



**Corporate Parenting Committee**  
28 April 2016

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

**Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report  
1 January – 31 March 2016**

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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.

**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 These remain the same as those provided to the Corporate Parenting Committee in the Brent Fostering Service Quarter Three Monitoring report (October – December 2015).

#### **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 The overall LAC population increased during the reporting period; from 328 on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015 to 337 on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016.

5.3 As at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 there were:

- 104 children placed with Brent foster carers compared to 96 children at the end of the previous quarter. This is 31% of the total.
- 44 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 13% of the total.
- 88 children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) compared to 83 children at the end of the previous quarter. This is 26% of the total.
- 71% of children lived within a fostering setting as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016.

5.4 As reported to the Corporate Parenting Committee in the Brent Fostering Service Quarter Three Monitoring report (October – December 2015), the most recent reporting period has continued to see an increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) approaching the borough for support. There were 64 UASC in the Local Authority's care as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016, compared to 58 at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015. The proportion of all Looked After Children who are UASC is now 19%, compared to 14.8% in April 2015. A greater number and proportion of LAC are now residing in semi-independent accommodation - an increase of 10% to 16% from April 2015 to March 2016. This reflects the older age range of young people entering the care system within Brent.

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 2016 there were 13 fostering households with at least one bed space available for fostering. This is approximately

12% of the total capacity of non-related households. The majority of carers with vacancies are approved for younger children and are therefore unsuitable to care for the older range of children becoming looked after.

- 5.6 The growth in new referrals in the older age range adversely affects our ability to provide in-house resources. However, semi-independent accommodation provides an effective option for those young people who are assessed as being able to live in a shared setting with a member of staff permanently on site.
- 5.7 The number of in-house carer resignations and terminations exceeded approvals in 2015-16, creating a net deficit of 3 households. This has had an adverse impact upon our capacity to provide placements for children in-house. To improve performance our activity has been re-focused (see section 6 below), resulting in an increase in enquiries and assessments in progress. This will result in greater capacity within the service and it is anticipated that, should the balance of LAC population move to a younger age range, the proportion of children placed in-house will rise over the next 12 months.
- 5.8 In response to the need 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 has continued to work closely with local IFA providers to provide the details of local carers to the Emergency Duty Team should a placement be required.

## **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 within the Brent community. For example we started the New Year with a campaign to encourage people to make a difference to the lives of other children: <https://www.brent.gov.uk/services-for-residents/children-and-family-support/fostering/make-a-difference/> and also participated in the national LGBT fostering recruitment week, with advertising across the borough.
- 6.2 Community events took place at a number of venues including St Raphael's Estate, the Pakistani Community Centre and three of our libraries. The purpose of our outreach activity is to market our brand within the local community and reinforce our campaign messages. The success of our marketing activity has been evidenced by our Fostering and Adoption campaigns being the second most remembered local authority initiatives over the last 12 months.
- 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 Our improved recruitment and marketing activity has seen a significant growth in enquiries to the service this year in comparison to 2014-15. The service received 307 enquiries in 2015-16, 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 enquiries resulting in an approved fostering household. The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 75 enquiries about fostering. These enquiries resulted in 10 initial visits. As at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 there were 15 formal assessments in process under the 2-stage fostering assessment process.

6.4 A digital advertising agency was selected in late 2015 to deliver a digital marketing strategy to assist Brent Council's Fostering and Adoption team to recruit foster carers from Brent and surrounding areas of West London. The agency was used as a result of their excellent track record in delivering fostering and adoption recruitment campaigns for other Local Authorities. Their focus is on recruiting foster carers for hard to place children, sibling groups and children with severe health needs. These are all areas which Brent has had difficulty recruiting to in the past. The first campaign with the agency was delivered between 28<sup>th</sup> December 2015 and 31 March 2016. During that period we received:

- 36 enquiries
- 3 initial visits as a direct result of those enquiries.
- 2 fostering assessments were initiated.

Overall the campaign has been successful in producing enquiries that match our recruitment needs, for example potential foster carers with 1 spare bedroom or more to look after sibling groups or older children. We also had the opportunity to deliver targeted campaigns based on geography and demographic data. We were also able to track and monitor campaigns and optimise the advertisements which were more popular.

