 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 19 October 2022
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People
Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report Quarter 2: 1 July 2022 to 30 September 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
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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 the 1st of July 2022 to the 30th of September 2022.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review and comment on 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 Brent Looked After 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 two Fostering Support and Assessment Teams have now been merged into one team with one team manager and one Interim Deputy Team Manager. There are currently 12 Supervising Social Work posts, 1 Marketing and Recruitment Officer (MRO) post in this establishment.

3.2.2 The workload in the team continues to grow as new kinship and foster carers are approved and allocated to supervising social

workers to ensure ongoing support and monitoring.

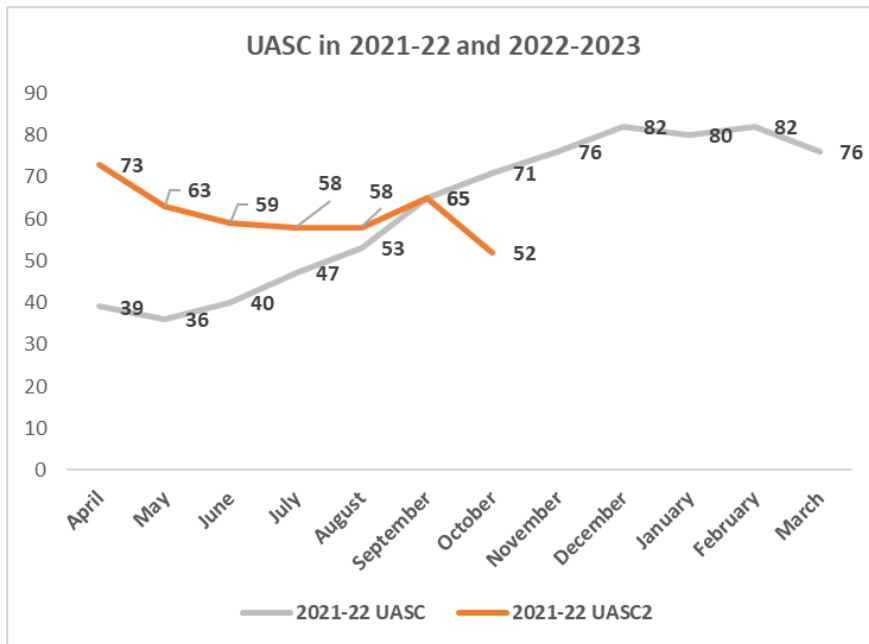
4.0 Placement Activity:

The total number of looked after children as at 30th Sep- 2022 was 334, which is a decrease by 5 children from Q1 of 2022-2023 and an increase by 22 children from the same period in 2021 (312 children)

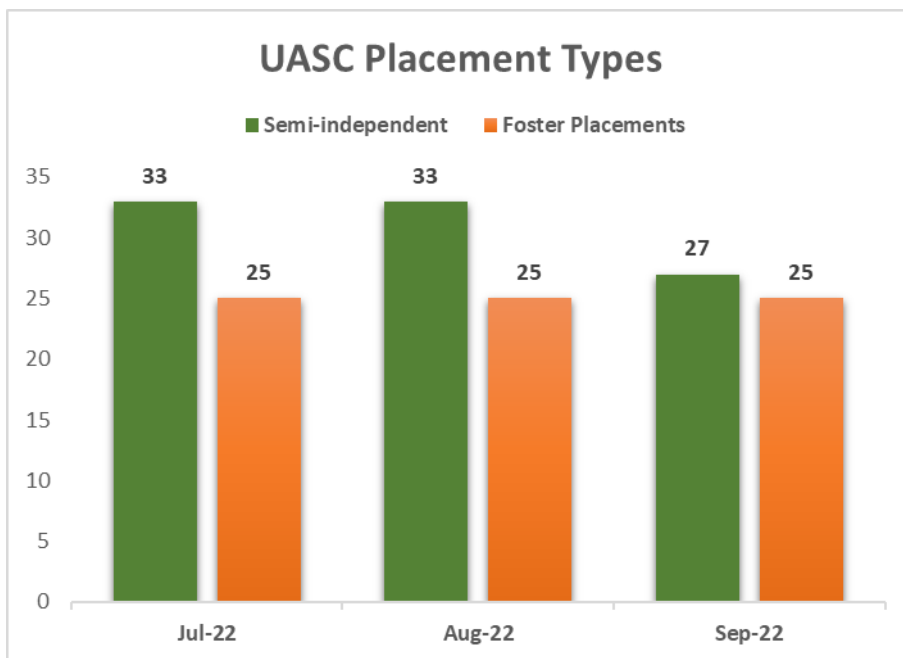
4.1 The corporate performance targets for 2022/2023 are as below:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 30th June 2022 was 18.9% (63 children), an increase of 3.6% the previous quarter Q1 of 2022/2023, 15.3% (52 children).
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 20% - the actual percentage as of 30th Sep - 2022 was 15.6% (52 children), same as Q1 of 2022/2023 of 15.6% (53 children)
- Percentage of looked after children placed with independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 30th Sep - 2022 was 28.7% (96 children); decrease from Q1 of 2022/2023 by 1.1% (29.8%, 101 children)
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 70% - the actual percentage as of 30th Sep -2022 was 64.7% (216 children), which is an increase by 3.9% from Q1 of 2022/2023 which was 60.8% (206 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 68 looked after children in registered semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations) as at 30th Sep - 2022, which represents 20.4% of all looked after children. This is a decrease by 2% from the end of Q1, 2022/2023 (22.4%, 76 children).

