

Fostering Recruitment Strategy

2017-2020



The Family Placement Team
Bracknell Forest Council
www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk



Document name & file location	g/Family Placement/Recruitment/Recruitment Strategy	
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Review date	This strategy stands alone for three years. The associated marketing plan is to be revised every year and the next review to occur no later than February 2018. Incremental reviews may take place as required.	
Accessibility	This document can be made available in hard and electronic formats. No copies in other languages are currently available.	
Version	Detail of change	Three year strategy
1.0	Document created	February 2017
2.0	Head of Service	March 2017
3.0	Consultation with Children's Social Care Management Team	April 2017
4.0	Public document	April 2017

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1. Introduction

This strategy sets out the family placement team's approach to recruit foster carers over the next three years.

The family placement team is responsible for all foster care services including recruiting, assessing and supporting Bracknell Forest's approved carers and finding suitable, secure placements for local children to promote best outcomes. This is a critical service for some of the borough's most vulnerable children.

To ensure best prospects for looked after children and their carers, the family placement team are focused on ensuring as many looked after children as possible are placed with Bracknell Forest approved carers in stable placements.

To be able to meet the needs of the diverse range of local children that need foster placements, it is imperative we recruit new local foster carers from in and around Bracknell. This includes not just long and short term foster carers but also those who can provide support in the form of short break, respite, supported lodgings and mother and baby placements.

2. Aims and objectives

The key aims and objectives of this strategy are follows:

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

This will be achieved if we can recruit more in-house foster carers to our network who can help meet the needs of looked after children in Bracknell Forest.

Our target is to recruit at least 10 additional foster carers annually.

3. Looked After Children/Needs Analysis

Nationally there were 70,440 looked after children as of 31st March 2016 (an increase of 1% from 2015). The number of looked after children has increased steadily over the past eight years and the rise reflects an increase in unaccompanied asylum compared to a rise in all looked after children.

In Bracknell Forest, whilst the total number of looked after children decreased in the two years prior, since April 2016 the number of looked after children has increased by 10% with 109 children in care in December 2016. Specifically the number of children over 10 years old requiring placements has continued to increase. As teenagers are generally more difficult to find placements for, this may have contributed to a slight decline in the number of children placed with in-house carers.

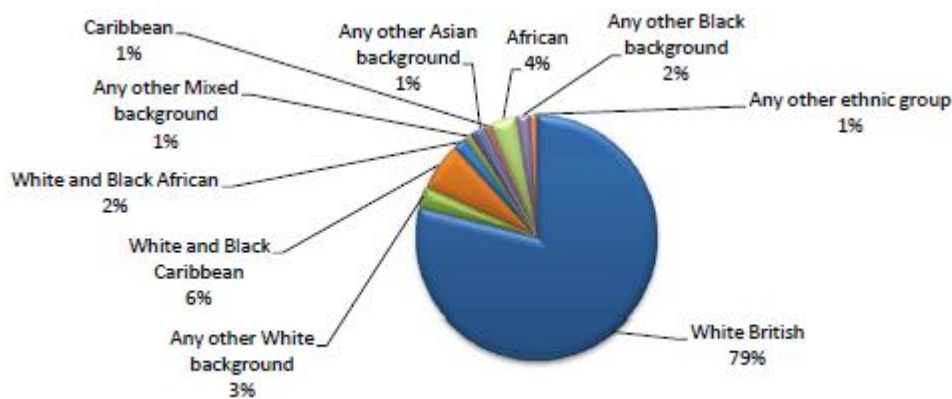
The below table details the number of looked after children in each age band for the last three years:

	2014	2015	2016
0-4	23	17	12
5-9	20	16	14
10-15	46	47	43
16+	24	24	29
TOTAL	113	104	98
% placed with BFC foster carers, adoption or parents	65.5%	61.5%	60.2%

Our primary focus must therefore be to attract more in-foster carers for teenagers.

This is not to say we will not recruit foster carers for younger children as it is understood that given adequate time, support and training, those carers may extent their offering to help older children in the future.

The below outlines the ethnicity of Bracknell Forest's looked after children in January 2017:

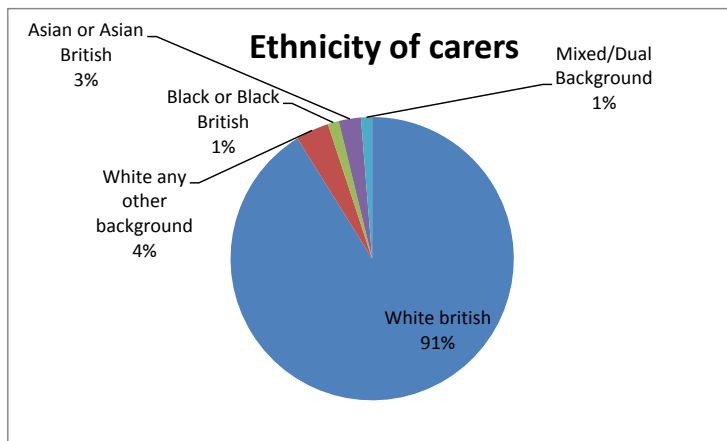


This broadly reflects the breakdown of ethnicity in the borough in line with the 2011 census.

