers have the opportunity to attend a range of courses that are delivered to enhance their skill set. These courses are not mandatory however the Brent Panel Advice and Quality Assurance Team hope that all Carers make every opportunity to access these wider learning opportunities.

Specialist Pathways – Identified Carers Only

It is the expectation that as the second annual review approaches the SSW and Carer will discuss the potential opportunity to become a Specialist Resource Carer within the third year of approval. The agreement to become a Specialist Resource Carer is made between the Carer, SSW, TM/DTM, FRO and the Head of Service for Placements; not all Carers will become Specialist Resource Carers.

Specific/Specialist Workshops (Not planned as part of the Training Programme)

Brent Placements Service Development Team works to proactively identify further training opportunities for Carers that generally will be in addition to the wider training programme. This programme is designed to facilitate more immediate, flexible sessions to carers with particular needs and will generally be delivered within small groups. The need for this workshop or programme could come from emerging behaviour from an existing child in placement or as a result of a new placement. The workshop will plan to provide introductory information in lieu of a formal training course on the subject matter. Further training may then be delivered within the wider training programme at a later date.

These will be advertised as required and may include a range of mandatory and optional sessions, additionally at times only certain carers may be identified to attend a session due to their approval range or issues arising.

Support Groups

Brent Placements Service Development Team provide the opportunity for Carers to attend a range of Support Groups; Support Groups are delivered in partnership between the Placements Service Development Team, The Fostering Support Team and the KAFA Team alongside the Brent Foster Carers Association.

Support Groups have various functions that support Service Development and Improvement, foster a greater rapport between the service and Carers and enable Carers to take a greater level of control over the services on offer to the carers.

Brent Placements Service Development Team run a minimum of one support group per month throughout the year.

Conferences and Events

The Foster Carers Conference is run bi-annually and all Carers are expected to attend. Carers should discuss any difficulties that they may face in attending with their SSW, the DTM or TM.

Additional Conferences and Events are planned to run throughout the year, these are not mandatory for carers to attend however it is the expectation that carers attend as many as are practically possible.

Brent Placements Service Development Team promote the permitted use of Nominated Carers to enable Foster Carers in attending training and other events delivered by the Placements Service.

Mentoring

Brent Placements Service Development Team will match all newly approved Carers that express an interest with experienced carers who will act as a mentor and be introduced to the wider support services provided by the Brent Foster Carer Association.

Deploying the Training Programme

To facilitate this training requirement the Brent Placements Service Development Team will:

- Provide early notification of training events and ensure all Carers are provided with a full training programme at the earliest possible opportunity
- Define carer training needs at the Carer Annual Review, carer supervision and as needs arise
- Organise and deploy a diverse training programme to address the needs of all carer groups.
- Plan training within school hours, evenings and weekends

The Placements Service will endeavour to provide and pay for child care if there is a clear difficulty by a foster carer making their own child care arrangements and without which they would not be able to attend the training.

Recognition of Prior Learning

Brent Placements Service Development Team recognise that all Carers have a range of learning opportunities outside of the Training Packages offered by the Council. Brent recognise that the external training completed has a positive impact on the care provided to children in placement and therefore it is the expectation that Carers provide evidence of the Learning opportunities undertaken, the expected evidence would generally be a certificate of completion.

Evidence can be forwarded to the Fostering Development Coordinator who will confirm that this evidence is acceptable and upload a copy of the evidence to the information management system.

Regardless of the amount of training completed by a Carer externally from the programmes offered by Brent Placements Service Development Team it is the expectation that Carers will still attend at least **4** courses per year as the minimum requirement as part of their approval as Carers. However it should be noted in some circumstances the level of training may be higher as recommended by the Fostering Reviewing Officer as part of the Annual Foster Carer Review.

The recognition of Prior Learning includes training undertaken at previous agencies for Carers who have transferred to Brent Placements Service.

Recording Learning

Brent Placements Service Development Team will keep a record of Training attended (or not attended) by a carer.

It is the responsibility of the foster carer to maintain a personal portfolio and training log in which their training needs and attainments will be recorded. Brent Placements Service Development Team will provide all Carers with these templates to enable a consistent approach to recording learning.

Electronic Certificates of attendance will be issued for all conferences, courses and workshops. Certificates for Professional Qualifications will be provided by the delivery body. Copies of all certificates will be kept on file in the event that a Carer needs a replacement and for recording purposes.

Foster carers will be asked to complete an evaluation of the courses and workshops attended to provide Brent Placements Service Development Team with a review of the quality and usefulness of the training that has been provided. Outcomes of this review will be conveyed to all carers on an annual basis via the Carers newsletter.

Non-Attendance at Training

Non-attendance at training by Carers poses an issue for the delivery of the Training Programme; non-attendance affects other attendees, reduces the opportunity for learning within the session and also does not allow other carers to attend the course. The non-attendance of training also poses financial implications on the department.

Non-attendance will be raised by the FDC with the SSW initially, the SSW will then raise this with the Carer; if this occurs on a number of occasions then it will be raised by the TM/DTM as an issue of concern and with further occasions at the annual review⁷. As presented in the Rates and Guidance Document carers who fail to maintain the agreed Training and Development Plan for the year will revert to the Standard Rate Fee. In serious cases, repeated non-engagement with Learning and Development Activities potentially poses a standards of care issue and may result in the deregistration of a Carer by the Fostering Panel.

⁷ It should be noted that Annual Foster Carer Reviews can be brought forward in the event that there is a cause for concern.

➤ Charges for Non-Attendance

The budget allocated for Carer Learning and Development, like all local authority budgets, is under close scrutiny and has to be allocated efficiently to enable maximum use of the resource. Therefore it is necessary for the introduction of charges for non-attendance and cancellation at short notice without good reason. The introduction of charges for non-attendance or cancellation at short notice without good reason will be introduced at the beginning of the 2015-2016 financial year.⁸

Financial Responsibility

Brent Placements Service Development Team hold responsibility for the Carers Training budget, and will arrange timely payment for all invoices relating to the delivery of training courses for Carers.

Placements Staff Attending Training

Training places are allocated on a first come first served basis to Carers, in the event that places are available on a course and there are no carers who have expressed an interest in attending then these will be offered to staff within the Placements Service.

This offer will be made between 24-36 hours before the course takes place and will be confirmed on a first come first served basis to staff. Staff on allocation of a place must either have or seek permission from their Direct Line Manager or nominee for permission in attending⁹. Attendance at a training opportunity should not be to the detriment of work currently being undertaken or incur toil by the staff member.

It should be noted that at a staff member will not be prioritised over a Carer in attending a Learning and Development opportunity. If staff members express an interest in attending a course this expression does not automatically result in a place being offered.

⁸ Further clarity can be found in the Charging for Non-Attendance on Training Document

⁹ The FDC takes no responsibility for informing a staff member's line manager, or seeking permission on their behalf. This responsibility is solely with said staff member.

Staff Responsibilities

The following staff have a responsibility for the deployment of this strategy;

Fostering Development Coordinator

The responsibilities of this position are to work across the Placements Service and with the Brent Learning and Development Team to manage, monitor and facilitate training of foster carers approved by Brent Council in line with the National Minimum Standards.

The dedicated post will ensure that a high profile of carer training is maintained within the Placements Service and that the training provided is reflective, responsive and reactive to carer and child care needs.

Quality Assurance and Agency Advisor (Placements)

The Quality Assurance and Agency Advisor has overall responsibility for the deployment and monitoring of Training Programmes delivered by the Brent Placements Service Development Team. Additionally this person has overall responsibility for the agreements of Training expectations, Specialist Resource Carers and the recommendation of Approval statuses through the Fostering Panel.

Team Manager/Deputy Team Manager (Fostering Support Team, KAFA Team)

The TM/DTM of FTS and KAFA are responsible for ensuring that all SSW/ASW are able to assess the Learning Needs of Carers and plan appropriate Personal Development Plans that are SMART¹⁰ and that fit within the needs of the Placements Service.

Fostering Reviewing Officer

The FRO as part of the Annual Review process for each Carer is expected to ratify the Personal Development Plans for each Carer, and any adult children within a household. Additionally the FRO holds a responsibility to recommend specific training opportunities to Carers that haven't previously been addressed by the SSW.

Supervising Social Worker/Assessing Social Worker

SSW/ASW is responsible for the assessment of the Learning Needs of Carers and plan appropriate Personal Development Plans that are SMART¹¹ and that fit within the needs of the Placements Service. SSW/ASW are also responsible for ensuring that Carers are fully aware of the expectations the Brent Placements Service Development Team has in regards to attendance at learning opportunities.

¹⁰ SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time Scaled.

¹¹ SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time Scaled.

 <p>Brent</p>	<p>Corporate Parenting Committee 3 November 2015</p> <p>Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</p>
<p>Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report 1 July – 30 September 2015</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 second 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 The primary in-house fostering functions are distributed across two teams:
- The recruitment and assessment of foster carers is completed within the Placements Assessment and Recruitment Team.
 - The ongoing support and supervision of foster carers is the responsibility of the Fostering Support Team.
- 4.2 The Fostering Panel Advisor, Fostering Reviewing Officer and Fostering Development Co-ordinator roles are also managed within the Placements' Service and are line managed separately from the two operational teams in order to provide appropriate challenge within the service.

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 As at the 30th September 2015 there were:
- 97 children placed with Brent foster carers compared to 107 children at the end of the previous quarter. This is 30% of the total.
 - 46 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 14% of the total.
 - 91 children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) compared to 84 children at the end of the previous quarter. This is 28% of the total.
 - 72.4% of children lived within a fostering setting as at 30th September 2015.
- 5.3 The overall LAC population increased during the reporting period; from 323 on 30th June 2015 to 326 on 30th September 2015. The Corporate Parenting Committee previously requested details of any LAC placed abroad. As at 30th December there was one young person placed in Ireland. The vast majority (83%) of children reside within 20 miles of Brent across a range of placement settings.
- 5.4 There has been a reduction in in-house and an increase in IFA placements since the previous quarter. One reason has been the increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) approaching the borough for support, many of whom are under the age of 16. Between 1st July and 21st September 2015 12 UASC started to receive support, 8 of whom were within foster placements. This represents 21% of all children starting to be looked after during this period. During the same period in 2014 only 5 UASC started to be looked after, with just 2 requiring a foster placement.

