

## BRACKNELL FOREST FOSTER CARE SERVICE

### ANNUAL REPORT 2011-2012

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Annual report should be read in conjunction with the Foster Care Statement of Purpose 2012-2013. 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 2011 to March 2012 and plans for the forthcoming year.

#### 2. Foster Panel

- 2.1 For several years the Foster Panel was managed through a tripartite arrangement between Bracknell Forest, the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead and familyplacement.com. This Panel was successfully chaired by Chris Mills, independent social worker. Following a review a decision was made to end this joint arrangement on the basis that the business needs of all members had grown and there was sufficient demand to warrant investment in separate Panels.
- 2.2 The Joint Panel met monthly until February 2012 when the partnership formally came to an end and each agency made their own arrangement. The Bracknell Forest Panel had the first meeting in March 2012 with a newly appointed Panel Chair. The Panel will meet on the second Monday of the month on nine occasions during 2012-2013.
- 2.3 The Panel procedures have been reviewed and meet the new Fostering Service National Minimum Standards which came into place in April 2011.
- 2.4 The new guidance and regulations allow panel members to remain on the panel with no maximum or minimum tenure. This will enable those panel members who choose to remain on the panel the opportunity to do so. Fostering panels no longer need to have fixed membership. Panel members will be drawn from a 'central list' of people with the qualifications and experience to be a panel member.

#### 3. Panel membership 2012-2013

Name	Role
Sarah Neville	Independent Panel Chair
Gareth Barnard	Executive Member for CYP&L
Judi Arnold	Children Social Care (inc Disabled Children) Rep
Sharon Hickson	Looked After Children Health team manager
Madaline Cockburn	Children's Social Care Rep

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Hilary Mason	Independent (Education experience)
Lyn Brown	Foster Carer (Independent)
Helen Fenton	Panel Adviser
Lyn Veale / Hilary Davis	Panel Administrators

- 3.1 The Panel membership meets the requirements of the Fostering Regulations 2002. Several members of the existing Panel have continued to be members of the new Panel and two new members have been recruited from within Children's Social care. A new panel adviser is now in post who has significant experience of fostering. Recruitment to the panel is ongoing with an emphasis on recruiting panel members able to provide ethnicity and diversity expertise or are care experienced.
- 3.2 Panel members will attend one business meeting this year and panel members generally attend one training session once a year. Panel members also have the opportunity to attend training lunchtime seminars or conferences run by the department.
- 3.3 The general feedback is good in relation to the quality of information provided about panel; applicants feeling welcomed and the extent to which they felt important issues are considered. Applicants are also invited to make positive suggestions on how fostering applications are processed or how the panel process can be improved. Any concerns raised in the feedback are addressed individually with the applicant.

#### 4. Panel Business

##### 4.1 Summary of Panel Recommendations (April 2011 to March 2012)

	Cases heard
<b>New approvals</b>	
Long term (non kinship)	3
Short term	6
Short Breaks	3
Family & Friends (Connected Persons)	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>
Reviews	13
Issues of Concern	0
Private Fostering arrangements	2
Long term match (non kinship)	2
Supported Lodgings	0
Safeguarding and support	2
Resignations	4

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Applicants not approved	0
<b>Total number of items considered</b>	<b>23</b>

## 4.2 Bracknell Forest Approved Carers (as at 31 March 2011)

<b>Total of Approved Fostering Households</b>	<b>51</b>	
<i>(NB: several households approved for more than one group)</i>		
For specific long term placements (non kinship)	8	
For short term placements	41	
For short breaks care	3	
For specific relatives or friends	5	
Supported Lodgings	3	
Out of the short term placements five are able to offer short breaks care Six are approved for long term as well as short term		

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.

## 5. Fostering Reviews

5.1 The foster carer's annual review of approval addresses all relevant aspects of the Minimum Fostering Standards and Regulations. The reviews are chaired by one of the family placement team's assistant manager for consistency. All the completed reviews are further scrutinised by the team manager who monitors compliance with the regulations via both monthly spreadsheets and scrutiny of the overall report before final sign off.

5.2 37 reviews have been carried out within 12 months of the previous review. Four reviews of foster households approved within the last twelve months were presented to the Foster Care Panel. There was a delay in some reviews being presented to Panel because of the full timetable of the Joint Panel. This has now resolved as the Bracknell Forest Panel has increased capacity to meet demand.

## 6. Outcome of OFSTED inspection of the Fostering Service

6.1 In June 2011 Ofsted inspected the Fostering Service. The outcome of this inspection indicates that there is a strong and effective fostering service in Bracknell Forest. It is particularly pleasing to note that the Inspectors found outstanding provision in relation to helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do and also in the area of helping

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children make a positive contribution. Overall the inspection report positively reflects some of the quality of the work being offered to our vulnerable children.

- 6.2 The inspection report is available upon request from the Family Placement Team. It is also available on the OFSTED website.

## 7. Bracknell Forest Children's Services' Data

- 7.1 Number of Children Looked After by Bracknell Forest (as at 31 March 2012)

Total number of Looked after Children	100	This is a significant increase from an average of 75-85 over previous years
Total number of Looked After Children placed with Bracknell Foster Carers	48	This does not include short breaks, supported lodgings, adult placements or children placed from another local authority using our placements.
Males	51	
Females	49	
Percentage aged 11 and over	55%	
Percentage from black and minority ethnic groups	13%	
Number in Bracknell Forest placements	51	
Number placed with independent fostering agency carers	18	
Number placed with other local authority carers	0	
Number in fostering placements	74	

## 8. Summary of relevant National Indicators data for March 2011

- 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 76.2%. This is a significant improvement from the average of 55-60% in previous years. The cohort is small but for these children the stability of placement will contribute towards a positive outcome in terms of education, health, and emotional wellbeing.
- 8.2 Percentage of looked after children with three or more placement moves in the last year 10.0%. Analysis of this cohort shows that nine

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out of ten children were teenagers who were experiencing unsettled periods in their lives. They have now settled down.

