



Fostering and Adoption Marketing & Recruitment Strategy

2015 – 16

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Introduction

When children cannot be cared for by their own family, the London Borough of Brent's Placements service enables them to move to alternative families who will care for them throughout childhood and beyond. The London borough of Brent aims to recruit and assess foster carers and adopters of the highest calibre who will be able to provide a home environment that promotes the development of children and young people.

According to the 2011 census, the population in Brent has increased from 263,464 in 2001 to 311,215. This represents an increase of 47,751 (18%). Brent has seen a rise in the number of migrants from the European Union, which has impacted, on both; the types of children coming into care and the ethnic mix of carers now required to meet and reflect the diverse needs and cultures of our children. In 2001 the number of 'White; other' self-categorised residents in Brent stood at 24,072. This had risen to 44,353 in 2011, representing an increase of 53.6%.

Black (African/Caribbean/British) looked after children still continue to represent the majority of children in our care at 36%; however White (European/British) children are close behind at 28%, followed by Asian and dual heritage children, both respectively at 16%. In terms of our carers, Black (African & Caribbean) carers represent the majority, followed by White (European/British) carers at 20%. There is a need to recruit foster carers from our wider White (British/European) community. There is also a need to recruit more carers with space and capacity to accommodate sibling groups and adolescents.

There have been a number of significant developments to adoption legislation and adoption services over the past couple of years with changes in court rulings and an increase in the number of special guardianship orders granted. As a result, nationally, and in Brent, there has been a decrease in the number of children suitable for adoption placements. Therefore, all adoption marketing activity during the course of this year will be primarily aimed at raising awareness of adoption and progressing enquiries where potential adopters express an interest in children we often find more difficult to place.

Overview

At the start of April 2015 there were 326 looked after children in Brent with an in-house provision of 173 foster carers. During the last financial year (April 2014 - March 2015), there were 203 initial enquiries from new prospective fostering households and 15 applications from prospective foster carers received. The figures for April 2014 – March 2015 shows a net decrease in the number of Brent foster carers recruited because six foster carers were approved during the year and 14 existing foster carers were de-registered. Exit interviews with former foster carers are in progress to determine the cause of de-registration.

New Adopter approvals for the same period indicate 43.75% decrease from April 2014 to March 2015. There were 32 individuals approved in 2013/14 and 18 individuals approved in 2014/15. This reflects the reduction in children with court ordered adoption plans and has been part of the service strategy.

Background

A report produced by the Department for Education (Scott and Duncan, 2013)¹ suggests that ‘there could be up to 6.3 million people (or 20% of the adult population) who would say they are ‘fairly likely, ‘very likely’ or ‘certain to’ consider’ adoption or fostering. This finding suggests that there is a significant audience available to target in any recruitment campaigns for potential foster carers or adopters. However, the report goes to suggest that there are many myths and assumptions about adoption and foster carer, such as age, single status and other lifestyle concerns, which prevent many individuals from pursuing an enquiry. Therefore any marketing strategy must clearly debunk the myths associated with fostering and adoption and be transparent about the eligibility criteria. Our current marketing literature reflects this and states from the onset what the requirements are for potential foster carers – a message which is reiterated at every stage of the application process. There is research by the Department of Education (2013) to also suggest the value of positioning fostering as a formal profession, because the qualities expected of a foster carer is similar to that of someone in a childcare profession. This is something which can be taken forward by forming partnerships with the employment and recruitment agencies in Brent and the West London region.

¹ Understanding attitudes, motivations and barriers to adoption and fostering - A marketing proposal for the Department for Education
Anastasia Scott & Chris Duncan, Kindred. March 2013

Competitors/ External forces analysis

Recruitment and retention of foster carers is a challenge for all local authorities in London and the United Kingdom. Neighbouring local authorities are often competing with each other to recruit from the same pool of people and are in constant competition with independent fostering agencies that work both regionally and nationally. Independent agencies are more commercially focussed, are working solely from a fostering perspective and in some cases can offer a more attractive support/finance package.

As a result, priorities for Brent when seeking to recruit foster carers include focusing on:

- Promoting the quality, support and knowledge our staff provide. This includes the following:

Regular contact with a qualified supervising social worker

A range of learning, development and training opportunities

Start up equipment (where applicable)

Advice from our Education of Looked After Children Team Service and advice from our health and well being services – including CAMHS

Regular newsletters

Foster carers' support group

Social events for both foster carers and Looked after Children

- Continuing to respond in a timely manner to enquiries and assessments to increase the pool of in-house foster carers and adopters.

