 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 20 July 2022
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People
Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 1: 1st April 2022 to 30th June 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)	Darren Johnson, Interim Service Manager, LAC and Permanency Darren.johnson@brent.gov.uk 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 2022 – 30th June 2022.

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 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 is focusing on the following priority areas in 2022/23:

- To have a greater focus on recruitment, assessment and approval of new carers with the view to achieve 5 net gain by the end of the financial year, considering termination of approvals and resignations
- To enhance the support offer to Brent's foster carers and kinship carers, considering therapeutic element to support placement stability
- To enhance the training and development programme for carers to include a permanent, ongoing mix of virtual and direct delivery of courses and seminars
- 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 five supervising social workers, two team managers and one marketing and recruitment officer (MRO) post.

3.2.2 The workload across the teams continues to grow as new kinship and foster carers are approved and allocated to supervising social workers to ensure ongoing support.

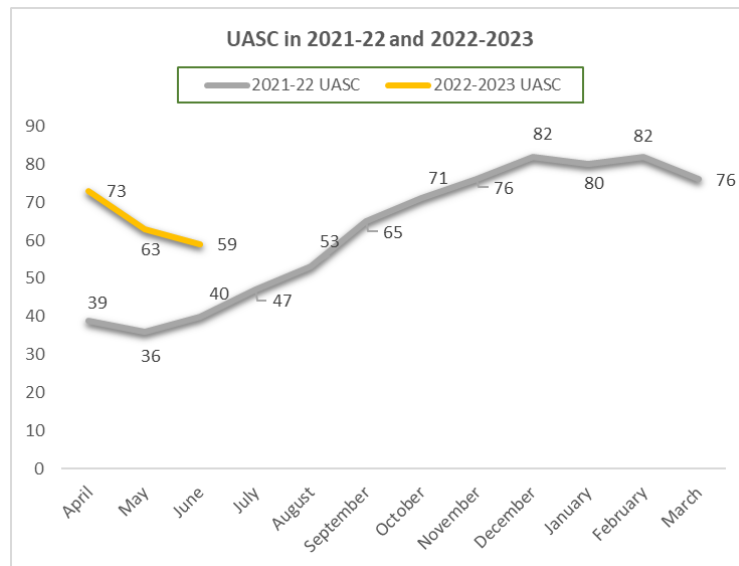
4.0 Placement Activity:

4.1 The total number of looked after children as at 30th June 2022 was 339, which is a decrease by 2 children from Q4 of 2021-2022 and an increase by 42 children from the same period in 2021 (297 children)

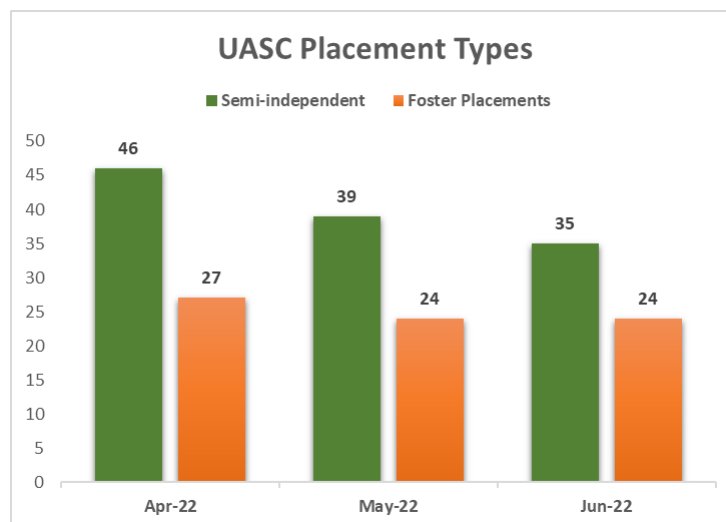
4.2 The corporate performance targets for 2022/2023 are as below:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 30th June 2022 was 15.3% (52 children), nearly same as the previous quarter Q4 of 2021/2022, 15.2% (52 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 20% - the actual percentage as of 30th June 2022 was 15.6% (53 children), an increase by 0.6% from Q4 of 2021/2022 of 15% (51 children),
- Percentage of looked after children placed with independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 30th June 2022 was 29.8% (101 children); same as Q4 of 2021/2022 30% (102 children)
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 70% - the actual percentage as of 30th June 2022 was 60.8% (206 children), which is an increase by 0.7% from Q4 of 2021/2022 which was 60.1% (205 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 76 looked after children in registered semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations) as at 30th June 2022, which represents 22.4% of all looked after children. This is a decrease by 0.2% from the end of Q4, 2021/2022 (24.6%, 84 children).

