



**Brighton & Hove
City Council**

Annual Fostering Service report

2010-2011

**Fostering and Adoption Service
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1. Introduction

The report will detail the work undertaken by the Fostering Service within Children & Families from April 2010 – March 2011, including information on fostering recruitment activity, the work of the Fostering Panel and developments within the Service.

The report will also highlight national developments in fostering practice and provide information on the profile of the children in care population within Brighton & Hove.

A key priority of the work of Children & Families is to ensure children can be brought up safely with their birth parents or within their wider family network if at all possible. The Fostering and Adoption service contributes to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people in the city in line with the priorities outlined in the Brighton & Hove City Council's Children and Young People's Plan 2009-12 that was agreed with partners and with children and young people themselves through their consultative forums.

When a child does come into care foster carers play a pivotal role in the multi agency team around the child. Foster carers take children and young people into their homes often at very short notice and work to ensure the best possible outcomes for the child in care. Ideally that child will be able to return to their birth family but if that is not possible achieve permanence either through adoption or another legal order or through permanent foster care.

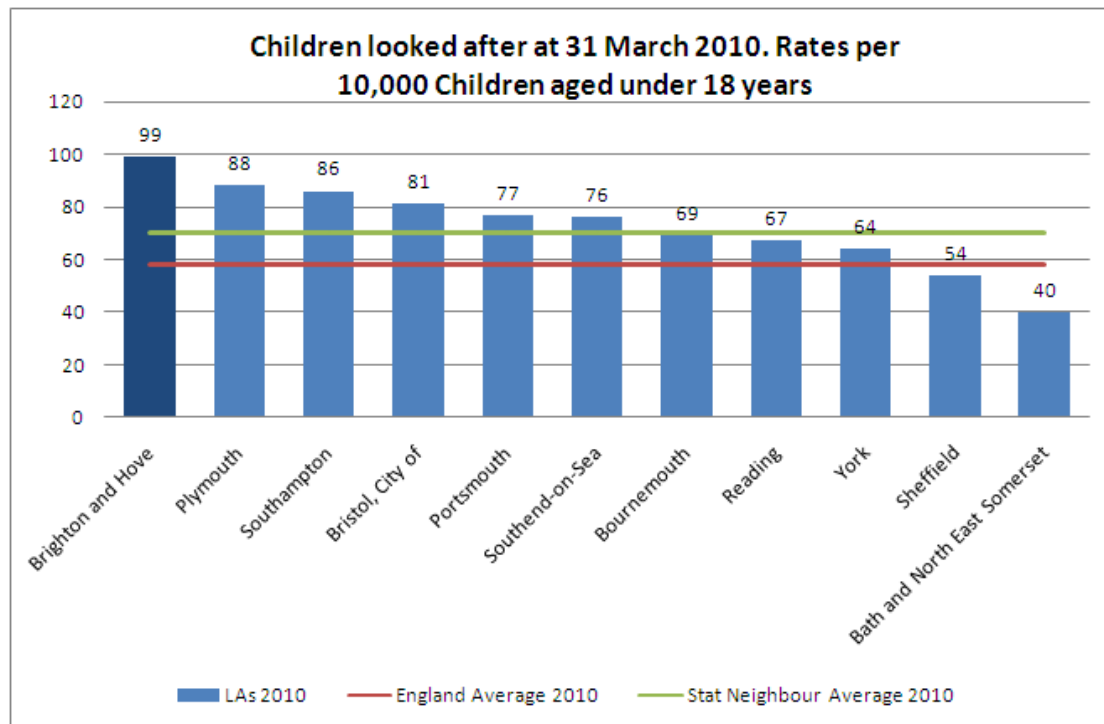
Fostering is a highly regulated area of social work practice and there has been a range of new regulations and statutory guidance issued by the Department of Education earlier this year. The new regulations and National Minimum Standards took effect from April 2011 and have been informed by the views of children and young people. The National Minimum Standards provide the framework against which Ofsted inspect local authority fostering services and fostering agencies.

The national profile of fostering remains very high. There was a 6% increase in the numbers of children in care in England at end March 2010 with a total of 64,400 children looked after by local authorities, a rate of 58 per 10,000 children under 18 years. The majority of looked after children (73%) were in foster care placements. The number of children looked after in foster placements has increased by 13% since 2006 (from 41,700 to 47,200). Within Brighton & Hove 82% of children in care on 31st March 2011 were in foster care.

Within Brighton and Hove there was a significant rise in the numbers of children coming into care from December 2008 which has remained high but stabilised over the last twelve months. The number of children in care over the last 12 months has ranged from 468 in May 2010 to 490 in December 2010. However the number of children looked after in Brighton & Hove at 31st March 2010 increased by 17.7% from the number at 31 March 2009 compared to a

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6% increase nationally. The rate of children looked after per 10,000 children aged under 18 is 99 per 10,000 at March 2010, higher than the national average (58 per 10,000) and the average for our statistical neighbours (70.2 per 10,000).



The new Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 also came into force in April 2011. The aim of these revised regulations and guidance is to streamline processes to increase the emphasis on more effective care planning for children in care. These regulations highlight permanence as the underpinning concept for all social work with children and families from family support through to adoption. Permanence is defined as the framework for emotional, physical and legal permanence which gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity. Achieving permanence is the key consideration from the point the child becomes looked after.

Within Children & Families a corporate parent strategy group has continued to meet as has the corporate parenting board which has representation from young people in care and care leavers as well as from the Brighton & Hove Foster Care Association. The corporate parenting board will continue to receive update reports in relation to progress against the key aspects of Brighton & Hove's pledge to children in care.

2. Fostering Service

The Service comprises the Fostering Team and the Intensive Placement Team and has retained a very stable and experienced management team. The Service Manager also has responsibility for the administrative team and for line managing the Independent Visitor Co-ordinator that is now located

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within the Fostering & Adoption Service. The Fostering Service has 3.8 Practice Manager posts and there is very close liaison between the Fostering & Adoption & Permanence teams given the overlap in the work with some children moving through from fostering to adoption. Foster carers are also supervised and supported within the Family and Friends team and Adoption & Permanence team and the work of those teams is reported on within the annual adoption agency report.

The Practice Managers within the Fostering Team take lead responsibility for different aspects of the service namely; recruitment and foster carer training, the placement finding duty service and parent and baby carers and carers for unaccompanied asylum seekers. The Intensive Fostering Team is managed by 1.2 Practice Managers and they both also play a role in supervising staff in the Fostering team and providing management cover to the duty service. The Intensive Placement Team was formed in 2006 and works to enhance placement stability and provide an increased level of support to intensive fostering placements.

The teams are made up of a number of experienced social work practitioners and social work resource officers plus a recruitment and publicity officer. As well as the placement finding duty service the service also runs a recruitment duty service to prospective foster carers.

The Fostering Agency Advisor, plays a key role in ensuring the effective running of the Fostering Panel, providing a quality assurance role in relation to reports being prepared for panel and for providing specialist advice to staff within the Children and Families in relation to fostering work. A separate report on the work of the Panel written by the Independent chair of Panel is appended to this report.

The Fostering Service Manager attends the quarterly meetings of the South East Local Authority Regional Foster Carer group which meets to share practice and policy issues.

The Fostering Service was last inspected by Ofsted in January 2009 when the service was rated as 'outstanding'. Ofsted have now moved to a 3 yearly cycle for fostering service inspections unless there is a reason to inspect more frequently. Ofsted also now require an annual fostering dataset from all local authorities and fostering agencies which gives a comprehensive picture of fostering provision nationally.

