

	<p align="center"><b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b> 30 October 2018</p>
	<p align="center"><b>Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services</b></p>
<p><b>Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 2: 1 July to 30 September 2018</b></p>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b> (only applicable for Cabinet, Cabinet Sub Committee and officer decisions)	N/A
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
<b>No. of Appendices:</b>	N/A
<b>Background Papers:</b>	N/A
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Onder Beter, Head of Service Looked After Children and Permanency Integration and Improved Outcomes, CYPS Email: <a href="mailto:onder.beter@brent.gov.uk">onder.beter@brent.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Nigel Chapman, Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Email: <a href="mailto:nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk">nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk</a></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 Department. The vision for the service as set out in the 2018-19 service plan is that:

- Caring and loving families will be found for children without delay and within their extended family network where appropriate.
- Diversity needs including disability, race, religion, language and culture will always be considered when placing a child.
- Placements will be well matched to children's individual needs. The best foster carers will be recruited for our children.
- 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 with the aim to have 5 net fostering households in the end of financial year taking into account termination of approvals and resignations.
- 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.

#### **3.2 Staffing Arrangements**

The Fostering Support and Assessment Teams consist of two team managers (the second manager post was successfully appointed into by an internal member of staff in August 2018), 10 social workers and one marketing and recruitment officer. The Marketing and Recruitment Officer left Brent during this reporting period and interviews are being held for a successor in October 2018.

Two social workers left the fostering service to take up new opportunities within Children and Young People's services. To support budgetary pressures elsewhere within the LAC and Permanency service the decision has been taken to keep these posts vacant until March 2019, as the workload can be safely managed until the end of the current financial year.

#### **3.3 Placement Activity**

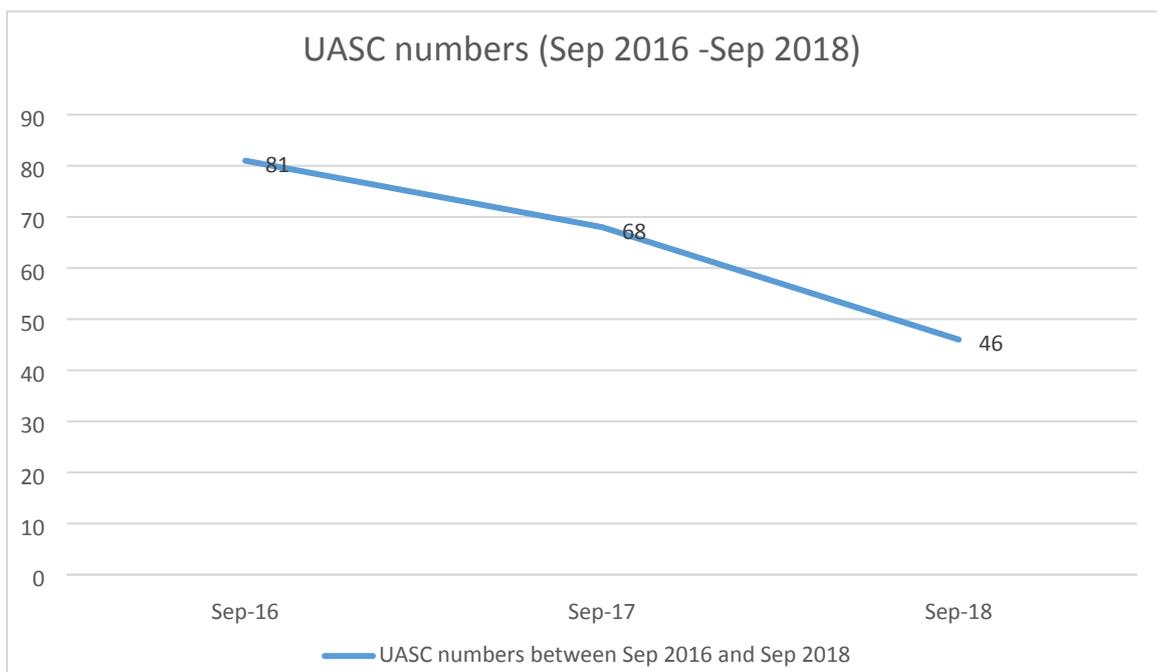
The total number of looked after children as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018 was 296 compared to 310 during the same period in 2017.

