

# **FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT 2015 / 2016**



## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1** This report provides an evaluation of the Fostering Service in Barking and Dagenham for the 2015 to 2016 period, outlining the key achievements and challenges and developments in relation to improving service delivery. The report provides information about the activity and outcomes achieved in this period and identifies priority areas for the year 2016 to 2017 period.
- 1.2** The annual Fostering Service report about the management and outcomes of the Fostering Service meets the requirements of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (Regulation 35) and Fostering Services: National Minimum standard 25.7

## **2. Background**

- 2.1** The Fostering Service is highly regulated by legislation and regulations. The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 are the primary sources of legislation that guide fostering practice, but the service also takes account of other child care legislation such as the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010.
- 2.2** The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 fulfilled commitments made in the White Paper, 'Care Matters: Time for Change' in imposing a duty on local authorities to find sufficient, appropriate fostering accommodation in the local area.
- 2.3** In 2010, Guidance and Regulations for Care Planning, Placement and Case Review were introduced, which has a number of implications for Fostering Agencies, notably greater expectations around placement stability for children and a strengthened role for Independent Reviewing Officers.
- 2.4** In 2011, new Fostering Service Regulations came into force in response to the consultations undertaken with children and young people. These regulations revoked and replaced the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. New National Minimum standards were also introduced in April 2011, which form the basis of Ofsted inspections of fostering services. The service is underpinned by a Statement of Purpose which is updated each year.

## **3. Service Overview**

- 3.1** The Fostering Service sits in the Complex Needs and Social Care division and is committed to working inclusively with all children's social work teams. There is support throughout Children Services to work

flexibly, share resources and deliver high quality services to children in care, in accordance with their individual care plans. The service consists of one team dedicated to all fostering activity including recruitment, assessment training, support to approved foster carers connected persons and private fostering. The team is managed by the Group Manager for Looked After Children and comprises of 1 Team Manager, 1 Deputy Manager, 2 Assessors, 9 Social Workers, 1 Private Fostering Social Worker and 2 Business Support Officers.

**3.2** The Fostering Service fulfills the following roles and responsibilities:

- Recruitment, preparation and assessment of all new foster carers, including Short Break carers for disabled children.
- Ongoing supervision and support of all approved foster carers.
- Ongoing training for foster carers (including weekends to meet the carers' needs).
- Assessment and support of all Connected iPerson foster carers.
- Management of all Private Fostering ii cases (there is a separate report for Private Fostering activity).
- Management of the Placement Finding Team, responsible for identifying placements for looked after children.
- Provision of a Duty Service to ensure that initial enquiries from potential carers are responded to promptly.
- Out of Hours helpline for foster carers until 10.00pm 7 days per week.
- Ensuring that there is a Fostering Panel for the approval and review of foster carers.
- Dealing with complaints and managing allegations which concern foster carers

#### **4. Performance & Outcomes**

##### **Looked after children, placement data and analysis**

**4.1** As at the end of the 2015/16 period, the number of looked after children had reduced from 418 compared to 457 in the previous year. This is a reduction of 9% and a positive direction of travel. The rate per 10,000 children aged 0-17 has decreased to 71.0 and is the lowest rate since 2007/08. The borough still has, however, a higher rate of looked after children per 10,000 compared to London and nationally but is in line with statistical neighbours.

**4.2** Table 1 provides a breakdown of looked after children by placement and whether in or out of the borough between 2013/14 and 2015/16. In

2015/16, 285 (68%) looked after children were placed in foster care (203 in house and 82 in agency foster care), a decline on 2014/15 figure of 321 (70% - 239 in house and 82 in agency placements). This decline can be partially explained by the increased use of connected person and semi –independent placements.

- 4.3** The number of looked after children in residential placements has decreased from 45 (10%) to 35 (8%) over the last year. Of the 35 looked after children placed in residential care at the end of 2015/16, 71% were teenagers (25/35) with extremely challenging behaviour or profound disabilities with associated behavioural difficulties.

