

BRACKNELL FOREST FOSTER CARE SERVICE
ANNUAL REPORT
April 2016 – March 2017

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Annual report should be read in conjunction with the Foster Care Statement of Purpose 2017-2018. The Statement of Purpose sets out the legislative and regulatory context under which Bracknell Forest Council carries out the functions of the fostering service.
- 1.2 This report provides details of activity over the financial year April 2016 to March 2017 and plans for the forthcoming year.

2. Foster Panel

- 2.1 Bracknell Forest Foster Panel plays a very important quality assurance role in assessing the suitability of people to become foster carers, first annual review and all subsequent reviews thereafter as necessary. The panel met on eleven occasions, usually on the second Monday of the month, during 2016-2017. The current foster panel chair has been in post since March 2015, and brings considerable experience to the panel.
- 2.2 The Fostering Services 2011 guidance and regulations allow panel members to remain on the panel with no maximum or minimum tenure. This enables those panel members who choose to remain on the panel the opportunity to do so. Fostering panels do not have fixed membership. Panel members are drawn from a 'central list' of people with the qualifications and experience to be a panel member. The panel includes our Children's and Young People's Participation Officer who offers views from the child's perspective given she works directly with our Looked After Children. The independent pool of members have gained in experience and made a valuable contribution. The Assistant Team Managers for the Family Placement Team and the Over 11's Team are also members of the central list and provide social work representation for the panel as required.
- 2.3 The Panel membership meets the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. During 2016 Bracknell Forest recruited two new independent panel members - an experienced foster carer from a neighbouring local authority and a former care leaver from another authority. The Panel would benefit further from having a more balanced male / female membership, and more diverse ethnic makeup to reflect the cultural diversity of the area.

**BRACKNELL FOREST FOSTER CARE SERVICE
ANNUAL REPORT
April 2016 – March 2017**

3. Panel membership 2016-2017

Name	Role	Comment
Frances Thompson	Independent Panel Chair	Appointed to panel March 2015
Gareth Barnard	Executive Member for CYP&L	Current
Gill Harbut	Independent (Education experience)	Current
Fiona Nyquist	Looked After Children Health Nurse for Bracknell	Current
Hilary Mason	Independent (Educational Psychology experience)	Current and also vice chair
Lis Norris	Independent (Education experience)	Unavailable from July 2016 due to family circumstances, now resigned
Judith Swindle	Independent (Foster carer experience)	Appointed September 2016
Sasha Milbourn	Independent (Care leaver experience)	Appointed September 2016 (currently on maternity leave)
Maeve Coupe	Independent (social worker)	Current
Andrew Ellery	Independent (social worker)	Current
Jenny Collins	Independent (social worker)	Current
Louise MacLennan	Participation Officer (views of young people)	Current
Eszter Kovacs	ATM Family Placement - social worker	Maternity leave June - March
Sam Howard	ATM Family Placement – social worker	Maternity leave cover June – March
Clare Glennerster	ATM Over 11s – social worker	Current
Rosanne Turner	Panel Adviser	Current
Lyn Veale / Hilary Davis/ Christine Jones / Tom O'Meara	Panel Administrators	Current

3.1 Feedback from applicants has been positive in relation to the quality of information provided about panel; applicants felt welcomed and satisfied with the extent to which important issues were considered. Applicants are also invited to make suggestions on how fostering applications are processed or how the panel process can be improved.

BRACKNELL FOREST FOSTER CARE SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

April 2016 – March 2017

Any concerns raised in the feedback are addressed individually with the applicant.

4. Panel Business

4.1 Summary of Panel Recommendations (April 2016 to March 2017)

	Cases heard
New approvals	
Long term (non connected persons)	1
Short term	3
Short Breaks	0
Family & Friends (Connected Persons)	15
Total	19
Reviews	19
Private Fostering arrangements	1
Long term fostering best interests	3
Long term match (non kinship)	3
Supported Lodgings	0
Resignations (households)	4
Applicants not approved	0
Total number of items considered	49

4.2 Approved Carers (as at 31 March 2016)

Total of Approved Fostering Households	50
<i>(NB: some households approved for more than one group)</i>	
For specific long term placements (non kinship)	13
For short term placements	26
For short breaks care	3
For short and long term	14
Connected persons	3
Supported Lodgings	1
Parent and Child	2

4.3 Carers are often approved for one or a sibling group of two or three children. However where the carers are not used to their full approval this is usually due to the need to match the needs of the child or children already placed with any new placement. Good matching of child with the carer and family reduces the risk of disruption later on.

