



**Corporate Parenting Committee  
21 July 2015**

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

**Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report  
1 January – 31 March 2015**

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**1.0 Summary**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).
- 1.2 The report covers the fourth quarter of this reporting year and a summary of the whole year position. For reference the 2014-15 data return submitted to Ofsted is attached to this report as an appendix.

**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 challenge within the service.

#### **5.0 Placement Activity**

- 5.1 One of the service priorities is to increase the proportion of Looked After Children placed closer to home with in-house foster carers.
- 5.2 As at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 there were:
- 109 children placed with Brent foster carers compared to 110 children at the end of the previous quarter.
  - 50 children placed with a relative or family friend on a fostering basis compared to 54 children at the end of the previous quarter.
  - 84 children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) compared to 87 children at the end of the previous quarter.
- 5.3 The overall LAC population decreased during the reporting period; from 336 on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014 to 328 on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015. The LAC population has also reduced over the reporting year period by 6%, achieved through swifter permanency planning and stronger gatekeeping work by the frontline Social Work teams.
- 5.4 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 the proportion of children placed with an in-house foster carer or relative/friend, as a proportion of the total LAC population was 48.5%, compared to 49% at the end of the previous quarter. When IFA placements are included 74% of our LAC population was living in a fostering setting as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 compared to 75% at the end of the previous quarter. The overall percentage of children placed with a Brent foster carer (including family and friends) has remained stable over the course of the year.
- 5.5 The service operates with few vacancies so that the majority of available space with foster carers is maximised. As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 there were 17 spaces available, less than 10% of the total capacity, a figure that has remained consistent throughout the 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. We continue to encounter challenges in placing large sibling groups, adolescents who enter care with offending histories and children where the plan is for them to reside outside of the local area. Despite these challenges, in the majority of cases we have been able to place sibling groups together where it has been assessed as being in their best interests to do so. The supporting data can be found in section A5 of appendix (i). Marketing and recruitment activity as well as development work within the West London Alliance are seeking to address these supply issues and are developed later within this report.
- 5.7 Where placements are made with IFAs in an emergency 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 11 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 Connects events, sports centre activities and International Women's Day. 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 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 55 enquiries about fostering. These enquiries resulted in 12 initial visits. As at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 there were 6 formal assessments in process under the 2-stage fostering assessment process. During the reporting year as a whole the service received 209 enquiries about fostering. This is a lower figure than the previous year and similar reductions have been reported anecdotally from other authorities within West London. The marketing and recruitment strategy for 2015-16 is to be refreshed in order to better target resources with the outcome that 10% of enquiries result in a fostering application (in the 2014-15 reporting year this figure was 7%).
- 6.4 At the beginning of the reporting year the service aimed 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 were taken into account. This target was not met as the service had a higher number of planned resignations and terminations than approvals. The service recruited 6 non-related fostering households and 14 households' approval was terminated. The supporting data can be found in section C3 & C4 of appendix (i). The introduction of the new 2-stage fostering assessment process and the impact of service reorganisation at the beginning of the reporting year contributed to some delays that have now been dealt

with. The number of family and friends fostering approvals has continued to rise and there were 18 of these arrangements made in the reporting year. The service ensures that family and friends carers are treated the same as non-related carers and this has enabled more families to be able to support children to live with them.

## **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> January – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 three panels were held with twenty four specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group, three new 'Family and Friends' foster carer households and one new fostering household was approved. One fostering and three family and friends households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review. Twelve family and friends foster carers' approval was recommended for termination – three due to the child returning to live with their parents, seven due to a Special Guardianship order being granted, one due to a Child Arrangement Order being granted and one where the child moved to other family members. Four fostering households' resignations were noted at panel – two were due to locating to agencies closer to their home; one due to changing circumstances; and one due to dissatisfaction with the level of financial support provided by the service. In that case the foster carer felt they were entitled to a larger financial support package for the care of a child than was contained within our fees and allowance structure. All of the recommendations made to the Agency Decision Maker were ratified.

7.5 The fostering panel this reporting year has, under the leadership of a new chair, provided a critical friend role to the service as it continues to develop. The feedback has been constructive and has enabled the service to focus on areas of development such as the need to ensure carers' training and development are more consistently implemented.

## **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> January – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 26 training courses were held, attended by 218 foster carers. As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 125 of our foster carers had been supported to evidence their training and learning and the remaining carers are being targeted to ensure these standards are met during 2015-16.
- 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 by the Head of Service to discuss training needs, the allowance system and how the foster carers' association can be effectively established. Details of the service's communication with our carers can be found in more detail at appendix (ii), the Fostering Newsletter – Spring 2015.
- 8.4 The programme to support the introduction of social pedagogy to fostering began in January with a mixture of foster carers, supervising social workers and children's social workers attending two, 2-day training couplets. The training model has been in use elsewhere in the UK with a small number of local authorities and has demonstrated encouraging results to enhance practitioner and foster carer confidence in working with their children. The overall aim is to 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 three 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. The number of complaints received over the reporting year is consistent with the previous period and are considered by the service on a quarterly basis to identify and emerging themes or trends.
- 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 32 annual reviews out of a possible 36 during this period. Of those uncompleted, two were due to foster carer and social worker unavailability and the other two due to the

non-engagement from foster carers; these carers' approval has subsequently been terminated.

## **10.0 Future Developments – 2015-16.**

- 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. Further detail of the impact of the course on quality of care given will be provided in subsequent monitoring reports.
- 10.2 Collaborative work has continued with other boroughs within the West London Alliance (WLA) to strengthen working arrangements to improve our fostering services as set out in the October-December 2014 quarterly monitoring report to the Corporate Parenting Committee. The action plan for West London fostering has been taken forward with agreed joint training priorities established and a consolidation of cross-borough data achieved to enable authorities to benchmark effectively. Joint preparation training for foster carers has been established to enable prospective foster carers to move through the approval system more quickly. The carer benefits package is also a priority for the WLA, in ensuring that the offer available to prospective carers is similar across each borough.
- 10.3 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. A jointly commissioned website is planned for launch in the summer of 2015 to broaden the reach of each boroughs advertising and to drive more interest to individual authorities.
- 10.4 The service's key fostering related challenges in 2015-16 are twofold:
- To increase the quality & range of our in house pool of carers; particularly those 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.
  - To ensure that targeted and specialist training is available to foster carers with the capacity to grow in their role.

## **Appendices**

- (i) Ofsted Data Return 2014-15.
- (ii) Foster Carers' Newsletter Spring 2015.

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