

Fostering Service Annual Report

May 2024

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The Fostering Service Annual Report 2023/24

Executive Summary:

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 require that the Fostering Services provides written reports on the management, outcomes, and financial state of the fostering service. This Annual Fostering Service Report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the Fostering Services in Barnet as required by statutory guidance.

For the purpose of this document, the word 'placement' and 'home' is used interchangeably throughout. Barnet recognises that these words may not be the right choice as each child will wish for the place where they live to be called something different. For some it is home, but for others home can have powerful connotations and therefore for the purpose of this report the words placement and home are both used.

This report outlines the progress that the fostering service has made over 2023/24 including securing our out of hours support service, embedding the supervision policy and Personal Development plans in practice and progressing our specific support groups. The service has retained 95% permanent staff, providing stability and continuity to the families we work with. The national challenge of recruitment of foster carers has continued throughout 2023/24, impacted by the cost of living crisis and the Ukrainian crisis, as potential carers supported the Home for Ukraine scheme.

Since 2019, approval rates of mainstream foster carers has continued to decrease, nationally by 7% and more locally in Barnet by 6%. Despite these challenges the service has remained aspirational and looked for creative solutions to support fostering households, including embedding the accessible online foster carer handbook into practice, hosting a number of successful celebration events, secured permanence for children with their long-term carers and successfully uplifted the foster carer skills fee. In this year we received 227 enquiries and approved 5 fostering households.

In response to the changes of legislation with The Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations, effective from April 2023, we have completed our Ofsted registration application, and awaiting agreement. This registration will ensure that Barnet continues to offer the Supported Lodgings option that has worked effectively for young people over the age of 16.

1. Introduction

This report provides an overview of the work of the Barnet Fostering Service for the year 2023/24 and highlights the service outcomes, quality of practice and innovations with plans to continue to improve the service.

Ensuring children and young people in the care of Barnet Family Services flourish and thrive is at the heart of Barnet's resilience-based approach to social work practice. We know that it is fundamental that children and young people in our care are placed in the best provision to meet their diverse and individual needs, as informed by our Placement Sufficiency Strategy (2024 – 2027) and Barnet's guidance document, Who We Place Where (2020).

2. Covid –19 pandemic

2023 saw the complete lifting of all restrictions in regard to the global Covid-19 pandemic and life returned to what most of us were used to. However, the passing of the pandemic signified many challenges for fostering locally and nationally, including a national shortage of carers alongside a significant reduction of enquiries nationally in parallel with 12% of current foster carers either leaving or retiring from fostering. Despite the devastating impact of Covid worldwide, the global pandemic asked us to think about the ways we combined our work / life balance, and a hybrid way of working became embedded in how we delivered services within fostering and more widely across Family Services. The pandemic also saw Barnet shift advertising to a more digital advertising recruitment strategy and this has continued with Facebook proving to be the most viewed marketing approach (analysis from enquiries), where traditional recruitment methods previously used such as newspapers and banners, are now used in conjunction with a wider social media presence.

3. Review of Objectives for 2023-24 - What have we achieved?

3.1 Aim to increase local foster care placement choice and stability for children and young people in Barnet, particularly for teenagers, parent and child and sibling groups through recruiting more carers.

- Within our placement sufficiency strategy 2020 – 2023, and based upon the then national picture, our target was to recruit an additional **15** foster carer households over this strategy period which equates to 5 households per year. This target was increased due to a national and local shortage of foster carers, however, we did not meet the new target. The previously 3 year set target of 5 for each year was met.
- The target was to recruit **5** Supported Lodgings Hosts. We successfully recruited 2 households during 2023-2024 and increased the capacity of one of our current hosts.
- We were able to maintain a consistent presence throughout the London Borough of Barnet's community both in person and via social media. 2023-2024 saw a return to more direct outreach.
- We successfully created an Events and Outreach Calendar which included the activities planned and organised by Fostering Service. This was a flexible activities calendar as items were added throughout the year (Appendix 1) which included innovative ways to attract new foster carers to Barnet.
- We sought creative solutions to placement sufficiency challenges by review each carers career progression and skills level. 3 Foster carers increased their skill level. 5 fostering household increased their approvals in order to care for more children.

- Two carers have enhanced their capacity through the use of home improvements, extensions, annex (for staying put or supported lodgings if in Young persons best interest) loft extensions.

3.2 Aim to ensure that our carers continue to enjoy being carers for Barnet and know that we appreciate them for all that they do.