3. Fostering Recruitment Activity 2010/11

The recruitment strategy for the service is updated annually and is developed in response to the profile of children in care and the trends in the demand for placements considered alongside the profile of Brighton & Hove's foster carers. At the end of March 2011 there were 160 fostering households approved by Brighton and Hove including family and friends foster carers with 207 filled placements. Foster carers can be approved for up to 3 children if appropriate but there may be many reasons where decisions are made that carers need a short break from fostering or that it is not appropriate to have

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another child in placement alongside a child with particular complex needs. Of these fostering households; 256 carers were White/ British and 22 were from Black or Minority Ethnic backgrounds. The service recruits within a 20 mile radius of the city and just over half of Brighton & Hove approved carers live within the city.

The age profile of current foster carers show that the majority of carers are aged 50+. Whereas there is no upper age limit for foster carers, the requirement is that carers need to be fit enough to foster. As some foster carers approach 60 there are a number that do consider retiring or scaling down their fostering. The 50 – 59 age range do bring benefits in that they are less likely to have children of their own living at home and hence provide greater degree of freedom in matching them with children in care. Infact the service ran a successful 'empty nester campaign' in 2009-10 profiling the opportunities of fostering once your birth children have left home.

The Fostering Service during the year has maintained a profile on the need to recruit more carers for older children (10 years+), Black and Minority Ethnic [BME] carers and parent and baby carers and for children under 5. It has continued to broaden the recruitment activity in acknowledgement of the very high numbers of children coming into care and the fact that it has not always been possible to place younger children under 10 years with in-house foster carers.

During 2010/11 there were 227 enquiries received by the Fostering team from prospective carers. There were 7 information sessions held during the year and 3 preparation training groups. Regular recruitment meetings are held to review progress with the recruitment strategy and work has been undertaken to streamline the recruitment processes. Recruitment practice is also informed by feedback and input from applicants and experienced carers as well as learning any lessons from good practice guidance published by Fostering Network or from sharing experiences with other local authorities that are part of the SE fostering regional group. Work undertaken by Fostering Network on recruitment activity comments on the high drop out rate from initial enquiry to approval and Brighton & Hove is not out of step on this. The decision to become a foster carer is a major event not only in the foster carer's life but also in the lives of their family and there are a number of applicants that make initial enquiries without understanding the full implications of the role and potential impact for their own birth children. However the service is striving to improve the ratio of initial enquiries that convert to approval and one aspect of this is setting up systems to keep in touch with potential applicants that may have enquired at a very early stage of their thinking about fostering and perhaps have not followed this up by attending an information session.

There were eleven new sets of foster carers [excluding family and friends] approved in the year. These new carers included one supported lodgings carers for young people over 16 years and all the other foster carers had approval ranges that extended to include teenage children reflecting the needs of the service. There were in addition 3 sets of concurrent carers approved via the Adoption & Permanence Panel; concurrent carers are approved as both foster carers and adopters and the child is placed on a

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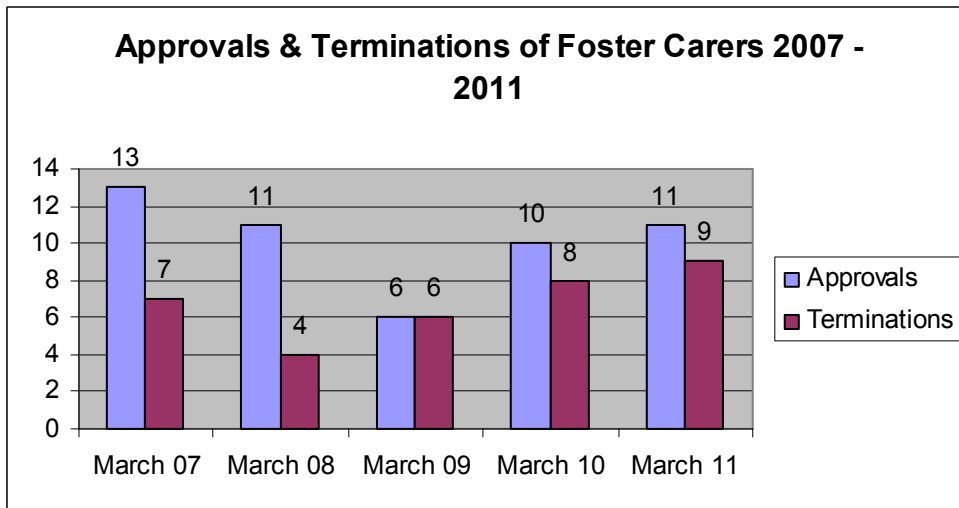
fostering basis but with the plan that the carers are able to offer adoption to that child if rehabilitation work with the birth family is not successful.

The total number of fostering resources [excluding family and friends foster carers] has for the last three years remained relatively stable with just a very slight increase each year as the number of new carers approved has been broadly balanced with the number of carers that were lost to the service through resignation or termination of approval. Managers within the service continually work to review the recruitment strategy and the way the service is configured to ensure recruitment and assessment activity is given a high priority alongside the other areas of work.

However without an increase in staffing into the service there is limited capacity to expand further as it is essential that all foster carers and particularly those newly recruited receive a high level of support from the service with the fostering task. The service has used 2 regular freelance social workers to assist with undertaking assessment work and has recently recruited a further two workers to undertake this work. Once carers are approved they have then to develop a new relationship with their supervising social worker so the use of freelance social workers to assist with recruitment and assessment work can only have a limited role.

There is a turnover of carers every year as fostering can be a very challenging and demanding task and some carers decide that it no longer fits with their family life or retire due to health issues or due to the fact that they move some distance from Brighton & Hove. In 2010/11 there were 9 resignations or terminations of approval including 1 supported lodgings carer. There were also 7 assessments that were discontinued during the year for a variety of reasons including unexpected health issues or changes in lifestyle such as starting new relationships or jobs that effected decision making about wanting to pursue fostering. Many people are counselled out at the initial enquiry stage when more information is given about the fostering role. Some people have very limited experience of childcare and may be encouraged to gain further experience and contact the service at a later stage.

The service always works hard to ensure foster carers are retained and the service currently does not lose foster carers to the independent sector. In the past few years there have been some approved foster carers from the independent sector wanting to move over to Brighton and Hove. They have been attracted by both the support offered by Brighton and Hove and the broader range of children they can foster. However the national increase in numbers of children in the care system has resulted in all the local fostering agencies being much busier and being able to offer their carers a wider range of children needing placements. There has been a slight uptake of interest in carers from the independent sector enquiring about transferring to Brighton and Hove since the beginning of 2011. One social worker within the team takes a lead on liaising with these carers.



As of July 2011 there are 12 further assessments that are ongoing with panel dates booked through the year and a preparation training groups taking place in July and October 2011.

Recruitment strategy

The Fostering Service works closely with the council press office and there have again been a number of features in the local press over the year presenting ‘good news’ stories which profile fostering households. There are regular advertisements in the local press and a significant campaign for National Foster Care Fortnight which is in May each year. This year the service ran a number of stalls at local supermarkets during fostering fortnight as well as attending other key community events during the year. Information events held during the evening and on Saturdays are held at different venues around the city. A Brighton & Hove foster carer was also featured positively in an item on a local TV news programme.

