



Supplementary: Corporate Parenting Committee

Thursday 27 July 2017 at 5.00 pm

Board Room 2 - Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way,
Wembley HA9 0FJ

Membership:

Members

Councillors:

M Patel (Chair)
Conneely
Hossain
Thomas
Warren

Substitute Members

Councillors:

S Choudhary, Crane, Dixon and
Hoda-Benn

For further information contact: Bryony Gibbs, Governance Officer
020 8937 1355, bryony.gibbs@brent.gov.uk

For electronic copies of minutes, reports and agendas, and to be alerted when the minutes of this meeting have been published visit:

www.brent.gov.uk/committees

The press and public are welcome to attend this meeting.

Notes for Members - Declarations of Interest:

If a Member is aware they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest* in an item of business, they must declare its existence and nature at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent and must leave the room without participating in discussion of the item.

If a Member is aware they have a Personal Interest** in an item of business, they must declare its existence and nature at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent.

If the Personal Interest is also a Prejudicial Interest (i.e. it affects a financial position or relates to determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission, or registration) then (unless an exception at 14(2) of the Members Code applies), after disclosing the interest to the meeting the Member must leave the room without participating in discussion of the item, except that they may first make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to the matter, provided that the public are allowed to attend the meeting for those purposes.

*Disclosable Pecuniary Interests:

- (a) **Employment, etc.** - Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit gain.
- (b) **Sponsorship** - Any payment or other financial benefit in respect expenses in carrying out duties as a member, or of election; including from a trade union.
- (c) **Contracts** - Any current contract for goods, services or works, between the Councillors or their partner (or a body in which one has a beneficial interest) and the council.
- (d) **Land** - Any beneficial interest in land which is within the council's area.
- (e) **Licences** - Any licence to occupy land in the council's area for a month or longer.
- (f) **Corporate tenancies** - Any tenancy between the council and a body in which the Councillor or their partner have a beneficial interest.
- (g) **Securities** - Any beneficial interest in securities of a body which has a place of business or land in the council's area, if the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body or of any one class of its issued share capital.

**Personal Interests:

The business relates to or affects:

(a) Anybody of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management, and:

- To which you are appointed by the council;
- which exercises functions of a public nature;
- which is directed is to charitable purposes;
- whose principal purposes include the influence of public opinion or policy (including a political party of trade union).

(b) The interests a of a person from whom you have received gifts or hospitality of at least £50 as a member in the municipal year;

or

A decision in relation to that business might reasonably be regarded as affecting, to a greater extent than the majority of other council tax payers, ratepayers or inhabitants of the electoral ward affected by the decision, the well-being or financial position of:

- You yourself;
- a member of your family or your friend or any person with whom you have a close association or any person or body who employs or has appointed any of these or in whom they have a beneficial interest in a class of securities exceeding the nominal value of £25,000, or any firm in which they are a partner, or any company of which they are a director
- any body of a type described in (a) above.

Agenda

Introductions, if appropriate.

Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members.

Item	Page
7 Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report 1st April - 30th June 2017	9 - 20

The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011). The report covers the first quarter of this reporting year.

8 Annual Corporate Parenting Report 2016-2017	21 - 76
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The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2011) require Local Authorities to provide an annual report about the outcomes for Looked After Children (LAC) which should be presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee. This report fulfils that requirement, providing a profile of Brent's looked after children and care leavers during 2016-2017 and reporting to the committee on work completed, highlighting strengths and areas for development in supporting looked after children and care leavers in Brent.

9 Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017	77 - 92
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This report outlines the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) on quality assuring and improving services for children in care. It also contains quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO provision in Brent as required by statutory guidance. This report includes quotations gathered from a 'Bright Spots' survey carried out with looked after children and consultation with the Care in Action, Brent's Children in Care Council.

Date of the next meeting: Tuesday 24 October 2017



- Please remember to set your mobile phone to silent during the meeting.
- The meeting room is accessible by lift and seats will be provided for members of the public.

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 <p>Brent</p>	<p>Corporate Parenting Committee 27th July 2017</p> <p>Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</p>
<p>Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report 1st April – 30th June 2017</p>	

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).
- 1.2 The report covers the first quarter of this reporting year.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review, comment on and question the contents of this report. This is to provide evidence that the management of the fostering service is being monitored and challenged in order to promote good outcomes for children.

3.0 Service Values

- 3.1 The in-house fostering function is positioned within the LAC and Permanency Service of the Children and Young People's Directorate. The vision for the service as set out in the 2017-18 service plan is that:
- We will increase good quality local placements for children by securing more in-house fostering placements. We will recruit, assess and approve new foster carers to accommodate 10 placements by the end of September 2017 and an additional 10 placements by March 2018.
 - There will be a decrease in the number of resignations/deregistrations of foster carers as a result of appropriate support and well-established, positive relationships with foster carers.

- Placements will be well matched to children's individual needs. The best foster carers will be recruited for our children.
- Diversity needs including disability, race, religion, language and culture will always be considered when placing a child.
- Children will be found permanent families without delay and within their extended family network where appropriate.

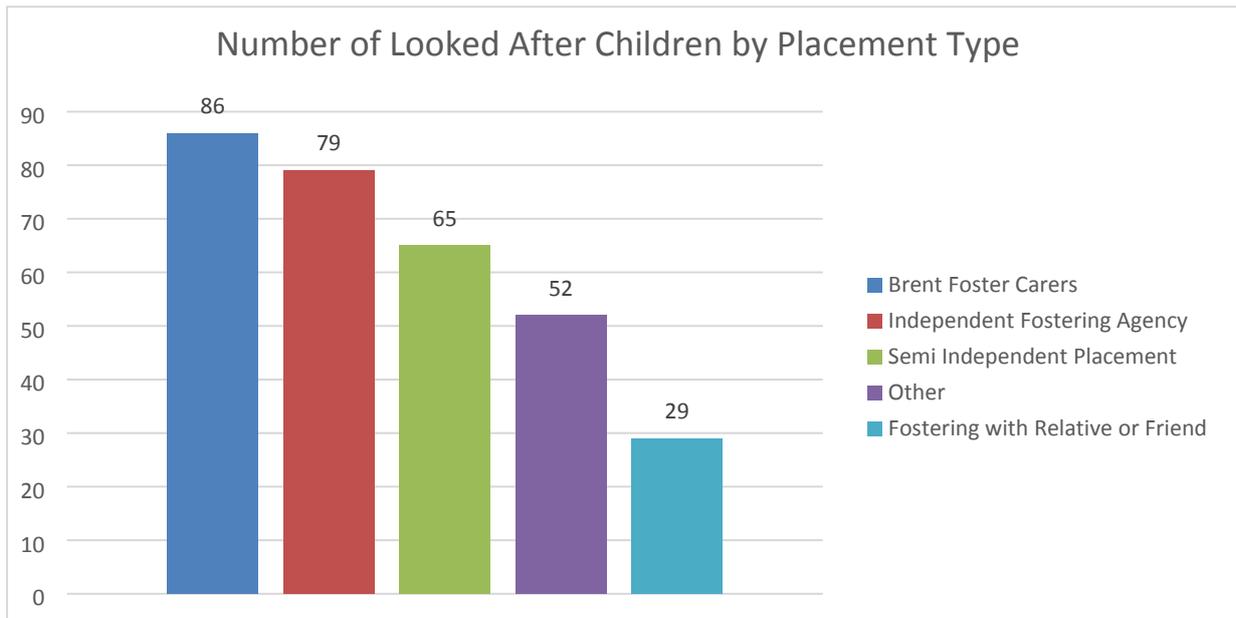
4.0 Staffing Arrangements

- 4.1 Staffing arrangements for fostering remain unchanged compared to the last reporting year. The primary in-house fostering functions are distributed across two teams:
- The recruitment and assessment of foster carers is completed within the Placements Assessment and Recruitment Team.
 - The ongoing support and supervision of foster carers is the responsibility of the Fostering Support Team.
- 4.2 The Fostering Panel Advisor, Fostering Reviewing Officer and Fostering Development Co-ordinator roles are also managed within the LAC and Permanency Service and are line managed separately from the two operational teams in order to provide appropriate challenge within the service.

5.0 Placement Activity

- 5.1 The corporate performance targets for this year relating to fostering remain broadly similar to last year:
- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 35%.
 - Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15%
 - Percentage of looked after children placed in Independent Fostering Agencies – annual target 25%.
 - Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 75%
- 5.2 The overall LAC population has reduced to 311 as at 30th June 2017 compared to 329 as at the 31st of March 2017, this is a 5.5% reduction.

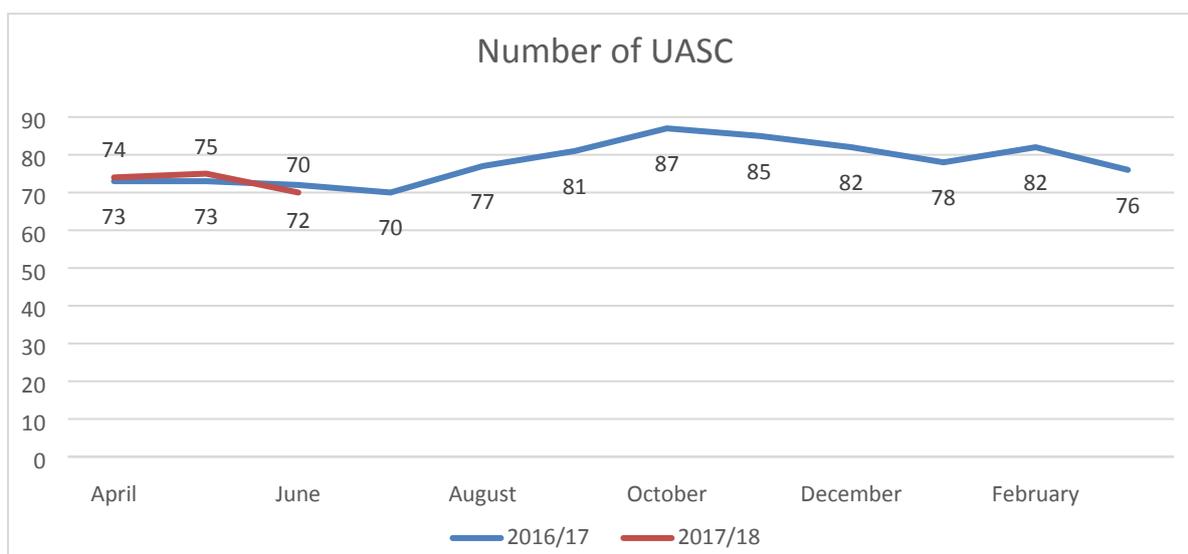
As of the 30th June 2017:



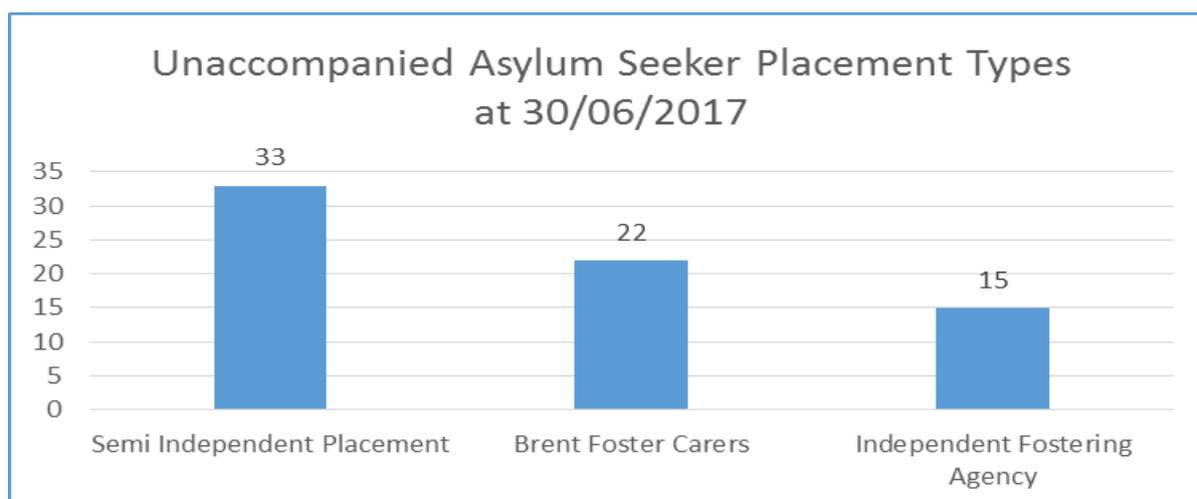
Please note **'other'** includes Children's homes (including secure), residential schools, hospitals, placement with parents, other local authorities and placed for adoption with placement order not with current foster carer.

- 86 children were placed with Brent foster carers. This represents 27.7% of total looked after children.
- 79 children were placed with IFAs. This is 25.4% of total looked after children.
- There are 65 looked after children in Semi Independent accommodation (Residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations) as at 30/06/17, which represents 20.9% of all looked after children
- 29 children were placed with a relative or family friend on a fostering basis. This is 9.3% of total looked after children as at 30/06/17.
- 194 looked after children were living within a fostering setting at 30/06/17. This is 62.4% of total looked after children. The lower percentage is explained due to a reduction in the overall number of looked after children and an increase in the number and proportion of our looked after children aged over 16 years' old. It is a significant challenge to identify foster placements to accommodate much older teenage young people.

