



**Corporate Parenting Committee
24 April 2019**

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

**Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report:
Quarter 3: 1st January to 31st March 2019**

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| 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) | Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Nigel.Chapman@brent.gov.uk Onder Beter, Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Onder.beter@brent.gov.uk |

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 1st January – 31st March 2019.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 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 Background

3.1 Service Values

The in-house fostering function is positioned within the LAC and Permanency Service of the Children and Young People's Department. The 2018-19 service plan set out the vision for the service as below:

- Caring and loving families will be found for children without delay and within their extended family network where appropriate.
- Diversity needs including disability, race, religion, language and culture will always be considered when placing a child.
- Placements will be well matched to children's individual needs. The best foster carers will be recruited for our children.
- We will increase good quality local placements for children by securing more in-house fostering placements. We will recruit, assess and approve new foster carers with the aim to have 5 net fostering households in the end of financial year taking into account termination of approvals and resignations.
- There will be a decrease in the number of resignations/de-registrations of foster carers as a result of appropriate support and well-established, positive relationships with foster carers.

3.2 Staffing Arrangements

The Fostering Support and Assessment Teams consist of two team managers, 11 social work posts and one marketing and recruitment officer post. A Marketing and Recruitment Officer (MRO) joined the team in January 2019.

One of the two previously mentioned social work positions that were being kept vacant until March 2019 has been recruited into as the workload has increased in the team. This social worker is due to start in the team in April 2019.

4.0 Performance Data

4.1 Child Related Data

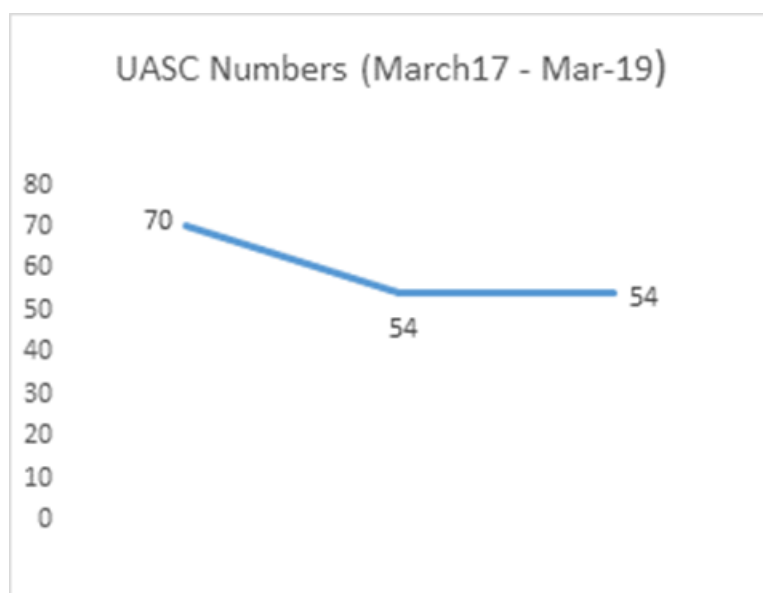
The total number of looked after children as at 31st March 2019 was 300 which is a decrease from the end of Q3 of 2 children, however this is a reduction of 12 children

from 313 in March 2018. The difference is regarding Brent having a smaller cohort of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) in 2018/19.