4.2 As of 30th Sep-2022, there were 52 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), a decrease of 7 UASC (59 UASC in Q1 2022-23). The decrease is attributable to the number of UASC turning 18 and those dispersed into the National Transfer Scheme.



4.3 The number of UASC placed in semi-independent accommodation is 27, 5 less than at the end of Q1, 2022-23 (35 UASC), none in residential children’s home and 25 UASC placed in foster placements, 1 UASC more from Q1 (24 UASC).



5.0 Recruitment and Assessment:

5.1. Marketing and recruitment activities continue to take place online. 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 continue to be considered but at the moment the feedback from participants is that they prefer online events.

- 5.2. To enhance recruitment, the MRO finalised a recruitment plan to be implemented starting mid-October. The aim is to recruit six more fostering households by the end of the financial year to meet the yearly target of 15 approved foster carers. The plan revolves around advertising on popular digital channels such as Google Ads and Facebook to acquire new leads that will afterwards be converted via the fostering newsletter/information evening. The campaign dedicated landing page has been built, and will be shortly followed by an update of the main fostering landing page. Both pages have been optimised for lead conversion.
- 5.3. The Fostering newsletter continues to be delivered monthly to the 5000+ subscribers. The September edition has recorded an all-time high click through rate of 4.1% - higher than the 2022 government and non-profit benchmarks of 3.99% and 2.79% respectively.
- 5.4. The service is promoting the need for local foster carers in the autumn issue of The Brent Magazine through an interactive ad which contains a QR code allowing viewers to download the digital fostering brochure. The number of downloads is being monitored throughout the campaign.
- 5.5. The MRO is working to promote the Sons and Daughters of Foster Carers campaign throughout October. Promotion will include a case study about a Brent fostering household and additional internal activities to celebrate the contribution to fostering of Brent foster carers' children.
- 5.6. In the reporting period, the fostering team recorded 16 information evening sign ups and 11 enquiries. Of these 1 is progressing to an initial visit. Phone calls and web request for callback were two of the most popular ways people contacted the service.
- 5.7. Of the 10 assessments that were reported to be in progress in previous quarter (Q1 2022/23), 2 of the 3 in stage1 progressed to stage 2 and 1 remains in stage 1. Of the 7 assessments which were reported to be in stage 2, 4 remain in stage 2, 1 is on hold and 2 applicants have withdrawn due to changes in their personal circumstances.
- 5.8. During this reporting period, 8 assessments were undertaken. Of these:
 - 1 in Stage 1; and
 - 7 in Stage 2.

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, 4 panels were held with 15 cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:
- 5 were recommended for approval as short term connected persons
 - 1 was recommended for approval as short term carers
 - 2 carers were re-approved as part of their 3 yearly annual review
 - 3 carers were re-approved as long term carers
 - 4 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 The CYP Learning and Development Team within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service continues to offer learning opportunities for foster carers and special guardians using a mix of delivery methods comprising of face-to-face, online virtual and E-Learning. The Team regularly review the number of face-to-face learning opportunities in consultation with Brent carers, and it is evident that there is an increase in their participation in sessions within each quarter. Additionally as part of learning evaluation feedback obtained from carers on whether they preferred face-to-face or online virtual sessions, there is an equal preference for both options.