5.3 The most recent reporting period has seen a plateau reached in the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) approaching the borough for support.



5.4 As of 30/06/17 there were 70 UASC, compared to 72 as at 30/06/2016. The 70 UASC represents 22.5% of all LAC as at 30/06/2017. This percentage is higher as compared to the same period last year (20.5%) due a decline in the overall number of Looked After Children. 33 UASC are placed in semi-independent accommodation and 37 are placed in foster care.



6.0 Recruitment and Assessment Activity

6.1 The fostering service carried out 7 recruitment focused activities within the reporting period with the aim of raising awareness of fostering and encouraging potential foster carers to come forward within the Brent community. During this quarter our main presence was at our fostering fortnight outreach events with stalls on Wembley and Kilburn High Roads as well as within the Civic Centre reception area.

6.2 We have continued holding the monthly information evenings at the Civic Centre for members of the public to find out more about the fostering role and to enable us to determine whether an individual or family has the potential to become a carer for Brent.

6.3 The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 59 enquiries for fostering. These enquiries resulted in 8 initial visits. As of the 30th June 2017 there were 12 formal assessments in process under the 2-stage fostering assessment.

6.4 The target for the service in 2017-18 is to recruit 20 fostering placements within the reporting year; with a net growth of 5 fostering households once carer resignations and terminations of approval are taken into account. We have already achieved 5 new fostering approvals (with 6 potential fostering placements) in the first quarter of 2017-18 and another 5 prospective fostering households are booked into panel for approval within the months of July and September 2017. The target set for this reporting period (quarter 1) has been met.

7.0 Fostering Panel

7.1 The fostering service has a Fostering Panel constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The service maintains a diverse and highly experienced central list of Panel members that includes an elected member. The panel chair and vice chair are independent people with professional experience of fostering and panel members include those with personal experience of both sides of the fostering system. Demand requires three panels to be held every two months.

7.2 The functions of the Fostering Panel are to consider:

- Each application and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a Foster Carer, Connected Person(s) (Family and Friends Foster Carer) and the terms of their approval.
- The first annual review of each approved carer and any other review as requested by the fostering service, including those of a Standards of Care issue and those exploring any allegations made.
- The termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a Foster Carer.

The panel makes recommendations to the fostering service on each of the cases presented and these recommendations are then referred to the Agency Decision Maker, who is the Head of Service, Looked after Children and Permanency, who makes the final decision.

7.3 During the period 1st April – 30th June 2017, 4 panels were held with 16 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:

- 5 new fostering households were recommended for approval;
- 1 prospective fostering household was found unsuitable to foster;
- 6 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
- 1 fostering household was put on hold pending additional work following Standards of Care concerns;

- 1 fostering household was put on hold pending a risk assessment following an allegation;
- 1 foster carer's suitability to foster was terminated due to sudden ill health;
- 1 fostering household resigned due to a change in circumstances (no spare room left for fostering).

All of the recommendations made to the Agency Decision Maker were ratified.

7.4 The panel has a quality assurance role, monitoring the standard of reports presented to it and the timeliness of decisions for children. This information is then taken back to the Agency Decision Maker. Feedback is also gathered from applicants and social workers attending panel. This data is analysed by the Agency Advisor and Agency Decision Maker at quarterly meetings and any positives, issues or concerns are relayed to the relevant manager with challenge questions being presented for follow up where necessary.

8.0 Training and Support to Foster Carers.

8.1 As part of our Learning and Development offer to foster carers we provide a range of mandatory and identified training courses including sessions in evenings and at weekends.

8.2 During the period 1st April to 30th June 2017, 16 individual training courses were offered providing 126 training spaces. Where there are attendance concerns at training this is followed up by Supervising Social Workers, the Fostering Reviewing Officer and the Fostering Panel.

8.3 The Fostering Development Co-ordinator role is currently vacant. This is putting some additional pressure on the service, but a process is underway to recruit a replacement.

9.0 Monitoring Arrangements

9.1 All foster carers, regardless of the length of their approval with Brent must have an annual review of their arrangements. The Fostering Reviewing Officer completed 34 annual reviews out of a possible 39 during this period. Of those uncompleted:

- 3 were cancelled by the Fostering Service due to further work being required in two cases and another being due to staff absence;
- 2 were cancelled by foster carers due to other commitments.

These reviews have all been re-scheduled.

9.2 During the reporting period there was one formal allegation made against a fostering household. This was investigated through the Local Authority Designated Officer

(LADO) process and has been concluded. The carer's annual review has been brought forward, so the matter remains unresolved.

- 9.3 There were three new Standard of Care meetings held during this quarter. Concerns was raised against one carer due to not working in partnership and not following directions in relation to the care plan; one carer had concerns raised around communication and understanding her role; and one carer demonstrated a lack of understanding of her role and was not available to support the young person's emotional needs. All of these concerns remain under review.

10.0 Future Developments

- 10.1 A Social Pedagogue has been recruited and will commence in role within the next month. The job description is attached. As set out in last quarterly report, the focus of their work will be to support the development of social pedagogical thinking and practice with those staff who have undertaken previous training and to undertake direct work with Brent fostering households and Looked after Children, modelling a social pedagogic approach to support carers to effect positive change. This will mean more focused work with young people who have challenging behaviour, which will in the long-term improve placement stability. In addition they will be working closely with the Fostering Manager, Operational Managers, Principal Social Worker and Learning and Development Team to promote and embed social pedagogical practice.
- 10.2 As part of our 2017 Fostering Fortnight (beginning 8th May) campaign we held a Brent schools' art competition which was a real success with a number of Brent schools participating. The winner of the competition, a pupil from Christ Church Primary School had a visit from Ledley King (Tottenham Hotspur) and our Brent foster carer Shabana Fazaldin, at a whole school assembly where she received her Tottenham Hotspur prize. The winning entry has been used in our current JCDecaux marketing campaign.

Some of our staff also took part in a photo shoot with well-known football players from Spurs that helped our social media presence during this campaign.

Appendices / Links

- (i) Brent's 'Make a Difference' Fostering Campaign:
<https://www.brent.gov.uk/services-for-residents/children-and-family-support/fostering/make-a-difference/>
- (ii) Social Pedagogue Job Description

Contact Officer

Onder Beter,
Head of Service, LAC & Permanency.
Brent Civic Centre
Engineers Way
Wembley, Middlesex HA9 0FJ.
Tel: 020 8937 1228
Onder.beter@brent.gov.uk

GAIL TOLLEY

Strategic Director of Children and Young People

	Job Title	Social Pedagogue
	Department	Children and Young People
	Section	Children’s Social Care – Placements
	Grade	PO1 – Salary: £31,683 - £36,924
	Reports to	Fostering Support Team Manager
	Staffing Responsibility	None
	Organisation	<i>Please attach organisation structure</i>

Job Purpose:

1. To support the development of social pedagogical thinking and practice with those staff who have undertaken previous training.
2. To undertake direct work with Brent fostering households and Looked after Children, modelling a social pedagogic approach to support carers to affect positive change.
3. To support sustainable change within fostering households based on a social pedagogical way of working and to support organisational development, playing an active role in the wider community of social pedagogy at local, regional and national levels.
4. To provide direction and support in the development of social pedagogy in the service by undertaking direct work in the service area in the merits of social pedagogy.
5. To work closely with the Fostering Manager, Operational Managers and Learning and Development Team. Will have professional supervision and support from an advanced practitioner in the long-term care planning team.
6. To contribute to the strategic and operational provision for social pedagogy to be embedded in to the service area.

Principal Accountabilities and Responsibilities:

The social pedagogue must build and maintain relationships with key partners, both within the Local Authority and external agencies, to improve outcomes for children.

1. To undertake direct social pedagogical work with fostering households to affect positive change in parenting.
2. To undertake mentoring/direct social pedagogical work with children and young people in care as well as foster carers and social care staff to achieve positive outcomes.

3. To ensure that case file records of work undertaken are regularly completed and stored on the Council's electronic recording system.
4. To support and lead workshops and conferences relevant to the subject of social pedagogy.
5. To produce a brief quarterly report of activity undertaken, outcomes of placements, needs assessments informed by the priorities of the service.
6. To provide quarterly reports on progress and learning of those children/young people placed in foster placement/other provision, where the foster carers/carer have been trained in social pedagogy. This work will include auditing case records, interviewing social workers, carers, children and young people and advising on progress and learning needs from these placements.
7. To attend meetings relating to foster carers and looked after children as required.
8. To maintain detailed and specialist knowledge in the area of social pedagogy and to disseminate good practice examples across Children and Young People's Services.
9. To build and maintain effective working relationships with foster carers, children, social workers and managers.
10. To represent the service at external meetings where required.
11. To contribute towards the development of policies and procedures as they relate to social pedagogy within the Local Authority.
12. To keep up to date with any changes to the national and local fostering, adoption and permanency context and to share this information with the wider service. This will include knowledge and understanding of the 'Signs of Safety' approach to social work practice. This may include the delivery of training on identified courses related to fostering.
13. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and all employees are required to act in such a way that at all times safeguards the health and well-being of children and vulnerable adults.
14. To carry out duties with due regard to the Council's Customer Care, Equal Opportunities, Information Governance, Data Protection and Health and Safety policies and procedures.
15. To undertake any other duties commensurate with the general level of responsibility of this post.

DBS Status	Enhanced and barred from working with children
Politically Restricted	No

Person Specification

Job Knowledge, Skills & Experience:

Specify the qualifications, experience, skills and abilities required.

Professional Experience/Knowledge

All criteria are essential

Knowledge and Qualifications:

- Social Work registration with the HCPC is not required
- Social Pedagogy qualification
- Evidence of relevant post-qualifying training
- Broad knowledge of service delivery within a fostering and/or Looked After Children context and an understanding of the national/local policy environment.

Experience:

- Significant experience as a social pedagogue within a fostering/looked after children or related setting.
- Of managing challenging relationships in a constructive and effective manner.
- Responding creatively and flexibly to rapidly changing work contexts
- Of contributing to the development of new and existing services within a social care setting.
- Of producing short reports that can analyse and evaluate the impact of work being undertaken.

Skills and Abilities:

- Ability to speak and write effectively in English.
- Ability to work independently.
- Ability to work in partnership with other professionals within services and across disciplines.
- A passion for social pedagogic practice, an ability to articulate social pedagogic theory and enable learning and social pedagogic practice for others
- An ability to balance the need for sensitivity and determination in situations of change
- To be articulate and effective in communicating verbally and in writing at a variety of levels and with a range of people within sometimes large and complex hierarchical organisations
- To work creatively and constructively with both determination and empathy in challenging situations
- To use IT packages effectively.

Special Requirements

- Work occasionally outside of office hours.
- Registered with the Health and Care Professions Council for admittance to the Social Care Register.
- Satisfactory compliance with an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check.

 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 27 th July 2017 Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People
For Action	Wards Affected: All
Annual Corporate Parenting Report 2016-2017	

1.0 Summary

1.1 The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010) require Local Authorities to provide an annual report about the outcomes for Looked After Children (LAC) which should be presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee or local equivalent. This report fulfils that requirement, providing a profile of Brent's looked after children and care leavers during 2016-2017 and reporting to the committee on work completed, highlighting strengths and areas for development in supporting looked after children and care leavers in Brent.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review and comment on the contents of this report. This is to provide evidence, alongside other reporting and scrutiny requirements, that the care of Brent's Looked After Children is appropriately monitored.

3.0 Corporate Parenting

3.1 The concept of Corporate Parenting was introduced in The Children Act 2004, placing collective responsibility on local authorities to achieve good parenting outcomes for all children in public care. 'Corporate Parent' defines the collective responsibility of the Local Authority, elected members, employees and partner agencies to provide the best possible care for Looked After Children and care leavers. Elected members in Brent carry out this duty through:

1. Weekly meetings between the Lead Member for Children and Young People, the Strategic Director for Children and Young People and other senior staff within the Local Authority as appropriate.
2. Regular meetings between representatives of Care in Action (CIA; Brent's Children in Care Council), with the Lead Member, Strategic Director, and Operational Directors.
3. Attendance of CIA representatives at the Corporate Parenting Committee.
4. The Corporate Parenting Committee, chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Young People with cross party Member representation where service performance is scrutinised.

4.0 Corporate Parenting Committee 2016-2017

4.1 In the year 2016-2017 the Corporate Parenting Committee provided scrutiny and challenge as follows:

- a. The Committee Members heard from Care in Action (CIA) representatives about the work they undertook. Members provided challenge following matters raised by CIA in order to promote good outcomes for LAC and care leavers. The full report on CIA and participation has been provided at appendix 1 to this report.
- b. Management of both the Adoption and Fostering Services has been monitored by Members in order to promote good outcomes for children. Strengths and areas for improvement were considered and commented on. Statutory fostering reports are considered on a quarterly basis. Statutory adoption service reports are considered on a 6-monthly basis.
- c. In February 2017, a presentation was made by the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) regarding Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and how it is proposed to be re-configured. Members provided scrutiny regarding the emotional and mental health services available to our LAC and care leavers.
- d. In October 2016, the Annual Independent Reviewing Officer Report was presented to the Committee, reporting on progress throughout the year and suggestions going forward. Members commented on progress and provided scrutiny on the IRO role in achieving good outcomes for LAC.
- e. The Brent Virtual School presented an Annual Report of Educational Outcomes in February 2017. Members commented on the work being undertaken and challenged performance around educational

outcomes, school attendance for LAC and work undertaken with care leavers.

