



**Corporate Parenting Committee  
19<sup>th</sup> April 2017**

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

**Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report  
1<sup>st</sup> January – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017**

**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 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.

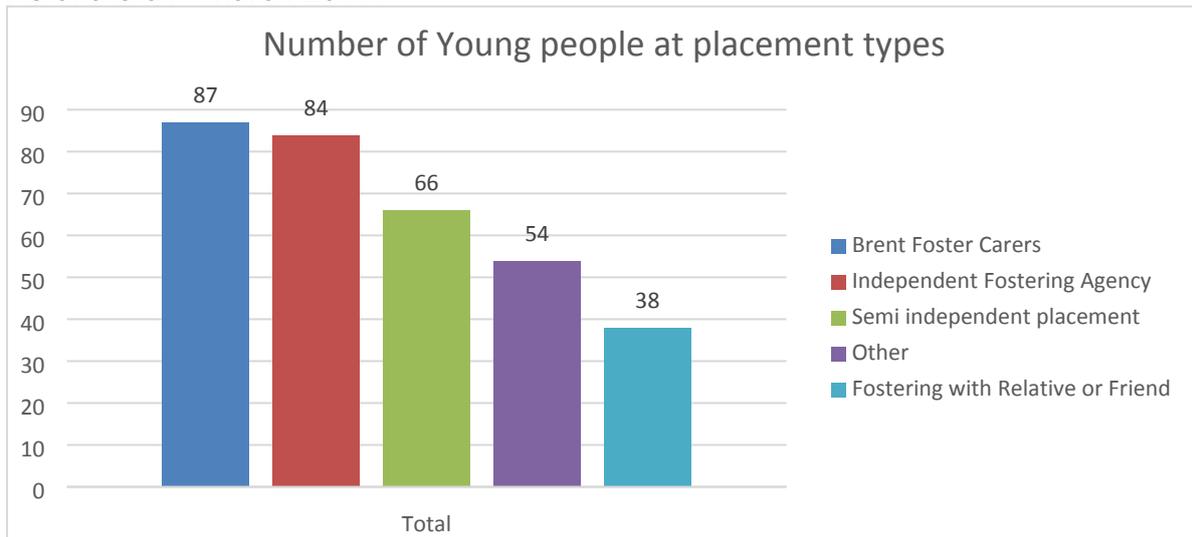
## 4.0 Staffing Arrangements

- 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 looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 35%.
  - Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15%
  - Percentage of looked after children placed in Independent Fostering Agencies – annual target 25%.
  - Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 75%
- 5.2 The overall LAC population has reduced to 329 as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 compared to 351 as at the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2016, this is a 6.2% reduction.

As of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017:

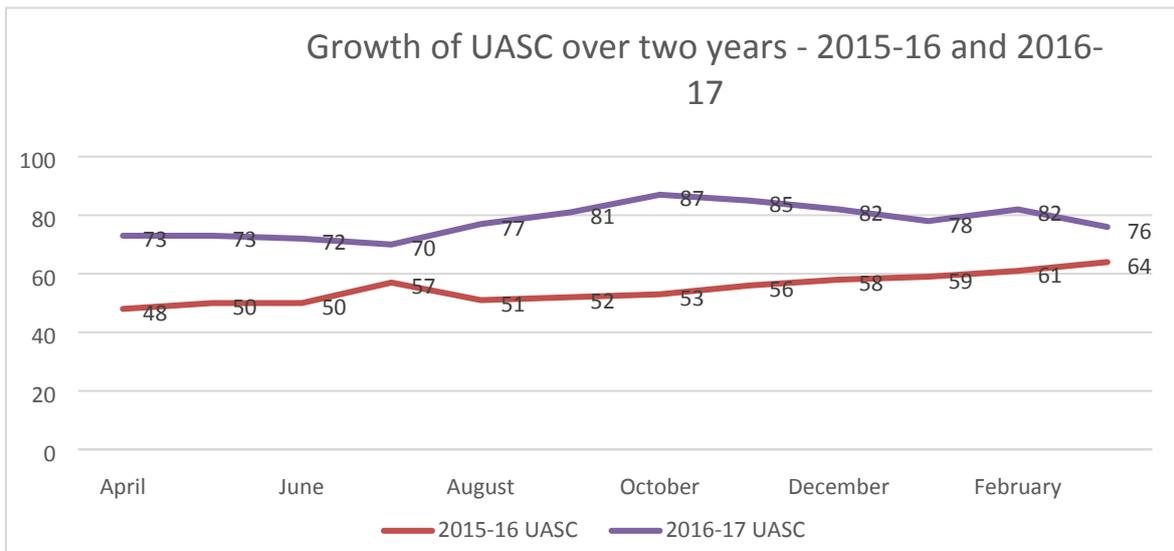


Please note '**other**' includes Children's homes (including secure), residential schools, hospitals, other local authorities and placed for adoption with placement order not with current foster carer.