Recruiting more in house foster carers is a priority for Brent, as each IFA placement costs £700-800 weekly in comparison to a Brent in-house placement which, when on-costs are taken into account, is approximately £500 per week. Residential costs are considerably higher. More in-house foster carers also provides more opportunities for siblings groups to remain together, teenagers to remain closer to home, for children to be given choice and to improve our placement stability. However any marketing strategy must acknowledge the fact that London as a whole is unique in comparison to other regions across the country because it faces an acute shortage of housing and lack of spare bedrooms. This issue is not something which we can fully address as part of this marketing strategy.

West London Alliance (WLA)

Brent Council and other neighbouring London boroughs (including Hillingdon, Hounslow, Harrow, Ealing and tri-borough) are now working with the West London Alliance on a collaborative marketing strategy that aims to deliver a regional marketing campaign for the recruitment of foster carers. The initiative is at the preliminary stage, however, future marketing activities include a regional WLA website and advertising campaigns with TFL and Mayor of London.

SWOT Analysis (Internal / micro environment)

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Foster carers receive a fortnightly allowance and fee, which is increased annually.Adopters receive some financial support at the start of a placement and may receive an allowance (means tested).A diverse mix of children requiring placements.Access to an excellent variety of training courses.Good quality support from qualified professionals.Regular support groups and social activities.Quarterly newsletters encouraging carer participation.Continued outreach activities in local authority area and surrounding boroughs.Regular advertising campaigns for recruitment.Targeted advertising for children/sibling groups requiring permanency and adoption.Availability of information online via the council website and social media pages.	<p>Weaknesses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Approval process can take up to six months.Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) generally pay their carers 10 – 15% higher than local authorities in West London.Drop out rate after initial enquiry is high (although similar to IFA/other local authorities).Budget limitations to dramatically enhance allowances.Lack of White (British/Irish/European) foster carers.Lack of carers for sibling group, and teenagers.Lack of placements for children requiring permanency.
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Access to mosaic data to help analyse the target audience.Knowledge and experience of foster carers already recruited.	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Increased competition from independent fostering agencies and adoption agencies like PACT.

Reaching people who are looking for a career change – e.g. public sector (job losses), and those whose children have left home.
Digital technology – utilising our own website more efficiently by establishing links with other departments.
Maximizing our presence on social networking platforms.
Closer collaboration with other west London boroughs as part of the West London Alliance may lead to broader marketing opportunities.

Changing legislation enforcing stricter guidelines on local authorities and the way assessments are carried out.
Greater budgetary pressures.

PEST Analysis (External / macro environment)

Political factors	<p>Small marketing budget – may decrease further with the implementation of the WLA strategy.</p> <p>Financial uncertainty – council and customers.</p> <p>Change in housing benefit regulations regarding spare bedrooms. However, this is being addressed by WLA.</p> <p>New legislation changes in dealing with looked after children.</p> <p>New Adoption legislation.</p> <p>Panel process and criteria changes.</p>
Economic factors	<p>Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) generally pay their carers 10 – 15% higher than other local authorities in West London pay. It is challenging to compete with private agencies.</p> <p>Lack of suitable housing is a major issue in London which cannot be addressed directly by one local authority.</p> <p>People concerned they may not manage financially if they become foster carers.</p> <p>Working hours for prospective foster carer.</p>
Social factors	<p>Stereo-typical view of looked after children leading to negative attitudes and feelings about fostering & adoption.</p> <p>Awareness of safeguarding children – people want to help.</p> <p>People don't think they can do it / on the flip side people think they can do it, but after the initial visit realise it's not really for them.</p>
Technological factors	<p>All fostering agencies have online presence – competition.</p> <p>Increasing use of internet to research aspects of fostering and adoption, resulting in comparisons being made between agencies and local authorities more easily.</p> <p>Online marketing methods are very targeted and easy to evaluate.</p> <p>Social media tools allow the local authority to talk directly to customers instantly and establishes engagement on a broader level.</p>

Target Audience

To help effectively recruit the right carers for Brent's Fostering and Adoption Service an analysis has been done on the ethnicity, age and postcode location of our current foster carers and Looked After Children. All statistics shown are based on data collected by Brent Council from 2014-15 ([DFE Report 29/06/15](#)), ([Brent Foster Carers Data](#)), and [Brent 2011 census profile](#). The information will be used to create a profile of our prospective foster carer.

