	Corporate Parenting Committee 5 February 2020
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People
Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 3: 1st October to 31st December 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 October – 31st December 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 at the end of the 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. All posts are filled with permanent members of staff.

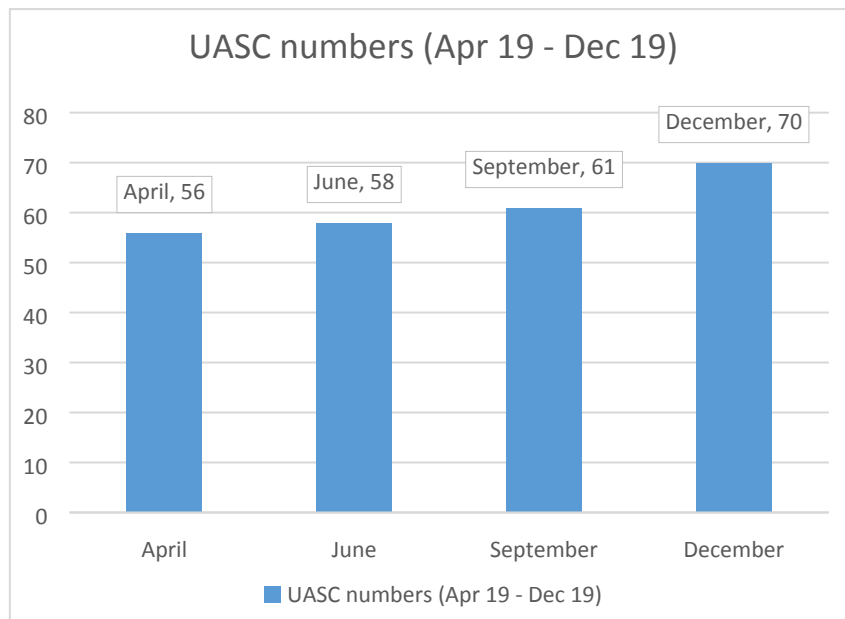
4.0 Placement Activity

4.1 The total number of looked after children as at 31st December 2019 was 305, which is a drop from the end of Q2 by 19 children (324 children) and an increase of 2 children from the same period in 2018.

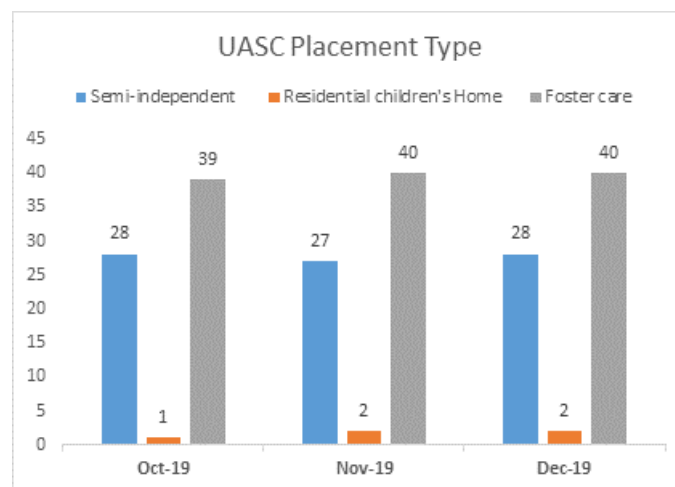
4.2 The corporate performance targets for 2019/20 are as below:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 30% - the actual percentage as of 31st December 2019 was 21% (64 children), decreased from the previous quarter 22.2% (72 children).
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15% - the actual percentage as of 31st December 2019 was 10.5% (32 children), an increase from 9.9% (32 children) at the end of Q2, 2019-2020
- Percentage of looked after children placed in independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 31st December 2019 was 27.9% (85 children); compared to Q2, 2019-2020 - 27.8% (90 children).
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 75% - the actual percentage as of 31st December 2019 was 59.34% (181 children), dropped from 60.2% (195 children) at the end of Q2, 2019-2020.
- There were 65 looked after children in registered semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations) as at 31st December 2019, which represents 21.3% of all looked after children. This number is an increase by 2.5% from the end of Q2, 2019-2020 (18.8%).

4.3 As of 31st December 2019 there were 70 UASC, 9 more than at the end of Q2, 2019– 20.



- 4.4** 28 UASC are placed in semi-independent accommodation (3 UASC more than the end of Q2, 2019-20), 2 placed within a residential children's home and 40 UASC are placed in foster care, five more than at the end of Q2, 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. This includes the exploration of the support networks of Brent's approved carers.

