

## ANNUAL REPORT ON FOSTERING ACTIVITY 2015-2016

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards (NMS) 2011 require all Fostering services to provide a report of the activity to review a written Statement of Purpose setting out the aims and objectives of the service and facilities provided.
- 1.2 The Foster Services Regulation and NMS 2011 require Fostering Services to produce, regularly update and make available a Children's Guide. These are updated regularly and are available on line – [www.linkinbromley.co.uk](http://www.linkinbromley.co.uk)
- 1.3 The Fostering Service primarily provides a service for children looked after. The service is committed to identifying and supporting stable placements for children where foster care is the identified plan.
- 1.4 The fostering Service contributes to the five key priorities:
  - Be Healthy
  - Stay Safe
  - Enjoy and Achieve
  - Make a Positive Contribution
  - Achieve Economic Wellbeing
- 1.5 The provision of high quality, local placements that are equipped and supported to meet the diverse needs of children and young people required a family placement is a key strategic priority within the Council's corporate parenting strategy and to meet the statutory requirement to ensure that there are sufficient local placements to meet the need.
- 1.6 Partners and stakeholders have agreed that as a priority that Foster Carers will be recruited, assessed, approved on an annual basis, supervised and supported to ensure that they:
  - Provide a safe, secure and comfortable home for the children and young people they care for.
  - Give children and young people time, attention and clear boundaries.

- Provide encouragement and motivation to help children and young people meet their potential.
- Work positively with birth parents and other family members where appropriate.
- Work in partnership with those who share responsibility for the child or young person's care, welfare and development.
- Provide care that support and promotes the child or young person's culture, race, religion, language, disability and sexual orientation.

1.7 The fostering service is Managed by a group manager, and two deputy group managers.

There are eight senior practitioners and four social workers; the team is well established with little staff turnover. There is an expectation for SSW to have a case load of fifteen carers, four f form assessments. We have a part time fostering support worker, whose main focus is assisting in recruitment

The Connected person's team, although sitting within the fostering team and managed by the family placement group manager, operates as a separate entity, with a deputy manager, who has a staff group of one senior practitioner and three social workers

The fostering team as a whole is supported, by a group of three business support workers

## 2. Bromley Children Looked After Data

2.1 On the 31 March 2016, the number of children looked after was 281. This is a slight increase from the 31 March 2015 when the number was 272.

**Table showing the number and percentage of CLA at 31 March 2016**

Age	Number of Children	%
Under 1 Years	14	5%
1-4 Year	28	10%
5-9 Years	43	15%
10-12 Years	56	20%
13-15 Years	61	22%
16+ Years	79	28%
Sum:	281	100%

2.2 Of the children looked after 54% are male and 46% are female.

- 2.3 At the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016, compared to 174 (62%) of all children who were looked after were placed with foster carers, of which 143 (82%) were placed with carers approved and supported by Bromley. There were 31 (18%) placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). The remainder of our children looked after were placed in residential units, residential schools, supported lodgings or in semi-independent accommodation.

**Table showing children in foster care by type since 2013**

Year	Total % in foster care	% in house	% in IFA
2015 - 16	62%	82%	18%
2014 - 15	69%	78%	22%
2013 - 14	66%	78%	22%

**3. Bromley Approved Carers** (as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016)

- 3.1 At the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 the total number of approved fostering households was 123.
- 3.2 Of which there were 97 Mainstream Foster Carers, 14 Connected Person(s) Family and Friends Carers and 12 respite carers

**Table showing number of carers since 2013**

Year	Mainstream	Connected Person	Respite
2015 - 16	97	14	12
2014 - 15	102	13	19
2013 - 14	98	0*	19

\*Connected person carers were not counted separately.

**Connected Persons/Special Guardianship Orders**

- 3.3 In the year 2015/16, 8 children left the care of Bromley by being cared for by 7 Connected Persons who were granted a Special Guardianship Orders by the court. Prospective Special Guardians are assessed by workers in the fostering service who work closely with the children's teams to ensure safe placements for children. During this period 5 Connected Persons Foster Carers resigned (as Foster Carers) due to becoming a Special Guardian.