BRACKNELL FOREST FOSTER CARE SERVICE
ANNUAL REPORT
April 2016 – March 2017

Connected persons cases are heard at Panel during assessment as they have temporary approval as foster carers. There has been a very significant increase in these cases during this year, due to an increase in care proceedings and assessments directed by the courts. A number did not go on to full approval as the carers were granted Special Guardianship Orders at the final court hearing, which means the children are no longer looked after under Fostering Regulations.

- 4.4 In 2016 – 2017 the number of approved foster carers has met its service target of 10, which included connected persons foster carers. However it is anticipated that the recruitment of new mainstream foster carers will increase in 2017-2018 following the appointment of a Recruitment and Publicity Officer and the development of a robust recruitment and marketing strategy (Appendix 1 and 2).

5. Fostering Reviews

- 5.1 The foster carer's annual review of approval addresses all relevant aspects of the National Minimum Fostering Standards and Regulations 2011. The reviews have mostly been chaired by an independent reviewing officer/consultant social worker. All completed reviews that are not presented to panel, are agreed by the Head of Service for Looked After Children, who is appointed as Agency Decision Maker for this purpose.
- 5.2 Eighteen reviews of fostering households were presented to the Foster Care Panel, six of these were seeking a change of approval and seven were first reviews. Three reviews were due to concerns or allegations made about the carers, and in all three cases it was agreed that their approval should continue. All first reviews were presented to Foster Panel within a year of the carer's approval as required by the regulations.

6. Outcome of OFSTED inspection of the Fostering Service

- 6.1 The Fostering Service was inspected by Ofsted in May 2017 as part of the full Children's Social Care inspection. Ofsted will publish its report on 14th July 2017.

The previous inspection by Ofsted was in June 2011. The outcome of this inspection indicated that there is a strong and effective fostering service in Bracknell Forest. The inspection report for 2011 is available upon request from the Family Placement Team. It is also available on the Ofsted website.

- 6.2 The regime of inspecting Fostering Services has changed so that this is now part of the single inspection framework for Children's Social Care.

**BRACKNELL FOREST FOSTER CARE SERVICE
ANNUAL REPORT**

April 2016 – March 2017

Fostering is no longer given a separate grading, but is inspected as part of the Looked After Children service.

7. Data about Children Looked After by Bracknell Forest

7.1 Number of Children Looked After by Bracknell Forest (as at 31 March 2017)

Total number of Looked after Children (LAC)	115	
Total number of Looked After Children placed with Bracknell Foster Carers	49	This does not include short breaks, supported lodgings, adult placements or children placed from another local authority using our placements.
Males	69	Out of the 115 LAC
Females	46	Out of the 115 LAC
Percentage from black and minority ethnic groups	18%	This is all ethnicities except white British for all LAC
Number in Bracknell Forest placements	67	This is all foster placements in Bracknell Forest – including In house, connected person and adopters or parents
Number placed with independent fostering agency carers	22	In or out of Bracknell
Total number in fostering placements	82	This is all fostering placements including connected person/kinship placements, placements with our own foster carers and placements with IFAs, whether in or out of Bracknell

8. Summary of relevant National Indicators data for end of March 2017

8.1 Percentage of looked after children aged under 16 years and in care for 2.5 years or more who have been in their current placement for at least 2 years is 45.5%. This is a decrease from 63% in the previous year and reflects a small number of children and young people with complex and challenging needs. Given this data is accumulative over the last 2.5 years the impact of permanency strategy that has been in place since Summer 2016 will not be evidenced until 2018/19.

