

 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 19 April 2022
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People
Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 4: 1st January 2022 to 31st March 2022	

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. 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 January 2022 – 31st March 2022.

2. 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. Background

3.1 Service Priorities

The in-house fostering function is positioned within the LAC and Permanency Service (LACPS) of the Children and Young People's Department. The service has focused on the following priority areas in 2021/22:

- To maintain use of recruitment drives that include an element of direct interface between the fostering teams and prospective foster carers, children and young people
- To enhance the support offer to Brent's foster carers and kinship carers with a mixture of face-to-face and virtual contact in social work and peer support
- To enhance the training and development programme for carers to include a permanent, ongoing mix of virtual and direct course and seminars
- To consider hybrid working as a permanent feature of the fostering panel, with a mix of hearing cases virtually and in person dependent upon the complexity of the issues being considered
- To continue improving the stability of children by providing more local and in-house placement options, minimising change of social workers and placements
- Developing partnerships with neighbouring authorities to recruit and retain more foster carers.

3.2 Staffing Arrangements

3.2.1 The Fostering Support and Assessment Teams consist of two teams of social workers, two team managers and one marketing and recruitment officer (MRO) post. The workload within the teams continues to grow as new kinship and foster carers are approved and allocated to supervising social workers to ensure ongoing support.

3.2.2 Currently we have 7 permanent staff members in post. More recently, we appointed an eighth member of staff who will be joining on 4th April 2022. The current Marketing and Recruitment Officer (MRO) remains on maternity leave until mid-April 2022 and this role has been covered by interim support.

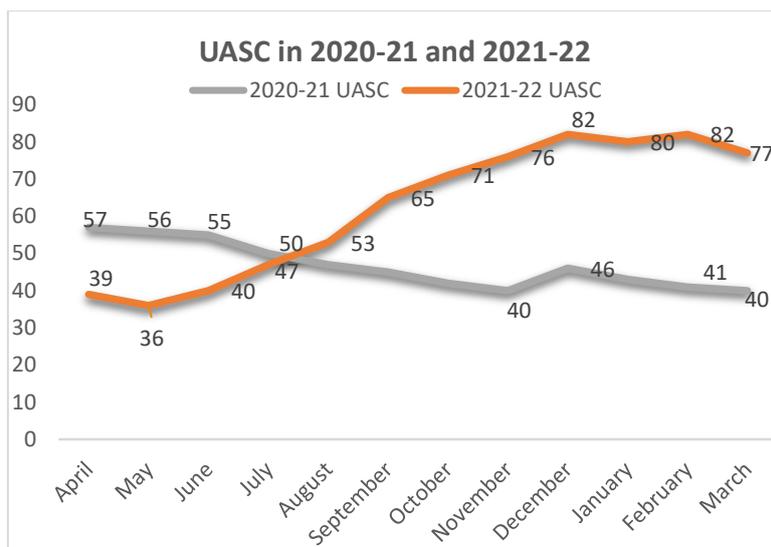
4. Placement Activity:

4.1 The total number of looked after children as at 30th March 2022 was 344, which is a decrease by 7 children from Q3 of 2021-2022 (351 children) and an increase by 56 children from the same period in 2021 (288 children)

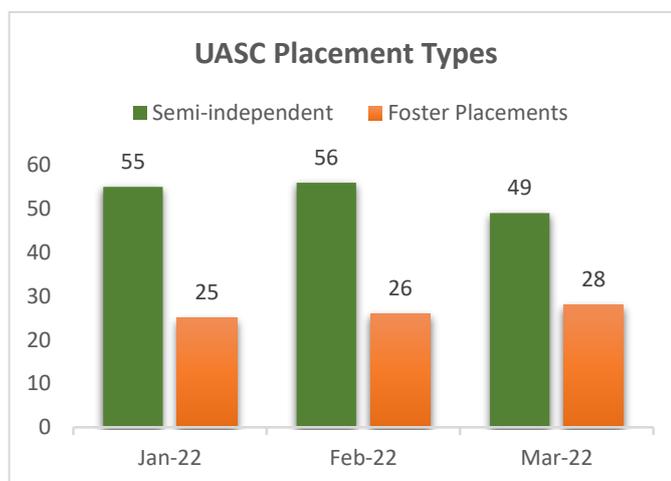
4.2 The corporate performance targets for 2021/2022 are as below:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 30% - the actual percentage as of 30th March 2022 was 14.8% (51 children), a drop by 1.4% from the previous quarter Q3 of 2021/2022, 16.2% (57 children). In this reporting period, more adolescents including unaccompanied asylum seeking children entered care and had to be placed in semi-independent accommodations based on their needs.
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15% - the actual percentage as of 30th March 2022 was 13.4% (46 children), an increase by 0.6% from Q4 of 2021/2022 of 12.8% (45 children),
- Percentage of looked after children placed with independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 30th March 2022 was 32% (110 children); a decrease by 0.7% from Q4 of 2021/2022 31.3% (110 children)
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 70% - the actual percentage as of 30th March 2022 was 60.2% (207 children), which is nearly the same as Q3 of 2021/2022 which was 60.4% (212 children). This is primarily related to the age of new looked after children and the increase in the number of 16 - 17 year-old UASC who were placed in semi-independent accommodation.
- There were 86 looked after children in semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations) as at 30th March 2022, which represents 25% of all looked after children. This is a decrease by 1% from the end of Q3, 2021/2022 (25.9%, 91 children).

4.3 As of 30th March 2022, there were 77 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), a decrease of 5 UASC (82 UASC in Q4)



4.4 The number of UASC placed in semi-independent accommodation is 49, 5 less than at the end of Q3, 2020-22 (54 UASC), none in residential children’s home and same number of UASC placed in foster placements in Q4 (28 UASC).