**Table 1**

	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
Number of Children In Care	458	457	418
Number in LBBB Foster Care	247 (53.9%)	239 (52.3%)	203 (48.6%)
<i>:of which in Borough</i>	110 (24.0%)	116 (25.4%)	105 (25.1%)
<i>:of which out of Borough</i>	137 (29.9%)	123 (26.9%)	98 (23.4%)
Number in Agency Foster Care	116 (25.3%)	82 (17.9%)	82 (19.6%)
<i>:of which in Borough</i>	12 (2.6%)	6 (1.3%)	7 (1.7%)
<i>:of which out Borough</i>	104 (22.7%)	76 (16.6%)	75 (17.9%)
% of all CIC in Foster Care	79.3%	70.2%	68.2%
Number in Residential Care	23 (5.0%)	45 (9.8%)	35 (8.4%)
<i>:of which Residential Homes</i>	14 (3.1%)	27 (5.9%)	25 (6.0%)
<i>:of which Residential Schools</i>	1 (0.2%)	2 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)
Number placed for Adoption	11 (2.4%)	13 (2.8%)	8 (1.9%)
Connected Persons	14 (3.1%)	24 (5.2%)	32 (7.7%)
Number placed with parents	15 (3.3%)	23 (5.0%)	19 (4.5%)
Semi Independent Units	29 (6.3%)	31 (6.8%)	39 (9.3%)
Other	3 (0.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

- 4.4** It is important to note that the Fostering Service also supported arrangements for 15 young people to remain with their foster carers beyond their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday through the 'Staying Put' scheme.

- 4.5** A key strength of the Fostering Service is the ability of the staff team to remain child focussed whilst providing a high level of support to the cohort of foster carers. Over the last year, there has been an increase in the number of children needing long term or permanent placements and a significant number of requests to place siblings groups of three or more children. The team has continued to work hard to keep young people in local, in-house foster placements thereby enabling them to maintain links with their families and communities.
- 4.6** The table (2) below offers some information regarding placement proximity to the Borough. As at the end of March 2016, the percentage of looked after children that were placed in borough increased to 39% compared to 38% in the previous year. 59% of looked after children are placed out of borough and 2% were placed with adopted parents. Although 59% of looked after children are placed out of borough, the vast majority are placed within 20 miles of the borough (84%).
- 4.7** Whilst 203 looked after children are cared for by our Borough foster carers, not all foster families reside within the Borough itself. This is largely an issue of housing stock; the Borough has a very large 'council housing stock' which does not lend itself to surplus bedrooms and sufficient space in general to be available to make fostering an option for prospective families, hence the need to recruit carers from beyond the borough boundaries. However, as the table illustrates, 'out of borough placements' are in the main within neighbouring boroughs or authorities within a short distance of Barking and Dagenham itself; Havering, Redbridge and Essex, ensuring that contact with professionals is easily maintained and that some services provided within the Borough are still accessed by young people who do not strictly reside with us.