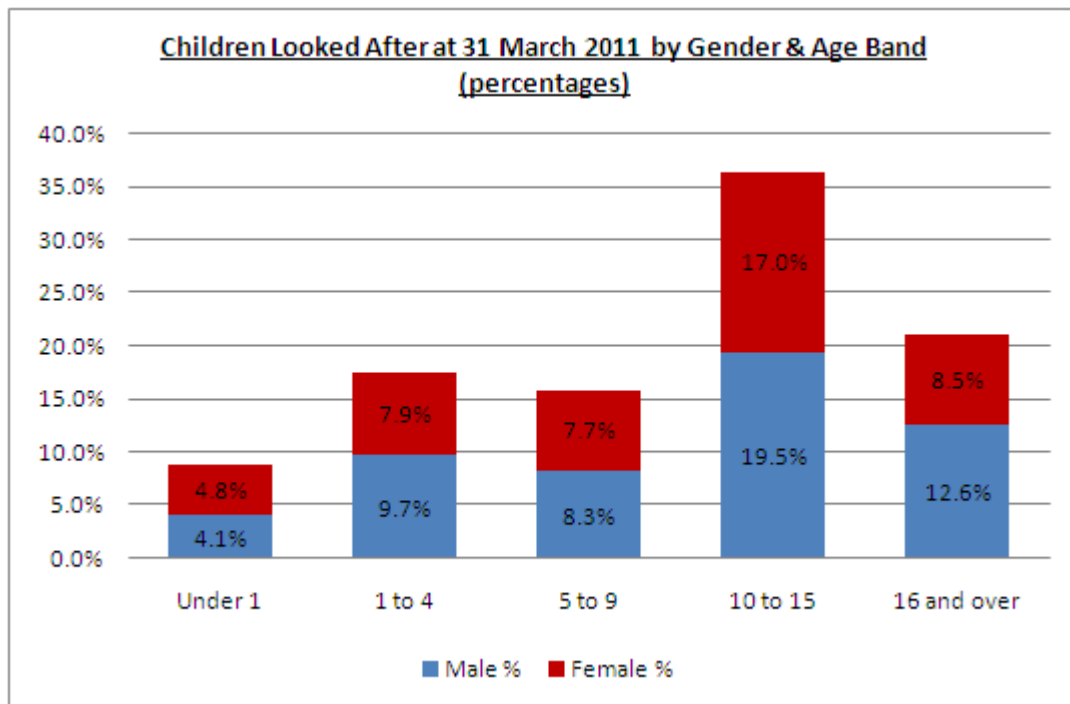
Many prospective foster carers seek out information about the service on-line before they make contact and the service has a dedicated website which is kept updated with information about recruitment events. The service is also developing the use of social media and linking with the council facebook and twitter pages to advertise recruitment events. New advertisements have also been developed in line with the council’s corporate image and reflecting different fostering tasks.

Foster carers and young people continue to play a role in recruitment events by attending information sessions and talking to prospective carers about their experience of fostering and the fostering task. The lead Practice Manager maintains an oversight of the recruitment activity and provides regular performance reports.

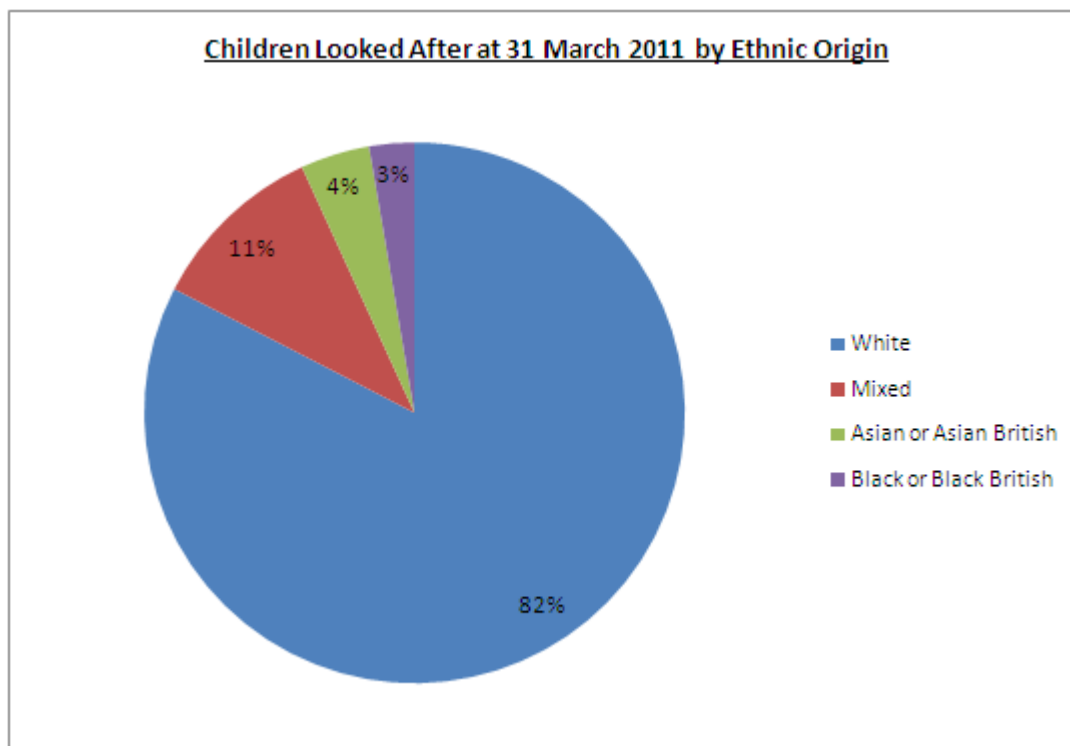
Profile of children in care 10/11

The following graphs give information on the age breakdown, gender and ethnicity as a snapshot at end March 2011.

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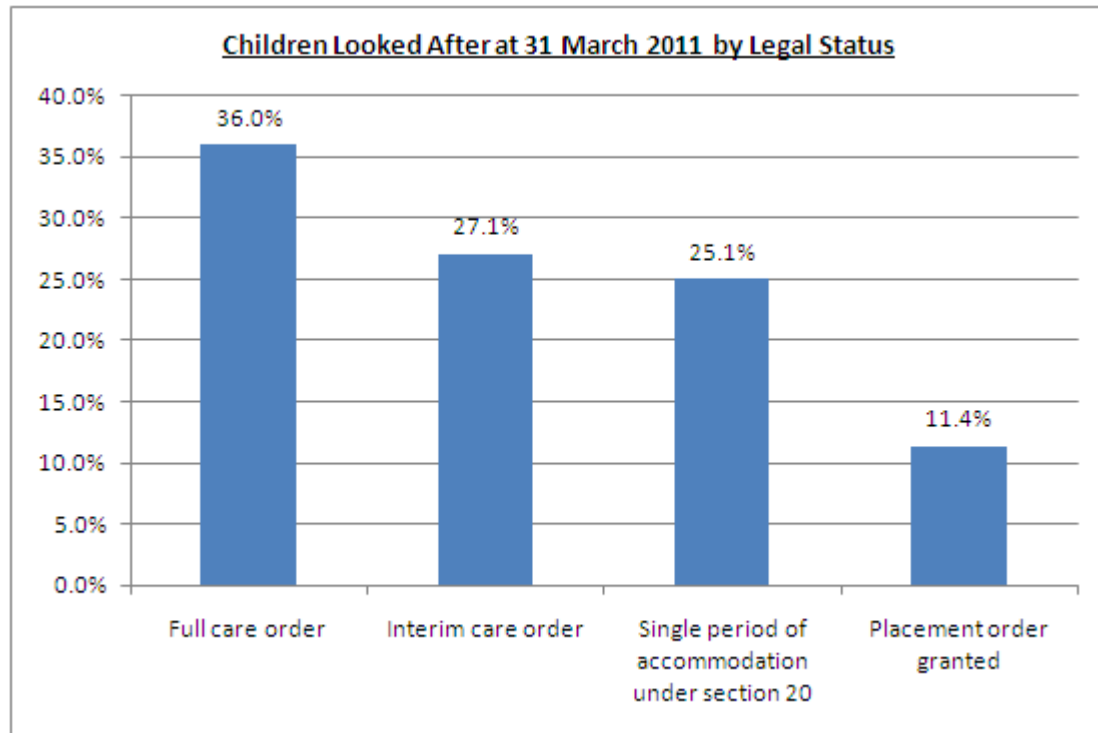


The gender split in the care population was 54% (262) male and 46% (221) female as of 31st March 2011.

