	<p align="center"><b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b> 16 October 2023</p>
	<p align="center"><b>Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People</b></p>
	<p align="center"><b>Lead Cabinet Member: Cllr Gwen Grahll</b></p>
<p><b>Brent Fostering Service 6-monthly Monitoring Report: 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023</b></p>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	N/A
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>List of Appendices:</b>	N/A
<b>Background Papers:</b>	N/A
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	<p>Elena Muller Service Manager, Looked After Children and Permanency <a href="mailto:elena.muller@brent.gov.uk">elena.muller@brent.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Kelli Eboji Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency <a href="mailto:Kelli.eboji@brent.gov.uk">Kelli.eboji@brent.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Palvinder Kudhail Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes <a href="mailto:Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk">Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk</a></p>

## 1.0 Executive Summary

- 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. It includes relevant data on the service's performance and activities, as well as updates on the functioning and progress of the Fostering Panel. Additionally, the report outlines the developments that have taken place in the Service throughout the year, as well as any planned initiatives for the upcoming period. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).

1.2 Brent Fostering Service operates in accordance with the Fostering National Minimum Standards, the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. These regulations are the foundation of the regulatory framework for fostering services under the Care Standards Act 2000. This report details the activity of Brent's fostering service from the 1 of April 2023 to the 30 of September 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 Brent Looked After Children.

## **3.0 Detail**

### **3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context**

3.1.1 This report sets out the management of the local authority's inhouse fostering service and the developments that have taken place in the reporting period. The work of the fostering service contributes to the following borough priorities:

- **The Best Start in Life**
- **Prosperity and Stability**
- **A Healthier Brent**
- **Thriving Communities**

In order for care experienced young people to have the best start in life, prosperity and stability, safety, and good health they need safe, stable homes with primary carers who love them and who are able to meet their holistic needs. The fostering service contributes to these priorities by recruiting, assessing, and supporting foster carers and connected person carers for Brent children and young people. Providing safe, stable, loving placements for children and young people when they are unable to remain with their parent/s, means that they will have the best life chances.

## **4.0 Background**

### **4.1 Service Priorities**

4.1.1 The in-house fostering function is located 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 2023/24:

- To have a strong focus on recruitment, assessment and approval of new carers with the view to achieve a net gain of 10 new carers by the end of the financial year
- To enhance the support offer to Brent's foster carers and kinship

carers, by providing therapeutic services and other additional benefits to increase 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
- 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
- To continue to develop and transform the service in consultation and collaboration with care experienced young people and foster carers through workstreams and co-designed training
- To ensure that the foster carers feel supported and valued by providing regular service updates, building and strengthening Brent foster carers community and celebrating their achievements.

## **4.2 Staffing Arrangements**

4.2.1 The structure of the Fostering Service has remained the same since the last report. The Fostering Service consists of two teams: one Support and Assessment Team, and one Kinship Care Team. The service is overseen by the Service Manager.

4.2.2 The Fostering Support and Assessment Team consists of 8 supervising social workers, one Team Manager, and one Recruitment Officer (RO) post.

4.2.3 The Kinship Care Team consists of 8 social workers, one Team Manager and one Practice Consultant Social Worker. The student who completed the Step Up programme during the previous reporting period has started as a newly qualified ASYE (Assessed and Supported Year of Employment) social worker in the team.

4.2.4 The workload in the teams continues to be at manageable levels, with a temporary increase in the number of cases in the Kinship Care team over the summer period, as new kinship and foster carers are assessed, approved and allocated to supervising social workers to ensure ongoing support.

