



Corporate Parenting Committee

24 April 2023

Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People

Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report Quarter 4: 1 January 2023 to 31 March 2023

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)	<p>Elena Muller Service Manager, Looked After Children and Permanency</p> <p>Kelli Eboji Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Kelli.Eboji@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Palvinder Kudhail Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk</p>

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 1 of January 2023 to the 31 of March 2023.

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 Looked After Children in Brent.

3.0 Background

3.1 Service Priorities:

3.1.1 The in-house fostering function is positioned within the LAC and Permanency Service of the Children and Young People's Service. The service is focusing on the following priority areas in 2022/23:

- Recruitment, assessment and approval of new carers with a target to achieve a net gain of 5 new carers
- 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 programme for carers that includes a 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 changes of social workers and placements
- To develop 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 post.

3.2.2 The Kinship Care Team, consists of 8 Social Workers, one Team Manager and one Practice Consultant Social Worker. Two student Social Workers had placements in the Kinship Team during this period and they were guided and supported by experienced Practice Educators. One student completed the Step Up programme (a fast-track social work training programme for high calibre graduates interested in career changes) and the other is due to finish her placement in May 2023. They will join the ASYE programme that gives newly qualified social workers extra support during their first year of employment.

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.

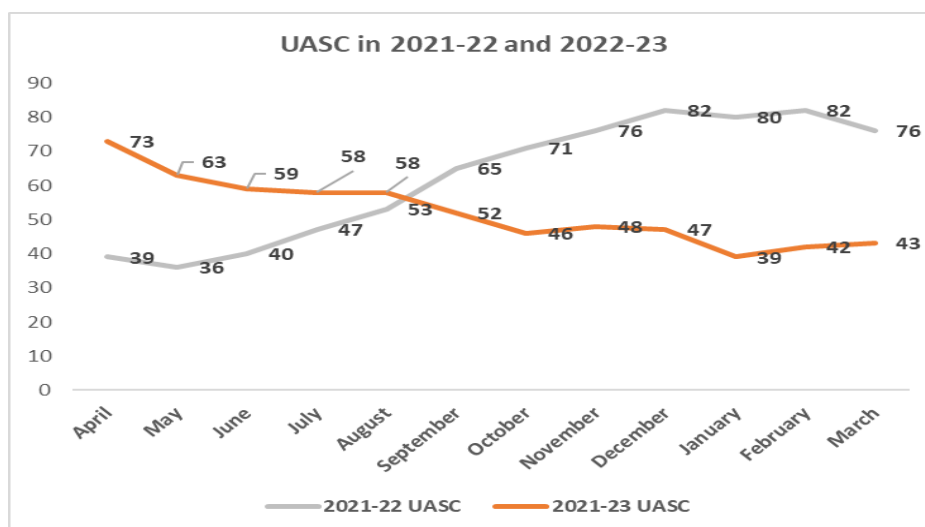
4.0 Placement Activity

4.1 The total number of looked after children as of 31st March 2023 was 317, which is a decrease by 6 children from Q3 of 2022-2023 and a decrease by 25 children from the same period in 2022 (342 children).

