



Corporate Parenting Committee

7 February 2018

Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services

Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: 1st October 2017 to 31st December 2017

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Nigel.Chapman@brent.gov.uk 020 8937 4387</p> <p>Onder Beter, Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Onder.Beter@brent.gov.uk 020 8937 1228</p>

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 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).

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 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 Detail

3.1 Service Values

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.

3.2 Staffing Arrangements

As mentioned in the previous quarterly report, a consultation process regarding proposed changes to the delivery of social work services within the department (including fostering) was initiated in September 2017. The rationale for change was based on the need to learn from the best social work systems, to embed quality improvements within services and to secure a more permanent and stable workforce.

Prior to the re-alignment of services the primary in-house fostering functions were distributed across two teams within the LAC and Permanency Service:

- The recruitment and assessment of foster carers were completed within the Placements Assessment and Recruitment Team.
- The ongoing support and supervision of foster carers was the responsibility of the Fostering Support Team.

This has changed and as of the 8th January 2018 the arrangements are as follows:

- The recruitment, assessment and support of foster carers will be undertaken within two Fostering Support and Assessment Teams.
- The Fostering Reviewing Officer role has moved to the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service; the Fostering Development Co-ordinator role has also moved to the same service area.
- The Fostering Panel Advisor role will be incorporated into a new Service Manager role which will have management oversight of the Fostering Support and Assessment, Kinship and Adoption and Post Permanency Teams.

The benefits of realignment will allow continuity of relationships with foster carers, more independent scrutiny and challenge through fostering reviewing

process and better aligned development programme for foster carers. Through these changes, the service aims to recruit and retain more foster carers which will have a positive impact on outcomes for children and young people. Wider benefits to children and young people will be stronger relationships with social work teams created through smaller team structures with a greater focus on staff learning and development.

3.3 Placement Activity

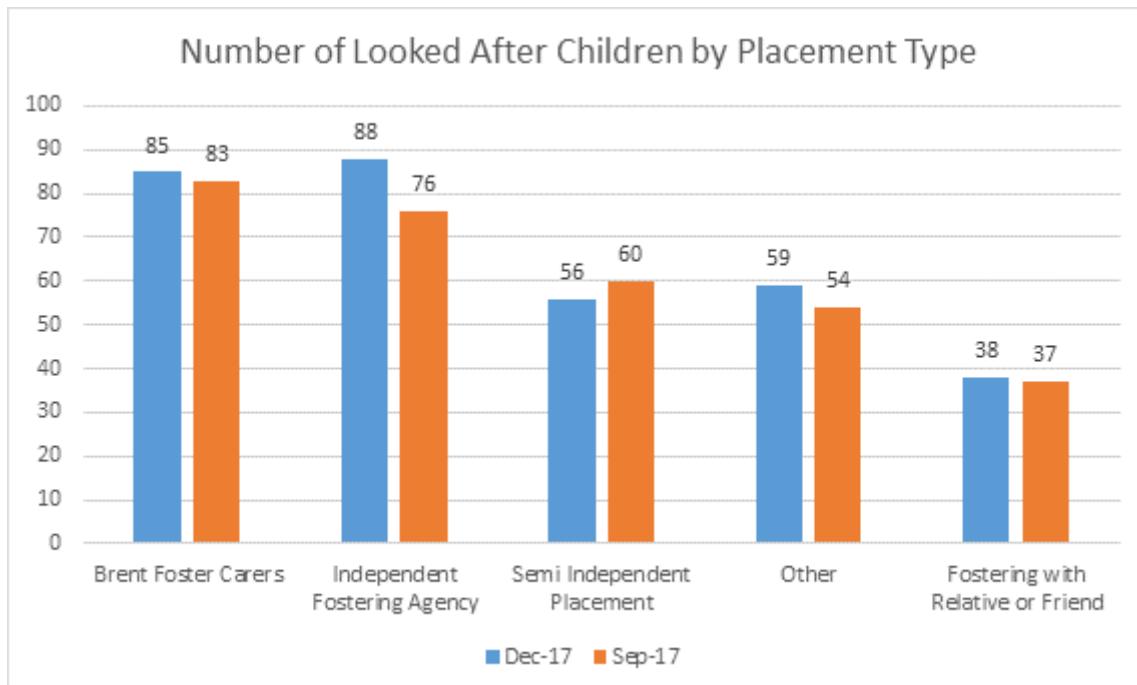
The corporate performance targets for this year relating to fostering remain broadly similar to last year:

