

BRACKNELL FOREST FOSTER CARE SERVICE

ANNUAL REPORT 2012 - 2013

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Annual report should be read in conjunction with the Foster Care Statement of Purpose 2013-2014. 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 2012 to March 2013 and plans for the forthcoming year.

2. Foster Panel

- 2.1 The first meeting of Bracknell Forest Panel was in March 2012 with a newly appointed Panel Chair. The Panel has met on the second Monday of the month on eight occasions during 2012-2013. A training session has also been held for Panel members.
- 2.3 The 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 will be drawn from a 'central list' of people with the qualifications and experience to be a panel member. However as a new panel it has been important for panel members new to the role to gain experience and so to date the panel has operated with all members being present.

3. Panel membership 2012-2013

Name	Role	Comment
Sarah Neville	Independent Panel Chair	Current
Gareth Barnard	Executive Member for CYP&L	Current
Judi Arnold	Children Social Care (inc Disabled Children)	Current
Sharon Hickson	Looked After Children Health Team Manager	Withdrew from panel due to availability
Madeline Cockburn	Children's Social Care	Current
Hilary Mason	Independent (Education Psychology experience)	Current
Lyn Brown	Foster Carer (Independent)	Current
Gill Garbut	Independent (Education experience)	Appointed as panel member in November 2012
Liz Norris	Independent (Education experience)	Appointed as Panel member in March 2013
Helen Fenton	Panel Adviser	
Lyn Veale / Hilary Davis	Panel Administrators	Current

- 3.1 The Panel membership meets the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. Several members of the Joint Foster Panel continued to be members of the new Panel. Their considerable experience combined with the support of the experienced Chair has made a considerable contribution to the development of the panel.
- 3.2 Recruitment to the panel is ongoing. However in order to ensure quality, it is important to build the panel and panel members experience at a steady pace. Therefore the timing of introducing new panel members needs to be carefully considered. The recently appointed LAC Nurse with responsibility for Bracknell Forest is expected to join the panel during the second half of 2013. There is a need to recruit panel members able to provide minority ethnicity and diversity expertise or who have care experienced.
- 3.3 Due to the changes in arrangements a business meeting was not held in 2012 but will be arranged in 2013 to consider the Chair's Annual Report. A successful training day was held jointly with the Family Placement Team in December 2012. The agenda included considering Foster Home Reviews and matching for permanence. Panel members also have the opportunity to attend training lunchtime seminars or conferences run by the department.
- 3.3 Feedback from applicants is positive 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 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 2012 to March 2013)

	Cases heard
New approvals	
Long term (non kinship)	2
Short term	4
Short Breaks	2
Family & Friends (Connected Persons)	0
Total	8
Reviews	18
Issues of Concern	1
Private Fostering arrangements	0
Long term match (non kinship)	3
Supported Lodgings	0
Safeguarding and support	0
Resignations	6
Applicants not approved	1
Total number of items considered	29

4.2 Bracknell Forest Approved Carers (as at 31 March 2013)

Total of Approved Fostering Households	53	
<i>(NB: several households approved for more than one group)</i>		
For specific long term placements (non kinship)	9	
For short term placements	38	
For short breaks care	8	
For specific relatives or friends	5	
Supported Lodgings	4	
Parent and Child	1	
Out of the short term placements, six are able to offer short breaks care Eight 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 National Minimum Fostering Standards and Regulations 2001. The reviews are chaired by an assistant team manager of the Family Placement Team for consistency. All the completed reviews are further scrutinised by the team manager who monitors compliance with the regulations before final sign off.

5.2 There has been a review of the forms and format of reviews during 2012 which involved consultation with foster carers, family placement workers and Foster Panel. Improvements include the introduction of formal Personal Development Plans and clearer presentation of information about checks. Further work is required but overall the new format seems to be working well.

5.3 Thirty two reviews have been carried out within 12 months of the previous review. Eleven reviews of foster households approved within the last twelve months were presented to the Foster Panel and seven reviews seeking a change of approval terms. All first reviews were presented to Foster Panel within a year of the carer's approval as required by the regulations. This is an improvement in performance in comparison to the previous Joint Panel where time was limited and reviews often deferred.

