	<p align="center"><b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b> 1 February 2023</p>
	<p align="center"><b>Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</b></p>
<p><b>Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report Quarter 3: 1 October 2022 to 31 December 2022</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	Open
<b>No. of Appendices:</b>	N/A
<b>Background Papers:</b>	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 its ambition to achieve good outcomes for Looked After Children by Brent Council. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).

- 1.2 This report details the quarter 3 activity of Brent's fostering service from the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2022 to the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 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, reviewed and challenged in order to promote good outcomes for Brent Looked After Children.

## **3.0 Background**

### **3.1 Service Priorities**

3.1.1 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 a net gain of 5 new carers as set out in the Marketing and Recruitment Strategy 2022-23 by the end of the financial year
- To enhance the support offer to Brent's foster carers and kinship carers, by providing therapeutic services to support placement stability
- To enhance the training and development program 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
- To develop collaborative partnerships with neighbouring authorities to recruit and retain more foster carers.
- To recruit, train and retain foster carers that offer emergency placements to children and young people who come into care in unplanned circumstances

### **3.2 Staffing Arrangements**

3.2.1 The Fostering Support and Assessment Team consists of 10 supervising social workers, one Team Manager, one Interim Deputy Team Manager and one Marketing and Recruitment Officer (MRO) post.

3.2.2 The Kinship Care Team consists of 8 social workers, one Team Manager and one Practice Consultant Social Worker.

3.2.3 The workload in the teams continues to be at manageable levels as new kinship and foster carers are assessed, 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 31<sup>st</sup> Dec- 2022 was 323, which is a decrease by 11 children from Q2 of 2022-2023 and an increase of 11 children from the same period in 2021 (312 children)

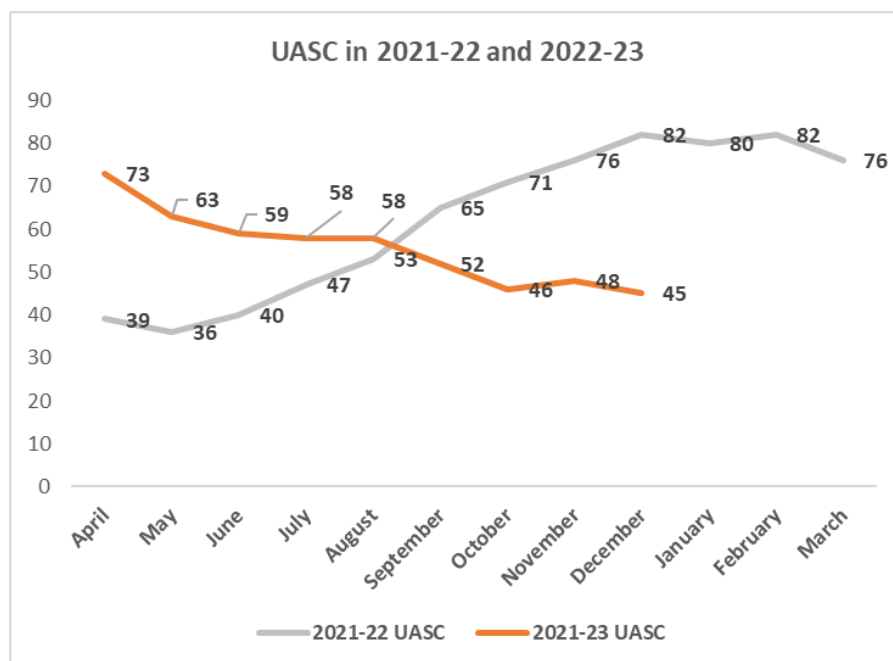
4.2 The corporate performance targets for 2022/2023 are as below:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 31<sup>st</sup> Dec- 2022 was 18.6% (60 children), a decrease by 0.3% the previous quarter Q2