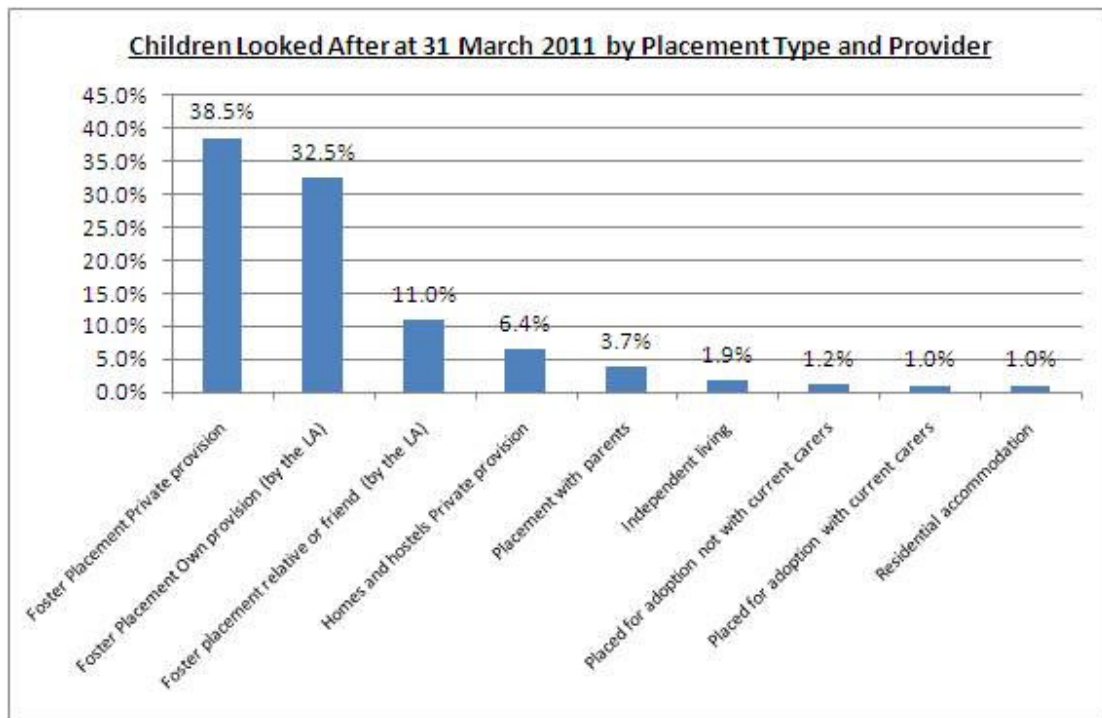


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In terms of legal status the majority of children in care are subject to a legal order, either full Care Order or Interim Care Order. Analysis of the figures show that it is more likely for younger children in care to be subject to legal orders than older children who are more heavily represented in the cohort of children that are voluntarily accommodated under Section 20 of Children & Young People's Act 1989.



Over a third of children in care are on a Full Care Order, with 27% under an Interim Care Order, 25% of children were looked after under Section 20, a slight fall from 30% last year, and 11% under a Placement Order which is an increase from 7% last year reflecting the rise in adoption activity.



Of the 82% children in care on 31st March 2011 that were in foster placements, 38.5% were placed with independent agency providers and 43.5% were in foster placements provided by Brighton & Hove which includes 11% in foster placements with relatives or friends.

5. Placement Activity

The Fostering Service runs a duty service for social workers needing to find a foster placement for a child. This service is overseen by a Practice Manager and is supported by other staff within the team.

The duty service has had a sustained high demand for placements with continued pressure on resources over the last year in particular referrals for parent and baby foster placements and placements for teenagers and sibling groups and other children with complex needs.

This high demand for placements has continued to have an impact on the capacity of the service to consider the detail of the matching requirements of the child and to find placements that fit with the matching needs. As the increase in numbers of children in care is a national issue and neighbouring authorities have also experienced rising numbers of children coming into care there continues to be pressure on available fostering or residential resources across the south east. There have at times been very limited availability of placements and although both the fostering duty team and agency placement team have worked very hard to find appropriate matches for children there has sometimes been a need to place children or young people at some distance from Brighton and Hove or to place more challenging children with carers that were newly approved. If appropriate a variation to a carer's approval range will be given or an exemption to the normal fostering limit if

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following a risk assessment that is considered appropriate to enable children to be placed with in-house carers.

Agency placements

The Fostering Duty service works to place children with in house foster carers that meet their needs where ever possible and referrals are passed to the Agency Placement Team when there are no appropriate in-house placements available. All referrals are received by the fostering duty team and there is close liaison with the social workers in the fieldwork teams to try and ensure that referrals are completed to give a clear picture of the matching requirements of the specific child and the outcomes required from a placement. Many of the referrals still come to the duty service with requests for placements to be found at very short notice which limits the capacity at times to focus on finding placements that fully meet the matching needs. For some children a dual search is carried out between both teams given the limited timescales available to find an available placement.

There is a close working relationship between the duty service and the agency placement team who oversee the contracts with the independent providers and the volume of placement activity require frequent liaison and discussion between the teams about practice issues. The duty team will organise planning meetings to consider care plans and matching needs where there is more time available for placement finding or where the child has particularly complex needs.

As of 31st March 2011 there were 186 children and young people in agency foster placements. This is a further significant increase from the same time last year when 153 placements were being purchased. This obviously has significant financial consequences given the higher unit costs of agency placements; however it reflects the rise in numbers of children in care and the lack of capacity to expand in-house fostering resources. A business case to expand the fostering service to enable more children to be placed with in-house carers has been developed through the value for money programme.