4. Foster carer cohort

As of January 2017, the current number of Bracknell Forest fostering households is 51. This is made up of 79 individual carers. Seven carers have resigned since April 2016 however we are projected to meet our target to recruit an additional 10 fostering households which includes a proportion of connected persons carers.

91% of our current carers are White British. This is slightly higher than the average of 85% as recorded in the 2011 census. Consideration should therefore be given to targeting black and ethnic minorities (BME) in marketing activity, ensuring they are presented in marketing materials and perhaps planning activity in areas such as College Town which has a higher than average number of BME residents compared to the rest of the borough.

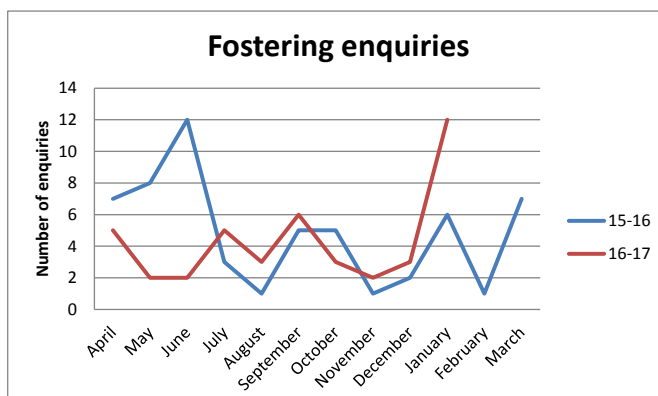


4. Enquiries

Between April '15 and March '16 (year one), 66 enquiries were received. Of these enquiries, approximately a third progressed to initial visits, after which a number were discounted for being unsuitable and others withdrew of their own choosing resulting in three approvals as of February '17.

In year one, spikes in enquiry levels were seen in June, September, October, January and March. The same spike in enquiries was not seen replicated in June '15, perhaps suggesting activity that took place during fostering fortnight in May was not as successful as the previous year, but enquiries again increased in September and January '17 suggesting that these times of year are particularly popular for people considering fostering.

The table below illustrates fostering enquiry levels by month '15-'16 vs '16-'17:



The Fostering Network estimates that on average one out of ten enquiries progress to approval as foster carers. To meet our target of recruiting 10 new fostering households per year, we must therefore aim for at least 100 enquiries per year.

To ensure the conversion rate is as good as possible we must also ensure:

- Enquirers are welcomed positively, provided with a personal service and responded to quickly
- Prospective carers are given clear, engaging information that highlights what Bracknell Forest Fostering can offer at every touch point with a consistent message.
- The application process is smooth and efficient with fostering carers approved with 26 weeks where possible

5. Research

There is research that is useful to consider in our recruitment and marketing of foster carers. A study conducted in 2013 by Scott and Duncan for the Department of Education explored attitudes, motivations and barriers to adoption and fostering. Some key findings from the research include:

- 1) One in five adults may have some interest in fostering or adopting in the future
- 2) Many myths need dispelling – people are quick to rule themselves out for many reasons including age, being single, being a smoker or overweight
- 3) Messaging must be simple and clear to understand what kind of applicants we are looking for, how the application process works, what support is available and what kind of children need fostering
- 4) Communication must also illustrate the benefits to the individual as well as society

It also revealed characteristics of people who are predisposed to fostering. These include people who are:

- Involved in altruistic activities (e.g. have done voluntary work, are active in their local community).
- Have previous experience of fostering or adoption (i.e. have adopted a child or know someone who has, were fostered as a child etc.)
- Actively practice a religion
- Work in higher managerial, intermediate managerial, skilled manual work (particularly those who currently work for a not-for-profit organisation and/or in healthcare) as well as carers.

A later piece of research by the Fostering Network, “Why Carers Care” 2015 revealed that 81% of recently approved foster carers share similar values. These were people were classified as “Pioneers”. Pioneers have a strong desire for fairness, a keen sense of what is right or wrong and are concerned about society. They are self-assured, have a high level of self-efficacy and will be the first to respond to what they see as a moral call to action. To engage and influence Pioneers it is therefore imperative to involve them and provide space for questions and discussion, so they may fully determine themselves whether something is ‘right’ or ‘fair’.