6. Outcome of OFSTED inspection of the Fostering Service

6.1 The Fostering Service was last inspected by Ofsted in June 2011. 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 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.
- 6.3 The system of inspecting Fostering Services is changing as a part of a change to the overall system of inspections. The details of the new inspection have not been confirmed but are likely to be part of inspecting Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspections. The theme of the 'child's journey' through care will underpin future inspections.

7. Data about Children Looked After by Bracknell Forest

Total number of Looked after Children March 2013	103	This is a sustained increase from an average of 75-85 over previous years
Males	51	
Females	52	
Percentage aged 11 and over	57.3%	(59/103)
Percentage from black and minority ethnic groups	24.3%	This is all ethnicities except white British for all LAC placements (out of 103)
Number in Bracknell Forest foster placements	57	
Number placed with independent fostering agency carers	18	
Number placed with other local authority carers	0	
Total number in fostering placements	75	Includes connected person/ kinship placements; Independent Foster Care Agencies and BFC carers. ,

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 68.4% (13/19). This is improving performance but a number of variables, including the lower average age of children becoming looked after will affect the percentage measure.
- 8.2 Percentage of looked after children with three or more placement moves in the last year 11.7% (12/103). Analysis of this cohort shows that most were teenagers who were experiencing unsettled periods in their lives and the small increase from the previous years figure is indicative of children with more complex needs being placed in foster care.
- 8.3 Percentage of children adopted (and Special Guardianship Orders granted) from the Authority in the last year is 9.5% (8/84). This is an increase from 6.3% in the previous year. At 31st March 2013 there are 17 children with plans for adoption which represent a significant increase on previous years.

9. Foster Care

- 9.1 2012 -2013 has been a challenging year. The comparatively high number of new carers approved in the previous year have required support to learn and settle in their new role. We have also seen the resignation of a few significant long standing foster carers due to retirement after offering many years service to Bracknell Forest.
- 9.2 Currently there are 12 fostering households approved for placement of three children which is a significant improvement in the capacity of the fostering service to meet this need. However it is not practicable to reserve these placements so none currently have a sibling group of three placed together. Twenty fostering households are approved for two children or one child and a sibling group of two children. Fifteen fostering households are approved for one child. Five Connected Persons (kinship) foster carers are approved for seven looked after children connected with them.
- 9.3 The team were very pleased to receive a record 14 applications to foster over the year. However it was disappointing that towards the end of 2012 four who were anticipated to be positive assessments did not progress to approval. This meant that there was insufficient time to achieve the target of approved foster carers by March. However, the quality of approved carers remains the first priority in the assessment process and increased monitoring processes are now in place to identify issues as early as possible in the assessment process.

10. Short Breaks Care

- 10.1 The authority has eight carers approved specifically for short break care to children with disabilities. This is the largest number for at least five years. Six foster carers can offer short break care in addition to short or long term foster care.
- 10.2 A matching process for children and short break carers has been introduced this year. Monthly meetings are now held between the Family Placement and Disabled Children's Managers for this purpose. Short break carers now offer day care placements to support families who have a child with a disability. The overall aim is to improve the range of support and flexibility of the service.
- 10.3 In addition to short break care there are two established 'shared care' arrangements for children with a disability. This is where the child spends two or more nights per week with a foster carer and the remaining time at home with parents. These arrangements allow the child to remain part of their birth family and avoid the need for full time care.

11. Recruitment

- 11.1 During the year a campaign was organised by the Recruitment and Publicity Officer, focusing on signposting new enquirers to informal fostering information sessions/coffee.
- 11.2 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.
- 11.3 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;
- § advertising - specifically seeking long term placements within the Borough and within travelling distance outside.

11.4 Analysis from this and other year's campaigns and experience of previous years show that a combination of local press coverage/ advertising and our website are the most successful methods of recruitment followed closely by our information and local events.

