

	<p>Corporate Parenting Committee</p> <p>25 October 2016</p> <p>Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</p>
<p>Wards affected: ALL</p>	
<p>Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report 1 July – 30 September 2016</p>	

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 new LAC and Permanency Service of the Children and Young People's Directorate. The vision as set out in the 2016-17 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.
 - To increase the number of children placed closer to home with our in-house foster carers.
 - Children are found permanent families without delay and within their extended family network where appropriate.

4.0 Staffing Arrangements

- 4.1 These remain the same as those provided to the Corporate Parenting Committee in the Brent Fostering Service Quarter One Monitoring report (April-June 2016).

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 slightly during the first quarter from 352 on June 30th 2016 to 353 on September 30th 2016.

As at the 30th September 2016:

- 97 children placed with Brent foster carers. This represents 27.5% of total LAC.
- 47 Children placed with a relative or family friend on a fostering basis. This is 13.3% of total LAC
- 90 children placed with IFAs. This is 25.49% of total LAC.
- 67.14% of children live within a fostering setting at 30/09/16

- 5.3 The most recent reporting period has continued to see an increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) approaching the borough for support. There were 72 as at 30/06/16 and this number has already risen to 81 as at 30/09/16, which represents 22.9% of all looked after children in Brent compared to 20.5% in June 2016. There are 18.7% LAC in Semi Independent accommodation as at 30/09/16, an increase from 15.6% in June 16. This reflects the older age range of young people entering the care system within Brent which includes an increase in entry of older aged UASC.

- 5.4 The service operates with few fostering vacancies so that the majority of available space with foster carers is maximised. As at 30th September 2016 there were 12 fostering households with at least one bed space available for fostering. This is approximately 10% of the total capacity of non-related households. The current carers with vacancies have a range of approval categories.

6.0 Recruitment Activity

- 6.1 The fostering service carried out 10 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. As this quarter encompassed the summer holiday months we were busy with summer community festivals and fun days, and had a presence at the Chalkhill Fun Day, the South Kilburn Family Fun Day, the Harlesden Community Festival, the New Life Christian Family fun Day and Queen's Park Day. We also took part in National Fitness Day at Vale Farm and Bridge Park

Leisure Centres, the Wates Living Space event, and a LGBT Community event in Harlesden. These events were in addition to our usual outreach activity in local supermarkets, leisure centres and within the communal spaces in the Civic Centre.

- 6.2 In addition to our usual recruitment activity, the fostering service participated in the Macmillan coffee morning. This outreach activity alone produced 12 fostering enquiries.

In line with our Recruitment Strategy, and our commitment to ensuring that our fostering recruitment utilises a broad range of mediums, we have also engaged in a second social media campaign in collaboration with Net Natives during the month of September. For information on Net Natives please visit <https://netnatives.com/about-us/>.

- 6.4 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.

- 6.5 Our improved recruitment and marketing activity has seen a significant growth in enquiries to the service in 2015-16 compared 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 61 enquiries for fostering. These enquiries resulted in 11 initial visits. As at the 30th September 2016 there were 16 formal assessments in process under the 2-stage fostering assessment process.

- 6.6 The target for the service in 2016-17 is to recruit twelve to 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. We are currently reviewing our retention of foster carers and are comparing our allowance and support provision against other London local authorities and agencies. We will report on this in the next quarterly report. There continue to be some ongoing delays in approval 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 be resolved by the Metropolitan Police.

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, currently Cllr Dixon. 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 (Nigel Chapman).
- 7.4 During the period 1st July 2016 – 30th September 2016, 5 panels were held with 27 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:
- 1 new 'Family and Friends' foster carer household was recommended for approval.
 - No new fostering households were recommended for approval.
 - 9 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review.
 - 3 'Family and Friends' fostering households were found suitable to continue as carers for specific children following review.
 - 3 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following Standards of Care concerns.
 - 1 fostering household was found suitable to continue following an allegation.
 - 1 fostering household's approval was recommended for termination due to a list of concerns which left panel feeling unsatisfied that the fostering household remained suitable.
 - 'Family and Friends' fostering households' approval were terminated due to the child in placement turning 18.
 - 2 fostering households' approval were terminated due to a breakdown in communication between the carer and the department which made panel felt unsatisfied that the fostering household remained suitable.
 - 5 fostering households resigned from their fostering role. Reasons included relocation outside London, Special Guardianship Order for another child in placement which left no capacity to continue to foster.

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. The department now more effectively deal with the issue of complaints or allegations against carers to support the reintegration of the household to fostering. The issue of children's social worker attendance at panels also continues to improve.

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 our Learning and Development offer to foster carers we provide a range of mandatory and identified training courses including sessions in evenings and at weekends. During the period July 1st to September 30th, 9 training courses were offered and a total of 75 carers attended these training courses within the period.
- 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 Senior managers have continued to meet during this reporting quarter to consider the continued development of social pedagogy throughout the service. This is referred to in the future developments section below.
- 8.5 The fostering teams are currently planning our Annual Foster Carer Conference for late November 2016 with a theme of "Developing Resilient Foster Carers". The conference will also provide an opportunity for foster carers to review the Looked After Children Pledge.

9.0 Monitoring Arrangements

9.1 During the reporting period there were no formal allegations made against a fostering household. During the previous reporting period we had had two outstanding allegations. Both carers had their annual reviews brought forward and each was subsequently presented to the Fostering Panel, where their suitability to continue to foster was considered. Each carer was reapproved to continue fostering.

There was one Standard of Care/Serious Concern meeting held during this quarter. This matter has been partly resolved and the carer's review is to be presented to the Fostering Panel in due course. The carer is currently placed on hold at her request due to some personal issues. It is anticipated the matter will be resolved by December 2016.

- 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 25 annual reviews during this period.

10.0 Future Developments

- 10.1 An initial social pedagogy programme commenced in October 2015. This comprised of a training programme that included foster carers and social workers. The next stage of the project has been the appointment of a principal social worker and steering group to progress the project plan. It is planned to appoint a social pedagogy social worker, who will be based within the Fostering Service, and then to deliver a second training cohort in early 2017.
- 10.2 We continue to work collaboratively with our west London neighbours to deliver joint foster carer preparation training and we also agreed from April 2016 to offer the same carer benefits' package to foster carers which is 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/>

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