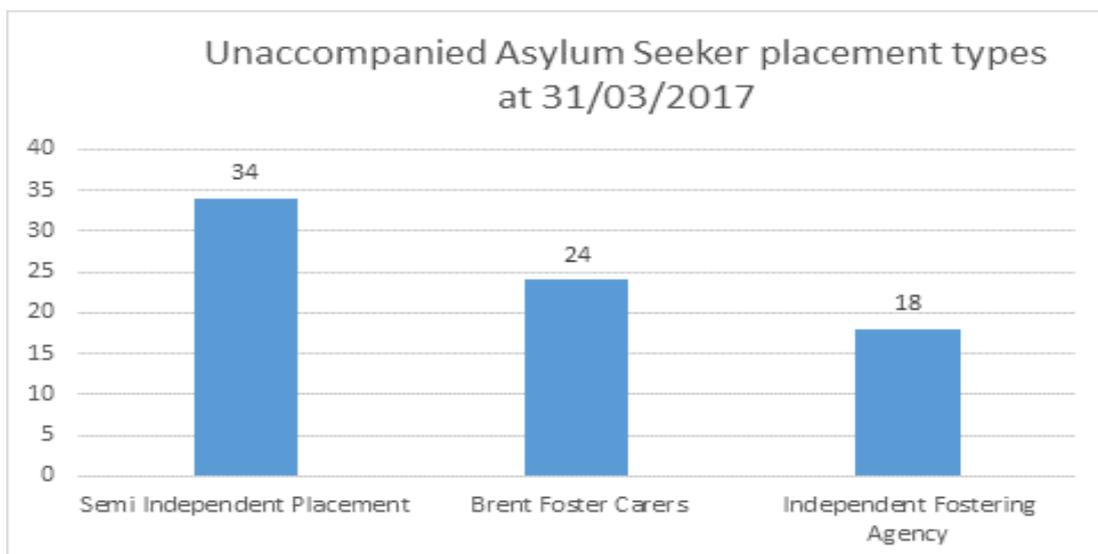
- 87 children were placed with Brent foster carers. This represents 26.4% of total looked after children.

- 84 children were placed with IFAs. This is 25.5% of total looked after children.
- There are 66 looked after children in Semi Independent accommodation (Residential accommodation not subject to Children’s Home Regulations) as at 31/03/17, which represents 20.1% of all looked after children
- 38 Children were placed with a relative or family friend on a fostering basis. This is 11.6% of total looked after children
- 211 looked after children were living within a fostering setting at 31/03/17. This is 64.1% of total looked after children

5.3 The most recent reporting period has seen the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) approaching the borough for support stabilised.



As of 31/03/17 there was a slight drop from 81 to 76 UASC, which represents 23.1% of all LAC. This percentage is higher in spite of declining number of UASCs. This is because of a decline in the overall number of looked after children. 34 UASCs are placed in semi-independent accommodation and 42 are placed in foster care.



5.4 In Brent we also support 60 care leavers who are former UASCs. This makes 22% of our Care Leaver population.

5.5 The fostering service operates with few vacancies so that the majority of available space with foster carers is maximised. As of 31st March 2017 there were 13 fostering households with at least one bed space available for fostering. This is approximately 14% of the total capacity of non-related households, the current carers with vacancies have a range of approval categories.

## **6.0 Recruitment and Assessment 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 within the Brent community. Our main presence was at the Health and Wellbeing event facilitated by the council, International Women's Day, and outreach within the civic centre reception area.

6.2 We have continued holding the monthly information evenings 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 74 enquiries for fostering. These enquiries resulted in 13 initial visits. As of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 there were 16 formal assessments in process under the 2-stage fostering assessment.

Our recruitment and marketing activity saw a slight decrease in enquiries to the service in 2016-17 compared to 2015-16. The service received 268 enquiries in 2016-17, compared to 307 in 2015-16. The reason for the slight decrease for this year could be attributed to the fact we had fewer community events this year in comparison to the previous year. Our last two major campaigns which were targeted recruitment campaigns to 'empty nesters' and families interested in fostering 'sibling groups', may also have had some impact on the reach of our audience. We used relatively new methods of advertisement such as Net Natives and Sky advert, which we are testing, altering and tailoring to meet our recruitment needs. The results from these advertisement models will take a while to filter through.

The conversion rate from enquiry to approval has also decreased as it was 1.5% in 2016-17, in comparison to 2.9% in 2015-16. This is less than the generally accepted average for fostering service providers of 4.5% of enquires resulting in an approved fostering household. The decrease in approval could be the ongoing issue of overcrowding in Brent. We are often approached by potential foster carers at the outreach events, who are keen and willing to foster but are unfortunately not progressed due to lack of space in their home. We also had a number of initial visits deemed unsuitable (including issues such as large levels of debt within a household or child protection concerns in their home local authority) and as such did not progress to assessments.

6.4 The target for the service in 2016-17 was 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. Although we have

not achieved this target, with 4 new fostering approvals, we have a total of 10 fostering assessments booked into panel for approval within the months of April, May and June. The new, permanent Head of Service who commenced in role in January 2017 has focused on this as a priority to resolve in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2017-18.