Table showing SGO granted since 2013

Year	SGO
2015 - 16	12
2014 - 15	23
2013 - 14	27

- 3.4 The Fostering team support Special Guardians for up to three years post placement as required, in addition where a support plan is in place annual reviews are undertaken, of which there are 70. In addition, the authority support 49 placements by the provision of financial support.
- 3.5 There has been a significant increase increase of the use of Special Guardianship Placements since 2011 and this is anticipated to continue. This is leading to more requests for support for 'Post Order' requests. Group training such as '*Expectations of a Connected Persons Carer*' has been offered.
- 3.6 Connected Persons foster carers and Special Guardians are encouraged to access the Fostering Training in order to enhance and consolidate their learning and development.
- 3.7 In common with most Local Authorities (LA'S), Bromley has seen a significant increase in the number of extended family members assessed, as part of Court proceedings, to provide placements either as a Connected Persons Foster Carers or more commonly under a Special Guardianship Order (SGO).
- 3.8 As of April this year, SGO placements have been allowed to access the adoption support fund; this will enable the authority to offer more therapeutic support to this group.
- 3.9 At present the connected person's team provide support to carers, via a duty system. The demand on this system is growing and, as a service we are aware that we will need to look, at alternatives ways of providing support

#### **4. Fostering allowances**

- 4.1 In 2015/16 a review of foster carer allowances was undertaken to identify possible savings. This followed analysis of the Bromley allowances scheme which suggested that the allowances received by our carers was at a higher rate than carers in the surrounding local authorities and IFA's operating locally.
- 4.2 As part of the review carers were consulted, and a final proposal put forward (and agreed by the Executive early in the 2016/17 financial year), that the Council would adopt the recommended Department for

Education weekly maintenance allowance rather than the previously (higher) Fostering Network recommended amount.

- 4.3 It is acknowledged that existing carers will see a reduction in the weekly maintenance allowance payable to them of between £20 and £60 per child, dependent upon the child's age.
- 4.4 The Bromley Foster Carers Association (BFCA) has worked well with the fostering services managers to try and manage the possible defection of foster carers to other agencies. As it stands there have been a total of 8 fostering families who have given their notice of intent to move and 19 who have requested their Form F assessments. Some Fostering Families have used this time as an opportunity to transfer to other agencies, but also to retire. However, at the time of writing this report only two foster carers units had formally moved to the next stage of transfer to an agency.

## 5. De-registrations & Resignations

- 5.1 During 2015/2016, 15 mainstream and respite fostering families' approval was terminated due to concerns with withholding information regarding possible safeguarding issues.
- 5.2 The reasons for resignation are broadly similar insomuch that it was either due to retirement or personal circumstances. One fostering family transferred their services to an IFA.
- 5.3 In addition there were 11 Connected Person(s) Foster Carers were de-registered, 5 became SGO holders, 4 had children placed back with their parents, one placement broke down and 1 was terminated as the child left the placement.

**Table showing foster carer deregistration's since 2013**

Year	Mainstream	Connected Person	Respite
2015 - 16	15	11	7
2014 - 15	9	3	2
2013 - 14	12	8	2

## 6. Foster Carer Recruitment

- 6.1 In 2015/16 the Bromley Fostering Team set a target to recruit 22 new Fostering Households; however this target was missed for a variety of reasons. Recruitment of carers, and particularly carers for adolescents, siblings and BME children remains challenging.
- 6.2 During 2015/2016 the service received a total of 178 initial enquiries from which 45 were successful application and their applications was

progressed to assessment of which 5 were presented to panel and approved during 2015/16. In addition to this there are currently 6 applicants whose assessment commenced in the later staged of 2015/16 who will be presented to the Fostering Panel early in 2016/17. The majority of applicants who fail to complete the assessment process 'counsel' themselves out, either because they have failed to fully understand the fostering task or there are other personal issues that makes fostering impractical or impossible for them at this time.