- **Ethnicity**

The information in *Appendix 1* suggests Brent has a high proportion of Black (African/Caribbean/British) foster carers and are lacking mixed heritage and White (European/British) carers. According to the census 2011, Brent has the largest count (12,320) and proportion (4.0%) of White: Irish group and has seen the largest increase (85.6%) of White: Other (2001 definition - i.e. including Gypsy or Irish Traveller). This is a significant proportion of the population which will need to be addressed as part of our marketing objectives.

In terms of adoption, we are not actively recruiting this financial year and are taking enquiries on a case by case basis. There is, however, more of a demand for Black (African/Caribbean/British) adopters (please refer to *Appendix 1*).

- **Age**

The information in *Appendix 2* shows that the majority of Brent foster carers are 41 – 60 years of age. This data suggests that we will be more successful in recruiting foster carers if we target this age range. Census 2011 information will be used to map the areas which have a higher density of households in the 41 – 60 years age bracket.

- **Location**

The information in *Appendix 3* suggests that current Brent foster carers reside all across Brent and the immediate surrounding areas. Therefore for the purposes of this marketing strategy we will target areas which have a higher proportion of residents aged 41 – 60 years and are of a White (European/British) background. In addition we use statements such as the following from the census 2011 to achieve our marketing objectives:

- Irish born residents are most numerous in Mapesbury and least numerous in Alperton.
- Residents who were born in the recent EU accession countries are most numerous in Dudden Hill, and least numerous in Queens' Park.

- **Other Factors**

Having a spare bedroom is crucial to successfully becoming a Brent foster carer for children over the age two. It is because of this factor we are looking at properties that are larger in size and therefore have potentially more room to take in a Looked After Child. This includes properties in the following wards; Queen's Park ward, Fryent Ward and Kenton Ward. We will be using geographical mapping data to achieve this task and a sample mailshot will be deployed to test the potential of this market.

In addition, we are also looking to distribute marketing information to households affected by the 'empty nest' syndrome. 'Empty nest' syndrome can be described as the moment when a child leaves a parents' home for the first time, such as to live on their own or to attend a college or university (Wikipedia). According to Mosaic, there are 18, 000 households in Brent who can be categorised under this banner as they either are a 'mature family with no children under 18' and 'older families with no children under 18'. A sample mailshot will be carried out to test the potential reach of this new audience.

Objectives /Targets

To raise awareness of fostering recruitment to the Eastern European community residing in Brent and surrounding areas by March 2016.

To raise awareness of fostering recruitment to the Irish community residing in Brent and surrounding areas by March 2016.

To raise awareness of fostering recruitment to Brent Council staff.

To increase the overall number of fostering enquiries to 20 - 25 a month by the end of March 2016.

To increase the number of overall applications by the end of March 2016 (target of 2-3)

Strategy and Tactics

- Ensure that information about fostering and adoption for Brent is clear and accessible through all platforms, including print, advertising, outreach and digital media.
- Deliver three specific events in the year to target fostering communities; White (European), White (Irish), Brent Council Staff.
- Launch a new fostering recruitment campaign in January 2016 for internal staff members. The new campaign will capitalise on the 'New Year' theme which suggests a time of new beginnings and fresh opportunities.
- Contact all foster carers that have left Brent in 2015 and produce a report by November 2015, with subsequent monitoring confirming enhanced retention of foster carers
- Engage innovatively with other service areas, build partnerships and exploit our internal communications network to promote fostering. For example, tap into the council's volunteer strategy and employment strategy for further marketing opportunities.
- Ensure all council buildings display information about fostering and adoption.

Key messages

Promoting the rewarding aspect of fostering and the long term impact it can have on a child's life:

- Make a difference today and help one of our 300 child in need achieve their full potential in life.
- Foster carers help children to achieve their full potential in life through support, encouragement and understanding.
- What's the most rewarding thing about fostering? Changing a child's life for good.

Promoting the inclusive nature of fostering:

- To foster for Brent you must have a spare bedroom, be over the age of 21 and have indefinite leave to remain in the UK.
- What's the most important thing about being a foster carer? Love.
- Anyone can be a foster carer. As long as you have a spare bedroom, are over the age of 21, and have childcare experience.
- All children are different and they all need different families; do not rule yourself out without talking to us first.

