



Corporate Parenting Committee
26 April 2018

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

**Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report:
1 January to 31 March 2018**

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| 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 |
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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

Alongside social work services in Brent, fostering has been realigned and the new service has been in place since January 2018. The changes in the fostering service are as follows:

- The recruitment, assessment and support of foster carers are now solely 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 has been 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. This role has been appointed to and is beginning 16th April 2018.

The benefits of realignment will allow continuity of relationships between foster carers and their supervising social workers, more independent scrutiny and challenge through the fostering reviewing process and a development programme for foster carers better aligned with other staff training arrangements. Through these changes, the service aims to recruit and retain more foster carers that will have a positive impact on outcomes for children and young people. Wider benefits to children and young

people will be the creation of stronger relationships with social work teams through smaller team structures with a greater focus on staff learning and development.

3.3 Placement Activity

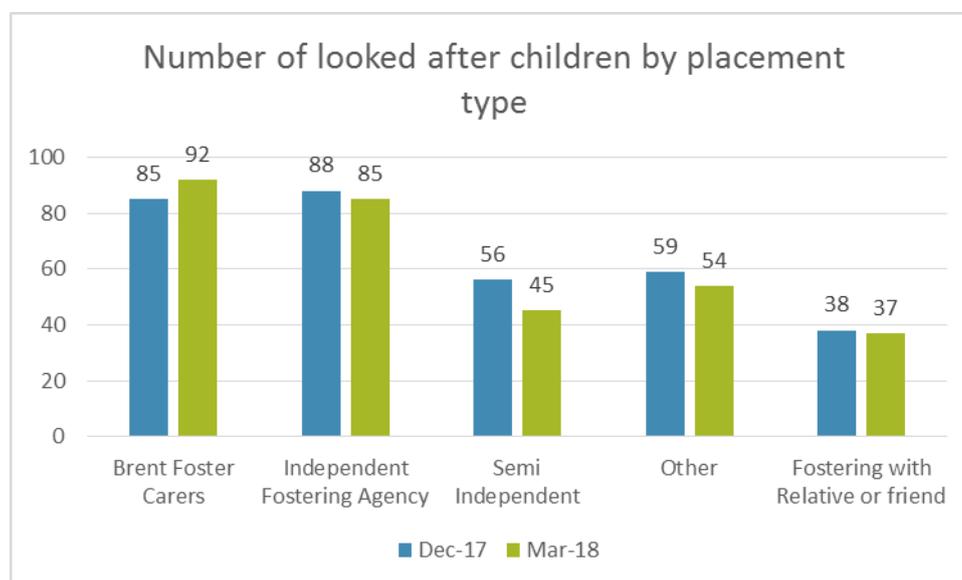
The corporate performance targets for 2017/18 were as below:

- 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 decreased from 326 as at 31st December 2017 to 313 at 31 March 2018. This represents a 4% decrease in the number of looked after children this quarter.

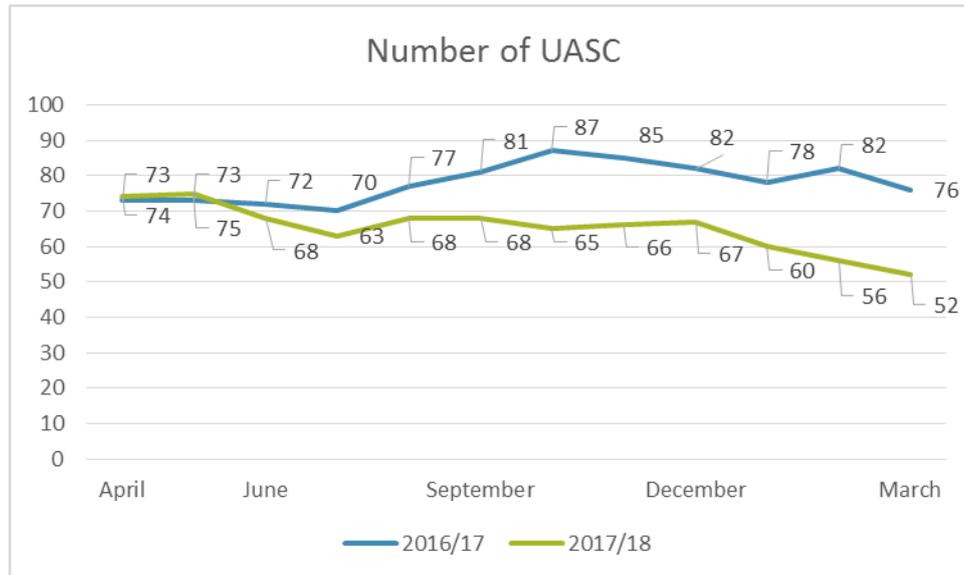
As of the 31 March 2018:

- 92 children were placed with Brent foster carers, compared to 85 children as at 31 December 2017. This represents 29.4% of total looked after children.
- 85 children were placed with IFAs, a reduction from 88 in December 2017. This is 27.2% of the total looked after children population.

