



LONDON BOROUGH OF BROMLEY

ANNUAL FOSTERING PANEL REPORT

1st April 2012 – 31st March 2013

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Contents

1.	Introduction	P.3
2.	Statutory Basis of the Fostering panel	P3
3.	Statutory functions of the fostering Panel (Regulation 25)	P.3
4.	The Constitution and Operation of the Fostering Panel	P.5
5.	Panel Business	P.7
6.	LBB Looked After Children Data	P.8
7.	LBB Fostering Service Data	P.10
8.	Additional information <i>Complaints</i> <i>Exemptions</i> <i>Independent Review Mechanism</i> <i>Matching</i> <i>TSDS</i> <i>Foster Carers Handbook</i>	P.11
9.	Conclusion	P.12

1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared to provide information on the operation of Bromley Fostering Panel from 1st April 2012 to 31st March 2013. This is the third annual report produced by Bromley on the work of its fostering panel.

2. STATUTORY BASIS OF THE FOSTERING PANEL

Under regulation 23 (constitution and membership of fostering panel) of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, Bromley Council as a Local Authority is responsible for appointing an appropriate Fostering Panel with sufficient capacity to undertake the required duties of such panels. Constitution and membership of fostering panels are set out in Regulations 23 and 24 (meetings of fostering panel) and National Minimum Standard 14 (NMS).

Fostering panels are intended to be multi-disciplinary bodies with a considerable element of independence from the fostering service. This independence means that they cannot themselves make decisions, which are the responsibility of the fostering service, but instead make recommendations in relation to their statutory functions as listed below.

Decisions are made by the fostering service, through its decision-maker, after taking into account the panel's recommendations (and any recommendation by the independent review mechanism - IRM). Bromley's current agency decision-maker is the Assistant Director of Safeguarding and Social Care / Education and Care Services.

One of the key functions of the fostering panel is to recommend the approval of short and long term foster carers, connected person carers (also known as family and friends carers), and to review the ongoing approval of foster carers. Although not being a statutory requirement, but is good practice Bromley Fostering panel also makes recommendation on the approval of supported lodgings carers.

The Fostering Panel plays an important quality assurance role, providing objectivity and having the ability to challenge practice which is felt to fall short of the Regulations or the NMS, or not to be in the best interests of children. Panel is required to give regular feedback to the fostering service. Bromley's Fostering Panel achieves this through the panel adviser and annual appraisals, and the implementation of feedback forms that were introduced in March 2013. In addition to this the Panel Chair meets with the Assistant Director of Safeguarding and Social Care/Education and Care Services once a year where feedback is also provided.

3. STATUTORY FUNCTIONS OF THE FOSTERING PANEL (Regulation 25)

The functions of the fostering panel in respect of cases referred to it by the fostering service provider are:

- (a) To consider each application for approval and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a foster parent;
- (b) Where it recommends approval of an application, to recommend any terms on which the approval is to be given;

- (c) To recommend whether or not a person remains suitable to be a foster parent, and whether or not the terms of their approval (if any) remain appropriate:
 - (i) On the first review carried out in accordance with regulation 28(2), and
 - (ii) On the occasion of any other review, if requested to do so by the fostering service provider in accordance with regulation 28(5), and
- (d) To consider any case referred to it under regulation 27(9) or 28(10).
- (2) In considering what recommendation to make under paragraph (1), the fostering panel:
 - (a) Must consider and take into account all of the information passed to it in accordance with Regulation 26, 27 or 28 (as the case may be);
 - (b) May request the fostering service provider to obtain any other relevant information or to provide such other assistance as the fostering panel considers necessary, and
 - (c) May obtain such legal advice or medical advice it considers necessary.
- (3) The fostering service provider must obtain such information as the fostering panel considers necessary and send that information to the panel, and provide such other assistance as the fostering panel may request, so far as is reasonably practicable.
- (4) The fostering panel must also:
 - (a) Advise, where appropriate, on the procedures under which reviews in accordance with regulation 28 are carried out by the fostering service provider, and periodically monitor their effectiveness;
 - (b) Oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service provider, and
 - (c) Give advice, and make recommendations, on such other matters or cases as the fostering service provider may refer to it.