- Throughout 2023-2024 we continued to review our support offers to carers. Rates were increased in line with the Department of Education. Further specific support groups were created, and the continuation of the social work led out of hours phone line was secured.
- We sought to ensure that foster carers felt valued for the contributions that they make and the role they play in our fostering community. We gathered feedback at each support group, and met quarterly with BAFCA to ensure we could hear the voice of the carers.
- We reinstated the exit interview process, to ensure that we analysis objectively what has happened when foster carers choose to resign and provided an analysis of the outcomes to improve the service.
- We reviewed placement stability by meeting the carers at each supervision and scaling the placement stability at the earliest possibility to increase our support offer and reduce the risk of carer fatigue and placement breakdowns.

3.3 Aim to continually improving our quality of Practice and ensure everyone has a voice about how to strengthen Barnet's fostering service.

- We have engaged with foster carers to seek their views on what is working well and what could be strengthened via surveys, feedback, forum's with senior management attendance, BAFCA, reviews and discussions.
- We reviewed a number of internal processes, ensuring that fostering is run efficiently and makes use of the latest technology to streamline processes for everyone in the service. This included remodelling our supervision policy and templates.
- To ensure a robust quality assurance programme is imbedded within the service to scrutinise and enhance practice of workers.
- We have continued to offer easy access to the highest quality training, learning and development opportunities both online and in the classroom.

3.4 Aim to create specialist foster care placements so that we have the right placement at the right time for our children and young people

- We have supported foster carers to evaluate their capacity.
- We have continued to promote staying put arrangements and encourage this option where it is a young person's interests to stay with their foster carers up until the age of 25 where needed.
- We have begun the process of becoming an Ofsted registered supported lodgings service and have continued to use Supported Lodgings as a placement option for young people age 16-25.
- We have increased our use of Early Permanence placements for children which has resulted in 5 children progressing to adoption providing them the stability of their forever home earlier.

4. Foster Care Fortnight 2023



Foster Care Fortnight took place from 15th -28 May 2023. Celebrating fostering and raising awareness of our recruitment campaign our program of activities included a foster carers walk through Hampsted Heath, picnic and get together. Feedback from the events indicated that foster carers felt valued to be celebrated and appreciated the opportunity to come together with each other, staff and wider partners across Family Services.



Staff and carers celebrating morning tea at Hamstead Heath



Fostering recruitment and support staff colleagues at Hamstead Heath

5. Fostering Households

As of 31st March 2024, Barnet had 67 approved mainstream foster carer households (caring for 97 children) and 19 connected carers households. The majority of Barnet fostering households are residents of Barnet with 52 (78%) foster care households living in the borough and a further 7 (10%) living in neighbouring boroughs. The remaining 8 (12%) reside both across London and outside the capital having moved away from Barnet after being approved as a foster carer. 66 (98%) of primary foster carers are female and 27 (40%) carers are of White British origin, with second largest groups being of Caribbean origin and African. The majority of Barnet's foster carers are over the age of 55, with 43% being over the age of 61.

Age Ranges	Foster Carers	%
	19	28.5%
55-60	19	28.5%
61-65	20	30%
66-70	6	9%
71-75	2	3%
76+	1	1%

Barnet has an aging fostering community and we are now seeing a number of our carers resigning after fostering for considerable lengths of time for Barnet. Additionally, we have seen some of our younger fostering families relocating outside of London and resign, wishing to settle into their new neighbourhood before consider fostering in their new location. Careful planning is done with carers ensuring there is minimal disruption for children in their care and with positive endings. For some children we have seen the foster carer or connected carer take on a permanent caring role for the child through adoption or special guardianship. In relation to connected carers, they at times only care for the children for a limited period during which social work teams implement interventions with the child's parents. For some children, they are able to return to the care of their parents and the connected carer will then be deregistered as they are only approved for specific children.

6. Supported Lodgings Hosts

As part of our placement sufficiency program, we continue to aspire to have a variety of accommodation options for young people as they transition towards independent living. As at March 31st 2024, Barnet had 6 supported lodgings hosts; 4 resided in Barnet, 1 on the border and another in another borough. 4 hosts are female and 2 male, 1 identifies as white British, 2 mixed heritage and 3 identity as Asian. 7% of young people aged between 17 and 21 are living with supported lodgings hosts.