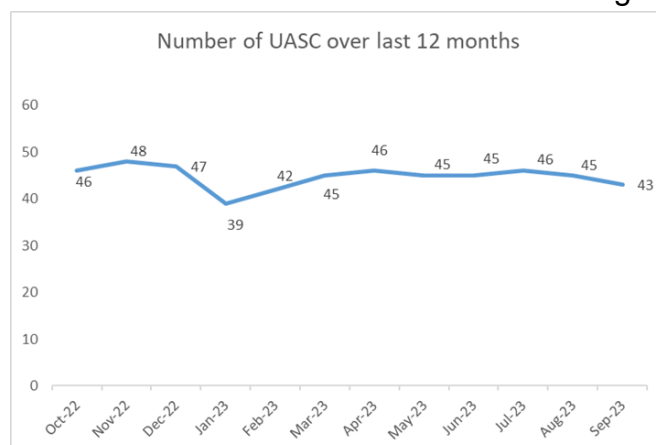
## **4.3 Placement Activity**

4.3.1 The total number of looked after children as at 30 Sep-2023 was 311, which is a decrease of 8 children from 319 on the 31 March 2023, and a decrease of 23 children from the same period in 2022 (334 children).

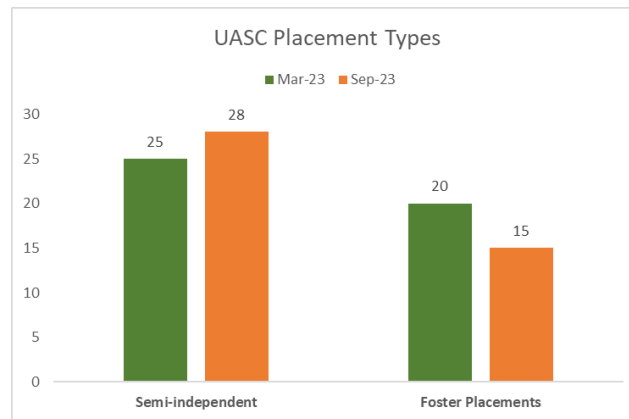
#### 4.3.2 The corporate performance targets for 2023/2024 are as follows:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers as of 30 September 2023 was 17.4% (54 children), a decrease by 0.6% from 31 March-2023, (18%, 57 children) – annual target 25%
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend as at 30 September 2023 was 14.8% (46 children), an increase by 2.8% from 31 March-2023 (12%, 38 children) – annual target 20%
- Percentage of looked after children placed with independent fostering agencies as at 30 September 2023 was 32.8% (102 children), a decrease by 0.4% from 31 March -2023 (33.2%, 106 children) – annual target 25%
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements as at 30 September 2023 was 65% (202 children), an increase of 2% from 31 March 2023 which was 63% (201 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 52 looked after children in semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children’s Home Regulations) as at 30 September 2023, which represents 16.7% of all looked after children. This is a decrease by 1.2% from 31 March 2023 (17.9%, 57 children).

#### 4.3.3 There were 43 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) as at 30 September 2023, a decrease of 2 UASC (45 UASC as at March 2023). The decrease is attributable to the number of UASC turning 18.



#### 4.3.4 The number of UASC placed in semi-independent accommodation as at 30 September 2023 was 28 compared to 25 UASC as at March 2023, none in residential children’s home and 15 UASC placed in foster placements, compared to 20 UASC in March 2023.



#### 4.4 Recruitment and Assessment of new foster carers

- 4.4.1 During this reporting period, the marketing and recruitment activities took place online, monthly information evenings were held online on Zoom, and face-to-face, in person events across the borough.
- 4.4.2 The Fostering Team attended eight local events during this period. The summer months were particularly busy, with school fetes, local summer fairs and festivals happening in all of Brent's wards. The main objectives of raising awareness about fostering and building a reputation among residents were achieved by distributing leaflets, personalised merchandise and networking with other local charities and council services.
- 4.4.3 The Fostering team engaged with various minority groups at two of the above-mentioned events: Eastern European Day and Brent Brazilian Community Day. The Fostering team will continue to attend more community events in the upcoming months, raising awareness in different communities and multi faith groups, about the need for local foster carers for local children.
- 4.4.4 Foster Care Fortnight took place from the 15 - 28 May 2023, and events included a Brent Fostering Walk in Gladstone Park, a Cream Tea event for foster carers and some online activities. The objective during Foster Care Fortnight was to encourage local people to discover what makes them unique and to invite them to bring their distinctive skills to fostering. The online campaign focused on disseminating the unique fostering stories of four local foster carers who have been using their skills and experience to help vulnerable children for years. This is the dedicated campaign landing page: <https://www.brent.gov.uk/fcf23>
- 4.4.5 The Foster Carers' Cream Tea event was attended by over 30 fostering households. The carers had the opportunity to meet the new management team, to see each other in person and catch up and to find out about upcoming initiatives within the service. They also attended a wellbeing training session and took part in a fostering-focused quiz created by one of the supervising social workers.

