	<p>Corporate Parenting Committee 24 October 2017</p> <p>Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</p>
<p>Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report 1st July – 30th September 2017</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 LAC and Permanency Service of the Children and Young People's Directorate. The vision for the service as set out in the 2017-18 service plan is that:
 - We will increase good quality local placements for children by securing more in-house fostering placements. We will recruit, assess and approve new foster carers to accommodate 10 placements by the end of September 2017 and an additional 10 placements by March 2018.
 - There will be a decrease in the number of resignations/de-registrations of foster carers as a result of appropriate support and well-established, positive relationships with foster carers.

- Placements will be well matched to children's individual needs. The best foster carers will be recruited for our children.
- Diversity needs including disability, race, religion, language and culture will always be considered when placing a child.
- Children will be found permanent families without delay and within their extended family network where appropriate.

4.0 Staffing Arrangements

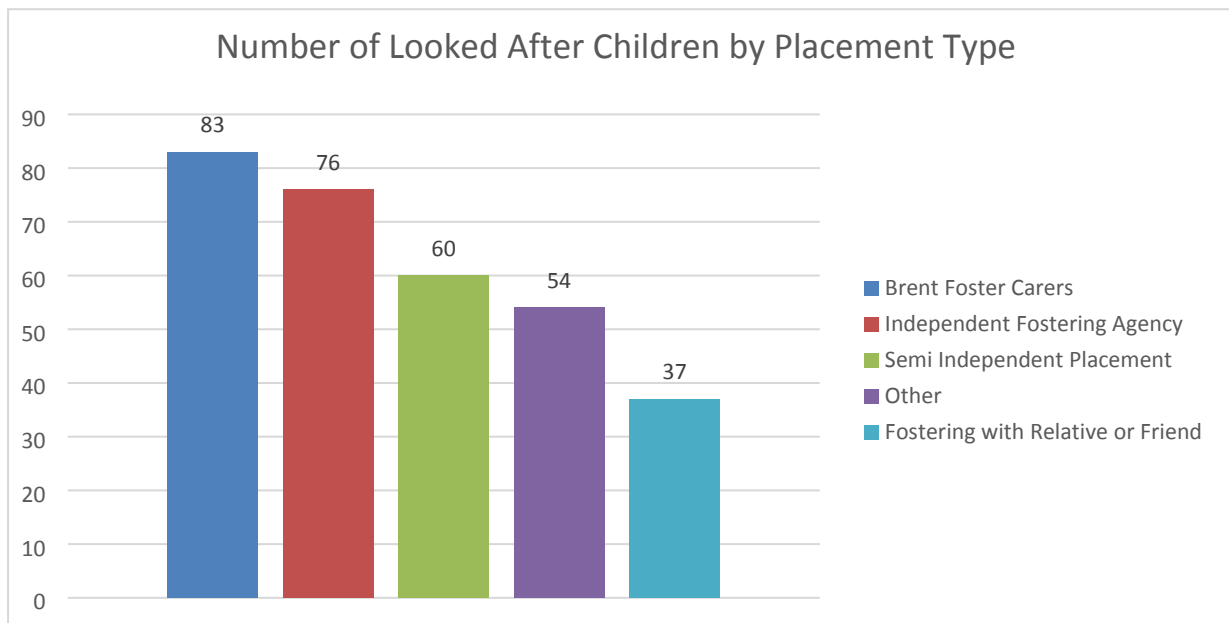
- 4.1 The primary in-house fostering functions are distributed across two teams within the LAC and Permanency Service:
- The recruitment and assessment of foster carers is completed within the Placements Assessment and Recruitment Team.
 - The ongoing support and supervision of foster carers is the responsibility 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.
- 4.3 A consultation process regarding proposed changes to the delivery of social work services within the department (including fostering) was initiated in September 2017 with this due to conclude in October 2017. The next report to this committee will provide further details in this area.

5.0 Placement Activity

- 5.1 The corporate performance targets for this year relating to fostering remain broadly similar to last year:
- 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 reduced to 311 on 30th September 2017. This is a 5.5% reduction in the figure at 30th June 2017 (329). The number of LAC as at 30th September 2017 was 310.