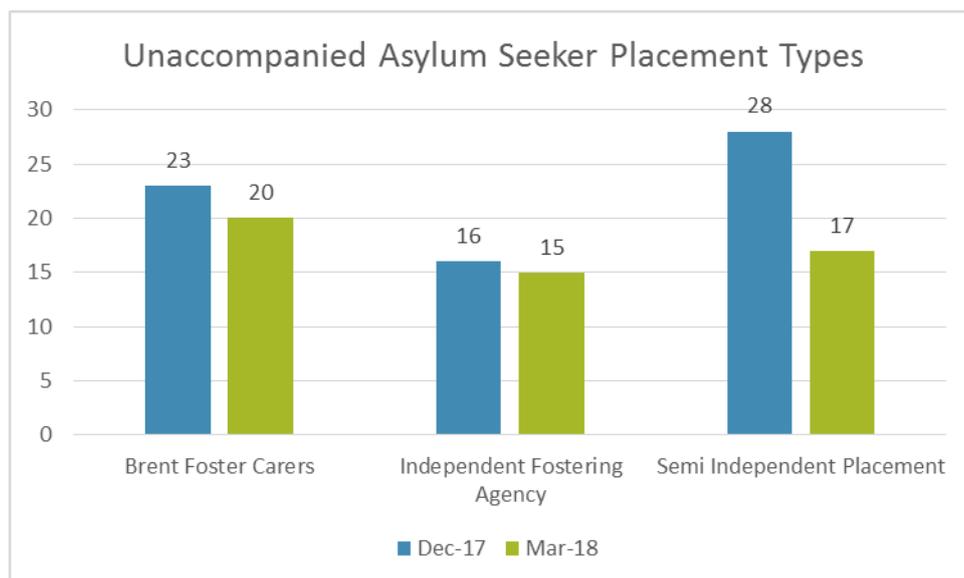


- There are 45 looked after children (aged 16-17) in semi Independent accommodation (Residential accommodation not subject to Children’s Home Regulations) as at 31/03/18, which represents 14.4% of all looked after children.
- 37 children were placed with a relative or family friend on a fostering basis. This is 11.8% of total looked after children as at 31/03/18.

- 215 looked after children were living within a fostering setting at 31/03/18. This is 68.7% of the total of all looked after children. This is an increase from Q3 where the percentage was 65.3% of LAC.



As of 31/03/18 there were 52 UASC, 24 fewer than the same period last year. The 52 UASC represents 16.6% of all LAC as at 31/03/2018. 17 UASC are placed in semi-independent accommodation and 35 are placed in foster care.



3.4 Recruitment and Assessment

The fostering service carried out 9 recruitment focused activities within the reporting period with the aim of raising awareness of fostering and encouraging potential foster carers to contact Brent Fostering Service. During this quarter, the main presence was at the Brent Early Years Conference, at Willesden Library, at the Metropolitan Housing Job Fair in Chalkhill Community Centre 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 82 enquiries for fostering. This includes enquiries generated for an advertising campaign on social media (Facebook) between 26 February and 11 March. The social media campaign reached 19,837 people and generated 47 enquiries, of which 13 enquirers are booked to attend the next monthly information evening.

During this reporting period, there were 5 initial visits. As of the 31st March 2018 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 was 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 12 new fostering household approvals with net growth of 1 fostering household. Recruitment targets could not be achieved in this reporting period. One of the reasons for this was lower conversion rates from referrals to 'initial visits' as 5 referrals resulted in initial visits in Q4 compared to 4 in Q3, 7 in Q1 and 6 in Q2. Only 1 of the initial visits conducted in Q4 has progressed to a full assessment.

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, 7 out of a total of 8 assessments ended in Stage 1, and those that progressed from initial visit to assessment in Q2, 5 out of 9 assessments ended in Stage 1. The reasons for ending these assessments are varied and include:

- Applicants' personal circumstances such as 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.
- Applicants' motivation and parenting skills.

Through the embedded fostering assessment and support service, the focus will be on recruitment and retention of foster carers with the continued aim to recruit 5 net fostering households in 2018-19.