The corporate performance targets for 2018/19 were as below:

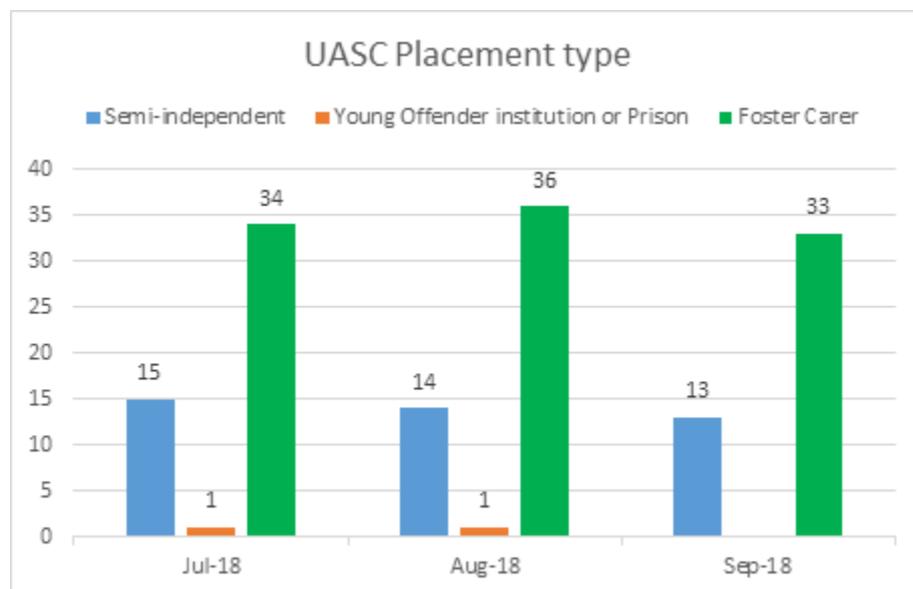
- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 35% - the actual percentage as of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018 was 26% (77 children) compared with 26.7% (83 children) in the same quarter in 2017;

- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15% - the actual percentage as of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018 was 13.9% (41 children) compared with 11.9% (37 children) in the same quarter in 2017;
- Percentage of looked after children placed in Independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018 was 28.7% (85 children) compared to 24.5% (76 children) during the same quarter 2017;
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 75% - the actual percentage as of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018 was 69% (204 children). This is an increase from the same quarter in 2017, where the percentage was 64% of LAC (198 children);
- There were 43 looked after children in semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children’s Home Regulations) as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018, which represents 14.5% of all looked after children. This number is smaller than the same time period in 2017 when there were 60 children (19.3% of the total looked after population at the time). This reduction is due in part to some young people turning 18 and concerted efforts to place young people in fostering placements rather than semi-independent provision.

As of 30th September 2018 there were 46 UASC, 22 fewer than the same quarter last year.



13 UASC are placed in semi-independent accommodation and 33 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 for Brent and encouraging potential foster carers to contact Brent Fostering Service. During this quarter, our main focus was on outreach events in local supermarkets (Tesco and Asda). We have also targeted our leaflet drops in Kensal Rise and Kensal Green in order to increase our presence in those parts of the borough as mentioned in the last quarter. We also attended the Chalkhill Festival; and we ran a new Facebook campaign, as well holding 2 recruitment events in the Civic Centre, with the aim of attracting local visitors to the building who may be interested in fostering. Additionally, there were 3 monthly information evenings 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. We continue to feature in every edition of The Brent magazine. The service is attending *The Job Show* event in Wembley Stadium as part of the West London Alliance on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> October.

The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 22 contacts (telephone calls or emails requesting further information) and out of the 22, 10 people expressed a serious interest in becoming foster carers. Of these 10 possible leads, only 4 chose to continue with the initial assessment process with 3 people being visited by social workers and 1 applicant asking to be placed on hold for 6 months.

Last quarter we assigned one worker the specific task of contacting those people who had expressed an interest in fostering with Brent in the past but had not felt able to continue for various reasons. Many had decided that fostering was not for them but 4 expressed an interest in meeting a social worker for an initial assessment. From these contacts 1 person has progressed to a stage 1 assessment.

Therefore, as of the end of Q2, there are 3 assessments in stage 1 and one assessment is almost complete and due to be presented to Fostering Panel in December.

Given the decline in the number of ongoing assessments an action plan was devised to increase the monitoring of recruitment activity. Performance meetings were increased to weekly and the roles for each team manager were refocused. The immediate outcome of this change has seen in an increase in activity for the duty worker as they revisit prospective carers who wanted more time to consider whether to become foster carers.

### **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 and personal 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 or 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 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 service and these recommendations are referred to the Agency Decision Maker who is the Head of Service, LAC and Permanency.

During the period 1<sup>st</sup> July – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018, 3 panels were held with 10 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:

- 1 new 'family and friends' fostering household was recommended for approval;

- 5 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
- 2 fostering households' approvals were terminated due to a failure on the part of the foster carers to meet the required fostering standards;
- 1 fostering household resigned from their fostering role due to ill-health and a change in their family circumstances; and
- 1 fostering household's approval was reduced to nominated carer status for their daughter (who was approved last quarter with her husband as short term foster carers).

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

A joint annual training day for fostering panel members and the kinship care and fostering teams' staff is held as per statutory regulation; the next one is scheduled for December 2018, the focus of which will be a combination of the National Fostering Stocktake and the Government's response (see **3.8 New Developments** below), radicalisation in relation to the fostering role and criminal exploitation and county lines.

