



## Corporate Parenting Committee

**Thursday 26 April 2018 at 5.00 pm**

Board Room 2 - Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way,  
Wembley HA9 0FJ

### Membership:

#### Members

Councillors:

M Patel (Chair)  
Conneely  
Hossain  
Kansagra  
Thomas

#### Substitute Members

Councillors:

S Choudhary, Crane, Dixon and  
Hoda-Benn

Councillor:

Warren

**For further information contact:** Bryony Gibbs, Governance Officer  
020 8937 1355, [bryony.gibbs@brent.gov.uk](mailto:bryony.gibbs@brent.gov.uk)

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

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

## **Notes for Members - Declarations of Interest:**

If a Member is aware they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest\* in an item of business, they must declare its existence and nature at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent and must leave the room without participating in discussion of the item.

If a Member is aware they have a Personal Interest\*\* in an item of business, they must declare its existence and nature at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent.

If the Personal Interest is also a Prejudicial Interest (i.e. it affects a financial position or relates to determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission, or registration) then (unless an exception at 14(2) of the Members Code applies), after disclosing the interest to the meeting the Member must leave the room without participating in discussion of the item, except that they may first make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to the matter, provided that the public are allowed to attend the meeting for those purposes.

### **\*Disclosable Pecuniary Interests:**

- (a) **Employment, etc.** - Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit gain.
- (b) **Sponsorship** - Any payment or other financial benefit in respect expenses in carrying out duties as a member, or of election; including from a trade union.
- (c) **Contracts** - Any current contract for goods, services or works, between the Councillors or their partner (or a body in which one has a beneficial interest) and the council.
- (d) **Land** - Any beneficial interest in land which is within the council's area.
- (e) **Licences** - Any licence to occupy land in the council's area for a month or longer.
- (f) **Corporate tenancies** - Any tenancy between the council and a body in which the Councillor or their partner have a beneficial interest.
- (g) **Securities** - Any beneficial interest in securities of a body which has a place of business or land in the council's area, if the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body or of any one class of its issued share capital.

### **\*\*Personal Interests:**

The business relates to or affects:

(a) Anybody of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management, and:

- To which you are appointed by the council;
- which exercises functions of a public nature;
- which is directed is to charitable purposes;
- whose principal purposes include the influence of public opinion or policy (including a political party of trade union).

(b) The interests a of a person from whom you have received gifts or hospitality of at least £50 as a member in the municipal year;

or

A decision in relation to that business might reasonably be regarded as affecting, to a greater extent than the majority of other council tax payers, ratepayers or inhabitants of the electoral ward affected by the decision, the well-being or financial position of:

- You yourself;
- a member of your family or your friend or any person with whom you have a close association or any person or body who employs or has appointed any of these or in whom they have a beneficial interest in a class of securities exceeding the nominal value of £25,000, or any firm in which they are a partner, or any company of which they are a director
- any body of a type described in (a) above.

# Agenda

Introductions, if appropriate.

Item	Page
<b>1 Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members</b>	
<b>2 Declarations of interests</b>	
Members are invited to declare at this stage of the meeting, any relevant disclosable pecuniary, personal or prejudicial interests in the items on this agenda.	
<b>3 Deputations (if any)</b>	
To hear any deputations received from members of the public in accordance with Standing Order 67.	
<b>4 Minutes of the previous meeting</b>	1 - 6
To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record.	
<b>5 Matters arising (if any)</b>	
To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.	
<b>6 Update from Care In Action Representatives</b>	
This is an opportunity for members of Care In Action (CIA) to feedback on recent activity.	
<b>7 Annual Report - Brent Virtual School</b>	<u>Report to follow</u>
The purpose of the annual report is to outline the activity and impact of the Brent Virtual School during the academic year 2016-2017. The report includes details of the educational outcomes of our Brent looked after children who had been in care for a year or more. It reflects on the impact of our activities and identifies areas of future development to achieve improved outcomes for our looked after children.	
<b>8 Brent Adoption Service Report - 1 October 2017 - 31 March 2018</b>	7 - 14
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 October 2017 – 31 March 2018.

**9 Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: 1 January to 31 March 2018** 15 - 24

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).

**10 Any other urgent business**

Notice of items to be raised under this heading must be given in writing to the Head of Executive and Member Services or his representative before the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 60.

**Date of the next meeting:** To be confirmed following the Annual Council Meeting



- 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 Wednesday 7 February 2018 at 5.00 pm

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

Also Present: Councillor McLennan

1. **Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members**

There were no apologies for absence.

2. **Declarations of interests**

There were no declarations of interest

3. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 October 2017 be agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. **Matters arising (if any)**

There were no matters arising.

5. **Order of Business**

**RESOLVED:** that the order of business be amended as set out below.

6. **Fostering Quarterly Monitoring Report**

Onder Beter (Head of Looked After Children (LAC) and Permanency) introduced the Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report for 1 October 2017 to 31 December 2017. Members' attention was drawn to details of recent changes to staffing arrangements which encompassed the realignment of the primary in-house fostering functions. This realignment meant that foster carers would be assessed and then supported post-approval by the same social worker, thereby providing greater continuity of relationships and in turn supporting greater placement stability. Members were then directed to the overview of placement activity. Onder Beter advised that there had been a slight increase in the Brent LAC population since the last reporting period. There had also been slight increases in the numbers of children placed with Brent Foster Carers and Independent Fostering Agency carers. Slight decreases had been recorded for the number of children placed in semi-independent placements. These trends reflected the slight decrease in the number of adolescents entering the care system. There was also fewer Unaccompanied

Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) in Brent's care. Commenting on recruitment activity, Onder Beter advised that recruitment targets had not been achieved in the current reporting period due to lower conversion rates from referrals to 'initial visits'. Additionally, a significant number of assessments had not progressed beyond Stage 1 of the assessment process over the last two quarters, largely due to applicants' personal circumstances.