**Table 2 Looked after children placement by area (March 2016)**

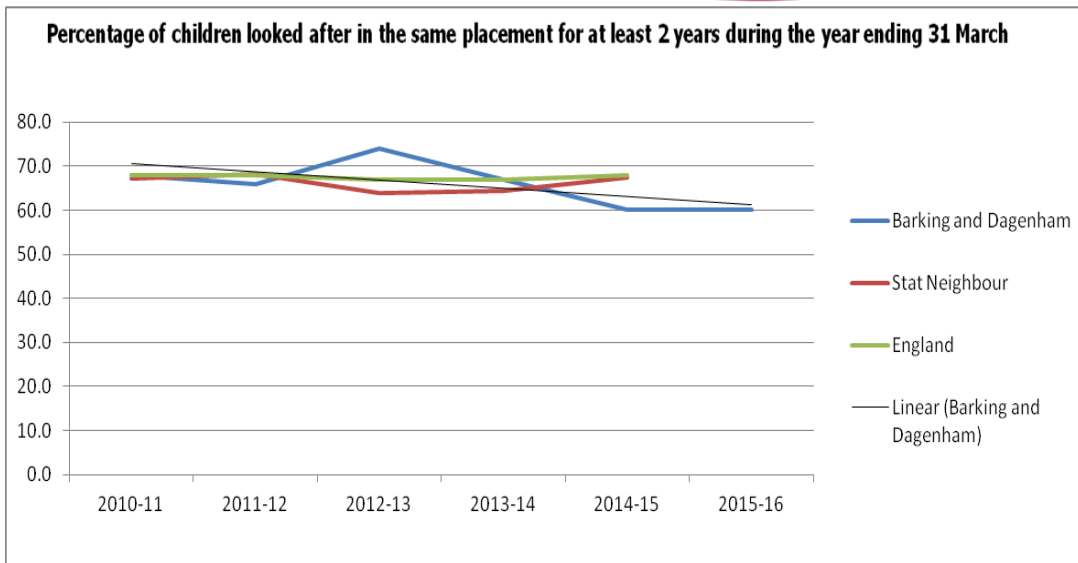
Placement Local Authority	Total	%
LBBB	163	39.0%
Havering	65	15.6%
Redbridge	50	12.0%
Essex	34	8.1%
Kent	16	3.8%
Thurrock	9	2.2%
Enfield	8	1.9%
Newham	8	1.9%
Tower Hamlets	8	1.9%
Placed for Adoption	7	1.7%
Lancashire	6	1.4%
Medway	5	1.2%
Norfolk	4	1.0%
Waltham Forest	4	1.0%
Brent	3	0.7%

Calderdale	2	0.5%
Hampshire	2	0.5%
Isle of Wight	2	0.5%
Leicestershire	2	0.5%
Cambridgeshire	1	0.2%
Darlington	1	0.2%
Devon	1	0.2%
Durham	1	0.2%
East Sussex	1	0.2%
Hackney	1	0.2%
Hertfordshire	1	0.2%
Hounslow	1	0.2%
Leeds	1	0.2%
Lincolnshire	1	0.2%
North Lincolnshire	1	0.2%
Northamptonshire	1	0.2%
Richmond upon Thames	1	0.2%
Shropshire	1	0.2%
South Gloucestershire	1	0.2%
Southend-on-Sea	1	0.2%
Staffordshire	1	0.2%
Surrey	1	0.2%
Warwickshire	1	0.2%
West Sussex	1	0.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

## Placement Stability

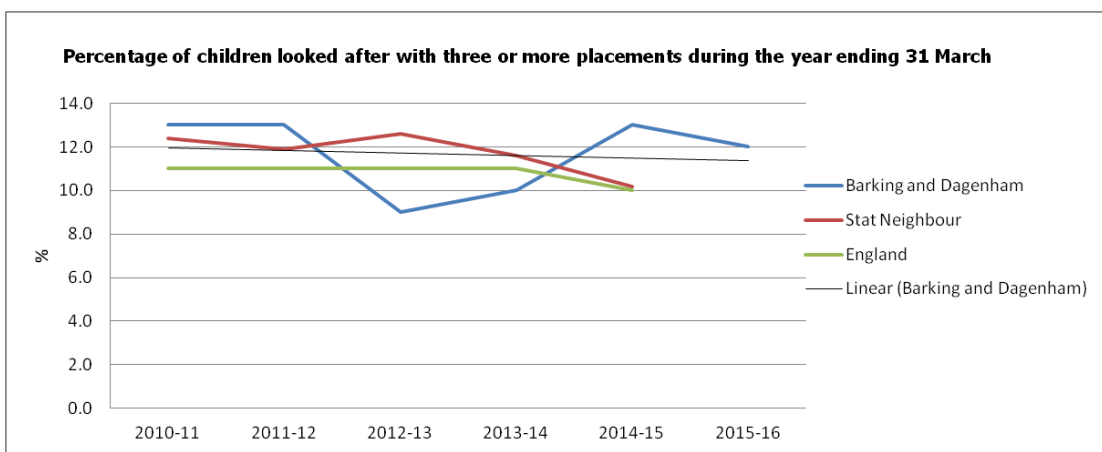
- 4.8** Research indicates that placement stability for children and young people in care is an important factor for them having more positive outcomes during their lives. Changes of placement and primary carers causes instability in terms of attachment and sometimes disruption in education, friendships etc. Young people find it hard to invest in placements if they do not believe they will remain there long term and this impacts on all aspects of their lives.
- 4.9** Getting the right number and type of permanent placements is a significant challenge. The placement team has a very good knowledge of providers and the fostering team strive to consider diversity including ethnicity, culture and religion when placing children. Examining levels of placement stability shows that in 2015/16 too few looked after children in Barking and Dagenham had been in the same placement for at least two years. Performance in 2015/16 improved by 1% to 60%, but this still remains below London, national and statistical neighbour averages by around 10%. Performance is in the bottom quartile for this indicator.