- 4.4.6 The Brent Foster Walk was a great opportunity to meet local residents, raise awareness about the need for local foster carers and receive feedback from the community. Fliers and branded merchandise were distributed to the people encountered in Gladstone Park. The walk was well attended, with over 20 people taking part. Amongst them were foster carers and their families, social workers and managers, looked after children and the Lead Member, Cllr Grahl.
- 4.4.7 The Recruitment Officer has continued to send flyers and merchandise to local stakeholders who have offered to promote fostering in the community and established good working relationships with the Brent community engagement team, the local Co-op community liaison officer, and the Queen's Park Folk online community leaders. They continue to support fostering by spreading the word about the need for local carers.
- 4.4.8 The Fostering Newsletter continues to be delivered monthly to the 4000+ subscribers.
- 4.4.9 In the reporting period, the fostering team received 31 enquiries. Phone calls and web requests for call-backs were two of the most popular ways for people to contact the fostering team. 8 applicants had an initial visit and 4 progressed to stage 1 of the assessment process. The remaining 4 applications required 'no further action' for reasons including: unwillingness to share personal information, lack of availability due to current lifestyle, opting to join an independent fostering agency, and lack of understanding of the issues and concerns discussed with the visiting social worker.
- 4.4.10 Of the 2 assessments reported in stage 2 in the previous reporting period, 1 applicant has pulled out due to change of circumstance and 1 remains in stage 2.
- 4.4.11 In this reporting period there are 9 assessments in progress in this reporting period. Of these:
- 5 are in stage 1
  - 4 are in stage 2, including one carer who is on hold until October 2023 and a connected person whose kinship placement ended but has expressed interest in becoming a mainstream carer. The assessment has been fast tracked to stage 2.

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

- 4.5.1 One of the main priorities continues to be the retention of foster carers. Feedback received during the annual reviews and Fostering Panel has highlighted 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.

- 4.5.2 To keep foster carers engaged and informed, the fostering service provides a monthly newsletter and facilitates foster carers' support groups. The monthly foster carers' support group continues to be facilitated virtually as it is the foster carers' preferred option.
- 4.5.3 On 29 July 2023, the Fostering Team organised a seaside trip to Brighton for foster carers, their families and Looked After Children. Feedback from the foster carers indicate that it was a successful trip and they enjoyed it.
- 4.5.4 To celebrate our foster carers and the great work they do with Brent children, an end of year celebration is being planned to take place on the 24 November 2023.

#### **4.6 The Kinship Care Team**

- 4.6.1 The Kinship Care team undertakes both planned and emergency assessments of prospective family members and friends who come forward as alternative carers when it is not possible for a child to remain in the care of their parents. The team provides placement support to the connected persons carers and training during the assessment period.
- 4.6.2 In the period from April 2023 to September 2023, the Kinship Care team received 85 referrals for viability assessments of a relative, friend and people connected to the child. A viability assessment is a preliminary assessment of a relative, friend or a person connected to the child, who may be unable to live with his or her parents, to determine whether that person is a realistic option to care for the child long-term and should undergo a full Connected Persons assessment. This assessment is usually undertaken within 10 working days and the outcome of the assessment is shared with the person being assessed and other parties involved in decisions around the child.
- 4.6.3 A Connected Persons assessment is a comprehensive and evidence-based assessment of relative, friend or a person connected to the child who may want to foster or be a special guardian to the child. This assessment usually takes 12 weeks to complete and includes comprehensive checks and triangulation of information from various sources. Based on the information gathered in the assessment, a recommendation is made to the Court whether the person being assessed is suitable to foster a child or become a Special Guardian to the child. A support plan is developed at the end of the assessment that outlines the support available to the kinship carer including information on post order support.
- 4.6.4 In this reporting period, following a positive viability assessment, 43 Connected Persons assessments were/are being undertaken. Of these 3 did not progress as further assessment was not required. 5 carers withdrew and did not wish to be assessed further.
- 4.6.5 17 children were placed in 13 emergency kinship placements between April 2023 and September 2023. An emergency placement is made under Regulation 24 of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England)