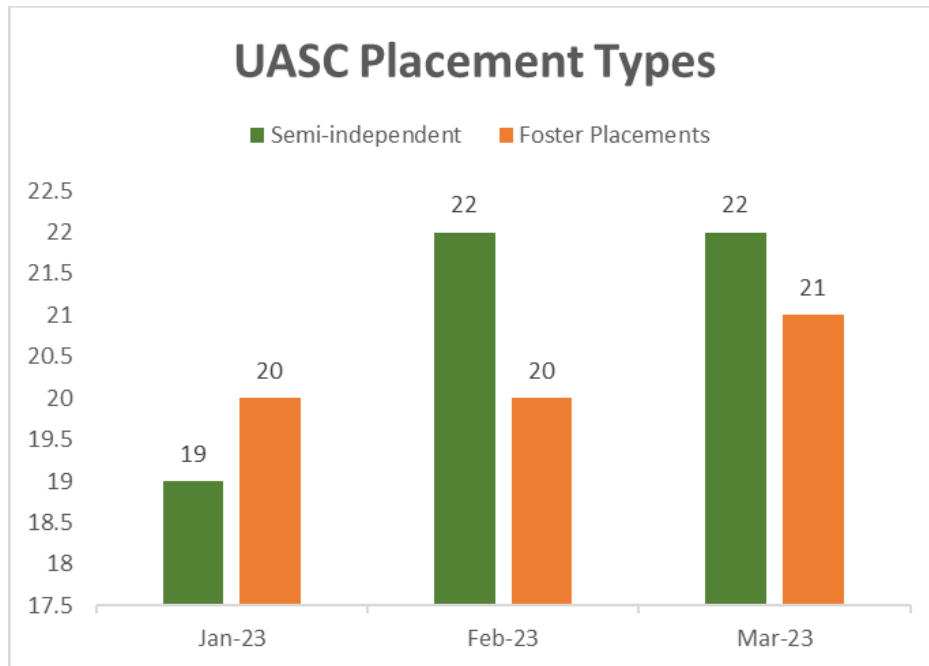
4.2 The corporate performance targets for 2022/2023 are as below:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers as of the 31st of March 2023 was 19% (58 children), an increase by 0.4% from the previous quarter Q3 of 2022/2023, 18.6% (60 children) – annual target 25%
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend as of the 31st of March 2023 was 14.5% (46 children), a decrease by 1.3% from Q3 of 2022/2023 (15.8%, 51 children) – annual target 20%
- Percentage of looked after children placed with independent fostering agencies as of the 31st of March 2023 was 35% (111 children), an increase by 4.3% from Q3 of 2022/2023 (30.7%, 99 children) – annual target 25%
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements as of the 31st of March 2023 was 67.8% (215 children), an increase of 2.8% from Q3 of 2022/2023 which was 65% (210 children) – annual target 70%. 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 61 looked after children in semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children’s Home Regulations) as of the 31st of March 2023, which represents 16.1% of all looked after children. This is a decrease by 2.8% from the end of Q3, 2022/2023 (18.9%, 61 children).

4.3 There were 43 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) as of 31st of March 2023, a decrease of 2 UASC (45 UASC in Q3 2022-23). The decrease is attributable to the number of UASC turning 18.



- 4.4 The number of UASC placed in semi-independent accommodation is the same as Q3 of 2022-23, 22, none in residential children's homes and 21 UASC placed in foster placements, 1 UASC more from Q3 (20 UASC).



5.0 Recruitment and Assessment of new foster carers

- 5.1 During this period, the marketing and recruitment activities took place both online and face-to-face. An advertising campaign took place on Facebook and Google which generated 102 unique visits to the website with four users filling out the enquiry/contact form.
- 5.2 Efforts to recruit new foster carers was supported by a Sky TV campaign rolled out exclusively in the London Borough of Brent aimed at mid, mid-to-high and high-income households. An increase in website traffic by 40% compared to the previous period has been reported and four enquiries about fostering were made through the dedicated campaign landing page.
- 5.3 The Marketing and Recruitment Officer attended events in the local area such as: International Women's Day which took place on the 7th of March 2023 at the Civic Centre and Brent Connects events for Willesden, Harlesden, Kilburn, Kingsbury and Kenton, and Wembley during March. Following the International Women's Day event, the Fostering team received four information requests. One enquirer was invited to the April Fostering Information Evening. The people attending Brent Connects events were very interested to find out more about looked after children and their

needs and expressed a desire to get involved in different community activities/initiatives. Moreover, Co-op stores in Brent will be able to distribute fliers and leaflets to promote fostering in Brent, free of charge.

- 5.4 The Marketing and Recruitment Officer contacted various local groups and faith leaders from all religious backgrounds in Brent to request their support to promote fostering. The response received was not consistent, and only a couple of faith leaders replied to the initial contact made. More efforts are needed to engage these communities, which will include meeting the faith and group leaders in their community and attending local events.
- 5.5 The Marketing and Recruitment Officer also sent out flyers, posters and information brochures to Brent Libraries, hubs and wellbeing centres which had been displayed and distributed to residents. The Fostering Newsletter continues to be delivered monthly to the 5000+ subscribers. Three newsletters were sent in the reporting period, focusing on the following themes: fostering as a way to start the year, the needs of children in care, and celebrating female foster carers on International Women's Day. All newsletters recorded on average a click rate of 4%, which is above the sector average.
- 5.6 In the reporting period, the fostering team received 14 enquiries. Phone calls and web requests for call-backs were two of the most popular ways for people to contact the fostering team. Two applicants had an initial visit and they were invited to progress to Stage 1. One applicant was invited to attend the Information Evening to gain a greater understanding of the fostering process. The other 11 enquirers were either in the initial stages of the process or they did not meet the criteria to become foster carers. The duty social worker and the Recruitment Officer keep in touch with previous applicants who for different reasons were not able to move the next stage of the process, by sending them the monthly newsletter, and information about different events to keep potential foster carers engaged.
- 5.7 Of the 5 assessments in stage 2 reported in the last quarter, 3 applicants have been approved and 2 remain in stage 2. 4 assessments are in progress in this reporting period. Of these:
- 2 are in stage 1; and
 - 2 are in stage 2, including one carer on hold until May 2023.

