



**Corporate Parenting Committee
February 2017**

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

**Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report 1st
October – 31st December 2016**

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 third 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 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 LAC and Permanency 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 The overall LAC population remained stable at 351 as at the 31st of December 2016, compared with 353 on September 30th 2016.

As of the 31st December 2016:

- 90 children were placed with Brent foster carers. This represents 26% of total LAC.
- 45 Children were placed with a relative or family friend on a fostering basis. This is 13% of total LAC
- 99 children were placed with IFAs. This is 28% of total LAC.
- 67% of looked after children were living within a fostering setting at 31/12/16.

5.3 The most recent reporting period has seen the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) approaching the borough for support stabilising. Earlier this year, between July and September 2016, the number of UASC rose from 72 to 81, which represented 23% of all looked after children in Brent compared to 20.5% in June 2016.

As of the 31/12/16 there continued to be 81 UASC. There are 19% LAC in Semi Independent accommodation as at 31/12/16, which is the same as the 19% in September 2016. The greater use of semi-independent provision in the last six months is directly linked to the large number of looked after 16 and 17 year olds, more than a third of our current LAC population.

5.4 The service operates with few vacancies so that the majority of available space with foster carers is maximised. As at 30th September 2016 there were 9 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 four 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 winter holiday months we were less busy with community festivals. Our main presence was at Black History month events, local sports centres and outreach within the civic centre reception area. We did however attend one community event; a Careers Fair at the Pakistani centre, which was well attended.
- 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 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 54 enquiries for fostering. These enquiries resulted in 13 initial visits. Of these 13 initial visits 8 are progressing to assessment. Currently 7 are in Stage 1 and 1 assessment is being “fast tracked” into Stage 2. As of the 31st December 2016 there were 16 formal assessments in process under the 2-stage fostering assessment process.

- 6.4 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 projecting to recruit 11 fostering approvals by the end of March 2017. There have been 20 fostering households deregistered to date this year.

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 diverse and highly experienced central list of Panel members that includes an elected member. The panel chair and vice chair are independent people with professional experience of fostering and panel members include those with personal experience of the fostering system. Demand requires three panels to be 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, including those of a Standards of Care issue and those exploring any allegations made.
- 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 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 1st October – 30th December 2016, 4 panels were held and 26 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:

- new 'Family and Friends' foster carer households were recommended for approval;
- new fostering households were recommended for approval;
- 7 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
- 'Family and Friends' fostering households were found suitable to continue as carers for specific children following review;
- 1 fostering household was found suitable to continue fostering following Standards of Care concerns;
- 3 fostering households were found suitable to continue following an allegation;
- 1 'Family and Friends' fostering household's approval was terminated due to the child in placement turning 18;
- 1 'Family and Friends' fostering household's approval was terminated due to the granting of a Child Arrangement Order for the child in placement;

5 fostering households resigned from their fostering role for the following reasons:

- relocation outside London;
- moving to an independent fostering agency;
- no longer having the room to foster due to son returning from university;
- not being able to meet the commitment to fostering due to securing full time employment; and
- carers deciding they needed to focus on the needs of their own birth children.

All of the recommendations made to the Agency Decision Maker were ratified.

8.0 Training and Support to Foster Carers.

- 8.1 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.
- 8.2 During this reporting period 13 individual training courses were offered providing 118 training spaces.
- 8.3 The Fostering Development Conference took place during this quarter and offered carers the opportunity to attend a range of workshops to augment their training programme. The theme of this year's conference was "Developing Resilience" with the morning workshop led by a very engaging external trainer. The conference also provided an opportunity for foster carers to consider the Looked After Children Pledge. Feedback from those attending the event was extremely positive.
- 8.4 Overall, in this period, carers attended 141 separate learning and development opportunities. Where there is poor attendance at training by foster carers this is followed up by Supervising Social Workers, the Fostering Reviewing Officer and the Fostering Panel.
- 8.5 Foster carers receive a fortnightly newsletter, the link here gives an example of the content. <http://dmtrk.net/2K3U-ZA9D-C655ZUEM02/cr.aspx>