This represents 9% of children starting to be looked after during the period. As a result we have found that our in-house fostering capacity to accommodate teenagers has been affected. The proportion of all Looked After Children who are UASC is now 16%, compared to 11% 12 months ago. The service has fewer internal foster carers approved to look after teenagers and therefore a growth in new referrals in this age range adversely affects our ability to provide in-house resources.

- 5.5 The number of in-house carer resignations and terminations exceeded approvals in 2014-15 and this has had an adverse impact upon our capacity to provide placements for children in-house. This has been recognised by the service and recruitment activity has been re-focused – resulting in an increase in enquiries and assessments in progress. This will result in greater capacity within the service and it is anticipated that the numbers of children placed in-house will rise.
- 5.5 A greater number and proportion of LAC are also now residing in semi-independent accommodation an increase from 10% - 13% between April-September 2015. This reflects the older age range of young people entering the care system.
- 5.6 The service operates with few vacancies so that the majority of available space with foster carers is maximised. As at 30th September 2015 there were 19 fostering households with at least one bed space available for fostering. This is approximately 15% of the total capacity of non-related households and has increased slightly due to the changing demographic of children entering care and that a higher proportion of our foster carers are approved to care for much younger children.
- 5.7 Using Ofsted data returns compiled by the West London Alliance (WLA) to enable benchmarking, as of 31st March 2015, Brent had the highest number of fostering households within the West London Alliance sub-region and the highest number of filled fostering places as at 31st March 2015. Brent also had the highest number of internal fostering placements used at any point during the year 2014-15.
- 5.8 In response to greater demand 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 is working closely with local IFA providers to offer greater range of local carers to the Emergency Duty Team should a placement be required.

6.0 Recruitment Activity

- 6.1 The fostering service carried out 8 recruitment focused activities within the reporting period with the aim of raising awareness of fostering and encouraging potential foster carers to come forward. The service conducted or was part of many different outreach events such as the Cricklewood and Queens Park festivals.
- 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 The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 56 enquiries about fostering. These enquiries resulted in 17 initial visits. As at the 30th September 2015 there were 13 formal assessments in process under the 2-stage fostering assessment process. Our improved recruitment and marketing activity has seen a significant growth in enquiries to the service this year in comparison to 2014-15. On current performance we are projecting 300 enquiries this reporting year, 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 applications resulting in an approved fostering household.

6.4 The target for the service 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. Fortnightly monitoring of the recruitment process ensures that the recruitment team's performance is scrutinised. Whilst there have been a number of carer resignations, there are a high number of assessments in progress with a projection of 15 completed before March 2016. The service may not however reach the net growth target due to the number of carer terminations. To better understand reasons for carers leaving the service in order to aid recruitment and retention a survey and analysis of those leaving fostering is in process with a report to be completed by the end of November 2015. This analysis will help the service respond to carer needs quickly with the outcome of carers remaining with the service. More focused training for carers to deal with the impact of allegations is one area of focus following from initial scrutiny of the reasons for carers ending their fostering role.

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. The Panel meets on the first Friday of every month and more regularly where there is service demand.

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 who is the Operational Director, Children's Social Care.

- 7.4 During the period 1st July – 30th September 2015 5 panels were held with 21 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group 3 new fostering households and 2 new 'Family and Friends' foster carer households were recommended for approval. 8 fostering and 1 family and friends households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review. 2 family and friends foster carers' approval was recommended for termination due to the young people turning 18 (although both young people remained with the carers under 'Staying Put' arrangements). 3 fostering households' approvals were recommended for termination; 1 due to the carer being unavailable for fostering due to ongoing health issues, 1 due to receiving a substantiated allegation from a child they were employed to work with and 1 as the named child for whom they were approved had left their care and they made a decision to retire from fostering. There were a further 2 resignations of foster carers – one of whom had decided to cease fostering after an unsubstantiated allegation and another foster carer who did not agree with the recommendations from their review about the requirements to attend training within their 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. One of the key areas of challenge has been in relation to the presentation of foster carer reviews. Whilst these are usually carried out within timescales there has at times been a delay in these then being presented to Panel, which has led to information being out of date. This issue was raised with the service by the chair and processes have been put in place to minimise this in future with the panel chair reporting in September that this has much improved.

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 1st July – 30th September 2015 15 training courses were held, attended by 89 foster carers. An overall analysis of the impact of foster carer training carried out during 2015 will be provided with the third quarter fostering service monitoring report.
- 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. A foster carers' focus group was held in July where the Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services also attended to hear and discuss issues of concern and service development, such as the establishment of the foster carers' association and the impact of social pedagogy.

8.4 The first programme to support the introduction of social pedagogy to fostering was completed in July. The evaluation of the programme found that foster carers reported a greater confidence to support children in their care, more positive working relationships with other professionals and greater capacity to reflect. For social workers the evaluation found the greatest improvements in their feeling of being able to reflect on casework and to provide more effective support to foster carers. Whilst this cohort was of a relatively small scale, the evaluation correlated with research findings in other larger projects. The outcomes we expect to see ultimately are an improvement in educational and other outcomes for children in the care of the foster carers and workers who have undertaken the course.

9.0 Monitoring Arrangements

9.1 During the reporting period there were 5 allegations made against Brent foster carers. In 4 of the cases no formal action was taken. The remaining case is currently subject to a formal child protection process.

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 26 annual reviews out of a possible 32 during this period. Of those uncompleted, 3 were at the request of the foster carer and 3 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, the first training programme to introduce social pedagogy to foster carers and social care staff has been completed; with encouraging progress evidenced by the evaluation. A small-scale bridging programme will continue from October through 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. It is anticipated that a second training cohort will commence after April 2016, potentially in conjunction with a partner Local Authority within the West London Alliance (WLA).

10.2 The broader collaborative work has continued within the WLA. The action plan for West London fostering has been taken forward with a focus this quarter on agreeing the introduction of a regional approach to fostering panels and consolidating a single carer benefits' package to foster carers. This will include a cross-regional approach to council tax exemption. This is to ensure Local Authority carer support offers are closely aligned.

10.3 As described in the April-June 2015 Fostering Service monitoring report the main activities for the following 6 months will be:

- To focus upon recruitment both in-house and within the WLA so that targets are met for the service as set out within the Placements' Service annual plan.

- To ensure that targeted and specialist training is available to foster carers with the interest in further developing their role.
- To ensure that we are better able to understand the reasons for carer resignations and terminations of approval to enable a more effective recruitment and retention strategy.

Appendices

- (i) Fostering Newsletter Autumn 2015

Contact Officer

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GAIL TOLLEY

STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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Fostering Newsletter

Autumn 2015



Featured in this issue

- Referral Reward scheme
- Foster Carers Ball

Fostering Fortnight Extravaganza

Willesden Sports Centre was a hub of activity on Saturday, June 13, as local residents came together to take part in Brent Council's Fostering Fun day. The event was held as part of the Fostering Fortnight which ran from June 1 - 14 and aimed to highlight the nationwide shortage of foster care placements. Activities in the sports centre included a bouncy castle, face painting, snack station and kids' activity zone. There was entertainment from St Michaels Steel Pan Orchestra and energetic dancing from local dance group, Revolution, who are based at Poplar Grove Youth Centre.

Staff from Brent's Fostering and Adoption team answered questions from residents interested in fostering and current foster carers were also out doing their bit letting residents know about the benefits and rewards of being a foster carer. Refreshments were provided courtesy of Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury, McVities and Manos Grill 2.

A huge thank you to everyone who supported us to deliver this great event!



Message from Head of Service

Dear Foster Carer,

I write this note with the sun blazing outside my window and the noise and activity of building work in progress on the new houses and flats being built next to the Civic Centre in Wembley Park. It has been very educational watching how these buildings are created; extremely quickly and with a huge number of different people involved with all of the different tasks. Not wanting to stretch things too far but I see a lot of parallels in how we all work together to support the children in our care. Foster carers need to create firm foundations for children and young people after they arrive to live with them. They need to build relationships, often brick by brick, with children and young people as well as other professionals. And we all need to maintain the building work – ensuring that where repairs are needed in relationships these are done in a timely way. Your training and learning opportunities, detailed later in this newsletter, are an example of how we support you to maintain these positive relationships. I see so many good examples of this ‘construction’ work happening on a daily basis with you, your supervising social workers and other professionals and would like to take the opportunity to thank you for this.

As I write we are also in the middle of our Ofsted inspection of children’s services. This is a 4-week inspection covering all aspects of work with children within Brent – from safeguarding through to adoption. We will learn the outcome of the inspection in a month or so and we will let you know once the details are published. We are confident of much of the good fostering work that goes on in Brent and are busy demonstrating this to the inspectors. I would like to say thank you to those foster carers that have been involved in conversations and meetings with inspectors.

We continue to experience ongoing problems in relation to payments within the Council and you will have received a recent letter from the Head of Finance and myself providing more details about this. I am very sorry that this has caused you all a great degree of inconvenience and I thank you for your patience whilst this is being resolved. Please be assured that I am working very closely with my colleagues in other parts of the authority to prevent these issues from happening again. If any of you wish to discuss your own situation please do not hesitate to contact me at nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk

Finally I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at our annual foster carers’ awards and celebration evening. This year it will be held on Saturday 5th December at the Clayton Crown Hotel, 142-152 Cricklewood Broadway, London NW2 3ED. This is our opportunity to thank you for all of your efforts over the course of the year and I hope you are all able to come.

With best wishes, **Nigel**

Dates for your diary

Please note down the dates of these forthcoming events and RSVP as soon as you can

Foster Carers Ball

Get your glad rags out! We will be hosting our annual end of year ball on Saturday 5th December at the Clayton Crown Hotel, 142-152 Cricklewood Broadway, London NW2 3ED.

This year promises to be an enjoyable night of fun and celebration for all with a three-course dinner and dance! Invitations will be sent shortly so please respond as soon as you can to confirm your attendance.

