



**Corporate Parenting Committee
19 July 2016**

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

**Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report
1 April – 30 June 2016**

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 first quarter of this 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 new LAC and Permanency Service of the Children and Young People's Directorate. The vision as set out in the 2016-17 service plan is that:
- The best foster carers are recruited for our children.
 - All placements receive high quality support, effectively targeted according to need and providing good value for the Local Authority.
 - To increase the number of children placed closer to home with our in-house foster carers.

- Children are found permanent families without delay and within their extended family network where appropriate.

4.0 Staffing Arrangements

4.1 These remain the same as those provided to the Corporate Parenting Committee in the Brent Fostering Service Quarter Four Monitoring report (January-March 2016).

5.0 Placement Activity

5.1 The corporate performance targets for this year relating to fostering are as follows:

- Percentage of LAC placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 35%.
- Percentage of LAC placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15%
- Percentage of LAC placed in Independent Fostering Agencies – annual target 25%.
- Percentage of LAC overall within foster placements – annual target 75%

5.2 The overall LAC population increased during the first quarter from 337 on 31st March 2016 to 352 on June 30th 2016.

As at the 30th June 2016 there were:

- 112 children placed with Brent foster carers. This represents 31.8% of total LAC.
- 42 Children placed with a relative or family friend on a fostering basis. This is 11.9% of total LAC
- 89 children placed with IFAs. This is 25.28% of total LAC.
- 70% of children live within a fostering setting at 30/06/16

5.3 The most recent reporting period has continued to see an increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) approaching the borough for support. There were 64 UASC in the Local Authority's care as at 31st March 2016 and this number has already risen to 72 as at 30/06/16, which represents 20.5% of all looked after children in Brent. There are 15.6% LAC in semi-independent accommodation as at 30/06/16. This reflects the older age range of young people entering the care system within Brent.

5.4 The service operates with few vacancies so that the majority of available space with foster carers is maximised. As at 30th June 2016 there were 10 fostering households with at least one bed space available for fostering. This is approximately 10% of the total capacity of non-related households a reduction from a vacancy level of 12% in the previous quarter. The current carers with vacancies have a range of approval categories.

6.0 Recruitment Activity

6.1 The fostering service carried out 15 recruitment focused activities within the reporting period with the aim of raising awareness of fostering and encouraging potential foster

carers to come forward within the Brent community. During this reporting period our fostering teams co-ordinated Brent Fostering Fortnight, which included a number of activities aimed at recruiting new foster carers from both within the council workforce and also the wider community.

6.2 In addition to our usual recruitment activity, the fostering service participated in Fostering Fortnight during the month of May 2016. We held three events to raise awareness of Foster Care Fortnight 2016:

- A [promotional video](#) featuring Brent Council staff. Distributed on Brent Council website, social media networks and YouTube. Viewed on YouTube 381 times.
- A coffee and cake morning at Brent Civic Centre on Wednesday 18 May. Event aimed towards raising awareness of fostering recruitment among Brent Council Staff. Current foster carers and children in care were invited to take part also. Promoted extensively on Yammer and social media.
- A pamper evening on Wednesday 25 May at Brent Civic Centre. The event was advertised on Facebook, Netmums, JC Decaux as well as social media. 19 people attended the event plus 3 current foster carers. 3 of our stall holders attended the event as a result of advertisements.

As a direct result of our Fostering Fortnight activity we had 39 enquiries during May 2016 (in comparison to 18 enquiries in May 2015). A key aim of Fostering Fortnight is to raise awareness of fostering in the community and this level of interest is therefore a very encouraging outcome. In line with our Recruitment Strategy we have been working hard to develop our social media presence as a platform for foster carer recruitment, and during Fostering Fortnight 2016 our engagement level on social media went up by 83% in comparison to the previous month.

6.3 During this quarter other recruitment events took place at a number of venues including Bridge Park, the Civic Centre, local supermarkets and three of our libraries. The purpose of our outreach activity is to market our brand within the local community and reinforce our campaign messages. The success of our marketing activity has been evidenced by our Fostering and Adoption campaigns being the second most remembered local authority initiatives over the last 12+ months.

6.4 The monthly information evenings have continued to be 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.

6.5 Our improved recruitment and marketing activity has seen a significant growth in enquiries to the service in 2015-16 compared to 2014-15. The service received 307 enquiries in 2015-16, compared to 203 in 2014-15. From our own historical data as well as comparisons with other boroughs and IFAs on average 10% of enquiries move ahead to a formal application to foster, with approximately 5-6% of enquiries resulting in an approved fostering household.

The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 77 enquiries about fostering. These enquiries resulted in 17 initial visits. As at the 30th June 2016 there were 16 formal assessments in process under the 2-stage fostering assessment process.