**4.10** It is important to note that this stability indicator includes all placement moves even when the move is positive, for example, placed back with parents, moving to independent living, kinship care and moving from residential to foster care. This indicator also counts a placement move if the foster carer moves house over boundary. It is not, therefore, necessarily the case that the move is negative.

**4.11** To understand performance, an analysis of the end of year cohort shows that of the 137 children who had been in care for 2.5 years as of March 2016, 55 children had experienced a placement move. Of these, 33 children had placement moves due to actual placement breakdown. In these situations a plan is put in place to identify and implement actions for long term placement stability for each child.

**4.12** Although the proportion of looked after children experiencing three or more placements in a year dropped to 12% as at the end of March 2015/16 compared to 13% in the previous year, performance is slightly above national and similar areas. We are, however, in line with London boroughs at 12%.



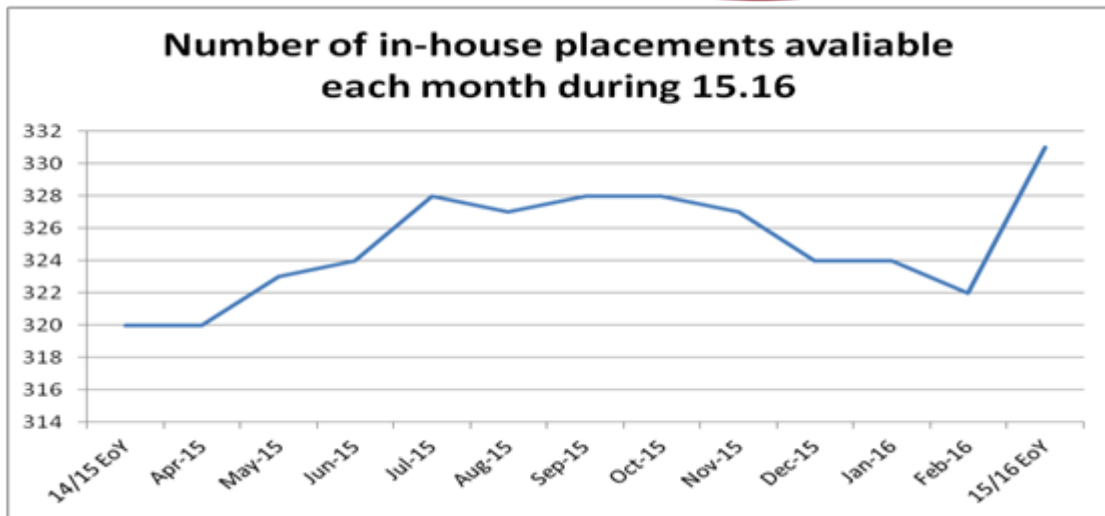


## **Resources and the SAFE programme**

- 4.13** The budget for the Fostering Service to provide placements for the Borough's looked after children is £13,620,460 for internal and external fostering and residential placements.
- 4.14** In delivering the service there are a range of pressures which have incurred additional expenditure beyond the budget and leading to an overspend of £1,027,269.
- 4.15** The service is addressing the situation through a number of actions as part of the wider SAFE programme within the Children's Complex Needs and Social Care service. Most particularly these are:
- Checking and reviewing all independent fostering agency placements to ensure these are appropriate and provide added value to meet children's needs.
  - Putting in place tighter commissioning arrangements to ensure value for money from external independent fostering agency placements and providers.