*Max 2 person per household



Foster Carers Children’s Party

It’s that time again....Christmas is soon upon us and this year the foster carers association will be hosting the annual children’s party. Further details regarding venue, time and date will be sent out shortly.

*Please note priority will be given to Looked After Children regarding gifts from Santa Claus.

Brent Community Champions

The Brent Community Champions Awards is back again this year with another round of nominations to honour and recognise individuals who have given outstanding community and voluntary service in Brent. The awards, presented by Mayor of Brent, Cllr Lesley Jones MBE, will be held in a prestigious ceremony on the 4 November 2015.

Winners in previous years have included carers, conservationists, youth workers, a classical Indian musician, and a retired postmaster. This year the Placements Service will nominate a carer who has made an outstanding contribution to the lives of children and young people in care. Look out for more details in the next edition of the Fostering Newsletter.

Staff Updates

We welcome to the Placements Service colleague, **Iran McGinn**, social worker, who has returned from a secondment, and new colleagues **Rachael Hinds** (social worker), **Rhiannon Spencer** (social worker), **Tamiko Victor** (social worker) and **Anjumara Hussain** (Marketing and Recruitment).

Placements Service has also recently said goodbye to a few colleagues including **Tsungai Tawanda**, **Julia Walters** and **Thomas Kpaamah**.

Training and Support Update August 2015

As we head into the autumn months, it's that time of the year when we re-look at our priorities for learning and development. Throughout the last year we have been steadily increasing the number of learning opportunities available to carers, however, the attendance at training courses has not increased.

A number of carers have not attended any training in the last 12 months and in the next 4 to 6 weeks these carers will be invited to attend sessions on Safeguarding and First Aid. Continuing professional development by attending training is a key part of the fostering role and ensures that carers are continuing to meet the national minimum standards for fostering.

Unfortunately the low numbers of carers signing up to training courses is resulting in courses being postponed, sometimes with only a days notice which is unhelpful for carers and the Placements Service. To ensure that courses are run, and you are all getting the opportunities to attend the training you want, please take an opportunity to relook at the training brochures and sign up to some courses.

If you don't see any courses that interest you, and you've completed the mandatory courses please contact me as we are always looking to hear about what courses you would like to see running.

Coming up in October we have;

6th October	10 -2:30pm	Life Story Work - Adoption
8th October	1 - 4pm	Allergies and Seizures
10th October	10 - 4pm	Working with Sexually Active Young People
20th October	10 - 1pm	Promoting Healthy Eating
21st October	10 - 12:30pm	Finance Information Workshop (Not at Brent Civic Centre)
21st October	6 - 8pm	Comments and Complaints
22nd October	10 - 1pm	Administration of Medication
22nd October	1 - 4pm	Introduction to Supporting Young People who have experienced Sexual Abuse
23rd October	10 - 1pm	WRAP: Working to Raise Awareness of Prevent Training
27th October	10 - 4pm	Supporting Young People with Disabilities

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

Please also look out for invites to other events, support sessions and consultations, if you are not receiving emails or feel that your missing details please either speak to your supervising social worker or contact me directly.

Lastly, I am happy to inform you that we are beginning the distribution of the carer email addresses. In the coming weeks you will receive your email account and temporary password, alongside instructions on using the system. IT Drop in surgeries will take place throughout October for any carers who need some support in using the new system, in addition to the IT Training already booked as part of the training offer.

As always, please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, suggestions or comments regarding any of the courses on offer, support sessions or for any other reason.

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

Fostering and adoption information evenings

The fostering and adoption 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.

- **22 October 2015 (special information event to mark National Adoption Week)**
- **5 November 2015**
- **3 December 2015**

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

Foster Carers support group dates

Held at Brent Civic Centre in first floor training suite area on the following dates. Time/theme to be confirmed nearer the time.

- **13/10/2015 (morning)**
- **10/11/2015 (evening)**
- **08/12/2015 (morning)**

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. I'm Tanika Buchanan and as the family finder for Brent's looked after children. I'm currently family finding a sibling group who are urgently in need of long term foster family. If you would like to discuss their profile or have any questions please contact me on **07788389531** or email - Tanika.buchanan@brent.gov.uk.

Mustifa and Mohammed

Mustafa and Mohammed are Somali siblings aged 12 and 9 who share a close, loving and caring relationship. Mustafa and Mohammed have unfortunately experienced neglect and as a result have emotional

difficulties and mild behavioural concerns; however Mohammed is currently being supported with therapy at school which is going well. During the boys' time in care they have made positive progress. Both children wish to be placed with a family that can support them to develop their emotional maturity and provide them with the essential life skills they need for later on in life. Mustafa and Mohammed are sociable, joyful children with cheeky smiles who enjoy visiting their local park and being creative. We are looking for carer(s) who can provide the boys with a routine, can implement boundaries, are patient, and able to provide a safe, nurturing and stable home to allow them to develop emotionally. The carer must be willing to care for the children long term until they mature providing them with a sense of family membership.

Zane

Zane is aged 10 and is of a British Black African heritage. He has been in care of Brent since 2011 due to his mother not being able to look after for him. Zane is an outgoing young boy with a good sense of humour. He is a very bright and likes to keep himself active. Zane has a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and is diagnosed with ADHD. His school provides him with lessons in small class sizes, school transport and one-to-one support where necessary. Zane wishes is to be placed in a long term foster placement where he can be considered part of a family and experience a home life that offers stability, love and commitment.

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

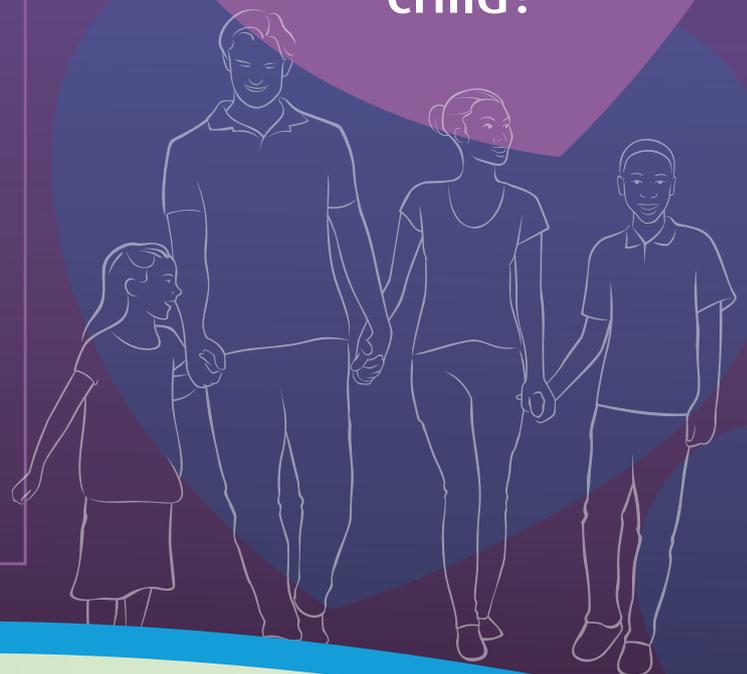
Did you know that looking after a child that is not a close relative for over 28 consecutive days is called private fostering?

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



Fostering Recruitment News

**EARN
£500
IN CASH**

The Fostering and Adoption team will be out and about this autumn promoting our need for more foster carers in the community. 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 young people. Please encourage your friends and family who may be interested in fostering to attend one of our outreach sessions. We will be there to answer any questions you have at the following locations:

- Harlesden Library
Wednesday 4 November,
10am – 4pm
- Ealing Road Library
Wednesday 18 November,
10am – 4pm
- Brent Civic Centre Foyer
Thursday 19 November,
11am – 2pm
- ASDA, Park Royal
Monday 23 November,
10am-4pm
- Brent Civic Centre Foyer
Wednesday 16 December,
11am – 2pm
- ASDA, Park Royal
Monday 19 October,
10am – 4pm
- Kingsbury Library
Wednesday 21 October,
10am – 4pm
- Brent Civic Centre Foyer
Thursday 22 October,
11am – 2pm

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.

Half Term Activities

October Half Term Play Scheme at Bridge Park Community Leisure Centre

School is off, play time is on! From Monday 26th to Friday 31st, October's half term brings back the Play Scheme at Bridge Park Community Leisure Centre.

From 9am to 5.30pm, children aged between 8 and 13 years old can spend the day engaging in a wide range of activities: multi-sports sessions, arts & crafts, inflatables, racket sports, dancing and much more. Book a Full Day for £10.80, or Half Day (9am to 12pm or 13pm to 5.30pm) at £6.10.

The Play Scheme also offers Drop-In Sessions for children aged 5 to 7, and Parents & Toddlers Sessions for children under 5 years old - with games and Bouncy Castle - for £3.70.

Only for October Half-Term, you can bring a new friend to the Play Scheme for free. Conditions apply, only one booking per child.

Get in touch for booking and more information.

Bridge Park Community Leisure Centre,
Harrow road,
London,
NW10 0RG
Tel: 020 8937 3730

Black Cat Halloween Workshops... Miaow!

Learn fascinating facts about cats, their care and behaviour and then enjoy a fun creative activity making all things Halloween. Workshops are delivered by Petra Couglin, Education Officer, Cat Protection London and South East.

- Kilburn Library – Wednesday 28 October, 11am-12.30pm
- Harlesden Library Plus – Wednesday 28 October, 2.30- 4pm
- Kingsbury Library – Thursday 29 October, 11am -12.30pm
- The Library at Willesden Green – Thursday 29 October, 2.30-4pm
- Ealing Road Library – Friday 30 October, 11am-12.30pm
- Wembley Library – Friday 30 October, 2.30-4pm

Monsters and Super Heroes

On Wednesday 28 October, discover monsters and super heroes, write their stories and then illustrate them in full colour!

Ealing Road Library, 11am – 12.30pm
Wembley Library, 2.30 – 4pm

Brent Fireworks Night

Join us at Brent's free fireworks show on Thursday 5 November at Roundwood Park, Harlesden Road, NW10, gates open at 6pm.

The funfair will also run at the park on Fireworks Night and will be on during half term from 24 October to 1 November in Roundwood Park. There will be a few hot food stalls inside the park and plenty of hot drinks & snacks to buy on the night.