In the subsequent discussion, Members questioned whether the realignment of services would result in greater stability for children in placement, queried what monitoring arrangements were in place and how LAC would be involved in these. A member questioned whether there were any particular issues which prevented the council from attracting foster carer applicants. Further queries were raised regarding how the success of different marketing methods were measured and whether the new Service Manager role had been filled.

In response, Onder Beter advised that part of the rationale for realigning services was to reduce the number of times a child was transferred between different teams. Under the new structure a child should only be transferred once – at the point of entering care – when a social worker would be assigned. Nigel Chapman (Operational Director of Integration and Improved Outcomes ) advised that nearly 40 per cent of Brent's LAC had completed the Bright Spots 'Your Life, Your Care' survey in 2017. This survey measured the quality of LAC's care experience and their sense of well-being and would be carried out again later that year. It was hoped that the impact of the changes to service structure would be reflected in an improved perception of the service by Brent's LAC.

Discussing barriers for potential foster carers, Onder Beter advised that recruitment difficulties were both London-wide and nation-wide, with the availability of a spare bedroom a key issue. A National Fostering Stocktake report had just been published for response by the Government and it was agreed that a summary of this report would be brought to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee. Gail Tolley (Strategic Director, Children and Young People) highlighted that the report also discussed recruitment practice as well as the debate regarding the professionalisation of foster carers. Nigel Chapman advised that interviews for the Service Manager role were currently being conducted.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- i) that the Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes arrange for a Brent foster carer to attend a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee to share their experiences of fostering for Brent.
- ii) that the executive summary of the National Fostering Stocktake report, along with a covering report from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People, be submitted to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee.

#### **7. Update from Care In Action**

The Chair welcomed representatives from Care In Action (CIA) and invited an update of CIA's activities since the previous meeting.

HM advised that a group of CIA members had met with Diana Schmidt (the Council's Development Lead Social Pedagogue) and had discussed the Practice Framework Tree model. HM provided a detailed explanation of this model and advised that it would be used to improve ways of working with children and families. HM further advised that the Brent Pledge had been reviewed at a recent CIA meeting and members had discussed a number of changes that should be made. These changes had been incorporated in the version of the Brent Pledge to be considered by the committee later in the meeting. CIA had also been involved in reviewing the Pathway Plan forms which had been considered overlong and boring in parts. A further draft copy would be considered by CIA and two members were working on art for the cover.

The committee further heard that the National Children's Bureau's (NCB's) report on measuring the wellbeing of children in care had now been published. The views of CIA had contributed to this report, alongside those of four other Children in Care Councils. The CIA had made it known to the NCB that they would like to be considered for further work with them in the future. It was highlighted that a number of recommendations were made in the report including that a national outcomes framework for children in care should be developed by the government.

HS explained that she had been part of an interview panel for a Head of Service role and was pleased to report that the person selected by the Panel had been appointed to the position. HS had also attended a training session for foster carers and had been able to share her experiences with foster carers. HS commented that this had been an interesting experience for both and she felt that it had been valuable for the foster carers.

JS stated that he had attended the penultimate rehearsal for the Voice in a Million Choir which would be performing at Wembley Arena on 14 and 15 March 2018. The concert was being held to raise awareness of fostering and adoption and tickets were now available to purchase.

ND spoke on the consultation that had been held with young people living in semi-independent provision. This consultation sought views on the provider and had been delivered to 128 young people. 23 young people had completed the survey. The results of this survey would be shared once available.

HS concluded the update by noting that the CIAs Christmas meal had been held at Nandos and had been attended by Gail Tolley. This had been a really enjoyable evening for all.

The Chair thanked the members of CIA for the comprehensive update provided.

**RESOLVED:** that the verbal update provided by representatives of Care In Action be noted.

## 8. **Brent's Pledge for Looked After Children**

Onder Beter (Head of Looked After Children (LAC) and Permanency) introduced the report which set out the revised Pledge for Looked After Children. Brent's Pledge had first been published in 2010 and was later reviewed and relaunched in

2014. The Pledge had again been reviewed in Autumn 2017, in consultation with Care in Action (CIA) and Care Leavers in Action (CLIA). Over 20 Looked After Children and 13 care leavers had shared their views. Learning from the Bright Spots Survey, conducted in Brent in April 2017, had also been incorporated in the reviewed Pledge, alongside feedback from social work teams, housing colleagues, and local partnership representatives from health and schools. It was anticipated that Members, chief officers and partners would sign up to the Pledge to signify their shared commitment to it.

Onder Beter further advised that the reviewed Pledge would be relaunched at the Celebration of Achievement Event in spring 2018. The Participation Officer would support CIA members to present the Brent Pledge at foster carers support groups, staff forums and team meetings to raise awareness. Gail Tolley added that all new councillors would have to undertake mandatory corporate parenting and safeguarding training which would include the Pledge. Nigel Chapman highlighted that children and young people had requested a credit card size version of the Pledge to make it easier to carry with them and this was currently being developed.

