



**Corporate Parenting Committee
11 December 2014**

**Report from the Strategic
Director of Children and Young People**

**Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report
1 July - 30 September 2014**

1.0 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. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).
- 1.2 The report covers the second quarter of this reporting year. To enable a comparison to be made against other West London boroughs appendix (i) is attached that provides relevant statistical data from the previous reporting year.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review, comment on and question the contents of this report. This is to provide evidence that the management of the fostering service is being monitored and challenged in order to promote good outcomes for children.

3.0 Service Values

- 3.1 The in-house fostering function is positioned within the Placements Service of Children and Young People's Services. The vision for the Placements service as set out in the 2014-15 service plan is that:
- The best foster carers are recruited for our children.
 - All placements receive high quality support, effectively targeted according to need.
 - There is an increase in the number of children placed closer to home with our in-house foster carers.

- Children are found permanent families without delay – whether within their extended family network or outside.
 - Staff within the service are encouraged to become more professionally autonomous and confident.
- 3.2 The Placements Service is committed to provide a range of safe and secure foster placements to help children to develop and enjoy stable relationships with significant adults who can best meet their needs.
- 3.3 The Service aims to provide placements that promote stability and positive outcomes for children and young people by working in partnership with young people, carers, birth families, other professionals and the community.

4.0 Staffing Arrangements

- 4.1 The in-house fostering functions are distributed across two teams:
- The recruitment and assessment of foster carers is completed within the Kinship, Fostering and Adoption Assessment Team.
 - The ongoing support and supervision of foster carers is the responsibility of the Fostering Support Team.
- 4.4 There have been no significant staffing changes for the service within this quarter.

5.0 Placement Activity

- 5.1 One of the service priorities is that the proportion of Looked After Children placed closer to home with in-house foster carers increases.
- 5.2 As at the 30th September 2014 there were:
- 122 children placed with Brent foster carers compared to 129 children at the end of the previous quarter.
 - 41 children placed with a relative or family friend on a fostering basis compared to 42 children at the end of the previous quarter.
 - 87 children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) compared to 94 children at the end of the previous quarter.
- 5.3 The overall LAC population reduced in size during the reporting period. As at 30th September 2014 333 children were in care, compared to 341 on 30th June 2014.
- 5.4 As at 30th September 2014 the proportion of children placed with an in-house foster carer or relative/friend, as a proportion of the total LAC population was 49%, compared to 50% at the end of the previous quarter. When IFA placements are included 75% of our LAC population was living in a family setting as at 30th September 2014, compared to 68% at 31st March 2012. There has been a significant improvement over the last two years in enabling more children to be brought up within a family setting, often close to their home communities. This promotes contact with children and young people's social networks, their families and schools which are important elements in improving overall outcomes for children in care.

- 5.5 One of the service priorities is to ensure children are placed as close to home as possible, which will usually involve placement with a suitable in-house foster carer. We continue to meet challenges in placing large sibling groups, adolescents with difficult behaviours and children where the plan is for them to reside outside of the local area. Marketing and recruitment activity as well as development work within the West London Alliance are seeking to address these supply issues.
- 5.6 Where placements are made with IFAs in an emergency the in-house fostering team work closely with other colleagues to consider whether a move to an in-house carer is possible and in the child's best interests.

6.0 Recruitment Activity

- 6.1 The fostering service carried out a number of recruitment focused activities within the reporting period with the aim of raising awareness of fostering and encouraging potential foster carers to come forward. There were 31 specific activities which included the Brent Housing Partnership roadshow, Libraries, Macmillan coffee morning, Brent Health and Well-Being event, schools and IKEA. Alongside our presence at local events the service ensures regular advertising in local media, transport services and advertising boards in Brent and neighbouring boroughs. The Brent fostering and adoption brand has been updated and this provides a fresh and vibrant offer to local people considering the fostering role.
- 6.2 A monthly information evening is held at the Civic Centre for members of the public to find out more about the fostering role and to enable us to determine whether an individual or family has the potential to become a carer for Brent.
- 6.3 The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 50 enquiries about fostering. These enquiries resulted in a number of initial visits. As at the 30th September 2014 there were 15 formal assessments in process under the 2-stage fostering assessment process. As part of the assessment and preparation process a number of professionals speak to prospective carers about the fostering task, including the involvement of young people who have been within the care system.
- 6.4 The service aims to recruit fifteen non-related foster carers between 1st April 2014 – 31st March 2015 with a net growth of approximately 5 fostering households once carer resignations and terminations of approval are taken into account. There have been four approvals to date this reporting year, with some continuing delays being experienced in stage one of the new 2-stage assessment process which is led by the foster carer. This is being addressed by the service. Subject to the current assessments progressing positively the service will be close to achieving the overall recruitment target by 31st March.