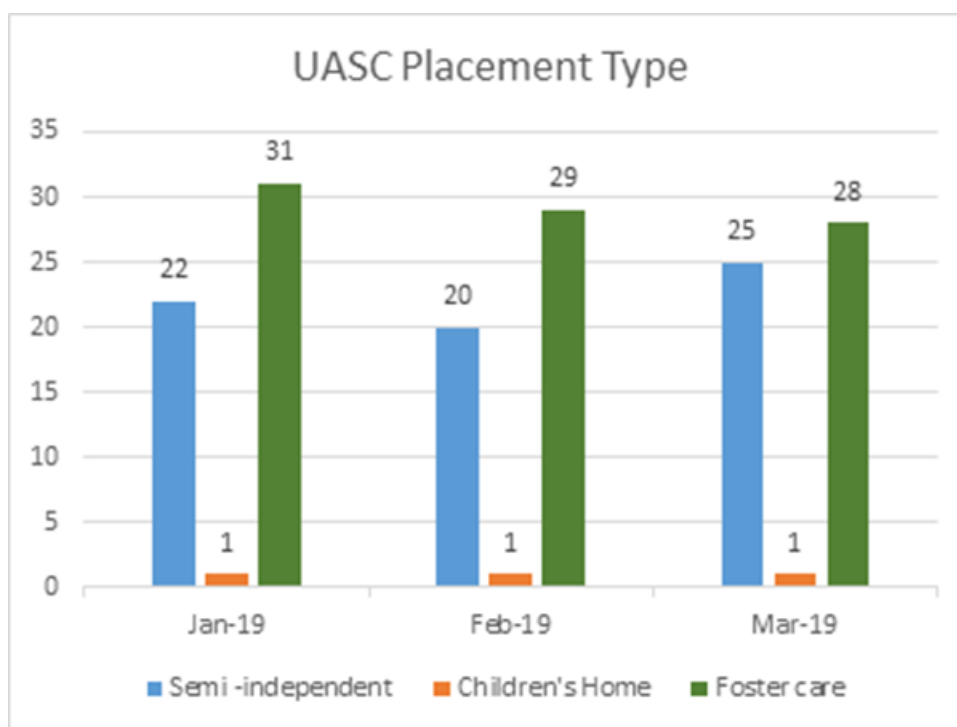
The corporate performance targets for 2018/19 were as below:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 35% - the actual percentage as of 31st March 2019 was 24% (72 children), a reduction from 24.8% (75 children) compared in the previous quarter;
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15% - the actual percentage as of 31st March 2019 was 11.7% (35 children) compared to 11.6% (35 children) in quarter 3;
- Percentage of looked after children placed in Independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 31st March 2019 was 27.7% (83 children) compared to 26.5% (80 children) in quarter 3;
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 75% - the actual percentage as of 31st March 2019 was 63.3% (190 children) compared to 63.58% (192 children) at the end of quarter 3;
- There were 63 looked after children in semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations) as at 31st March 2019, which represents 21% of all looked after children. This number is an increase from 54 in quarter 3 (17.8%).

As of 31st March 2019 there were 54 UASC, 1 fewer than at the end of quarter 3.



25 UASC are placed in semi-independent accommodation, compared to 21 in Quarter 3, 1 UASC is in a residential children's home, and 28 UASC are placed in foster care compared to 33 in quarter 3.



5. Recruitment and Assessment

- 5.1 Within the reporting period Brent's new Marketing and Recruitment Officer (MRO) and the fostering teams carried recruitment focused activities with the aim of raising awareness of fostering for Brent and encouraging potential foster carers to make enquiries with Brent Fostering Service. The period was dedicated to testing the strengths associated with different routes (online and offline) by which outreach can be undertaken to reach specific groups. Targeted carers included: parents of young children; professionals with flexible working patterns; and LGBT+ individuals and couples, in order to tap into their availability in the first instance.
- 5.2 With regards to physical outreach, 3 major events were attended by the teams during this quarter: International Women's Day; Voice in a Million (children's concert); and event organised by Time to Talk in relation to mental health and wellbeing. Additionally, a stand was set up at Kilburn Library during an event for children under 5.
- 5.3 The MRO has heightened the digital presence of fostering in Brent by increasing the presence on social media on both Facebook and Twitter to raise awareness. In addition, the MRO has had some creative ideas about including positive fostering stories to make the whole experience more accessible. Enquiries are then received via the Brent website, which filter through to the fostering teams' internal email address

and are responded to on a daily basis. Through this forum, there has been an increase in approved foster carers 'liking' the web page, sharing non-confidential positive stories and achievements and more enquiries via the webpage.