Positioning fostering as a professional career:

- Start your childcare career with Brent and be a foster carer to one of our 300 children in need.
- Start your childcare career as a Brent foster carer.
- Help children and young people in our community and start your rewarding career as a Brent Foster Carer.
- Can you demonstrate the skills, experience, motivation and commitment to caring for a child? If so, you could be the perfect candidate to foster a child in need.
- If you are looking for a change in career that's rewarding and fulfilling at the same time, then foster for Brent and change a child's life.

Raising awareness of Adoption:

- Adoption offers children an excellent way to get a loving, stable and secure family home.
- All children are different and they all need different families; do not rule yourself out without talking to us first.

Tactical Grid

Audience	Key messages	Media type	Channel/tactic	Date	By	Cost
White European (Polish)	Promoting the inclusive nature of fostering. Promoting the rewarding aspect of fostering and the long term impact it can have on a child's life.	Information event specifically for the Polish community.	Interpersonal communication and news media (press release promoting event)	Oct/Nov 2015	AH/KE/TW	TBC
		Fostering recruitment posters and leaflets distributed in key locations including local churches, medical surgeries, council buildings and Polish newsagents.	Advertising/promotional media	Oct/Nov 2015	AH/Design Team	TBC
		Case study of a foster carer with a Polish background.	News media/Organisational media	Oct/Nov 2015	AH/CG	TBC
		Leaflet drop to areas where there is a high density of residents with Polish background (Census 2011).	Organisational media	Oct/Nov 2015	AH/WH	TBC
		Fostering recruitment advertisement on social media platforms	Organisational media Advertising/promotional media	Oct/Nov 2015	AH	TBC
		Email advertisement of event to all current foster carers.	Organisational media (Dotmailer)	Oct/Nov 2015	AH	£0
Brent Council Staff	Positioning fostering as a professional career. Promoting the inclusive nature of fostering.	Information event specifically for Brent Council staff.	Interpersonal communication	Jan/Feb 2016	AH/KE/TW	TBC
		Case study/article about fostering.	Organisational media (E-sight Lite, Chief Executive's Blog, Members Bulletin, News item on the	Jan/Feb 2016	AH/NC/AS	£0

			Intranet, BCC Screens, Yammer)			
White British/Irish	Promoting the inclusive nature of fostering. Promoting the rewarding aspect of fostering and the long term impact it can have on a child's life.	Information event specifically for the Irish community and households affected by the 'empty nest' syndrome.	Interpersonal communication and news media (press release promoting event)	March 2016		TBC
		Fostering recruitment posters and leaflets distributed in key locations including local churches, medical surgeries, council buildings and libraries.	Advertising/promotional media	March 2016	AH/Design Team	TBC
		Case study of a foster carer with an Irish background.	News media/Organisational media (council website and social media platform)	March 2016	AH/CG	TBC
		Leaflet drop to areas where there is a high density of residents with Irish background (Census 2011).	Organisational media	March 2016	AH/WH	TBC
		Fostering recruitment advertisement on social media platforms	Organisational media Advertising/promotional media	March 2016	AH	£0
		Email advertisement of event to current carers.	Organisational media (Dotmailer)	March 2016	AH	£0
Borough Wide	Promoting the rewarding aspect of fostering and the long term impact it can have on a child's life. Positioning fostering as a professional career.	Fostering recruitment outreach at key locations across the borough and surrounding locations.	Interpersonal communication	All year	A/TW/KE	£0
		Fostering recruitment advertisement in local papers including Brent Kilburn Times	Advertising/promotional media	Sept and Dec 2015 Mar 2016	AH/KE	TBC

		and The Brent Magazine				
		Fostering recruitment advertisement on websites and social media platforms.	Advertising/ promotional media	TBC	AH/KE	TBC
		Fostering recruitment advertisement on local streets and council buildings.	JCDecaux	Sept and Dec 2015 Mar 2016	AH/KE	TBC
		Leaflet drop to areas which have larger properties.	Advertising/ promotional media	Mar 2016	AH/WH	TBC
		Leaflet drop to areas which have higher density of households affected by the 'empty nest' syndrome.	Advertising/ promotional media	Mar 2016	AH/WH	TBC
		Raising awareness of LGBT Fostering and Adoption Week	Advertising/ promotional media	7 – 13 Mar 2016	AH/TW/KE	TBC
Black African/ Caribbean	Raising awareness of adoption.	Special information event during National Adoption Week	Interpersonal communication	19 – 25 October 2015	AH/TW/ KE/MS	£0
		Promotion of National Adoption Week	Advertising/ promotional media (Brent Civic Centre Screens) Organisational media (E-sight Lite, Chief Executive's Blog, Members Bulletin, News item on the Intranet, BCC Screens, Yammer)	19 – 25 October 2015	AH	£0
		Raising awareness of adoption during Black History Month events at Brent	Interpersonal communication	29 October 2015	AH/TW	£0

