



## Family Services

Document control	
<b>Document title</b>	<b>Annual Fostering Service Report</b>
<b>Document description</b>	This report provides an overview of service delivery for 2019/20.
<b>Document Author</b>	Kate Jeffrey, Head of Service, Corporate Parenting
<b>Director of Children's Services</b>	Chris Munday
<b>Document production date</b>	August 2020

## **The Fostering Service Report**

In May 2019 Ofsted completed their inspection of Barnet Children's social care and identified that services for Children are good and much improved from the previous inspection in 2017. Ofsted noted in their 2019 report that 'Children receive good-quality care from their foster-carers. Most in-house foster carers are recruited, assessed and approved within appropriate timescales. Assessments are thorough and demonstrate consideration of the impact of fostering on the whole family. Foster carers benefit from a wide range of support and training opportunity, and carers report being well supported'.

We have progressed throughout 2019-2020 with a recruitment strategy successfully generating a significant number of enquiries. Our assessments of potential carers remain thorough and robust thinking of the family as a whole and we continue to offer a good and varied training program to support their development as carers of our children.

### **Recruitment and Assessment**

In January 2020 the Carer Recruitment and Assessment Team formerly separated into two distinct teams, the Carer Assessment Team and the Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team. The Carer Assessment Team is responsible for assessing prospective family and friends carers through Viability Assessments, Special Guardian Assessments and Reg, 24/25 assessments, while the Fostering Recruitment and Assessment team are responsible for the advertising, recruiting and the assessment of prospective foster carers for Barnet Council.

The Fostering Recruitment and Assessment team are involved with prospective carers from the point of initial enquiry, until they are formally presented to the Adoption and Fostering Panel for approval after which their approval as foster carers is ratified by the Agency Decision Maker. Carers are supported by the Fostering Support and Development post their approval.

### **Overview of performance**

#### **Approvals:**

In 2018/19, the recruitment and assessment of foster carers became the key area for focus, with additional resources created within the team to manage the assessment of family and friends carers as a separate project, although remaining in the same team. The target for foster carers and supported

lodgings carers (new scheme) was set to 35. Whilst the target was not met, 31 foster carers were successfully recruited and assessed alongside 2 supported lodgings carers.

In response to the positive recruitment figures achieved in 2018/19, an ambitious target of 37 foster carer approvals was set for 2019/20. This was to include 2 parent and child carers, 4 specialist carers for teenagers, 10 supported lodgings carers, 6 respite specialist carers for children with disabilities and 15 mainstream foster carers.

In 2019/2020 there was a significant decrease in approvals, with 8 carers successfully approved. A review of the enquiries suggest that people would make initial contact however were unwilling to progress to a screening call and assessment, preferring to be on hold. Changes in staff may also have attributed to a less robust marketing strategy and outreach work in the first half of the year.

Low enquiry to approval rates were repeated across the North London Fostering and Permanence Consortium of which Barnet is a member with 5 other Local Authorities (Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey and Islington), where there was a decrease to 58 approved carers compared to 86 carers in 2018/19.

#### **Enquiries:**

As outlined in our improvement plan of 2018/2019, we introduced our digital application process to ensure consistency and ease of the application process. A decision was made that this online platform of enquiry would also provide greater scope and detail in the enquiry detail replicating the social work screening form. There was an expectation that the number of enquiries would decline after the introduction of this 'screening form', however, there would be an increase in the quality of applicants coming through.

A decline in enquiries was visible from the start of the year with only 11 enquiries being placed in April.

**Table 1: Barnet Fostering Enquiries 2018/2019 – 2019/2020**

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Enquiries 18/19	20	33	17	18	12	14	17	17	8	13	12	13	194
Enquiries 19/20	11	33	18	18	13	14	16	16	15	12	13	22	201

During 2019/2020 we generated 201 initial enquiries up from 194 in 2018/2019. This too was replicated across the Consortium with in an increase in enquiries across all 6 Local Authorities to 1353, compared to 1275 in 2018/2019.