The nearest tube stations Neasden, Willesden Green & Willesden Junction. Buses 52, 98, 206, 226 & 297.

We would like to thank Irvin Leisure & 1st Galaxy for their support at this event.

FIREWORKS
5 November NIGHT
FREE FIREWORKS SHOW

8pm Main display, 7pm Children's display
Roundwood Park, Harlesden Road NW10

Sponsored by
IRVIN
LEISURE
info@irvinleisure.com
020 8795 4282

Funfair on 5 November and Half Term 24 October to 1 November
Please use public transport
No pets, no personal fireworks, no alcohol.

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Brent
www.brent.gov.uk/fireworks

Make 'n' bake corner

Scary Halloween Cookies!



Ingredients:

250g/9oz unsalted butter, softened
250g/9oz golden caster sugar
2 free-range eggs, lightly beaten
½ tsp vanilla extract
500g/1lb 2oz plain flour
Red and black food colouring (optional)
1 tsp baking powder
Halloween-themed cookie cutters
Red, white and black writing icing
200g/7oz ready-to-roll fondant icing
1 tbsp apricot jam, warmed with 1tsp water

Preparation method:

1. Beat together the butter and sugar in a large bowl, preferably using an electric mixer, until the mixture is light and fluffy. Beat in the eggs and vanilla extract. (If the mixture looks a little curdled, add a spoonful of the flour.) If you're using food colouring, add a few drops to the mixture.
2. Sift together the flour and baking powder in a separate bowl. Stir the flour into the butter mixture and work into a dough using floured hands. Turn onto a floured work surface and knead into a ball (the dough will be quite wet). Divide the dough into two portions, wrap in cling film and leave to chill in the fridge for at least one hour.

3. Preheat the oven to 170C/325F/ Gas 3. Line two baking trays with greaseproof paper.
4. Roll the dough out to a 0.5cm/¼in thickness on lightly floured work surface. (It's best to roll out one portion of the dough at a time, leaving the remainder in the fridge.) Cut shapes out with the Halloween cutters. Take a few limbs and heads off the gingerbread man for added gore.
5. Place the cookies onto the baking tray, leaving a gap between them in case they spread a little.
6. Bake for 12-15 minutes, leave on the tray for 10 minutes and then move to a wire rack to finish cooling.
7. Once cool, let your imagination run wild. Use the red writing icing along the edges of the missing limbs and heads as blood. For the skeletons and mummies, roll the fondant icing out to a 0.5cm/¼in thickness on a work surface dusted with icing sugar and cut out shapes using the same cutters as the cookies. Brush the cookies with the warmed apricot jam and stick the icing onto the cookies. Decorate with the white and black writing icing.

Courtesy of www.bbc.co.uk/food/recipes/scary_halloween_cookies_86970

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 October 2015

Placements, 3rd Floor, Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Middlesex, HA9 0FJ

020 8937 4538 / fostering@brent.gov.uk

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	<p style="text-align: center;">Corporate Parenting Committee 3 November 2015</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</p>
<p>Brent Adoption Service Report 1 April – 30 September 2015</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 April 1st – September 30th 2015.

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 Since the 1st April 2014, adoption services have been 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 December 2014, covering the 3-year period 2012-14 and were presented to the July 2015 Corporate Parenting Committee.

4.2 The next set of adoption scorecards covering the reporting period 2012-13 to 2014-15 will not be released until the end of this calendar year. Whilst it is not yet possible to provide comparative data, 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.
- **A2** (The time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 197 days. This is a 36% improvement against the previous reporting period.

4.3 Projections have been made for the current reporting year, based on performance achieved to date and planned activity until 31st March 2016. This updated adoption timeliness data shows the following continued performance improvements. As at 30th September 2015 the indicators were as follows:

- **A1:** 492 days.
- **A2:** 180 days.

4.4 Child related data – 1st April – 30th September 2015

- In the first six months of this reporting year 1 child was adopted.
- At the 30th September there were 10 Looked After Children with an adoption plan who had not yet been adopted. The details of these children's cases are as follows:

- Five children are placed for adoption.
 - Two are living with foster carers where the adoption application has been made.
 - 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 plan is changing away from adoption.
- Three children's plans changed away from adoption during this period. In one case a subsequent assessment of the birth parents resulted in the child remaining in the care of his parents. In another case the court determined that a family member should care for the child under a Special Guardianship Order and Supervision Order to the local authority in which the family member lived. In the third case the child's complex mental health needs resulted in no links with prospective adopters in over 5 years. The child's plan is now one of long-term fostering with his current foster carer.
 - 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. The Department for Education recently provided quarterly data suggesting that new placement orders have continued to fall; from 1,550 in quarter 2, 2013-14 to 740 in quarter 1, 2015-16, a decrease of 52%. Brent has also seen a reduction in numbers of children with placement orders and as a result it is projected that there will be 6-8 adoptions made this reporting year. However our own analysis and auditing of children entering care confirms that all children's plans are effectively scrutinised and adoption prioritised where it is in that child's best interests.
 - The child adopted during this reporting period was Brent's first Fostering for Adoption arrangement, an initiative aimed at reducing the time a child spends in foster care before moving to his/her permanent family.

4.5 Adopter Recruitment

- At 30th September 2015 Brent had 15 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 47 enquiries about adoption. Many people following this enquiry were signposted to our

monthly information evenings. The enquiries received have resulted in 4 ongoing adoption assessments and 4 adoptive households being approved during the reporting period. Of the 4 on-going adoption assessments, 2 are in stage one and 2 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 2014-15, 47 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 April and 30 September 2015, 9 new families have requested adoption support. Of these families four have had successful applications to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) following an assessment. Two further ASF assessments are in process. Brent also successfully submitted a joint West London Adoption Consortium ASF bid for therapeutic parenting support where three Brent families will attend and benefit.

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. During this reporting period the adoption panel Chair stated her overall satisfaction with the quality of work presented to panel and the effective gatekeeping role undertaken by the panel advisor. The Chair reported that panel continues to be a critical friend to the Local

Authority and uses tracking data effectively to ensure that work is within regulatory guidelines. The Local Authority has also considered and implemented practice recommendations of panel in a number of cases.

- 5.3** A joint annual training day for adoption panel members and the adoption team staff is held and the last one was delivered in January 2015 by the British Agency for Adoption and Fostering. The next training day has been scheduled for November 2015.
- 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 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 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.
- 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. A recent example would be concerns about whether religious or cultural beliefs had been sufficiently questioned when considering if prospective adopters could unconditionally accept an adopted child. This led to a further piece of work to reassure both panel and Local Authority of the prospective adopters' commitment.
- 5.6** During the period 1st April – 30th September 2015 five panels were held with thirteen specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:
- Three households were recommended as suitable to adopt.
 - Four children were recommended to be placed for adoption with specific carers
 - The long-term fostering matches of eight children were discussed (four individual children and two sibling groups of two). All were recommended except for one individual child's match that was deferred pending confirmation of a current DBS for the carer.

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.

- The Post Adoption Centre (PAC) 1-year education project ended in September 2015. The project targeted support to children within schools where there were concerns about behaviour and attainment. Each authority within the consortium nominated schools within their borough with whom PAC then worked. Activity was focused on direct work with nominated children and the staff group to encourage longer-term changes within staff understanding. Key outcomes were increased confidence from educational professionals in dealing with children who had been permanently placed within families and also an improvement in relationships between schools and families receiving the support. Consideration is now being given within the West London consortium whether an ASF bid can be submitted for project continuation.
- As described earlier in this report, a number of successful applications have already been made to the ASF, as the Local Authority was ready to make these applications from the start of the programme in May 2015.

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 our annual adopters' picnic that was held in July at a local park.

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 has taken the matter to Stage Two of the corporate complaints' process and this had not been resolved at the time of completion of this report.

6.5 Staff Engagement. Staff have contributed to service development during the reporting period. A number of staff attended a large conference on 'brain based parenting', run by the American academic Dan Hughes. Staff who attended then provided a presentation to colleagues within a staff forum. The adoption team also attended a joint event with other boroughs to promote educational attainment for adopted children. Staff also take responsibility for the delivery of adoption preparation courses across other West London authorities.

7. Broader adoption issues and the future

7.1 As described in the October 2014-March 2015 report to the Corporate Parenting Committee, Brent chairs the West London Adoption Consortium (WLAC). The workplan for the consortium was completed, ensuring agencies are clearer of their responsibilities. An example of collaborative success has been a joint funded ASF project. The WLAC co-ordinator is also now located within the West London Alliance and this is already providing greater effectiveness by sharing administrative support allowing the co-ordinator more time to focus on child and family activities within the workplan.

7.2 During this reporting period the Education and Adoption Bill was published. Local Authorities will be encouraged to establish regional adoption agencies within 2 years with the risk of these services being removed if sufficient progress is not made. There has been significant activity within the London Adoption Board and regional consortia to agree on future direction for adoption services within London. The Department for Education has made funding available to adoption agencies to consider how this may best be achieved within each region and the London Adoption Board, on behalf of all adoption agencies within London, submitted a bid in early September. The DfE have determined that the London bid has been successful and has been categorised as a 'Scope and Define' bid. This is because the delivery model is currently unclear. Support is needed to determine the best model and to start to lay foundations for moving to this. This will include producing an options appraisal, deciding on which model to pursue and agreeing a plan for delivering this. The DfE have been clear that any bid and proposal must engage Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) fully in the design stage, working with them in the spirit of co-production and that this pan-London activity should not get in the way of smaller scale collaborations. The bid will be further scoped before the end of this calendar year with clearer proposals available for each Local Authority to consider and determine what the best model upon which to move forward is.

Appendix – Adoption Newsletter Winter 2015

Contact Officer

Nigel Chapman, Head of Service, Placements.
Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 0FJ.

Tel: 020 8937 4456

Email: nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk

GAIL TOLLEY
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Adoption News

Summer 2015

Featured in this issue

- We Are Family Shepherds Bush
- Next Steps Support group
- Marital counselling info from Tavistock
- Adoption Service's Summer Picnic
- Adoption Support Fund
- Letterbox Contact
- Pupil Premium



Dear Parents, Children and Family Members,

I hope that you are all enjoying the summer break and that many of you have an opportunity to take time away from work, studies or other commitments to recharge your batteries and spend time with each other. I was pleased that so many of you were able to join the team at the picnic held last month and also that the weather made for a really great afternoon. We really value the opportunity to meet families, to see how things are progressing and also to give you the opportunity to share experiences with others in a relaxed setting.

