	Corporate Parenting Committee 30 th October 2019
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People
Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 2: 1st July to 30th September 2019	

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)	Onder Beter, Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes

1. 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 July – 30th September 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 2019-20 service plan set out the vision for the service as below:

- Family finding for looked after children will be timely and within their extended family network where appropriate.
- Children's individual needs, including diversity needs such as disability, race, religion, language and culture will always be considered when placing a child.
- 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 additional 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.
- We will continue to provide an excellent learning and development package for foster carers who will have permanent supervising social workers to supervise and support them.

3.2 Staffing Arrangements

The Fostering Support and Assessment Teams consist of two team managers, 12 social work posts and one marketing and recruitment officer post. The workload within the teams continues to grow as new carers are approved and need to be allocated for support when they care for children. As reported last quarter, a social worker has now joined the team as part of the international recruitment initiative.

4.0 Placement Activity

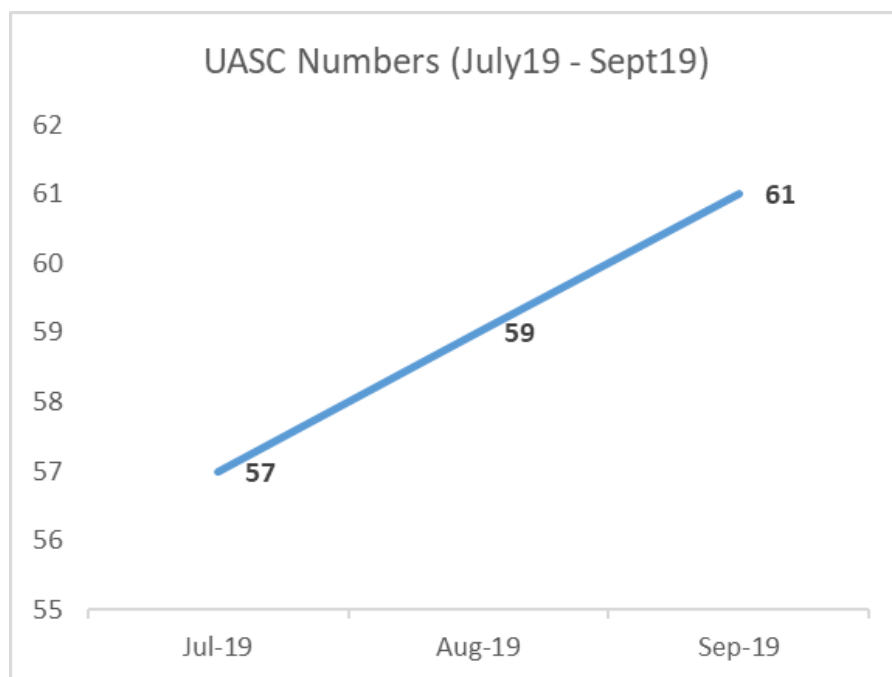
4.1 The total number of looked after children as at 30th September 2019 was 324, which is an increase from the end of Q1 of 18 children and also an increase of 28 children from the same period in 2018.

4.2 The corporate performance targets for 2019/20 are as below:

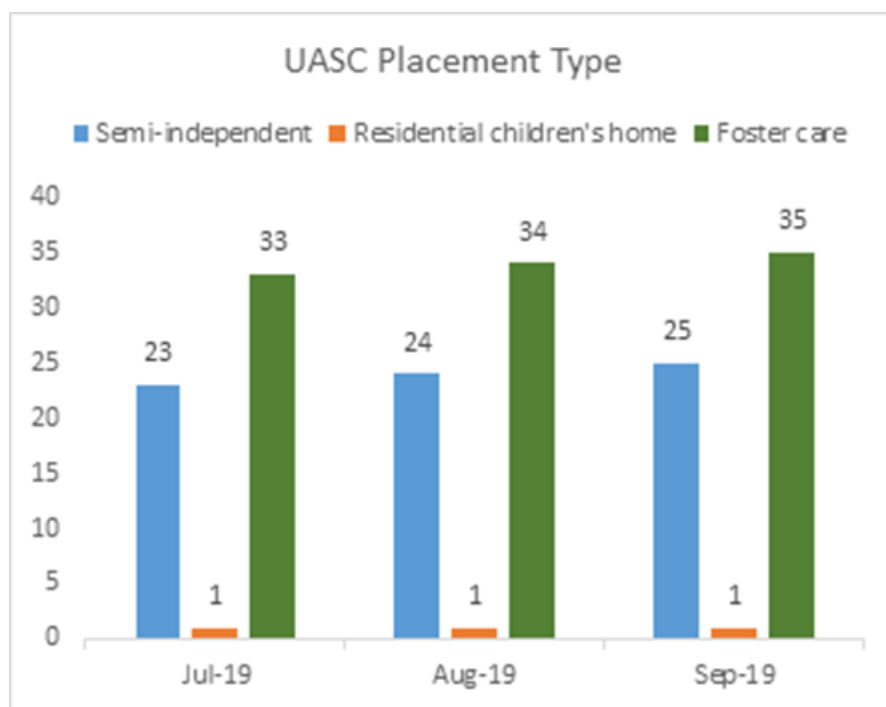
- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 30% - the actual percentage as of 30th September 2019 was 22.2% (72 children), same as the previous quarter 22.2% (68 children).

- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15% - the actual percentage as of 30th September 2019 was 9.9% (32 children) compared to 10.5% (32 children) at the end of Q1, 2019-2020
- Percentage of looked after children placed in independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 30th September 2019 was 27.8% (90 children); same as at the end of Q1, 2019-2020 - 27.8% (85 children).
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 75% - the actual percentage as of 30th September 2019 was 60.2% (195 children) compared to 60.8% (186 children) at the end of Q1, 2019-2020.
- There were 61 looked after children in semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations) as at 30th September 2019, which represents 18.8% of all looked after children. This number is a decrease from 62 at the end of Q1, 2019-2020 (20.3%).

4.3 As of 30th September 2019 there were 61 UASC, 3 more than at the end of Q1, 2019 – 20.



4.4 25 UASC are placed in semi-independent accommodation (no change from the end of Q1, 2019-20), 1 is placed within a residential children's home and 35 UASC are placed in foster care compared to 32 at the end of Q1, 2019 – 20.



5.0 Recruitment and Assessment

- 5.1** Within the reporting period Brent's Marketing and Recruitment Officer (MRO) and the fostering teams continued to carry out 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. Following on from the last period's focus on comparing interest raised from online and offline recruitment activities, it was clear that Brent's digital presence seemed to be creating more interest from people seeking further information about fostering.
- 5.2** With regards to physical outreach, team members attended a host of community events mainly during the summer months, led by various services in the community: the police, Brent Housing, Brent Start – managing employment opportunities for residents - and the employee engagement team. The fostering team have found that attending targeted events encourages more interest than going to different locations in the borough with a pop-up stand, as people attending already have the mind-set to discover and engage with local services.
- 5.3** The MRO continues to develop the presence of fostering in Brent by increasing the presence on social media, using both Facebook and Twitter. The MRO is currently implementing a content strategy with the aim of informing, educating and inspiring people who are interested in fostering but not ready to take action. The content consists of profiles of and interviews with current carers, articles about support and training available, social media posts summing up information from the website. Other agencies have found that this encourages people to recall the service and come back when they are ready to progress to assessment.

- 5.4** During this quarter, the team continued to facilitate information evenings at the Civic Centre (one per month), 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.
- 5.5** The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 36 enquiries (website, telephone calls or emails requesting further information). Out of the 36, 19 attended the information evening sessions in July, August and September. Of the 19 possible prospective carers 9 were considered suitable to progress to initial visit. Common reasons for not progressing enquiries further included: planning to move away from London and people only seeking information about fostering at this stage rather than wishing to be assessed.
- 5.6** Of the initial visits undertaken 6 were considered suitable to progress to stage 1 of the assessment process.
- 5.7** 2 of the 3 assessments recorded in the last quarterly report as being in stage 2 are noted in paragraph 6.3 below as having been to panel, receiving positive recommendations for approval as foster carers.
- 5.8** Of the 3 assessments in stage 1 in the last reporting period:
- 2 have progressed to stage 2;
 - 1 has remained in stage 1 as some information needed further clarification.
- 5.9** 1 fostering household that resigned from Brent to move to an independent fostering agency in 2017 has subsequently approached the team to request re-assessment due to the lack of support received from the agency. They have been fast-tracked to stage 2. This is of particular importance to the team as they have 3 Brent children in placement.
- 5.10** In this reporting period there is a total of 11 assessments underway: 7 in stage 1, and 4 in Stage 2.