- 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%

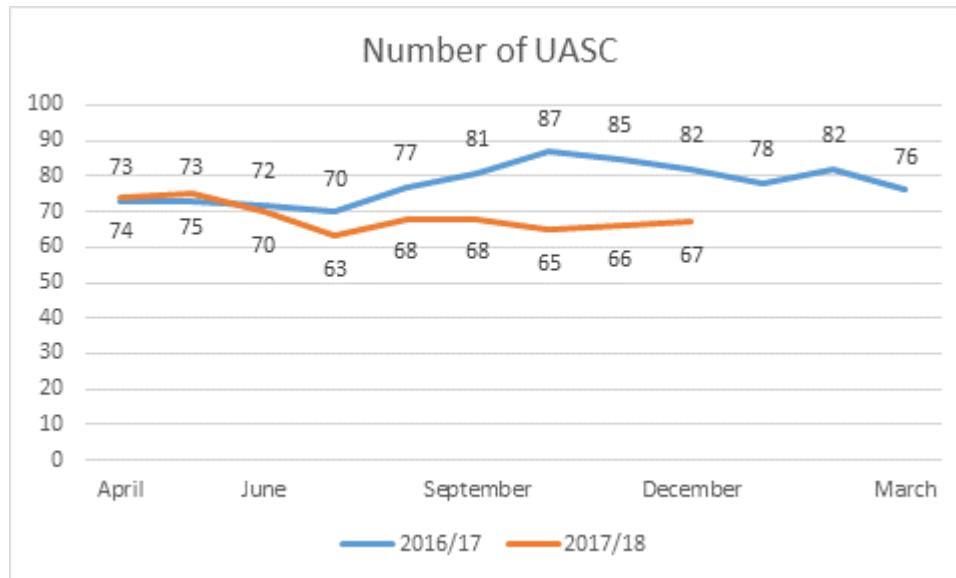
The overall LAC population increased from 311 on 30th September 2017 to 326 as at 31st December 2017. This is a 4.8% increase in the number of Looked After Children.

As of the 31st December 2017:

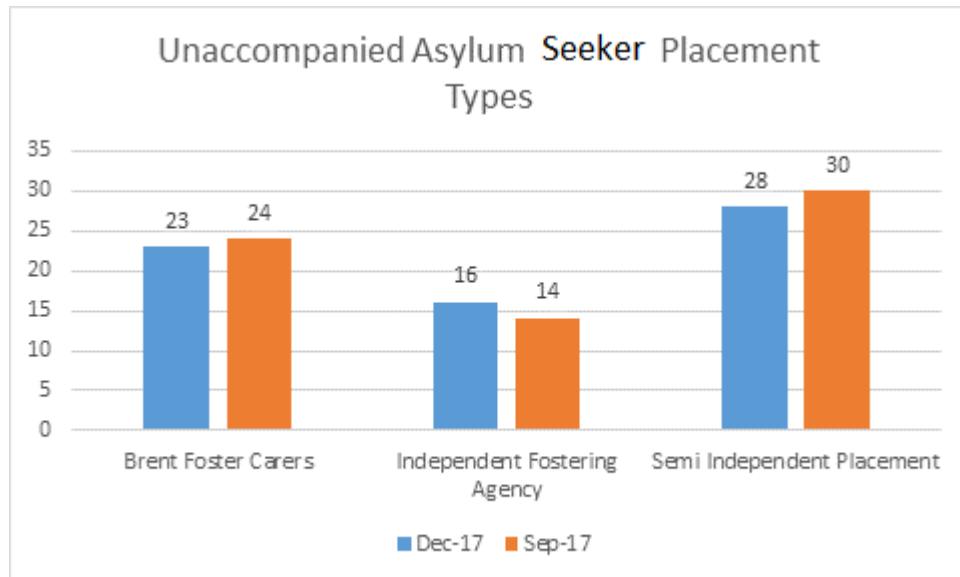
- 85 children were placed with Brent foster carers. This represents 26.07% of total looked after children.
- 88 children were placed with IFAs. This is 26.9% of the total looked after children population. (This is an increase of 12 children and 2.4% since end of Q2)



