	<p align="center"><b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b> 4 February 2019</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 3: 1 October to 31 December 2018</b></p>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	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>Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes <a href="mailto:Nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk">Nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Onder Beter, Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency <a href="mailto:onder.beter@brent.gov.uk">onder.beter@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, 11 social work posts and one marketing and recruitment officer post. The newly recruited Marketing and Recruitment Officer is due to join the team in January 2019.

As previously mentioned, two social work positions are being kept vacant until March 2019 to support budgetary pressures elsewhere within the LAC and Permanency service, as the workload can be safely managed until the end of the current financial year. In addition, a social worker in the team went on maternity leave in December 2018 so the team are covering her cases.

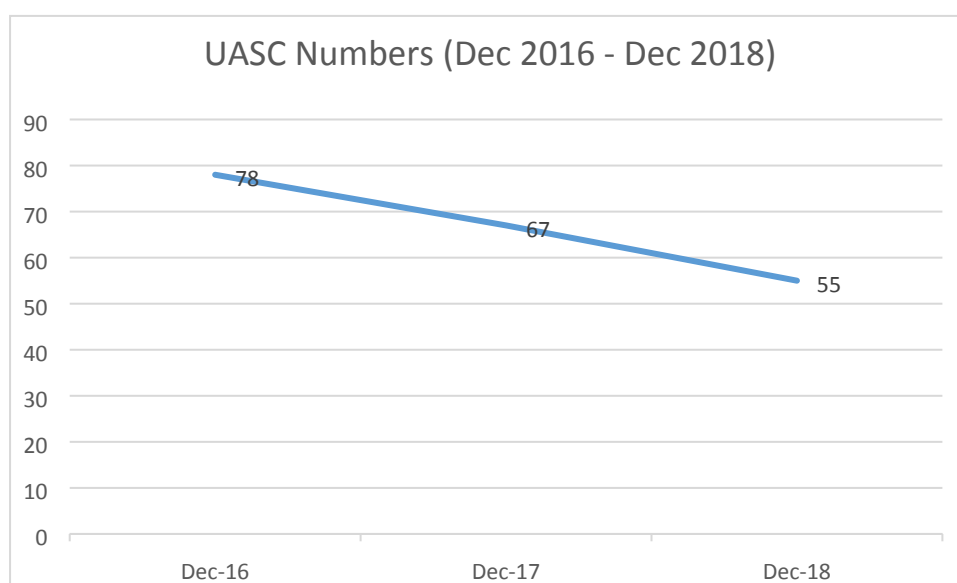
### **3.3 Placement Activity**

The total number of looked after children as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018 was 302 which is an increase from the end of Q2 of 6 children, however this is a reduction of 21 children from 323 in December 2017.

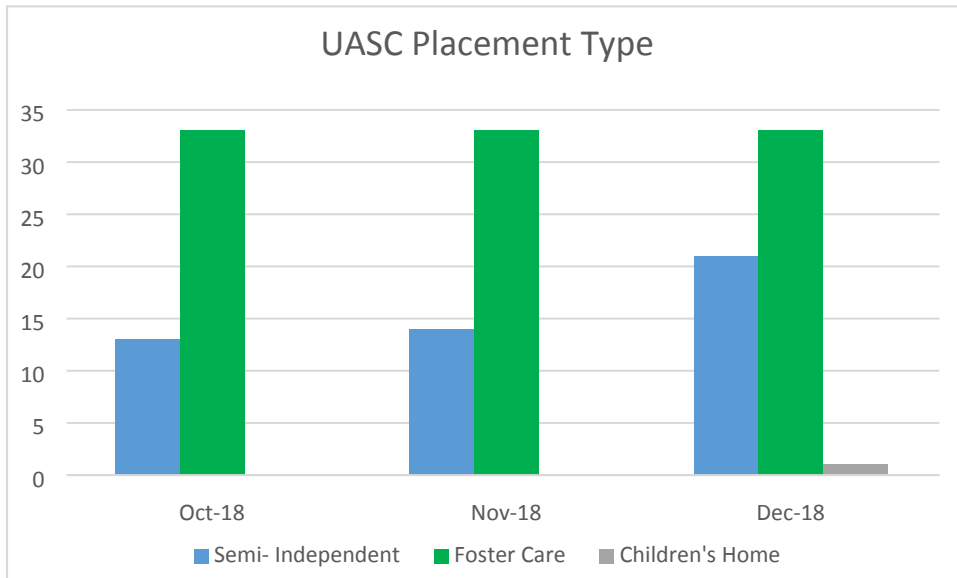
The corporate performance targets for 2018/19 were as below:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 35% - the actual percentage as of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018 was 24.8% (75 children), a reduction from 26% (77 children) compared in the previous quarter;
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15% - the actual percentage as of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018 was 11.6% (35 children) compared to 13.9% (41 children) in quarter 2;
- Percentage of looked after children placed in Independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018 was 26.5% (80 children) compared to 28.7% (85 children) in quarter 2;
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 75% - the actual percentage as of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018 was 63.58% (192 children) compared to 69% (204 children) at the end of quarter 2.
- There were 54 looked after children in semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children’s Home Regulations) as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018, which represents 17.8% of all looked after children. This number is an increase from 43 in quarter 2 (25.6% increase).