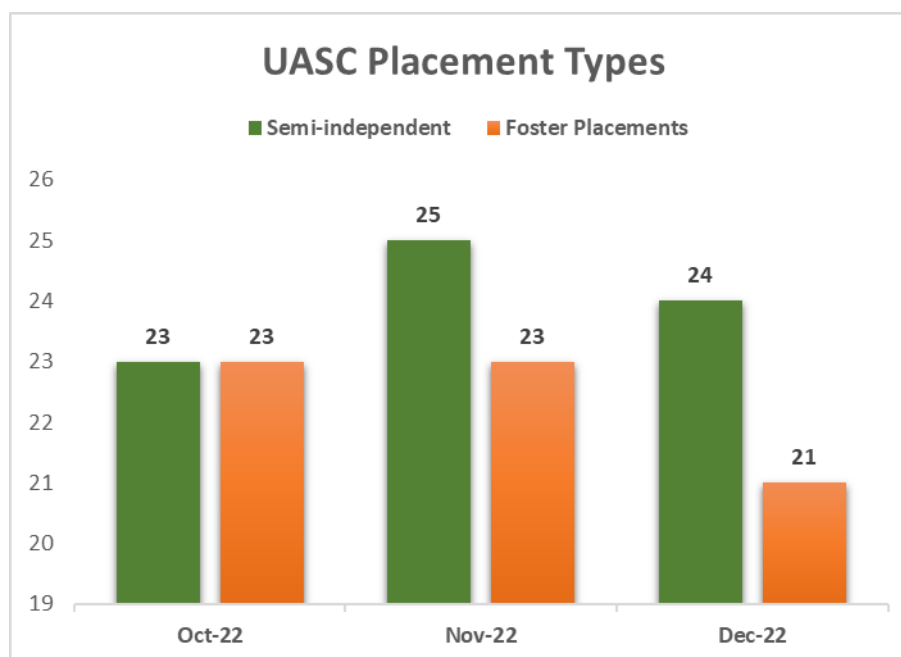
of 2022/2023, 18.9% (63 children).

- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 20% - the actual percentage as of 31<sup>st</sup> Dec- 2022 was 15.8% (51 children), similar to Q2 of 2022/2023 (15.6%, 52 children)
- Percentage of looked after children placed with independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 31<sup>st</sup> Dec- 2022 was 30.7% (99 children); an increase of 2% from Q2 of 2022/2023 (28.7%, 96 children)
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 70% - the actual percentage as of 31<sup>st</sup> Dec- 2022 was 65% (210 children), similar to Q2 of 2022/2023 which was 64.7% (216 children). This is primarily related to older children and young people becoming newly looked after and the increase in the number of 16 and 17-year-old UASC who were placed in semi-independent accommodation.
- There were 61 looked after children ( 16 and 17 years old) in semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children’s Home Regulations) as at 31<sup>st</sup> Dec- 2022, which represents 18.9% of all looked after children. This is a decrease of 1.5% from the end of Q2, 2022/2023 (20.4%, 68 children).

4.3 As of 31<sup>st</sup> Dec- 2022, there were 45 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) under the age of 18 years, a decrease of 7 UASC (52 UASC in Q2 2022-23). 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 24, fewer than at the end of Q2, 2022-23 (27 UASC), none in residential children's home and 21 UASC placed in foster placements, 4 UASC fewer than Q2 (25 UASC).