Whilst the pace of work for us here within the Placements' Service reduces a little over the summer months there has been plenty happening to keep us occupied,

both within the Local Authority, on a regional and national level. Within Brent we have continued to develop our post-permanency services so that we can offer both adopters and special guardians good quality advice. We have been getting to grips with the Adoption Support Fund and have made the first few successful applications to the fund over the last month. More details of how the fund works are within this newsletter.

At a regional level we continue to strengthen our links with other Local Authorities within the consortium – particularly with adoption recruitment and commissioning post-adoption services. We have just finished the first year of a project with the Post-Adoption Centre aimed at improving adopted children's educational experience and the initial results have been very encouraging.

Nationally you may have seen the government's Education and Adoption Bill that proposes the creation of regional adoption agencies with the intention of improving the timeframe for children to be matched more swiftly with adoptive families as well as encouraging better commissioning of post-adoption support. The government has asked the sector to propose how this may work best and so we are working closely with our other Local Authority and Voluntary Adoption Agency partners to decide on how services will look in the future. There will be no immediate changes to how you work with us (or who you work with) but we will keep you updated through these newsletters and on our website.

With all good wishes for a relaxing summer and autumn period.

Thanks, Nigel

Message from the Adoption team

Hello All,

We hope that you have been enjoying the summer holidays and have lots of exciting things planned. It's been a busy period in Brent's Adoption Service and things show no sign of slowing down. There have been some new additions to the team and some goodbyes. Nico Swart is new to the Adoption & Permanency Team and Alexandra Weatherill and Iran McGinn have now both returned from secondment. Alexandra and Nico are working with our children and Iran will be assessing and supporting adopters. Julia Walter, who has been with Brent since she was a student, has moved on to exciting opportunities. We will miss her, but sincerely wish her well!

As you probably know, there have been big changes to adoption legislation and adoption services over the past couple of years. There has been a change in court rulings and an increase in the number of special guardianship orders granted. As a result, nationally, and in Brent, there has been a decrease in the number of children available for adoption. Whilst we support children remaining with their birth families wherever possible, we recognise the frustration that many adopters feel at having to delay their own dream of having a child join their family.

As a service, we are doing our best to meet the needs of our adoptive families no matter what stage of the process they're in - from approval of new adopters, to providing therapeutic support during times of need, to counselling adopted adults. However, we are always open for your suggestions and feedback. If you need any assistance please don't hesitate to contact our duty line on **0208 937 4525** (option 2).

We are now available, Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm. You can also email us at adoption@brent.gov.uk.

Sincerely,

All of us at Brent Adoption Service

Training



Things are slowing down a bit over the summer; however, there are plenty of opportunities to gain new knowledge and access to support this autumn.

West London Consortium



The next WLC Seminar is scheduled for November 10th in Ealing. It will focus on 'Managing Contact'. This can often be a sensitive area for adopters, as the dynamics are sometimes difficult and a child's needs around contact change as they grow older. More details will be sent closer to the time.

We are Family

For those of you who would prefer to attend a group during the week, or who are just looking for something a bit different, there is a new adoption support group, 'We Are Family' Shepherds Bush. The group is now available to adopters

in the West London area who have children placed with them. 'We Are Family' provides support for adopters and prospective adopters through parent support groups and other activities. The fortnightly meetings will take place at a local venue on a weekday evening and will be informal, friendly and run on a drop-in basis. The support evenings are run on a voluntary basis by other adopters and it's a place for adopters to share their experiences, rather than be offered information or training.

'We are Family' organisers say; 'We believe that parental self care is the foundation of a happy and healthy family, as only when we are well, can we truly be the compassionate, attuned, playful parents that we would wish to be. We Are Family was created out of a feeling that there was a need to share with other parents the questions, feelings, experiences and momentous changes that come with becoming parents through adoption.'

If you are interested in joining them, please do get in touch on shepherdsbush@wearefamilyadoption.co.uk

Training

Brent Council Training

Brent Placements Service has an excellent training & development programme. While most of this is geared towards foster carers and kinship carers, much of it is transferable to adoptive parents as well. In 2015/2016, there are a number of courses which you may find useful. Some of the upcoming ones are listed below. Do get in touch with Zak Darwood, our training coordinator, to book a course.
Zak.Darwood@brent.gov.uk

12th of August, 2015 - Attachment & Emotional Well Being

9th of September - Attunement & Attachment with Babies

10th of October, 2015 - Life Story Work for Adoptive Parents

19th of November - First Aid for Babies and Toddlers

24th of November, 2015 - Working with Traumatized Children

18th of January, 2016 - The Importance of Child Focused Play

Next Steps Support Group

The Next Steps Support group was started in recognition that Brent, like most other local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies, now has a number of adopters who remain unmatched for a significant period. This is because of the limited number of children available for adoption nationally. We understand this can be a frustrating time for many prospective adopters as they wait in limbo to complete the family that they are so much looking forward to. The Next Steps group aims to engage adopters during this period and continue to provide training and support from Brent staff and other adopters. Two groups have been held so far and it has been

very well attended. The most recent meeting focused on how to critically read a Child Permanency Report [CPR], so prospective adopters are aware of what questions they should be asking the child's social worker.

We are pleased to offer this service to our adopters during what can be a challenging period. If you are currently awaiting a match, we warmly welcome you to attend this group. The group is held bi-monthly and the next one is due to take place in September. We'll notify everyone when details are finalised.

Opportunity for Couples Counselling via the Tavistock

The Tavistock is offering FREE couples counselling, either group or individual. The aim is to offer adoptive parents support for their relationship, help to manage the stresses of parenting, and thereby enhance their children's lives. You must have already been granted the Adoption Order to benefit from this service. The group therapy sessions will be meeting for sixteen weeks for two hours. It will consist of a small number of adopters exploring their various parenting experiences. Alternatively, if couples prefer to meet with a therapist individually, they can do so for up to twenty sessions. The Tavistock is a very well respected organisation and this is a good opportunity to access additional support to strengthen your relationship.

You can be referred to either of these services via Brent's Adoption Service or you can contact them yourself. Further details are available online at www.tccr.org.uk.

You can call them on **0207 380 1950** or email adoptingtogether@tccr.org.uk

Upcoming Dates for the Brent Adopter's Support Group

Where:

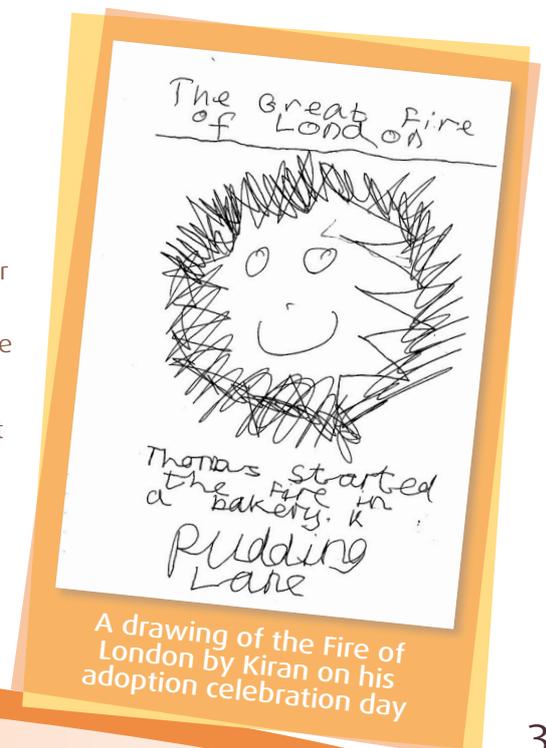
**The Willows Children's Centre
Barnhill Road
Wembley
HA9 9YP**

When:

**26th September
14th November
30th of January
19th of March
7th of May**

*A crèche will be provided.

Anyone who has a Brent child placed with them for adoption is welcome to join us. The meetings include information around topical adoption news, but are mostly a forum for adopters to meet and discuss their experiences. It is an important forum in which you can share both the challenges and joys of being an adoptive parent. Please mark these dates on your calendar. We look forward to seeing you!



News!!!

The Adoption Support Fund

The Adoption Support Fund went live on the 1st of May 2015.

Hopefully, you have read about this in our last couple of newsletters or seen this highlighted in the media. The Adoption Support Fund is a government funding initiative, (£19.3 million pounds), which is now available to local authorities to assist children or families who may need therapeutic support following the making of an Adoption Order. Brent has made their first application and has several more in process.

If you or another adoptive family you know could benefit from this, please call us on the duty number [0208 937 4525, option 2] for more information. We can give you an idea about what sorts of things are covered by the ASF. Alternatively, there is some information on the First4Adoption website, which you may find useful.

An Important Reminder about Letterbox Contact

Letterbox contact continues to be an important part of post-adoption in order to ensure that links between adopted children/families and birth families are maintained. Adoption is clearly a continuing journey and what we know from adopted adults is that this 'link' is important to adopted children as a way of acknowledging and respecting a child's past. This part of their life needs to be honoured and validated and maintaining contact through

letterbox gives this very important message to an adopted child.

We very much appreciate the time and effort taken by adoptive families in ensuring letters are written for the birth families. We also know how much it means to birth families for this link to be maintained.

Life-story work is another way of respecting and validating a child's past and this work is essential in strengthening a child's sense of identity and sense of self. It is important for adoptive families to introduce the life-story book to the child in a gradual and sensitive way, whilst at the same time not to overwhelm the child with giving too much information. Often, adopted children already have a sense that 'something' has happened and by introducing the life-story book you are also allowing them to trust their instincts and 'felt sense'.

Both letterbox contact and life-story work are important ways to keep the link with birth families alive by respecting the adopted child's right and need to know their past.

Pupil Premium

There were a number of questions in relation to the Pupil Premium at the last Adoption Support group, so we thought it would be a good idea to clarify some of the details.