In this regulation "recommend" means recommend to the fostering service provider.

4. THE CONSTITUTION ON OPERATION OF THE FOSTERING PANEL

The Bromley Fostering Panel has one independent Chair Person and 8 panel members, these members form the central list (Reg 23(1)) and are invited to attend every panel. Panel members bring a great deal of variety in terms of both expertise and experience to the operation of Bromley's Fostering Panel, such expertise includes social work knowledge regarding child protection, Children Looked After, adoption and fostering. There is also expertise in health, local

geographical and political knowledge, housing for teenagers, as well as being a young person previously in the care of Bromley and a foster carer from another Local Authority.

In March 2013 the panel received the resignation of a panel member who was also Vice Chair and whose expertise was in Education (particularly in terms of Children Looked After). The recruiting of a replacement is underway to enable panel to continue to keep a central list that is adequate in size and expertise.

The Panel Chair person, Dr Helen Cosis Brown, is independent and she was appointed on the basis of her extensive experience and knowledge in relation to fostering. The Vice Chair Person up until she resigned was the Specialist Education Adviser for Children Looked After in Bromley. A replacement for her role as Vice Chair was found within the current central list, and the panel Vice Chair is now Claire Cornelius who represents young people who are leaving care in her role as Supported Housing co-ordinator.

In August 2012 Bernadette Wilby took up the post of Panel Administrator following the resignation of Kathryn Stapley. The current Panel Advisor Linda Shephard replaced Andrew Bravery when she joined Bromley in November 2012.

For details of the current panel membership, please refer to the table below.

Panel meets at least every month on the second Thursday of the month. The average length of a panel meeting is six hours. However, due to the demand of panel places the panel meetings increased bio monthly to twice a month towards the end of 2012. Papers for the panel are distributed at least ten days before the meeting, which exceeds the requirements of at least five working days as stated in NMS 14 (3). This then gives the panel members enough time to read, digest the paperwork and record their thoughts and comments prior to the panel meetings. It is recognised that the preparatory reading for the panel requires a minimum of four hours but often much longer for each panel member.

Between the 1st April 2012 and the 31st March 2013 the panel met 15 times. Attendance at panel has remained high averaging seven members at each panel over this period. This demonstrates a continuing high level of commitment from our panel members. However it has been recognised that extending the panel's central list would widen expertise and help prevent the risk of a panel failing to be quorate or just being quorate should unforeseen circumstances of panel members occur, or if they have a prior engagement. The latter is likely to be more common with the increase of panel meetings as when members on the current central list were accepted panel meetings were only 12 times a year.

Standard 14(2) of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering states that 'Panel/s provides a quality assurance feedback to the fostering service provider on the quality of reports being presented to panel. In March 2013 a feedback form for panel members was piloted and is in the process of being monitored in respect of how useful providing feedback in this format is, and its effectiveness towards improving standards within the reports that are presented to panel.

CONSTITUTION OF THE FOSTERING PANEL

Panel membership at the end of March 2012 was as follows:

Name	Role	Start date	Resignation Date
Dr Helen Cosis Brown	Independent Panel Chair	October 2009	Continuing
Helen Priest	Specialist Education Adviser and Vice Chair.	September 2009	April 2013
Claire Cornelius	Supported Lodgings Co-ordinator & Vice Chair	November 2011	Continuing
Cllr Judith Ellis	Elected Member	June 2006	Continuing
Cllr Anne Manning	Elected Member	March 2004	Continuing
Barbara Mayne	Foster Carer	April 2008	Continuing
Brianne Lindsey	Bromley Children's Project, and former Bromley Looked After Child	November 2011	Continuing
Lissa Coward	Looked after Children's Nurse	December 2006	Continuing
Ray Suomi	Independent Reviewing Officer/ Social Worker	September 2009	Continuing
Joy Bullen	Social Worker	March 2012	Continuing
Linda Shephard	Deputy Group Manager for Fostering and Panel Advisor	November 2012	Continuing
Bernadette Wilby	Panel Administrator	August 2012	Continuing

The Panel membership continues to meet the requirements of the Fostering Regulations 2011.