## 5 Recruitment and Assessment of new foster carers

- 5.1 The recruitment of new foster carers takes place both online and offline, relying on paid and organic campaigns. In relation to online recruitment, the service has run an intense promotional activity on Facebook and Google. In regard to the recruitment activity which takes place offline, there has been a fostering advert in the Brent Magazine and the MRO completed work on a TV campaign. The monthly fostering information evenings have taken place online via Zoom, which enabled greater attendance and participation. The attendees reported that they found online meetings more convenient and saves them travelling time. In November 2022, the service held a morning information event, which did not turn out to be as successful as the virtual evening ones.
- 5.2 The Google Search and Facebook campaigns have generated a total of 113 users attending to the campaign landing page where they can find out more information about fostering for Brent Council. Out of the 113, 34 started to complete the Contact Form, however only 4 eventually submitted a completed enquiry. All fully completed enquiries were followed up and spoken to by the duty social worker.
- 5.3 On 20 December 2022, the service launched its first TV advert since 2017, through Sky Media. Results of the TV campaign are expected in the next reporting period. The feedback received so far shows that the campaign is reaching the intended primary target group which is Brent women aged 35-55 years old.

- 5.4 In the reporting period, the fostering team recorded 26 information evening sign ups and 13 enquiries. Of these: 2 were recommended for initial visit and the remaining 11 were sadly unsuccessful for various reasons such as unsuitable accommodation, availability, interest in fostering with private agencies, needing more time to decide, or are interested in adoption only. The enquirers who are interested in fostering, but have not decided, will be contacted by the service and encouraged to apply.
- 5.5 Of the 8 assessments reported in the last quarter, 3 applicants were approved by the fostering panel as foster carers in November and December 2022. 5 are in stage 2, of which 2 are on hold for personal reasons. During this reporting period, there were:
- 2 Initial visits in progress
  - No assessment in stage 1
  - 5 assessments in stage 2
- 5.6 Brent Kinship Care service supports Localities and Care Planning Teams to identify and assess friends and family members for children who are unable to live with their birth parents. Brent is committed to keeping children in their local community and living with people familiar to them whenever it is possible and safe to do so. In Q3, 6 Connected Person carers were presented to the Fostering Panel to be approved as Short Term foster carers for named children. The Kinship Care team also completed 12 Special Guardianship Assessments which were presented to Court to support Special Guardianship Order applications in this period.

## **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, including care experienced panel members and one independent panel member who was brought up in a kinship placement. 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 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 21 cases presented of which:
- 6 were recommended for approval as short term connected persons
  - 5 were recommended for approval as short term carers
  - 3 carers were re-approved as part of their 3 yearly annual review
  - 2 carers were re-approved as part of their 1st annual review
  - 2 carers were re-approved as long term carers
  - 2 carers were re-approved with change of approval numbers
  - 6 carers fostering approval/status were terminated

All the recommendations made by the panel were ratified by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

## 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 and training for new and experienced foster carers and special guardians using a mix of delivery methods comprising of face-to-face, online virtual and E-Learning. There is evidence of steady increase in the carers take up of the training offer. Feedback is sought after each training and carers overwhelmingly continue to express a preference for online training. The carers attended face to face First Aid training in the last quarter and a further two face-to-face sessions have been organized in the next quarter. Moving forward, the plan is to continue towards more balanced hybrid training sessions from April 2023, by progressively increasing the number of face-to-face sessions, towards a target of 50/ 50 split for all facilitated training being either face-to-face, or online virtual sessions.
- 7.2 In the last quarter in addition to the First Aid training, the service facilitated 8 learning sessions for carers. These included Safeguarding and Safer Caring; Understanding Adolescent Exploitation; Learning from Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR); Men in Foster Care, Oral Health of children in care, and Identifying and Supporting Children with Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties. The carers provided feedback on the training and some of the feedback as follows:-

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*"I do miss training taking place face to face as you get to share experiences with other carers. It also a good way of getting to know other carers. With saying that online takes away the need to leave home making it sometimes easy if you have a busy schedule."*

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*"It helped to remind me that even if it's a small niggle of uncertainty still record and log and use S.S.W as sounding board also doctor therapist teachers friends and most importantly communication with young person". (Learning from Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR feedback))*

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*"Having a child in placement with speech and language support it reminded me how important it is to be aware of the language they are using . It encourages me to be aware of my communication with her and the benefits that she can gain from different forms of communication, playing games, speaking with age appropriate language and active listening". (Identifying and Supporting Children with Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties feedback)*