9.0 Monitoring Arrangements

- 9.1 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 21 annual reviews during this period.
- 9.2 During the reporting period there were two formal allegations made against the same fostering household. Both matters were referred to the local authority LADO. The first allegation was not deemed to be an allegation and the matter was closed. The second allegation led to a child protection investigation being carried out and the outcome was that the allegation was unfounded. The carer's annual review has been brought forward to February 2017 which will address the issues raised in the allegation/investigation. The review will be subsequently presented to the Fostering Panel to look at continuing suitability. In the interim, the young person was moved to an alternative placement, as the young person's needs were assessed as being more likely to be met in an alternative placement.
- 9.3 There was one Standard of Care/Serious Concern meeting held during this quarter. This matter has been resolved and the carer's review is to be presented to the Fostering Panel in March 2017, to look at suitability to foster. The carer has not been placed on hold, as the serious concern did not impact upon the young person's placement. The young person is placed on a long term basis and made his feelings known that he would not want to move.

10.0 Future Developments

10.1 In relation to the continued development of our social pedagogy programme, the social pedagogy steering group has drafted a “terms of reference” document and also held an Open Event for staff during this quarter. The purpose of the Social Pedagogy Steering Group is to map and support the introduction of the next phase of social pedagogy across the LAC service. Further training for both foster carers and social work staff is being set up with the intention of using social pedagogy as a tool to increase placement stability through the establishment of new approaches to dealing with challenging needs and behaviours of our LAC.

Staff who had completed Cohort 1 in 2015/16 were able to deliver a Social Pedagogy workshop to foster carers as part of our annual foster carers’ conference in November 2016, which was well received by carers who attended this.

10.2 We continue to work collaboratively with our west London neighbouring local authorities to deliver joint foster carer preparation training and we have also agreed to offer the same carer benefits’ package to foster carers, (from April 2016), which is delivered through the Fostering Network.

10.3 In line with our Recruitment Strategy, and our commitment to ensuring that our fostering recruitment utilises a broad range of mediums, we will engage in a second social media campaign with Net Natives during the final reporting quarter (Jan-Mar 2017). For information on Net Natives please visit <https://netnatives.com/about-us/>.

10.4 There is a greater use of Independent Fostering Agencies which also relates to our greater numbers of older LAC. We are using our data smartly to ensure that we are able to make the right placements for our LAC against a national shortage of foster carers and a very competitive market. We continue to benchmark ourselves against other local authorities. Our Brent foster carers are more able to provide placements for younger children and we are planning our next round of advertising to target foster carers for an older age group of LAC. We very much need to attract households who are able to have a teenage focus in their work with LAC. We have also been using information from exit interviews with foster carers to consider how we can improve our offer to them. We will be establishing an out of hours telephone support line for evenings and weekends so that carers can speak directly to a member of our team when they have issues which they urgently need support with.

10.5 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. In this reporting quarter we have agreed to implement a new way of gathering feedback from our children and young people, using up to date technology which will make this more accessible to our LAC.
- To ensure that the recruitment of in-house carers continues to improve and that the impact of the digital campaign is evaluated. All of our current digital campaigns have clear evaluation plans and these are feedback into our

Marketing Strategy in order for outcomes to be measured. We also continue to meet monthly to ensure a good level of oversight and scrutiny of the recruitment and assessment process.

- 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. This is currently being progressed as referred to in 10.4 above. When themes have emerged, we will use this information to inform our foster carer recruitment and retention.
- To ensure the foster carer training offer is monitored and the impact reflected within foster carer supervision and care of children. A good example of the way in which we tailor training to the individual needs of carers was our Annual Foster Carer conference, held in November, where each carer was allocated to a specific workshop in line with their placement type and/or learning needs.
- To ensure feedback from fostering panel is embedded into quality assurance work and development areas are progressed by team managers. Fostering Panel feedback is provided to practitioners via supervision and is used to inform annual appraisals and team plans.

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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