As of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018 there were 55 UASC, 9 more than at the end of quarter 2, 12 fewer than this time in December 2017.



21 UASC are placed in semi-independent accommodation, compared to 13 in Quarter 2, 1 UASC is in a residential children’s home, and 33 UASC are placed in foster care which is the same as quarter 2.



### 3.4 Recruitment and Assessment

Within the reporting period, the fostering service carried out some low level recruitment focused activities with the aim of raising awareness of fostering for Brent and encouraging potential foster carers to make enquiries with Brent Fostering Service. During this quarter, the main focus was on outreach events. The service attended *The Job Show* event in Wembley Stadium as part of the West London Alliance on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2018 generating a good amount of interest, all of which have been followed up. Most of them have not proceeded to assessment as they were not suitable for a variety of reasons. Nevertheless, the opportunity to raise awareness of Brent’s Fostering brand was achieved and the team managers remain in contact with the organiser to engage in any future similar events.

With regards to the targeted leaflet drops, undertaken in Kensal Rise and Kensal Green due to the housing stock in that area and possible spare bedrooms for fostering, there was no increase in enquiries, however, as this was undertaken leading up to the Christmas period, this could be one of the reasons and this is something that will be revisited in the forthcoming months.

The Facebook campaign continues, which is more about raising awareness around fostering but also provides some enquiries, which filter through to Brent Fostering’s internal email address. All enquiries received via this system are responded to on a daily basis. Through this forum, there has been an increase in approved foster carers

liking Brent's page and enquiries. With the new marketing and recruitment officer joining the team in January, digital presence will be managed by her – she suggested some good ideas as part of her interview so we are looking forward to develop this area.

Even though a plan of action was devised to increase the monitoring of recruitment activity, the numbers for recruitment enquiries have not proven fruitful and the numbers of enquires have not significantly increased. It is hoped that the marketing and recruitment officer will bring fresh ideas for increasing numbers but alongside this, a joined up approach is explored with neighbouring authorities – Ealing in the first instance – to pool resources. This is discussed further at the end of this report under **3.8 New Developments**.

The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 39 contacts (website, telephone calls or emails requesting further information) and out of the 39, 8 people expressed a serious interest in becoming foster carers. However, through further discussions many had decided that fostering was not for them. Of these 8 possible prospective carers: 2 people had a successful initial visit and progressed to stage 1 of the assessment process; 2 are being visited by social workers in January 2019; 2 withdrew from the process for various reasons; 1 was not contactable; and 1 had a negative initial visit.

Therefore, as of the end of Q3, there are 2 assessments in stage 1 and 2 assessments in stage 2 – both of these are scheduled to come to fostering panel in March 2019.

The assessment, recorded in the report from Q2 as being in stage 1, progressed to stage 2 but the applicants subsequently withdrew as they felt that they did not have the time for fostering.

In addition, the assessment that was due to be presented to the fostering panel in December had to be deferred pending further work. This is due back to panel in February 2019.

During this quarter, we have facilitated 4 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. Brent Fostering continues to feature in every edition of The Brent magazine; we have received helpful constructive feedback as to how to make this more eye catching to members of the public, which we will be tasking the marketing and recruitment officer with when she starts.

Performance meetings remain weekly to ensure that the focus remains strongly on increasing numbers. Alongside this, we are looking at improving sufficiency via smarter matching during the placement searches to ensure we utilise as many of vacancies as possible.

### 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; and
- 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> October – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018, 4 panels were held with 16 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:

- 2 new 'family and friends' fostering household was recommended for approval, providing placements for 4 children;
- 1 'family and friends' fostering household was found suitable to continue as foster carers following a standards of care investigation;
- 6 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review, 1 of whom increased their approval numbers thus providing a possible additional placement;
- 1 fostering household was put on hold for 6 months following a standards of care investigation;
- 2 fostering households' approvals were terminated due to a failure on the part of the foster carers to meet the required fostering standards; and
- 4 fostering households resigned from their fostering role – 2 felt that Brent's financial package was not competitive enough, 1 considered that they had naturally come to the end of their fostering career and one had never fostered since approval for various reasons. With regards to the financial package offered by Brent, whilst the allowance may be lower than some statistical

neighbours, it is still above that recommended by Fostering Network and the additional support offered by way of: more frequent visits from supervising social workers; a varied learning and development programme; reduced membership of local gyms; and the foster carer's summer trip and winter ball add to the support and balance out the package offered.