- 8.3 Percentage of children adopted (and Special Guardianship Orders) from the Authority in the last year is 6.3%. Historically there have been low numbers of children becoming looked after who have needed adoption. However the number of younger children now becoming looked after has increased significantly so we anticipate this percentage will increase significantly in 2012-2013.

#### **9. Short Breaks Care**

- 9.1 The authority has three carers approved specifically for short breaks care to children with disabilities as well as one foster carer who offers short breaks care in addition to foster care.

#### **10. Recruitment**

- 10.1 During the year a planned recruitment campaign was run by the Recruitment and Publicity Officers, focusing on signposting new enquirers to our planned informal fostering information sessions/coffee.

- 10.2 The information sessions ran regularly at various local venues, including 'pop up' sessions at Time Square. The aim was to improve accessibility for information – through telephone, email, website or face to face.

- 10.3 Promotions included:

- advertising regularly in the local newspapers with dates of sessions;
- posters displayed in local venues (community centres, doctors, schools, etc);
- utilising a connection with the Bracknell Bee's ice hockey team;
- taking a Fostering Information Bus to various locations across the borough during Fostering fortnight;
- targeting members of the Children and Adults Workforce during 'Share the Care' week. This included emailing them to encourage them to support the campaign through either coming forward themselves or passing the email on to colleagues and friends who may be interested or help us to distribute leaflets and information.

- 10.4 Analysis from this year's campaigns and experience of previous years have shown that a combination of local press coverage/ advertising

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and our website are the most successful methods of recruitment followed closely by our information and local events.

#### 10.5 Enquiry Figures

- 98 enquiries about fostering, short break and supported lodgings enquires were received during the year April 2011-March 2012.
- Three fostering preparation groups were organised over the year, all arranged for weekends and evenings for the convenience of prospective foster carers.
- Of the 12 households who attended a total of seven applications were made.
- In total, 10 households were assessed and approved at Panel for fostering, short break and supported lodgings during this year.
- The average time taken for a fostering assessment, from formal application to approval following consideration by Fostering Panel was approximately six months which compares favourably nationally.

#### 10.6 During 2012-2013 we aim to recruit the following:

- three households to replace carers who are considering retirement due to their ages or change of circumstances;
- three short term foster carers;
- five long term foster carers;
- one parent and baby foster placement;
- one long term placement for a child with physical care needs.

Within these numbers we are seeking to recruit two black or minority ethnic households.

### **11. Additional Information**

- 11.1 The number of children requiring fostering placement has continued to increase. This significant increase is putting a lot of pressure on placement availability and this will put additional pressure on current placements. Although we will continue to recruit we will also need to place children with Independent Fostering Agencies to meet the

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demand for placements and to provide the opportunity for an appropriate match to meet the child's needs.

- 11.2 From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 a South East Region project involving eleven local authorities, including Bracknell Forest, have an agreed contract with over 40 Independent Foster 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.
- 11.3 An assistant team manager of the family placement team now has responsibility to oversee the placements of children in Independent agencies in order to ensure that the quality of care remains at the standards we require.
- 11.4 The Life Chances Team is a 'virtual' team set up in October 2011 consisting of twenty representatives from all the 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.
- 11.5 A family worker has been employed to work to the Life Chances team and provide practical support directly for foster carers in order to enable children with challenging behaviour to remain in their local placement. She is managed by the family placement team.
- 11.6 One of the aims of the Life Chances team is to provide a robust network of support to enable children with complex needs and challenging behaviour to be successfully cared for within the borough and reduce the need for external placements. A family worker has been employed to enable carers to call for immediate support and undertake practical tasks that can assist carers to focus on the child.

## **12. Fostering 4 Bracknell Association**

- 12.1 Bracknell Foster Carers are automatically members of the Fostering Association, which 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 Association is very active, a variety of social activities are arranged throughout the year, usually including children but occasionally for carers only. Foster carers are always well represented at recruitment activities and information evenings and give a talk to prospective foster carers at preparation groups.

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- 12.2 Representatives of Fostering4Bracknell routinely meet the Head of Service, Looked After Children, and are also invited to attend the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel once a year to present their Annual Report.
- 12.3 The annual foster carer conference was held on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2011 with a theme of 'Moving (Children) On'. There was also a consultation about the Foster Carers Charter and new learning and Development arrangements. This was well attended,
- 12.4 The bi-annual foster carer achievement ceremony was held at Easthampstead Park conference centre in February 2012. This event is always appreciated by our carers and this year it was particularly well attended reflecting the growing camaraderie within the foster carer's community.

### **13. Summary**

- 13.1 This has been another busy year for the Family Placement Team in terms of placements. There has been an increase in the number of children requiring foster care and a significant increase in the number of children needing long term placements as well as referrals for family finding for adoption. The team has worked hard to keep young people in local, in-house placements thereby enabling them to maintain the links with their families and communities.
- 13.2 There have been a number of new developments which are already proving to have a positive impact on outcomes. The increase in the establishment of the family placement team has enabled the recruitment of more carers; the Life Chances team has brought together professional teams to support children in placement; the Bracknell Forest Foster Panel is enabling a more efficient use of resources and avoiding delay in cases brought before it.
- 13.3 Next year will see further challenges as the reduction in timescales for court hearings will require Connected Person's assessments to be completed and children placed for permanence within increasingly shorter timescales. We will also be preparing for the new Ofsted inspection regime.

Helen Fenton  
Team Manager  
Family Placement Team  
Date: 8.5.2012