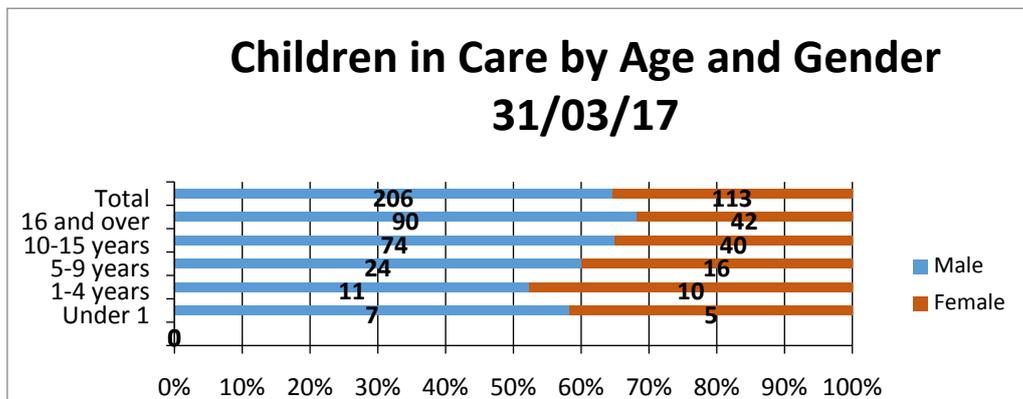
5.0 Participation of children and young people, and care leavers

- 5.1. Children and young people are encouraged and supported to participate in all decisions made regarding their lives. Social workers visit children regularly at their placements and record their wishes and feelings clearly on their electronic case files. Children and young people are encouraged to attend their LAC Reviews and Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings and to have active involvement in their care or pathway plans.
- 5.2. CIA promotes participation and encourages young people to take an active part in shaping the services they use in order to make improvements and respond to their needs. The work of the Participation Officers is to provide a forum for children and young people in care and care leavers to share their views and to ensure that service improvements are linked directly to young people's feedback.
- 5.3. An annual report on the participation and engagement with LAC and care leavers during 2016/17 is attached to this report at Appendix 1.

6.0 Profile of Looked After Children and care leavers

- 6.1. As of 31st March 2017 there were 319 Looked After Children in Brent, representing a rate of 43.1 LAC per 10,000 child population in 2016/17. This contrasts with 335 children at 31st March 2016, a rate of 45.3 children per 10,000 population. This contrasts with the rate for our statistical neighbours of 54 children per 10,000 population. If Brent were to look after a similar number of LAC as statistical neighbours an additional 81 children would be in care. The national rate for LAC has consistently been 60 per 10,000 population. If Brent were to look after a similar number of LAC as the national average an additional 125 children would be in care. Over the last four years the number of looked after children in Brent has steadily reduced from 345 (March 2013) to 319 (March 2017). The majority of Brent's statistical neighbours have also seen a decrease in LAC although across England there has been a rise in LAC over the same period. There is no currently researched available explanation to detail the reasons why this trend within Brent and statistical neighbour authorities differs from the national picture. The introduction and further embedding since 2014 of the 'Signs of Safety' approach to social work practice has strengthened work with families and enabled risk to be managed more effectively. This is likely to have made a contribution to more children remaining in the care of their families.

6.2. The chart below shows looked after children on 31st March 2017 by age group:



6.3. 43% of the care population in Brent is aged over 16 years old, with 66% being over 13 years' old. This reflects a growing older age group of LAC; in 2015 only 61% of the care population were over 13 years' old.

6.4. As at 31/03/17, 64.5% of Brent's care population were male, compared to 61% at the same time in 2016. For Brent's statistical neighbours 56% of LAC were male, the same as the national average. One reason for this variance can be explained in the high number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), of whom the vast majority are male.

6.5. At 31/3/17, Brent had 74 UASC compared to 65 the same point in 2016. This represents 23% of the total Brent LAC population. Brent's UASC numbers have been increasing since 31/03/13 when there were only 25 UASC in Brent.

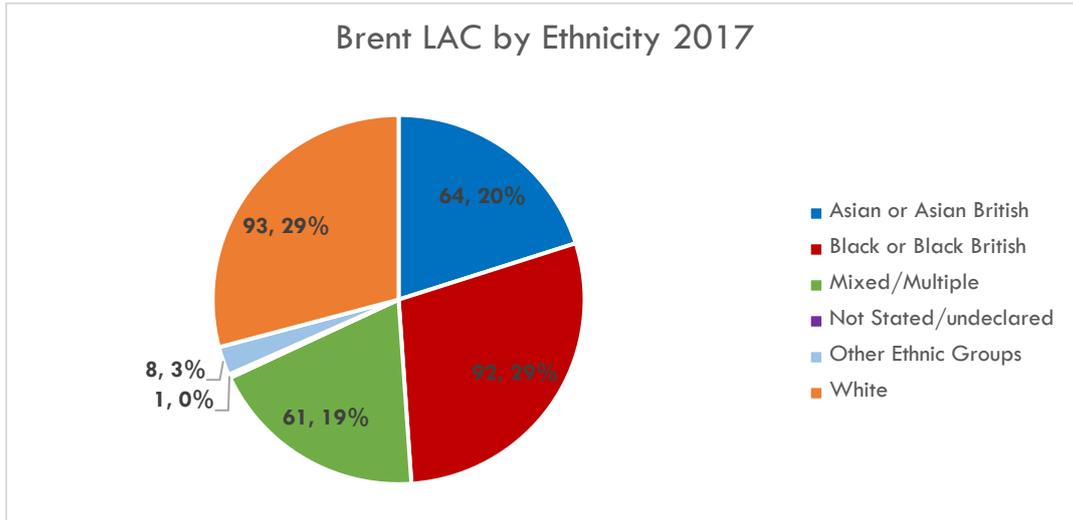
6.6. Despite many barriers our UASC have shown remarkable resilience and have been able to achieve outstanding successes. In the table below is a story of the achievements of one young person who came to the UK at the age of 16.

CASE STUDY - UASC

HA came to the UK in February 2012 when she was 16 years' old. She is now a care leaver and is supported by her Personal Advisor who describes HA as an exceptional young woman. When she first arrived, HA presented as extremely volatile due to abuse she experienced in her home country, exhibiting attachment and abandonment issues that manifested themselves in anger and aggression. Reflecting back, HA acknowledges that she was beyond her mother's control and presents as deeply remorseful. Keen to excel and become a businesswoman, HA has shown great resilience and determination having insufficient English language skills upon her arrival in the UK. English is now her 4th language. Forging ahead with her future plans, HA recently completed her first year at the London School of Science & Technology; studying for an HND in Business, expecting her results this month. HA thoroughly enjoys studying and despite initial obstacles relating to her immigration status she was granted indefinite leave to remain in 2016. HA secured her own tenancy with London

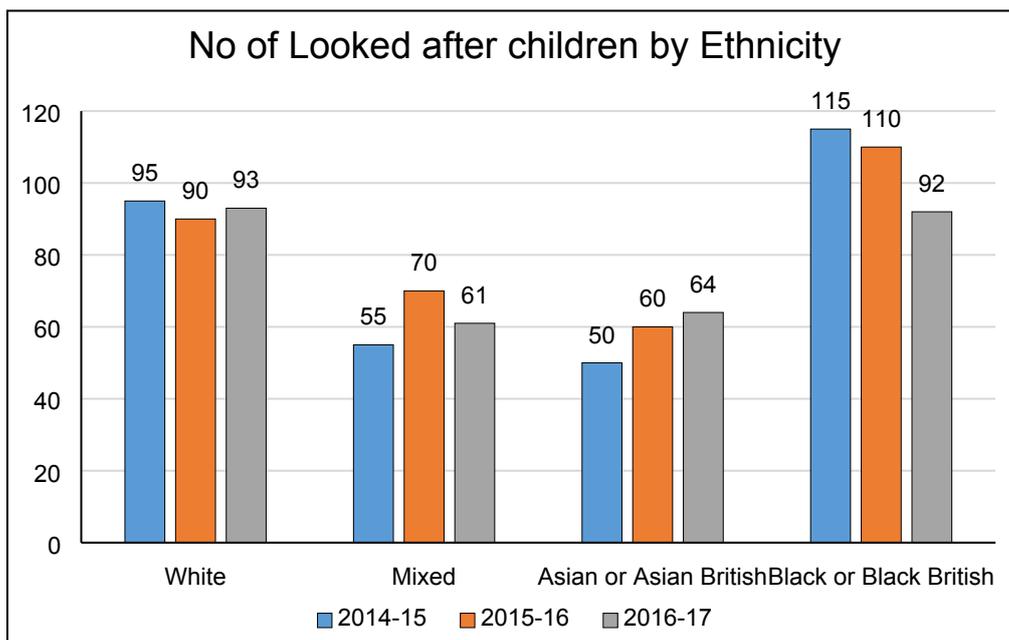
and Quadrant in February 2017 and has created a lovely home. Keen to gather as much knowledge as possible, HA often researches business opportunities and is currently considering her options. Having turned 21 this year, HA is currently seeking employment opportunities for the summer.

6.7. The figures below show the ethnicity of Looked After Children in Brent:



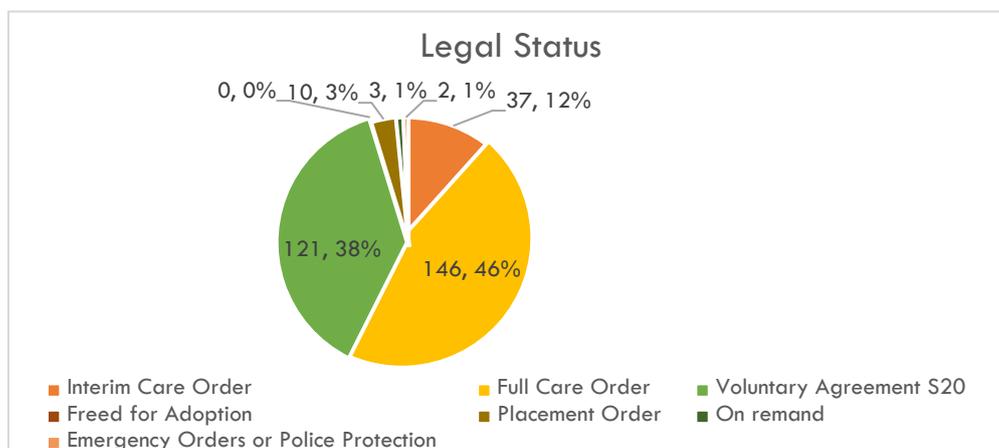
6.8. Over the last three years, there has been a reduction in Black or Black British LAC and an increase in Asian and Asian British children. There are 92 Black or Black British LAC compared to 115 in 2014/15. The number of children from an Asian and Asian British background increased from 50 in 2014/15 to 64 in 2016/17.

6.9. The chart below shows the pattern of change in the ethnicity of LAC:



6.10. The majority of our Looked After Children are subject to Care Orders (Interim Care Orders and Full Care Orders) under the Children Act 1989, representing 57% of all LAC in this reporting year. A further 121 children (38% of all LAC) were in care through a voluntary agreement with the parents/carers.