**Table showing foster carers recruitment since 2013 (mainstream and respite)**

Year	Total New foster carer approvals	Approvals for 13+
2015 - 16	5	1
2014 - 15	11	7
2013 - 14	8	5

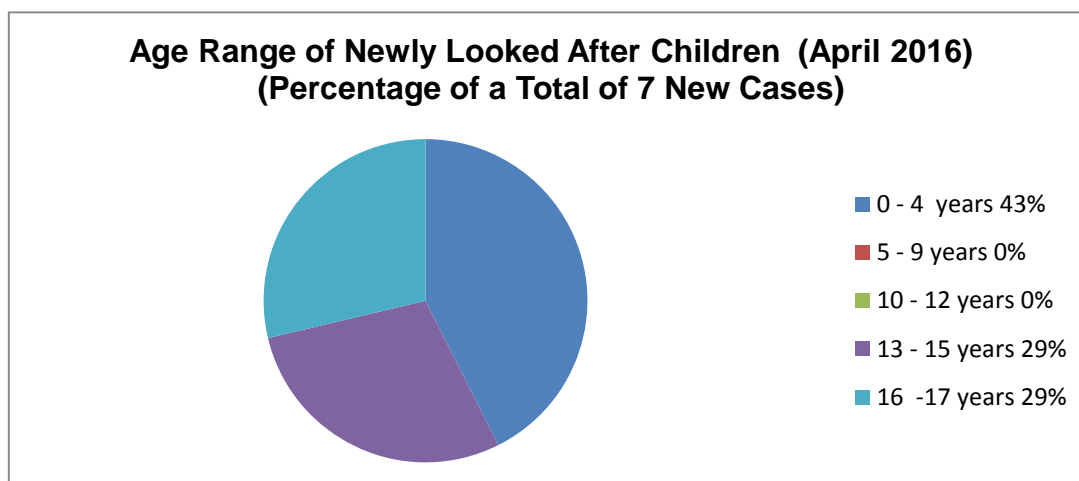
6.3 Since 2014 we have experienced an increase in the number of young people over the age of 13 who have become looked after. The recruitment of carers for this age group is a priority.

**Table showing the number of new CLA over the age of 13 since 2014**

Year	Total new CLA cases	New adolescents (13+) becoming Looked After	Adolescents as percentage of the total of all new CLA cases
2014/15	137	53	39%
2015/16	161	85	53%

6.4 Early indication are that this trend for older children and young people becoming looked after is continuing.

## Table showing age range of all new CLA since 1 April 2016 by age



- 6.5 We have reviewed and refresh our recruitment strategy to attempt to attract more carers. Our research shows that the majority of applicants have viewed the council fostering web pages as the primary vehicle for obtaining information about fostering. As a result, we have made some adjustments to our website so it is slightly easier to navigate to the foster pages from the main site. The website continues to be a place where comprehensive information and video links where Foster Carers talk about their experiences of caring for Bromley's children who are looked after. Information about forthcoming events and information meetings are also regularly updated and application to be assessed as Foster Carers can be submitted electronically. A full review of the website, including re-branding is planned for 2016/17.
- 6.6 In addition, we have, over the last year, arrange for two borough wide leaflet distributions, via council tax information and an environmental information that was already, arranged to be sent out. We have continued to have our monthly drop in sessions, which have been very well attended.
- 6.7 Our aim is to further increase the number of locally available Bromley Foster Carers and will be working hard this year to increase our recruitment drive to attract an additional 20 fostering units. Whilst we need to recruit generally, our focus is to recruit foster carers for teenage placements, disabled children, sibling groups and parent and child placements, to meet the needs of Bromley's children and young people.