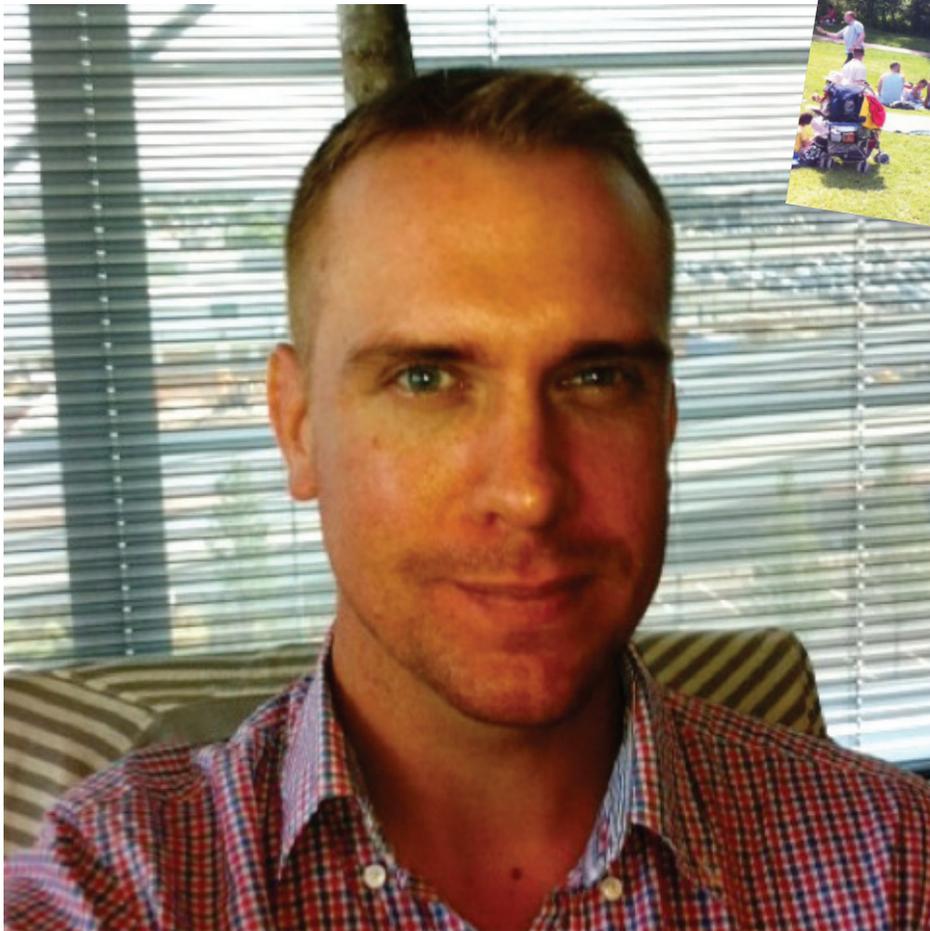
The pupil premium is a pot of funding available to Looked After Children and those who have an Adoption Order or a Special Guardianship Order. This is a recognition by the government that these groups of children have often been impacted by their difficult early life experiences. The impact of these experiences is that these children often have various issues in the academic environment, which make hard for them to succeed. The aim of the pupil premium money is to help bridge that gap.

It does not matter when your child was adopted - the government has changed requirements to ensure that all children and young people are eligible from reception up to Year 11. They must be attending a state funded school or non-maintained special school.

In order to qualify for this financial support, adopters are supposed to self disclose their child's adopted status and provide evidence such as a letter from the placing local authority or copy of the adoption order (although we have received some reports of schools applying for the PP without notifying parents). Their status will be recorded on the school census, which is what makes them eligible. As long as you have provided this information to the school by that deadline then the funding will be paid. The money is paid directly to the school on a quarterly basis and totals £1900 per child per year.

If your child is moving schools, you will need to notify their new school of their eligibility by the time of the January census in order for them to be eligible when they start their new school in the autumn. Although the money is to support this specific group of children, the £1900 will not necessarily specifically be spent on your child individually. For example, some schools decide to use this money to assist in hiring additional support in the classroom or to access particular learning opportunities for the school. They are not obliged to seek input from adoptive parents, although I'm sure that most schools would welcome suggestions as to how best to help their children. The money is monitored by Ofsted and each school must evidence how they are using the pupil premium to help the child in question achieve to the best of their ability.

News!!!



Profile on Nico

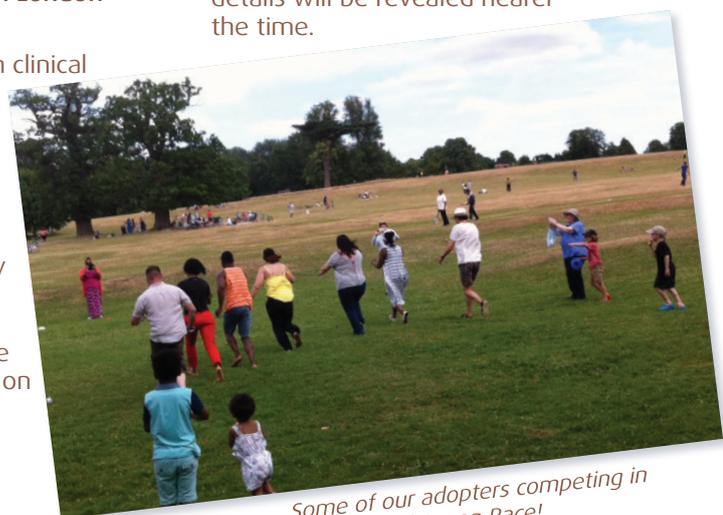
Our newest colleague in the Adoption & Permanency Team is Nico Swart. He originally hails from Cape Town, South Africa, but has been in London since 2004.

Nico brings an extensive skill set to the team. He holds a degree in clinical social work; however, he is also a practising psychotherapist. Nico previously worked in the Brent Fostering and Assessment department for many years. He says 'On a personal level I am very grateful for this opportunity. That said, I miss my foster families and the children I worked with. Their commitment, resilience and compassion of Brent Foster Carers has been truly inspiring. It is my aim to bring at least some of this positive energy to my new role. Joining the Adoption and Permanency Team feels like a very natural progression and I have been welcomed in such a warm way by my colleagues that I immediately felt at home.' He has already been doing a terrific job and we're happy to have him on board. Welcome Nico!



Summer Picnic

The Adoption Picnic took place on Saturday, July 11th. It was held at Cassiobury Park in Watford and we were fortunate enough to have marvellous weather. More than fifty adopters and children attended throughout the day. There was delicious food and lots of things to do, including relay races, badminton games, and even a parachute! Some adventurous folks headed off to enjoy the paddling pools, train, and bouncy castle as well. This event provided a good opportunity for old friends to reconnect, as well as for establishing new links with other adoptive families. Thank you so much to everyone who attended. It was delightful to see you all! We hope to have an equally good turnout to our Holiday Party which will be held in December. More details will be revealed nearer the time.



Some of our adopters competing in the Egg and Spoon Race!

Fun Summer Activity Ideas!



Summer is finally here! Make the most of your precious time together by engaging your child in fun and creative activities. Here are a few suggestions to get you started!

- ▶ Make edible body paint and let your child decorate themselves. All it requires is some instant vanilla custard and food colouring in various shades. We suggest that you use this one outside to make cleaning up easier!
- ▶ Body tracing - Use sidewalk chalk to trace your child's outline at the playground, in your back garden, or wherever you can find some pavement. Let your child then colour themselves in.
- ▶ Make a 'Summer Memory Jar' using any clean glass or clear plastic jar. Encourage your child to collect bits and pieces from your adventures throughout the summer- this could be objects from nature, small mementos from your travels, or anything that captures their imagination. The possibilities are endless!

Produced August 2015

Placements, 3rd Floor, Brent Civic Centre,
Engineers Way, Wembley, Middlesex, HA9 0FJ

020 8937 4525 / adoption@brent.gov.uk

Send your stories
and feedback to
adoption@brent.gov.uk
020 8937 4525

brent.gov.uk/adoption



Corporate Parenting Committee
3 November 2015

**Report from the Strategic
Director of Children and Young People**

**Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report
2014/15**

1. Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee with the Annual Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report for 2014/15 as required by statutory regulations. The report provides both quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in Brent.

2. Recommendations

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 service is being monitored and challenged in order to promote good outcomes for children.

3. Purpose of service and legal context

The Independent Reviewing Officers' (IRO) service is set within the framework from the updated IRO Handbook, linked to revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance (2011). The regulations set out the requirement for an independent review of the circumstances and plans for all looked after children, within 28 days of becoming accommodated (first review), within three months of the first review and at a period not to exceed six months thereafter. There is also an expectation that a review is convened when the plan for that child changes substantially. The IRO service in Brent is provided by an external provider, Aidhour.

3.1 The responsibility of the IRO has changed from the management of the looked after children's (LAC) review process, to a wider overview of cases including regular monitoring and follow-up between reviews. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of care planning for children looked after and for challenging drift and delay.

- 3.2** The importance of the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer is captured in the foreword of the research conducted by the National Children's Bureau in 2011, written by Mr Justice Peter Jackson.

The Independent Reviewing Officer must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment, or whether we are failing.

4. Review of 2014/15 workplan

The priorities for the IRO service in 2014 /15 were;

Improve the quality of the service to LAC through closer monitoring and contract management of Aidhour IROs. A quarterly contract monitoring meeting will take place with the IRO manager.

The quarterly meeting has been taking place regularly during 2014/15. The meetings are primarily held to trouble shoot practical issues, offer training and look at areas which have led to escalations to try to reduce reoccurrence by addressing the initial reason.

- 4.1** The IRO group including permanent and Aidhour IROs will meet together bi-annually to discuss developments in the area of their work and be further updated on Children's Social Care in Brent.

Aidhour IROs met twice, the first with Brent's Principal Lawyer who focused on the national and local drivers, such as the public law outline that influence care planning practice and the second meeting with the Operational Director and the Strategic Director for Children Services, to ensure integration into the organisation. IROs are independent of the management structure for looked after children although they need to be confident to escalate concerns to the DCS if necessary.