BRACKNELL FOREST FOSTER CARE SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

April 2016 – March 2017

- 8.2 Percentage of looked after children with three or more placement moves in the last year was 9.6% (April 2016-March 2017) as compared to 17.3% (April 2015 – March 2016). This is a positive decrease indicating children being able to settle in placements able to meet their needs. There has been extensive work within the team to support this improvement including weekly meeting to review placement searches, monthly review of this data with the Head of Service and a change in culture when foster carers are not encouraged to take children for short periods. However, the exception is carers are identified who are able to provide care at least until the conclusion of care proceedings. In addition, there have been disruption meetings from every placement ending in an unplanned way and placement support meetings where extra support is provided to carers.
- 8.3 Percentage of children adopted or made subject of Special Guardianship Orders from the Authority in the last year is 20.7%, a small decrease from 24.7% the previous year. This is as a percentage of children who had been in care for 6 months or more, excluding Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

9 Foster Care

- 9.1 The 2016-2017 period continued to offer challenges due to a very significant increase in requests for connected persons assessments (40 assessments), the timescales of which have been determined by the court, and continuing to seek new fostering resources. The team has also sought to assist the childcare teams by jointly carrying out the initial viability assessments of prospective family and friends where possible.
- 9.2 The annual target for the recruitment of 10 foster carer households was achieved although there have been resignations received from four fostering households this year. The resignations were all solely due to changes in personal circumstances, reflecting the support foster carers receive from the department. There continues to be a need to recruit carers for children of all ages, but particularly for those over the age of 10, to reflect the LAC population need.
- 9.3 There are twelve fostering households approved for placements of three children. However it is not practicable to reserve these placements so none currently have a sibling group of three placed together. Eighteen fostering households are approved for two children and seventeen fostering households are approved for one child. Three fully approved connected persons foster carers are caring for four looked after children, while seven temporarily approved connected person carers are caring for a total of ten looked after children.

BRACKNELL FOREST FOSTER CARE SERVICE
ANNUAL REPORT
April 2016 – March 2017

9.4 The team received six general fostering applications in this reporting period. Three have been approved, and three are still in assessment. It is noted that the long term sickness of the Recruitment Officer during this period had an impact on the recruitment of new carers, in addition to a high level of competition for foster carers in the Berkshire area. It is anticipated that with a new Recruitment Officer in post, who has considerable marketing experience and has developed a robust recruitment strategy, that recruitment will increase in the coming year. Please refer to the 'Fostering Recruitment Strategy 2017-2020'

10. Short Breaks Care

10.1 The authority has three carers approved specifically for short break care to children with disabilities. Foster carers can offer short break care in addition to short term foster care. Four children are linked for short breaks, but it is hoped this number will increase in the coming year, as the carers have the capacity to care for more than one child at different times.

10.2 There is a matching process for children and short break carers with a specific short breaks agreement and risk assessment. The Family Placement Team liaises with the Specialist Support Services Team Manager for this purpose. Short break carers also offer day care placements to support families who have a child with a disability. The overall aim has been to improve the range of support and flexibility of the service, and although the number of carers is small, they offer a range of experience and activities for all ages and disabilities.

11. Connected Person Assessments

11.1 Connected persons is an 'umbrella' term and can refer to assessments of family and friends who seek to care for children either as temporary foster carers, seeking full approval or pursuing permanence in the form of Special Guardianship. During the year 1st April 2016 - 31st March 2017 an increase in care proceedings has resulted in a significant increase in the number of Connected Persons assessments referred. These have needed to be completed within short timescales as per requirements from the court. There were a total of forty requests for Connected Persons assessments. Of these, eight ceased at different stages, eg applicants withdrew. Two were not recommended following assessment. Seventeen Special Guardianship Orders were granted during this year.

