



Corporate Parenting Committee October 2014

Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People

Report Title:

Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring
Report 1st April - 30th June 2014

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).
- 1.2 The report covers the first quarter of this reporting year. An appendix is attached for comparison purposes that provides statistical data regarding the reporting year 2013-14.

2.0 Recommendations

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

3.0 Service Values

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

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

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

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

4.0 Staffing Arrangements

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

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

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

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

5.0 Placement Activity

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

5.2 As at the 30th June 2014 there were:

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

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

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

6.0 Recruitment Activity

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

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

7.0 Fostering Panel

- 7.1 The fostering service has a Fostering Panel constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The service maintains a central list of Panel members. The panel chair and vice chair are independent people with professional experience of fostering. A new panel chair began in role within the reporting period and is a very experienced social work practitioner with a great deal of experience in fostering and related fields. Other panel members on the central list include a Social Worker with more than three years relevant post-qualifying experience, a Brent councillor, independent members and the agency medical advisor. The Panel meets on the first Friday of every month. Detailed minutes are kept of all panel meetings.
- 7.2 The functions of the Fostering Panel are to consider:
- Each application and recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a Foster Carer, Connected Person(s) (Family and Friends Foster Carer) and the terms of their approval
 - The first annual review of each approved carer and any other review as requested by the fostering service.
 - The termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a Foster Carer.
- 7.3 The panel has a quality assurance role and monitors the standard of reports presented to it and relays any issues or concerns to the Registered Manager. The panel makes recommendations to the fostering service and these recommendations are referred to the Agency Decision Maker.
- 7.4 During the period 1st April – 30th June 2014 three panels were held with twenty specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group two new fostering households were approved and two households' approval was recommended for termination as a result of a number of concerns raised about their suitability. All of the recommendations made to the Agency Decision Maker were confirmed.
- 7.5 The Fostering Panel has requested more regular attendance from children's Social Workers when cases are presented. This matter is being taken up by the Heads of Service for Placements and Care Planning to ensure greater consistency of attendance and to enhance the child's voice within discussions.

8.0 Training and Support to Foster Carers.

- 8.1 All of Brent's foster carers are allocated to a Supervising Social Worker who carries out monthly supervision and support visits, ensures carers provide a good standard of care and creates an important link between the child's Social Worker and the foster carer.
- 8.2 As part of foster carers' commitment to Brent and reinforced within their foster care agreement is a requirement to attend mandatory and identified training courses. During the period April – June 2014 a number of training courses were held, attended by 54 foster carers.
- 8.3 Every month a foster carers' support group is held, facilitated by Supervising Social Workers but informed by the needs of carers. The groups are well attended and provide an important communication link between carers and the Placements' Service.
- 8.4 The Head of Service (Placements) met with carers during this period to discuss changes to the fostering allowance and to receive feedback on the planned implementation arrangements.

9.0 Monitoring Arrangements

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

10.0 Service Development

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

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

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

Background Papers

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

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

STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
GAIL TOLLEY