5. Recruitment and Assessment:

5.1 Marketing and recruitment activities continue to take place online. In the past quarter, there has been a steady increase in enquiries and attendance at information evenings. The monthly fostering information evenings have taken place online via Zoom, which attendees reportedly enjoyed, and continue to find more convenient than having to travel to a venue to hear more about

fostering. However, with the end of lockdown and the beginning of spring, we plan to make face-to-face meetings available.

- 5.2** During this reporting period, all marketing activity has been carried out online through the Brent Council website and managed by the social work team. Interested parties made enquiries by phone or online and the team carried out initial visits and assessments face-to-face and virtually via video calls, ensuring that the experience for prospective carers was 'business as usual'.
- 5.3** We carried out a short testing period for Google Ads, which indicated that Google Ads would attract more potential carers.
- 5.4** Of the 16 enquiries over the period, 4 were general enquiries, 8 were considered not suitable due to the lack of a spare room or the time commitment required of the prospective carers. 4 enquiries resulted in initial home visits with 2 progressing to Stage 1 of the fostering assessment process. Therefore, the total initial visits for this quarter is 4.
- 5.5** During this quarter, 5 prospective carers progressed to stage 2 (assessment phase). 3 new carers were approved during this quarter. 7 assessments are in stage 2 with the expectation that they will be presented to the fostering panel in May 2022 for approval as new carers.
- 5.6** In this reporting period there are 12 assessments underway, of these:
- 5 are in Stage 1;
 - 7 are in stage 2.

6. Fostering Panel

- 6.1** The LACPS 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; and
- the long-term fostering matches of all children below the age of 12.

6.3 During the period 1st January 2022 – 31st March 2022, 5 panels were held with 16 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:

- 4 ‘family and friends’ fostering households were recommended for approval;
- 3 new carers was recommended for approval as short term carers
- 2 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
- 2 short term carers were recommended for approval
- 1 change of approval numbers linked to fostering household
- 1 family and friends’ fostering household’s status was terminated as the carer was granted a Special Guardianship Order in respect of the child
- 2 fostering households resigned from their fostering role for Brent – 1 due to health reasons
- 1 assessment was discontinued at Stage 2 due to the applicant’s personal reasons.

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

7.0 Training and Support for Foster Carers:

7.1 Brent’s Learning and Development Team within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service continues to keep the training offer for foster carers and special guardians under review given the removal of lockdown restrictions with the intention of face-to-face sessions being delivered in the spring. At present, First Aid Training is the only course that is offered in person to carers.

7.2 Six courses were offered (all virtual) during the period under review, using Zoom, including:

- 13th January – Preventing Placement Breakdowns
- 26th January – The Professional Role of The Foster Carer
- 7th February – Traffic Light Tool for sexually harmful behaviours
- 25th February – First Aid Training
- 9th March – Professional Boundaries and Record Keeping
- 28th March – Prevent Training

Carers’ comments about the sessions were mainly positive but they continue to express that they are missing face-to-face interaction with their peers:

“The courses expectations were met, and course was excellent”

(Preventing Placement Breakdowns training)

"I found the section about (preventing) choking and (providing) CPR most useful in the First aid Training course"

First Aid Training

7.3 All carers additionally have access to an online training package provided by an external provider. The training courses offer a range of topics from *Caring for a child of a different ethnicity* to specialist educational needs courses such as *"Transitions in education"*. The courses can be accessed at any time of the day, or at the weekend, in response to carers asking for more flexible training times. Feedback from foster carers has been positive for all training commissioned and sign up has stayed consistent with carers regularly requesting the online training. Currently 66 carers have accounts with the external provider, an increase of 6 carers, with a view to having more signed up as the year progresses. The license is also up for renewal and a meeting will take place in April to discuss this further. The plan is to move towards more hybrid training sessions allowing both in person and remote attendance.

7.4 Support from Supervising Social Workers (SSW)

7.5 Alongside recruitment, retention of foster carers is a priority for the team, and the support offered to foster carers forms a large part of why carers remain committed to Brent, according to their feedback in Fostering Panel presentations and in their annual reviews.

7.6 To keep foster carers engaged and informed in writing, the fostering service use emails and mobile text messaging. Additionally, SSWs have maintained this flow of information via their supervisory visits and in their email and telephone communications.

7.7 The monthly foster carers' support group continues to be facilitated virtually as foster carers have expressed that it is their preferred option. Foster carers feed back that they find these online sessions useful and this view is supported by the increasing number of attendees each month; a shared view is that it is easier to commit to such a group without having to leave home to attend. To enable more carers to attend, the groups alternate between daytime (10am – 12noon) and evening (5:15 – 7:15pm) slots.

The support groups that took place during the reporting period focused on topics ranging from finance to the reviewing process.

8 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints:

8.1 During this quarter, there were no complaints or allegations made by or against any Brent foster carers.

8.2 There have been 25 reviews of foster carers in this period.

9 Practice Development

9.1 BERRI Clinical Evaluation Tool

As part of evaluating the impact and difference our work is having on children placed with foster carers, we will be piloting use of the BERRI clinical evaluation tool. The evaluation tool can be used for identifying, tracking and improving the outcomes of children with complex needs. The BERRI assessment checklist gathers information around five themes - Behaviour, Emotional Wellbeing, Relationships, Risks and other indicators and applies a score to produce a profile on children in our care and strategies to inform our work in strengthening placement stability. This pilot will be led by our Fostering/Placement Stability Practice Consultant.

9.2 West London Fostering Collaboration Project

The CPC has regularly been updated about the progress of this piece of work. The work continued until March 2022 and, due to the end of year budget setting period affecting other LAs involved and local elections taking place, the work has now been put on hold until June 2022.

Report sign-off:

Gail Tolley

Strategic Director Children and Young People