



Corporate Parenting Committee
24 July 2019

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

**Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report:
Quarter 1: 1st April to 30th June 2019**

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)	Onder Beter, Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Onder.beter@brent.gov.uk Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk

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).

1.2 This report details the activity of Brent's fostering service from 1st April – 30th June 2019.

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 Background

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 2019-20 service plan set out the vision for the service as below:

- Family finding for looked after children will be timely and within their extended family network where appropriate.
- Children's individual needs, including diversity needs such as disability, race, religion, language and culture will always be considered when placing a child.
- 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 additional 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.
- We will continue to provide an excellent learning and development package for foster carers who will have permanent supervising social workers to supervise and support them.

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 workload within the teams continues to grow as new carers are approved and need to be allocated. As such, whilst we retain 2 vacant posts (one reported in the last report and one from a member of the team who has recently retired), one is due to be filled by an international social worker in July 2019.

4.0 Performance Data

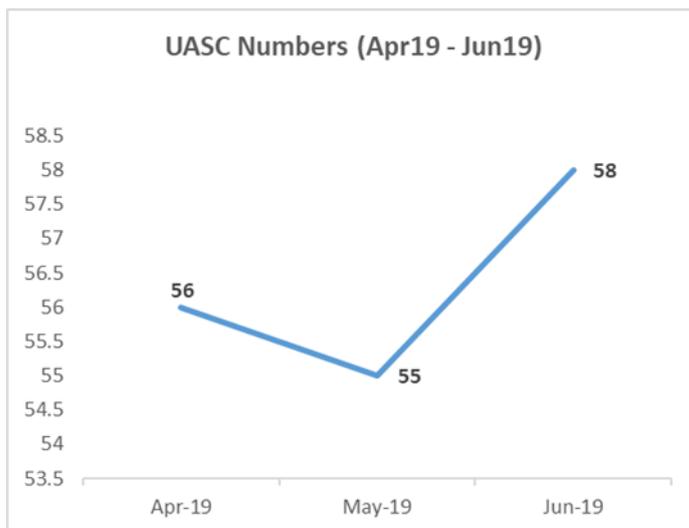
4.1 Placement Activity

The total number of looked after children as at 30th June 2019 was 306, which is an increase from the end of Q4 of 6 children, however this is a reduction of 6 children from 312 the previous year (June 2018).

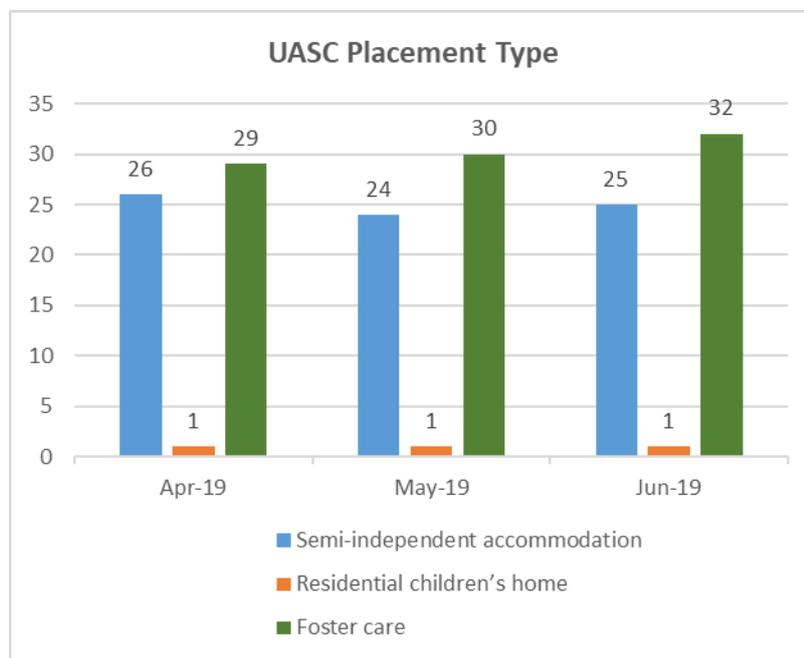
4.2 The corporate performance targets for 2019/20 remain broadly the same as the previous year and are as below:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 30% - the actual percentage as of 30th June 2019 was 22.2% (68 children), a reduction from 24% (72 children) compared to the previous quarter.
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15% - the actual percentage as of 30th June 2019 was 10.5% (32 children) compared to 11.7% (35 children) at the end of Q4, 2018 -19.
- Percentage of looked after children placed in independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 30th June 2019 was 27.8% (85 children) compared to 27.7% (83 children) at the end of Q4, 2018 – 19.
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 75% - the actual percentage as of 30th June 2019 was 60.8% (186 children) compared to 63.3% (190 children) at the end of Q4, 2018 – 19.
- There were 62 looked after children in semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children’s Home Regulations) as at 30th June 2019, which represents 20.3% of all looked after children. This number is a decrease from 63 at the end of Q4, 2018 – 19 (21%).