Regulations 2010. Temporary approval is provided to the carer to foster a child for 16 weeks with a possibility of seeking an extension for a further 8 weeks to allow completion of the assessment.

- 4.6.6 Children who remain in kinship placements beyond 24 weeks where the carer has not been approved as a Connected Persons carer (following presentation and recommended for approval at the Fostering Panel) are in an unregulated placement. A risk assessment is undertaken for these placements and social workers are required to visit the placement weekly until the foster carer is presented at the Fostering Panel for approval or the termination of the placement. During this reporting period, there were a total of 20 children in 16 unregulated placements (these include placements that started prior to April 2023 and those placements that have subsequently been formalised during the period) due to delays in receiving the outcome of the medical checks, DBS checks, connected person's availability to engage with the assessment process, delay in starting the assessment, and/or ADM ratification.
- 4.6.7 As at 30 September 2023, there were 10 children in unregulated placements with 8 carers. 5 carers will attend Panel in the next 2 months. 2 carers have already attended Panel and ADM decision is awaited. 1 carer has applied for a Child Arrangements Order. There is a clear process in place to ensure management oversight of these unregulated arrangements which includes completing risk assessments, obtaining the views of the child's IRO and sign off from the Fostering ADM.
- 4.6.8 4 Connected Persons foster carers were presented to the Fostering Panel between April and September 2023 of which 2 have been approved as short-term Connected Persons carers whilst the decision on 2 cases are pending ADM approval.
- 4.6.9 7 children were made subject of Special Guardianship Orders in this reporting period.

## **4.7 Fostering Panel**

- 4.7.1 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. Most of the independent panel members also have personal experience of the fostering system, including one independent panel member who was brought up in a kinship arrangement. The work of the Fostering Panel is supported by the Panel Adviser.
- 4.7.2 Three new Panel members have been recruited in the last 6 months. One Panel member with professional background in education has already started and the other 2 new panel members, with professional expertise in mental health and social work will be gradually introduced over the next few months.



4.7.3 Fostering Panels are generally held three times every two months and extra panels are arranged if there is an increase in demand. Most panels take place virtually; although, some meetings have taken place face to face in the recent months.

4.7.4 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) 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.

4.7.5 During this period, 7 panels were held with 33 cases presented of which:

- 4 carers were recommended for approval as short-term connected persons
- 6 carers were re-approved as part of their 3 yearly annual review
- 5 carers were re-approved as part of their 1st annual review
- 14 carers whose fostering approval/status were terminated/resigned (5 mainstream foster carers and 9 connected person carers)
- 2 carers were re-approved as a long-term carers
- 2 prospective foster carers whose Stage 2 was terminated.

4.7.6 All the recommendations made by the panel were ratified by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), apart from one connected persons approval which was deferred by Panel and approved by the ADM.

4.7.7 The Head of Service for Looked after Children and Permanency acts as the ADM for the Fostering Service. The ADM, upon reviewing the recommendation of the Fostering Panel, decides whether applicants should be approved as foster carers or not. The ADM also has the responsibility of determining the continued suitability of foster carers following completion of annual reviews of foster carers and recommendation from the Fostering Panel.

## **4.8 Training and Support for Foster Carers**

4.8.1 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.