- There are 56 looked after children (aged 16-17) in semi Independent accommodation (Residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home)
- Regulations) as at 31/12/17, which represents 17.2% of all looked after children.
- 38 children were placed with a relative or family friend on a fostering basis. This is 11.7% of total looked after children as at 31/12/17.
- 213 looked after children were living within a fostering setting at 31/12/17. This is 65.3% of the total of all looked after children. This is a slight increase from Q2 where the percentage was 63.9% of LAC.



As of 31/12/17 there were 67 UASC, 15 fewer than the same period last year. The 67 UASC represents 20.6% of all LAC as at 31/12/2017. 28 UASC are placed in semi-independent accommodation and 39 are placed in foster care.



3.4 Recruitment and Assessment

The fostering service carried out 6 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, the main presence was at two local hospitals (Northwick Park and Central Middlesex Hospital) and within the foyer area of the Brent Civic Centre. Additionally, there were 3 monthly information evenings held at the Civic Centre, providing an opportunity to members of the public to find out more about the fostering role and to enable Brent to determine whether an individual or family has the potential to become a carer for Brent.

The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 16 enquiries for fostering. These enquiries resulted in 3 initial visits. As of the 31st December 2017 there were 8 formal assessments in process. These are a mixture of Stage 1 and Stage 2 assessments.

The target for the service in 2017-18 remains to recruit 20 fostering placements within the reporting year; with a net growth of 5 fostering households once carer resignations and terminations of approval are taken into account. We have achieved a total of 11 new fostering household approvals (with 12 potential fostering placements and a mother and baby placement) in quarters 1, 2 and 3 of 2017-18. A further prospective fostering household is currently booked into panel for approval within the final quarter of 2017.

Recruitment targets have not been achieved in this reporting period. One of the reasons for this was lower conversion rates from referrals to 'initial visits' as only 4 referrals resulted in initial visits in Quarter 3 compared to 7 in Quarter 1 and 6 in Quarter 2.

Additionally, a significant number of assessments have not progressed beyond Stage 1 of the assessment process over the last two quarters. Of the positive Initial Visits that progressed to Stage 1 in Q1, 6 out of a total of 8 assessments ended in Stage 1, and in Q2, 4 out of 9 assessments ended in Stage 1. The reasons for ending these assessments are varied and include;

- Applicants' personal circumstances; moving house, family crisis, ill health, deciding to remain with current fostering agency.
- A lack of engagement and communication from the applicants.
- One case where it became evident that the applicant's level of English proficiency was not sufficient.

Through the newly realigned fostering assessment and support service, focus will be on recruitment and retention of foster carers with the aim to have 5 net fostering household recruited by the end of the financial year.

3.5 Fostering Panel

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.

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.

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 Head of Service, LAC Care Leavers & Permanency.

During the period 1st October – 31st 2017, 4 panels were held with 15 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:

- 4 new 'Family and Friends' foster carer households were recommended for approval;
- 3 new fostering households were recommended for approval;
- 3 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
- 1 'Family and Friends' fostering household was found suitable to continue following an allegation;
- 2 'Family and Friends' fostering households' approval were terminated due to the following:
 - child in placement returning to birth parents' care;
 - placement change for a young person.
- 1 fostering household resigned from their fostering role following the outcome of a Standards of Care concern;
- 1 fostering household was found unsuitable to continue fostering due to there being significant concern about their ability to safeguard a child and themselves.

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

3.6 Training and Support to Foster Carers

As was mentioned in the previous quarterly report, the Fostering Development Co-ordinator (FDC) role was vacant and recruitment was underway. This role has been successfully recruited to and the successful candidate commenced in role on 8th January 2018.