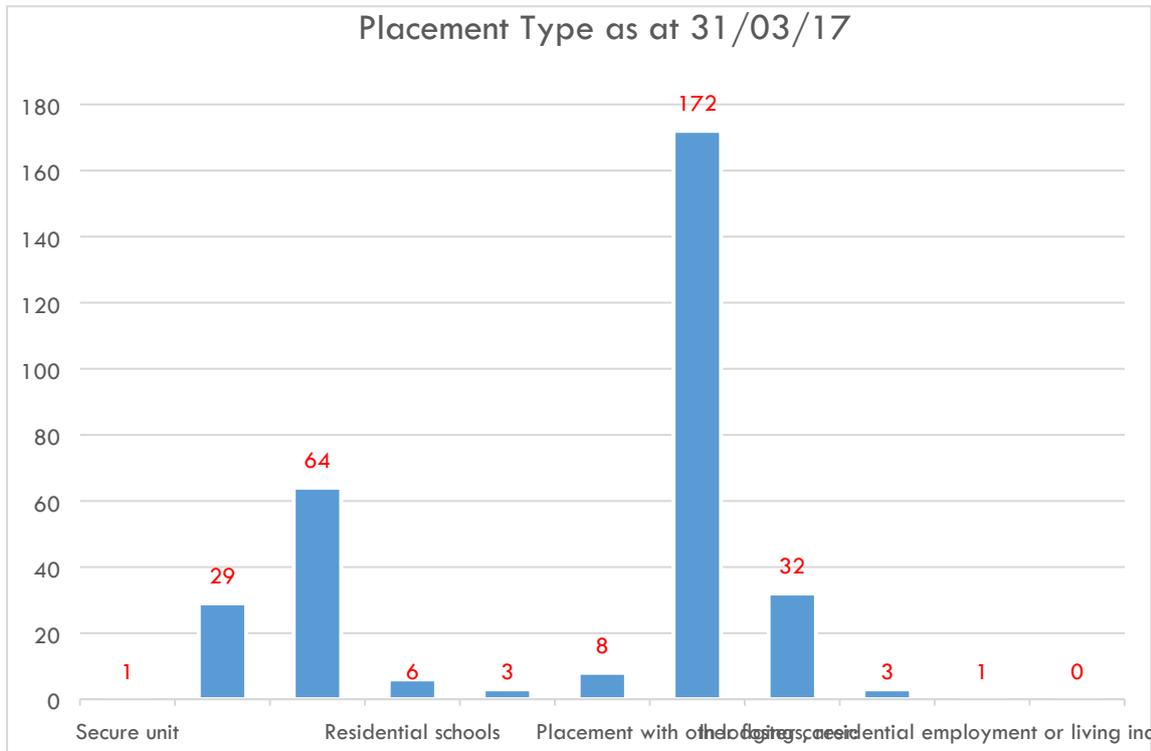
6.11. The chart below chart highlights the different legal status of our children.



7. Placements of LAC in Brent

7.1. The proportion of children placed more than 20 miles away as at 31st March 2017 was 17%, compared to 15% in 15/16 (the national average is 15%). As described above, our reducing LAC population has a high proportion of older children, many of whom have multiple vulnerabilities such as the risk of exploitation by gangs or child sexual exploitation, requiring placement away

from Brent. There is also a challenge in identifying suitable specialist provision within a 20 mile radius of Brent.



7.2. Most of our children resided within fostering placements (204) - 65% of all LAC. 65 children were placed in semi-independent accommodation, representing 21% of the total population.

7.3. Stability of placements:

7.4. As at 31st March 2017, 44 children had three or more placements in the year (13.8% of all LAC). The criteria for determining 3 or more placements has changed in 2016, so is not comparable to previous years.

7.5. LAC achieve better outcomes when they are in stable placements. However, for some children and young people it takes time until they fully settle in their placements. The case study below shows the complexity of work with a young person who has experienced multiple placement breakdowns.

CASE STUDY

RC is a 16 year-old young man; he was from a traveller family and his mother had passed away. RC had multiple placement breakdowns [over the course of 9 years in care RC had 7 placement moves]. RC had minimal contact with his birth family. He was placed in a residential placement as his needs were not being met in a foster family setting. RC became involved in drugs, was out of education and frequently

went missing from care. RC entered into a relationship with a female who appeared to provide some stability in his life. Social workers worked with RC and his girlfriend, and her family in a holistic way to help stabilise his life. RC was spending long periods of time at his girlfriend's house and refusing to go back to his residential placement. Social workers then met with RC's extended birth family who expressed the wish to care for RC until he was ready to move into semi-independent accommodation with support. After a positive assessment, RC was placed with his extended birth family and his behaviour stabilised. Tuition was put in place every morning at a library and RC attended without fail, receiving certificates for his outstanding performance. Regular visits were carried out with RC who responded well to the direct work. He started boxing and became passionate about it. He is currently boxing at an amateur level and taking part in amateur fights, which is improving his discipline. RC's social worker attended his boxing matches to show her support. RC has now moved on in a planned way to a semi-independent placement. He has been spending all his time either at the placement or with his girlfriend's family. There have been no missing episodes or further drug involvement and RC completed his GCSE exams this summer.

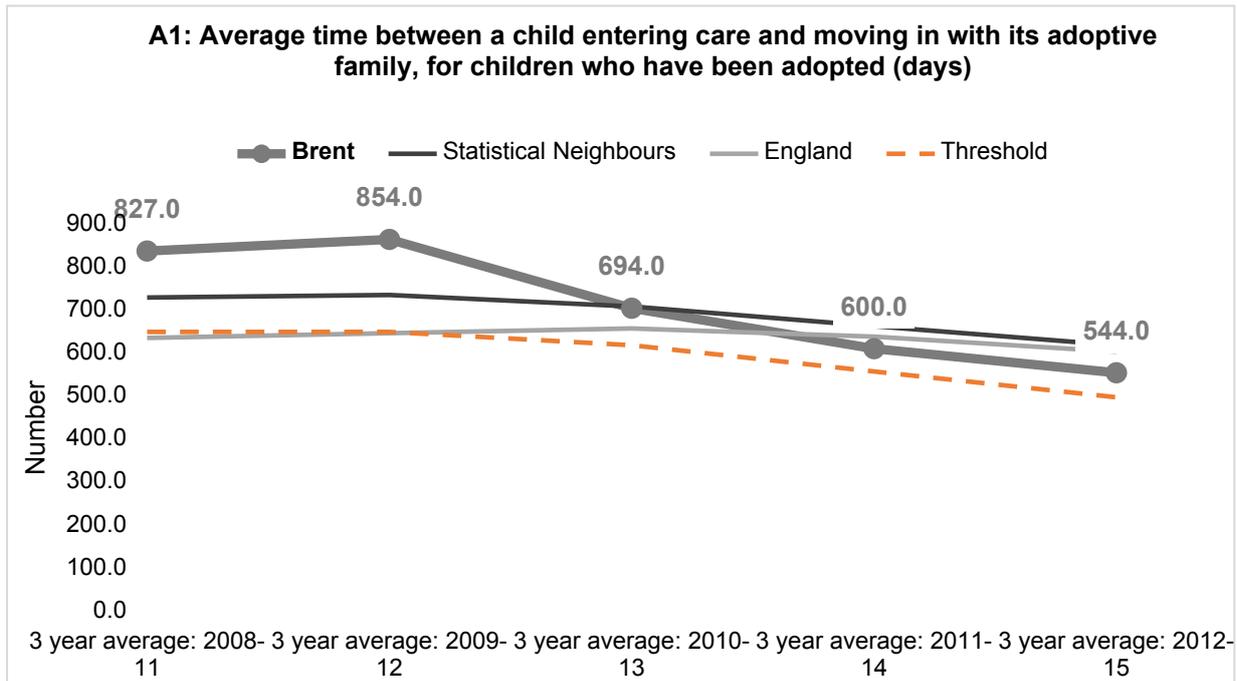
8. Permanency and Care Proceedings

8.1. Permanency is achieved in different ways for looked after children. Many children cease to be looked after through adoption, Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or rehabilitation to their families. Long-term fostering arrangements is another method of achieving permanency for LAC.

8.2 Adoption and Special Guardianship:

8.3. In the reporting year 2016/17, 4 children were adopted from Care, 5 children ceased to be LAC due to the granting of a Child Arrangements' Order, 10 children ceased to be LAC due to the granting of an SGO to their former foster carer and 7 children ceased to be LAC due to the granting of an SGO to someone other than their former foster carer.

8.4. As at 31.03.17 the three-year average time in days between a child entering care and moving in with his/her adoptive family was 523 days, compared to 544 days at the 31.3.2015. This is a 5.3% improvement against the previous reporting period and compares against a national average of 558 days. The chart below shows the three yearly data up to 2015, as data for the 2015-18 period is not yet available.



8.5. Adoption performance is reported at 6-monthly intervals to the Corporate Parenting Committee and is scrutinised at those points.

CASE STUDY - Adoption

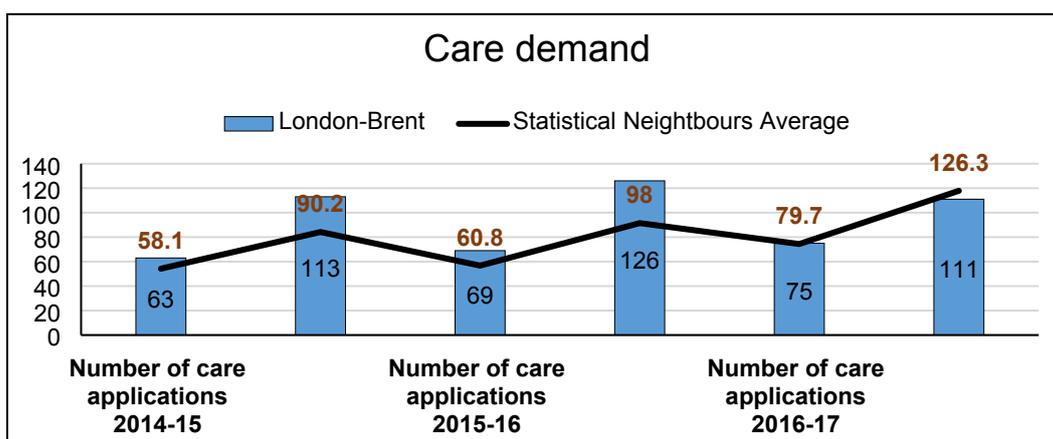
A and S are two of the children placed for adoption in this reporting year. They are twins, a boy and a girl, whose birth parents both have a long history of substance misuse. The twins were born prematurely and because of their mother's chronic drug and alcohol use throughout the pregnancy, there were significant concerns about their development, particularly with the male child, who was thought to possibly have a diagnosis of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome.

The concerns about their delayed development, along with so much future uncertainty about their health and development, did impact on family finding with many prospective adopters withdrawing their potential interest on learning more about the twins' history and the future uncertainty. Despite this, due to diligent family finding by the children's social worker, the twins were successfully matched with adopters from an Adoption Agency.

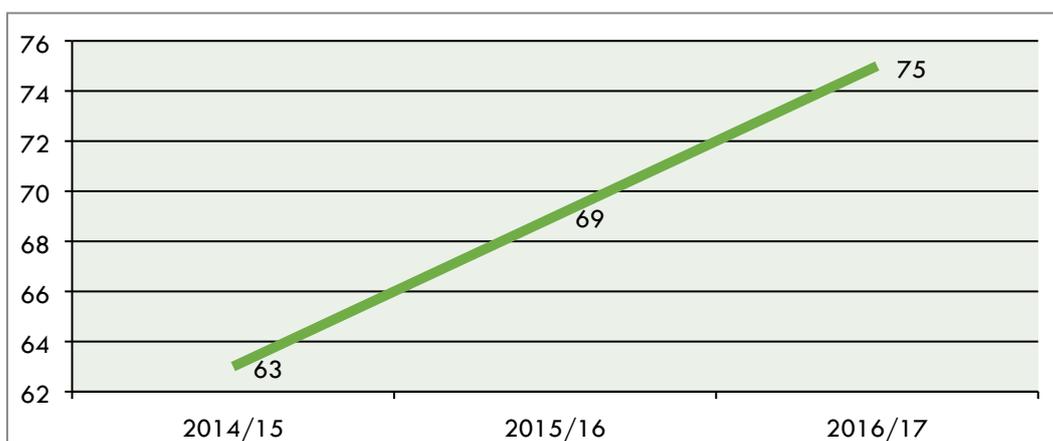
The children have made tremendous strides in their progress in all areas of their development since being placed in their adoptive placement. Their adopters are delighted with their progress, are completely committed to them, whatever the future holds, and love them unconditionally.

8.6. Care Proceedings and care demand

8.7. The number of care proceedings initiated by Brent has risen, with a total of 77 cases commencing in 2016/17. There has been an upward trend since 2014. This is in line with the national picture. It has been driven primarily by the commitment to secure greater control and permanency planning for the growing number of older children entering the care system. The table below shows the number of care applications initiated by Brent compared to statistical neighbours, including the number of children subject to care proceedings. The upward trajectory is evident in the data of statistical neighbours*.



8.8. The chart below shows the increase in the number of care applications in Brent since 2014.



8.9. The timeliness for the completion of care proceedings has remained relatively steady with an average time for 2016/17 of 29 weeks.

8.10. During 2016/17 there were a number of complex cases, some with an international element or complex health needs of the child, that prevented care

* Brent's statistical neighbours are as follows: Greenwich, Hounslow, Enfield, Newham, Lewisham, Croydon, Haringey, Waltham Forest, Ealing and Hackney

proceedings completing within the 26 week target average. However Brent's performance is better than last year and is in line with the London average.

8.11. The table below shows the duration of care proceedings:

	2015/16	2016/17
Brent	31 weeks	29 weeks
London average	33 weeks	29 weeks

9. Health Outcomes for Looked After Children

- 9.1. The Local Authority is responsible for ensuring that LAC receive regular health checks (six monthly for children under the age of 5 and annually for those over the age of 5), dental checks and appropriate immunisations. Statutory health data for LAC is reported for those children who have been in care for more than 12 months.
- 9.2. There were 220 LAC who had been looked after by Brent for 12 months or more at the 31st March 2017. Of these 205 (93%) had an up to date health assessment, a slight reduction on the previous year's position (96%). To ensure performance remains strong a joint action plan has been implemented between Brent's Looked After Children Service and the London North West NHS Trust to ensure there are no gaps in health assessment recording.