All Panel members attend regularly and approach the task conscientiously, studying the papers in advance and preparing thoroughly for the meetings. The proceedings are very ably managed by the Chair and capably organised and recorded by our dedicated Panel Administrator.

Annual appraisals are conducted with all panel members, chaired by the Panel Chair and with the Panel Adviser also in attendance. The panel Chair's appraisal is conducted by the Agency Decision Maker. The appraisals for 2012 have been completed and one common theme that came out of these was that panel members wanted training that Focus on the Fostering Regulations and Standards, and Delegated Authority. In response to this a joint training day for Panel members and Supervising Social Workers was held on the 6th December 2012. A date for further training has been set for the 10th July 2013.

Additional comments within the appraisals were regarding tea/lunch breaks being structured into the panel agenda, and I am pleased to say these are now incorporated in the agenda, and the Chair is very good at keeping to time to enable breaks to take place.

5. PANEL BUSINESS

Summary of Recommendations (April 2012 to March 2013)

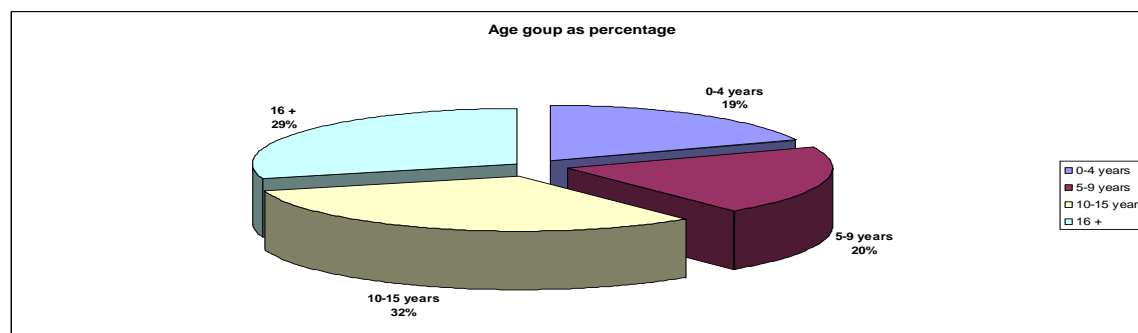
Placements refer to how many children placed in a family unit – additional sibling equates to approval where a family unit is also approved to take a sibling group if they can share a room.

Number of Panel Meetings	15		Additional
New approvals – fostering households	22		
Fostering placements	24	inc. 6 family units approved for 2 or 3 single placements	Inc. 5 family units were sibling group of two is attached to their approval (<i>i.e. one child or same sex or sibling group of 2</i>)
Short breaks placements	6		
Supported Lodgings placements	4		
New Connected Person placements	1		
First Reviews	14		Inc. 1 change of approval
Annual Reviews every three years (no change to approval)	11		
Annual Review every three years & Changes of Approval	7		
Change of approval (outside annual review)	10		Inc. 2 long term matches of YP
Long term matches	11		
Special Guardianship Orders	0		
Updates	4		
Change of circumstances	3		
Addendum reports	3		
Deregistration/ resignation	18		
Total number of cases considered		108	

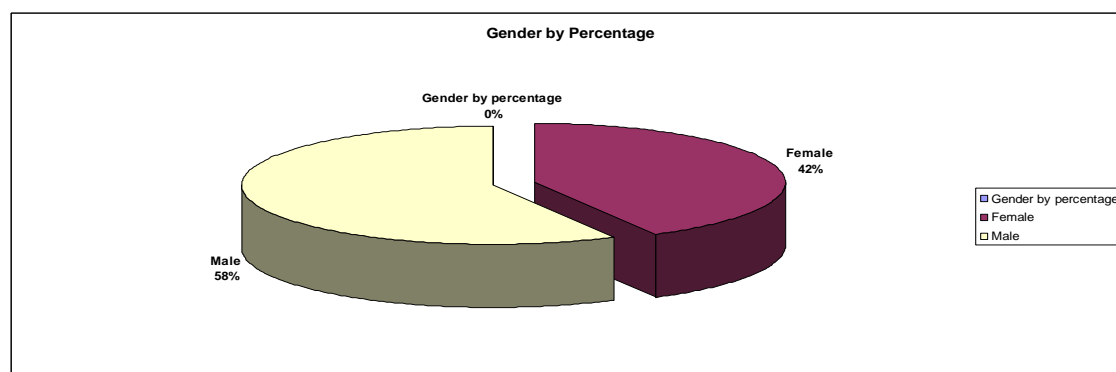
6. LBB LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN DATA