In terms of the age profile of people becoming foster carers, a report by the Fostering Network on Why Foster Carers Care in 2015 revealed the following information:

Age profile of newly approved foster carers in 2014 (recruited nationally)

20-24	0.6%
25-34	10.2%
35-44	32.1%
45-54	40.7%
55-64	15.7%
65-74	0.6%
75+	0%

This suggests that 45-54 is the most common age to become a foster carer and that people aged 35-54 should be our primary target demographic for recruiting new carers.

There may however there may be scope to increase the number of people fostering between the ages of 55-64 given the aging population and when seeking carers for older teenagers as it is often people who have parented teenagers who are more confident in their ability to help this age group.

6. Review of past marketing activity

6.1 Marketing and publicity undertaken

While limited marketing activity took place between April-September 2016 due to the absence of a recruitment officer, a significant amount of marketing and publicity effort took place from October '16 onwards showing signs of success with a record month for enquiries recorded in January '17.

In addition to monthly information events, some activity included:

- Weekly social media posts and a number of paid sponsored facebook posts
- Leaflets sent out via primary schools to parents
- Posters distributed locally
- Print advertisements in local media (magazines and school folders)
- Bus rear advertising
- Press release sent out to local media

A referral scheme for existing foster carers was also re-launched with a £250 voucher reward for any referrals that results the recruitment of a new foster carer.

We also began the process of re-branding, with a strong visual brand being launched for Bracknell Forest Fostering. In line with this we have adopted a friendlier, more personal tone to our marketing content and communication with the public.

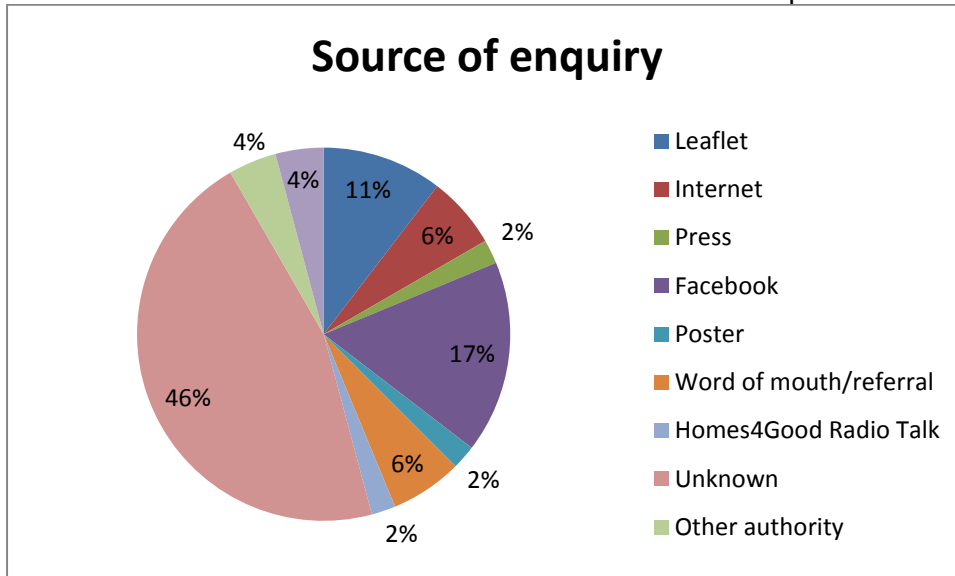
A full website review was undertaken including competitor analysis and all website content was re-written to make it more clear, concise and engaging. In addition, a new recruitment pack has been produced for the same purpose, highlighting the benefits to the individual as well as the child, and outlining the process in simple terms.

6.2 Measurement and success

There is some difficulty tracking results of all activity as much of the publicity is designed to raise awareness in the local community about fostering. Also from speaking to those that

enquire, it is clear that fostering is something that people often think about for a number of months or years before they contact us and it is difficult for them to remember where they found it out initially.

Below outlines the information that has been collated from April 2016 to January 2017:



The results suggest that Facebook has proved one of the most successful marketing channels. In addition to accounting for 17% of enquiries, the sponsored events generated over 350,000 impressions and over 3,500 clicks to the website.

Measurement and tracking for online advertising could be improved if we were able to have some code added to our enquiry form on the website.

6. Future approach

To achieve our recruitment target and thus meet our aims and objectives our approach will be to adopt a multi-faceted marketing approach utilising various channels to reach our key audience(s). This will include some partnership working where possible with local businesses, community groups as well as schools and colleges. We will utilise our existing foster carers as advocates in our marketing and publicity.