	2016-2017		2015-2016	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Number aged 4-16 eligible for an SDQ	164	74.6%	155	74.5%
Number with an SDQ recorded	153	93.2%	145	93.6%
Annual health assessment	205	93.2%	200	96.2%
Up to date development assessment (under 5s only)	11	100.00%	10	100.00%
Up to date immunisations	157	71.4%	159	76.4%
Substance misuse recorded as an issue	37	16.8%	22	10.6%
Teeth checked by a dentist	194	88.2%	182	87.5%

- 9.3. The percentage of children who had a dental check improved in 2016/17 compared to the previous year, but there was a reduction in the percentage of children with up to date immunisations. This is explained due the increase of UASC who do not have a record of their immunisations and for whom additional research is required to ascertain the correct immunisation plan.
- 9.4. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a tool that is completed by parents, carers or teachers, to measure behavioural challenges faced by

LAC. This tool is designed to assist carers in understanding whether a child has a well-being related problem. In this reporting year 93% of looked after children had an SDQ score recorded, a similar proportion as to the previous year.

- 9.5 Performance targets are set for the year and monitored within the CYP Directorate Plan. This is reported through Cabinet on a quarterly basis.
- 9.6 The West London Mental Health Trust provides services to Looked After Children in Brent through the Brent Emotional Wellbeing Team (BEWT). Support is provided to children and their carers whose needs can be met at level below that requiring formal clinical intervention. BEWT clinicians are co-located with LAC and Permanency Service staff and they deliver consultation to social workers as well as support and training to foster carers, which aims to increase their skill and knowledge in the areas of attachment, managing behaviour and reflective parenting.
- 9.7. 120 consultations with social workers took place between April 2016 and March 2017. The consultations focused on ways of thinking about emotional needs of the child and how these can be met; considered what support could be provided to foster carers to sustain placements and to promote therapeutic care. Social workers were asked to identify a goal for each consultation and later to identify to what extent the goal was met.
- Below is a case study showing the impact of support provided by BEWT:

CASE STUDY - E

E is a 6 year-old boy with severe learning disabilities. He is a looked after child cared for by his grandmother. It was reported that E was becoming increasingly aggressive towards his grandmother who was looking for some support in understanding and managing this aggression. A team member met with E's grandmother, as well meeting with and observing the staff supporting E in school.

The most troubling issue for the grandmother was E's aggression around food. Through assessment, it was established that this was linked with E's medical history, known reflux and bowel issues, for which he took medication. Liaison with the school established that E could, with time and tolerance of messiness, feed himself contentedly. School agreed to provide grandmother an adapted spoon to support this process. This gave E more alternatives and control about what and how much he ate, allowing him to eat the amount that he found comfortable at his own pace. In addition, recommendations were made about supporting independence in other areas such as teeth brushing (count downs and musical reward) to increase positive well-being and reduce the need for restraint. E has remained in his placement with his grandmother.

- 9.8. The Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust provide Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for children aged 0-18 and their

families who are experiencing a more significant range of mental health problems.

- 9.9. The CAMHS service provided interventions with a total of 31 LAC in 2016/17. Of these children, 5 were LAC from other local authorities. Of the Brent LAC, 9 received a service from the Brent CAMHS Adolescent Team and the remaining children were receiving a service from Child and Family Services. The average waiting time for all LAC was 11 weeks as at March 2017. LAC are treated as a priority group when receiving CAMHS specialist services. The Brent Clinical Commissioning Group is taking the lead in re-shaping CAMHS services across the borough and will ensure that LAC are given a higher priority to prevent behavioural and emotional difficulties at an earlier stage from worsening.

10. Missing and Absent Looked After Children

- 10.1. Children missing from care are amongst the most vulnerable groups of Looked After Children. In the year ending 31st March 2017, 122 LAC were recorded as having at least one missing episode. This represented 23% of all LAC looked after at any point during the year (n=545*). This is an increase on the 111 children recorded as having a missing episode the previous year. Better systems that record missing episodes has explained the increase.
- 10.2. There were 80 of this group of 122 LAC who had more than one missing episode during the year. This is a similar figure as to the previous year.
- 10.3. In this reporting year 95 LAC were reported as being absent from their care placement. An absence may be a situation where a child has not returned home at an agreed time but their whereabouts is known. Within this cohort, 67 children were absent from their placement more than once, a higher number than the 57 LAC recorded in this category in 2015/16.
- 10.4. To deal strategically with children missing from home or care a Vulnerable Adolescents' Panel was established in November 2016 to replace the Missing Children's Panel. The Panel has a broader scope and aims to create wider perspective on vulnerable adolescents including those missing from care. The Panel considers links between children missing and other areas of vulnerability. Other types of children's cases are considered including those:
- at risk of child sexual exploitation;
 - missing from home or education;
 - involved in gang-related activity or offending/violent behaviour;
 - at risk of peer on peer abuse;
 - displaying sexually harmful behaviour;
 - at risk of other forms of exploitation such as radicalisation, female genital

* This is not total number of looked after children who have remain in care. Some of these children have ceased to be looked after during the year 2016/17.

mutilation or forced marriage.

- 10.5. Children with the above criteria are discussed at the Panel. Each panel includes an in-depth case discussion looking at the history of service provision and with a critical review of the child's experience to develop areas for improvement. The panel ensures that the needs of vulnerable adolescents are understood at a strategic level in order to develop and improve services through an action plan. As an example of action being taken to deal with an emerging issue, autism awareness training has been introduced to staff within the Local Authority and partner agencies. It was recognised that professional misunderstanding of autistic spectrum disorder behaviours was hindering effective responses to those children missing from home or care. Attendees from the Inclusion Service have reported on the effectiveness of their use of the Signs of Safety approach in supporting and managing the cases of young people on the verge of permanent exclusion and who benefit from a co-ordinated professional response.
- 10.6. The Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes, chairs the panel and membership includes Heads of Service from Children and Young People's Services, Community Protection, Housing Needs, Police and Health. The work of the panel feeds into the LSCB Child Sexual Exploitation Sub-Committee.

11. Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE)

- 11.1. The MASE Panel is a multi-agency forum established to ensure there are robust multi-agency plans in place to ensure the protection of children who are at high risk of sexual exploitation.
- 11.2. The Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Brent Children and Young People's Services, chairs the monthly MASE Panel. The panel has a role in ensuring that children and young people are appropriately identified and flagged with the respective agencies and that any plans aimed at ensuring their protection are progressed in a timely and effective manner. It focuses on the management and disruption of offenders identifying locations and themes where a risk of CSE has been identified.
- 11.3. MASE panels continue to operate in every London Borough in accordance with the pan-London Child Sexual Exploitation Protocol (2015). 3 LAC were presented to the MASE Panel during 2016/17. As a result of intervention risk was reduced for 2 of these children with partner agency work on-going with the 3rd child.

11.4. Multi-Agency Professional Meetings

- 11.5. Since January 2016 Brent has introduced a more targeted approach to CSE identification through Multi-Agency Planning Meetings (MAP) for all cases identifying young people at risk of CSE or sexually harmful behaviour. This process underpins and informs the monthly MASE panel.
- 11.6. Between January 2016 and March 2017, 16 LAC were discussed at these meetings. Of these children 10 were placed outside of Brent, either due to the presenting risks within the authority or as a result of challenges in securing an appropriate placement within the borough. The 3 young people who were deemed to be at the most significant risk in these meetings were escalated for interventions to the MASE panel as described above.
- 11.7. As for the MASE panel, MAP Meetings have multi-agency attendance with police, health and educational establishments fully engaged in working together to safeguard children and young people at risk of CSE.
- 11.8. In November 2016, the Safer London Foundation provided 2 Young People's Advocates to work with children at risk of CSE and/or displaying Sexually Harmful Behaviour. These advocates – one female who is working with our girls and young women and a male working with boys and young men presenting harmful sexual behaviours – sit within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance service and offer targeted, individual service delivery to children and young people most at risk of CSE.

12. Education Data

- 12.1. The educational outcomes for looked after children for the academic year 2016/17 will not be available until January 2018. The data presented in this report refers to that most recently provided to the Corporate Parenting Committee (2015/16) and can be found at Appendix 2.
- 12.2. The annual report from the Brent Virtual School highlighted that:
 - 24% of LAC in Brent in compulsory education in 2015/16 had been in care for less than a year;
 - PEP completion rates continued to improve in 2015/16 and an audit conducted in June 2016 showed a considerable improvement in quality. During 2015/16 the format of the electronic PEP was thoroughly revised to produce a more 'user friendly' and efficient document. PEP completion during the 2016 Autumn Term was 96%;
 - The Key Stage 1 results for those in care for a year or more exceeded the national outcomes for all children in Reading, Writing and Mathematics;
 - The Key Stage 2 results showed that 50% achieved the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Mathematics and this was only 3% below the national average for all children.
 - The Key Stage 4 results were better than previous years although based

on a small cohort. 17% achieved 5A*-C grades, including English and Mathematics. This is in line with the 2015 national KS4 outcomes for LAC: 13% in England and 15% in Outer London;

- The post-16 Education Employment and Training (EET) data was positive. In July 2016, 48 of the total cohort of 51 (94%) had a September Guarantee¹. However the current EET figure in Year 12 (January 2017) is down to 81%; the 11 young people currently NEET (not in education, employment and training) are receiving intensive support from the BVS;
- Overall school attendance declined from 90% to 88%. This is primarily due to poor attendance in KS4. The higher numbers of LAC in KS4 also affects this average;
- There were no permanent exclusions in 2015/16 although the number of fixed term exclusions rose;
- The BVS has been working to a service improvement plan that has focused on improving the completion and quality of PEPs (see above) and the raising of LAC outcomes at KS4. As was stated in the BVS report, the varying numbers and backgrounds of children in care at KS4 present many challenges in ensuring there is a steady and continuous upward improvement in outcomes.

13. Care Leavers

- 13.1. The Local Authority has a duty and responsibility to those young people who leave care at 18 until they reach the age of 21, or 25 if they are in higher education. The Children & Social Work Act 2017 received its royal assent on the 27 April 2017. One of the key changes made was that the duty and responsibility to all care leavers is extended to 25 regardless of their education or employment status.
- 13.2. Improving outcomes for care leavers is a key local priority. Brent Council has also endorsed the Department for Education Charter for Care Leavers, that sets out how care leavers will be treated and the support they should expect to receive from their Local Authority. This means that the Council, as corporate parent, agrees to use the Charter principles when making decisions about care leavers. It recognises the challenges facing young people leaving care, such as moving into their first home as an independent adult and the practical support they need. This will need to be reviewed in light of the Children & Social Work Act 2017. Steps were taken to achieve this by Senior Managers across all Brent departments, who pledged to work together at an event in June 2017 to develop a local offer for care leavers.

14. Care Leavers in Education, Employment & Training

¹ The September Guarantee is an offer, by the end of September, of a suitable place in learning to young people completing compulsory education. The Guarantee was implemented nationally in 2007 for 16 year olds and extended to 17 year olds in 2008.

14.1 As of 31st March 2017, Brent was responsible for the support to 308 Former Relevant Young People [aged 18 -21] and 25 young people aged 21-25 in higher education.

14.2. There are currently 25 young people aged 19-21 in higher education, mostly in University, studying a variety of subjects from Accountancy to Civil Engineering. An additional 20 care leavers aged between 22 and 25 are in higher education. The table below highlights some of the comparative data for young people at university:

Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in Higher Education (i.e. studies beyond A-levels)	Brent	Brent %	Statistical Neighbour average	Statistical Neighbour average %	National figure	National figure %
2015-16	25	13%	24	10%	1,760	7%
2016-17	25	12%				

14.3. Care leavers going to University are provided with a financial package that includes a one-off payment in the 1st year of a Higher Education bursary [as endorsed by the Department for Education Charter for Care Leavers] of £2000 paid in 4 equal instalments. In addition, young people receive subsistence and rent payments from Brent Council during Christmas, Easter & Summer Vacations.

14.4. Young people not in education, employment or training, particularly those who are care leavers can find it more challenging to enter the labour market and sustain a job or training course due to the disadvantages they may have faced in earlier life. Some young people may have had a number of placement changes in their care history that will have disrupted mainstream schooling and reduced the likelihood of achieving the basic skills necessary to move into further education or employment.

14.5. In response to these issues, a monthly 'Education & Employment Panel' has been set up that monitors and develops plans for care leavers at risk of becoming NEET. The panel consists of partner agencies including Connexions. The focus of the panel is on problem solving and agreeing joint action plans for each case, reviewed on a quarterly basis. There are two panels in operation, one of the panels focuses on young people aged 16-18 and is led by the Brent Virtual School; the other focuses on young people aged

18-25 and is led by the Principal Officer in the Looked After Children and Permanency Service.

14.6. 'Brent Works' also offers specialist life & career coaches on a pilot basis, funded by the DWP and the Brent Employment, Skills and Enterprise Team. The project is being delivered over the course of a 12-month contract and staff are co-located with the Leaving Care Team in the Civic Centre. A job coach holds a case load of care leavers and provides a 'whole person' approach in providing careers' advice and one to one coaching. When a young person secures education, employment or training the support continues. There is also a seconded DWP worker who works 2 days a work and enhances the service provided by the job coach. To date, the project has successfully supported 9 Care Leavers into paid employment.