In response to a query, HM (CIA representative) advised that the Pledge had previously been too long. The new version had amalgamated some of the points and reduced the length of the descriptions. The Chair noted the Pledges of other authorities had also been considered as part of the review.

Responding to a further query, Onder Beter confirmed that the Pathway Plan template had been revised to make it more accessible for young people.

**RESOLVED:** that the revised Brent Pledge for Looked After Children as attached at Appendix 1 be endorsed by the committee and recommended for adoption by the council.

## 9. **Children and Social Work Act 2017 and Local Offer for Care Leavers**

Onder Beter (Head of Looked After Children (LAC) and Permanency) introduced the report on the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The committee heard that the Act broadened the principles of corporate parenting for local authorities and required all local authorities to publish their Local Offer to care leavers by April 2018. The council had completed a lot of work in advance of this deadline and had consulted with a wide range of stakeholders, including Care Leavers in Action. The draft Local Offer to Care Leavers, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, was presented to the committee for consideration in advance of its submission to Cabinet on 12 February 2018 for approval.

A member questioned whether, rather than making care leavers exempt from paying council tax, it would be better for them to be supported to manage their money to cope with such expenses. Onder Beter advised that the number of care leavers who would be liable to pay council tax was relatively small and that Personal Advisers worked with care leavers to build money/budget management skills. However, underlying the proposal to exempt care leavers from paying council tax was the desire to show support for those young people as a corporate parent. Representatives from Care in Action and Care Leavers in Action advised that many care leavers lacked the familial support network that other young people might rely

upon if financial difficulties arose. Furthermore, care leavers did not have the same level of choice that many other young people had about when to leave home. The committee, accepting these points, highlighted the importance of supporting care leavers in this transitional phase.

Members further queried the council's commitments regarding mental health provision for care leavers. Onder Beter advised the council was making amendments to how care leavers were supported, particularly during the transition from Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to adult mental health services. Work was underway with social workers to ensure that care leavers' needs in this respect were better identified and supported. A meeting had been scheduled with the provider of CAMHS tier 3 services to further discuss support for LAC and care leavers. Nigel Chapman (Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes) advised that the thresholds for accessing adult mental health services were higher than CAMHS and therefore transitional support was required. This work was being pursued in partnership with Brent Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). Members commented that there should be a referral pathway prioritising care leavers as a vulnerable group. Representatives for Care Leavers in Action advised that the increased difficulty experienced by care leavers in trying to access adult mental health services could leave young people feeling uncared for. Furthermore, the increased difficulty of access came at a time when many young people were in a better position than their younger selves to be able to address and reflect on issues that had affected them. It was subsequently agreed to invite the Assistant Director, Brent CCG to a future meeting of the committee to discuss this issue further.

**RESOLVED:**

- i) That the report regarding the Children and Social Work Act 2017 – The 'Local Offer' for Care Leavers, from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People be noted.
- ii) That the Corporate Parenting Committee support the work of the department in ensuring partner agencies commit to providing an offer to care leavers that would be included in the final version of the Local Offer document.
- iii) That the Assistant Director, Brent CCG be invited to a future meeting of the committee to discuss care leavers' access to mental health services;

**That Cabinet be recommended to:**

- iv) approve the draft Local Offer to Care Leavers as set out in Appendix 1 of the report from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People;
- v) delegate authority to the Strategic Director, Children and Young People, to make any necessary revisions to the Local Offer and re-consult if required following publication of statutory guidance;
- vi) approve the Brent Care Leavers Charter as set out at Appendix 2 of the report from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People;

- vii) agree that as part of the Local Offer to Care Leavers who are looked after by Brent:
  - a. that the Council use its powers as a billing authority to reduce to nil council tax payable by care leavers who live in the borough;
  - b. that in cases where care leavers live outside the borough and are liable to pay council tax, the Council provide financial support to reimburse that cost;
  
- viii) delegate authority to the Strategic Director of Resources and the Strategic Director, Children and Young People to take all appropriate steps to set up, implement and administer all the areas of support as set out in the Local Offer.

10. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 6.15 pm

M Patel  
Chair

 <b>Brent</b>	<p><b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b> 26 April 2018</p> <p><b>Report from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People</b></p>
<p><b>Brent Adoption Service Report</b> <b>1 October 2017 – 31 March 2018</b></p>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	N/A
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
<b>No. of Appendices:</b>	N/A
<b>Background Papers:</b>	N/A
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes 020 8937 1732 <a href="mailto:Nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk">Nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Onder Beter Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency 020 8937 1228 <a href="mailto:onder.beter@brent.gov.uk">onder.beter@brent.gov.uk</a></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 1 October 2017 – 31 March 2018.

## 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 Adoption Statement of Purpose highlights the outcomes that the service aims to realise:

- 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 Following a realignment within Brent's Looked After Children (LAC) and Permanency Service in January 2018 all adoption services are delivered from within the Adoption and Post Permanency Team. This change was made in order to enhance the existing focus of activity within one team as well as to ensure the service was best able to respond to the future requirements to regionalise adoption services. The team is now responsible for:

- The recruitment, assessment and training of prospective adopters, as well as family finding and support for them post approval up until an Adoption Order is made.
- Family finding for children with an adoption plan; statutory social work responsibility for some children subject to a Placement Order up until an Adoption Order is made (all new cases now remain held by social workers within the care planning teams); supporting adoptive families, Special Guardians and birth families and providing a counselling and intermediary service for adopted adults and their birth relatives.