6.0 Fostering Panel

- 6.1 The LAC and Permanency 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 people 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 approximately three panels to be held every two months. Active recruitment of more panel members is taking place with a focus on people with a professional background in mental health and education which will add value and expertise to the Fostering Panel and ensure another level of scrutiny and challenge. Suitable candidates have been identified and they are going through the recruitment process.

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
- The long-term fostering matches of all children below the age of 12.

6.3 During this period, 4 panels were held with 18 cases presented of which:

- 5 were recommended for approval as short term connected persons
- 3 were recommended for approval as short term carers
- 4 carers were re-approved as part of their 3 yearly annual review
- 2 carers were re-approved as part of their 1st annual review
- 3 carers whose fostering approval/status were terminated
- 1 carer was re-approved as a long term carer.

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 for new and experienced foster carers and connected persons using different delivery methods comprising of face-to-face, online/virtual and E-Learning.

7.2 In the last quarter, the service offered 14 learning sessions to carers which included 4 workshops via the Brent Safeguarding Partnership. Most of the sessions took place online. The initial target, set in April 2022, was for half of the training to take place face-to-face, and half online/virtual sessions, however this has changed following a recent consultation with the carers who shared their preference for the training sessions to be delivered online. The carers have also requested that the sessions are held in the evening, and this request will be taken into consideration when developing the new training offer.

7.3 There has been a reduction in the take up of mandatory training in this quarter, which led to the cancellation of 2 key training sessions due to low

numbers of carers who signed up, The Professional Role of the Foster Carer and The Role of the Local Authority Designated Officer. Despite regular reminders and concerted efforts to promote the mandatory training sessions, the take-up for some workshops remains low. The Learning and Development Team and the supervising social workers will continue to promote and encourage the carers to attend all mandatory courses. The Fostering Panel and each carer's annual review enables monitoring and scrutiny of foster carers' training attendance and hold carers to account if the carers are not compliant with this requirement.

7.4 Conversely, there has been a steady increase in carers accessing the multi-agency learning and development offer via the Brent Safeguarding Partnership. Foster carers have completed the following training via this route: Serious Youth Violence-Gang Affiliation, Criminality, Vulnerability and Safeguarding; Adolescent Mental Health – the rise, and how to support; Parental Mental Health – what, and the impact on the adult(s) and any children; Domestic Abuse: a focus on children and young people in Brent. Other training completed by carers this quarter has included Professional Boundaries and Record Keeping; Digital Safety – keeping children safe online; Attachment and Child Development; Domestic Violence and Impact on Children; Managing Behaviours and De-escalation Techniques; Sexual Health of Children Looked After.

7.5 Carers are encouraged to provide feedback on the training sessions they attend and some quotes can be found below:

"Knowing where to go for that extra support and help" (Domestic Abuse: A Focus on Children and Young People in Brent)

"She really explained them well for I have done this course before some years back and like this was like refreshing for me and I enjoyed it."
(Professional Boundaries and Record Keeping)

"My first time doing this course it was so interesting/ because it's something people are scared to address...Not only can you help children in your care but also adults in need... I found all the information helpful" (PAPYRUS Suicide Prevention – Tutorial Overview)

7.6 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 & Adoption),

Understanding Trauma and Promoting Positive Behaviour, Working in Health and Social Care, Working with Disabilities and Special Educational Needs, and Children Safe Online.

7.7 Following a period of consultation involving carers, young people and social workers, new training opportunities will be offered to carers in the new financial year. The new training sessions will focus on Trauma Informed Practice, Adolescent Mental Health, Self-Harming, and Neurodiversity in addition to the mandatory/core training offer.

8.0 Support from Supervising Social Workers (SSW)

8.1 One of the main priorities continues to be the retention of foster carers. Feedback received during the annual reviews and Fostering Panel highlight that carers value the support they receive from the highly skilled and experienced supervising social workers, and this continues to remain the main reason why foster carers are committed to fostering for Brent. The foster carers are able to contact their supervising social workers and the Team Manager outside of office hours as and when required.

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

8.3 The monthly foster carers' support group continues to be facilitated virtually as it is the foster carers' preferred option.

8.4 Keeping Brent children as close to their family origin where appropriate is crucial to ensuring positive outcomes for children and young people. The aim is to further increase the number of locally available Brent foster carers, and in order to do this Brent Fostering Team are planning to revise the foster carer offer and relaunch the recruitment drive.