- 4.2** An annual IRO service meeting will take place to include the Strategic and Operational Directors to review progress.

This has taken place and is an annual event at which the DCS and the OD can hear about the work of the IROs directly and learn what is working well and what needs to change. Meetings provide an important opportunity for IROs to hear about the vision for the service and the aspirations for Brent's looked after young people. In addition the themes emerging from the IROs work influences service planning and practice.

- 4.3** Practice will be further improved by the IRO manager observing practice of the in-house and Aid hour IROs. Feedback will be given to individual IROs and themes will be developed for discussion at the bi annual meeting.

Observation of IROs was undertaken by the IRO manager and Director of Aid hour with feedback given to IROs directly afterwards. The observation and feedback from professionals taking part in Reviews is positive. Most comments noted that IROs are very experienced and child focused, able to challenge and take up issues with the Local Authority where this is required.

- 4.4** Children will be supported to write and present an annual report about their experiences of being in care in Brent.

This has not been implemented but a report will be produced in the 2015/16 period

- 4.5** The induction programme for new social workers includes an introduction to the IRO service in Brent so that they are clear about the process and the resolution arrangements for escalations.

The IRO manager has been attending induction meetings with social workers to support them to understand all the relevant processes and arrangements.

- 4.6** Develop a child friendly guide called, "Your IRO" with LAC that can be included as part of the 'coming into care pack'

A pack has now been developed in liaison with children and young people in care and is handed to the child / young person by the IRO at their first review.

- 4.7** Develop a tracking system for children who have a permanency plan of adoption, so that the reviewing process promotes swift progress towards a child's final placement.

The IRO manager attends the Tracking Panel chaired by the Head of Service for Fostering and Adoption and liaises with IROs following meetings to progress any necessary actions. Over the last financial year nine children were placed for adoption and 12 children were subjects of an Adoption Order

- 4.8** Successful tendering and re-commissioning of the IRO service.

The IRO service was successfully re-commissioned in April 2015, in line with the council's procurement and tendering procedure.

- 4.9** Increase parental participation in children's reviews by producing a 'guide to your child's review' and promote the use of an advocate if deemed necessary.

This has been partially Implemented. All the children who have requested an advocate or where an advocate was recommended by an IRO had an advocate provided. In total 42 children were provided with an advocate representing 13% of the LAC population, however this still remains low compared to other local authorities' figures and is an area requiring further development.

Parental inclusion and participation in Brent are usual practice in LAC reviews. Where parents are not able to attend reviews at the child's placement, IROs would see them either in the office or at a mutually agreed venue.

5. Professional Profile of the IRO Service

The IRO Service sits within Brent Children's Social Care Safeguarding Service. The service's core function is reviewing plans for (looked after children) children in care and monitoring the Local Authority in respect of its corporate parenting and safeguarding responsibilities.

- 5.1** In 2014/15 Brent directly employed one full time IRO and an IRO Manager both with several years experience. The remainder of the reviewing officers are freelance, experienced social work practitioners contracted through an independent agency, Aidhour Ltd (a not-for-profit company established 1998). All of the IROs are DBS checked (Disclosure and Barring Service), HCPC registered (Health Care Professional Council) fully qualified (above the minimum requirements) and experienced. Many of the IROs have been undertaking reviews for Brent for a number of years and know the children well. In some instances, the IROs have been the most consistent and trusted person in the child's life apart from their carers.

6. Referral and allocations

The IRO service is supported by business support officers who process invoices, liaise with Aidhour and allocated social workers and complete other administrative work as necessary.

- 6.1** Referrals to Aidhour are completed via the Director of Aidhour who ensures children are promptly allocated to an Aidhour IRO, promoting smooth communication and liaison with allocated social workers and the LAC review team.
- 6.2** Full time IROs carry a case load of 60 – 65 children at any given time. This case load is in line with national guidance and Ofsted recommendations. IROs are valued by social work staff as experts in the field of LAC and as such offer guidance on care planning, as well as tracking individual plans through regular mid-way reviews.
- 6.3** Once allocated, IROs are expected to provide and maintain continuity and consistency in reviewing a particular child's care plan whilst they remain looked after. In addition, the IROs complete the midway reviews and liaise with the Child's Guardian if there are court procedures and other professionals, as and when required. This promotes a joined up approach in order to achieve the agreed care plan for the child and ensure that the required standard is maintained. In addition to Brent's internal quality assurance systems Aidhour Ltd also monitors the work of their IROs to ensure it is undertaken in line with the care planning regulations to agreed standards and deadlines.

7. Quality assurance and monitoring of the IRO service

The Head of Safeguarding and the IRO manager in Brent oversee the work of the Aidhour IROs through contract monitoring, audits, meetings and direct observation of their work by the IRO manager.

- 7.1** Contract meetings take place once a quarter and are attended by the Director of Aidhour, the Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance and the IRO manager. Agenda items for this meeting include the consideration of practice issues arising through the period and examination of potential future developments. The agenda is agreed prior to the meeting. During 2014/15 these meetings took place on 03/07/14, 22/10/14 and 19/01/15.
- 7.2** An annual meeting with the Strategic Director for Children and Young People attended by all the IROs took place on 22/10/14. At this meeting IROs raised a number of issues including the impact of the turnover of social work staff. Brent IROs were updated of the robust plan Brent has in place to address this through a recruitment and retention programme. Though the challenge continues to be present, the turnover of social work staff has reduced with the proportion of permanent staff increasing. Social workers also have reduced case loads and closer supervision and support. IROs have direct access to the Operational Director of Children's Social Care and the Strategic Director of Children and Young People to raise issues in respect of LAC children, should they require it.
- 7.3** IROs carrying out review tasks have secure remote access to Brent 'Mosaic', the integrated children's service database so that they can input their reports and review the progress of a child's care plan. They are able to add a case note to a child's case record on Mosaic, record the midway review of care plans and identify any relevant issues that require escalation to senior managers for resolution.
- 7.4** IROs have secure remote access to the Brent internal e-mail system which facilitates confidential communication and information exchange between IROs and Brent social workers and managers, thus complying with data protection requirements.
- 7.5** The team has remained stable with only one change in staffing in the last 12 months. This has led to continuity of IRO input and stability for many of the LAC.
- 7.6** In terms of diversity there is a mix of IROs within both the Permanent and Aidhour IRO provision. The team of IROs, including those permanent and from Aidhour comprised 7 (44%) males and 9 (56%) females. Of the children looked after on the same date 137 (42%) female and 189 (58%) male. Over the same period at the end of 31st March 2014, 155 (45%) were female and 193 (55%) were male.

The ethnic make up of the IROs is less diverse than that of the looked after population.

IRO Ethnicity	
White	14
Mixed	0
Asian or Asian British	1
Black or Black British	1

7.7 While it is noted that the ethnic composition of the IROs is not fully representative of the borough's LAC population, services are provided within an equal opportunities framework and all IROs, as qualified social workers, are expected to adhere to the Health and Care Professional Council code of conduct and Brent's internal policies and procedures.

7.8 The IRO service in Brent has embedded in its practice, protocols for CAFCASS and Independent Reviewing Officer and Good Practice for Public Law Work. This has helped to ensure cases in proceedings are subject to robust analysis and challenge about the matters of critical importance to the child's safety, wellbeing and permanency. The IRO manager is part of Brent's permanency tracking panel and attends the West London Court Users Group and London IRO managers' meeting which is held every quarter at the Department for Education (DfE). This ensures the service stays in touch with developments across the sector, in respect of recent court judgements and meeting the expectations of the court in care planning cases in proceedings. The DfE meetings look at local and national issues affecting LAC.

8. Re tendering of the IRO service

The IRO contract was re-procured at the end of 2014 as the contract was due to expire on 31st of March 2015. Following Brent's tendering and procurement procedure, Aidhour was chosen as the preferred provider and awarded the contract for a further two years, with the option to extend for a third year.

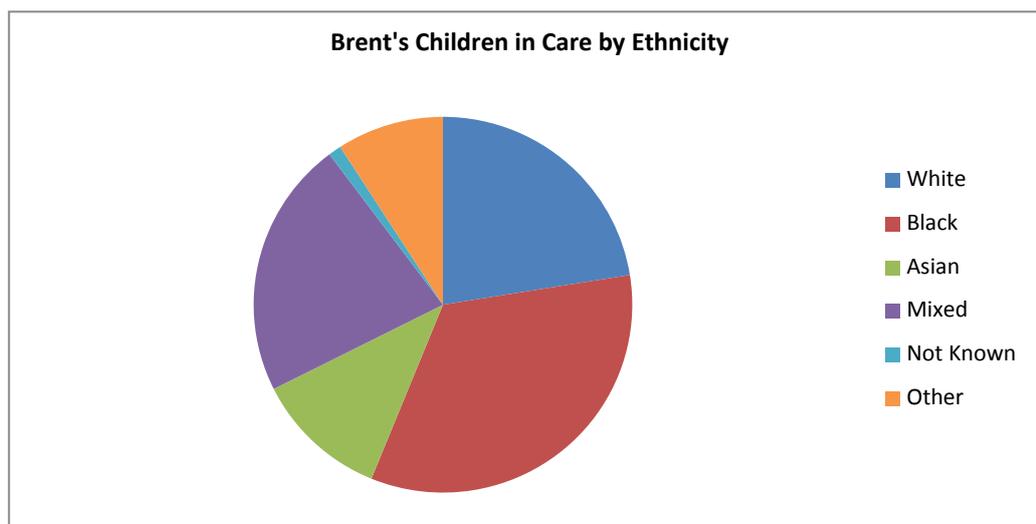
8.1 The outcome of this award, to the same provider, has resulted in less disruption for children and young people as they continue to have the same IRO. Some of the Aidhour IROs have known the children for over 10 years and are in many cases the most consistent person in the children and young people's life.

9. Quantitative information - Looked After population and the IRO service

- The Looked After population at 31st March 2015 was 326.
- A total of 929 reviews were chaired by IROs in the year ending 31st March 2015.
- Fourteen looked after children have disabilities.
- The overwhelming majority of children and young people aged 4 years plus (606 reviews) attended their review and spoke for themselves.
- On a month by month basis the majority of Reviews are held within the appropriate time scales.