Barnet's ratio of enquiries to successful approvals is at 3.92%, compared to 4.2% across the Consortium, evidencing that while Barnet is slightly below the enquiry to approval ratio all Consortium boroughs have a low enquiry to approval rate. We are now robustly tracking all enquiries and undertaking specific reviews of potential carers whose initial enquiries are on hold to better understand and improve the enquiry to approved assessment ratio.

**Table 2: Fostering enquiries/approvals 2019/20**

	Barnet	Camden	Enfield	Hackney	Haringey	Islington
Number of Enquiries	<b>201</b> (194)	200 (181)	260 (234)	<b>327</b> (228)	111 (164)	<b>251</b> (274)
Number of Approvals	<b>8</b> (31)	10 (9)	15 (14)	<b>9</b> (12)	10 (15)	<b>6</b> (7)

From: *North London Fostering and Permanence Consortium Annual Report (2019/2020)*.

A focused piece of work has commenced reviewing all enquiries made between October 2019 and March 2020 to understand why so few enquiries progressed to positive assessments. This has already resulted in a positive assessment of supported lodgings carer being approved.

Consistent with previous year data the majority of enquiry sources recorded have been Outreach (36), search engine (33), with a new top performer of social media, that being Facebook (22). Use of social media is considered performing well due to the new lead generation campaigning options. Online searches are still a top source of information for those thinking of fostering, this is currently split via website and search engine enquiries with a combined total of 43 online enquiries in total.

**Table 3: Enquiry Source Data 2019/2020**

Source	Enquiries	Stage 1 (IV'S)	Stage2	Approved	Closed	Total
Search Engine	6	3	2	0	17	<b>33</b>
Outreach	15	0	0	0	21	<b>36</b>
Referral	0	1	2	0	12	<b>15</b>
Word of Mouth	7	0	0	1	12	<b>20</b>
Consortium	2	0	0	0	9	<b>11</b>
Unknown	6	1	0	0	5	<b>12</b>
Website	1	1	0	0	13	<b>10</b>
Publication	2	0	0	0	7	<b>9</b>

Poster	1	0	0	0	3	4
Previous Enquiry	3	0	1	0	4	8
Internal Comms	0	0	1	1	3	5
Social Media	12	0	0	0	10	22
Leaflet	1	0	0	0	4	5
Bus stop ad	2	1	1	0	7	11
Total Enquiries						201

### Review of targets for 2019/20

As targets for 2019/2020 of 37 foster carers was not met it is worth considering whether this was too ambitious a target. The average recruitment of foster carers for 2018/2019 across the other 5 Local Authorities within the Consortium was 11.4 carers, suggesting that to repeat the success of 31 approved carers with 37 carers the following year would be a challenge. The data from 2018/2019 did also not evidence that a large number of these carers (10) were recruited from an Independent Fostering Agency which was closing down.

Our Target for 2020 / 2021 has been reviewed in line with positive recruitment activity for the first quarter for 2020, whereby there were 24 enquiries resulting in 13 prospective carers progressing to Stages 1 & 2 of assessment by end of first quarter (June 2020).

Our revised fostering recruitment targets for 2020/2021 is for 35 carers to include:

- 15 mainstream foster carers
- 2 Parent & Child foster carers
- 4 specialist carers for teens
- 6 respite carers for children with disabilities
- 10 supported lodgings foster carers

### Objectives for 2020/2021

- Ensuring consistency across Barnet's website for an improved journey, including monitoring and reviewing the online enquiry submission, information sessions and initial visit booking systems
- Increase focus on social media presence and campaigns, including Facebook boosts, google AdWords to increase website views alongside Barnet fostering Instagram page (@barnetfostering and hashtag #more2give).

- Improve and expand Internal communications with staff and current cohort of foster carers to increase recruitment, including financial incentive.
- Targeted approach for digital communications online to include information sessions, initial visits and Skills to Foster Training to be provided digitally online
- Targeted marketing and campaign is required for each specialism of fostering such as parent and child, respite for children with disabilities and supported lodging to be supported by the Consortium recruitment activity with specific focus on parent and child and teenage carers.
- Smooth transition between assessment social work and supervising social worker from Fostering Support Service to ensure carers feel supported, held and contained throughout their first child being placed.