Parent and baby placements

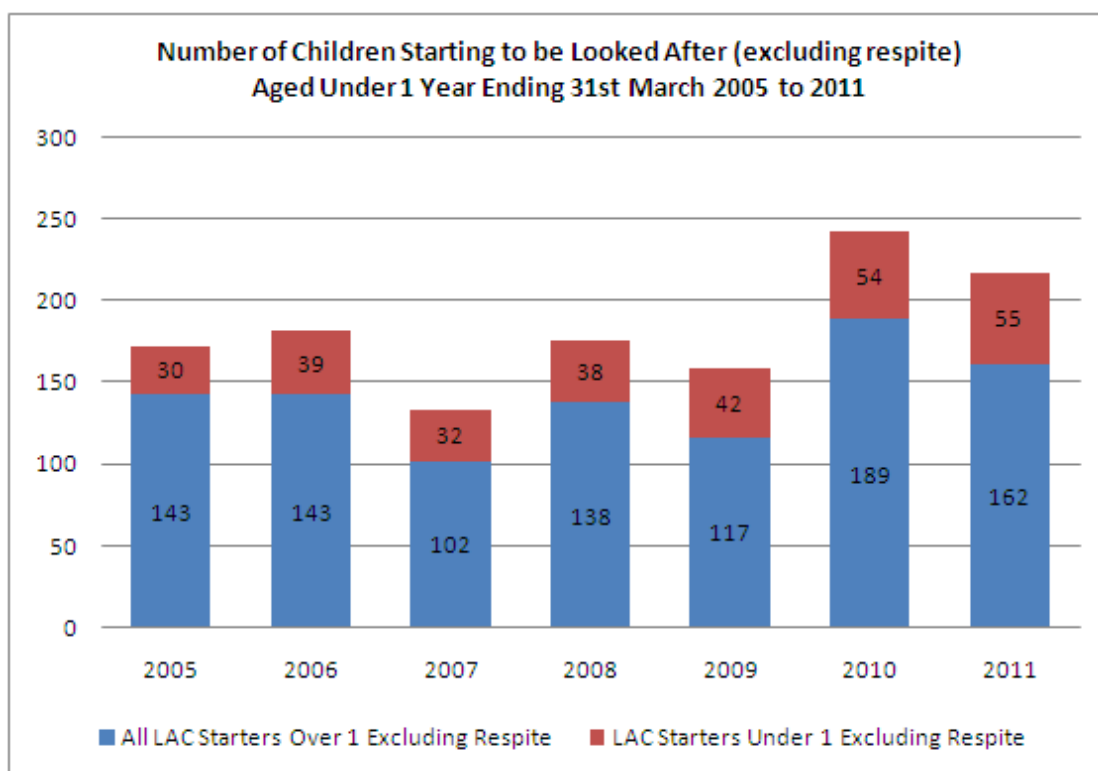
During the year there has continued to be a sustained high demand for parent and baby or parent and child foster placements. Most of these placements are made at birth and as part of a care plan within proceedings.

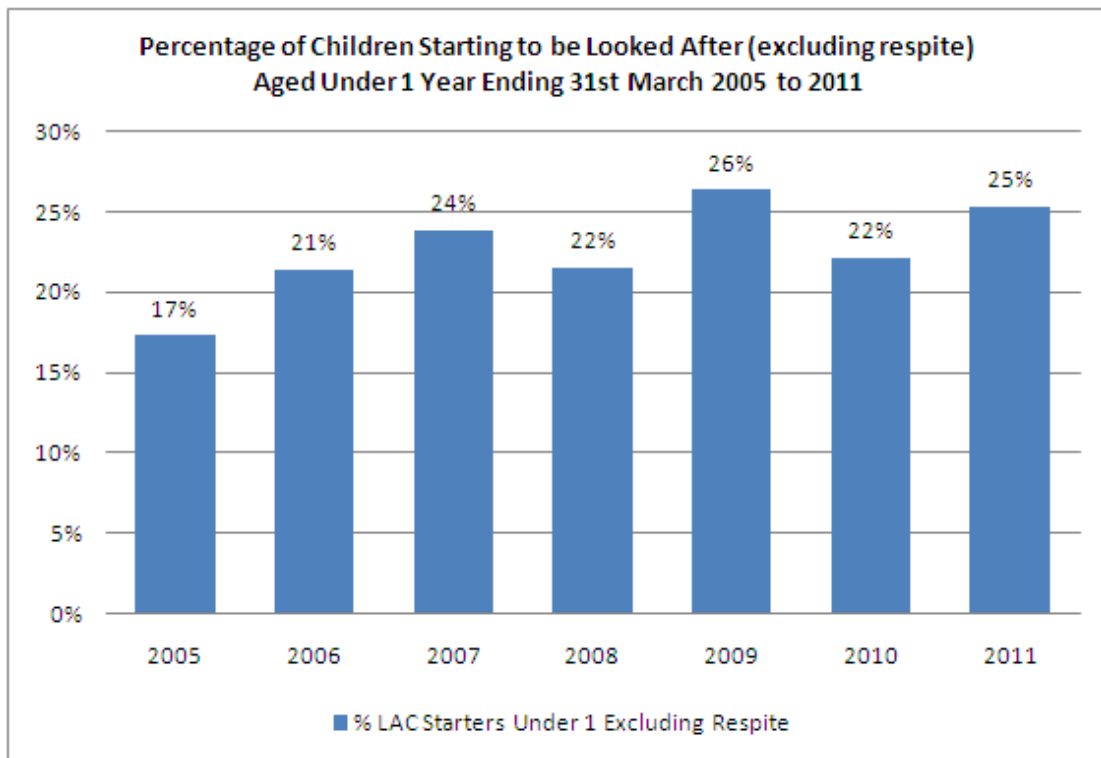
There has been considerable activity during the year to progress actions agreed as part of a work stream to improve early permanence planning for babies and infants in the care system. Brighton & Hove have a high number of referrals in relation to vulnerable babies and many of the referrals relate to concerns about the parents' substance misuse. The high numbers of under 1s in the care system demonstrate the need to give priority to ensuring that services are effectively co-ordinated pre birth and that timely assessments are undertaken to ensure that there is minimal delay in achieving early permanence for the most vulnerable babies

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This work has been reported on within the Children & Families value for money work programme. As part of that the Fostering & Adoption Service has been involved in organising a 2 day training programme for staff and carers in February 2011 on early permanence planning. This involved input from the midwifery and children in care health team plus a dedicated session on the impact of substance misuse in pregnancy from the specialist midwife and consultant neonatologist. One of Brighton & Hove's parent and baby foster carers also contributed with a presentation on her and her family's experience of this challenging fostering task. The British Association for Adoption & Fostering [BAAF] is now developing a resource handbook and training on parent and child foster placements and Brighton & Hove foster carers and practitioners have contributed significantly to this.

Within Children & Families there has also been very positive progress on establishing a new early permanence team which will be staffed by health visitors and early years visitors. The team will have specialist support from the Clermont child protection unit and will be open to undertake pre birth and post birth assessments with families from July 2011. It is envisaged that parents in parent and baby foster placements will be able to be part of a 2 day parenting assessment and support programme which will dovetail with the work undertaken by the foster carer in placement.





6 Fostering support services

The provision of a range of support services from the individual work provided by the supervising social worker to training and support groups, an out of hours service, support with respite arrangements and an extensive school holiday activity programme for children in placement all play a key role in ensuring carers are enabled and supported to meet the needs of the children in their care. It is also a significant factor in the retention of foster carers and enables the service not only to ensure carers are well supported in line with the fostering minimum standards but also enables Brighton and Hove to compete with the better independent fostering agencies locally.

The Fostering Service has continued to work hard over the year to review and develop the support services provided to carers, the central component of which is the supervisory relationship. The service has a stable staff group of experienced social workers and all carers have an allocated social worker.

The on-line version of the Foster Carers' Handbook has been well received by carers and the Fostering Agency Advisor has the lead role to update and expand this handbook.

Training and Support groups

There is a general monthly support group open to all carers which is long standing and well attended. There are also regular support groups focusing on the CWDC TSD Standards for foster carers throughout the year to support carers with their work to complete their workbook.

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A specific group for parent and baby foster carers is now well established which has a clear training element with a programme of different speakers. There is also a group for the intensive placement foster carers and it is an expectation of being part of the scheme that they meet together regularly with the two dedicated workers who supervise the placements.

The service continues to offer a comprehensive training programme to foster carers that builds on the basic training they receive during the preparation group and assessment process. A working group is held with staff and foster carer representatives to review and develop the training programme.