On the 31st March 2013 there were 286 looked after children/young people

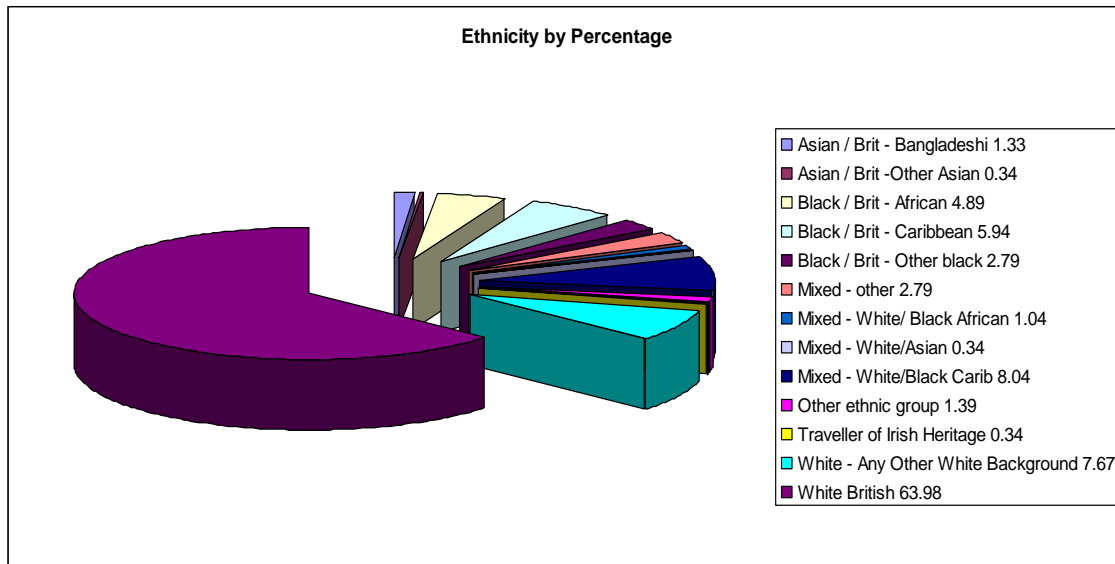
Age	
0 – 4 years	54
5 – 9 years	58
10 – 15 years	90
16 +	84



Gender	
Female	120
Male	166



Ethnicity	
Asian / Brit - Bangladeshi	4
Asian / Brit -Other Asian	1
Black / Brit - African	14
Black / Brit - Caribbean	14
Black / Brit - Other black	8
Mixed - other	8
Mixed - White/ Black African	3
Mixed - White/Asian	1
Mixed - White/Black Caribbean	23
Other ethnic group	4
Traveller of Irish Heritage	1
White - Any Other White Background	22
White British	183



Placement type	Total	Percentage
Foster placement with relative / friend outside LA	10	34.9%
Foster placement with relative or friend in LA	20	6.99%
Placed with foster carer provided by LA outside LA	50	17.48%
Placement with agency foster carer in LA	2	0.69%
Placement with agency foster carer outside LA	29	10.13%
Placement with foster carer, provided by LA in LA	93	32.51%
Missing from placement - Whereabouts known	3	1.04%
Missing from placement - Whereabouts unknown	0	0%
Independent living	19	6.64%
Placed with parents / person with parental resp.	4	1.39%
Placed for adoption	7	2.24%
Children's home inside LA boundary	1	0.34%
Children's home outside LA boundary	22	7.69%
Family Centre / Mother and Baby Unit	1	0.34%
Residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home regulations Act 1984	8	2.79%
Residential Care Home (Regulations Homes Act 1984)	3	1.04%
Residential School	12	4.19%
Secure unit outside LA boundary	1	0.34%
NHS / Health Trust / medical or nursing care establishment	0	0%
YOI or Prison	1	0.34%
Grand Total	286	