### 4.0 Performance Data

4.1 The most recent set of national adoption scorecards was published in August 2017, covering the 3-year period 2014-2016. **Adoption Scorecards (published [here](#))**

4.2 Our non-published data for the period 2015-2017 indicates that 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): 378.7 days. This is a 26% improvement against the previous reporting period (515) and compares against a national average of 558 days and our statistical neighbour average of 578.
- **A2** (The time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 162 days. This

is a 12% improvement against the previous reporting period (184) and compares against a national average of 226 days and our statistical neighbour average of 222.

#### **4.3 Child related data**

- In the first six months of this reporting year (1<sup>st</sup> April – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2017) seven children were adopted. In the second six months of this reporting year (1<sup>st</sup> October 2017 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018) two children have been adopted, bringing the total number of adoptions for the year 2017/2018 to nine.
  
- At the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, there were twelve Looked After Children with an adoption plan who had not yet been adopted. The details of these children's cases are as follows:
  - Six children are placed for adoption;
  - One child is due to be matched for adoption at the May Adoption Panel
  - One child has been potentially linked with Brent approved adopters.
  - Of the four remaining children, three are still in the court arena and although an adoption ADM decision has been made, these children are not yet subject to a Placement Order. The fourth child is subject of a Placement Order, but family finding has been delayed due to specific medical reasons requiring further professional assessment.

#### **4.4 Adopter Recruitment**

At the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 Brent had 5 approved adoptive households waiting for an adoptive placement and where a child had not yet been matched or placed.

In response to the need to recruit Somali adopters, contact was made with various organisations which support the Somali community in Brent and wider London area. Organisations that were included in this outreach were: Somali Advice and Forum of Information (SAAFI); Jazari Community Centre; and the Brent Somali Community Centre in Harlesden.

A street poster advertising campaign promoting LGBT Adoption and Fostering Week 2018 went ahead for two weeks during 27 Feb to 13 March 2018.

During National Adoption Week in October 2017, a press release was issued promoting the need to recruit more 'forever families' for siblings, and encouraging people to attend the next information evening. On social media,

people were also encouraged to use the hashtag #supportadoption during this week.

**Impact:** During this reporting period the service received 26 general enquiries about adoption with one proceeding to full assessment. Other enquiries were received in relation to step-parent adoption (4) and inter-country adoption (1). Inter-country adoption referrals are referred to the Inter-Country Adoption Centre, a specialist Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) with whom a service agreement is in place.

Brent strives to attract adopters from a diversity of backgrounds in order to best meet the variety of needs of our Looked After Children. Brent adopters currently waiting to be linked or matched to children are either of Asian, African Caribbean, White Irish or White European heritage.

There have been three new adoptive families approved during this reporting period.

At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, there was:

- 1 assessment in Stage One of the process
- 1 assessment in Stage Two of the process

Two assessments that were in Stage One did not progress to Stage Two of the process.

Also, in this reporting period, two Brent adopters were matched with Brent children and one Brent adopter was matched with a child from another local authority. Another Brent adoptive family have been linked with a sibling group of two from another local authority and are being matched in April 2018.

#### **4.5 Adoption Support**

- During this reporting period a number of new families have requested post-adoption support. During this period, ten applications to the DfE Adoption Support Fund (ASF) were successfully approved to support the therapeutic needs of Brent families. In the past six months a number of ASF applications have been completed on behalf of a wide age-range of children. All but two of these applications were in relation to children already known to our service. There are currently eight adoption support assessments in process, which will be resulting in applications for therapeutic intervention for these families in 2018-19. The total number of ASF applications for 2017/2018 was 24, none of which were refused.

There were 14 applications between April – Sept 2017 and 10 applications from October 2017 – March 2018.

- Forty-eight adults also received adoption support. This was in the form of provision of access to their records, linking them with members of their birth family, and providing counselling support around issues related to adoption.

## **5.0 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 to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

**5.2** A central list of panel members, in line with statutory guidance, is used on a rotating basis to ensure members maintain regular links with Brent and current issues in adoption. The central list in Brent remains the same as recorded in previous reports to the Corporate Parenting Committee. After the upcoming May local elections, councillors will determine which elected member will sit on the panel. All panel members receive an annual appraisal and have the opportunity to attend any additional relevant training provided by Brent and the West London Adoption Consortium.

**5.3** A joint annual training day for adoption panel members and the adoption team staff is held as required by statutory regulation; the last one was delivered on 6th October 2017 by an independent trainer. The focus was on 'Unconscious Bias', that aimed to improve the quality of the assessments coming through panel, the robust quality assurance of those reports by managers, and the independent scrutiny of those assessments by panel members. Due to the low volume of assessments being presented to panel it is not yet possible to evaluate the full impact of this training – it will be measured throughout 2018 as assessments are presented. The next training day is scheduled for the end of 2018. The focus is likely to be the future role of local authority officers and panels in adoption given further developments in the regionalisation agenda.

**5.4** 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 (Operational Director – Integration and Improved Outcomes, Children and Young People) who ensures this is given to the Head of Service (LAC and Permanency) and Service Managers for follow up with individual staff or, should the issues be more systemic, broader service improvement.