There are 9 mandatory courses that carers are expected to take up over the course of their first two years post approval. Carers also have the opportunity to take up additional training provided within the training programme for foster carers or the wider training programme offered within Children & Families and through the NVQ Level 3 award.

Sons and Daughters of Foster Carers

The sons and daughters of foster carers play a vital role in the fostering task and the service has continued to provide them with dedicated support services. Fostering is very much a family activity and research has shown that placements are more successful and less likely to break down when there is a positive framework of support in place that includes the sons and daughters of carers.

Supervising social workers will meet with these children to ascertain their views during the year. The Intensive Placement Team provide specific activity days within the school holidays for these children which are well attended; 41 different young people attended specific activity days for the sons and daughters of carers during the year.

7 Foster Care Association

The Brighton and Hove Foster Care Association has been in existence for 7 years and plays an important role in supporting foster carers by providing a buddy scheme and monthly coffee mornings and inputting into the development of the service. The secretary of the association has provided this section for the annual report.

'The Brighton & Hove Foster Care Association, an independent registered charity, has continued to support and encourage our foster carers in 2010/11.

They have held social activities to bring carers and their families together and held fundraising events such as the Christmas Fair and a sponsored sky dive by the Chair and Treasurer!

They are committed to working in partnership with the Fostering Department in an effort to improve the service to foster carers. This year they have successfully lobbied for parking vouchers to be made available to those

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carers who most need them and they are currently in the process of introducing regular foster carer 'surgeries' whereby carers will be able to meet with managers directly to put forward any concerns, worries or suggestions in an effort to improve provision.'

8 Children in Care Health and Virtual School teams

The Consultant Nurse for children in care and her colleagues continue to work very closely with the service. They provide training input to foster carers as part of their mandatory training but also run additional workshops for staff and carers as needed. Over the last year the Nurse Consultant organised with her colleague the Nurse for 16+ team, a training event for staff to update on sexual health and protective behaviours and provided additional training for staff and carers on early attachment.

The nurses for children in care also provide additional individual support and advice to foster carers as required about any health issues related to their children in placement. Since 2008 there has been a national requirement to report on the emotional well being of children in care and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire are sent to carers to complete on an annual basis with input from the young person as appropriate. The results of these are analysed and for children that are shown to have scored highly follow up support and advice is provided to carers and social workers by the health team.

There are also plans now to re-establish the regular liaison group with CAMHS clinicians that work with children in care which is a very positive development.

The Virtual School team for children in care also work closely with the service and provide input to the training programme for carers. The Educational Psychologist within the team has developed very good links with the service and has worked during the year to provide additional support and advice to carers on a range of educational issues including for example supporting children with reading. She holds regular drop in surgeries for carers.

9 Intensive Placement Team

The Intensive Placement Team (IPT) works to support the general development and placement stability of children and young people aged between 7 and 16 years living in Brighton and Hove foster placements including Family and Friends placements.

The remit of the team also includes the supervision of a limited number of Intensive Foster Placements where enhanced levels of placement support are required to sustain ongoing placement stability. IPT staff are also allocated to provide direct work to children and young people individually and in groups.

The work of the team has changed during the year in response to the need to make savings within the service and ensure that staff time is prioritised to maximise the capacity of the service to recruit and support foster carers. All

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staff within the team now also undertake the supervision of carers and take part in recruitment and duty tasks. The morning unit which had been running to support young people return to school where there is a break in education and to help support placement stability closed in October 2010. In part this reflected the small number of children that were involved in the unit but also the fact that the Virtual School team works closely with schools to try and maximise the engagement of young people in care within the education system. Since the closure of the morning unit there have still been occasions when the team has been able to respond to a particular need for a young person in care to be engaged in an activity during the day.

Activity programme

An integral part of the team's work continues to be the provision of activity programmes for children and young people during each school holiday. The number of children and young people reached the activity programme has remained consistently high. The programme provides respite for carers and opportunities for children in care to share and enjoy different experiences together.

Holiday Period	Places offered	Places filled	No. of individual young people
Easter 10	85	82	48
June half-term 10	45	39	35
Summer 10	216	192	61
Oct half-term 10	27	19	19
Feb half-term 11	27	25	23
Total	400	357	

Direct work

The child or young person is allocated an individual social work resource officer who will work with them on a weekly basis addressing specific areas of need such as life story work; protective behaviours; anger management or assisting young people and their carers to access appropriate recourses in the community. The work aims to support the healthy development of the young person's self esteem and sense of identity. Over the past year IPT have worked with 42 young people which is an increase from last year despite having a reduced staff team.

Therapeutic Art Group

An IPT social work resource officer also jointly facilitates a therapeutic art group for children in care with CAMHS workers throughout the year and alongside the IPT summer activity programme. In the past year the summer art group worked with 8 young people and the weekly group working with 6 young people.

Listen up-scheme

IPT administer this scheme which provides free access to leisure activities in the city children and young people in care. IPT has liaised with Brighton and

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Hove Albion FC to provide 152 free tickets for looked after young children and young people and 85 free tickets to accompanying adults to attend matches this season.

Music workshops

IPT staff have retained a close working relationship with the Music and Performing Arts Service and have worked alongside the Cre8tive Sounds Project successfully facilitating music workshops during the holidays.

IPT staff also work alongside specialist external music tutors providing young people the opportunity to learn and play music together. Feedback from the young people and foster carers is always very enthusiastic.

Arts Award

The arts award is a national qualification offered under the National Qualifications Framework to support young people and the team has three staff members qualified to assess this award.

Intensive Foster Placements

Intensive Foster Placements aim to provide stability and continuity ideally as a permanent placement but certainly beyond the short-term. It is not the child's needs or the capacities of the foster carers alone but a close fitting match between the two that defines an IFP and there are clear expectations of the support provided to carers and of the level of care provided by the carers to the child or young person. Three social workers within the team supervise a limited number of Intensive Foster Placements where enhanced levels of placement support are required to sustain ongoing placement stability. The enhanced package of support to carers includes intensive supervision an enhanced fostering rate and regular respite.

IFP carers will also have access to the activity programme and the allocation of an IPT social work resource officer for direct work with a young person. IFP supervising social workers also facilitate the IFP development group in order to support carers with their professional development, share common challenges and strategies to resolve them and to help develop a coherent identity.

There has been an increase in the matching of IFP placements with carers and there are currently 15 young people in placement with 11 IFP carers.

Future Projects:

Bike Club

Funding has been awarded to IPT alongside other local organisations working with young people. This is to enable the team to facilitate cycling and bicycle maintenance workshops for young people in care via jointly funded equipment and bikes based at Sussex University. These activities are planned to start in July 2011.

Children in Care Celebrations

IPT are developing and organising the Children in Care award celebrations for 2011. As a part of the preparation for this event IPT will be facilitating a music Group for young people that will work towards performing on the day of the event.

10 Fostering Panel

It is the responsibility of the service to ensure the effective running of the Panels and the Agency Advisors manage the panel administration team and take a lead in the recruitment of panel members. A report on the activity of the fostering panel prepared by the Independent Chair is appended to this report.

11 Complaints and allegations

During the year there have been 13 incidents investigated either as child protection allegations or as 'standards of care' issues in relation to Brighton & Hove foster carers including family and friends carers.

Of these, 4 were started as child protection referrals but following further investigation 3 were concluded as not being substantiated and no further action was required. The 4th was opened as a child protection enquiry but revised to a standards of care investigation.