- 5.4 The fostering service also took part in the national LGBT+ Adoption and Fostering Campaign between 4th – 10th March 2019, organised and led by *New Family Social*, a UK-wide social network run by LGBT+ adopters and foster carers. To show Brent's support, the MRO organised a dedicated LGBT+ information evening, which was promoted through a range of digital resources, including: the all-Brent residents' newsletter; social media (videos of fostering and adoption staff, previous adopters, and Cllr Mili Patel talking about the need for LGBT+ carers and adopters); LGBT+ supporters and media networks; and a news article on the Brent website homepage. The event attracted many individuals and couples interested in adoption and one fostering enquiry came out of the campaign.
- 5.5 Flyers and Brent fostering branded goodies have been distributed to all customer service points in the Civic Centre, at 'The Yellow' – activity centre managed by Wembley Park, at SEID (Social Innovation and Enterprise Hub) where many flexible-workers/part-timers spend time, and the Wembley Hub Café.
- 5.6 The overwhelming response from enquirers is that they first noticed Brent's fostering adverts on the webpage rather than as a result of the previous quarter's leaflet drop. The MRO is therefore focusing attention on improving the accessibility of the webpage and simplifying the online enquiry form, in conjunction with Brent's Communications Team.
- 5.7 During this quarter, the team continued to facilitate information evenings at the Civic Centre (3 in addition to the LGBT+ specific one), providing an opportunity to members of the public to find out more about the fostering role and to enable Brent to determine whether an individual or family has the potential to become a carer for Brent.
- 5.8 Future plans include finding local businesses that are willing to support fostering, as part of their corporate social responsibility strategy, and working closely with Wembley Park stakeholders to find out more about their events calendar and how we can get involved to raise awareness about fostering in the community.
- 5.9 The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 23 contacts (website, telephone calls or emails requesting further information) and out of the 23, 11 people expressed a serious interest in becoming foster carers. 1 enquiry was for adoption, which was passed on to the adoption team. Of these 11 possible prospective carers: 7 people had a successful initial visit and progressed to stage 1 of the assessment process; 2 are being visited by social workers in April 2019; and 2 withdrew from the process for personal reasons.

- 5.10 The 2 assessments recorded in the last quarterly report as being in stage 1 have progressed to stage 2 in this period. The 2 assessments that were already noted as being in stage 2 are due to Fostering Panel in May 2019.
- 5.11 In this reporting period there are a total of 13 assessments underway (including the 4 noted above): 8 in stage 1 and 5 in stage 2.
- 5.12 Performance meetings have remained weekly during this period to ensure that the focus remains strongly on increasing foster carer numbers. Alongside this, the teams are improving sufficiency via smarter matching during placement searches as well as increasing foster carers' approval numbers through Qualifying Determination Letters for carers who have the capacity and skills to care for more children or young people. The intention is then to return these carers to fostering panel after this to permanently increase their terms to ensure utilising as many vacancies as possible as well as being more creative around increasing in-house placements.

6.0 Fostering Panel

- 6.1 The fostering service has a Fostering Panel constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The service maintains a 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. 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 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.
- 6.3 During the period 1st January – 31st March 2019, 5 panels were held with 23 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:
- 4 'family and friends' fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
 - 9 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review, 2 of whom increased their approval numbers thus providing a possible additional placement;
 - 3 fostering households' approvals were terminated due to a failure on the part of the foster carers to meet the required fostering standards; and

- 3 fostering households resigned from their fostering role – 1 transferred to an independent fostering agency, 1 considered that they had naturally come to the end of their fostering career and 1 cited their deteriorating health; and
- The approval of 3 'family and friends' foster carers was terminated – 2 due to the child in their care turning 18 and 1 due to the child returning to the care of their birth mother.

All of the recommendations made above were ratified by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who is the Head of Service, LAC and Permanency.

- 6.4 The panel has a quality assurance role and monitors the standard of reports presented to it and relays any issues or concerns and any suggested practice improvements to the ADM. The Agency Advisor and the ADM continue to hold quarterly meetings to review all feedback received from the Fostering Panel to review learning to disseminate within the service to improve social work practice. The next meeting is scheduled for 26th April 2019.
- 6.5 A joint annual training day for fostering panel members and the kinship care and fostering teams' staff is held as per statutory regulation. This took place on 8th February 2019, the focus of which was a combination of the National Fostering Stocktake and the Government's response (as noted in the previous report), and learning from a serious case review from another council covering issues including: radicalisation in relation to the fostering role; criminal exploitation; and county lines.