14.7. The national key performance measures as related to outcomes for care leavers in education, employment or training are as below:

Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in Education, Employment or Training	Brent	Brent %	Statistical Neighbour average	Statistical Neighbour average %	National figure	National figure %
2015-16	110	51%	132	56%	12,980	49%
2016-17	102	50%				

14.8. Until the Children and Social Work Act received royal assent local authorities had a duty to provide Personal Advisers to care leavers up to the age of 21 or 25 if in further education. Our performance in remaining in touch with care leavers for the most recent comparative period was below the statistical neighbour average. The Care Leavers' Team was created in part to improve performance in this area by ensuring there is a dedicated team focused on supporting and remaining in touch with care leavers. This issue is a priority for the service in 2017/18.

Care leavers aged 19 - 21 'In touch'	Brent	Brent %	Statistical Neighbour average	Statistical Neighbour average %	National figure	National figure %
2015-16	165	83%	203	86%	23,000	87%

2016-17	163	80%				
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15. Care Leavers' Accommodation

- 15.1 Two key factors that are critical to a successful transition from being looked after and moving on to independent living are:
- Access to good quality and secure accommodation provision
 - Equipping young people with appropriate education and skills that promotes access to opportunities for employment or further education and training.
- 15.2 Where young people living in their primary placements (Residential Children's Homes or Foster Care) are assessed as requiring a semi-independent placement as a 'stepping stone' from care to independent placements, a range of semi-independent options are available. These options are:
- Registered Social Landlords;
 - 'Staying Put' with foster carers but in a more independent arrangement;
 - Private Semi-Independent Accommodation Providers.
- 15.3 A longer-term strategic approach to address the affordable housing issues facing young people in Brent is being discussed with our partner agencies. It has suggested some first order priorities to widen the housing offer for young people through innovation in flexible tenure and new sharing options, streamlining commissioning and delivery of housing related services and reviewing tenancy support to young people, in particular within their first year of a tenancy.
- 15.4 Care leavers are referred for permanent housing only when they are ready to manage and maintain their own tenancy. Personal Advisors have to evidence that the young person being nominated has acquired the appropriate life skills. This includes an assessment of a broad range of issues, including appropriate practical skills, emotional resilience and well-being, their ongoing support requirements and the type of education, employment and training conditions that will support a successful transition to young adulthood.
- 15.5. All our care leavers are paid a £2,000 setting up home allowance when they are ready to live independently.

- 15.6. The relevant national key performance measure as related to accommodation is listed below. Improving performance in this area through the dedicated Leaving Care team and effective working with colleagues within the Community Wellbeing directorate should ensure this performance measure exceeds the statistical neighbour and national average by March 2018.

Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in suitable accommodation	Brent	Brent %	Statistical Neighbour average	Statistical Neighbour average %	National figure	National figure %
2015-16	165	85%	187	80%	21,500	83%
2016-17	152	75%				

CASE STUDY- Story of SJ, care leaver

SJ came to the attention of Brent Children’s Services in January 2013 due to high level of concerns regarding her welfare. Due to concerns regarding SJ’s ongoing safety at home and her mother’s inability to protect her from harm, she stayed with a friend. This placement was assessed thoroughly and then regulated as a Connected Person’s placement by Brent Children’s Services. SJ remained living there as a looked after child until she was 18. The arrangement post 18 changed to a staying put arrangement so that SJ could continue to reside with her friend.

SJ will be bidding for her tenancy this year as she now feels that she can live independently and manage a tenancy. She is in her 1st year at University whilst working part-time. She is supported by her Personal Advisor (PA) who has established an effective rapport with her.

The PA is very proud of SJ’s achievements and describes her as follows:

“SJ has come a long way to achieve her dreams and her goals and has been a very determined young person who has not allowed her past to hinder her future”.

16. Summary

- 16.1. The Corporate Parenting Committee continued providing scrutiny and challenge to services in order to promote good outcomes for LAC and care leavers throughout 2016-17.
- 16.2. Health outcomes for children and young people remain good with the majority of children having their health assessments undertaken. In this reporting year, practice around monitoring health checks for children and young people was sound, however, it was not always possible to evidence this activity on the case files. This is being addressed jointly with health colleagues via an action plan established in March 2017.

- 16.3. There has been improvement in the number of children receiving dental checks but our performance in completion of SDQs has declined compared to previous years. This area is also addressed via the joint action plan with health professionals.
- 16.4. Education outcomes for Key Stage 1 exceeded the national average for all children in Reading, Writing and Mathematics. Key stage 2 students also achieved outcomes comparable to the national average for all children. Key Stage 4 results improved compared to the previous year. A higher number of young people who are 16 and over were provided with a September guarantee offer this year. It remains a significant challenge to support young people in sustaining educational and employment placements in the post 16 phase, primarily due to the complexity of many young people's needs.
- 16.5. Attendance of children in secondary schools has dropped slightly compared to the previous reporting year. Brent's Virtual School and social work teams have set up regular meetings to address this with young people and their carers. This work is on-going.
- 16.6. The rise in care applications continued this year, in line with the national trend. We maintained our performance in the timeliness of care proceedings compared to last year, absorbing the impact of many cases with an international dimension.
- 16.7. We have improved timeliness in adoption which meant that children adopted waited less time before they were placed for adoption. The LAC Tracking Panel met regularly to track permanence arrangements for children (0-13) and this remained a strength area for the service.
- 16.8. In 2016/17, there were fewer children in care compared to the previous reporting year. This is partly because more children left care and were rehabilitated back to their families at the end of care proceedings. As described above the embedding of the Signs of Safety approach has enabled practitioners to manage risk more effectively with families and is likely to have contributed to the reduction of children entering the care system. The positive impact of effective early help and preventative work in the borough has also contributed to this trend, although the firm evidence for this hypothesis is being considered as part of an ongoing Council Outcome Based Review.
- 16.9. Increases in children entering care were primarily seen in the adolescent age range. These young people presented with multiple vulnerabilities such as being at risk of CSE, gang-affiliation and missing from home or education. Towards the end of 2016, a systematic review of 40 adolescents who had entered care was commissioned. Taking into account the findings of this review, a more strategic approach was taken in supporting this cohort of young

people. An Entry to Care panel and Vulnerable Adolescents' Panel were established to join up services and understand emerging trends.

- 16.10. A needs analysis of the care leaver population was completed in late 2016 that identified the need for a more focused leaving care service to improve outcomes. A reconfiguration of the service took place in January 2017 with a new Leaving Care Team established and operational in March 2017.
- 16.11. The team has started working with care leavers and former asylum seeking young people, building up their professional network and expertise. The leaving care team has already shown evidence of improvement on key areas for care leavers such as increasing the number of care leavers in suitable accommodation.
- 16.12. Brent remains one of the leading local authorities when it comes to care leavers in higher education. A focus for 2017/18 is to improve opportunities within vocational training and apprenticeship programmes for older children and care leavers who may not attend higher education.
- 16.13. To ensure that young people have the necessary life skills to sustain independent accommodation a Preparation for Independence Life Skills Programme is being developed with Centrepoint who already provide semi-independent accommodation provision to Brent Council. The programme will be developed in partnership with foster carers, semi-independent providers, young people and staff working across the complete range of children looked after and care leaving services.

17. Priorities for 2017-18

17.1. The LAC and Permanency Service Plan for 2017/18 has been completed with participation from all members of staff. The plan is linked with our CYPS Directorate Plan and the Brent 2020 corporate plan. There are 5 main priority areas to focus on this year:

- a. *Achieving safer, more stable and local homes for our children.* We aim to focus on increasing the number of local in-house fostering placements with effective recruitment and retention of foster carers. We are committed to improving placement stability through the use of the Placement Panel, placement stability activity and use of social pedagogy to identify children at risk of placement breakdown, supporting placements with earlier interventions. We continue assessing risk and needs of children and young people in order to judge if it is safe for those placed out of borough to be placed locally.
- b. *Improving overall quality of practice with more effective care planning for children and young people.* Working closely with both internal and external partners we aim to improve practice around care planning at the earliest stage in order to maintain our strength for achieving early permanence for LAC. We aim to reduce the number of children going missing from care (CMC) or at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation by effectively managing risk and developing effective relationships with them. Management oversight will be evidenced in all cases and practitioners will receive monthly, good quality supervision.
- c. *Children and Young People achieve well in life by accessing education, development and training.* Enabling more children to engage with education, employment and training opportunities is one of our priorities. With more established 'NEET to EET' Panels, we aim to increase the number of young people who are in EET. We will also develop and publish our Local Offer with care leavers as required by the Children and Social Work Act 2017.
- d. *Children and young people are actively participating and enjoying life, engagement, inclusion, social skills, resilience and leisure.* Children and young people will be supported to access recreational activities that promote self-esteem, wellbeing and inclusion. We aim to further improve the participation of young people in decision making processes about their lives.
- e. *We have a more permanent, skilled and confident workforce.* We aim to recruit more permanent, skilled practitioners and managers to enhance the overall stability of the service. A reorganisation of staffing arrangements within the LAC and Permanency Service will contribute

to this. We will reduce the number of social workers a looked after child experiences as their lead worker so that the continuity of care for our children improves. The Signs of Safety programme will be further embedded to strengthen development opportunities for our staff in ensuring their continuous professional development.

Contact Officers

Onder Beter
Head of Service, Looked After Children and Permanency
Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Brent
020 8937 4382

Janet Lewis
Head of Virtual School for Looked After Children
Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Brent
020 8937 3813

Nigel Chapman
Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes
Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Brent
020 8937 4091

GAIL TOLLEY
Strategic Director Children and Young People.

Appendix 1 - Annual Report: Participation and Engagement with Looked After Children and Care Leavers – Period of Review: 01/04/2016 to 31/03/2017

Appendix 2 - Brent Virtual School for Looked After Children, Annual Report 2015/16

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Brent Council Children and Young People**Annual report: Participation and Engagement with Looked After Children and Care Leavers****Period of review: 01/04/16 to 31/03/17**

This report outlines the contribution and participation of Looked after Children and Care Leavers in improving services for children in care. This report was developed with the contribution of children and young people and references a 'Bright Spots' survey conducted in March 2017. Some feedback from children and young people is included in quotations.

'You listen to our views and discuss how you'll enforce them into the system. The system has bettered because of our contribution'

1. Summary of key messages**What children and young people said has gone well**

- The profile of the Care in Action (CIA) group was raised through awareness events held throughout the year.
- Participation on the recruitment panels for staff including senior managers was empowering and helped choose the right people to work in Brent.
- Participating in the Bright Spots survey with Coram Voice in partnership with Bristol University and Brent Council gave children and young people another opportunity to express their views. CIA supported with getting young people to participate, leading to 33 % of Brent's looked after children taking part.
- Working on the Brent Pledge and Care Leaver's Charter let children and young people in care know what they should expect from Brent.

'Being part of Care in Action helped me to become more confident and I now speak out more'

What children and young people said needs to improve

- Although CIA do not want the groups to be too big, it would be good to have more people involved.
- There currently is not an achievement award for Care Leavers. CIA would like to develop a Care Leavers achievement award.

- CIA members said that some social workers have left Brent and have not said goodbye. One young person said that this made him feel really angry and impacted on his education. As a result CIA will conduct a survey on the 'saying goodbye in a healthy way', the young people's chosen campaign theme and share the outcome with relevant teams.
- CIA want to be able to contact social workers when they need to, get a response to their query swiftly and reduce the frequency of the change of social workers.

'My last social worker has written a letter informing me that she was leaving she is the third one to leave in a short period, I wish she stayed'

2. Priorities from the 2016 – 2018 Looked after Children Participation Strategy

Priority 1: To provide opportunities for children and young people in care to shape and influence the parenting they receive, both in relation to their individual care and the overall strategy for Brent Looked after Children.

Looked after Children and Care Leavers have shaped and influenced services over the past year. They were consulted on the proposed structural change for the youth services; part of the interview panel for the recruitment of two Operational Directors, four Heads of Service and other staff for CYP; included in the consultations on a number of issues such as the setting up of a separate Leaving Care Team; and reviewing the Personal Educational Plan (PEP) template.

Priority 2: To increase children and young people's knowledge about the participation service and the different opportunities to have their views heard, including promoting how to contact the Participation Workers and Brent Care in Action.

The three participation groups currently have 18 members, consisting of 8 members of Care leavers In Action (CLIA), 7 members of Care in Action (CIA) and 3 members of Junior Care in Action (JCIA). A leaflet has been developed informing children and young people about the existence and work of the participation service. As part of the recruitment drive CIA presented at the Celebration of Achievement event and raised awareness of the participation service. Increasing membership will be an ongoing focus in 2017/18.

