



**Corporate Parenting Committee
3 November 2015**

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

**Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report
1 July – 30 September 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 second 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 September 2015 there were:
- 97 children placed with Brent foster carers compared to 107 children at the end of the previous quarter. This is 30% of the total.
 - 46 children placed with a relative or family friend on a fostering basis compared to 48 children at the end of the previous quarter. This is 14% of the total.
 - 91 children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) compared to 84 children at the end of the previous quarter. This is 28% of the total.
 - 72.4% of children lived within a fostering setting as at 30th September 2015.
- 5.3 The overall LAC population increased during the reporting period; from 323 on 30th June 2015 to 326 on 30th September 2015. The Corporate Parenting Committee previously requested details of any LAC placed abroad. As at 30th December there was one young person placed in Ireland. The vast majority (83%) of children reside within 20 miles of Brent across a range of placement settings.
- 5.4 There has been a reduction in in-house and an increase in IFA placements since the previous quarter. One reason has been the increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) approaching the borough for support, many of whom are under the age of 16. Between 1st July and 21st September 2015 12 UASC started to receive support, 8 of whom were within foster placements. This represents 21% of all children starting to be looked after during this period. During the same period in 2014 only 5 UASC started to be looked after, with just 2 requiring a foster placement.

This represents 9% of children starting to be looked after during the period. As a result we have found that our in-house fostering capacity to accommodate teenagers has been affected. The proportion of all Looked After Children who are UASC is now 16%, compared to 11% 12 months ago. The service has fewer internal foster carers approved to look after teenagers and therefore a growth in new referrals in this age range adversely affects our ability to provide in-house resources.

- 5.5 The number of in-house carer resignations and terminations exceeded approvals in 2014-15 and this has had an adverse impact upon our capacity to provide placements for children in-house. This has been recognised by the service and recruitment activity has been re-focused – resulting in an increase in enquiries and assessments in progress. This will result in greater capacity within the service and it is anticipated that the numbers of children placed in-house will rise.
- 5.5 A greater number and proportion of LAC are also now residing in semi-independent accommodation an increase from 10% - 13% between April-September 2015. This reflects the older age range of young people entering the care system.
- 5.6 The service operates with few vacancies so that the majority of available space with foster carers is maximised. As at 30th September 2015 there were 19 fostering households with at least one bed space available for fostering. This is approximately 15% of the total capacity of non-related households and has increased slightly due to the changing demographic of children entering care and that a higher proportion of our foster carers are approved to care for much younger children.
- 5.7 Using Ofsted data returns compiled by the West London Alliance (WLA) to enable benchmarking, as of 31st March 2015, Brent had the highest number of fostering households within the West London Alliance sub-region and the highest number of filled fostering places as at 31st March 2015. Brent also had the highest number of internal fostering placements used at any point during the year 2014-15.
- 5.8 In response to greater demand for placements out of office hours and to ensure children and young people are less likely to be found homes at a distance from Brent the service is working closely with local IFA providers to offer greater range of local carers to the Emergency Duty Team should a placement be required.

6.0 Recruitment Activity

- 6.1 The fostering service carried out 8 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 conducted or was part of many different outreach events such as the Cricklewood and Queens Park festivals.
- 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 56 enquiries about fostering. These enquiries resulted in 17 initial visits. As at the 30th September 2015 there were 13 formal assessments in process under the 2-stage fostering assessment process. Our improved recruitment and marketing activity has seen a significant growth in enquiries to the service this year in comparison to 2014-15. On current performance we are projecting 300 enquiries this reporting year, compared to 203 in 2014-15. From our own historical data as well as comparisons with other boroughs and IFAs on average 10% of enquiries move ahead to a formal application to foster, with approximately 5-6% of applications resulting in an approved fostering household.

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. Fortnightly monitoring of the recruitment process ensures that the recruitment team's performance is scrutinised. Whilst there have been a number of carer resignations, there are a high number of assessments in progress with a projection of 15 completed before March 2016. The service may not however reach the net growth target due to the number of carer terminations. To better understand reasons for carers leaving the service in order to aid recruitment and retention a survey and analysis of those leaving fostering is in process with a report to be completed by the end of November 2015. This analysis will help the service respond to carer needs quickly with the outcome of carers remaining with the service. More focused training for carers to deal with the impact of allegations is one area of focus following from initial scrutiny of the reasons for carers ending their fostering role.

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 July – 30th September 2015 5 panels were held with 21 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group 3 new fostering households and 2 new 'Family and Friends' foster carer households were recommended for approval. 8 fostering and 1 family and friends households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review. 2 family and friends foster carers' approval was recommended for termination due to the young people turning 18 (although both young people remained with the carers under 'Staying Put' arrangements). 3 fostering households' approvals were recommended for termination; 1 due to the carer being unavailable for fostering due to ongoing health issues, 1 due to receiving a substantiated allegation from a child they were employed to work with and 1 as the named child for whom they were approved had left their care and they made a decision to retire from fostering. There were a further 2 resignations of foster carers – one of whom had decided to cease fostering after an unsubstantiated allegation and another foster carer who did not agree with the recommendations from their review about the requirements to attend training within their role. 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 with the panel chair reporting in September that this has much improved.

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 1st July – 30th September 2015 15 training courses were held, attended by 89 foster carers. An overall analysis of the impact of foster carer training carried out during 2015 will be provided with the third quarter fostering service monitoring report.

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 July where the Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services also attended to hear and discuss issues of concern and service development, such as the establishment of the foster carers' association and the impact of social pedagogy.

8.4 The first programme to support the introduction of social pedagogy to fostering was completed in July. The evaluation of the programme found that foster carers reported a greater confidence to support children in their care, more positive working relationships with other professionals and greater capacity to reflect. For social workers the evaluation found the greatest improvements in their feeling of being able to reflect on casework and to provide more effective support to foster carers. Whilst this cohort was of a relatively small scale, the evaluation correlated with research findings in other larger projects. The outcomes we expect to see ultimately are an improvement in educational and other outcomes for children in the care of the foster carers and workers who have undertaken the course.

9.0 Monitoring Arrangements

9.1 During the reporting period there were 5 allegations made against Brent foster carers. In 4 of the 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 26 annual reviews out of a possible 32 during this period. Of those uncompleted, 3 were at the request of the foster carer and 3 due to supervising social worker delays. These have all been re-scheduled and will be completed within timescales.

10.0 Future Developments

10.1 As described above, the first training programme to introduce social pedagogy to foster carers and social care staff has been completed; with encouraging progress evidenced by the evaluation. A small-scale bridging programme will continue from October through until April 2016 to support those who have completed the programme and to share and embed the learning and knowledge more broadly across Children's Social Care. It is anticipated that a second training cohort will commence after April 2016, potentially in conjunction with a partner Local Authority within the West London Alliance (WLA).

10.2 The broader collaborative work has continued within the WLA. The action plan for West London fostering has been taken forward with a focus this quarter on agreeing the introduction of a regional approach to fostering panels and consolidating a single carer benefits' package to foster carers. This will include a cross-regional approach to council tax exemption. This is to ensure Local Authority carer support offers are closely aligned.

10.3 As described in the April-June 2015 Fostering Service monitoring report the main activities for the following 6 months 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.
- To ensure that we are better able to understand the reasons for carer resignations and terminations of approval to enable a more effective recruitment and retention strategy.

Appendices

- (i) Fostering Newsletter Autumn 2015

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