7. Staying Put Arrangements:

Staying Put arrangements continue to be available to young people remaining with their foster carers after turning 18, reflecting a more usual type of family arrangement and supporting young people maintaining their relationships and sense of belonging in their home. As at 31st March 2024, Barnet has 11 care experienced young people who remain living with their former foster parent. The data evidences a decrease in the number of young people who remain living with their carers under Staying Put arrangements, in comparison to 2022/23, when 17 young people remained living with their foster carers post 18. This is due to a variety of factors, including young people's improved access to their permanent property.

8. Deregistration

During the period from April 2023 – March 2024 there has been a total of 13 de-registrations, (compared to 24 in 2022-2023) including both internal foster carers and connected carers, who no longer had children in their care. Foster carers or connected carers who can no longer foster for Barnet are presented to the Fostering Panel where de-registration is fully considered, and a recommendation is sent to the Agency Decision Maker for the final decision.

Of the **16** Foster Carers who were deregistered:

7 foster carers resigned

1 for other reasons

Of the **8** Connected Carers who were deregistered

3 were deregistered on account of no longer having a child in their care

2 connected carers became Special Guardians for the child in their care

9. Fostering Support and Development

Foster care is the right choice for the majority of children in our care and children of all ages need to feel secure in their relationships with adults who look after them. Barnet's resilience and secure based model is provided by high-quality foster care in a stable family-like environment acting as a protective factor in supporting and enabling children to achieve positive outcomes and thrive throughout their lives.

When we place children and young people in foster care, we focus on their needs, the quality of the care and the outcomes we wish to achieve for the child as their corporate parent. We think systematically about their relationships and networks in their local area and the support that will enable them to thrive, including aiming to place siblings together where possible.

CASE STUDY: N and G story from 2022 -2023 report along with 2023-2024 update

Faith and Bruno have been fostering for Barnet from September 2004 (19 years) with an approval criterion of short term/ permanent carers for three children/young people ages 11 -18 (males only). Prior to 2nd December 2022, they were caring for three young people; E is 15 years old, H is 16 years old, and N is 17 years old. All three children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).

N had not been living long with Faith and Bruno, when he discovered through social media his younger brother had also successfully travelled to the UK and was living in Portsmouth with foster carers. N asked his social worker to help reunite him with his brother G, and contact was arranged .

During October half term, overnight contact was arranged and G came to stay with N at Faith and Bruno's home. This not only helped the brothers in spending time together, it led Bruno and Faith to think about the brothers living together permanently. Following the overnight contact, Faith and Bruno concluded they wanted to support N and G to live together.

G's social worker in Portsmouth was also advocating for the children to live together and this was supported by N's social worker. Faith and Bruno's supervising social worker became involved, supporting the adults to identify areas of support they would require and the practicalities of having another child living in the home. Faith and Bruno are strong advocates for children, and are proactive, resilient foster carers. They had discussions with social workers for N and G and supported the transition plan for G to move to Barnet in December 2022.

In 2023 Faith and Bruno requested to be considered as long-term foster carers for both N and G. Both young people were consulted and confirmed their delight at the prospect of being able to stay with their carers throughout their childhood and into their adult years if they so wished. The children were

matched with Faith and Bruno at the matching panel, and the family celebrated becoming a permanent home for the boys, showing their love, stability and commitment to each other.

This is a great example of several professionals from two local authorities working together, listening to children, and achieving the best outcomes for them.

Barnet prioritises cultural matching and other individual factors and to ensure that the secure base relationship promotes not only children and young people's identity but their sense of security, confidence and resilience. Our goal is to find an alternative home for children where they know they are loved, kept safe and are encouraged to be the best they can be.

The fostering support team are responsible for the support and development of foster carers to ensure that they meet National Minimum Standards as underpinned by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, providing care for Barnet's children which supports their overall well-being and aspirations. The team of 9 social workers have several years of experience in front line child protection and fostering. They have attended training offered to foster carers in Attuned Therapeutic Care, PACE and working with the mental health needs of children and young people looked after, to enable them to support carers in working therapeutically.

10. Reflective Fostering Study

Over the past 3 years, supervising social workers have been involved with the Reflective Fostering programme in partnership with the Anna Freud Centre, aiming to assist foster carers to provide the best possible home and care by building strong supportive relationships through a reflective stance and to provide foster carers with practical ways to help build and maintain supportive relationships with the children in their care.

The main goal of the Reflective Fostering Study is to learn if the Programme assists in improving the emotional wellbeing of children in care aged 4–13, if the programme reduces stress and burnout among carers (both foster carers and connected carers) and if it has an impact on placement stability. The team have shared positive feedback in the tools they are using, strengthening their relationships with foster carers and ultimately the carers relationships with the children they provide a home for. This project is due to conclude in 2024.