## 7. Panel Business

- 7.1 The Fostering Panel exercises its role fully as laid out in the Fostering Services Regulations and NMS 2011. The Fostering Panel is chaired by an independent person who is also a qualified social worker, and is not in the employment of Bromley. The current Chair has a national

and international recognised and respected as an eminent Professor of Social Work and brings a wealth of experience from both a practice and academic perspective.

- 7.2 The Fostering Panel Adviser is a statutory position and this role is undertaken by one of the deputy managers in the Fostering Team.
- 7.3 The Fostering Panel considers all new applications to foster and reviews every Foster Carer on an annual basis. The Panel then makes a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker who has the final decision.
- 7.4 The statutory Agency Decision Maker, is the Assistant Director of children’s social care who has access to and can consult with the Panel Chair, Fostering Panel Advisor, Medical Advisor and a specialist Child Care Lawyer as and when necessary.
- 7.5 The Fostering Panel meets on a monthly basis, though the frequency does increase if required. Annually Panel Members also attend training events that explores a number of relevant practice issues. Between 2015/2016 the panel met a total of 19 times.
- 7.6 The Panel considered and made the following recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker between 2015/2016:

**Table of summary of recommendations 2015/2016**

Number of Panel Meetings	19	Additional
New approvals – mainstream fostering households	4	
Maximum new mainstream fostering placements	6	1 child or 2 if siblings aged 4-11 years -1 child aged 0-5 years -1 child (2 if siblings able to share) 0-8 years -1 child aged 12-18.
New approvals of respite carers	1	1 child or 2 if siblings 0-11 years
Supported Lodgings placements	1	1 fostering unit approved
New Connected Person carers	13	13 fostering units approved.
First Reviews	16	16 fostering units approved
Annual Reviews every three years (no change to approval)	5	5 fostering unites approved
Annual Review every three years & Changes of Approval	7	7 reviews & accordingly change to their terms of approval.
Long term matches	8	8 fostering units approved



Updates	5	Total 5 fostering unit updates: 2 of them are Updated Form Fs, 1 case deferred, 2 general case updates.
Change of circumstances	1	1 fostering unit approved.
Deregistration/ resignation totals	27	18 Foster Carers terminations 9 Connected Persons terminations
<b>Total number of cases considered</b>	<b>94</b>	

## **8. Training**

- 8.1 The Fostering Service is required, through Fostering Regulations and NMS 2011, to provide training, support and development for Foster Carers.
- 8.2 In conjunction with the training consultants, the service reviewed and updated its training offer for Foster Carers. Post-Approval training consisted training, providing Foster Carers with a number of different topics, with Signs of Safety being paramount within all the training provided.
- 8.3 In addition, the service provided 4 pre-approval training events (Skills to Foster). These training events included input from members of the LINCC.
- 8.4 Additional workshops are provided where a need is identified either by Foster Carers and/or the department.

## **9. Support for Foster Carers**

- 9.1 Following approval, all Foster Carers and Connected Persons Foster Carers are allocated a Supervising Social Worker (SSW) who supports and supervises them. The SSW supports the carer(s) in their work, including the impact of fostering on the wider family. Where appropriate, the SSW will undertake direct work with the child /children of the carer.
- 9.2 The SSW will advise on relevant training courses; how to access the online Foster Carers Handbook, which includes fostering policies and procedures and information on the required Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers (TSDS.). The SSW ensures that the Foster Carer meets all the standards of care set by the department and is responsible for assisting the carer in the development of their competencies and their career as carers. To support them in their task of caring, Connected Person(s) Carers are expected to complete their training standards within 18 months (with Professional Foster Carers completing them within 12 months) and to attend all core training required to maintain their registration as Foster Carers.

