



Corporate Parenting Committee
3 November 2015

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

**Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report
1 April – 30 June 2015**

1.0 Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).

1.2 The report covers the first quarter of this reporting year.

2.0 Recommendations

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

3.0 Service Values

3.1 The in-house fostering function is positioned within the Placements Service of Children and Young People's Services. The vision for the Placements service as set out in the 2015-16 service plan is that:

- The best foster carers are recruited for our children.
- All placements receive high quality support, effectively targeted according to need and providing good value for the Local Authority.
- The number of children placed closer to home with our in-house foster carers increases.
- Children are found permanent families without delay – whether within their extended family network or outside.
- Staff within the service are encouraged to become more professionally autonomous and confident.

4.0 Staffing Arrangements

- 4.1 The primary in-house fostering functions are distributed across two teams:
- The recruitment and assessment of foster carers is completed within the Placements Assessment and Recruitment Team.
 - The ongoing support and supervision of foster carers is the responsibility of the Fostering Support Team.
- 4.2 The Fostering Panel Advisor, Fostering Reviewing Officer and Fostering Development Co-ordinator roles are also managed within the Placements' Service and are line managed separately from the two operational teams in order to provide appropriate challenge within the service.

5.0 Placement Activity

- 5.1 The corporate performance targets for this year relating to fostering are as follows:
- Percentage of LAC placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 35%.
 - Percentage of LAC placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15%
 - Percentage of LAC placed in Independent Fostering Agencies – annual target 25%.
 - Percentage of LAC overall within foster placements – annual target 75%
- 5.2 As at the 30th June 2015 there were:
- 107 children placed with Brent foster carers compared to 109 children at the end of the previous quarter. This is 33% of the total.
 - 48 children placed with a relative or family friend on a fostering basis compared to 50 children at the end of the previous quarter. This is 15% of the total.
 - 84 children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) compared to 84 children at the end of the previous quarter. This is 26% of the total.
 - 74% of children lived within a fostering setting as at 30th June 2015.
- 5.3 The overall LAC population decreased during the reporting period; from 328 on 31st March 2015 to 323 on 30th June 2015. The overall percentage of children placed with a Brent foster carer (including family and friends) has remained stable over the course of the last 12 months.
- 5.5 The service operates with few vacancies so that the majority of available space with foster carers is maximised. As at 30th June 2015 there were 12 fostering households with spaces available, this is 10% of the total capacity of non-related households, a figure that has remained consistent throughout the last year.
- 5.6 One of the service priorities is to ensure children are placed as close to home as possible, which will usually involve placement with a suitable in-house foster carer. To counter the difficulties in recruiting carers with the capacity to accommodate a

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

- 5.7 Where placements are made with IFAs in an emergency, often out of hours, the in-house fostering team work closely with the child's Social Worker to consider whether a move to an in-house carer is possible and in the child's best interests.

6.0 Recruitment Activity

- 6.1 The fostering service carried out 9 recruitment focused activities within the reporting period with the aim of raising awareness of fostering and encouraging potential foster carers to come forward. The service held a week long recruitment drive within a Harrow shopping centre and also held a fostering fun day at Willesden Sports Centre that resulted in 68 families attending.
- 6.2 The monthly information evenings have continued to be held at the Civic Centre for members of the public to find out more about the fostering role and to enable us to determine whether an individual or family has the potential to become a carer for Brent.
- 6.3 The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 113 enquiries about fostering. These enquiries resulted in 14 initial visits. As at the 30th June 2015 there were 11 formal assessments in process under the 2-stage fostering assessment process. As described above, the marketing and recruitment strategy for 2015-16 has been refreshed to better target resources with the outcome that 10% of enquiries result in a fostering application.
- 6.4 The target for the service is to recruit fifteen non-related foster carers during the reporting year with a net growth of 5 fostering households once carer resignations and terminations of approval are taken into account. The service is now running stage 1 and 2 of the fostering assessment process concurrently to prevent delay and is in line with other west London boroughs. There is no set target for the number of family and friends fostering approvals as these arrangements the Local Authority has less control over. Where family and friends carers make a decision, endorsed within the child's care plan, to continue to foster this arrangement will then be taken to the fostering panel for consideration.

7.0 Fostering Panel

- 7.1 The fostering service has a Fostering Panel constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The service maintains a central list of Panel members. The panel chair and vice chair are independent people with professional experience of fostering. The Panel meets on the first Friday of every month and more regularly where there is service demand.
- 7.2 The functions of the Fostering Panel are to consider:
- Each application and recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a Foster Carer, Connected Person(s) (Family and Friends Foster Carer) and the terms of their approval.

- The first annual review of each approved carer and any other review as requested by the fostering service.
- The termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a Foster Carer.

7.3 The panel has a quality assurance role and monitors the standard of reports presented to it and relays any issues or concerns to the Registered Manager. The panel makes recommendations to the fostering service and these recommendations are referred to the Agency Decision Maker who is the Operational Director, Children's Social Care.

7.4 During the period 1st April – 30th June 2015 3 panels were held with 14 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group 1 new fostering household and 2 new 'Family and Friends' foster carer households were recommended for approval. 6 fostering and 1 family and friends households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review. 1 family and friends foster carers' approval was recommended for termination due to the young person turning 18 (although remaining with the carers under 'Staying Put' arrangements) and 1 fostering household's approval was recommended for termination due to their many indications that they did not wish to continue fostering and had not taken a new placement for some time. 2 fostering households' resignations were noted at panel – 1 due to the birth of their twins and 1 due to wishing to work with adults rather than children. All of the recommendations made to the Agency Decision Maker were ratified.

7.5 The feedback from the fostering panel chair has been constructive to the service as it develops. One of the key areas of challenge has been in relation to the presentation of foster carer reviews. Whilst these are usually carried out within timescales there has at times been a delay in these then being presented to Panel, which has led to information being out of date. This issue was raised with the service by the chair and processes have been put in place to minimise this in future.

8.0 Training and Support to Foster Carers.

8.1 All of Brent's foster carers are allocated to a Supervising Social Worker who carries out monthly supervision and support visits, ensures carers provide a good standard of care and creates an important link between the child's social worker and the foster carer. The training and development strategy for foster carers can be found at appendix 2.

8.2 As part of foster carers' commitment to Brent and reinforced within their foster care agreement is a requirement to attend mandatory and identified training courses. During the period 1st April – 30th June 2015 12 training courses were held, attended by 76 foster carers.

8.3 Every month a foster carers' support group is held, facilitated by Supervising Social Workers but informed by the needs of carers. The groups are well attended and provide an important communication link between carers and the Placements'

Service. A foster carers' focus group was held in April between carers and managers within the Placements' Service to discuss issues of concern and service development.

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

9.0 Monitoring Arrangements

- 9.1 During the reporting period there were 3 allegations made against Brent foster carers. In two cases no formal action was taken. The remaining case is currently subject to a formal child protection process.
- 9.2 There were no formal complaints received from Brent foster carers during the reporting period.
- 9.3 All foster carers, regardless of the length of their approval with Brent must have an annual review of their arrangements. The Fostering Reviewing Officer completed 29 annual reviews out of a possible 35 during this period. Of those uncompleted, 3 were due to staff or foster carer illness and 3 due to supervising social worker delays. These were all re-scheduled and completed at a later date, within timescales.

10.0 Future Developments

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

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

Appendices

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

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