"The reflective fostering project was an opportunity for carers and social workers to look at the needs of a child through a difference lens and being able to identify trauma in relation to the behaviour exhibited and to then be able to support that child" Fostering Team Manager

11. Training for foster carers

Our training program for foster carers has continued to develop, embedding feedback from carers whilst adhering to the National Minimum Standards guidance on training for carers. Our virtual training platform was well received during Covid, and have therefor progressed to a hybrid model to meet the needs of all carers through face to face and virtually. Training opportunities for Barnet foster carers is also accessible via the North London Consortium of which Barnet is part of along with Camden, Haringey, Hackney, Enfield and Islington.

Over the year, foster carers have accessed support from BICS (Barnet Integrated Clinical Services) through consultations and therapeutic sessions with the child in their care, enhancing the support

provided to children and carers in the home. This level of support was reduced in 2022- 2023 due to sufficiency within the BICS service but has resumed again in 2024.

A new foster carer handbook was published on Tri.x Procedures on-line May 2022. This has provided more accessibility for all carers with regular reviews and updates provided throughout each year. The feedback on this has been positive and it was agreed in 2023 that the electronic handbook would continue. The electronic handbook also includes the revised Foster Carer Charter, confirming the partnership between Barnet Family Services and the foster carers. The Charter was reviewed in April 2023 in consultation with BAFCFA, Barnet's Foster Carer association and can be accessed here: [Barnet Foster Carer Charter \(2023\)](#)

There have been changes in Barnet's Foster Carer Association (BaFCA) with a new Chairperson and changes in other roles and the committee members in 2023. BaFCA has provided a strong message of collaboration with the fostering service and support to foster carers. BaFCA have hosted a number of events for Children and Young people living in foster care throughout the year, which has been well received.

12. Supported Lodgings



Your kindness will make all the difference

"It's nice to have choices like everyone else. I didn't feel ready to live alone at 18 and it was good I had the freedom to choose when I was ready." Ahmed, 20yrs

Supported Lodgings

Do you have a spare room? You could support a young person like Ahmed on their journey to independent living.



For further information: 020 8359 6274
www.barnet.gov.uk/supportedlodging



Your kindness... makes all the difference!

"Staying in a family environment gave me the confidence I needed to believe in myself. I have now started university. I feel more confident and ready to live independently." Sarah, 19yrs

Supported Lodgings

Do you have a spare room? You could support a young person like Sarah on their journey to independent living.



For further information: 020 8359 6274
www.barnet.gov.uk/supportedlodging



Barnet's Supported Lodgings scheme was introduced in 2019 with 2 supported lodgings carers successfully recruited in the first year. Capacity increased with a further 6 being approved in 2020/21 and 5 in 2021/22. Barnet currently has 6 supported lodgings hosts.

From 28th October 2023, all providers in England offering Supported Lodgings option to 16 and 17-year-old looked-after children, and care leavers had to register with Ofsted. The change addresses long-standing concerns over the sector's lack of regulation, aiming to ensure the safety and well-being of these vulnerable individuals. Running such a service without registration is now an offence and we have commenced the registration process recognising that the Supported Lodgings offered a unique placement option for a number of young people.

The Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023 ("the Regulations") introduce four Quality Standards which all registered providers must comply with: the leadership and management standard, the protection standard, the accommodation standard and the support standard. These standards emphasise maintaining safe living conditions, effective governance, safeguarding residents, and providing personalised support plans. Further guidance on the Quality Standards were issued by

Principles for Young People

Eight principles underpin the new Regulations, focusing on young people's rights and entitlements. The principles were developed with care experienced young people. The expectation is that providers must deliver their service in a way that reflects the eight principles. The eight principles are:

1. I feel safe and secure where I live and in my wider environment.
2. My voice is respected, heard and advocated for, so I can influence the support I receive.
3. I have confidence that the adults who support me understand me, are skilled and work effectively together to best meet my needs.
4. I have my own space that I feel proud of and live in a comfortable, well maintained and stable accommodation.
5. I receive high quality, tailored support that sustains my health and well-being/
6. I have strong, trusting and meaningful relationships within my support system and can rely on the adults around me.
7. I feel empowered to learn and apply skills for independent adult living
8. I feel positive about my future and opportunities as a result of the support I receive.