7.0 Fostering Panel

- 7.1 The fostering service has a Fostering Panel constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The service maintains a central list of Panel members. The panel chair and vice chair are independent people with

professional experience of fostering. The Panel meets on the first Friday of every month. Detailed minutes are kept of all panel meetings.

- 7.2 The functions of the Fostering Panel are to consider:
- Each application and recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a Foster Carer, 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 fostering service.
 - The termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a Foster Carer.
- 7.3 The panel has a quality assurance role and monitors the standard of reports presented to it and relays any issues or concerns to the Registered Manager. The panel makes recommendations to the fostering service and these recommendations are referred to the Agency Decision Maker who is the Operational Director, Children's Social Care.
- 7.4 During the period 1st July – 30th September 2014 three panels were held with fourteen specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group, four new 'Family and Friends' foster carer households were approved, two new foster carers were approved, six foster carers were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review (one of whom was matched with a young person on a long-term fostering basis), and two households' approval was recommended for termination as a result of their resignations. These resignations were due to carers deciding to move to Local Authorities in their home area. All of the recommendations made to the Agency Decision Maker were ratified.
- 7.5 The Fostering Panel has noted more consistent attendance and engagement from children's Social Workers when cases are presented, following this issue being noted within the previous quarterly report. The Heads of Service for Placements and Care Planning will continue to monitor this issue.

8.0 Training and Support to Foster Carers.

- 8.1 All of Brent's foster carers are allocated to a Supervising Social Worker who carries out monthly supervision and support visits, ensures carers provide a good standard of care and creates an important link between the child's social worker and the foster carer.
- 8.2 As part of foster carers' commitment to Brent and reinforced within their foster care agreement is a requirement to attend mandatory and identified training courses. During the period 1st July – 30th September 2014 four training courses were held, attended by 47 foster carers.
- 8.3 Every month a foster carers' support group is held, facilitated by Supervising Social Workers but informed by the needs of carers. The groups are well attended and provide an important communication link between carers and the Placements' Service. Foster carers also enjoyed a summer outing to Weston-Super-Mare with their children, supported by the Local Authority.
- 8.4 During this period our foster carers' conference was held – attended by 66 foster carers and focused on how we can keep children at the heart of what we do, through developing

solutions to common problems. A summary of the event can be found at page 8 of appendix two - the Foster Carers' Autumn Newsletter.

- 8.5 The Learning and Development Calendar for Sept 2014 – March 2015 was produced and circulated, containing a range of new and innovative training opportunities. Additionally the service has introduced a new Personal Development Plan for all carers and is working towards the deployment of a Specialist Carers' Resources Programme.

9.0 Monitoring Arrangements

- 9.1 During the reporting period there was one formal allegation made against a Brent foster carer. This has been subject to the appropriate investigation which is ongoing. There were three formal complaints received from Brent foster carers. These related to dissatisfaction with the new finance system and the difficulties in payment of fees and allowances to carers. Following the migration to the new Council-wide Oracle system there were difficulties in some cases in ensuring timely payments. The system issues have now been largely resolved and those carers for whom there are some ongoing issues are in regular communication with the department.
- 9.2 All foster carers, regardless of the length of their approval with Brent must have an annual review of their arrangements. The Fostering Reviewing Officer completed 18 annual reviews during this period and has established tracking systems to ensure reviews continue to be completed in a timely manner.

10.0 Service Development

- 10.1 All active fostering households have produced child-friendly profiles of their family in collaboration with their Supervising Social Workers to ensure children have an opportunity to learn more about the home they will be moving into.
- 10.3 Exploratory discussions took place with a provider of Social Pedagogical training during the reporting period with the aim of collaborating upon a programme of support and development to staff with the aims of improving local placement choice and stability. Further detail of this proposed project will be provided within the next quarterly report.
- 10.4 Collaborative work continued with other boroughs within the West London Alliance to consider how to improve joint fostering services. Benchmarking data has been shared to compare strengths and development areas for each authority and to focus upon gaps where collaborative efforts could be concentrated. An action plan has been produced for the approval of Directors of Children's Services. Early work will focus upon sharing of internal vacancies across boroughs, collaboration on foster carer training and the commissioning of an out of hours support service. The benefits of increased joint working will reduce placement costs and enable a more effective support package for carers that will be an effective retention tool.

Appendices

- i) West London Children's Efficiency Programme Ofsted Fostering Data 2013-14.
- ii) Foster Carers' Newsletter Autumn 2014.

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