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- 7.3 The service continues 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 cover a wide range of topics including: 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. There has been a steady increase in the carers engagement with this method of learning. In this current quarter, 45 E-Learning courses were completed; this is an 87.5% increase from end of Q2 of 2022/2023. Compared to 55.2% the same Q3 period in 2021/2022.
- 7.4 In addition to the Brent Fostering Training calendar 2022-23, carers are also able to access training via the Brent Safeguarding Partnership multi-agency learning and development catalogue, with some carers consistently utilising this resource.

## **8.0 Support from Supervising Social Workers (SSW)**

- 8.1 One of the main priorities continues to be the retention of foster carers. We know from the feedback received during the annual reviews and Fostering Panel that our carers value the support they receive, and this continues to be the primary reason why carers remain committed to Brent.
- 8.2 To keep foster carers engaged and informed, the fostering service provides a monthly newsletter and facilitates foster carer support groups. The carers find the support group helpful and informative.
- 8.3 The monthly foster carer support group continues to be facilitated virtually as foster carers have expressed that it is their preferred option.
- 8.4 The month of October 2022 was 'Sons and Daughters of Foster carers' event. This is a one-month long event taking place every year in October. Initiated by The Fostering Network, it has become very popular as it shines a light on the unsung heroes of fostering - the birth children. Brent Fostering joined the celebrations with a special message from the Head of Service, certificates of appreciation and gift vouchers for all birth children under 18 years of age.
- 8.5 In October 2022, the service marked Kinship Care Awareness Week. Brent Kinship Fostering celebrated the achievements of its kinship carers during different events where kinship carers could learn more about their role as well as how to access support. The Corporate Director, CYP, joined the campaign and helped raise awareness through an interview with one of our kinship carers focusing on kinship in Brent.

## **9.0 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints:**

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

9.2 There have been 20 annual reviews of foster carers in this reporting period.

## **10.0 Service Development**

### **10.1 Website Development**

10.1.1 The fostering website is fully optimised to support recruitment. For the digital marketing campaign, there is a dedicated landing page that has been optimised for conversions. This means that users clicking through from the Facebook and Google ads can easily contact the service or submit their expression of interest. For those who are not ready to foster, there is a button which allows them to subscribe to the fostering newsletter - thus keeping all prospective applicants engaged.

### **10.2 West London Fostering Collaboration Project**

10.2.1 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.

10.2.2 Brent will continue to champion a joint working approach to recruiting, preparing and assessing foster carers with neighbouring Local Authorities.

10.2.3 Over the next few months, the service is working with Adopt London West and volunteers to plan a series of events to engage the Brent kinship community and involve kinship carers and their children in decision-making processes, policy development and service provision by promoting open dialogue between those experts by experience and professionals delivering services and support.

### **10.3 Enhanced Support and Resources for Brent Carers**

10.3.1 One of our main priorities has continued to be the enhancement of the support offer to Brent's foster carers and kinship carers, by including a therapeutic element to support placement stability.

10.3.2 The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families via our Brent WEST service has been providing a targeted mental health and emotional wellbeing service for vulnerable children and young people in Brent as well as delivering consultations and indirect intervention programs supporting foster carers and kinship carers such as Reflective Support Groups. These groups are open to all of our carers, and they provide an opportunity to meet with a mental health professional, reflect on the care they provide, prevent placement breakdowns, improve the relationship with their looked after children, upskill the carers and

reduce the number of additional professionals in the life of our Looked After Children.

10.3.3 The task and finish group set up in September 2022 has been looking at developing an in-house specialist support service aimed at strengthening placement stability, training and supporting carers who would like to become specialist and therapeutic carers. This task and finish group will continue to meet monthly over the next few months and regular updates will be provided.

**Report sign off:**

***Nigel Chapman***

Corporate Director Children and Young People