13. Support groups

This year saw Barnet increase their support group offer to carers, with the development of specific support groups, including male foster carers, children with additional needs, connected carers and carers for unaccompanied and separated migrant children.

This are facilitated in conjunction with staff and foster carers.

Group	Frequency
Mainstream Support Group - Open to all Mainstream Foster carers	Once and month
Support group & Forum (attended by HOS/AHOS) - Open to all Mainstream Foster carers	Once every 3 months
Children with Additional Needs Support Group – Open to carers caring for children with additional needs	Every 2 months
Therapeutic Support Group – Open to all carers	Every 2 months
Reg 24/ Connected carers Support Group – Open to specific carer groups	Every 6 weeks
TSD Training Support group - (Foster Carer Led) – Open to carers needing assistance in completing their training Standards Folders	Twice a month
Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) Support Group – Open to carers caring for a UASC	Once a month

Barnet Foster Carers Association (BAFCA) group meetings – Open to all members of BAFCA	Once a month
Male Foster Carers Support Group - Hosted by North London Fostering and Permanence Consortium - Open to LB Barnet Male Foster Carers	Once a month

14. Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel acts in accordance with the regulatory framework provided by the Fostering Service Regulations 2011, Family and Friends Care, Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2011, and the Standards set out in the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011. The Foster Panel takes account of the legislation set out in The Children Act 1989, and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and Amendments 2015 and Guidance, volume 2, 2010.

The Fostering Panel has the responsibility for making recommendations in relation to:

- The approval of foster carers.
- The approval of family members or friends as "connected person" carers
- The first annual review of foster carers and connected persons carers
- Reviews of carers where there have been serious concerns and breach of the fostering regulations
- Investigations or reviews of carers where there are concerns regarding their fostering practice and their suitability.

Barnet Fostering Panel continues to sit remotely once a month, and membership includes councillors, social workers, care experienced young people, professionals from across the partnership and lay members. The Chair, panel advisor and senior members of the fostering service meet quarterly with the Agency Decision Maker / Operational Director for Children's Services to review trends, themes and challenges in the system, to ensure robust and appropriate decision-making systems are in place.

15. Permanency

Creating long term stability for children in care remains a priority for the fostering service. Permanency planning meetings have continued for all children who come into the care of the Local Authority or have a high chance of coming into care following birth.

In Barnet, permanence means making a long-term plan for how a child will be cared for throughout their childhood and beyond. There are a range of options for permanence, aiming to deliver good outcomes, giving children a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging to ensure future positive life chances. Permanence options for children include:

- returning home to their families;
- living with kinship carers, including special guardians;
- living with adoptive families; living with long-term foster carers;
- living in residential care.

16. Long-term fostering

Foster carers can and do look after children for many years often until adulthood and following this staying in relationship with young people, as any good parent. Long term fostering is a likely care plan for older children coming into care, where returning to their birth family network is not safe and where adoption is no longer an option available to them, likely due to their older age or presenting needs. While Foster carers never have parental responsibility for a child that they care for, the intention of long-term fostering is for a child to claim their carers as theirs, and where a child or sibling group of children will live in a stable, long-term care arrangement, much like a birth family.

Long-term fostering has a formal status as a permanence option for looked after children. While Barnet continues to hold joint parental responsibility with the child's parent, foster carers have greater authority to make decisions on behalf of the child and, if all parties are in agreement, meet less frequently with social workers. These changes were made in 2015 with the aim to provide better stability and a better sense of 'normal' family life for a looked after child.

12 children were successfully matched with their foster carers during 2023-2024 through the matching tracker panel. Barnet's matching panel retains a decision-making function, considering the care plan for a child or children and endorsing suitable and appropriate matches between children and their carers.

17. Recruitment and Assessment

The Fostering Recruitment Team are involved with prospective carers from the point of initial enquiry, until they are formally presented to the Fostering Panel for approval, after which their approval as foster carers is ratified by the Agency Decision Maker. Once approved, fostering households are allocated a supervising social worker in the Fostering Support Team, who will then oversee their development as carers, provide them with regular supervision and support them in their care of Barnet's looked after children.

Barnet's placement transformation programme is underpinned by developing our in-house offer for foster carers and supported lodgings hosts. As part of this programme, the fostering service have undergone a review focusing on a needs-led analysis of the service. The results of this analysis has enabled us to implement systemic changes to how we deliver services across fostering, utilising virtual working mechanism such as the continuation of virtual fostering panels and progressing our online social media presence through social media platforms as both a recruitment tool and a support service. Alongside this, we returned to in person events in local supermarkets, shopping centres, Library's and coffee shops, engaging with the public, forging connection and maintaining a presence in Barnet's neighbourhoods.