4.3 As of 30th June 2019 there were 58 UASC, 4 more than at the end of Q4, 2018 – 19.



4.4 25 UASC are placed in semi-independent accommodation (no change from the end of Q4, 2018 – 19), the same 1 UASC is in a residential children’s home as was at the end of March 2019, and 32 UASC are placed in foster care compared to 28 at the end of Q4, 2018 – 19.



5.0 Recruitment and Assessment

- 5.1** Within the reporting period, Brent's Marketing and Recruitment Officer (MRO) and the fostering teams continued to carry out 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. Following on from the last period's focus on comparing interest raised from online and offline recruitment activities, it was clear that Brent's digital presence seemed to be creating more interest from people seeking further information about fostering.
- 5.2** With regards to physical outreach, Foster Care Fortnight (13 – 26th May 2019) was the main focus during this period. This is an annual event across the UK devoted to recruiting foster carers. The teams used this time to promote fostering for Brent in different ways: For the first time foster carers participated in this event; our MRO recorded positive stories of Brent foster carers' experiences of fostering for Brent, which were broadcast at each of the outreach events – the main ones of which were in the Civic Centre, Brent libraries, at Brent Fest and at the Wembley Job Fair. It was felt that the videos brought a human element to the outreach events and will be used from now on.
- 5.3** The MRO continues to develop the presence of fostering in Brent by increasing the presence on social media on both Facebook and Twitter. Following on from the last quarter, she has recorded some positive fostering stories from Brent carers to make the whole experience more accessible. Enquiries are then received via the Brent website, which filter through to the fostering teams' internal email address and are responded to on a daily basis. These forums continue to show an increase in approved foster carers 'liking' our page, sharing non-confidential positive stories and achievements and more enquiries via the webpage.
- 5.4** During this quarter, the team continued to facilitate information evenings at the Civic Centre (one per month), 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.
- 5.5** The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 52 contacts (website, telephone calls or emails requesting further information). This is a big increase from last quarter and was mainly due to enquiries received from the Job Fair. Out of the 52 contacts, 17 attended the information evening sessions in April, May and June. Of the 17 possible prospective carers only 3 were considered suitable to progress to initial visit. Common reasons for not progressing further included: working hours that did not allow any time for fostering; lack of suitable accommodation; large debts; and some people only seeking information about fostering rather than wishing to be assessed at this time.

- 5.6** 2 of the initial visits concluded negatively as they are moving out of the area so assessment and future placements could not be considered. 1 initial visit was very successful and has progressed to stage 1 of the assessment process.
- 5.7** 4 of the 5 assessments recorded in the last quarterly report as being in stage 2 have been to panel and received positive recommendations for approval as foster carers in the May and June panels.
- 5.8** The 5th assessment was due to come to panel as well but the couple shared the presence of a lodger in their home with their assessing social worker and asked to be put on hold until September 2020 when the lodger is moving out. However, given that the couple's circumstances may have changed by then a decision was made to cease the assessment and add an addendum nearer the time to update panel before possible approval can be considered.
- 5.9** Of the 8 assessments in stage 1 in the last reporting period:
2 have withdrawn for personal reasons;
1 has been ended by the team due to non-availability for assessment visits; and
5 remain in assessment.
- 5.10** In this reporting period there are therefore a total of 5 assessments underway: 3 in stage 1 and 3 in Stage 2.