Evaluation

Tackling the drop out rate – on average 10% of initial enquiries result in an application and 5% of enquiries go on to produce an approved foster carer. Whilst this data is in line with other West London boroughs we are determined to understand and improve our performance.

Although the communications and marketing campaigns generate enquiries, there is a significant drop out rate after the first enquiry which can be for a variety of reasons. Initial ideas around challenging this are:

Keeping people interested – sending them something after enquiry to keep them ‘warm’ e.g. copy of information booklet or a promotional item and providing call backs where necessary. If they are not pursuing fostering, find out the reason why and use it to inform next year’s marketing strategy.

In order to meet all of the outlined objectives for both fostering and adoption, the following evaluation methods will be carried out to assess and analyse the success of our activities:

- Evaluation forms after events/workshops
- Media monitoring (press office and web team to evaluate all press coverage featuring fostering and adoption)
- Distribution/pick up rate of newsletters and marketing materials
- Level of participation/numbers attending at fostering and adoption events
- Profile of event attendees (giving the ability to measure if we are reaching out to the right groups)
- Bespoke surveys to find out people’s awareness of fostering and adoption
- Anecdotal feedback from staff and partners
- Monitoring data figures for fostering and adoption
- Enquiry rate
- Transferral and resignation rates
- Assessments
- Web analytics to monitor website usage and social media influence.

Appendix 1: Ethnicity of Brent Foster Carers²

Ethnicity	Ethnicity of our current foster carers (%)	Ethnicity of our current adopters waiting for placement (%)	Ethnicity of our Looked After Children (%)	Ethnic breakdown of Brent population
Black British	56%	10%	36%	18%
White (European/British)	20%	45%	28%	36%
Asian British	17%	45%	16%	33%
Mixed Heritage	5%	0%	16%	5%
Other	2%	0%	4%	6%

Appendix 2: Age of Brent Foster Carers³

Age	Age of our current foster carers in %
21-30	3%
31-40	10%
41-50	26%
51-60	43%
61-70	17%
70+	1%

² [Brent Foster Carer Analysis 31.03.15](#)

³ [Brent Foster Carer Analysis 31.03.15](#)