- 5.2** The MRO continues to develop fostering in Brent by increasing the presence on social media. Facebook is used to reach members of the public, and through Twitter we engage with stakeholders like councillors and other council services that have a high following and can help us to reach more residents. The MRO is currently implementing a digital strategy which allows us to geo-target Brent residents and identify prospective carers using interests filtering (so that Brent fostering pops up whenever they open their search engine if they have ever searched fostering previously). Compared to traditional media, digital channels allow for more cost-effective and centralised marketing practices. There is also a strong focus on creating content to spark people's interest in fostering – the addition to the website of videos of Brent foster carers talking about their own experiences positively has been particularly impactful on the numbers of people returning more than once to Brent's fostering page.
- 5.3** Starting this quarter, the Fostering Information Evenings have been promoted on Eventbrite – an events platform where the majority of the council's public events are advertised. This tactic has been successful as a high number of people who meet the fostering criteria signed up to attend the information sessions.
- 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 32 enquiries (website, telephone calls or emails requesting further information). Out of the 32, 22 attended the information evening sessions in October, November or December. Of the 22 possible prospective carers 3 were considered suitable to progress to initial visit. The main reason for not progressing enquiries further was that people were only seeking information about fostering at this stage rather than wishing to be assessed.
- 5.6** Of the 3 initial visits undertaken 2 were considered suitable to progress to stage 1 of the assessment process but one of these people subsequently withdrew (they had been wishing to transfer to Brent from an Independent Fostering Agency but were persuaded by the agency to remain).
- 5.7** Of the 7 assessments in stage 1 in the last reporting period:
- 2 have progressed to stage 2;
 - 2 have remained in stage 1 as we await the outcome of statutory checks;
 - 3 have withdrawn from the process, 2 due to reflecting that they cannot meet the level of needs that looked after children present and 1 had a change in their personal circumstances.

5.8 Of the 4 assessments recorded in the last quarterly report as being in stage 2, 1 has been approved at fostering panel. Of the others, 1 is scheduled to attend panel in January 2020 and the other 2 are due to panel in February 2020.

5.9 In this reporting period there are a total of 8 assessments underway: 3 in stage 1, and 5 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; and
- the long-term fostering matches of all children below the age of 12.

6.3 During the period 1st October – 31st December 2019, 3 panels were held with 12 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:

- 3 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
- 4 fostering households resigned from their fostering role – 1 due to the extent of challenging behaviour exhibited by the young person in their care, and 3 due to changes in their personal circumstances;
- the approval of 1 fostering household was terminated due to standards of care concerns;
- 1 long-term fostering match was supported;
- 2 new 'family and friends' fostering households were recommended for approval; and
- 1 new fostering household was 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.

7.0 Training and Support for Foster Carers

7.1 The Learning and Development Programme

The Fostering Development Coordinator, who arranges training for foster carers, has reported that during the period 7 courses were offered. The training courses offered were on a variety of topics ranging in diversity from 'Key Legislation & Delegated Authority', to 'Child Sexual Exploitation' and 'Managing the challenges of conflict with De-escalation Techniques', the latter replaced the cancelled session from August 2019 mentioned in the last quarterly report. Supervising social workers and the Fostering Development Coordinator continue to emphasise importance of attending training to foster carers in their visits.

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

On childhood trauma and attachment:

"I enjoyed learning about the development of a child's brain and attachment building and doing things together will help improve the care I provide for a child".

On sexuality and gender:

"I learnt about how to protect and child on the internet / online".

On caring for a child who has been sexually abused:

"It is important for foster carers to understand that children as young as two years old can be sexually abused and what behaviours to look out for".

7.2 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:

"I would like to personally thank you for all the hard work, time, patience and support you've given me over the years. Without all your input, I wouldn't have been a Brent Foster Carer today so thank you!"

"Thank you for meeting me on Friday.

A's placement has ended and I am happy that she is back with her family. I would like to request another placement as soon as possible...I really appreciate everything you have done. I want to thank you and the team for all your support this year".

7.3 The Foster Carers' Annual Awards event was held in Brent Civic Centre's Grand Hall on 30th November 2019. It was well-attended and the carers appreciated the awards they received. Some of the feedback was as follows:

"It was nicely organised... it was a lovely night. The decoration and atmosphere was excellent".

"I enjoyed the night because it is a chance to see managers, social workers and foster carers all in the same place, enjoying themselves and in appreciation of why we do what we do".

"It was nice to see everyone in a relaxed atmosphere".

"I liked that it wasn't too formal an event. As foster carers we spend a lot of our time in meetings with professionals so it's good to let your hair down with people who are like minded as yourself".



8.0 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints

- 8.1** A total of 24 foster carer annual review meetings were scheduled to be held during the period under focus. They all went ahead except one, which was cancelled due to the carer resigning.
- 8.2** During this quarter, there was one complaint made by a Brent foster carer. This was about the practice of two workers in the child protection teams. This has been followed up by the Head of Service for the Localities Service.

9.0 New Developments

9.1 Fostering Steering Group

Work on the feasibility project in the area of closer working arrangements on improving placement stability and choice for adolescent children in the care system between Hounslow, Ealing and Brent, led by Brent, continues.

Two Fostering Steering Group meetings have been held during this period for information and data sharing purposes. The next stage of the process will be for the project leads to meet foster carers, the fostering teams and the Marketing and Recruitment Officers of each of the three authorities.

9.2 Exploring Family Networks of Foster Carers

Some of Brent's most resilient carers have originated from the support network of approved foster carers. As such, the fostering teams are planning do a piece of targeted work to explore support networks of our existing carers with the view to identify possible foster carers. Family Network Meetings will be used to bring family and friends networks together for this piece of work.

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