  - Reviewing all residential placements to devise plans for step down into lower cost provisions where appropriate.
  - Reviewing all children in foster placements (internal and external) to explore the possibility of rehabilitation to family where appropriate.
  - Working with Housing, private housing providers, 16+ and 18+ providers to move young people into lower cost accommodation where appropriate.
- 4.16** The work as part of the SAFE programme will continue, building on the considerable positives of the Borough's Fostering Service and placing children in or nearby to their family and community whilst also making efficiencies.

## **5. Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers**

- 5.1.** As at the end of March 2016, the service had 173 in house foster carers compared to 174 in March 2015. Although this has not increased in the last year, 331 looked after children's' placements were offered by the 173 fostering carers compared to 320 children at the end of March 2015. This is a net increase of 11 placements in the year.



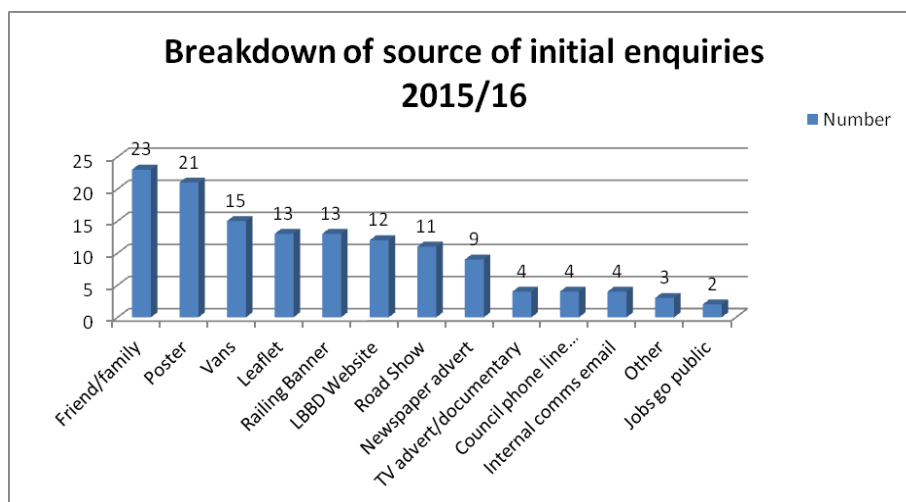
Source: ICS, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

- 5.2.** In 2015/16, LBBDD approved 25 new in-house foster carers, a slight decline on the 27 approved in 2014/15 but higher than the 22 recruited in 2013/14. The team's performance is in direct contrast to that of neighbouring boroughs who continue to struggle to recruit new, quality carers.
- 5.3.** A key strength of the Fostering Service is the continued successful recruitment of foster carers from a diverse range of backgrounds which reflect the rapidly changing local population. This has been a major achievement that has not been reflected with our consortium partners.
- 5.4.** Examining the 25 new in-house foster carers by ethnic groups shows the range across different ethnic communities with 66% (14) coming from ethnic minority backgrounds.