The other remaining 9 were investigated under the standards of care procedures. The Fostering Service has endeavoured to conclude these investigations in a timely fashion and 9 investigations were concluded in under 2 months, 3 were completed in under 4 months, 1 was concluded in under 6 months due to specific personal circumstances for the family involved.

Of the 13 investigations, 4 resulted in no further action being taken, 6 have concluded with some amendment to practice or increased support to the foster carers and 2 investigations concluded with the decision to end the child's placement with the carers and a further investigation concluded with the recommendation to amend the carers' terms of approval.

In addition there has been 1 referral to the Independent Review Mechanism which has also resulted in a Stage 2 complaint which was not upheld. This matter is still ongoing.

Fostering Network in conjunction with the Social Policy Research Unit at the University of York completed a report in 2010 on maltreatment and allegations of maltreatment in foster care. The report outlines the fact that unfounded allegations of maltreatment in foster care are profoundly upsetting and stressful for the foster carers and children and may lead to some carers giving up fostering. The evidence in relation to the prevalence of allegations and substantiated maltreatment is limited and sometimes conflicting. Only 2 UK studies have reported and found 3.5-4% of foster carers were subject to

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allegations in a single year and that the proportion of foster families with substantiated reports of maltreatment during that year was less than 1%.

12 Service Planning 2011/12

During 2010/11 the service has continued to give a high priority to ensuring that support services for young people and carers are sustained given the significance of this in terms of good outcomes for children in care, placement stability and successful recruitment and retention of foster carers. The Intensive Placement Team has continued to review and develop their group and individual support programme with young people and have sustained an activity programme which not only is a support to carers but also enables young people to have the opportunity to be part of a range of different fun, creative and therapeutic activities during the school holidays. This in part recognises the fact that some young people in care do struggle to access mainstream services and can gain a great deal from being part of a very safe and focused activity programme which takes account of their specific needs.

The Intensive Fostering Scheme has also continued to develop and be successful in contributing to placement stability by providing a high level of individual support to carers and an intensive team around the placement. Likewise the service has maintained and developed the support to parent and baby foster carers and improved our capacity to expedite permanence plans for some of the most vulnerable babies in the care system. Brighton & Hove has been profiled within a good practice guide on these placements and one of our foster carers will be speaking about her experiences at a national conference in September 2011. This will continue to be an ongoing area of work for the forthcoming year and close links will be developed with the new early permanence team within Children & Families.

The service continues to focus on ensuring recruitment work is given a high priority and a business case has been put together as part of the value for money work programme for additional staff to focus on recruitment activity with the aim of reducing the spend in 2012/13 on high cost agency foster placements. A stretch target for recruitment for 2012/13 has been agreed which if the numbers of children coming into care remains stable will enable the service to increase the percentage of children that are placed with Brighton & Hove in-house approved foster carers. In summary this equates to £162,000 investment into the in-house fostering service to enable the appointment of additional staff to set up a dedicated recruitment team within the Fostering service in order to be able to run more frequent recruitment events and preparation training groups and fast-track assessments as appropriate. The stretch target is to be able to place an additional 18 full time equivalent children with in-house foster carers by the end of 2012/13. The service will continue to recruit a range of carers but will endeavour to work towards improving capacity to place all children under 10 years with in-house carers.

There are, however, a significant percentage of children placed with independent fostering providers that have lived with their carers for many years and their placement has been confirmed through the panel or review

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process as a permanent placement. There would be no intention to disrupt any foster placement for a child or young person that is a permanent or long term placement and is clearly meeting their needs. The aim of the value for money business case is to develop the in-house fostering resource base to enable more children to be placed in-house when children are coming into care or when a placement disrupts for whatever reason and a new placement for a child already in care is needed. Progress in relation to this new recruitment initiative within the Fostering service will be monitored carefully and reported on at regular intervals.

Considerable work is being undertaken currently to develop practice and procedures to ensure compliance with the new fostering standards and regulations. The new fostering minimum standards were developed in part in response to feedback nationally from young people in care and there is an increased commitment to consulting and involving children. The standards also profile the central importance of the child's relationship with their foster carer and the need for foster carers to be recognised as core members of the team working with the child. There is a recognition that foster carers need to be empowered to take on the day to day tasks of parenting and the notion of the 'good parent' yardstick is referred to. A briefing on the new standards has been provided to carers and work is underway on for example developing a new placement agreement and scheme of delegation for carers.

There is also now a requirement for each local authority and fostering agency to develop a foster carers' charter. The Foster Carers' Charter was launched in March 2011 which was jointly produced by Government, fostering organisations, charities and children. The new charter sets out clear principles on how foster carers should be treated, recognises their invaluable work and also profiles the expectations of carers. Within Brighton & Hove initial work has been undertaken to consult carers on the content of a charter and a small working group of staff and carers is being established to take this work forward which will be reported on further within the Corporate Parenting board.

Other aspects of work to comply with the new guidance and standards involves the updating of the children's guide to fostering which will involve input from young people and the development of profiles of all Brighton & Hove carers that can be provided to children and young people prior to placement.

The Fostering & Adoption service contributed to the Ofsted inspection of safeguarding and services to looked after children that was undertaken in March 2011. However the service will be due a dedicated Fostering inspection against the framework of new fostering minimum standards in 2012.

Sharon Donnelly
Head of Service, Fostering & Adoption
July 2011

Appendix 1

BRIGHTON & HOVE FOSTERING PANEL ANNUAL REPORT (1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011)

1. Introduction

This report briefly summarises the work of Brighton & Hove and Barnardo's Link Plus Fostering Panel over the last year. It has been a really busy year and the workload of the Panel has continued to increase. This is in line with the higher demand locally for placements for children both in foster care and family and friends' care and it reflects the national picture.

I have now been the Independent Chair of the Panel for over two years and I continue to be impressed by the quality of much of the work that has been presented. The Panel has continued to function effectively although we have experienced a number of changes to membership over the year.

2. Composition of the Panel

Over the last year, the Panel was constituted in line with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2002 and the Fostering Services (Amendment) Regulations 2009.

Members in 2010/11 were:

- Sarah Borthwick, independent Chair
- Jacqueline Stillwell, Barnardo's officer, vice chair
- Coun Jayne Bennett, Brighton & Hove elected member
- Miriam Patrick, independent member, ex foster carer
- Andy Gay, Barnardo's officer, childcare **(rejoined in February 2011)**
- Kay Woodley, independent member, ex service user **(left in December 2010)**
- Amanda Freeman, Brighton & Hove CYPT officer, fostering
- Gerry Brandon, Brighton & Hove CYPT officer, childcare **(left in December 2010)**
- Vanessa Wright, Brighton & Hove CYPT officer, health
- David Noble, Brighton & Hove CYPT officer, education
- Andy Hill, independent member, foster carer
- Lisa Giles, Barnardos officer, child care **(temporary cover from December 2010)**
- Seb Burton, Brighton & Hove CYPT officer, childcare **(started in January 2011)**

Graham Whitaker was Fostering Agency Adviser to the Panel and Wendy Kenyon was Panel Administrator.

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Unfortunately the Panel continues to have no black and/or minority ethnic representation and this is a priority in the recruitment of new Panel members over the next few months.

Panel members and staff worked very hard over the year. The Panel members who left during the year had been longstanding and committed members.

3. Work of the Panel

The Panel met on a monthly basis over the year. It met on **13** occasions from 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011. One additional Panel meeting was needed due to the volume of work being presented.

The Panel dealt with and made recommendations on **118** case presentations. Brighton & Hove presented **93** cases and Barnardo's Link Plus presented **25** cases. Most notably over the year, **1** more family was approved for fostering than in the previous year and the work around family and friends' carers continued to be in significant numbers.