BRACKNELL FOREST FOSTER CARE SERVICE
ANNUAL REPORT
April 2016 – March 2017

12. Recruitment Market

12.1 The recruitment of foster carers is a key priority for the service in order to ensure there are sufficient foster carers to meet the demand of looked after children. Following a lengthy period without a Recruitment and Publicity Officer, we were very pleased to appoint to the post in September 2016. The Recruitment and Publicity Officer has focused on getting to know the needs of the service, and the placement needs of children, and has developed a recruitment strategy for the next 3 years, based on her research and understanding of the market. A market segmentation exercise was undertaken identifying the groups who are most likely to foster. Further information surrounding this is within the Recruitment Strategy.

12.2 Information sessions ran regularly at various local venues, including 'pop up' sessions at Time Square and the Bracknell Leisure Centre. These were advertised on the Bracknell Forest website and Facebook and Twitter pages. Some of our foster carers joined these sessions, to offer insights into the day to day life of a foster carer.

12.3 Recruitment activity included:

- Social media advertising including the Bracknell Forest website, Facebook, Twitter and local news media
- DVDs of foster carers talking about fostering for Bracknell Forest, which were posted on the website and linked to social media
- Revised and improved information on fostering on the Bracknell Forest website, including the support available to foster carers and dispelling myths about fostering
- New posters and targeted advertising in Tesco, the Leisure Centre and mail drops via Community Tax letters
- Editorials in local community publications
- Posters displayed in local venues (community centres, doctors, schools, etc).

12.4 Enquiry Figures

- Sixty-one fostering, short break and supported lodgings enquires were received during the year April 2016-March 2017.
- Three fostering preparation groups were organised over the year, all arranged for weekends and evenings for the convenience of prospective foster carers.

BRACKNELL FOREST FOSTER CARE SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

April 2016 – March 2017

- Around 10% of enquiries led to assessment which is in line with the Fostering Network's findings from the Local Authority Fostering Service benchmark 2014/15. This is the most recent data available on this matter.
- Assessments were begun for six households from these groups and three were approved at panel for short term fostering and short breaks. Of the remaining three, one has since been approved in May and the remaining two are due for approval in the next 2-3 months.
- The average time taken for a fostering assessment, from formal application to approval following consideration by Fostering Panel was approximately six months, well within the National Minimum Standards guidance of eight months.

12.5 Recruitment Aims

Between April 2016 and March 2017 the service aimed to recruit ten more fostering households. It was our plan to target recruitment activities to encourage applications from households who may meet the needs set out below.

The key aims and objectives of this strategy are:

To achieve fostering placements to ensure permanency for children in our care.

This will be undertaken through:

- improving local placement choice and stability for children and young people in Bracknell Forest, particularly for teenagers and children requiring short break care
- increasing the number of in-house placements and reduce the usage of independent fostering agencies and residential care

12.6 Whilst we met our target for this year, there will always be some natural resignation of carers eg due to moving to a different area, and the need to continue recruiting carers remains high.

12.7 The team have been successful in securing funding to work with the Cornerstone Partnership. The Cornerstone Partnership have developed a program to transform the recruitment, training and support for foster carers to enable them to meet the needs of children who become looked after.

BRACKNELL FOREST FOSTER CARE SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

April 2016 – March 2017

- 12.8 The proposal sought to address two problems 1) children being placed out of area and; 2) reducing both the number of unplanned moves for children (particularly for older children) or moves into IFA or residential placements which result from in house carers being unable to sustain challenging placements.
- 12.9 Cornerstone are seeking to deliver to foster carers in Bracknell Forest as well as the other 3 local authorities an adapted version of the adoption model i.e.: targeted foster carer recruitment, peer led support through a professional mentoring scheme with support groups as above and a DDP (dyadic developmental psychotherapy) informed restorative parenting program to foster carers but adding into the model the provision of planned and emergency respite care via the family mentor.
- 12.10 Cornerstone have provided a bespoke package of support for BFC. The proposal is three fold.
- Firstly, there will be a focus on recruitment activity that will seek to yield at least 10 additional carers for Bracknell Forest over 12 months i.e. the new target would be 20 new foster carers.
 - Secondly, is the proposal to set up and run a family mentoring service that offers respite to support longevity and placement stability. This has some similarities to the Mockingbird Family Model which has been evaluated as an effective model in supporting placement stability.
 - Thirdly there is proposed to be training and support to be offered to all current carers.
- 12.11 Collectively it is anticipated that more carers will be recruited, equipped with the right skills and support, to provide care for adolescents with complex needs who currently have to be placed with higher cost IFA carer or in some cases, residential care and often at distance from Bracknell Forest Council. This work will commence in quarter 2 of 2017/18.