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 has been moved to 8<sup>th</sup> February 2019 to accommodate the facilitator, the focus of which will be a combination of the National Fostering Stocktake and the Government's response (as noted in the previous report), radicalisation in relation to the fostering role and criminal exploitation and county lines.

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

#### Training and development

The feedback regarding the courses offered continues to be positive.

During this reporting period, 23 individual training courses were offered ranging from diverse subjects such as 'Equality & diversity' to "Childhood trauma & attachment" & "Professional record keeping".

The carers' feedback has been positive for most sessions. We have had increased attendance for some trainings sessions such as 'Sexuality & Gender' following feedback from annual reviews. Carers thoroughly enjoyed attending and the sessions will run again in the next years training programme.

#### Social Pedagogy

The Social Pedagogue organised a 'Common Third' art intervention during the autumn half term for both foster carers and their children. This was open to both in-house foster carers and carers with independent fostering agencies who care for Brent looked after children aged 10 – 18 years.

The 'common third' is a social pedagogic model devised to create situations where both foster parent and foster child meet on equal terms, that is they share a common potential to learn, using activity and action. The experience of learning together has been found to help the relationship to develop.

The focus of this session was 'commonalities and differences'. Further Common Third Workshops for Foster carers and their foster children for the half-term periods are currently in planning. We are planning to share the positive feedback from both the carer and the child (anonymously) via the fostering newsletter to increase interest for the next intervention.

Supervising Social Workers continued to have the offer of attending social pedagogy surgeries with social pedagogue, reflecting and receiving advice on methods or

models to be used to help the situations. Also Supervising Social Workers continue to have the opportunity to engage with the Social Pedagogue as and when required.

One of the learners for the Level 3 Diploma in Social Pedagogy has left Brent. The remaining learner continues to receive mentoring by the social pedagogue through their course. And it is anticipated that they will successfully complete their course by the end of January 2019.

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

#### **Reviews:**

A total of 32 foster carer annual review meetings were scheduled to take place in this period. 7 of these reviews were cancelled: 3 of these carers had resigned so no longer required reviewing; 2 carers were granted Special Guardianship of the children in their care and were therefore no longer foster carers; and 2 were due to personal circumstances of the foster carers. Of those reviews that did take place, they were all held within timescales.

During this quarter, there were no allegations or complaints.

The Agency Advisor and the ADM continue to 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. The next meeting is scheduled for 31<sup>st</sup> January 2019.

### **3.8 New Developments**

#### Foster Carer's Ball

This event was held on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2018. Positive feedback received from those attending was: "we enjoyed the evening", "lots of fun" and "I think it was a good thank you for the work we are doing". Constructive feedback was received from carers who were unable to attend: "we could not get child care for our fostered children so could not attend" (a number of carers gave this feedback) and "it is better in November, I am less busy".

The fostering teams have been proactive in responding to this and have already planned a number of working groups to plan for the forthcoming year in terms of social events and support groups. They have come up with some creative ideas and look forward to bringing foster carers on board to take this forward.

#### Brent's response to *Fostering Better Outcomes 2018*

As outlined in Q2's report, the response from the government, *Fostering Better Outcomes*

[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), to Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers' report, *Foster*



[Care in England](#), was published in July 2018. The fostering teams and senior management in the LAC and Permanency Service have been working together to formulate an action plan to address the areas identified from this report as being areas for development:

- Improving the consultation of current and past looked after children to use their views to drive improvements;  
We are looking to involve Care in Action, Junior Care in Action and Care Leavers in Action, with support from the Children in Care Participation Officer, to address this point.
- 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 partner agencies;  
This is the focus of the LAC and Permanency staff forum on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2019.
- Making peer-to-peer support more structured for foster carers and their children;  
The fostering teams have agreed to set up working groups focusing on particular areas of interest – birth children of foster carers, social events for carers, improving support group provision, peer-to-peer support and recognition of achievements – and are taking these forward with the foster carers during support groups to be guided by the 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;  
Senior managers in LAC and Permanency and Forward Planning Performance and Partnerships are working together to drive improvements in this area.
- Developing a creative approach to deciding which individual social worker is best placed to offer support to the foster family in long-term placements;  
This
- Exploring the use of regional consortia and/or neighbouring local authorities for combined needs-led and targeted marketing and recruitment and commissioning and integration.

We recognise that, despite extensive efforts, we are not making substantial progress. In order to address this, 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. Senior managers in Brent and Ealing are exploring the possibility of taking this forward. These discussions are in the very early scoping stages.

We will continue to update this meeting in terms of progress in relation to the above.

**Report sign off:**

**GAIL TOLLEY**

Strategic Director, Children and Young People