9.1 The ethnic identity of the cohort of children looked after as of 31 March 2015 was as follows:

Ethnicity		
White	93	28.5%
Mixed	53	16.2%
Asian or Asian British	51	15.6%
Black or Black British	116	35.5%
Other	13	4.2%
Total	326	100%



Children in Care by Age and Gender		
	Male	Female
Under 1	6	7
0-4	9	13
5-9 years	29	25
10-15	75	51
16 - 17	70	41
Total	189	137

The age profile of children and young people at 31st March 2015:

- 4% of children who were looked after during the year ending 31st March 2015 were aged less than one year old
- 6.7 % of children who were looked after were aged 1-4.
- 16% of young people who were looked after were aged 5-9.
- 38.6 % of young people who were looked after were aged 10-15.
- 34.4 % of young people who were looked after were 16-17.

9.2 During 2014/15 the IRO manager has assumed a number of other responsibilities including participation in the induction of new staff, supervision and support for newly qualified social workers, related work activities with teams and attendance at regional and national meetings and events.

10. Participation of children

It is always preferable that children attend their review meetings and give their views. However, there are some children with special needs, who may have autism or behavioural problems who cannot easily manage disruption to their daily routine or sitting in a meeting discussing their Care Plan, therefore such a forum is inappropriate. IROs are sensitive to these children's needs and work with the allocated social worker and carer to listen to a child's views, wishes and feelings in a way more suited to them and incorporate this into their care plan.

11. Attendance at Reviews

Reviews offer an important opportunity for children to have their say about their care plans and for professionals and carers to listen and take children views into account. IROs encourage children to attend their reviews. If a child does not want to attend his/her review he/she can participate in a number of other ways. Participation types are recorded against the following heading listed in the chart below.

Type of participation	Number of children	% of total LAC
Child aged under 4 at the time of the review	117	26.2%
Child physically attends and speaks for him or herself	606	65.2%
Child physically attends and an advocate speaks on his or her behalf	5	0.5%
Child attends and conveys his or her view symbolically (non-verbally)	1	0.1%
Child physically attends but does not speak for him or herself, does not convey his or her view symbolically (non-verbally) and does not ask an advocate to speak for him or her	7	0.75%
Child does not attend physically but briefs an advocate to speak for him or her	160	17.2
Child does not attend but conveys his or her feelings to the review by a facilitative medium	18	1.9%
Child does not attend nor are his or her views conveyed to the review	15	1.6%

	1	0.1
	930	100%

- 11.1** The overwhelming majority of children and young people aged four years plus (606 reviews) attended their review and spoke for themselves, in comparison to 2013 /14 when this figure was 593.

The increase in children's participation has been a result of greater focus and activity by the IROs and the social workers to ensure that the child's voice is heard and that reviews are held at a time and place to facilitate the greatest opportunity for attendance.

12. Permanency Outcomes

During 2014/15, the largest number of children have achieved permanency through returning home to their parents or a family member, with the second highest number of children settled in a permanency arrangement in foster care.

13. Advocacy Service

IROs routinely check that children and young people know about advocacy and how it can support them in having a real say in decisions affecting their lives. They also check at each review whether an independent visitor is needed, and if there are any communication needs requiring additional or specialist support.

- 13.1** The Advocacy Service for LAC is provided through a contract with Aidhour and commissioned on an individual basis when required.

The total number referred to advocacy was 42 representing 13% of the Looked after Children population.

The broad profile of children referred for advocacy as of 31st March 2015 included,

- Children with a registered disability
- Unaccompanied asylum seekers
- Children whose first language is not English
- Children in secure accommodation
- Children placed at a distance from their home address.

The majority of advocacy requests related to young people's concerns in the following areas:

- Entitlement to pocket money and other funds for activities
- Choice of placements and wanting a certain type of location or placement.
- Contact with family members
- Reviewing a secure accommodation order

Children placed in secure accommodation for their own safety under s25 of the Children Act 1989, are always provided with an advocate as a matter of course. This ensures that their views are transmitted to each review to consider if they should be immediately released.

14. Timeliness of reviews

In 2014/15 95.5% of Looked after Reviews took place within the statutory timescales. IROs completed some reviews in a series of meetings to ensure the relevant people were involved and the meeting remained child focused and friendly.

A small proportion did not take place within the required timescale for the following reasons:

- IRO being ill on the day of a review.
- Late notification by allocated social workers.
- Unplanned change of placement on the day of the review.

As a result of the number of late notifications for reviews, a new process has been put in place to ensure that social workers notify the IRO manager immediately when a child becomes looked after to prevent further occurrences.

15. Quality of Care Planning

IROs continue to monitor the quality of care plans. IROs report that most children have a child friendly care plan, written in a clear and coherent manner. Children and young people can expect to contribute to their care plan and receive their own copy. IROs routinely check the care planning process has helped children and young people to have their say on matters important to them and help them to understand what is happening and why.

16. Progress-chasing activities between Looked after Reviews

IROs routinely contact social workers for updates on the progress of LAC review decisions. This is mid-way through the review by visiting or phoning the young person. All looked after children and young people are given a child friendly leaflet entitled 'My Independent Reviewing Officer' at their initial review. The leaflet has details of their IROs name, contact number and email address. Young people often contact their IROs directly to discuss issues worrying them.

17. Management oversight of Care Plans

The revised statutory guidance states that operational social work managers must consider the decisions from the Review before they are finalised. This is due in part to the need to ensure any resource implications have been addressed. Once the decisions are reached the manager has five days to raise any queries or objections. However instances of this are rare, which indicates that managers are generally satisfied with the recommendations and decisions at reviews.

17.1 IROs have continued to monitor the quality of social work reports to ensure these meet the expected standard with most attention paid to the child's progress in physical health, emotional wellbeing, school life and academic attainment, permanency and identity needs. However social workers do not routinely provide pathway plans to review meetings and this is an area that requires further action.

18. Children's views about their IRO and their review process

Overall, the experience reported by children of their IROs continues to be positive. Children and young people have told us that they appreciate the consistent approach of IROs, their independence and availability. The following examples are taken from the feedback from children and young people to their reviews:

I would like to see my family every day!

My social worker is great!

I can not Waite to go back home and my IRO is helping me!

My IRO sorted my Lap top!

I would like to become a publicist!

My IRO is like the brother I never had!

My IRO knew me since I was three, he saw me going through primary and secondary, now I am 18, can he stay in contact with me?

19. Quality Assurance of the IRO Service

Auditing and observations undertaken by the IRO Manager

Audit and observation of reviews are undertaken by the IRO manager and Director of Aidhour. Each IRO has been observed once during the year and a number of audits were completed on the quality of review minutes and mid way reviews.

- 19.1** Overall the quality of the minutes and how IROs chair and approach LAC reviews is assessed to be good. However mid way reviews did not appear on every file audited and this is an area that requires improvement. In addition IROs do not always upload their email correspondence with social workers routinely and one

particular IRO has had difficulty in accessing Mosaic. This is being rectified through the Brent IT service.

20. Escalations and conflict resolution

One of the key functions of the IRO is to identify and resolve problems arising from the care planning process. In Brent this is called the Looked after Children Escalation Management Process.

- 20.1** The IRO will, in the first instance, seek to resolve the issue informally with the social worker and the social worker's manager. If this is unsuccessful the IRO escalates this to the Team Manager and Principal Officer.
- 20.2** If the issue is not resolved by the Team Manager or Principal Officer the IRO will escalate further to the Head of Service.
- 20.3** Information elicited from the issues identified in escalation is used to target support and challenge practice to make improvements. Young people have reported that they feel supported when IROs raise concerns and alerts about practice or plans.

A total of 65 escalations were initiated by IROs in 2014/15.

Among the 65 case escalations raised by IROs the majority were resolved at the SW/Team Manager and Principal Officer level and include the following areas:

- Frequent change of social workers
- Drift and delay including policy and procedures not being followed
- Paperwork incomplete
- Statutory duties not fulfilled (Health Assessments, visits, etc.)
- Education issues, including delay in securing a school place.
- Lack of management oversight
- Transition to semi independent units
- IROs were not consulted on a change of care plan

- 20.4** One case was escalated to the Operational Director and one to the Strategic Director in 2014/15. In both instances the issues were resolved through their intervention. Under Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 the IRO has the authority to refer the case of any looked after child to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) if they are of the view that the child's human rights have been breached. In 2014/2015 there were no referrals made to CAFCASS by IROs in Brent.
- 20.5** The use of the escalation and dispute resolution protocol often proved successful in negotiating a positive outcome. An example of this was when a young person was unhappy about a proposed move and this was resolved through the intervention of her IRO.
- 20.6** The consultation forms were replaced with more interactive, child friendly and colourful forms. These forms were devised in consultation with children and young

people and have been implemented.

21. Areas for Development in 2015/16

Since the service moved into the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance service, further developments have been identified to ensure the IROs continue to undertake their role in a way that promotes positive impacts and continuous improvements in the lives and plans of Brent's LAC. These developments are led by the IRO manager and Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance and monitored as part of the contracting arrangements with Aidhour.

21.1 Planned improvements for 2015/16 are as follows:

- Closer monitoring of timescales and midway reviews.
- Incorporating the Signs of Safety model into the review process.
- The IRO group, including permanent and Aidhour IROs, will continue to meet together bi-annually to discuss developments in the area of their work and be further updated in Children's Social Care in Brent
- Revise the current review meeting template in partnership with the Children in Care council
- Increase the gathering of children's feedback to improve the quality and responsiveness of the service and individual reviews
- The IRO manager continues to observe reviews of the in-house and Aidhour IROs. Any feedback themes will be discussed at the bi annual meeting to support IRO development
- Children to be supported to write and present an annual report about their experiences of being in care in Brent
- Investigate further opportunities to strengthening the tracking system for children who have an adoption decision, so that the reviewing process supports swift action towards a child's final placement
- Increase parental participation in children's reviews by producing a 'guide to your child's review' and promote understanding and the use of an advocate for parents where necessary.
- Continuous learning from feedback from children and young people; parents, professionals and carers incorporated into the Learning and Development offer.

Appendices

N/A

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