7. LONDON BOROUGH OF BROMLEY FOSTERING SERVICE DATA

LB Bromley Approved Carers (as at 31st March 2013)

Total of Approved Fostering Households*	129	Including 9 connected person households
Actual number of foster carers (not households)	210	Including 11 connected person approved carers
Total number of foster placements (not carers) provided by the fostering service during the period 1 st April 2011 to 31 st March 2012 (FY11/12)	172	
Total number of short breaks placements provided by fostering service during FY 11/12	18	
Total number of children placed by the fostering service during FY11/12	227	
Total number of children placed in short breaks during 11/12	12	
Total number of disabled children placed as at 31 st March 2012	10	

8. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Complaints

From the 1st April 2012 to the 31st March 2013 The fostering service received one complaint that was partially upheld and response issued in July 2012.

Exemptions

Eleven exemption requests were made and out of these 4 exemptions request did not proceed.

Independent Review Mechanism

One case was heard by the IRM and the decision which came back from the IRM regarding was to uphold panel's decision. The main reason for their decision was due to the breach of trust and the foster carer's lack of understanding regarding safeguarding issues. The foster carer also demonstrated no reflection on what she could have done differently. The IRM did however highlight the inadequate letter that was sent by the local authority which did not outline the reasons as to why the foster carer was being deregistered and also the lack of annual reviews in the past that the foster carer had. In response to this letters now state clearly the recommendation and reason/s why when a recommendation to not approve is made.

The fostering Service have worked hard to ensure that annual reviews are undertaken within the 12 month time frame, and this is work ongoing.

Matching

The Panel commented on the amount of paperwork contained within the bundle when a match is presented to panel. They asked if it was necessary to have a Form F included with the matching paperwork and they would in place of the Form F prefer the minutes from the last annual review, and this preference has now been applied.

TSDS

The numbers of carer's completing their TSDS has increased, but there are still some that are outstanding. Linda Shephard signed off carers Portfolios when she joined Bromley in November 2012. However, LBB training section has taken over responsibility for TSDS work shops and for signing off Portfolios. Supervising Social Workers will commence taking responsibility for keeping the TSDS on the agenda at each supervisory visit, and this together with any forthcoming work shops this should ensure that all Portfolios for new foster cares are completed on time.

Foster Carers Handbook

Standard 17 and NMS 21.10 states that on approval foster carers are given information either in a handbook or by an electronic resource which covers: policies, procedures, guidance, financial information, legal information and insurance details. The fostering service commenced a review of its foster carer's handbook at in March 2013 and this is currently almost completed. The new foster carer handbook will reflect current government legislation and guidance, as well as LBB procedures, and will be available electronically for all LBB foster carers and staff.

9. CONCLUSION

This report has set out the functions of the fostering panel/team and outlined its core business and successes over the past year.

Our priorities over the coming year are:

- 1) To continue to recruit a number and range of foster carers to meet the diverse placement needs of our looked after children and young people
- 2) To review our current recruitment policy and this includes the process, and the proforma that is currently being use. It will also include the re-introduction of information evenings.
- 3) To continue to provide quality support and training to our foster carers in order to ensure their retention and to enable them to provide quality care and placement stability for the children and young people they look after.
- 4) The fostering services recognises that connected person carers play a unique role in enabling children and young people to remain with people they know and trust if they cannot, for whatever reason, live with their parents. In order to support our connected person carers, the fostering service aims to introduce a new pre-approval course that has a particular focus on the needs and circumstances of this group of carers (NMS 30(11)). Post approval connected person carers have equal access to training alongside our mainstream and short breaks foster carers.
- 5) The fostering service will continue to work closely in partnership with all professionals in order to provide a quality service to our carers and to improve the life chances of our looked after children and young people.