4.8.2 In the period April to September 2023, 22 learning sessions were offered to carers which included 7 workshops via Brent Safeguarding Partnership. Except for First Aid Training, all the sessions took place online.

- 4.8.3 Low take up of learning opportunities by carers is a national issue affecting many local authorities, and Brent is no exception to this. Nonetheless, the Learning and Development Team continue to make efforts to promote and encourage participation of carers in mandatory training and other learning offers, through regular reminders. The Fostering Panel also monitor and scrutinise the foster carers' training attendance and hold carers to account if the carers are not compliant with this requirement.
- 4.8.4 Carers continue to have access to training via the Brent Safeguarding Partnership, multi-agency learning and development offer. The training offer was diversified following a period of consultation with the key stakeholders: care experienced young people, foster carers, social workers, supervising social worker and managers. In addition to the mandatory training, new facilitated training/ learning opportunities for foster carers were introduced, such as:
- Race, Culture and Spirituality: Improving practice with children and families from Black and minority ethnic communities.
  - Working with Children and Young People Who Self-Harm: Responding to Risk and Managing Anxiety.
  - Parental Mental ill Health: Working better together to Safeguard the Child and the Adult.
  - Neurodiversity and ADHD in Children and Young people.
  - Safeguarding Missing children in care, incorporating the Philomena Protocol.
  - Gaming and Gambling Awareness Workshops for foster carers by YGAM (Young people's gaming and gambling harm prevention).
- 4.8.5 The training offer is regularly reviewed to ensure that the foster carers continue to develop their professional skills, deepen their understanding of the looking after children's needs, and have the opportunity to keep abreast with new findings, research and learnings from serious case reviews. For the coming period new learning opportunities include: Supporting LGBT+ young people; Consent and Managing Disclosures of Sexual Assault; Principles of Trauma Informed Practice: Beyond Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs); and Suicide Prevention Training.
- 4.8.6 As part of strengthening relationships, improving the quality of care for children and young people in care, and promoting multi-agency learning, Brent foster carers have been invited to attend internal CYP staff trainings, for instance Principles of Trauma Informed Practice: Beyond ACEs, and Suicide Prevention Training.
- 4.8.7 Following each learning opportunity, carers are encouraged to provide feedback. In response to feedback question relating to 'what carers learned, what they plan to apply to their role as a carer', some quotes can be found below:

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*“To be more empathic and to be mindful of what the children have been through.”*

**(Parental Mental ill Health: Working better together to Safeguard the Child and the Adult)**

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*“Knowing what to say to a child before it happened to them and how they should deal with a search... Explain to my child the importance of answering question when getting searched, NAME AND NUMBER”*

**(Learning from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews – Child Q)**

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*“Be less judge mental [health] of others as we all can mask and hide from the world, and have time, patience, understanding and the ability to seek to understand others [to] help theirs and my needs to improve and make sure they can see there is hope and light and a way forward to success in this world and be happy to love oneself for how unique we are”*

*“To talk calmly, allow the child to just be and recognize that their ADHD impacts everything about them.”*

**(Neurodiversity and ADHD in Children & Young people)**

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4.8.8 In addition to facilitated learning opportunities, the Learning and Development Team continues to provide all carers access to learning opportunities at any time of the day, evenings, and weekends, through access to an online E-Learning courses package.

#### **4.9 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints**

4.9.1 During the reporting period, there were 2 allegations made against Brent foster carers. One temporary approved (Reg 24) connected person carer made a complaint about the social work team. The allegations made against foster carers were thoroughly investigated by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and no further action was taken. The foster carers reapproval will be considered at the Fostering panel and the outcome of the investigation will be taken into account before a recommendation is made. The connected person carer's complaint was investigated by the Head of Service for LAC and Permanency.