7.0 Training and Support for Foster Carers

7.1 Learning and Development Programme:

The feedback regarding the courses offered as part of the learning and development programme for our foster carers continues to be positive.

During this reporting period, 11 separate training courses were offered on a variety of topics ranging in diversity from 'managing and de-escalating conflict', to 'young people and sexual health' and 'working with birth parents'.

The carers' feedback has been positive for most sessions in relation to the training format and content. The constructive feedback received in relation to the 'managing and de-escalating conflict' course requested an improvement, with the addition of suggested practical techniques. This has been listened to and a session has been scheduled for May 2019.

7.2 Social Pedagogy:

The second 'Common Third' art intervention workshop went ahead during the February half term holiday, with foster carers, their birth children and foster children all taking part. Feedback received suggested that carers felt that the art workshops created a

stronger link with each other and supported them to get to know each other better. All attendees agreed that they would love more such activities based on social pedagogic practice.

Supervising social workers continued to have the offer of attending social pedagogy surgeries with the social pedagogue, reflecting and receiving advice on methods or models to be used to help the situations. In addition, the social pedagogue is available in-between these times for consultation where necessary.

One of the Fostering Support Team's Supervising Social Workers has acquired a Level 3 Diploma in Social Pedagogy through the Crossfields Institute and can now hold the title 'Social Pedagogy Practitioner'. This has provided her with the skills to work closely with Brent's Social Pedagogue and to assist in implementing social pedagogic practice, which should improve the support offered to Brent's foster carers.

The new learning and development programme is in progress and will feature various learning and development activities surrounding social pedagogic practice for foster carers.

7.3 Social Work Support:

The feedback received from foster carers is consistently positive in relation to the support they receive from their allocated supervising social workers and the wider fostering service.

8.0 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints

8.1 A total of 32 foster carer annual review meetings were scheduled to take place in this period. 7 of these reviews were either postponed or cancelled for legitimate foster carers-led reasons.

8.2 During this quarter, there were no allegations or complaints.

9.0 New Developments

9.1 Brent's response to *Fostering Better Outcomes 2018*

As outlined in the last 2 quarterly reports, Brent's fostering service is being proactive in responding to the government's, *Fostering Better Outcomes* report in relation to each of the developmental points. Updates will continue to be provided as this work develops in the future.

9.2 *Improving the consultation of current and past looked after children to use their views to drive improvements.* Initial discussions have taken place with Care in Action, Junior Care in Action and Care Leavers in Action, via the Children in Care Participation Officer, to address this point. As the individual in post is leaving Brent, this work will be continued by their successor once recruited.

- 9.3 *Improving the recognition of foster carers as valued experts who best know the children they care for across children and young people's services and with partner agencies* – this was the focus of Brent's LAC and Permanency staff forum on 11th January 2019. It was very successful; 3 foster carers attended and presented their experiences for the staff, sharing their suggestions for achieving best practice and therefore improved outcomes for children. Feedback from the staff present was that this was a powerful presentation. There are plans to repeat this within the Localities and Early Help staff forums to develop this further.
- 9.4 *Making peer-to-peer support more structured for foster carers and their children* – four task groups, each comprising two social workers, have been established by the fostering teams to drive progress in the following areas: summer trip for foster carers; foster carer's ball; supporting the birth children of foster carers; and developing a more inclusive awards scheme for foster carers. They are seeking the support of interested foster carers to join these groups to encourage a more collaborative development of these four areas.
- 9.5 *Developing partnership working and commissioning of placements to ensure that matching is driven by the needs of the child, not cost.* Senior managers in LAC and Permanency and Forward Planning Performance and Partnerships continue to work together to drive improvements in this area.
- 9.6 *Exploring the use of regional consortia and/or neighbouring local authorities for combined needs-led and targeted marketing and recruitment and commissioning and integration.* Early scoping work has identified that Ealing and Hounslow are keen to progress this with Brent. The 3 local authorities are looking to make a bid for seed funding, due to be released by the DfE very soon, to progress this. The MROs from Ealing and Brent have met and discussed their plans for future marketing and recruitment and are in the early stages of combining efforts.

Report sign off:

Gail Tolley

Strategic Director of Children and Young People