### **3.6 Training and Support to Foster Carers**

The feedback regarding the courses offered continues to be positive. Some carers ask for more courses to be held in the evenings and at weekends as they work but it is felt that there are a reasonable number of courses offered outside of working hours.

During this reporting period, 20 individual training courses were offered ranging from diverse subjects such as 'Developing Good Bedtime Routines' to 'Keep Breathing – Emotional Resilience for Foster Carers'.

The carers' feedback has been positive for most sessions. Carers thoroughly enjoyed attending the Keep Breathing/Emotional Resilience training session. A number of carers sent emails individually, to praise the trainer in relation to the course content as well as the delivery. Carers also sent positive emails of praise about Safeguarding Children in a Digital World training course.

### **3.7 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints**

#### **Reviews:**

A total of 26 foster carer annual review meetings were scheduled to take place in this period. Of this number, 20 were held within timescale but 6 were not. The reasons for the reviews not going ahead were primarily foster carer led (i.e. health problems or personal circumstances)

During this quarter, there were two new allegations made about foster carers – details of which, for reasons of confidentiality, cannot be shared in this report. Both allegations

were investigated by the Brent Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), with one being investigated by another local authority LADO. Both investigations have been concluded, which was followed by the respective carers having their annual review brought forward for consideration by the Fostering Panel.

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

- Good practice examples and performance issues raised by the Fostering Panel were addressed by managers directly with the relevant workers;
- Investigations into possible Standards of Care are now done by peers within the team to provide an element of independence to the assessment.

Team Managers continue to discuss these cases as case examples in their team meetings to disseminate the learning and also use the cases within group supervision.

### **3.8 New Developments**

#### Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)

Brent's Children's Services were inspected by Ofsted in May 2018. The *experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers* was graded 'outstanding'. A relevant section of the published report stated,

*"An increasing number [of foster carers] are 'in house' due to successful recruitment activity. Efficient screening and assessment processes ensure that only the most appropriate carers are recruited. Enhanced payment incentives are appropriately provided for carers who support children with more complex and challenging needs. This includes support for staying put arrangements. Local recruitment campaigns have been particularly successful in recruiting carers from a wide range of backgrounds. Foster carers have good access to regular training and support."* Ofsted, May 2018

#### Out of Hours support for Foster Carers

There has been only a small number of contacts made to the Out of Hours support line during this reporting period. An annual position will be provided on its efficacy at the end of this reporting year. Individual supervising social workers offer additional support when placements are particularly challenging. Workers are also making increased use of the Social Pedagogue to strengthen the skills of the foster carers.

#### Foster Care in England, 2018

Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers were appointed by the Secretary of State for Education to conduct a national fostering stocktake for England during 2017. Their report, [Foster Care in England](#), was published in February 2018. It contained 36

recommendations to the government about how the outcomes of children in foster care can be improved, including:

- Ensuring foster carers are supported and included in decision-making;
- Improving foster placement commissioning, and matching;
- Greater stability and permanence for children and young people in foster care.

In response, the government published *Fostering Better Outcomes* in July 2018 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/727613/Fostering\\_better\\_outcomes\\_.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/727613/Fostering_better_outcomes_.pdf) and identified five overarching ambitions to address the 36 recommendations from the above report. These included:

- Children are listened to and involved in decisions about their lives;
- Foster parents receive the support and respect they need and deserve to care for children;
- There are enough high quality fostering placements, in the right place, at the right time;
- LAs commission placements according to the needs of the child; and
- Children experience stability regardless of permanence plan.

The implications for fostering in Brent have been considered by the two teams and senior management in the LAC and Permanency Service. Brent currently performs well regarding permanence planning, listening and responding to children and young people's views, offering children stable and high quality placements, providing well considered contact arrangements for children separated from family members and the support offered to young people who wish to remain with foster carers past the age of 18.

The current service plan addresses the areas that need to continue to improve in order to respond consistently to each of the ambitions set by the government. This includes:

- Improving the consultation of current and past looked after children to use their views to drive improvements;
- Improving the recognition of foster carers as valued experts who best know the children they care for across children and young people's services and with our partner agencies (this is the focus of an upcoming staff forum);
- Making our peer-to-peer support more structured for foster carers and their children;
- Developing partnership working and commissioning of placements to ensure that matching is driven by the needs of the child, not cost;
- Developing a creative approach to deciding which individual social worker is best placed to offer support to the foster family in long-term placements;
- Exploring the use of regional consortia and/or neighbouring local authorities for combined needs-led and targeted marketing and recruitment and commissioning and integration.

Regarding this final point, as part of the Council's published consultation on the 2019-20 and 2020-21 budget there is a proposal to explore the option of a shared fostering service with other West London authorities. Should this budget proposal be accepted by the Council then it will be progressed with a view to implementation during 2020-21.

**Report sign off:**

**GAIL TOLLEY**

Strategic Director, Children and Young People