#### **Ethnicity Breakdown of newly approved foster carers (2015-2016)**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number</b>
White British	11
Black British	2
Black African	3
White British/Asian	1
Asian/Pakistani	5
Indian	1
Italian/Greek – White European	1
Albanian	1

- 5.5.** In the 2015 to 2016 period, there were a total of 134 enquiries received by the fostering service compared to 189 in the previous year. Part of the reason for the decline in enquiries is linked to capacity available for marketing as the Recruitment Officer post (shared with Adoption Service) was withdrawn once the Adoption Support Grant, from which the post was funded, was stopped. LBBB are competing with neighbouring boroughs and IFAs who have dedicated marketing teams/officers. However, on a positive note, the LBBB fostering service has remained competitive and approved more foster carers annually than our Consortium partners for a number of years.



- 5.6.** A wide range of promotions have been run by the fostering service in the last 12 months and all literature provided in those promotions now carries the silhouette campaign, including banners, pull up banners, leaflets, cards and enquiry packs. Promotions ranged from:

- Advertising in local events brochure – Warren School.
- Residents' borough newsletter out to 72,000 residents.
- Fostering promoted on volunteering page of LBBB website.
- Updated fostering enquiry brochure delivered to enquirers.
- Social media and press campaigns – LBBB tweets and Facebook alert.
- ½ page advert in National Press (Daily Mirror alongside Fostering Fortnight article).
- Recruitment website pages for LBBB updated.
- Road-shows including shopping centres, and other events.
- Strong presence at borough's 50th anniversary celebrations.
- Telephone advertising secured on LBBB central answer-phone.

- Half hour Staff Meeting presentation at Trinity School to all staff group.
  - 30 Railing banners hung around Barking and Dagenham (2x1m PVC).
  - Posters and leaflets distributed via council buildings.
  - Advertising secured on council fleet at cost price.
  
  - New permanent 6 foot banners secured at Civic, Town Hall, Barking Learning Centre and Heathway library.
  - 2 yellow advertiser wrap-around adverts (Havering area) for Fostering Fortnight.
  - Word of mouth campaign discussed at Foster Carers coffee morning.
  - Letter out to all carers with Fostering business cards to share with interested parties.
- 5.7.** Analysis of the last 3 years' campaigns and the historical knowledge held within the team on what works in recruitment show recommendations from current carers to their friends and family are the most successful methods of recruitment, followed closely by published information (posters, vans, leaflets and railing banners).
- 5.8.** Initial Visits are thorough and robust. Applicants must be able to meet children's high level of needs before they are invited to Skills to Foster Training. In 2015/16, of the 134 Initial Enquiries, around 98 met the criteria for an Initial Home visit. 73 households were invited to the preparation groups post visit to the families. The service finally approved 25 new foster carers.
- 5.9.** The Fostering Service has continued to have a good reputation in respect of the support it provides to its foster carers, and this is reflected in foster carers' feedback and in annual reviews of foster carers. Foster carers have been involved in recruitment activity, training new applicants to foster and media interviews.
- 5.10.** Training and support are key ingredients to not only recruit but also retain foster carers. Foster carers can also access a wide range of training either through the training manual, specialist consortium training, and bespoke training for specific areas e.g. health conditions, education needs, celebrating cultures, court work, creative play and understanding the trauma children have experienced.
- 5.11.** Foster carers are also able to access Fostering Changes which is a 12 week interactive learning experience for foster carers designed by

the Maudsley Hospital and Kings College. All foster carers have access to this training and to date in excess of 100 carers have participated. The courses provide carers with a framework for understanding behaviour and developing skills to strengthen the relationship with the children placed with them, and enhance children's self-esteem.

**5.12.** There are a wide range of support groups to ensure that foster carers are well supported and ensure that they do not feel isolated. These include

- The LBBD Foster Care Association is a local voluntary organization set up and run by foster carers. As a group they provide support, information and advice to members and offer opportunities for foster families to work together.
- The Black and Ethnic Minority Fostering Support Group focuses on issues relating to culture and how this can be integrated within the fostering role, particularly if the placement was trans-racial or cross-cultural/religious.
- The 'Sons and Daughters Group' is held bi-monthly at the Vibe for foster carers' birth children from age 5 onwards and recognises the needs of the foster family birth children.