6.0 Fostering Panel

- 6.1** 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.
- 6.2** 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.

6.3 During the period 1st April – 30th June 2019, 4 panels were held with 21 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:

- 2 'family and friends' fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
- 10 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review, 2 of whom increased their approval numbers thus providing possible additional placements;
- 3 fostering households resigned from their fostering role – 2 transferred to independent fostering agencies for financial reasons and 1 wanted to concentrate on child minding;
- the approval of 1 'family and friends' foster carer was terminated due to the child in their care turning 18;
- 1 new 'family and friends' fostering household was recommended for approval; and
- 4 new fostering households were recommended for approval.

All of the recommendations made above were ratified by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who is the Head of LAC and Permanency.

6.4 An appeal by a family and friends carer against the recommended termination of their approval as foster carers was upheld by the ADM. This had been reported as being in progress within the last quarterly report (Q4 2018-19).

6.5 The panel has a quality assurance role and monitors the standard of reports presented to it and relays any issues or concerns and any suggested practice improvements to the ADM. 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 last meeting was held on 7th June 2019 and found that close communication is now happening proactively between the fostering and care planning teams resulting in better planned placements. The performance of 3 individual workers has continued to improve resulting in quicker recognition of carers who excel and swift identification of those carers whose abilities fall below the standards outlined in fostering guidance and legislation. The workers have been informed of their achievements in person and publicly via the LAC and Permanency staff forum. The carers who have excelled are acknowledged by senior managers in writing and via public recognition in the fostering newsletter. Support and training are offered to those carers where concerns are noted. The improved timescales around this have resulted in fewer carers requiring formal monitoring.

7.0 Training and Support for Foster Carers

7.1 The Learning and Development Programme

The feedback regarding the courses offered as part of the learning and development programme for our foster carers continues to be positive.

7.1.1 During this reporting period, 21 individual training courses were offered on a variety of topics ranging from 'Education Transitions, to 'Social Pedagogy Learning' and 'The Power of Positive Parenting'.

7.1.2 The carers' feedback has been positive for most sessions in relation to the training format and content. The constructive feedback received in relation to the 'managing and de-escalating conflict' course resulted in an improvement, with the addition of suggested practical techniques. A session has been scheduled for August 2019.

7.2 Social Pedagogy

The 2019 – 20 Carers Learning and Development Programme is now up and running and, as proposed in the last quarter's report, features various social pedagogic learning and development activities, such as a monthly social pedagogic learning space, 'common third' workshops and foster family socials. These activities are core learning for foster parents and were introduced as a direct response to the carers' requests to undertake more activities based on social pedagogic practice, as noted in the previous quarterly report.

7.2.1 Feedback on the social pedagogic learning space thus far has been positive; foster parents feel that the space allows for reflective practice, enables a greater understanding of children's life worlds and their needs as well as getting ideas for their practice.

7.2.2 In order to make more focused use of the social pedagogue, specific carers are being referred to her with the targeted aim of improving their skillset – see 9.1 New Developments.

7.2.3 Supervising social workers continue to have the offer of attending social pedagogy surgeries with the social pedagogue, reflecting and receiving advice on methods or models to be used to help situations. In addition, the social pedagogue is available in-between these times for consultation where necessary. Regular slots are offered in the fostering team meetings for focused case discussions facilitated by the social pedagogue with the aim of developing techniques for the workers to use in their supervisory visits. The role of a social worker in the fostering support team, also now a qualified social pedagogue, will be utilised differently in order to support social pedagogic approach in practice.