17.1 Enquiries & Approvals

Our ambitions to secure more foster homes for Barnet's looked after children encouraged us set the target of 15 Fostering households and 15 supported lodgings household across the 3 financial years of 2020-2024.

The below table illustrates the decrease in enquiries pre- and post-pandemic.

Enquiries	Total
2019/20	201
2020/21	168
2021/22	121

2022/23	169
2023/24	227

Table 1: Barnet Fostering Enquiries 2019 - 2024

Although lower levels of enquiries were received from prospective fostering households during 2021-22, the proportion of those enquiries converting into applications was at an all-time high at 9%. Barnet’s conversion rate from enquiries to approval increased from 3.98% in 2019/2020 to 8.92% in 2020/2021, with the approval of 16 households, and a further improvement in 2021/22 to 9% conversion rate whereby 11 fostering households were approved. This increased significantly in 2022-2023 with a conversion rate of 11.83%.

Barnet’s enquiries to approval ratio is similar to national figures, as noted in Ofsted’s transparency data: Recruitment and retention in mainstream fostering (March 2024); ‘In the year ending March 2023, there were 125,195 initial enquiries from mainstream fostering households. This was 9% lower than the previous year (2021 – 2022) and 2% lower than 2018 – 2019. The number of initial enquiries peaked in the pandemic year 2020 – 2021, when it reached 160,635. This year, 6% of the 125,195 initial enquiries to become a foster carer resulted in an application. This proportion has remained between 6% and 8% on initial enquiries since 2018 – 2019.

Through the use of creative and dynamic approaches on social media platforms in parallel with usual campaigns and increased outreach activities, we recruited 5 carer households in 2023-24. This low number reflects the **downward trend** of applications for mainstream fostering across the last 5 years. The annual Fostering in England statistics highlight the huge pressures currently facing foster care and the urgent need for new foster carers. As the Fostering Network notes, ‘Numbers are continuing to decline against a backdrop of record numbers of children in need of fostering families’. (November 2023).

17.2 Analysis

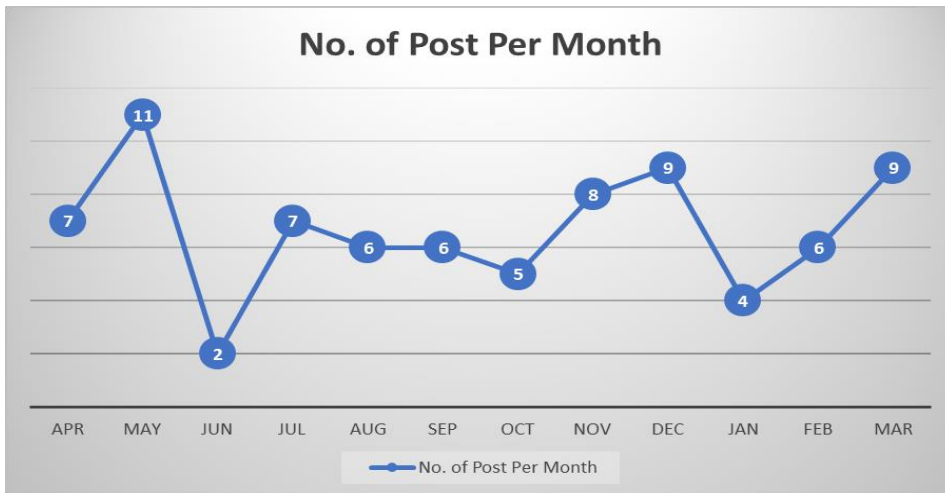
Since the reduction in the numbers of enquires due to COVID we have seen a steady increase in the numbers of enquiries with the re-introduction of face to face outreach activities and continued social media and digital advertising. We can see that both approaches have been effective and we have had a total of 227 enquiries: 29 of these via outreach activities and 35 via our website. We have increased our offline marketing activity to accommodate the shortfall lost because of iOS, Facebook and the pandemic. We have seen an increase in the number of enquiries, which have now returned to pre pandemic levels.