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 July – 30th September 2019, 4 panels were held with 17 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:

- 1 'family and friends' fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
- 7 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review, 2 of whom increased their approval numbers thus providing possible additional placements;
- 1 fostering household was found suitable to continue fostering after a standards of care investigation;
- 1 fostering household resigned from their fostering role wishing to retire;
- 2 fostering households were put on hold following concerns raised in panel about the carers' understanding of the impact of trauma on the children in their care;
- the approval of 2 'family and friends' foster carer were terminated due to the child in their care leaving the placement;
- 1 new 'family and friends' fostering household was recommended for approval; and
- 2 new fostering households were recommended for approval.

All of the recommendations made above were ratified by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who is the Head of 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 due in December 2019 and the findings will be reported in the next quarterly report.

7.0 Training and Support for Foster Carers

7.1 The 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. The Fostering Development Coordinator, who arranges training for foster carers, has reported that foster carers' attendance at training has increased in the past 6 months. During this reporting period, 25 individual training courses were offered on a variety of topics ranging in diversity from 'the Impact of Fostering on Birth Children', to 'Missing Children' and 'Managing the challenges of conflict'.

- 7.1.1** The carers' feedback has been positive for most sessions in relation to the training format and content. Carers particularly enjoyed the session on Childhood Trauma and Attachment, and have asked for the session to be offered again later in the year.
- 7.1.2** In response to the above, colleagues in the Early Help service are offering 3 training days in Spring 2020 on the topic of 'trauma informed approaches' for foster carers, 'family and friends' foster carers and relevant staff members.
- 7.1.3** The constructive feedback received in relation to the 'managing and de-escalating conflict' course resulted in the addition of suggested practical anger management techniques that carers can share with the young people in their care. The next session will be held on 28th November 2019.

7.2 Social Pedagogy

The monthly 'Social Pedagogy Learning Space' continues to run and various foster parents have attended. The focused use of the social pedagogue, with newly approved foster parents and/or at the beginning of new placements, is now in place. Suitable foster carers are identified by the fostering team managers and referred to the Social Pedagogue.

The Social Pedagogue's role has become more focused, with specific carers being referred with the aim of improving their skillset and shifting the focus away from crisis intervention to development. Initially, 6 families were referred to the Social Pedagogue – 3 newly approved carers and 3 more experienced carers. The aim of the work with the new carers is in preparing them for their first placement and then supporting them in the early days of that placement and the sessions with more experienced carers are focused on those carers who can be stretched further – helping get them to the next stage of taking on slightly more challenging placements.

7.3 Support from supervising social workers

The feedback received from foster carers is consistently positive in relation to the support they receive from their allocated supervising social workers, their managers and the wider fostering service. Some examples of the feedback received are as below:

"Thank you for all your support and understanding in some very difficult moments over the past year. You truly are a peacemaker!"

"We have always felt that you have been a great support to us and we really feel that this is the most important thing from a SSW. Even though you are busy, I always feel that I can call you and you will do what you can to help us and take the time where needed to support us all. You really do make it a joy to be a foster caring family".

"You always come back to me so quickly with any queries or help and always keep me updated if you don't have an answer for us straight away. This helps us to feel that you really are there for us and have our best interest at heart. You also know that we were going through a difficult time with our daughter

over the last few months and I have really felt supported by you during this time”.

- 7.4 A very successful coach trip was organised for foster carer families to Brighton, organised and planned by the carers themselves. Their feedback was positive: “we love being given the opportunity to have fun by the sea with our peers” and “we look forward to this trip every year and thank you Brent for letting us choose where we want to go”.
- 7.5 Preparations for the foster carers’ annual celebration and awards event continue. The event is scheduled for Saturday 30th November.

8.0 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints

- 8.1 A total of 17 foster carer annual review meetings were held during the period under focus. This work is now commissioned from AidHour, covered by the same reviewing officers who chair children’s LAC reviews and tracked by the Review, Engagement and Participation Officer.
- 8.2 During this quarter, there were no allegations or complaints made by or about Brent foster carers.

9.0 New Developments

9.1 Fostering Steering Group

Following the successful bid for Department for Education seed funding to scope work using a regional approach to fostering a steering group, led by Brent is being established. The intention of the 6-month project is to scope the potential for closer working arrangements and, with the agreement of the involved authorities (Ealing, Hounslow and Brent) to consider how these arrangements could be delivered during 2020/21. The overall intention is to improve placement stability and choice for adolescent children in the care system. Updates will be provided to subsequent committees regarding progress.

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