The focus of this will be to:

1. Raise awareness of the need for more foster carers as well as educate people on what foster carers do, can achieve and who can foster.
2. Convert more people thinking about fostering by engaging with these people (either face to face, on the phone or via the website) and communicating the strengths of Bracknell Forest Council

Marketing activity will be targeted towards people ABC1 35-55 living within 10 miles of Bracknell. We will not exclude anyone based on their sexual orientation, ethnicity or gender. We will uphold the fostering brand identity and focus on key messages with strong calls to action.

The full plan for next year's activity and how it will be measured will be set-out in an annual marketing plan.

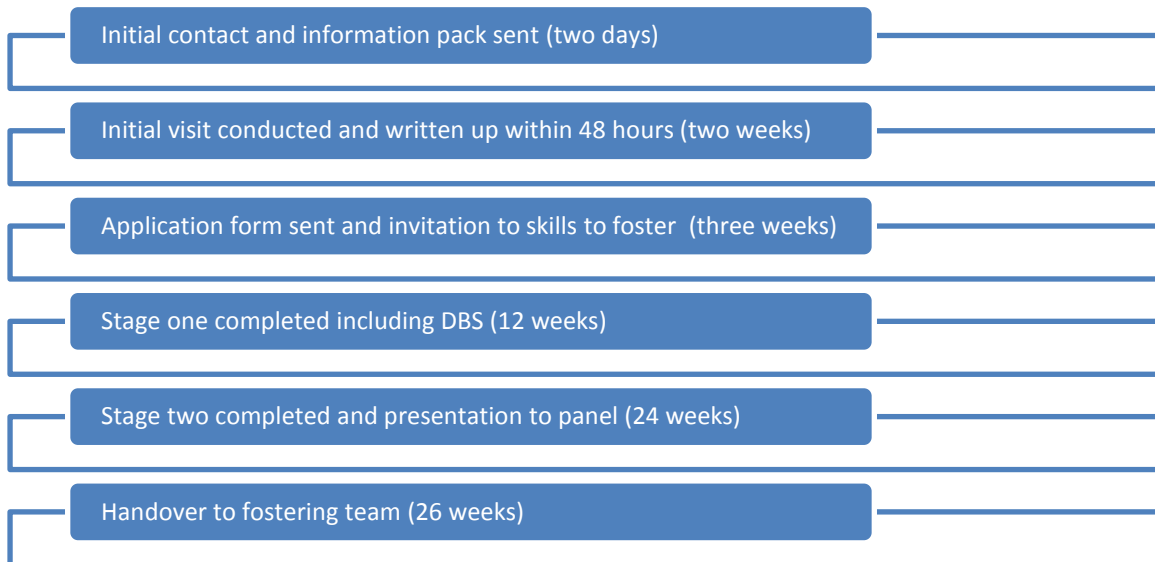
7. The recruitment process

The initial stages of our recruitment process have been reviewed and modified to ensure that prospective carers are progressed through the process in a timely fashion and approved ideally within 26 weeks of their enquiry.

When people contact us via telephone our aim is to speak to them immediately so telephone enquiries are being taken by anyone who is available within the family placement team. In addition online/email enquiries are being responded to by the Recruitment & Publicity Officer within two working days. We are now sending out recruitment packs by email where possible so there is not a delay in people receiving information.

Meetings to review initial visits are being booked in once the visit is scheduled so that decisions as to whether to invite people to apply are made within a week of their visit. Successful initial visits are followed up immediately with an invitation to the next skills to foster group and an application form for completion.

The below illustrates ideal timescales following enquiry:



8. Summary

In summary it is of utmost importance that we recruit more foster carers to foster in-house with Bracknell Forest Council. The number of looked after children is increasing, as is their age. We will focus on recruiting foster carers of all ethnicities and particularly those that could foster teenagers or offer short breaks however we will not exclude people willing to foster younger children or offer respite as we have needs across the board.

The aim is to attract at least 100 enquiries a year to meet our recruitment target and ensure that people enquiring are responded to promptly and given a personal service that conveys the strengths of Bracknell Forest's fostering service.

Research gives an interesting insight into the types of people who foster and who are predisposed to fostering. This will guide our approach and targeting.

Some success has been recorded from marketing activity to date. Our future marketing approach will build on this success and use measurement and review to drive improvements and efficiencies. We will focus on raising awareness of fostering and who is eligible to foster, as well as converting more of those actively considering fostering through a strong brand identity and key messages tailored to our audience.

Processes have been put in place to help ensure as many people as possible who are interested and suitable for fostering are approved within 26 weeks.

Sarah Crawforth April 2017