Data from April 2023 - March 2024				
Source of Enquiry	No. of Enquiry	Screening/IV	STAGE 2	APPROVED
Bus Stop Ad	2	0	0	0
Consortium	1	0	0	0
Facebook	101	1	1	0
Internal Comms	8	5	3	1
Leaflet	6	0	0	0
Outreach	5	2	1	0
Poster	8	3	1	1

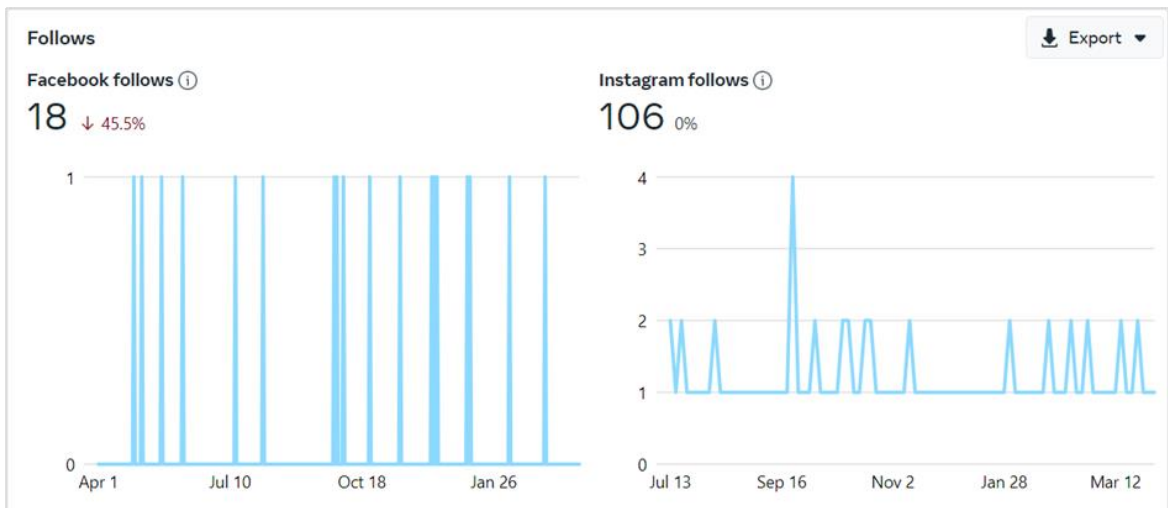
Previously enquired	4	2	4	1
Publication	8	0	0	0
Referral	13	2	0	2
Search Engine	7	1	0	0
Website	35	6	9	0
WOM	16	3	2	0
Others	13	0	0	0
Grand Total	227	25	21	5

17.3 Facebook and Instagram

A Facebook leads campaign was launched at the end of June 2023, with satisfactory results of 101 enquiries. Feedback from individuals who made these enquiries indicated that the campaign was not clear, as prospective foster carers understood this to be a job in a residential unit rather than their own home. In response, plans are underway to amend the campaign with specific emphasis on 'caring for a child or teenager in your home'. Clear communication about the purpose and nature of fostering can help set accurate expectations and encourage potential foster carers.

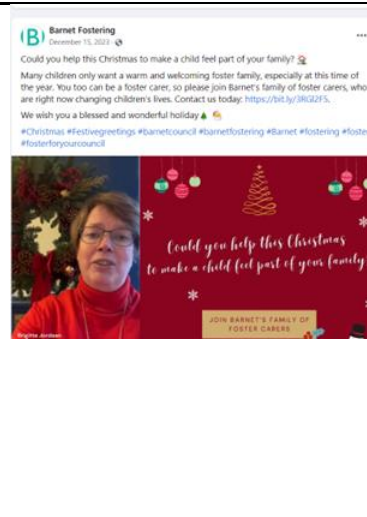




In 2023-2024, we gained 18 new followers on Facebook, which was a 45.5% drop compared to 2022. Meanwhile, we had 106 new followers on Instagram. We suggest asking people to like our Facebook page and follow us on Instagram during outreach events.



The number of post reach, post interactions, and link clicks has increased; post reach has increased by 67.7%, post interactions, including comments increased by 35.9%, and link clicks by 2.1K%. These results were driven by the steady number of Facebook posts from Q3-Q4 2023 to Q1 2024. The launch of 'Any Of Us' fostering film in September, along with the promotion of other business as usual campaigns, helped to drive awareness towards Barnet Fostering.