6.5 The target for the service in 2016-17 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. There continue to be some ongoing delays in recruitment of foster carers due to the slow return of information from the Disclosure and Barring Service. This is a systemic issue affecting all fostering agencies within London and has been signalled as a priority area to resolve by the Metropolitan Police.

6.6 Our analysis of current foster carer views and those of carers who have ended their fostering role is helping the service to respond to carer needs quickly with the intended outcome that there are greater levels of retention.

## **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 that includes an elected member. The panel chair and vice chair are independent people with professional experience of fostering. Recent demand has risen and three panels have been held every two months.

- 7.2 The functions of the Fostering Panel are to consider:
- Each application and to 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 relevant manager. The panel makes recommendations to the fostering service and these recommendations are referred to the Agency Decision Maker who is the Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes.
- 7.4 During the period 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 4 panels were held with 23 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:
- 4 new fostering households and 2 new 'Family and Friends' foster carer households were recommended for approval.
  - 9 fostering and 1 family and friends households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review.
  - 1 foster carer's approval terms were changed from short to long term to provide permanency for a child in placement.
  - 2 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following allegations.
  - 1 fostering household's approval was recommended for termination - due to concerns relating to the carer's limited insight into the impact fostering had on their own family and the carer's adult children not being in support of the task continuing.
  - 1 'Family and Friends' fostering household's approval was terminated following the placement breakdown;
  - 2 fostering households resigned from their fostering 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. Discussions have been held with the chair about how the service could more effectively deal with the issue of allegations against carers to support the reintegration of the household to fostering. The issue of inconsistent children's social worker attendance at panels has been noted. As a result the panel advisor is providing a regular report to the Head of Service for Care Planning to ensure there is a regular presence, whether in the form of a written report or verbal presentation. At the next panel training day a mock panel will be created, where supervising social workers will be invited to take the roles of panel members. This will improve both panel members and social workers' understanding of the role and what is expected of them in presenting their assessments and reports.

## **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 January 1<sup>st</sup> – March 31<sup>st</sup> 2016 16 training courses were held, attended by 132 carers. Unfortunately a number of courses were cancelled due to poor sign ups. This is an area that is being looked at for the forthcoming training year.
- 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 generally attended by a small group of carers and the Fostering Support Team are working to improve attendance as they provide an important communication link between carers and the Placements' Service.
- 8.4 As mentioned in the Q3 2015-16 Fostering Monitoring Report, Patrice Thomas, one of our longest serving foster carers, was recognised nationally through the award of the MBE in the New Year Honours' List.
- 8.5 A continuation of social pedagogy development through a bridging project to embed the learning of foster carers and social care staff is taking place between October 2015 and April 2016. Meetings have been held with other Local Authorities using a similar approach in order to share practice.

## **9.0 Monitoring Arrangements**

- 9.1 During the reporting period there were no formal allegations made against a fostering household. There was one standards of care meeting held to discuss inappropriate correspondence from a foster carer to the department – this was resolved appropriately.
- 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 24 annual reviews out of a possible 32 during this period. Of those uncompleted, 5 were at the request of the foster carer and 3 were 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, a social pedagogy bridging programme is in operation between October 2015 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. A project plan has been developed with the intention to deliver a second training cohort in 2016.

- 10.2 Collaborative work with other west London authorities has continued with joint foster carer preparation training now in place. An agreement was reached from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 for all 8 West London Alliance authorities to offer the same carer benefits' package to foster carers – delivered through the Fostering Network.
- 10.3 The main activities for the fostering teams within the newly formed LAC & Permanency Service from April 2016 are as follows:
- To use the opportunity from a newly formed service to listen effectively to the voice of children and young people and embed their views into improving the quality and consistency of our fostering service.
  - To ensure that the recruitment of in-house carers continues to improve and that the impact of the digital campaign is evaluated.
  - To finalise the survey of current foster carers and to compare this with exit interviews completed in December 2015 to identify trends and to support service planning.
  - To ensure the foster carer training offer is monitored and the impact reflected within foster carer supervision and care of children.
  - To ensure feedback from fostering panel is embedded into quality assurance work and development areas are progressed by team managers.

### **Appendices / Links**

- (i) Brent's 'Make a Difference' Fostering Campaign:  
<https://www.brent.gov.uk/services-for-residents/children-and-family-support/fostering/make-a-difference/>
- (ii) Fostering Newsletter Winter 2016.

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