13. Additional Information

- 13.1 The number of children in care has increased from 98 at end March 2016 to 115 at end March 2017. The largest group (35) remains 10-15 years old males, and 70% of all children in care are over 10 years of age. The overall rise in numbers and complex needs of many of the older children puts pressure on placement availability and on current placements. Although we have endeavoured to recruit more carers, the number has been small compared to the needs of the service. We have needed to place children with Independent Fostering Agencies to

BRACKNELL FOREST FOSTER CARE SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

April 2016 – March 2017

meet the demand for placements and to provide the opportunity for an appropriate match to meet the child's needs. It is envisaged that this will continue to be the case in the forthcoming year, but alongside this a robust recruitment strategy is in place.

- 13.2 Since 1st April 2012 a South East Region project involving eleven local authorities, including Bracknell Forest, have had an agreed contract with over 40 Independent Fostering Agencies to provide quality placements for children. This arrangement has reduced the cost of some independent agency charges and ensured that quality standards are maintained.
- 13.3 The Life Chances Team is a 'virtual' team which consists of representatives from a variety of professional teams and services who work with Bracknell Forest's Looked After Children. The team meet once a month to discuss concerns relating to individual looked after children and make specific plans to address them; champion the needs of looked after children in their respective services and are developing training opportunities for the wider children's workforce.
- 13.4 The Assistant Team Manager and one of the family workers in the team attends the Life Chances Team Meetings and ensure children and carers are identified for discussion. The family worker also provides practical support directly to foster carers and has proved effective in her role. This practical support has enabled children with challenging behaviour to remain in their local placement. She has also developed relationships with the team of foster carers through completing a range of practical tasks with them. This worker also co-runs the Children in Care Council groups (Say it Loud Say it Proud: SILSIP) with the Children's Participation Officer which further raises her profile directly with young people. The knowledge gained about foster carers and the children/ young people they care for has allowed her to provide effective direct support in emergency or crisis situations.
- 13.5 Foster carers and young people, along with the other designated professionals involved in working with and supporting Looked After Children, were involved in the development of a Life Skills Programme for Children in Care. The project is being implemented by a number of foster carers and the young people they look after. The Life Skills Programme is targeted at all young people 11 years plus.

BRACKNELL FOREST FOSTER CARE SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

April 2016 – March 2017

14 **Fostering Support**

- 14.1 Bracknell Foster Carers are automatically members of the Fostering Network, a national organisation, and more locally the Bracknell Foster Care Association. The latter was set up in 2009 as a group independent of the Council and is supported by a small grant. The purpose of the Foster Care Association is to provide support for each other and to contribute to the recruitment of new foster carers. The committee has met regularly with the Head of Service and Team Manager of the Family Placement Team. Foster carers are always well represented at recruitment activities and information evenings and give a talk to prospective foster carers at preparation groups.
- 14.2 One of the most significant developments for Bracknell Forest foster carers over the past few years has been the development a 'fostering community'. The social activities shared by carers, their own children and those they foster has led to looked after children getting to know other carers and their families and makes the occasional 'respite' arrangements from their substantive placement a more positive experience than staying with 'strangers'. In addition, a foster carer and a family worker have joined forces to set up a buddying scheme for new foster carers, which will be launched in September 2017.
- 14.3 The Family Placement Team continues to support and facilitate carers to develop on-going relationships and links through the hosting of Cheese and Wine evenings, a thank you celebration during fostering fortnight and a bi-annual foster carers celebration evening. The service also recognises the important role that foster carers' own children play in ensuring the stability of placements and positive outcomes for looked after children, and celebrated this through a 'sons and daughters' lunch. A new development this year has been the setting up of a 'Foster carers' café' on a bi-monthly basis. This is an informal lunchtime get-together between foster carers and team members, and has got off to a very good start, with attendance increasing at each meeting. The purpose is to promote communication through informal discussion.
- 14.4 The Annual Foster Carer Conference was held on 12th November 2016, and the theme was permanence for children and the support foster carers need in order to sustain challenging placements. A training session was facilitated by Jacqui Lawrence from Coram BAAF which received very good feedback from foster carers, so we are hoping to involve her in the next Conference.