4.9.2 During this period, a number of compliments regarding the fostering service were received. The Fostering and Kinship Team received numerous positive comments from foster carers during assessments, annual reviews and from other colleagues and professionals. The practitioners' achievements and good practice have been acknowledged and celebrated at the bi-monthly LAC and Permanency service forums. Additionally, the Fostering Panel complimented several practitioners for the quality of the reports presented.

4.9.3 There have been 48 annual reviews completed in this reporting period. 5 annual reviews were cancelled due to the carers' resignation and 1 annual review had to be rebooked.

4.9.4 Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) for fostering conduct all the annual reviews of foster carers, ensuring impartiality and providing a safeguarding mechanism for both the child and the carer. The Fostering Independent

Reviewing Officer also completes Standards of Care Review meetings, where concerns have been identified regarding carers. This allows a level of independence from the Fostering Service, and the officer will then take these to Fostering Panel where appropriate for fuller discussion and recommendations on continued approval.

#### **4.10 Service Development**

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

- 4.10.1 The Kinship Care Team continues to work with a Brent Kinship Carer Peer Volunteer and other external organisations (Family Rights Group, Families in Harmony, CoramBAAF) to promote the voice and interests of kinship carers in Brent and West London. The Kinship Care team organised a professional network meeting in June 2023 and invited the agencies that provide community services to kinship carers. The aim of the meeting was to put together a guide for professionals and carers of all these organisations that offer services and support to the Brent kinship community. A small number of organisations took up the invitation, so a similar event will be organised before the end of the year.
- 4.10.2 The Kinship Care team is working with the Brent Kinship Carer Peer Volunteer to update the information on Kinship Care on the Brent website. This piece of work will be finalised in October 2023.
- 4.10.3 The current Kinship Care and Support policy is being reviewed and updated. This is in consultation with our Kinship Care team, Brent Kinship Carer Peer Volunteer and Adopt London West. It is due to be fully updated by the end of October 2023.
- 4.10.4 The Kinship Care Team is looking forward to working with Brent Health Matters to spread awareness of the various kinship care arrangements that happen in the community and share information on the support that is available to the carers in the community through statutory and voluntary agencies.
- 4.10.5 Kinship Care Week: 02.10.2023 to 08.10.2023.  
The Kinship Care team in collaboration with the Brent Kinship Carer Peer Volunteer, Brent Health Matters, Brent Community Engagement Team, Virtual school and Adopt London West is hosting and taking part in a series of events to mark Kinship Care week and celebrate and appreciate the contribution and commitment of kinship carers. The events include:
- A display in Wembley Library between the 2 to 6 October about Kinship Care through time as reflected in literature.
  - A “Meet and Greet” on the 5 October 2023 between 9:00 am to 11:30am at the Brent Civic Centre for Special Guardians and Kinship carers to meet the Brent Kinship Care Team.
  - A “Fun Day” on the 7 October 2023 from 11:00 am to 3:00pm at Jason Roberts Foundation, Stonebridge NW10. Kinship carers and their

families have been invited to attend the fun day where there will be activities and refreshments.

#### Enhanced Support and Resources for Brent Carers

- 4.10.6 One of the Fostering Service 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.
- 4.10.7 The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families via 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 support Foster Carers and Kinship carers through consultations and Reflective Carers' Groups.
- 4.10.8 During the reporting period Brent WEST ran the Reflective Fostering Programme on-line for six weeks between May 2023 and June 2023. It was facilitated by a WEST Child and Family Specialist. Due to small numbers, the group was a mix of foster carers and kinship carers. The programme was regularly attended by five carers caring for seven Brent children. Content included: mentalising for self and others and techniques to support this; an exploration of carers' experience of being parented/cared for and how this influences their approach to caring; and an overview of trauma and how this impacts emotions and behaviour.