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. After May local elections the councillor will determine which elected member will sit on the Fostering Panel. 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. Current 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 and Permanency.

During the period 1 January – 31 March 2018, 3 panels were held with 14 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:

- 2 new 'Family and Friends' foster carer households were recommended for approval;
- 1 new fostering household was recommended for approval;
- 3 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
- 1 fostering household was found suitable to continue as foster carers following Standards of Care concerns;
- 3 'Family and Friends' fostering households were found suitable to continue following review;
- 1 'Family and Friends' fostering household's approval was terminated due to the child reaching the age of 18;
- 2 fostering households resigned from their fostering role – one for financial reasons and one relocated away from Brent;
- 1 fostering household was found unsuitable to continue fostering due to concerns about their ability to safeguard children.

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

3.6 Training and Support to Foster Carers

The Fostering Development Co-ordinator (FDC) role was vacant in the last reporting period. This role has now been successfully recruited to and the successful candidate commenced in role on 8 January 2018.

During this reporting period, 13 individual training courses were offered. These courses were as below:

- Working with young people affected by domestic violence
- Dyslexia and dyscalculia
- Concerns and allegations
- Strategies for de-escalating anger and aggression in children and young people
- Advanced safeguarding and safer caring
- Promoting safer environments in connected persons care
- Contact and working with birth families
- Life story work
- Promoting emotional resilience in fostered children
- Working with young people towards 'independence'
- Refresher- concerns and allegations
- First Aid
- Refresher safeguarding and safer caring

The carers' feedback about training sessions was very positive. For example, 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 working with young people towards 'independence' training provided good insight into the needs of Looked after children, and Safeguarding and Safer Caring training was a helpful refresher in stressing the importance of communication and logging.

3.7 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints

A total of 15 annual fostering household reviews were held in this period. A total of 7 reviews scheduled for March had to be deferred as a result of the Fostering Reviewing Officer's absence from work. Cover arrangements have been put in place and all the reviews for March and April have been allocated to Aidhour Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs). Aidhour IROs have previously carried out Foster Carer annual reviews for Brent therefore are familiar with the expectations and standards required.

In the last reporting period (January – March 2018) there were no allegations against foster carers, no Standard of Care/Serious Concerns raised nor formal complaints from foster carers.

There is currently one outstanding allegation that is due to be heard at the Fostering Panel in June 2018. The complexity of the LADO investigation and the foster carer's availability have prevented the matter from being resolved within this reporting period.

The Fostering Panel recommended that the fostering household who were found unsuitable to foster following an allegation should be referred to Ofsted for notification. This has been done.

The Panel Advisor and the ADM hold quarterly meetings to review all feedback received from the Fostering Panel to take necessary learning and disseminate that within the service to improve social work practice. In this period, a number of actions taken as a result of fostering panel feedback:

- It was agreed that an independent SSW (employed by Brent but not allocated to the case) will now undertake standard of care investigations. This is believed to bring an independent lens to enable better outcomes for children.
- Peer challenge sessions have been introduced within Fostering Assessment and Support Teams to discuss the investigation of allegations and learning from those.
- Performance issues raised by The Panel are addressed by managers.
- Learning from the panel feedback continued to be used in supervision to be able to support Supervising Social Workers to feel more confident to address early signs of possible Standards of Care and feel able to address them in a timely manner.

Learning taken from the allegations made against foster carers, resignations and termination of approvals has been within 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 children with challenging behaviours 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.

3.8 New Developments

National Fostering Stocktake Review

In February 2018, the Department for Education published the National Fostering Stocktake, an independent review of the fostering system in England. The Review was commissioned by the DfE and conducted by Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers. It has made 36 recommendations to the government about how the outcomes of children in foster care can be improved. Some of the recommendations are below:

- Ensuring foster carers are supported and included in decision-making; they should be treated professionally, rather than considered as professionals.

- Improving foster placement commissioning and matching and exploring the costs and advantages of a national register of foster carers
- Foster carers should be able to show physical affection towards children they care for unless this is unwelcome to the child.
- The flexibility for local authorities to reduce the number of professionals and allow one social worker to support foster carers and looked after children as a family unit in stable placements. This is believed to provide greater stability for children.
- It was recommended that money spent on the IRO role could be redirected to frontline and management staff who could perform the same functions.
- It was recommended that local authorities should support foster carers with increased access to familiar and reliable respite care, and the peer support networks. This is believed to increase retention of foster carers.

The Government has yet to respond to these recommendations. Once these are announced they will be contained in a future report to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

Report sign off:

GAIL TOLLEY

Strategic Director of Children and
Young People