11.5 Enquiry Figures

- § 73 enquiries about fostering, short break and supported lodgings enquires were received during the year April 2012-March 2013.
- § Three fostering preparation groups were organised over the year, all arranged for weekends and evenings for the convenience of prospective foster carers.
- § Of the twenty seven households who attended, a total of fourteen applications were made.
- § In total, 14 households were assessed and eight fostering households were approved at Panel for fostering, short break and supported lodgings during this year.
- § The conversion rate from numbers of enquiries made to approval as foster carers is 11% for 2012 – 2013 which compares well with the national statistic (Fostering Network) of 5%.
- § 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.

11.6 Recruitment Aims.

During 2013-2014 we aim to recruit ten more foster placements. We will target our recruitment activities to encourage applications from households who may meet the needs set out below. However, we know that carers do develop skills and interests as they become more experienced so the primary consideration is to recruit carers who have the capacity to learn and develop and may in due course be able to widen their interest.

Target

- § 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

12. Additional Information

12.1 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 continue to need to place children with Independent Fostering Agencies to meet the demand for placements and to provide the opportunity for an appropriate match to meet the child's needs.

12.2 LASPO

In accordance with The Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO), all children and young people remanded into Youth Detention Accommodation (YDA) automatically acquire LAC status and from 1st April 2013, funding for remands to YDA has transferred from central government to local authorities. In response to this, we have reviewed our provision of alternatives to remand into YDA including access to remand foster placements. Currently we are not proposing to change our current provision as numbers over the past 3 years of secure remands have been extremely low, and do not justify the cost of reserving specific remand foster places for young people who could potentially be remanded to YDA. Were a remand bed to be required it would be commissioned on a spot purchase basis from an Independent Fostering Agency. This will be monitored over the next year.

12.3 From 1st April 2012 Bracknell Forest has been part of a South East Region framework agreement with eleven local authorities, to commission placements from 40 Independent Foster Agencies. This arrangement has reduced the cost of some independent agency charges and ensured that quality standards are maintained.

12.4 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. This has proved an effective method of support for children's social workers in dealing with issues that arise with these placements.

12.5 The Life Chances Team is a 'virtual' team set up in October 2011 consisting of 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.

12.6 The family worker employed to work to the Life Chances Team is managed by the Family Placement Team. She provides practical support directly for 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. 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 Fostering4Bracknell Association

- 13.1 The Foster Care Association was set up in 2009 by Bracknell's foster carers. It is an independent association 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.
- 13.2 One of the most significant developments for Bracknell Forest foster carers over the past four years is the gradual movement towards 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' arrangement from their substantive placement a more positive experience than moving to strangers.
- 13.3 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.
- 13.4 The annual foster carer conference was held on 10th November 2012 with a theme of 'Effective Communication with resistant children.' There was also a presentation about Information Security and a consultation about the new format for Foster Home Reviews.

14. Connected Person assessments

During the year 1.04.12 to 31.03.2013 the increase in care proceedings led to a rise in the number of Connected Persons (Kinship) assessment that have needed to be completed within short timescales to the requirements of the court. Fourteen Special Guardianship assessments have been completed and a further application regarding one child is in the process of assessment. Five applications have resulted in the making of Special Guardianship Orders with a further three awaiting the outcome of court proceedings. Six applications were assessed as not being suitable.

15. Summary

- 15.1 This has been yet 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. The team has continued to work hard to keep young people in local Bracknell Forest, in-house placements thereby enabling them to maintain links with their families and communities.
- 15.2 Overall the work of the Family Placement Team has increased significantly and brought with it the challenge of meeting the individual demands of the various timescales in different parts of the service. In addition to recruiting and supporting foster carers, the team works with adoption, step parent adoption, post adoption

support, connected person's assessments of potential permanent and foster carers, family finding for adoption and 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. During the past year the team has completed a total of 35 assessment across the service (fostering, adoption, private fostering, in family adoption, connected persons assessments) in addition to supporting fifty three fostering households. In real terms the work of the team has more than doubled since 2009.

- 15.3 Next year will see further challenges across the service with the introduction of new processes for applications to adopt and a similar proposal for a two stage process for foster carers. The introduction of new legislation and changes to regulations always requires additional time and thought however the team is positive and well placed to move forward.

Helen Fenton
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Family Placement Team
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