**5.13.** The Fostering Service also offers carers Peer Mentoring as another means of support. This is generally offered to new carers, but can also be provided to carers who particularly challenging placements eg large sibling groups, child with additional needs.

**5.14.** The annual foster carers' awards ceremony took place in November 2014 and a Coffee morning on 3 December 2015 at which carers are recognised for outstanding work in different categories and are nominated by social workers and children. Over the last 2 years we have taken the opportunity to hold a training session prior to the celebration event. This was a presentation by Professor David Shemmings, who is also delivering Relationship Based Social Work training to social workers so we are supporting foster carers and social workers to develop the same ethos for intervention with children and families so there is cohesion across the service.

## **6. Foster Panel and Review of Foster Carers**

**6.1.** Arrangements have been in place for the Foster Panel to meet on a monthly regular basis to consider foster carer approvals, de registrations and the review of foster carers. Meetings also include discussions on any update in the service, changes in legislation and Panel members' training needs.

**6.2.** The Panel has an independent chair and members are drawn from a central list of approved people who have been agreed as being suitably qualified and/or experienced. A booklet was introduced in 2015 which is

regularly updated and is shared with those attending the meeting, giving information about the Panel members.

- 6.3.** The Panel is viewed as being effective and feedback is that it is friendly and welcoming to those attending and is able to both praise and challenge appropriately.
- 6.4.** Foster carers are subject to a First Annual Review one year after being approved. They subsequently have reviews every 3 years to ensure that they are meeting the Fostering regulations and that they receive adequate support and opportunities to develop. These reviews are conducted by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). All foster carers, together with the social worker and IRO, attend their reviews when presented to Panel.
- 6.5.** During the year 57 annual review reports were presented to Panel for consideration of which 17 were first annual reviews which is an increase from the previous year where 49 reviews were presented to panel. The remaining annual reviews were presented to panel following care standards matters, allegations, change of circumstances and 3 yearly annual reviews as per LBBD Fostering policy.
- 6.6.** In 2015/16, 9 foster carers were de-registered, representing a de-registration rate of 5%. This is below the national average de-registration rate of 13%. The service closely monitors this situation.

<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>REASONS</b>
2	Bereavement and personal reasons
1	Wished to return to work as a teacher
1	Did not wish to continue to foster
1	Health reasons
1	Retired after 43 years of fostering for LBBD
1	Family commitments – unable to continue to foster
1	Downsized and moved to another area to retire
1	SGO granted to foster carer for children in her care –resigned as F/C

## **7. Connected Persons Fostering**

- 7.1.** Local authorities have a responsibility to consider a member of the family or a friend (referred to as a Connected Person), when a child needs to become Looked After. This is an area of activity which is growing both in LBBD and nationally as part of exploring options within family networks .
- 7.2.** During the period 2015 to 2016 period there were 15 referrals for Connected Persons support and assessment. Of these, 2 progressed

to a full Connected Persons' assessment, offering support to the carer. The remaining 13 progressed to a Special Guardianship Order being granted. In the previous year there were 11 referrals and one progressed to a full assessment and approval.

## **8. Complaints and Allegations**

- 8.1.** There have been no complaints within the Fostering Service in the past year. There have also been no referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). The IRM is a mechanism for appeal open to the foster carer/s when disagreeing with the fostering service provider which considers a prospective or existing foster carer not to be suitable to foster a child, or feels an alteration is needed to an existing foster carers terms of approval
- 8.2.** When allegations against foster carers are received these are investigated using the London Child Protection Procedures. All allegations are referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) of the borough in which the carer resides. A strategy meeting is held and a decision is made with regards to whether a S.47 investigation will be undertaken or the matter will be managed under the Care Standards process.
- 8.3.** There were four allegations made against foster carers during the last year that progressed to a S47 inquiry as compared to 8 allegations the previous year The outcomes were as follows:

<b>Outcome of allegation</b>	<b>Number</b>
Unfounded	2
Substantiated	1
Unsubstantiated	1

- 8.4.** All the above allegations were subjected to an independent annual review of the household and the matter presented to the Fostering Panel for further consideration and recommendation of approval.