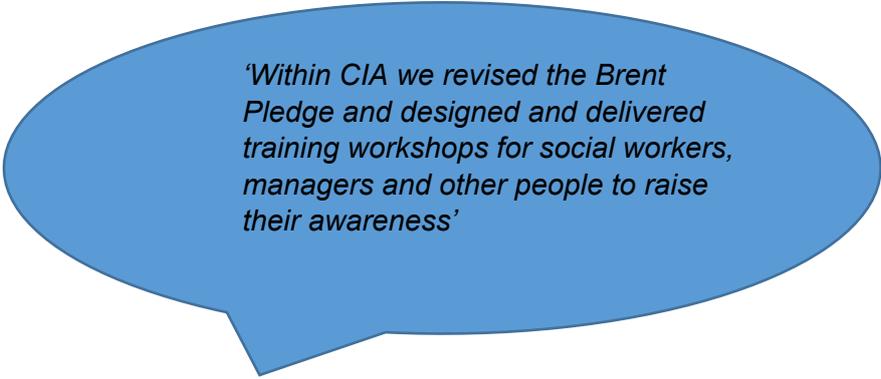
'Care in Action helps me to speak out and feel confident in myself. I am able to make new friends that help me get through my problems'

Priority 3: To raise awareness and profile of participation and consultation amongst staff, foster carers and corporate parents so they are more supportive of young people's attendance and involvement of participation within children and young people services and other partner agencies.

Members of CIA are part of the Corporate Parenting Committee and have representation at each meeting. The lead member for children and young people, the Strategic Director, Operational Directors, a number of Heads of Service and other professionals regularly attend CIA meetings. Young people have fed back that they appreciate and value this proactive approach by senior officers and have used the opportunity to raise issues relevant to them.

A member of CIA presented at the annual Foster Carers Conference on the importance of stable placements. Members of CIA have also been part of training for staff, foster carers and work with other partners such as the LSCB.

Two members of CIA also joined Brent Youth parliament (BYP) this year



'Within CIA we revised the Brent Pledge and designed and delivered training workshops for social workers, managers and other people to raise their awareness'

Case study: Lisa

Lisa is a 16 year old who came into care as a young child. Her IRO encouraged her to join CIA to help build her confidence. Since joining, Lisa has been involved in events and did a great job presenting to a group of young people, professionals and foster carers at the achievement awards.



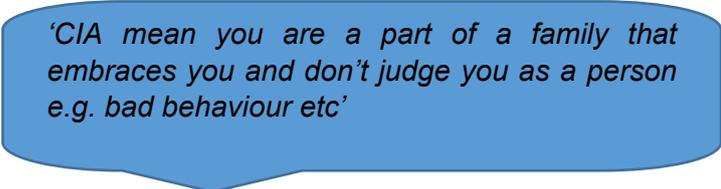
'I participate in more things and am more confident as a person'

3. Support for Care in Action

The children in care participation officer supports Care in Action. This role was integrated into Review, Engagement and Participation Team in the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service in January 2017. The Review, Engagement and Participation team includes Independent Reviewing Officers, Engagement and Participation Officers across CYP. This has increased independence from frontline operational services as well as encouraging collaboration with IRO's. Consideration is being given to the amount of support provided to the CIA groups, particularly with the ambition to increase membership.

4. Key Events and Activities

CIA meets twice a month whilst the Junior Care in Action (JCIA) and Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) meet once a month. Please see Appendix 1 for a full list of events and activities.



'CIA mean you are a part of a family that embraces you and don't judge you as a person e.g. bad behaviour etc'

5. Debating Society

Two CIA members have joined the monthly debating society that is run at the Yellow Pavilion in Wembley Park and attend this on a regular bases. This is open to all children and young people.

Amara is 12 years old and her new foster carer encouraged her to join CIA. Amara started in the junior group before joining the main group. Amara said that CIA has helped her become more confident and she is now part of the debating society. Amara said she is able to help other looked after children.



'I have changed my ways on the streets and in school, so I am getting into less trouble'

6. Bright Spots Survey

Brent took part in an online survey called “Your Life, Your Care” conducted by Coram in partnership with Bristol University in March 2017. The survey looked at the wellbeing of looked after children on a variety of issues which will provide Brent with an overview of children’s views.

The participation officer took an active part in coordinating this and facilitating the CIA to promote the survey being completed. Other staff from across the department including Virtual School and Looked after Children and Permanency service were key players in promoting the completion of the survey. As a result, a total of 96 (33%) Children and Young people looked after filled out the survey.

A summary of the survey has been shared with the working group as well as senior managers within CYP with a view to disseminating the results to all Looked after Children. An action plan will be developed to address the key issues with the input of CIA.

7. Building Partnership with the Corporate Parenting Committee

The chair and representatives from Care in Action attend the Corporate Parenting Committee quarterly meetings to share children and young people’s views. Over the last year, young people trained the committee members about the Brent Pledge.

8. Meeting with senior leaders

The Strategic Director and Lead Member for Children and Young People attend Care in Action meetings on a regular basis. The Strategic Director and Lead Member have attended five meeting over the past year and have participated in group discussions and activities with young people. The Operational Director for Integration and Improved Outcomes attended a joint CLIA and CIA meeting. He used the

time to find out what issues the young people were facing in their lives and what service improvements they would like to see in the future.

The children and young people say that they value the proactive approach of senior officers and elected members. They have made full use of these sessions to raise issues, influence, shape and input into policy and other major changes being proposed.

9. London Participation Network meeting

The participation officer continues to attend London wide quarterly meetings for participation officers. The meetings are a support network, where officers share initiatives that are happening in their borough. The meeting covered topics such as a starter pack for care leavers who are going to university or moving into semi-independent living. Brent hosted the most recent meeting in April 2017.

10. Participation officer attendance at team meetings

The participation officer continues to attend Team meetings within Children and Young People's Services in order to raise awareness, promote Care in Action activities and events for children and young people.

11. Foster Carers' Newsletter and Support Group

There is a regular Care in Action update in the Fostering Newsletter sent out to all Brent foster carers, informing carers of the work of Care in Action and promoting the groups and any upcoming events. In order to recruit new members for the groups, the Participation Officers have attended the Foster Carers' Support Group meetings. They have also been involved in training foster carers and other professionals.

12. Priority Areas for 2017/18

1. To recruit more children and young people and increase members of JCIA from 3 to 8 active members, CIA from 7 to 11 active members and CLIA members from 8 to 12 active members.
2. Arrange the annual Summer Fun Day. Thirty five children and young people attended the event last year. By working with the Participation Champions to promote the event there is a target to increase attendance to at least 50 - 60 young people.
3. Arrange the first care leavers' celebration event in partnership with the Leaving Care Team and other partners.
4. To work with CIA on their chosen theme for campaigning, 'saying good bye in a healthy way', the impact of this and share the outcome with relevant services.
5. To share the learning from the Bright Spots Survey with looked after children through Care in Action (junior and senior) groups and work with them to share the results with staff and the Corporate Parenting Committee. This includes feedback about getting in touch with social workers and changes of social worker.
6. To complete the Bright Spots Survey in 2018/19 and to improve participating in this survey from 33% to 40%.
7. Develop a new Looked after Children participation strategy and align this with the wider Brent children and young people engagement strategy.

Shirley Rickets, Participation Officer

Goitom Mebrahtu Review, Engagement & Participation Team Manager

Sonya Kalyniak, Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance

Appendix 1: Key Care in Action activities and events in 2016/17

Date	Activity	Outcomes
Apr 16 (All groups)	CIA members designed a workshop for to give full awareness of the Brent pledge to professionals and Foster Carers.	In June 16, CIA members delivered workshops to professionals to raise awareness of the Brent Pledge and gather professional's views. At the end of the workshops, the professionals' were asked to sign a commitment to say that they would attend an event to promote the Brent Pledge and Care Leaver's Charter. 35 professionals pledged to come to the launch of the pledge and charter. They also signed to say that they would bring some of their young people to an event to promote the Pledge and Charter. From the evaluation forms the professionals who attended the event pledged to raise awareness of the pledge and charter amongst their children and young people.
May 16 (JCIA and CIA) CIA and CLIA	Advisory Teachers for Brent Virtual School visited the CIA group to find out their views on the existing PEP forms. Big House Theatre	Views of the children and young people, were incorporated into new PEP forms that were introduced in September 2016. Ten young people went to see a production of "Knife Edge" with a cast of the play that was made up mainly of care experienced young people. From the feedback received, this was a positive experience for the young people.
July 2016 (CLIA) (All groups)	A Participation Officer accompanied two young people to an introductory session workshop run by "MyBank". The purpose of the workshops were to help young people to prepare for financial stability. A group of children and young people went to a trip to Oxygen Free jumping in Park Royal. This was followed by a meal at Pizza Hut.	The young people found this helpful and gained more insight and understanding on budgeting and financial stability. There are plans for the Connexions Service in partnership with the Leaving Care team to run more workshops in the future. 10 young people attended

July 2016 (CLIA)	Awareness on The Challenge, a programme through the National Citizen Service (NCS). This is an intensive, part-residential programme followed by a number of social action days, designed to empower young people to meaningfully impact their local community and gain new life skills.	A Participation Worker shared information and promoted the scheme with social workers and the CIA members.
August 2016 (JCIA and CIA)	Summer fun day. The young people reviewed the previous year's fun day, considered what activities they would like to see in the next fun day. They decided that there needed to be more activities for teenage boys, came up with the idea of having someone who could teach a martial art and a fitness zone which was adopted.	35 Children and young people attended the fun day hosted at the Bridge Park complex.
April - Nov 16(CLIA and other care leavers)	Participation on young people's interview panels	Young people contributed to the recruitment of the two Operational Directors and four Heads of Service.
October 2016 (CLIA and other care leavers)	<p>An event to mark "National Care Leavers week" was organised. They considered the achievements that they had already made and the things that they would like to achieve.</p> <p>There were presentations from 3 care leavers about their experience of leaving care and the difficulties that they have faced and where they are now in their lives.</p> <p>The event was attended by the Strategic Director, a number of Senior Managers, foster carers and other staff.</p>	<p>17 young people attended. They shared their views about what is going well, what is not going so well and what needs to change.</p> <p>The feedback from the activity was taken away by the HOS for LAC and Permanency for action where possible.</p>
October 2016 (CIA)	Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) "Voice of the child" Conference, hosted by CAFCASS. The conference looked at the experience of children who are subject to care proceedings. Presentations included by the President of the Family Court Division, and the Chief Executive of CAFCASS.	Three members of Care in Action attended with the Participation Officer and Team Manager.
November 2016	Foster Carers' conference	A care leaver attended Brent

		Foster carers' conference. He spoke of his experience of being in Foster Care and the importance of stable placement.
January 2017 (CLIA)	Connexions consulted with the group on the barriers that prevent Care Leavers accessing and remaining in education and Employment. They said that they would like help with budget and employment issues.	The young people's views will help to inform the programme of workshops that Connexions aim to put on for Care Leavers.
January 2017 (JCIA)	LAC review quiz	Most of the children were also aware of the process of the LAC review.
(JCIA and CIA)	Celebration of Achievement - Care in Action members stalled a stall and ran a recruitment drive as well as doing presentation on the benefits of joining Care in Action group at the Celebration of Achievement event.	The young people's presentation was well received and as a result two children expressed interest in joining the group.
January 2017(JCIA and CIA)	National Children's Bureau consultation The young people were asked a number of questions about how their wellbeing is measured and who measures their wellbeing.	The overall findings of the research will be used to help to improve the care that looked after children are given and to influence national policy and practice. The NCB will provide a copy of their findings which the Participation Officer will share with the children and young people who were consulted.
February 2017(CIA)	The Participation officer attended Brent Youth Parliament with two Looked after children who were identified to join Youth parliament	Two Looked after Children are now members of Brent Youth Parliament and one of them put her name forward to be considered for the executive group. Though she was not successful this time round she will be encouraged and supported in applying again in the future.
February 2017 (CIA)	The CIA members considered and discussed the campaign theme they would like to work on.	CIA chose to look at the impact 'Saying goodbye in a healthy way' when social workers leave the department. The young people would like to find the impact this has on looked after children through different methods and will consider who they will share the findings and recommendations with.
March 2017 (CIA)	In preparation for the professional workshops on missing from home/care return	The young people's feedback was presented to a group of social workers at a return to

(CIA)	<p>interviews, the CIA members were asked to think about questions that could be included in the return interviews. They were also asked to consider who would be the best person to carry out such interviews.</p> <p>The Service Manager for the Inclusion Service visited the group to find out what targeted provisions if any, the young people would like to see in the borough.</p>	<p>home interview workshop and this has now been made part of the regular training on conducting return home interviews.</p> <p>The Service Manager will come back to a future meeting to inform the young people how their views have been utilised to shape the targeted service for young people.</p>
March 2017 (CIA and CLIA)	Dr Sam Wolfe and Dr Helen Watson from New Beginnings visited the young people to find out who inspires and motivates them to consider going to university in the future.	The views of the young people will be used in a proposal to Central Government for funding. Sam and Helen have agreed to come back to inform how the project has developed.

Brent Virtual School for Looked After Children

Annual Report 2015/16

February 2017



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1. Purpose of the Annual Report

The purpose of this annual report is to outline the activity and impact of the Brent Virtual School during the academic year 2015-16. The report includes details of the educational outcomes of our Brent looked after children who had been in care for a year or more. It reflects on the impact of our activities and identifies areas of future development to achieve improved outcomes for our looked after children.