**5.5** During the period 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, 5 panels were held with 12 cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:

- Three households were recommended as suitable to adopt;

- Three individual children were recommended to be placed for adoption with specific carers (two of which were matched on the same day to two of the newly approved families above, minimising any delay);
- Five children were matched long-term with their foster carer (4 of whom have significant additional needs, including ASD and ADHD – a significantly positive outcome for each of them)
- One prospective adoptive family resigned from the process due to a change in their home circumstances.

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

## **6.0 Service Improvement**

- Brent's first Child Appreciation Day is currently being organised for a child being matched with adopters at May's Adoption Panel. These days aim to bring all professionals working with the child to meet with prospective adopters, share information and show appreciation of the child's journey. BAAF Coram have produced guidance on the organisation of Child Appreciation Days, which we will be closely following.
- Quarterly support groups have been established for Special Guardians (SGO carers) with feedback from attendees being positive. The focus of the team will be to encourage more SGO carers to take up this opportunity for mutual support and advice.
- Over the December holidays a first festive party for Kinship Carers and their children was held. Those who attended made a thank you card, which they presented to staff on the day as a sign of their appreciation.
- Additional support will be provided to the birth families of adopted children to supplement the existing individual case allocation. From April 2018 a monthly drop-in service will be established to allow birth families to receive assistance in writing letters to the adopted young person, as part of the existing 'letterbox exchange'. Birth families face many barriers to completing these letters, but it is a good way to maintain a connection between the adopters and birth families. Adopted young people are able to form a more accurate picture of their birth family and have the opportunity to ask questions which might arise about their history.

## 6.1 Involving Adopters

- Brent Adoption Service held its customary festive party for adopters and their children, which was enjoyed by all. One of our adopters was involved in helping with the delivery of the event by providing face painting. The children enjoyed taking part in a range of party games and craft activities.
- Brent adopters are regular speakers at Adoption Preparation Groups and always provide a balanced account of their adoption journey and the joys and challenges of adoption.
- A number of Brent adopters and other local authority adopters who have adopted Brent children are involved in 'buddying' up with other adopters in order to provide mutual support.

## 6.2 Adopter Feedback

During this reporting period, Brent Adoption Service received positive feedback from service users. One of the adoptees who received post adoption support from the service said:

*“Anyone who walks through your door, whatever their situation, is lucky to have you dealing with their case.”*

In another case, one of the adopters who was matched with a child commented on how thorough the matching process was and how well she had been supported:

*“The team were supportive and encouraging through the small number of what we thought were disappointments, before we were chosen to become M's parents... and now we look at the families that were chosen (as we know most of them) and realise...so those other matches were also really well chosen.*

*We received so much support especially...”*

No complaints were received about the Adoption Service in this reporting period.

## 7. Broader adoption issues and the future

- ### 7.1
- As stated in the previous report to the Committee, the DfE has capped the amount of financial support available to individual children through the ASF.

This has had an impact on some of our families as the projected therapeutic support package costs are in excess of £5k, meaning that support arrangements in these cases have to be modified and renegotiated. Although the cap on the Adoption Support Fund continues to be an issue for some families with a very high level of need most of our adopted children are able to receive relevant therapeutic input within the £5,000 limit. The therapeutic agencies that are currently used are, in the majority of cases, able to manage services within the existing resource.

## 7.2 Adoption Regionalisation

7.2.1 The work to establish a London Regional Agency (LRAA) is on-going. The latest update from the LRAA Project Team has recommended to authorities a model based on an enhanced version of the 4 adoption consortia already in existence. This will form a 'hub and spoke' approach with a number of services centralised within a central hub office. LB Ealing has agreed to take the lead for the West London region. It is anticipated that new arrangements will be in place by April 2019. The plans will be taken through the appropriate governance routes within the Council to secure cabinet approval to move forward with regionalisation before the end of 2018 to allow sufficient time for implementation.

**Report sign off:**

**GAIL TOLLEY**

Strategic Director of Children and  
Young People

 <b>Brent</b>	<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b> 26 April 2018
	<b>Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services</b>
<b>Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: 1 January to 31 March 2018</b>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	N/A
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
<b>No. of Appendices:</b>	N/A
<b>Background Papers:</b>	N/A
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes 020 8937 1732 <a href="mailto:Nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk">Nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk</a> Onder Beter Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency 020 8937 1228 <a href="mailto:onder.beter@brent.gov.uk">onder.beter@brent.gov.uk</a>

## 1.0 Purpose of the Report

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).

## 2.0 Recommendation(s)

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 Detail**

#### **3.1 Service Values**

The in-house fostering function is positioned within the LAC and Permanency Service of the Children and Young People's Directorate. The vision for the service as set out in the 2017-18 service plan is that:

- We will increase good quality local placements for children by securing more in-house fostering placements. We will recruit, assess and approve new foster carers to accommodate 10 placements by the end of September 2017 and an additional 10 placements by March 2018.
- There will be a decrease in the number of resignations/de-registrations of foster carers as a result of appropriate support and well-established, positive relationships with foster carers.
- Placements will be well matched to children's individual needs. The best foster carers will be recruited for our children.
- Diversity needs including disability, race, religion, language and culture will always be considered when placing a child.
- Children will be found permanent families without delay and within their extended family network where appropriate.