8.5 Foster Care Fortnight is The Fostering Network's annual campaign to raise the profile of fostering and show how foster care transforms lives. Foster Care Fortnight 2023 will take place from 15-28 May and provides a great opportunity for Brent Fostering Team to celebrate the work, the strength and the resilience of the Brent fostering community. Brent's Fostering Team are planning a series of events during Foster Care Fortnight to shine a light on fostering and highlight the need for more foster carers.

9.0 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints

9.1 During this quarter, there was 1 allegation made against a Brent foster carer.

9.2 There have been 34 annual reviews of foster carers in this reporting period.

10.0 Service Development

Working with carers and community partners to engage and promote the voices of Brent Kinship Carers

- 10.1 The Kinship Team have been working with a Brent Kinship Carer Peer Volunteer and other external organisations (Family Rights Group, Families in Harmony) to promote the voice and interests of kinship carers in Brent and West London.
- 10.2 The Peer Volunteer and the Kinship Team organised a forum event in February 2023 for kinship carers, professionals and Elected Members to start an open and transparent dialogue about their lived experiences of being kinship carers in Brent. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the carers' support needs and to agree a way of developing and co-designing the service with input from the carers. One suggestion from this forum was for the group to develop a set of *Practice Promises* specifically for kinship carers and children living in kinship care.
- 10.3 The Kinship Team joined another forum event in March 2023 organised by the Kinship Carer Peer Volunteer. This event was attended by kinship carers, and a number of organisations working in the borough such as Brent Health Inequalities Team, (part of Brent Health Matters programme), Brent Gateway Partnership and Virtual School. As there are a number of organisations in Brent that offer services to kinship carers, the Kinship Team will organise an event and invite these agencies to a meeting in order to get to know one another and develop a joined up approach to supporting carers. One of the anticipated outcomes of the meeting is to put together a guide for professionals and carers of all these organisations that offer services and support to Brent's kinship community.

Enhanced Support and Resources for Brent Carers

- 10.4 One of our main priorities has remained the enhancement of the support offer to Brent's foster carers and kinship carers by including a therapeutic element to support placement stability.
- 10.5 The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families via our Brent WEST service has continued to provide targeted mental health and emotional wellbeing service for vulnerable children and young people in Brent as well as deliver consultations and indirect interventions, supporting foster and kinship carers such as Reflective Carers' Groups. These groups are open to Brent mainstream and connected persons carers and they are increasing in popularity. The carers attending the groups benefit from input from highly skilled and trained mental health professionals, and they are supported to understand how their responses to the children and situations impact on their relationship and ultimately the stability of the placement.
- 10.6 Reflective Carers' Group combines teaching with engaging exercises to help

carers learn and reflect. It uses activities and discussions to explore some of the challenges the carers face in their role. The group offers practical ideas and support to help the carers develop a reflective style. Some foster carers attending these reflective groups found sharing some of their difficulties very helpful and benefitted from listening to and learning from other people's experiences. Other foster carers enjoyed the interactive style of the sessions and found some of the techniques useful and relevant to the development of their professional role as well as their personal lives.

10.7 To increase the sufficiency of foster carers directly employed by Brent, and as a result reduce the requirement to use Independent Fostering Agencies, Brent will seek to increase in-house fostering capacity by developing a more comprehensive and flexible package that can be aligned to the levels of complexity and child need. This will include:

- Marketing: developing an attractive, sustainable brand to sell the impact of fostering alongside developing a more effective, sustainable recruitment campaign
- Enhancing the existing training structure for in-house foster carers to ensure they are equipped to deal with more complex behavioural needs
- Widening the support offer for foster carers (e.g., health and wellbeing, respite, developing a foster carer mentoring system) and developing further a comprehensive package that will offer more than just financial incentives to foster carers
- Exploring how Brent can become a Fostering Friendly organisation and therefore can encourage Brent businesses to do the same.

10.8 Work to develop this model has already commenced as part of the previous West London Fostering Collaboration Project. This work will be used as a starting point to further develop a new package for in-house foster carers.

10.9 Moving forward, the service is proposing that the Fostering report is presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee every 6 months, in October and April and the format is altered slightly to include updates from the Kinship Care Team. Reporting on a longer period of time will give the Committee a clearer picture of the progress made on some of the short to mid-term projects, whilst continuing to scrutinise and monitor the delivery of the regular fostering services and the achievement of best outcomes for children looked after.

Report sign-off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director Children and Young People