17.4 Post Performance

Organic Posts *Posts without ad boosting		
#1) Christmas greeting video	#2) Information session – Feb	#3) Siblings Campaign
		
Impression: 432 Reach: 381 Interactions: 9	Impression: 367 Reach: 306 Interactions: 6	Impression: 311 Reach: 265 Interactions: 16

In 2023-2024, the top-performing organic post was a Christmas greetings video featuring the Director in December 2023, followed by an Information session post in February 2024 and the Siblings campaign in November 2023. Sharing this content on the council's Facebook page significantly amplified the impressions and reach of this video post. An emotional approach is particularly effective during the festive season.

Website:

There has been an increase (35) in enquiries from [Barnet's fostering website](#). Plans are underway to update the webpage layout to direct prospective carers to the pages they are interested in. Alongside this, we are updating the content for Supported Lodgings and sibling groups to provide visitors with information regarding different types of fostering ensuing we are identifying the range and need of fostering.

Google Ads:

Google ads had been suspended since September 2023 with the intention to review key words and ad copies with the corporate communication team. We expect to resume Google ads in summer 2024.

Links to Barnet fostering webpage remains in place with majority of Facebook posts, increasing traffic to the site.

Print:

We advertised again took out print advertisement in the local Barnet First Magazine. This has proven to be a promising platform to engage with Barnet residents, resulting in 8 enquiries. We intend to continue advertising in the magazine in 2024/2025.

18. Campaigns

18.1 Staff Referral Program:

In October 2023, the staff referral program was relaunched allowing staff to earn a £2,000 bonus when referring friends or family to become foster carers. The campaign was promoted across the Council via email and presentations to team meetings (8) and attendance at the regular Director of Children Services briefings. We received 15 enquiries from staff referrals. The Internal Fostering Friendly Employers' campaign will continue in 2024 raising awareness and encourage members of staff to foster for Barnet through internal communications and digital resources such as Team Barnet, Yammer, Viva Engage, and Grapevine.

Estimates from the Department for Education (2023) suggest that prospective foster cares can take between 2 to 5 years from making the initial enquiry to becoming an approved foster carer with a looked after child in their home. Becoming a foster carer continues to be a significant decision made by the individual, and it is not unusual that an individual will make the first enquiry to casually explore the option, rather than progress to an assessment. Other reasons whereby an enquiry does not progress is due to lack of space in the home, financial instability and lack of understanding regarding the legislative requirements of fostering, such as written logs and regular in person supervision with a supervising social worker. For individuals needing additional time to reflect and consider, the Fostering Recruitment Team remain in contact, sending out regular information regarding outreach activities alongside the mailout of the regular Fostering Newsletter.

18.2 Campaigns



18.3 Film Launch

In July 2022 we launched the fostering film “The Difference is You!” to great success and have continued to promote the film throughout 2023/2024 with over 38,000 views to date. [The Difference is You](#) highlights the fact that every 20 minutes another child in the UK becomes in need of a foster family and confirms Barnet’s quest to provide the best possible care for our looked after children. Foster care transforms lives and “The Difference is You”.



Continuing with our film and television success, in September 2023 we collaborated with over 80 other local authorities launching the national fostering film, [Any of Us](#), a powerful short film encouraging people to consider becoming foster carers for their local authority. 'Any of Us' has had over 32,000 views on You Tube, and won Best collaboration and Best Creative Comms at the comms2point0 industry awards, recognising excellence in public sector communication. Judges feedback noted:

"The excellent collaboration between so many councils just goes to show what can be achieved through our industry working together to address common challenges" (best collaboration)

"Exactly the kind of campaign the public sector needs right now. It combined precious resources in order to secure a better chance of success for everyone who collaborated and boosted by smart targeting and a beautifully shot video. Well done everyone" (best creative comms)

The Difference is You:

https://youtu.be/bPuskJoM3do?si=8oAfFCiAXCWB_1E4

Any of Us – Barnet version:

<https://youtu.be/-lTMyU3SUt0?si=vbFH-jDff4zRk5Ku>

18.4 Foster care Friendly employer



Fostering Friendly is The Fostering Network's programme to encourage employers to support fostering, and in particular, foster carers. In 2023 we were successfully accredited as a Fostering friendly employer with the introduction of our Fostering Friendly policy. According to the Fostering Network 2022 approximately 40% of foster carers work and as part of Barnet's accreditation, we secured agreement whereby any employees who are foster carers can receive up to an additional 10 days annual leave to support them in their caring role.

A campaign took place within the corporate parenting service which received 15 responses of which 3 staff members applied, 2 of which have begun the assessment process to become Barnet Foster Carers.