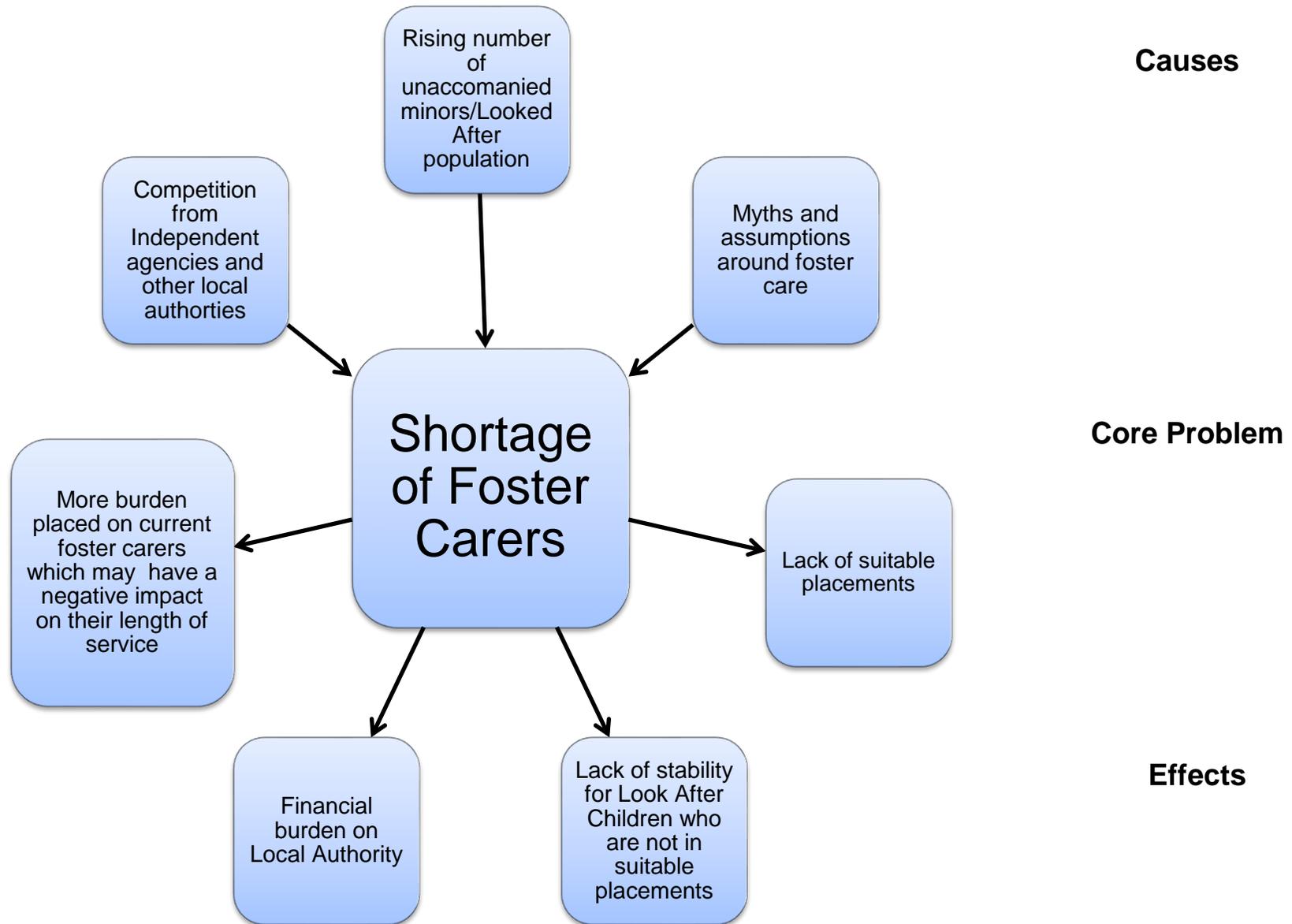
Appendix 3: Where Brent Foster Carers Live:

WARD	% Foster Carers
Alperton	3%
Barnhill	7%
Belsize	1%
Brentford	1%
Brondesbury Park	1%
Burnt Oak	1%
Bush Hill Park	1%
Camberwell Green	1%
Central	1%
Childs Hill	1%
Colindale	1%
Colliers Wood	1%
Copers Cope	1%
Coppetts	1%
Dollis Hill	2%
Dudden Hill	2%
East Acton	1%
Enfield Lock	1%
Fortune Green	1%
Glyndon	1%
Golders Green	1%
Greenford Green	1%

Greenhill	2%
Hale	1%
Hanger Hill	1%
Harlesden	4%
Harrow on the Hill	1%
Harrow Road	1%
Haverstock	1%
Headstone South	1%
HEMMINGWELL	1%
JAMAICA	1%
Kensal Green	2%
Kenton	1%
Kenton West	1%
Kilburn	4%
King's Park	1%
Long Ditton	1%
Manor	1%
Mapesbury	2%
Northolt West End	1%
Northwick Park	4%
Perivale	1%
Preston	5%
Queens Park	1%
Queensbury	1%
Rayners Lane	1%

Roxbourne	1%
Shadwell	1%
St Katharine's & Wapping	1%
St Marys	1%
Stanmore Park	2%
Stonebridge	7%
Sudbury	1%
The Risboroughs	1%
Tokynnton	5%
TOWCESTER	1%
UNKNOWN	3%
Waltham Cross	1%
Wealdstone	1%
Welsh Harp	1%
Wembley Central	4%
West Harrow	1%
West Hendon	2%
White Hart Lane	1%
Willesden Green	2%
Witham South	1%
Yiewsley	1%
(blank)	1%

Appendix 4 – Problem Tree: A problem tree provides an overview of all the known causes and effect to an identified problem and it establishes the context for this marketing strategy.



Appendix 4 – Objectives Tree: The Objectives tree provides the results and effects of the issues raised in the problem tree.