- 7.2 In this quarter two opportunities for face to face training offered; First Aid and Missing Persons' Training. There are at least a further two face-to-face sessions coming up in the next quarter. In the last quarter four facilitated learning sessions were completed [two face-to-face in July 2022 and two online virtual in September 2022. The online virtual sessions were Key Legislation and Delegated Authority training, and PREVENT Training. There were no facilitated sessions in August due to the summer holiday, however there has been an increase in carers accessing and completing E-Learning courses this year with 73 courses completed in 2021 and 113 in 2022.

"I like both, because it depends on the type of training. Some definitely need face to face. For example, First Aid."

"The course was well put together, abundance of information, the content explained nicely so that each and everyone could understand what is been said. I really enjoyed the course. Thank you"

"The legislative side of the course. How it works. From the beginning middle and the end result of a child being LAC. The many agencies evolved. All working together for the betterment of the child/young people. Was an eye opener for me in regards to private fostering. Was good to know that they are not under the radar."

- 7.3. In addition to facilitated training and in response to carers requesting more flexible training times, the team continue to provide all carers access to learning opportunities at any time of the day, evenings and weekends, through access to an E-Learning online courses package. The E-Learning courses available are many under the following categories: Core Knowledge and Values, Safeguarding and Child Protection Skills, Therapeutic Care, Supporting Adolescence, Working with Looked after Children (Fostering, Residential Care and Adoption), Understanding Trauma and Promoting Positive Behaviour, Working in Health and Social Care, Working with Disabilities and Special Educational Needs, and Children Safe Online.

- 7.4. Moving forward the plan is to continue towards more balanced hybrid training sessions from 2023, by progressively increasing the number of face-to-face sessions, towards a target of 50/50 split for all facilitated training being, face-to-face, or online virtual sessions.

7.5 Support from Supervising Social Workers (SSW)

- 7.5.1 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.

- 7.5.2 To keep foster carers engaged and informed, the fostering service provides a monthly newsletter and facilitates foster carer support groups.
- 7.5.3 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.
- 7.5.4 The support groups that took place during the reporting period focused on topics ranging from training, foster carer association, life story work and working together. There was no Foster carers Support group meeting in August as the summer trip takes place in August each year. This year the foster carers went on a Summer Seaside trip with their families and children in their care to Southend-On-Sea. Positive feedback received from foster carers was that they thoroughly enjoyed spending time away from London and having fun with the children.

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 28 annual reviews of foster carers in this reporting period.

9.0 Service Development

9.1 Website Development

The fostering website is fully optimised to support recruitment; furthermore, a bespoke landing page has been created for our Google Ads digital campaign due to be launched late-October.

Brent Fostering continues to have a social media presence on all major social networks: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram.

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 local authorities involved and local elections taking place, the work has now been put on hold until the end of the financial year.

Brent will continue to champion a joint working approach to recruiting, preparing

and assessing foster carers with neighboring Local Authorities.

9.3 Enhanced Support and Resources for Brent Carers

9.3.1 The team reviewed the current resources allocated to Brent's in-house fostering function, by looking into the structure of the teams and the existing budget for support and supervision of carers. The two fostering teams have now merged with one full time Team Manager supported by a full time Acting Deputy Manager. By doing this we are anticipating that we will uniform the practice across the fostering service, upskill the supervising social workers and strengthen placement support.

9.3.2 The main focus remains marketing, recruitment and approval of new carers. Brent continues to have a good social media presence intended to attract more potential foster carers. The team is currently revisiting the fostering offer to new and existing carers, exploring creative, cost effective ways in which to enhance our service offer in order to prepare and upskill the existing foster carers so they feel empowered and confident to look after children with complex needs and trauma. A working group has been set up to look at developing an in-house specialist support service aimed at strengthening placement stability and training and supporting carers who would like to become specialist and therapeutic carers, this is also reflected in our current Sufficiency Strategy.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director Children and Young People