4.3 As of 30th June 2022, there were 59 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), a decrease of 18 UASC (77 UASC in Q4 2021-22). The decrease is attributable to the number of UASC turning 18 and those dispersed into the National Transfer Scheme.



4.4 The number of UASC placed in semi-independent accommodation is 35, 14 less than at the end of Q4, 2021-22 (49 UASC), none in residential children's home and 24 UASC placed in foster placements, less by 4 UASC from Q4 (28 UASC).



5.0 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. Face-to-face recruitment activities and information evenings are planned to take place in the second quarter of this financial year.

5.2 During this reporting period, marketing activity has been carried out 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. Therefore, our recruitment activity will include the use of Google Ads in the future.

5.4 Of the 13 enquiries received during this reporting period, 6 were general enquiries, 1 was unsuitable due to personal commitments, 2 enquirers were invited to our information evenings, 3 expressed interest in progressing to initial visit, 1 enquirer was an approved IFA foster carer so progressed to Stage 2.

5.5 During this reporting period, 10 assessments were undertaken. Of these:

- 3 are in Stage 1; and
- 7 are in Stage 2.

5.6 In terms of assessments reported in previous quarter (Q4 2021/22); 4 applicants went on to be approved as new carers during Q1 2022/23.

6.0 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 this period, 6 panels were held with 22 cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:

- 3 were recommended for approval as short term connected persons
- 4 were recommended for approval as short term carers
- 8 carers were approved as part of their 3 yearly annual review
- 3 carers were approved as part of their 1st annual review
- 1 carer was approved re long term match
- 1 carer was approved re change of approval numbers
- 2 carers fostering approval/status were terminated

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 summer 2022. At present, First Aid Training is offered in person to carers. Training is hybrid combination of face to face and virtual courses.

7.2 Six courses were offered (all virtual) during the period under review, using Zoom, including: Professional Boundaries and Record Keeping, Oral Health and Sexuality and Gender. Carers' comments about the sessions were mainly positive but they continue to express that they would like to have more face-to-face interaction with their peers. This is being planned to move towards more face to face training in the near future. An example of the carers' comments is below:

"Sexuality and Gender course was rated "Excellent" (Sexuality and Gender 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 Positive Parenting Techniques for Parents and Carers to Specialist Educational Needs courses such as Understanding Dyslexia and Dyspraxia. 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. We have recently renewed the

agreement with the agreed provider, with a view to signing up more carers as the year progresses. The plan is to continue the move towards more hybrid training sessions allowing both in person and remote attendance.

7.4 Support from Supervising Social Workers (SSW)

7.4.1 Retention of foster carers remains a priority, based on feedback from annual reviews and fostering panel. The support offered to foster carers forms a large part of why carers remain committed to Brent.

7.4.2 To keep foster carers engaged and informed, the fostering service provides a monthly newsletter and facilitates foster carer support groups.

7.4.3 The monthly foster carers' support group continues to be facilitated virtually as foster carers have expressed that it is their preferred option. However, some foster carers have expressed that they would welcome in the future alternate face-to-face and virtual sessions. This is being explored with foster carers.

7.4.4 The support groups that took place during the reporting period focused on topics ranging from training, summer trip, foster carer charter, foster carer association, finances and working together. The group in June was attended by the Fostering Service Manager and there was positive feedback received about their attendance and engagement on issues raised.

8.0 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 26 annual reviews of foster carers in this reporting period.

9.0 Service Development

9.1 Website Development

Work is being progressed to fully optimise the council website by enhancing our fostering digital platform to support 2022-23 marketing and recruitment activities.

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 September 2022.

9.3 Enhanced Support and Resources for Brent Carers

A review of current resources allocated to Brent's in-house fostering function is underway with the view to look into structure of teams and existing budget for support and supervision of carers. The aim is to place an enhanced focus on marketing, recruitment and approval of new carers as well as strengthening placement support. It is anticipated with some realignment of resources, Brent would be in a better position to attract more people into fostering as well as upskilling and supporting existing carers so that they would be enabled to care for children with complex needs and trauma.

9.3.1 The review will identify creative, cost effective ways in which to enhance our service offer to carers with the hope to create a dedicated in-house specialist support service aimed at strengthening placement stability and building carers' confidence and resilience. Part of the review will also explore approaches/best practice in "growing our own" especially regarding development of specialist and therapeutic cares.

Report sign off:

Gail Tolley

Strategic Director Children and Young People