- 9.3 In addition to the SSW, a range of fostering support services is made available to foster carers:
- A quarterly newsletter - and it is envisaged that in the future, the new website will have the facility to provide approved carers a secure section for peer support and communication.
  - Foster carers meet a minimum of six times a year in support groups. They can access the training programme set up for all workers in the Safeguarding and Social Care Division. In addition, specific training courses are run to enhance foster carers' skills.
  - Specialist therapeutic support to children and their foster carers through the Children and Adolescents Mental Health Service (CAMHS) Tier 2 and Tier 3 /4 services and Specialist Education and Health teams.
- 9.4 All Bromley approved foster carers are members of the Bromley Foster Carers Association (BFCA). Over the past year the BFCA has reorganised, they now have a new Chair and a new committee. Their stated purpose is to work with the fostering team to provide the best possible outcomes for children. The BFCA provide a range of events to support foster carers, including coffee mornings, formal and informal meetings, social events and the annual children's Christmas Party.
- 9.5 The Bromley Foster Care Association meets bi-monthly. The Department meets regularly with members of the Committee of the Association to ensure an effective working relationship is maintained.

## **10. Independent Reviewing Mechanism**

- 10.1 The Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM) is an independent panel managed through CoramBAAF<sup>1</sup> (Coram British Association for Adoption and Fostering). Foster Carers have the right to take their case to the IRM in specific circumstances, namely if they are displeased with the way their case has been handled when they are either presented to the Fostering Panel or unhappy with the outcome made by the Agency Decision Maker. The IRM operates as another panel and consider all the information that was presented to the local authority panel and makes a recommendation to the agency decision maker.
- 10.2 During 2015/16 one carer exercised her right for our decision that her approval be terminated be examined by the IRM. By a minority of one, the IRM found for the carer, however the agency decision maker did not change their decision and the carer approval was terminated

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<sup>1</sup> [www.corambaaf.org.uk](http://www.corambaaf.org.uk)

## **11. Private Fostering**

- 11.1 In January 2016 the fostering team assumed responsibility for private fostering and ensuring that the statutory requirements in terms of assessment and support are met. To date we have 8 children who are privately fostered in Bromley, 7 of these are held by the fostering team and 1 is held in Safeguarding as he is on a CP plan.
- 11.2 A significant part of the local authority responsibility for private fostering is to ensure that children who are privately fostered are safeguarded. The requirements that children who are privately fostered must be notified to the local authority and subject to assessment and regular visiting is not widely understood and it is therefore a crucial part of the role that we work closely with partner agencies and members of the public to promote our statutory responsibilities.

## **12. Staying Put**

- 12.1 The Children and families Act 2014, placed a statutory obligation on local authorities that enables care leavers to continue to live with their foster carers when they reach 18 years of age, until the young person is 21 years of age.
- 12.2 The fostering service in collaboration with the leaving care team has developed a policy that outlines the what support, both practical and financial, carers can expect to receive when offering a staying put placement.
- 12.3 At present we have 11 young people in Staying Put placements.
- 12.4 Extending the period of time that young people can remain with their foster carers after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, whilst supportive to the young people, brings with it a reduction in the number of carers available for adolescents. This has and is likely to continue to contribute to a shortage of carers for this age group locally, which increases our need to recruit.

## **13. Future Plans for the Fostering Service in 2015/6**

- 13.1 The challenge to recruit LB Bromley foster carers remains high on the service agenda. This is the single most important area of need within the service to manage the demand for placements.
- 13.2 The Fostering Team has worked hard to support and retain our current cohort of carers, however in the next few years some of our older established carers may consider retirement and there are always life events that contribute to all carers re-considering their fostering career.

- 13.3 In order to ensure that LB Bromley can continue to provide for Children Looked After to remain living within their local community we need to provide sufficient local placements to meet their needs.
- 13.4 The Fostering Service will continue to work on recruitment and retention of carers working with internal and external stakeholders to improve practice. Currently foster carers are actively involved in foster carer recruitment and we look forward to increasing those opportunities.
- 13.5 We will explore recruitment options, including bespoke recruitment activity through an external provider, to increase the number of carers available for adolescents.
- 13.6 We will established a sub group of the Corporate Patenting Strategy Group to lead on the development of improved support packages for foster carers to enable them to care for children and young people with complex needs and/or challenging behaviour.