### **Fostering Support and Development**

The fostering support and development team are responsible for the support and development of foster carers to ensure children in their care are resilient and aspirational. The team pride themselves on ensuring that all carers are supported in furthering their parenting skills to provide warm and loving homes to care for our children, whether this is an interim arrangement before they return home to their families, or a long-term relationship beyond the child turning 18.

The support and challenge provided to Barnet foster carers focusses on the development of their skill base, particularly for those who care for children and young people with complex needs resulting from early childhood trauma and neglectful parenting. A comprehensive training offer includes high level therapeutic input for families through attuned therapeutic care and PACE training which is offered to all foster carers. BICS (Barnet Integrated Clinical Services) also offers support to carers through consultations and therapeutic sessions with the child in their care, enhancing the support provided to children and carers in the home. Additional training opportunities and support is available to carers through the Consortium, including specific training for men who foster, which is considered positive.

As of March 2020, Barnet had 102 approved fostering households, a slight decrease from the 110 fostering households in the previous year. As the data indicates, we had 16 resignations throughout the year, attributed to both foster carers retiring and carers moving to become foster carers with independent agencies. Feedback from carers who have continued to foster however with independent agencies suggest a preference to be with an agency local to their home to enable better access to training and in some instances an increase in fostering fees, despite the competitive offer Barnet

provides. Finally, in comparison with the other local authorities within the Consortium, Barnet's number of approved fostering households is in the mid-range.

63% of carer households live within the Barnet area and 37% of carer households based out of borough. In terms of diversity 63% of carers are female, 39% are of White British origin with second largest group being of Caribbean origin. The service had 9 approved carers of Jewish origin and three same sex carer households.

### **Staying Put**

The 'Staying Put' Scheme allows care leavers to stay with their foster carers after they turn 18, if the young person and foster carer agree to this arrangement. As at 31 March 2020, Barnet had 27 (8.39%) care experienced young people remaining living with their former foster parent. The data evidences a significant drop of young people remaining living with their carers under Staying Put arrangements, as in 2018/2019, 46 young people (15%) remained living with their carers post 18. This is attributed to a variety of reasons including, young people being accommodated later in adolescence and preferring to move into their own accommodation than maintain a live-in relationship with their carers, a clear Staying Put policy that is now implemented opposed to arrangements made with carers individually, and some young people graduating from university and moving on to independent living.

Staying Put placements supports young people continuing to engage in education while providing a gradual transition to living independently. Conditions conducive to the Staying Put arrangement include a positive placement that meets the young person's needs, and the will of both the young person and foster carer to continue with the arrangement.

Planning for permanence post 18 has been an area of focussed attention for care leavers in the first quarter of 2020/2021. Procedures are now in place to ensure discussions in support of Staying Put arrangements now take place at Child in Care reviews following a young person's 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, and for non-local authority carers, negotiations with their fostering agency are now taking place earlier to ensure finances are not a barrier to prevent young people remaining in their homes.

### **Supported Lodgings:**

Barnet's Supported Lodgings scheme was introduced in 2018/2019 with 2 supported lodgings carers successfully recruited in the first year. Last year in 2019/2020 we increased capacity with a further 3

supported lodgings carers successfully approved. A recommendation from 2019/2020 annual review was to provide clear documentation and procedures for supported lodgings which has developed and now in place.

#### **What we have done**

- Improved handover process from Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team to Fostering Support team to ensure stability of carers and placements
- Improved induction for newly approved foster carers
- Supervising Social Workers now lead on Skills to Foster Training in partnership with foster carers
- Developed training to enhance knowledge and skills of foster carers, such as attuned therapeutic training and PACE training
- Staying Put carers have named supervising social worker

#### **What we need to do**

- Continued focus on individual development plans for foster carers
- Explore further therapeutic training opportunities for foster carers through the Reflective Fostering Project running in partnership with the Anna Freud Centre to commence in September 2020.
- Develop virtual support groups for foster carers to provide spaces for reflection, challenge and learning