#### **3.2 Staffing Arrangements**

Alongside social work services in Brent, fostering has been realigned and the new service has been in place since January 2018. The changes in the fostering service are as follows:

- The recruitment, assessment and support of foster carers are now solely undertaken within two Fostering Support and Assessment Teams.
- The Fostering Reviewing Officer role has moved to the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service; the Fostering Development Co-ordinator role has also moved to the same service area.
- The Fostering Panel Advisor role has been incorporated into a new Service Manager role which will have management oversight of the Fostering Support and Assessment, Kinship and Adoption and Post Permanency Teams. This role has been appointed to and is beginning 16<sup>th</sup> April 2018.

The benefits of realignment will allow continuity of relationships between foster carers and their supervising social workers, more independent scrutiny and challenge through the fostering reviewing process and a development programme for foster carers better aligned with other staff training arrangements. Through these changes, the service aims to recruit and retain more foster carers that will have a positive impact on outcomes for children and young people. Wider benefits to children and young

people will be the creation of stronger relationships with social work teams through smaller team structures with a greater focus on staff learning and development.

### 3.3 Placement Activity

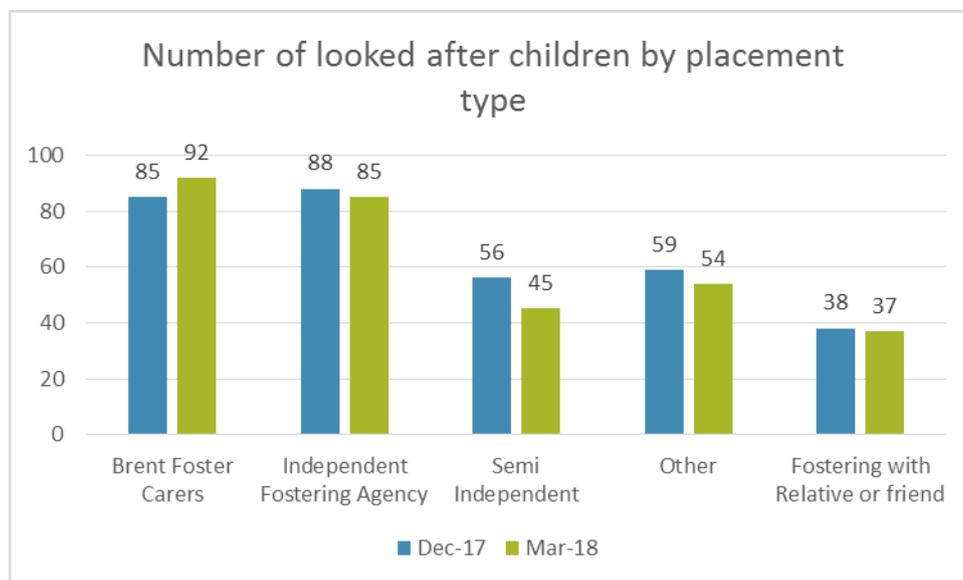
The corporate performance targets for 2017/18 were as below:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 35%.
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15%
- Percentage of looked after children placed in Independent fostering agencies – annual target 25%.
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 75%

The overall LAC population decreased from 326 as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017 to 313 at 31 March 2018. This represents a 4% decrease in the number of looked after children this quarter.

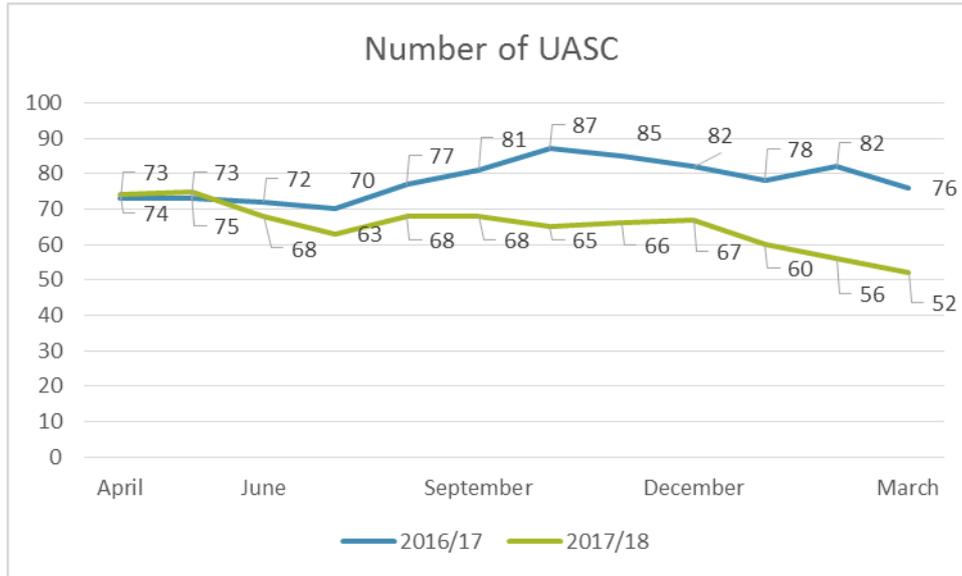
As of the 31 March 2018:

- 92 children were placed with Brent foster carers, compared to 85 children as at 31 December 2017. This represents 29.4% of total looked after children.
- 85 children were placed with IFAs, a reduction from 88 in December 2017. This is 27.2% of the total looked after children population.

