



**Corporate Parenting Committee  
12 February 2015**

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

**Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report  
1 October – 31 December 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 third quarter of this reporting year. To enable a comparison to be made against other West London boroughs appendix (i) is attached that provides relevant statistical data from the previous 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 2014-15 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.

**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 Kinship, Fostering and Adoption Assessment 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 questioning.

## **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.
- 5.2 As at the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014 there were:
- 110 children placed with Brent foster carers compared to 122 children at the end of the previous quarter. The reduction was partly caused due to the granting of Special Guardianship orders for children formerly with in-house carers and also young people turning 18 and choosing to remain with their foster carers under 'staying put' arrangements.
  - 54 children placed with a relative or family friend on a fostering basis compared to 41 children at the end of the previous quarter. This is a significant increase that has ensured that children remain looked after within their kinship network.
  - 87 children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) compared to 87 children at the end of the previous quarter.
- 5.3 The overall LAC population increased during the reporting period; from 333 on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014 to 336 on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014.
- 5.4 As at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014 the proportion of children placed with an in-house foster carer or relative/friend, as a proportion of the total LAC population remained at 49%, the same as the previous quarter. When IFA placements are included 75% of our LAC population was living in a family setting as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014.
- 5.5 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. We continue to meet challenges in placing large sibling groups, adolescents with difficult behaviours and children where the plan is for them to reside outside of the local area. Marketing and recruitment activity as well as development work within the West London Alliance are seeking to address these supply 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 14 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 had a presence at various events that included the Brent Libraries for Black History Month, a Brent Equality and Diversity awareness session and a White Ribbon event. In December a fostering information session was held at the Civic Centre specifically for the Brent Somali community. This event was well attended and provided a good opportunity for us to understand community concerns and to ensure fostering processes were communicated effectively. Alongside our presence at local events the service ensures regular advertising in local media, transport services and advertising boards in Brent and neighbouring boroughs.

- 6.2 The monthly information evenings 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 45 enquiries about fostering. These enquiries resulted in 6 initial visits. As at the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014 there were 9 formal assessments in process under the 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 who have been within the care system.
- 6.4 At the beginning of the reporting year the service aimed to recruit fifteen non-related foster carers between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 with a net growth of approximately 5 fostering households once carer resignations and terminations of approval were taken into account. There have been five non-related foster care approvals to date this reporting year and it is unlikely the overall target of 15 will be met, although the number of approvals of family and friends foster carers continues to rise. The introduction of the new 2-stage fostering assessment process contributed to some delays earlier in the reporting year, as these were led by the applicant. These have now been resolved. We have also taken action to terminate the approval of a number of carers who have not fostered for some time and this is likely to mean that we do not receive a net increase of carers this reporting year.

## **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.
- 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 1<sup>st</sup> October – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014 three panels were held with nineteen specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group, six new 'Family and Friends' foster carer households and two new fostering households were approved. Five fostering and two family and friends households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review. One family and friends foster carer's approval was recommended for termination as a result of the child leaving the placement. Three fostering households' approval was recommended for termination. These were due to a change in housing circumstances for one carer; another carer deciding to leave because of the breakdown in relationship with the child's social worker and another carer sadly passed away. All of the recommendations made to the Agency Decision Maker were ratified.
- 7.5 The Fostering Panel has noted more consistent attendance and engagement from children's Social Workers when cases are presented, following this issue being noted within the previous quarterly report. The Heads of Service for Placements and Care Planning will continue to monitor this issue.

## **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 1<sup>st</sup> October – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014 16 training courses were held, attended by 119 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 also held to discuss training needs and early discussions about establishing an association. Foster carers and their foster children also enjoyed a Christmas party and many of our carers attended the annual Foster Carers' Celebration event in December. Details of these events can be found on pages 5 & 7 within appendix (ii), the Fostering Newsletter - Winter 2014.
- 8.5 A number of learning and development opportunities for carers were offered during the reporting period. Our programme of introducing social pedagogy to fostering began with two meetings held in November and December that incorporated awareness raising sessions about the concept. A 10-day course will commence from January 2015 for 20 participants – a mixture of foster carers, supervising social workers and children's social workers. The training model has been in use elsewhere in the UK with a small number of local authorities and has demonstrated encouraging activity. The aims of our course are to help participants gain greater reflective capability and to be able to choose and apply the models taught on the course to their practice. This will enhance the quality of care provided to children, increase the ability of carers to continue to care for children with challenging behaviour and will enable children in care to show a greater engagement in their education.

## **9.0 Monitoring Arrangements**

- 9.1 During the reporting period there were seven allegations made against Brent foster carers. In three cases no formal action was taken. The remaining four cases went through a formal child protection process and one is still ongoing. No further action was taken in the other three cases. These cases related in one example to inappropriate enforcement of boundaries; one to the difficulties a carer experienced in managing challenging adolescent behaviour and the third involved a serious dispute between a foster carer's teenage daughter and the young person in placement.
- 9.2 There were four formal complaints received from Brent foster carers. These related to a variety of issues:
- One related to a difference of opinion regarding the amount of allowance provided between a nominated carer and the foster carer.
  - One complaint was regarding a foster carer requesting larger accommodation from her Housing Association.
  - Another complaint related to a breach of a foster carer's confidential information by an NHS Hospital Trust.
  - The final complaint related to difficulties experienced by a carer in managing her child's behaviour and the support offered by Children's Social Care.
- 9.2 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 31 annual reviews out of a possible 35 during this period. Those incomplete within the period were due to foster carer and social worker unavailability. These have all been rearranged. The service is working to improve the quality of the reports for reviews and that they are more evidence based and that they will demonstrate the learning undertaken by carers and how their care has led to improved outcomes for children.

## **10.0 Service Development**

- 10.1 As described above, the innovative training programme to introduce social pedagogy to foster carers and social care staff is now in progress. The programme expects to deliver recognisable improvements in the relationship between foster carers and social workers where a better quality of interchange between staff/carers and young people is observed by participants and their supervisors. This course is an early step in refocusing the approach to enhance the quality of care to our children and young people.
- 10.4 Collaborative work has continued with other boroughs within the West London Alliance (WLA) to strengthen working arrangements to improve our fostering services. The benchmarking data (at appendix i) has enabled authorities to compare strengths and development areas. An area for Brent's development is to reduce the number of unplanned endings of foster placements. We are addressing this through our refreshed training programme for carers and improving the recruitment and retention of children's social workers. An action plan for West London fostering has been approved by Directors of Children's Services. A protocol has been agreed to share internal fostering vacancies across boroughs. Joint preparation training for foster carers is being established that will enable more courses to be available across the sub-region to increase the choice available to potential foster carers. An out of hours support telephone line is to be

commissioned to allow carers the opportunity to speak to a knowledgeable fostering professional in situations where advice is needed and to prevent situations from escalating. The WLA action plan also includes joint marketing and advertising activity to find foster carers from particular groups where we as individual authorities struggle to recruit – such as sibling groups and adolescents.

## **Appendices**

- i) West London Alliance Ofsted Fostering Data 2013-14.
- ii) Foster Carers' Newsletter Winter 2014.

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