## **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 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 2017 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, 5 fostering panels were held with 20 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:

- 1 family and friends who had their 3<sup>rd</sup> annual review and was suitable to continue fostering.
- 1 fostering household was deferred for further assessment.
- 6 fostering households was found suitable to continue fostering following their 3<sup>rd</sup> annual review.
- 1 fostering household was found suitable to foster following an allegation.
- 1 fostering household was deferred following an allegation.
- 1 family and friends foster carer was found suitable to continue fostering following further assessment around the child's needs.
- 1 new fostering household was recommended for approval.
- 1 family and friends household's approval was terminated due to the child reaching the age of 18 years old.
- 1 family and friends household's approval was terminated due to the child moving to an alternative placement.
- 1 foster carer's approval was recommended for termination but the panel did not agree and recommended continued fostering.
- 5 fostering households resigned from their fostering for the following reasons:

- Moved out of London
- Change in circumstances due to birth child's studies.
- Wants to focus on daughter's wedding.
- Young person reached 18 years old and they no longer wish to foster
- 1 transferred to a different fostering provider.

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 16 individual training courses were offered providing 222 training spaces. A small number of courses were cancelled in this period due to facilitators being unavailable.
- 8.3 Overall, in this period, carers attended 107 separate learning and development opportunities. Any issues with attendance at training is followed up by Supervising Social Workers, the Fostering Reviewing Officer and the Fostering Panel.
- 8.4 Throughout this period the Development Coordinator has been developing the new learning programme for 2017/18 utilising feedback from carers, supervising social workers, children via the participation lead and from consultation with facilitators directly.

## **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 Review Officer completed 20 annual reviews out of a possible 26 during this period. Of those uncompleted:
- 3 review were cancelled by foster carer due to carers' personal circumstances.
  - 3 reviews were cancelled due to supervising social worker unplanned absence.

Any annual reviews that could not go ahead in the months that they were scheduled for took place in the following month.

- 9.2 During the reporting period there was one formal allegation made against a fostering household. This matter was referred to the respective local authority Designated Officer (LADO) as the carers live outside of Brent. The allegation went through a section 47 investigation process under the Children Act 1989, concluding that the allegations were unsubstantiated. The foster carers will now have a further annual review that will be presented to the Fostering panel before fostering can recommence.

9.3 There were no new Standards of Care/Serious Concerns' meetings held during this quarter.

## **10.0 Future Developments**

10.1 In supporting the Social Pedagogy Programme, we have recruited a Social Pedagogy Development Worker who, subject to references, will be joining London Borough of Brent in May 2017, the post is being funded through reallocation of existing resources. The focus of their work will be to support the development of social pedagogical thinking and practice with those staff who have undertaken previous training and to undertake direct work with Brent fostering households and Looked after Children, modelling a social pedagogic approach to support carers to affect positive change. This will mean more focused work with young people who have challenging behaviour, which will in the long-term improve placement stability. In addition they will be working closely with the Fostering Manager, Operational Managers and Learning and Development Team to promote and embed social pedagogy practice.

10.2 We are currently planning our 2017 Fostering Fortnight (beginning 8<sup>th</sup> May) campaign, which will include a variety of "pop up" recruitment stands in some of Brent's busiest high roads, a photoshoot with the Tottenham Hotspur football team in the shadow of Wembley Stadium and a Brent schools' art competition.

10.3 In February 2017 we agreed to work with Coram Voice to distribute a survey called 'Bright Spots' to help us understand the care experience and well-being of looked after children called 'Your Life, Your Care'. The survey asked children and young people aged between 4 and 18 years old to answer questions about their placements, the people they know, their well-being, their carers and social worker, their rights and the chances they get. The survey was actively promoted by supervising social workers, foster carers and designated Looked after Children teachers.

The Local Authorities that take part will receive a bespoke report of the findings and an interactive platform to allow us to benchmark our results against the population as a whole. Ofsted expects local authorities to ensure the views and experiences of children and young people influence service development and strategic thinking and this survey will enable us to achieve this. The main findings of the results will be reported in the next quarterly monitoring report. The findings are expected to help us shape development of support services for our children and carers.

In March 2017 the Placement Assessment Recruitment Team launched a new video to promote fostering in Brent. The video highlights the experience of a current foster carer and a previous looked after child and is a great showcase of the journey to becoming a foster carer in Brent. The launch was attended by dignitaries such as the Mayor of Brent, Dawn Butler MP and Councillor Butt whom were all complimentary and supportive of the work we undertake. We will be using the video in our future recruitment campaigns.

10.4 Our annual exit interview report has been completed for the period April 2016-February 2017. Some of the key areas that emerged and that will be considered and addressed in our planning for 2017/18 were:

- *The need for better placement matching, suitable to the needs and experiences of individual foster carers.* We are putting in place regular information sharing with the various teams within the service i.e. Placement Commissioning, LAC teams and Locality teams to raise awareness around our expectations.
- *The need for consistent communication between foster carers, social workers and management.* Building into current systems to ensure that any concerns raised are dealt with in a timely manner, thus allowing carers to feel supported.
- *The need to recognise and reward the role played by foster carers, including an assessment of the current allowance rates and its comparison with neighbouring boroughs and general support we offer to carers.* We are undertaking a benchmarking exercise of fostering allowances. This work is expected to be completed by June 2017.

## **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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