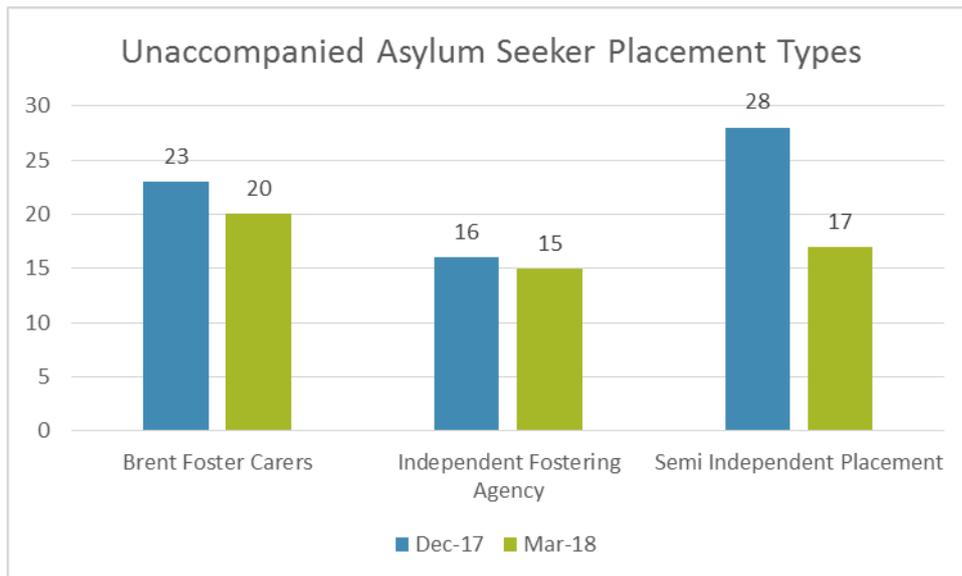


- There are 45 looked after children (aged 16-17) in semi Independent accommodation (Residential accommodation not subject to Children’s Home Regulations) as at 31/03/18, which represents 14.4% of all looked after children.
- 37 children were placed with a relative or family friend on a fostering basis. This is 11.8% of total looked after children as at 31/03/18.

- 215 looked after children were living within a fostering setting at 31/03/18. This is 68.7% of the total of all looked after children. This is an increase from Q3 where the percentage was 65.3% of LAC.



As of 31/03/18 there were 52 UASC, 24 fewer than the same period last year. The 52 UASC represents 16.6% of all LAC as at 31/03/2018. 17 UASC are placed in semi-independent accommodation and 35 are placed in foster care.



### 3.4 Recruitment and Assessment

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 contact Brent Fostering Service. During this quarter, the main presence was at the Brent Early Years Conference, at Willesden Library, at the Metropolitan Housing Job Fair in Chalkhill Community Centre and within the foyer area of the Brent Civic Centre. Additionally, there were 3 monthly information evenings held at the Civic

Centre, providing an opportunity to members of the public to find out more about the fostering role and to enable Brent to determine whether an individual or family has the potential to become a carer for Brent.

The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 82 enquiries for fostering. This includes enquiries generated for an advertising campaign on social media (Facebook) between 26 February and 11 March. The social media campaign reached 19,837 people and generated 47 enquiries, of which 13 enquirers are booked to attend the next monthly information evening.

During this reporting period, there were 5 initial visits. As of the 31st March 2018 there were 8 formal assessments in process. These are a mixture of Stage 1 and Stage 2 assessments.

The target for the service in 2017-18 was to recruit 20 fostering placements within the reporting year; with a net growth of 5 fostering households once carer resignations and terminations of approval are taken into account. We have achieved a total of 12 new fostering household approvals with net growth of 1 fostering household. Recruitment targets could not be achieved in this reporting period. One of the reasons for this was lower conversion rates from referrals to 'initial visits' as 5 referrals resulted in initial visits in Q4 compared to 4 in Q3, 7 in Q1 and 6 in Q2. Only 1 of the initial visits conducted in Q4 has progressed to a full assessment.

Additionally, a significant number of assessments have not progressed beyond Stage 1 of the assessment process over the last two quarters. Of the positive Initial Visits that progressed to Stage 1 in Q1, 7 out of a total of 8 assessments ended in Stage 1, and those that progressed from initial visit to assessment in Q2, 5 out of 9 assessments ended in Stage 1. The reasons for ending these assessments are varied and include:

- Applicants' personal circumstances such as moving house, family crisis, ill health, deciding to remain with current fostering agency.
- A lack of engagement and communication from the applicants.
- One case where it became evident that the applicant's level of English proficiency was not sufficient.
- Applicants' motivation and parenting skills.

Through the embedded fostering assessment and support service, the focus will be on recruitment and retention of foster carers with the continued aim to recruit 5 net fostering households in 2018-19.

### **3.5 Fostering Panel**

The fostering service has a Fostering Panel constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The service maintains a diverse and highly experienced central list of Panel members that includes an elected

member. After May local elections the councillor will determine which elected member will sit on the Fostering Panel. The panel chair and vice chair are independent people with professional experience of fostering and panel members include those with personal experience of the fostering system. Current demand requires three panels to be held every two months.

The functions of the Fostering Panel are to consider:

- Each application and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a Foster Carer, Connected Person(s) (Family and Friends Foster Carer) and the terms of their approval.
- The first annual review of each approved carer and any other review as requested by the fostering service, including those of a Standards of Care issue and those exploring any allegations made.
- The termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a Foster Carer.