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*Feedback from carers: "I found the mentalizing, thermometer and 2-handed approach very useful, as well as [the practitioner] who was excellent at delivering this course". "[The practitioner] was very understanding to my needs and continued to help me to be a different parent. She provided a safe place to air my concerns and was very empathetic and curious to my situation".*

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- 4.10.9 A Child and Family Specialist attended the Foster Carers' Cream Tea event in May 2023. The event focused on self-care and increasing resilience for foster carers. WEST provided a presentation on the Reflective Carers' Programme and offered some strategies to recognise, reflect and improve emotional wellbeing, including support networks, emotional thermometer and breathing exercises. Laughter as a therapy tool was introduced to the carers present. The foster carers engaged well and reported to finding the session interesting and fun.

#### 4.11 Recruitment and retention

- 4.11.1 Brent has continued to be ambitious for its children and is committed to increasing the number of in house foster carers to ensure that Brent children are looked after locally by high quality, supported foster carers, delivering improved long-term outcomes for children.

- 4.11.2 To increase the sufficiency of in- house foster carers, and to reduce our reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies, Brent is currently developing a proposal for a comprehensive and flexible recruitment and retention package that is competitive across the sector and provides the right level of support and reward for new and existing foster carers.
- 4.11.3 Brent has been revising the current fostering offer, conducted a review of the current fostering rates and is looking at widening the support package for foster carers to include health and mental wellbeing services to bring them in line with other West London local authorities. This proposal was discussed with a small reference group of foster carers and their input and suggestions will shape and improve the final offer.
- 4.11.4 Brent, together with 7 other neighbouring boroughs (Ealing, Harrow, Hounslow, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster and Hillingdon), submitted a funding application to Department for Education to improve recruitment and retention of foster carers in September 2023. The proposal is firstly for Brent and the other local authorities to establish a West London fostering recruitment hub, and secondly to establish and implement the Mockingbird model across the local authorities to boost retention and support for foster carers. The bid was successful, and the new Fostering Recruitment Hub will be operational by April/May 2024, hosted by Hammersmith and Fulham. The local authorities will be working with The Fostering Network over the coming months to develop the Mockingbird model. The funding from DfE will last for 2 years, after which the partner local authorities will be expected to continue to fund these depending on their success.
- 4.11.5 The Fostering team has been working closely with the Brent Communication Team to develop an attractive, sustainable fostering brand that will be finalised when the new fostering offer is agreed. The new brand identity for Brent Fostering will be used across all advertising materials to give a consistent and recognisable look and aid recruitment.
- 4.11.6 Brent has during this period joined a growing partnership of councils and children's trusts and CAN Digital to promote Local Authority fostering. The project is called 'Any Of Us' is the largest public sector fostering film collaboration yet, with over 80 participants across England. CAN Digital have produced a short film telling three different stories from diverse foster carers who are sharing their own experience of looking after children. The film will appeal to a wide audience, and it is envisaged that it will encourage people to foster for Brent. The film was launched nationally in Birmingham on the 26 September 2023 and can be accessed on the Brent website and social media.

## **5.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement**

- 5.1 Stakeholder consultation and engagement takes many varied methods within the service, and we are committed to evaluating and developing new and creative ways of hearing from stakeholders.

5.2 Carers views are sought through one-to-one discussions with their SSW, Annual Foster Carer Reviews, and Support Groups. Carers are encouraged to provide written feedback on their experiences of assessment and panel process.

5.3 Children and young people provide feedback through discussions with their social worker, IRO, or their carers SSW, Looked After Children Reviews, written feedback for Annual Foster Carer Reviews, Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings, Care in Action/Participation activities, Brent Care Journeys.

## **6.0 Financial Considerations**

6.1 There are currently no financial considerations arising from this report. However, the cost implication of a revised fostering offer will be considered at a later stage following the outcome of a project reviewing the inhouse fostering offer.

## **7.0 Legal Considerations**

7.1 There are currently no legal considerations arising from this report.

## **8.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations**

8.1 There are currently no Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) considerations arising from this report.

## **9.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations**

9.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

## **10.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)**

10.1 There are no human resource or property considerations.

## **11.0 Communication Considerations**

11.1 At this stage there are not any communication considerations.

**Report sign off:**

***Nigel Chapman***

Corporate Director of Children and Young People