6.6 The target for the service in 2016-17 is to recruit fifteen non-related foster carers during the reporting year; with a net growth of 5 fostering households once carer resignations and terminations of approval are taken into account. There continue to be some ongoing delays in approval of foster carers due to the slow return of information from the Disclosure and Barring Service. This is a systemic issue affecting all fostering agencies within London and has been signalled as a priority area to be resolved by the Metropolitan Police.

6.7 Our analysis of current foster carer views and those of carers who have ended their fostering role is helping the service to respond to carer needs promptly, with the intended outcome that there are greater levels of retention.

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 that includes an elected member. The panel chair and vice chair are independent people with professional experience of fostering. Recent demand has risen and three panels have been held every two months.

7.2 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, 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 relevant manager. The panel makes recommendations to the fostering service and these recommendations are referred to the Agency Decision Maker who is the Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes.
- 7.4 During the period 1st April 2016 – 30th June 2016, 5 panels were held with 25 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:
- 2 new fostering households and 3 new 'Family and Friends' foster carer households were recommended for approval.
 - 4 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review.
 - 1 foster carer's approval terms were changed from short to long term to provide permanency for a child in placement.
 - 3 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following allegations.
 - 1 fostering household's approval was recommended for termination due to a list of concerns which left panel feeling unsatisfied that the fostering household remained suitable.
 - 4 'Family and Friends' fostering household's approval were terminated for the following reasons:
 - the child in placement no longer being looked after;
 - the child in placement returning to the care of their parents;
 - a Special Guardianship Order being granted; and
 - a list of concerns which made panel feel unsatisfied that the fostering household remained suitable.
 - 6 fostering households resigned from their fostering role for the following reasons:
 - a change in family circumstances;
 - electing to foster for another London Borough;
 - wishing to adopt instead;
 - finding their first placement too challenging;
 - a breakdown in relationship between carer and the department; and
 - due to the challenging behaviour of the young person in placement (the carer had been approved to care for one specific child).

All of the recommendations made to the Agency Decision Maker were ratified.

7.5 The feedback from the fostering panel chair has been constructive to the service as it develops. The department now deals more effectively with the issue of allegations against carers to support the reintegration of the household to fostering. The Fostering Service took part in research into unfounded allegations against foster carers, the outcomes of which support us to develop our work with carers who are subject to allegations.

The annual joint training day for Central List Fostering Panel members and social workers within the Fostering Service was held on 24th June 2016, its main focus being using a Serious Case Review from another London Borough Fostering Service to improve our practice; this was received extremely well.

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 April 1st – June 30th 2016, 11 training courses were held, attended by 78 carers. Also in this quarter half day training sessions were held for the Fostering and Adoption Panels with attendance from relevant teams.
- 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 generally attended by a small group of carers and the Fostering Support Team are working to improve attendance as they provide an important communication link between carers and the Placements' Service.
- 8.4 A continuation of social pedagogy development through a bridging project to embed the learning of foster carers and social care staff took place between October 2015 and April 2016. Meetings have been held with other Local Authorities using a similar approach in order to share practice. Senior managers have met during this reporting quarter to consider the continued development of social pedagogy throughout the service.

9.0 Monitoring Arrangements

- 9.1 During the reporting period there were two formal allegations made against a fostering household. Both cases were dealt with under the LADO process and both facilitated by another local authority. In addition there was one standards of care meeting held. All of these matters are being dealt with through the usual processes.
- 9.2 There were no formal complaints received from Brent foster carers during the reporting period.
- 9.3 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 27 annual reviews during the last quarter.

10.0 Future Developments

- 10.1 Collaborative work with other West London Authorities has continued with joint foster carer preparation training now in place. An agreement was reached from 1st April 2016 for all 8 West London Alliance authorities to offer the same carer benefits' package to foster carers – delivered through the Fostering Network.
- 10.2 The main activities for the fostering teams within the newly formed LAC & Permanency Service from April 2016 are as follows:

- To use the opportunity from a newly formed service to listen effectively to the voice of children and young people and embed their views into improving the quality and consistency of our fostering service.
- To ensure that the recruitment of in-house carers continues to improve and that the impact of the digital campaign is evaluated.
- To finalise the survey of current foster carers and to compare this with exit interviews completed in December 2015 to identify trends and to support service planning.
- To ensure the foster carer training offer is monitored and the impact reflected within foster carer supervision and care of children.
- To ensure feedback from fostering panel is embedded into quality assurance work and development areas are progressed by team managers.

Appendices / Links

- (i) Brent's 'Make a Difference' Fostering Campaign:
<https://www.brent.gov.uk/services-for-residents/children-and-family-support/fostering/make-a-difference/>

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