There continues to be a full training calendar in place and the service managed, within existing resources, to deliver these courses during the period without the FDC in position.

During this reporting period (Oct-Dec 2017), 20 individual training courses were offered. These courses ranged from core training such as 'First Aid', 'Concerns and allegations', 'Domestic violence & the effect on young people', 'Caring for a Child who has been sexually abused', 'Dealing with the

Challenges of Caring for Unaccompanied Minors' to more specialist training such as 'Down Syndrome Awareness', and 'Blood Borne Diseases'.

The carers' feedback about training sessions was very positive. In terms of First Aid training, carers specifically mentioned their new skills in CPR and being aware of dangers before they pose a risk to children of different ages as something they will take forward. They felt that Concerns & Allegations training provided tools to identify signs and how to continue offering good standards of care whilst an allegation is being investigated. Domestic violence & the effect on young people training was found to be helpful in increasing ability to understand the impact on the child, how this may present itself in the young person's behaviour and how to adjust the care of that young person with this in mind. Another training session provided was dealing with the challenges of caring for unaccompanied minors. Carers felt it provided increased insight into the emotional world of the child (therefore offering increased emotional intelligence in the area) as well as advising on the practical process with dealing with the Home Office. The carers requested this training to be delivered in one day instead of a half day and this request is being reviewed.

3.7 Monitoring

All foster carers, regardless of the length of their approval with Brent must have an annual review of their arrangements.

A total of 32 annual review meetings were scheduled to take place in this reporting period:

- 15 reviews scheduled for October 2017; 10 reviews went ahead;
- 11 reviews scheduled for November 2017; 8 reviews went ahead;
- 6 reviews scheduled for December 2017; 4 reviews went ahead.

Of the reviews that did not go ahead, there were 4 resignations.

During this reporting period there were no allegations against foster carers.

In the last reporting period (July-Sept 2017) there were 3 allegations made against foster carers. Two of these allegations were concluded and have been presented back at the Fostering Panel. They have been recommended to continue fostering. The other allegation has also concluded and will be presented to the Fostering Panel in March 2018.

Following an allegation that was made prior to the last reporting period, the foster carers have resigned. They will be presented to Fostering Panel in February 2018. Learning from the allegations and panel feedback was used to improve our recording of visits to foster carers.

Learning taken from the allegations made against foster carers, resignations and termination of approvals has been on three areas:

- Need for better and more timely communication between allocated social workers and supervising social workers for foster carers

- Need to provide social workers appropriate tools to assess applicants' ability to deal with the changing challenges as children grow into adolescent years
- On one case, need to give careful consideration when placing known challenging children with newly approved foster carers

Training workshops have been arranged and are being delivered to social workers and supervising social workers on the above matters. Team Managers also discuss these cases as case examples in their team meetings to disseminate the learning.

During this reporting period, there were no Standard of Care/Serious Concerns raised.

During quarter two, there were 5 formal complaints received that have all been resolved satisfactorily. There have been no formal complaints in this reporting period.

3.8 New Developments

Social Pedagogy

The Brent Practice Framework has been introduced to the department to support learning and development of staff. Social pedagogy represents one of the 4 practice approaches within the framework.

The Brent employed Social Pedagogue is currently developing a learning and development programme for foster carers with the newly appointed Fostering Development Coordinator. The programme will offer social pedagogic workshops to foster parents, supervising social workers and foster children.

Social pedagogical reflective sessions and support are now being provided to supervising social workers.

Joint social worker and foster carer training

Joint training is currently being delivered to foster carers and social workers in relation to Strengths and Difficulty Questionnaires (SDQs) for looked after children. This has been a positive experience for carers and staff, with several more workshop dates scheduled. These workshops help to develop a common language in relation to emotional wellbeing and enable the SDQ tool to be used to consider how our children and young people are managing, demonstrating resilience and alerting carers and social workers where they may require additional support.

Report sign off:

GAIL TOLLEY

Strategic Director of Children and Young People