7.2.4 The development lead for social pedagogy has also met with the Kinship Care Team to explain the social pedagogic offer to them with the intention that kinship foster carers and their social workers can also benefit from the offer given that they face the same issues as our foster carers and could benefit from this additional support.

7.3 Support from supervising social workers

The feedback received from foster carers is consistently positive in relation to the support they receive from their allocated supervising social workers, their managers and the wider fostering service.

8.0 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints

8.1 A total of 17 foster carer annual review meetings were held during the period under focus. The dedicated Fostering Reviewing Officer has left the department via voluntary redundancy so this work is now commissioned from AidHour and covered by the same reviewing officers who chair children's LAC reviews.

8.2 During this quarter, there were no allegations or complaints.

9.0 New Developments

9.1 As briefly outlined earlier in this report, in order to make more focused use of the Social Pedagogue's role, specific carers are being referred to her with the targeted aim of improving their skillset and shifting the focus away from crisis intervention to development. Initially, 6 families are being referred to the Social Pedagogue – 3 newly approved carers and 3 more experienced carers. The aim of the work with the new carers is in preparing them for their first placement and then supporting them in the early days of that placement and the sessions with more experienced carers are focused on those carers who can be stretched further – helping get them to the next stage of taking on slightly more challenging placements. This will increase to 10 families by September 2019. The impact of this will be considered in the next quarterly report.

9.2 The new Participation and Engagement Lead, based within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service of CYP, started in May 2019 and a meeting has been arranged within the next quarterly reporting period to continue discussions about how best to improve consultation with current and former looked after children to drive service development.

9.3 Working groups

9.3.1 The working groups outlined in the last quarterly report are all up and running. The group responsible for the planning of the summer foster carers trip consists of two social workers and 11 foster carers, who collectively chose the destination and the date. This year the destination is Brighton and it is on 10th August 2019. As part of the preparation and encouraging foster carers to work together to plan this, a 'bring and

share' evening has been organised for the 9th July 2019 foster carers support group. This has generated much interest and foster carers are looking forward to this. If this is successful, more events will be arranged in future.

9.3.2 The working group for the foster carer's ball is in progress. The date being suggested is at the end of November; venues are being explored and funding for this is being sought. Two foster carers are participating in the planning of this event initially, with more joining once the early arrangements are secured. It is anticipated that the arrangements will be finalised by the end of September 2019. Plans for the award scheme that takes place at this event has been broadened to include long service, split into those who have fostered 5, 10 years and over 10 years. Other categories include: carers currently with or who have had sibling group placements; carers who have cared for children with additional needs; carers who have successfully fostered individual children for a year or more (thus providing consistency); carers who have been 'buddies' to newly approved carers or have helped other carers in the year; carers who have completed the Training Support and Development Standards within timescales; and a welcome card to newly approved foster carers.

9.3.3 The working group supporting the birth children of foster carers has not yet got any foster carer members. However, there are two social workers pushing this forward who have requested the foster carers support group nominate 2 foster carers to join the group. Meanwhile, a proposal has been made to acknowledge birth children of foster carers and family and friends foster carers and the understanding they show the fostered children in their family home in a similar event to that which is offered to foster carers.

9.4 Exploring the use of regional consortia and/or neighbouring local authorities for combined needs-led and targeted marketing and recruitment and commissioning and integration – Ealing and Hounslow remain keen to progress this with Brent taking the lead. The outcome of Brent's bid for seed funding offered for this purpose from the Department for Education has been successful. A group, led by Brent will now review future steps with an update provided to a future committee this reporting year.

10 Financial Position

The budgeted expenditure in 2018-19 for placements with Brent foster carers was £1.9m compared to actual expenditure of £2.0m, an overspend of £0.1m. The 2019-20 budget has been set at £2.0m. The budgeted expenditure in 2018-19 for placements with independent foster agencies was £3.7m compared to actual expenditure of £4.0m, an overspend of £0.3m. The 2019-20 budget has been set at £3.9m.

Report sign off:

GAIL TOLLEY

Strategic Director of Children and Young People