As of the 30th September 2017:

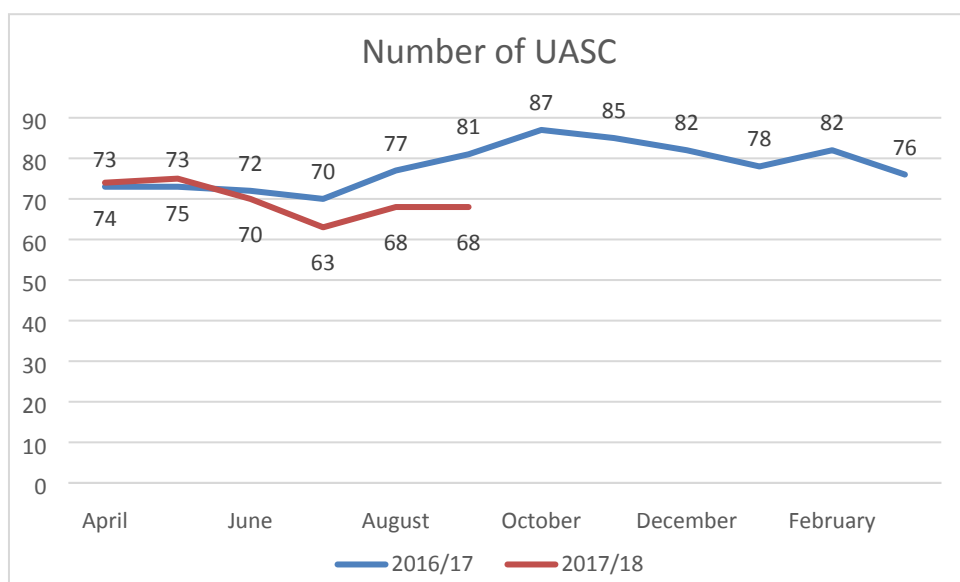
- 83 children were placed with Brent foster carers. This represents 26.7% of total looked after children.
- 76 children were placed with IFAs. This is 24.5% of the total looked after children population.



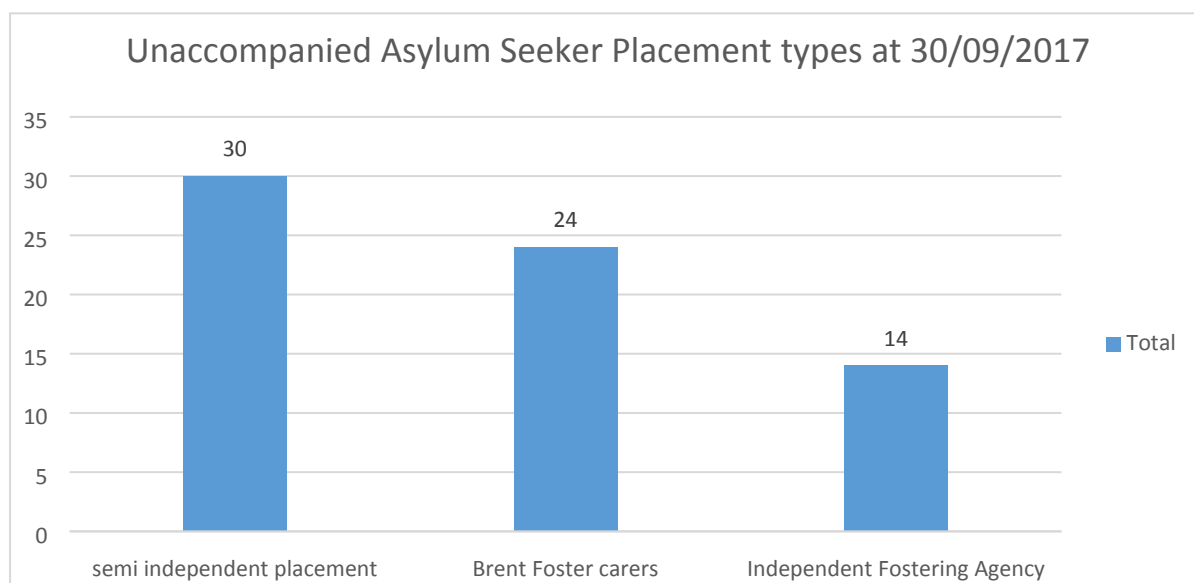
Please note '**other**' includes Children's homes (including secure), residential schools, hospitals, placement with parents, other local authorities and placed for adoption with placement order not with current foster carer.

- There are 60 looked after children (aged 16-18) in semi Independent accommodation (Residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations) as at 30/09/17, which represents 19.3% of all looked after children.
- 37 children were placed with a relative or family friend on a fostering basis. This is 11.9% of total looked after children as at 30/09/17.
- 198 looked after children were living within a fostering setting at 30/09/17. This is 63.87% of total looked after children. The lower percentage is explained due to a reduction in the overall number of looked after children and an increase in the number and proportion of our looked after children aged over 16. It is a significant challenge to identify foster placements to accommodate older teenage young people.

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



- 5.4 As of 30/09/17 there were 68 UASC, 13 less than the same period last year. The 68 UASC represents 21.9% of all LAC as at 30/09/2017. This is one percent lower than the same period last year. 30 UASC are placed in semi-independent accommodation and 38 are placed in foster care.