## **9. Summary of achievements in 2015-16**

- 9.1.** In the period of 2015-16 the Fostering Service has sustained and slightly increased its capacity to provide in house and local foster placements for the Borough's looked after children and provide opportunities to improve their outcomes:
- The Fostering Service has provided in house foster carers for 203 looked after children.



- The service provided an increased total number of placements for looked after children in the 2015-16 period - 331 compared with 320 in 2014-15.
- There was a slight increase – from 38 to 39 % - of children placed within the Borough whilst the majority of looked after children - 84% - are placed within 20 miles of the Borough. This is very positive and the fostering service is the most significant contributor to this position.
- The service maintained its track record of recruitment with 25 new in house carers approved.
- Increased diversity of foster carers recruited. The Fostering Service has successfully recruited foster carers from a diverse range of backgrounds which reflect the rapidly changing local population.

**9.2.** A number of the arrangements in the Fostering Service are reported as working well as shown by:

- Positive feedback from foster carers to Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) during annual reviews regarding support received from the Fostering Service.
- Foster Carer annual review performance has remained at 100%.
- Comprehensive training programme for foster carers including 12 week Fostering Changes behaviour management programme.
- Effective and committed Fostering Panel.
- No complaints within the Fostering Service in 2014/15 and no matters have been referred to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

## **10. Service development, plans and priorities for 2016-17**

- 10.1.** The Fostering Service plan for 2016 -17 continues to focus on providing quality in house placements which are local and provide value for money whilst taking into account the complexity of the needs of the Borough's looked after children.
- 10.2.** The Fostering Service will focus on actions which improve outcomes for looked after children with particular regard for placement stability and the performance regarding long term stability.
- 10.3.** Arrangements are in place to continue the recruitment of foster carers in a competitive market and a target of recruiting 30 new foster carers has been set for the 2016-17 period.
- 10.4.** LBBD has completed an Expression of Interest with Fostering Network to become a participant in the Mockingbird Family Model Project. This is an alternative method of delivering foster care with the potential to



improve placement stability, safety and permanency for children and young people in care and to improve support for, and retention of, foster carers.

- 10.5.** The programme of support and training of foster carers has been reviewed and is in place for the 2016-17 period recognising that this is an important part of both recruiting but also retaining in house foster carers. This will include opportunities for on line training for foster carers to increase and improve access to training.
- 10.6.** The Fostering Service will continue to be an important part of the SAFE programme with a focus on value for money and appropriate savings regarding costs for caring for looked after children. Budget performance will be closely monitored.
- 10.7.** Arrangements regarding the assessment and support of Connected Persons along with support for carers who are approved as Special Guardians for children are being reviewed to ensure that services can keep pace with practice developments.
- 10.8.** Representatives from the Fostering Service will continue to be an active participant of London Care Services Steering Group to discuss fee structures, contract issues and share practise issues to keep abreast of regional and national developments.
- 10.9.** Support recruitment to the Fostering Central List to broaden Fostering Panel membership and ensure that Foster Panels can take place.

**Pranitha Rampersad, Team Manager, Fostering Service**  
**Joanne Tarbutt, Group Manager, Looked After Children Service**

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<sup>1</sup> Connected Persons to a looked after child is a relative, friend or other person who has a connection with them. Relative means only a grandparent, brother, sister uncle or aunt (either of full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or a step parent. A connected person could also be somebody with a professional relationship with the child, such as a childminder.

<sup>ii</sup> Private fostering is when a child under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled) is cared for by someone who is not their parent or a 'close relative'. This is a private arrangement made between a parent and a carer, for 28 days or more