The Panel recommended approval of **16** new carers:
11 were Brighton & Hove foster carers (1 was a supported lodgings carer) 6 of these were couples and 5 were single women, two of whom were black British/African/Caribbean
5 were Link Plus carers

The Panel did not recommend approval of **1** Link Plus Contract carer.

The Panel dealt with first annual reviews for **20** carers:

13 were Brighton & Hove foster carers

7 were Link Plus carers

The Panel dealt with reviews and variation of terms of approvals for **8** carers

6 were Brighton & Hove foster carers

2 were Link Plus carers

There were **29** terminations of approval of foster carers:

9 were Brighton & Hove foster carers (including 1 supported lodgings carer)

10 were Link Plus carers

10 were family and friends' carers

The vast majority of these terminations of approval were resignations of carers following a number of years' service. Many of the family and friends' carers went on to obtain Special Guardianship Orders for the children they were fostering.

The Panel made **35** recommendations in relation to family and friends' care this year, which represents **16** new family and friends' fostering households:

There were **14** initial (interim) approvals

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There were **10** continued initial (further interim) approvals
There were **11** full assessments

In addition, the Panel endorsed an exemption to the usual fostering limit of three children in **4** cases [only 1 related to a Brighton & Hove carer]. It did not defer any items over the year.

The Agency Decision Makers for both Brighton & Hove and Barnardo's Link Plus endorsed nearly all of the Panel's recommendations. After obtaining further information, the Agency Decision Maker for Brighton & Hove did not agree to the 1st interim approval of **1** family and friends' carer.

4. Functioning of the Panel

Process

The Panel works well. It is friendly and welcoming to those attending and it is able to praise and challenge practice appropriately. The business is conducted in a thorough way and all Panel members participate and ask questions. The Panel sees applicants and carers with social workers and it sees social workers on their own when additional questions need to be asked about assessment practice or about confidential references. The Panel also met with a number of children and young people when considering approvals and matches with family and friends' carers.

Feedback

Feedback forms are given to all social workers, applicants and foster carers attending the Panel. The Panel received **26** feedback forms for this year. **22** were from applicants and carers and **4** were from social workers. These were mainly positive about the experience of attending Panel and this was reinforced by informal feedback from other social workers and managers. Many comment that, although it is daunting to meet with such a large number of Panel members, they are quickly put at ease and enabled to participate. The practice of introducing myself and outlining the questions that will be raised prior to people coming into the room continues to be received very positively.

However, a number of people commented on having to wait for their cases to be heard. We have therefore recently reviewed our processes and agreed a more focused pre-discussion prior to the attendance of carers and social workers so that it is possible to keep to time more effectively.

One written feedback was negative about the applicants' experience at the Panel. This concerned a very difficult application where the Panel was unable to recommend their approval. The Panel has considered their feedback very carefully.

Information about the Panel

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Applicants and foster carers should have information available to them in respect of Panel members and the Agency Decision Makers in the waiting room. This is being updated in line with changing membership. A booklet is sent to them about the Panel and they have discussions with their assessing social worker or supervising social worker to prepare them for attending Panel.

Liaison with the Service

For every case presented to the Panel, I complete feedback forms for the Agency Decision Makers. This arrangement works well. We have also started to hold quarterly meetings to discuss practice issues. These are held with the Agency Decision Maker for Brighton & Hove, the Panel Chair and Agency Advisers to both the Adoption and Permanence Panel and Fostering Panel. In addition Brighton & Hove's Agency Decision Maker and the Head of Safeguarding met with Panel members over the last year and this was valued by Panel members. The Panel meets on occasion with the Head of Service, Service Manager and Practice Managers for the fostering service in Brighton & Hove to discuss developments. The Panel also meets with Barnardos' managers on occasion. A consultation was held with Panel members to obtain their views about government's proposed changes to the membership and functioning of Panels. These views were incorporated into Brighton & Hove's response in November 2010.

Reviews and training

Panel members have continued to develop their roles and responsibilities over the last year. The Agency Adviser and I met with Panel members individually over the year and completed annual appraisals. This was a very useful exercise and it reinforced people's commitment and ability to contribute to the Panel process. I also had an appraisal with the Agency Decision Maker for Brighton & Hove and the Agency Adviser. A Panel training day was held in March 2011 and this was a useful opportunity to reflect on what members bring to Panel and the work with family and friends' foster carers. It was unfortunate that not all Panel members were able to attend. It is planned to hold a training day with the Fostering Service over the next year.

5. Practice

Foster carer assessments and reviews of approval

In general the assessments and reviews presented to the Panel continue to be of a high standard. A number of Independent Social Workers have undertaken the assessments of Brighton & Hove carers and these have generally been of a good standard. All Brighton & Hove assessments are completed using the BAAF format. Barnardo's Link Plus use the format produced by the Fostering Network and these are generally of a very good standard too.

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One family approved for fostering last year did not foster for very long. This was clearly of concern to both Brighton & Hove's fostering service and to the Panel as the assessment had appeared to be very promising. It is important that the Panel and the Team are able to reflect on whether there are any lessons to be learnt for the future as ideally carers need to be able to foster with confidence and support for some time.

The Panel considered a significant number of first annual reviews of new carers and was very impressed at the work undertaken. Panel is keen that carers are invited to attend Panel to talk about their first year of fostering so that we are able to acknowledge and value their work.

The Panel dealt with one contested termination of approval over the year. It mirrored the process followed by the IRM (Independent Review Mechanism) Panel. The IRM Panel hears cases afresh where it is being proposed that carers should not be approved or that the terms of their approval should be changed. The new process allows both the carer concerned and social workers into the Panel together for individual questions and all leave the Panel meeting whilst the Panel reaches its recommendation.

One family applied for their case to be reviewed by the IRM Panel over the year.

Family and Friends' carers

The Panel's work continued to be very busy in relation to dealing with family and friends' carers and we were impressed at the high level of commitment offered. Some family and friends' carers are offering very good care in highly challenging circumstances. However some of the work remains difficult for Panel both in respect of the nature of the cases and the paperwork. There was improvement in respect of most initial reports but there were some reports which were not adequate and further information was required. In one case, approval was not agreed after further information had been gathered. The format of the reports has been improved and it allows better assessment of complex relationships and dynamics within the families concerned. Guidance to staff has clarified social workers' responsibilities in the field work and family and friends' teams. The new report format has allowed more focus on how the family and friends' carers specifically meet the needs of the child or children concerned. The Agency Adviser continues to work very hard to check the quality of reports and to advise staff of any additional information required prior to the Panel meeting.

Link Plus Carers and Contract Carers

The Panel considered the first annual reviews of 1 Contract Carer over the last year. It did not recommend approval of any new Contract Carers. Panel noted from the review that the Contract Carer was able to provide a considerable number of short breaks to disabled children and the Panel was impressed at the high level of skill and experience evidenced.

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Link Plus assessments and annual reviews have continued generally to be of high quality. However Panel noted two resignations of Link Plus carers over the last year where the carers had been recently approved and unable to foster for a reasonable length of time. Again it is important to understand why resignations have occurred early so that any lessons can be taken on board both for the Panel and staff when considering future assessments.

6. Conclusion

The organisation and functioning of the Panel has worked well over the year. It remains an effective Fostering Panel and I am looking forward to our continuing consolidation of membership and practice over the next year.

Sarah Borthwick
Independent Chair, Brighton & Hove and Barnardo's Link Plus Fostering
Panel (2 June 2011)