The panel has a quality assurance role and monitors the standard of reports presented to it and relays any issues or concerns to the relevant manager. The panel makes recommendations to the fostering service and these recommendations are referred to the Agency Decision Maker who is the Head of Service, LAC and Permanency.

During the period 1 January – 31 March 2018, 3 panels were held with 14 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:

- 2 new 'Family and Friends' foster carer households were recommended for approval;
- 1 new fostering household was recommended for approval;
- 3 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
- 1 fostering household was found suitable to continue as foster carers following Standards of Care concerns;
- 3 'Family and Friends' fostering households were found suitable to continue following review;
- 1 'Family and Friends' fostering household's approval was terminated due to the child reaching the age of 18;
- 2 fostering households resigned from their fostering role – one for financial reasons and one relocated away from Brent;
- 1 fostering household was found unsuitable to continue fostering due to concerns about their ability to safeguard children.

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

### **3.6 Training and Support to Foster Carers**

The Fostering Development Co-ordinator (FDC) role was vacant in the last reporting period. This role has now been successfully recruited to and the successful candidate commenced in role on 8 January 2018.

During this reporting period, 13 individual training courses were offered. These courses were as below:

- Working with young people affected by domestic violence
- Dyslexia and dyscalculia
- Concerns and allegations
- Strategies for de-escalating anger and aggression in children and young people
- Advanced safeguarding and safer caring
- Promoting safer environments in connected persons care
- Contact and working with birth families
- Life story work
- Promoting emotional resilience in fostered children
- Working with young people towards 'independence'
- Refresher- concerns and allegations
- First Aid
- Refresher safeguarding and safer caring

The carers' feedback about training sessions was very positive. For example, in terms of First Aid training, carers specifically mentioned their new skills in CPR and being aware of dangers before they pose a risk to children of different ages as something they will take forward. They felt that working with young people towards 'independence' training provided good insight into the needs of Looked after children, and Safeguarding and Safer Caring training was a helpful refresher in stressing the importance of communication and logging.

### **3.7 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints**

A total of 15 annual fostering household reviews were held in this period. A total of 7 reviews scheduled for March had to be deferred as a result of the Fostering Reviewing Officer's absence from work. Cover arrangements have been put in place and all the reviews for March and April have been allocated to Aidhour Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs). Aidhour IROs have previously carried out Foster Carer annual reviews for Brent therefore are familiar with the expectations and standards required.

In the last reporting period (January – March 2018) there were no allegations against foster carers, no Standard of Care/Serious Concerns raised nor formal complaints from foster carers.

There is currently one outstanding allegation that is due to be heard at the Fostering Panel in June 2018. The complexity of the LADO investigation and the foster carer's availability have prevented the matter from being resolved within this reporting period.

The Fostering Panel recommended that the fostering household who were found unsuitable to foster following an allegation should be referred to Ofsted for notification. This has been done.

The Panel Advisor and the ADM hold quarterly meetings to review all feedback received from the Fostering Panel to take necessary learning and disseminate that within the service to improve social work practice. In this period, a number of actions taken as a result of fostering panel feedback:

- It was agreed that an independent SSW (employed by Brent but not allocated to the case) will now undertake standard of care investigations. This is believed to bring an independent lens to enable better outcomes for children.
- Peer challenge sessions have been introduced within Fostering Assessment and Support Teams to discuss the investigation of allegations and learning from those.
- Performance issues raised by The Panel are addressed by managers.
- Learning from the panel feedback continued to be used in supervision to be able to support Supervising Social Workers to feel more confident to address early signs of possible Standards of Care and feel able to address them in a timely manner.

Learning taken from the allegations made against foster carers, resignations and termination of approvals has been within three areas:

- Need for better and more timely communication between allocated social workers and supervising social workers for foster carers.
- Need to provide social workers appropriate tools to assess applicants' ability to deal with the changing challenges as children grow into adolescent years.
- On one case, need to give careful consideration when placing children with challenging behaviours with newly approved foster carers.

Training workshops have been arranged and are being delivered to social workers and supervising social workers on the above matters. Team Managers also discuss these cases as case examples in their team meetings to disseminate the learning.

### **3.8 New Developments**

#### National Fostering Stocktake Review

In February 2018, the Department for Education published the National Fostering Stocktake, an independent review of the fostering system in England. The Review was commissioned by the DfE and conducted by Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers. It has made 36 recommendations to the government about how the outcomes of children in foster care can be improved. Some of the recommendations are below:

- Ensuring foster carers are supported and included in decision-making; they should be treated professionally, rather than considered as professionals.

- Improving foster placement commissioning and matching and exploring the costs and advantages of a national register of foster carers
- Foster carers should be able to show physical affection towards children they care for unless this is unwelcome to the child.
- The flexibility for local authorities to reduce the number of professionals and allow one social worker to support foster carers and looked after children as a family unit in stable placements. This is believed to provide greater stability for children.
- It was recommended that money spent on the IRO role could be redirected to frontline and management staff who could perform the same functions.
- It was recommended that local authorities should support foster carers with increased access to familiar and reliable respite care, and the peer support networks. This is believed to increase retention of foster carers.

The Government has yet to respond to these recommendations. Once these are announced they will be contained in a future report to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

**Report sign off:**

**GAIL TOLLEY**

Strategic Director of Children and  
Young People

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