BRACKNELL FOREST FOSTER CARE SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

April 2016 – March 2017

- 14.5 Delegated authority for foster carers has been developed and embedded within the team and Children's Social Care. This has provided a framework to ensure carers are provided with the responsibility to carry out key tasks and decisions for children in their care. This is reviewed at every stage of the child's journey and leaflets for the parents, child and carers support this process.
- 14.6 Staying Put is a national initiative which allows young people to remain living with their foster carers up to the age of 21 years. Foster carers who support this become 'Staying Put' carers and work with the young person and their personal advisor (from the Leaving Care Team) to ensure young people remain living with them and they develop the appropriate life skills before moving to independence. The policy and procedure provides clear guidance as to how this should be implemented and there is a leaflet for young people. At the end of March 2017 five young people were in Staying Put arrangements. This is an area of keen interest from the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel and a report is provided twice a year.
- 14.7 The Family Placement Team is currently fully staffed with permanent employees, apart from one contract social worker covering maternity leave. The team is supported by the Head of Service for Looked After Children. All our carers are supervised and supported by having their own supervising social worker. We continue to enjoy close working relationships with the other childcare teams with the aim of ensuring the children remain the focus of our work.

15 Complaints, Allegations and Compliments

- 15.1 There were no formal complaints made about foster carers and fourteen allegations made in relation to foster carers in this period. Ten of the allegations were unsubstantiated, three were false, and one was substantiated. The substantiated allegation did not lead to any harm coming to a child and advice and training has been provided to the carer. None of the allegations involved child protection proceedings. There were no formal complaints made regarding the fostering service. There were a number of compliments regarding the care provided by foster carers, and the support, training and communication provided by the fostering service.

16 Summary

- 16.1 This has been another busy year for the Family Placement Team in terms of service and recruitment activity. There has been an increase in the number of children needing both short and long term placements, mainly in the older age group. There have also been a

BRACKNELL FOREST FOSTER CARE SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

April 2016 – March 2017

number of requests for Parents and Child placements, which is an area we wish to develop further. The team has continued to work hard to keep young people in local, in-house foster placements where possible, thereby enabling them to maintain links with their families and communities.

- 16.2 Overall the work of the Family Placement Team has increased, particularly in relation to assessments of connected persons or family and friends carers, with tight timescales required by the courts. In addition to recruiting, supporting and training foster carers, the team works with post adoption support, connected persons assessments of potential permanent carers, family finding for long term fostering, a short break fostering service and private fostering assessments. The team also provides a Duty Service each day to identify any placement required across Children’s Social Care and cover for those on leave etc. Social Workers in the team also provide regular training for foster carers both pre approval and post approval. To meet the needs of the foster carers, training is often during evenings and weekends. The team also provides out of hours telephone support on a rota basis.
- 16.3 Next year will continue to require a high level of recruitment activity in order to meet the demand for local, in house foster carers, who can provide stable, family care for some of our most challenging young people, and we need to develop the additional support services needed for these foster placements. We also need to look more at developing schemes to attract resources for adolescents, short breaks, parent and child placements and children needing permanent foster placements.

New developments

Action	Person and Timescales
Follow recruitment and marketing plan and include quarterly reviews to ensure activity is yielding sufficient enquiries.	Family Placement Team Manager (Quarterly)
Recruit a minimum of 10 foster carers	Family Placement Team Manager to monitor monthly
Commence the work with Cornerstone Partnership	Head of Service Looked After Children July 2017

Rosanne Turner
Team Manager
Family Placement Team

Peter Hodges
Head of Service for Looked After Children

Date: 30th May 2017