6.0 Recruitment and Assessment Activity

- 6.1 There were 5 new fostering approvals (with capacity for 6 children) in the first quarter of 2017-18 and a further 3 fostering household approvals (with capacity for 4 children) have been approved in the second quarter. The service is currently meeting the targets set for 2017/18.
- 6.2 The fostering service carried out 13 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. During this

quarter (over the summer months) our main presence was at local community festivals and events with stalls as well as local supermarkets.

- 6.3 The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 53 enquiries. These enquiries resulted in 10 initial visits. As of the 30th September 2017 there were 7 formal assessments in process under the 2-stage fostering assessment.
- 6.4 Monthly information evenings continue 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.

7.0 Fostering Panel

- 7.1 The aim, functions and operation of the Fostering Panel have been set out in previous reports to the Corporate Parenting Committee.
- 7.2 During the period 1st July – 30th September 2017, 4 panels were held with 19 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:
- 3 new fostering households were recommended for approval;
 - 1 new “family and friends” fostering household was recommended for approval;
 - 6 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
 - 1 fostering household was found suitable to continue as long-term foster carers following allegations made by children in placement;
 - 3 foster households’ suitability to foster was terminated due to their resignation from the role: 2 wanted to focus more on their family life and 1 described the breakdown in their relationship with the department as their reason. This was in relation to our response to concerns reported about the standard of care provided. As a result, training on how to handle and respond to allegations has been provided to social work teams and fostering panel members.
 - 5 “family & friends” fostering households approval as foster carers ceased: 3 due to the child in placement turning 18 and 2 due to a Special Guardianship Order being granted.

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

8.0 Training and Support to Foster Carers.

- 8.1 Brent has a Learning and Development offer to foster carers and as part of this we provide a range of mandatory and identified training courses including sessions in evenings and at weekends.

During the period 1st July to 30th September 2017, 12 individual training courses were offered providing 95 training spaces.

The Fostering Development Co-ordinator (FDC) role is currently vacant, but recruitment is underway and it is anticipated that the post will be filled by mid-November. There is a full training calendar in place and the service is managing the training arrangements within existing resources until the new FDC takes up post.

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 33 annual reviews out of a possible 38 during this period. Of those uncompleted:
- 1 was cancelled as an investigation into a standard of care issue required completion before the review was held;
 - 2 were postponed due to staff sickness;
 - 2 were postponed by foster carers due to other short-term commitments.

These have all been re-scheduled where necessary.

- 9.2 During the reporting period there were three formal allegations made against a fostering household. All of these were investigated through the Local Authority Designated Officer process (the formal arrangements within which allegations against professionals or volunteers working with children are considered). Two have concluded as unsubstantiated. One is pending. The carers' annual reviews have all been brought forward and will be taken to the Fostering Panel for consideration.

There are currently two allegations that pre-dated this reporting period and remain outstanding. In the first case the Fostering Panel considered a carer's position in June 2017 with the matter deferred until November 2017 pending further assessments. In the second case the panel recommended in March 2017 that more work was required to assess whether the carers have the capacity to meet a young person's long-term needs. This matter will be concluded at the November 2017 Fostering Panel.

During this quarter 5 complaints were received from fostering households. Three have been resolved to a satisfactory manner and two remain outstanding. The complaints related to issues such as a payment dispute, a difference of opinion with the child's social worker, information not being shared by a child's social worker, arrangements regarding respite care and a lengthy wait to obtain a child's passport.

In these situations the Head of Service reviews each complaint and considers service improvement measures. With the role encompassing both children's social work and fostering services there are clearer methods through which improvements in systems between the two areas can be made.

We are constantly learning from complaints/feedback and improve practice. For example, one of the complaints made was in relation to children's passports

which highlighted some difficulty we have when applying for Polish passports due to different domestic law in the UK and Poland. This has resulted in an action to review the immigration status of our LAC who are not British citizens. This work has now commenced. This piece of work will allow us to be more proactive in resolving immigration matters early.

10.0 New Developments

- 10.1 The Social Pedagogue started work within the Fostering Service within this reporting period. Previous committee reports have explained the social pedagogy role of the social pedagogue.

Fostering social workers who previously received introductory training to social pedagogy now have the opportunity to undertake a Level 3 Diploma in Social Pedagogy as part of the Children and Young People's Department's commitment to enhancing practice. It is anticipated that the training will start in January/February 2018 and will last 28 weeks.

Contacts with other Local Authorities who are implementing Social Pedagogy have been initiated. It is envisaged that by mid-November potential Level 3 Social Pedagogy Learners will visit Surrey County Council.

Further development work in the second half of the reporting year will focus on embedding proposed changes to the staffing structure within the fostering assessment and support teams, considering amendments to how information evenings are conducted and ensuring managers within the service undertake visits to carers' homes with social workers to observe practice.

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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