Data contained in this report is for looked after children who were in the care of the Brent Council for the academic year 2015/16. The 2016 end of Key Stage assessment data relates only to those children in care in Brent for a year or more. The national LAC comparison data included in this report is from 2014/15¹. National, validated LAC data includes only children who have been in care for a year or more and because of our small numbers of eligible children in each cohort our outcomes did not feature in the 2015 national LAC data. ***Please also note that because of significant changes to national assessment at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2, including the removal of national curriculum levels, comparison of LAC outcomes from previous years is not valid and has therefore not been included.***

The Annual Report will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee on 07.02.2017.

2. Key Messages from the 2015/16 Data²

- 24% of LAC in Brent in compulsory education in 2015/16 had been in care for less than a year
- 20% of LAC in Brent were aged 15-17 years and 68% were aged 12-17 years
- PEP completion rates continued to improve in 2015/16 and an audit conducted in June 2016 showed a considerable improvement in quality. During 2015/16 the format of the electronic PEP was thoroughly revised to produce a more 'user friendly' and efficient document. Current PEP completion for the Autumn Term 2016 is 96%
- The Key Stage 1 (7 year olds) results for those in care for a year or more (4 children) exceeded the national outcomes for all children in Reading, Writing and Mathematics. In 2015 Brent's KS1 LAC outcomes were well below the Outer London average
- The Key Stage 2 (11 year olds) cohort comprised 8 children. Of this 8, 4 (50%) achieved the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Mathematics: 3% below the national outcome (53%). In 2015 Brent's KS2 LAC outcomes were well above the Outer London average of 69%
- The Key Stage 4 (15 year olds) results were our best for a few years. 17% (3 children) of an eligible cohort of 18 achieved 5A*-C grades, including English and Mathematics. This is in line with the 2015 national KS4 outcomes for LAC: 13% in England and 15% in Outer London
- The post-16 EET data (in education, employment and training) was positive. In July 2016, 48 of the total cohort of 51 (94%) had a September Guarantee³. However the current EET figure in Year 12 (January 2017) is down to 81%; the 11 young people currently NEET (not in education, employment and training) are receiving intensive support from BVS. The Year 12 cohort comprises 58 LAC
- Attendance: 88%; a decline of 2% from 2014/15. This is concerning due mainly to poor

¹ National attainment data for LAC will be available in May 2017. This Annual Report will then be updated accordingly.

² The examination data in this section is based on the numbers of LAC eligible to be included in our reported data

³ The September Guarantee is an offer, by the end of September, of a suitable place in learning to young people completing compulsory education. The Guarantee was implemented nationally in 2007 for 16 year olds and extended to 17 year olds in 2008.

- attendance in KS4. Higher numbers of LAC in KS4 also affects this average
- Permanent Exclusion in 2015/16: 0. However fixed term exclusions rose in 2015/16
- Following Brent's Ofsted inspection in October 2015 BVS has been working to a post-Ofsted action plan that in particular focused on improving the completion and quality of PEPs (see above) and the raising of LAC outcomes at KS4 which in 2016 were a considerable improvement. However it must be noted that LAC cohorts vary significantly from year to year making a continuous upward improvement in outcomes impossible to sustain.

3. Role of the Brent Virtual School and the Virtual Headteacher

Role of the Brent Virtual School

The Virtual School in Brent (BVS) has the overall responsibility for the monitoring, supporting and provision of interventions to ensure that looked after children (LAC) achieve the best possible educational outcomes. BVS strives to achieve this by:

- Co-ordinating and quality assuring all Personal Education Plans (PEP)
- Monitoring and challenging schools to make effective use of Pupil Premium in line with DfE guidance
- Tracking the academic progress, attendance and exclusions of LAC
- Using tracking data to highlight individuals who are not on target to achieve their predicted outcomes and providing them with additional educational support.
- Ensuring Special Educational Needs or Disability (SEND) needs are identified and supported appropriately, including applications for statutory assessment
- Implementing a range of targeted interventions to raise academic standards
- Providing support and challenge to LAC, schools and carers, ensuring that expectations around achievement are high
- Ensuring effective transition between schools or specialist providers
- Encouraging LAC to have high aspirations about their futures and helping to remove barriers to further education
- Leading training for foster carers, designated teachers, school governors and bespoke training for alternative learning providers and staff in schools
- Encouraging LAC and their carers to engage in a wide range of enrichment activities
- Providing education updates for the various LAC and Permanency Panels and reminding our social work colleagues of the importance of education
- Celebrating LAC achievements.

Role of the Brent Virtual Headteacher

The concept of the 'Virtual School Headteacher' for Children Looked After was first outlined in the White Paper 'Care Matters: Time for Change' (DCSF, June 2007). Directors of Children's Services have a statutory responsibility to make sure that their local authority promotes the educational achievement of the children they look after, regardless of where they are placed.

The Children and Families Act 2014 amended section 22 of the Children Act 1989 and placed a statutory duty on all local authorities to appoint a Virtual School Head (VSH) to promote the educational achievement of its Looked After Children. It is the responsibility of the Director of Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services to ensure that these duties are met.

The VSH role in Brent Council is held by Janet Lewis and is a strategic role that can influence practice and the use of resources across the authority.

The role was expanded in the DfE document 'Promoting the Education of Looked After Children, statutory guidance for local authorities' July 2014. This document prescribes clearly

that:

- VSHs are in place and that they have the resources, time, training and support they need to discharge the duty effectively
- VSHs have robust procedures in place to monitor the attendance and educational progress of the children their authority looks after (including those placed and educated out of county)
- VSHs must maintain an up to date roll of their Local Authority's Looked After Children who are in school or college settings and gather information about their education placement, attendance and educational progress
- VSHs must inform headteachers and designated teachers in schools if they have a child on roll who is looked after by the VSH's local authority
- Ensure social workers, designated teachers and schools, carers and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) understand their role and responsibilities in initiating, developing, reviewing and updating each child's PEP (personal education plan) and ensuring that identified needs are met
- Ensure up to date, effective and high quality PEPs focus on educational outcomes and that all Looked After Children, wherever they are placed, have an effective PEP
- Ensure the educational achievement of children looked after by the authority is seen as a priority by everyone who has responsibility for promoting their welfare.
- Report regularly on the attainment of Looked After Children through the authority's corporate parenting structures.

Following a re-structure of Brent's Children and Young People Department in early 2016 the post of Headteacher of BVS was confirmed as a Head of Service post in its own right. The BVS Headteacher is also a regular member of the borough's Fostering Panel.

4. Brent Virtual School Members

2015/16

Janet Lewis, Headteacher

Susan Lofthouse, Interim Deputy Headteacher (01.04.15-31.01.16)

Priya Upadhyaya, LAC Information Analyst

Nayna Joshi, KS4 LAC Advisory Teacher

Anna Lewis, Interim KS4 LAC Advisory Teacher (from 01.01.16 until 31.10.16)

Margaret Curtin, KS3 LAC Advisory Teacher

Emma Gavin, KS1 and 2 and Early Years LAC Advisory Teacher

Elizabeth Hannah, LAC Educational Psychologist (0.6)

Ben Kwofie, Year 11 LAC Life Coach, Connexions Team (until 30.03.16).

2016/17

Janet Lewis, Headteacher

Sarah Miller, Deputy Headteacher (from 01.09.16)

Priya Upadhyaya, LAC Information Analyst

Nayna Joshi, KS4 LAC Advisory Teacher

Margaret Curtin, KS3 LAC Advisory Teacher

Emma Gavin, KS1 and 2 and Early Years LAC Advisory Teacher

Elizabeth Hannah, LAC Educational Psychologist (0.6)

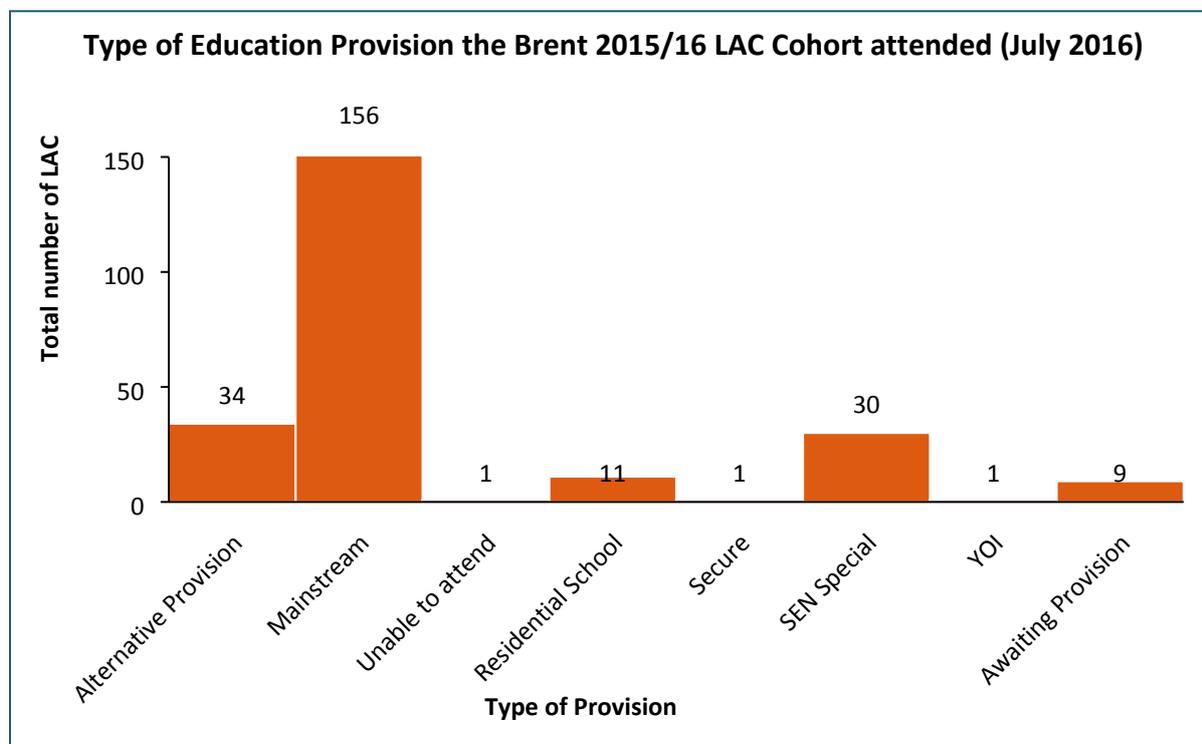
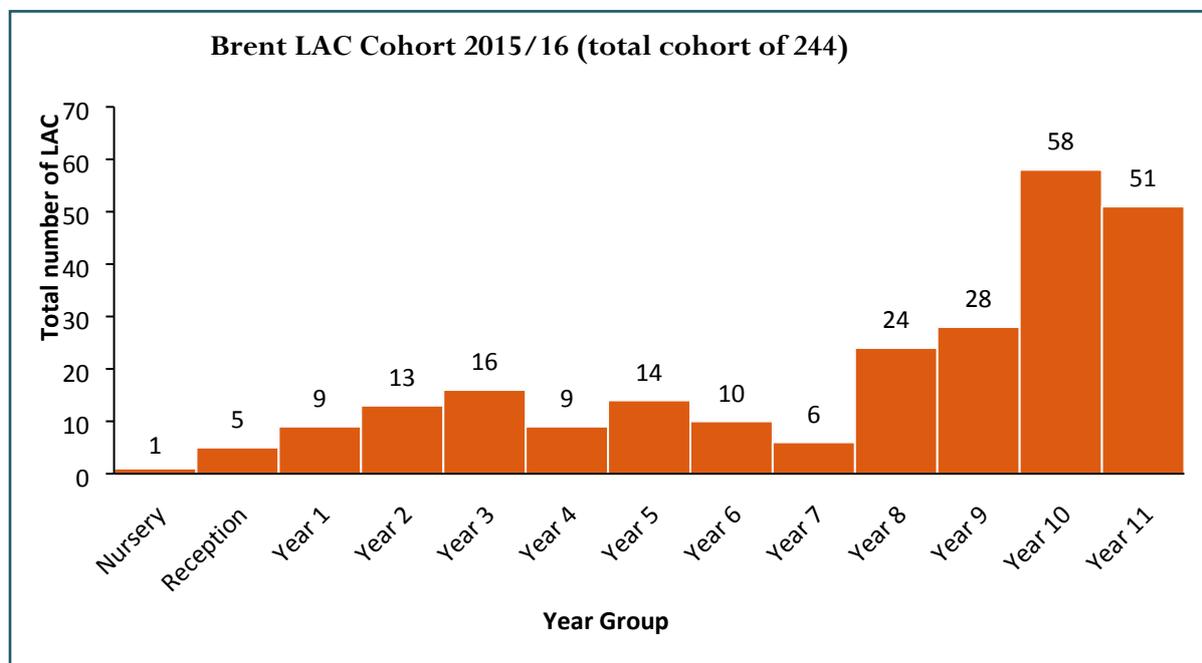
Ben Kwofie, Year 11 LAC Life Coach, Connexions Team (until 30.03.17).

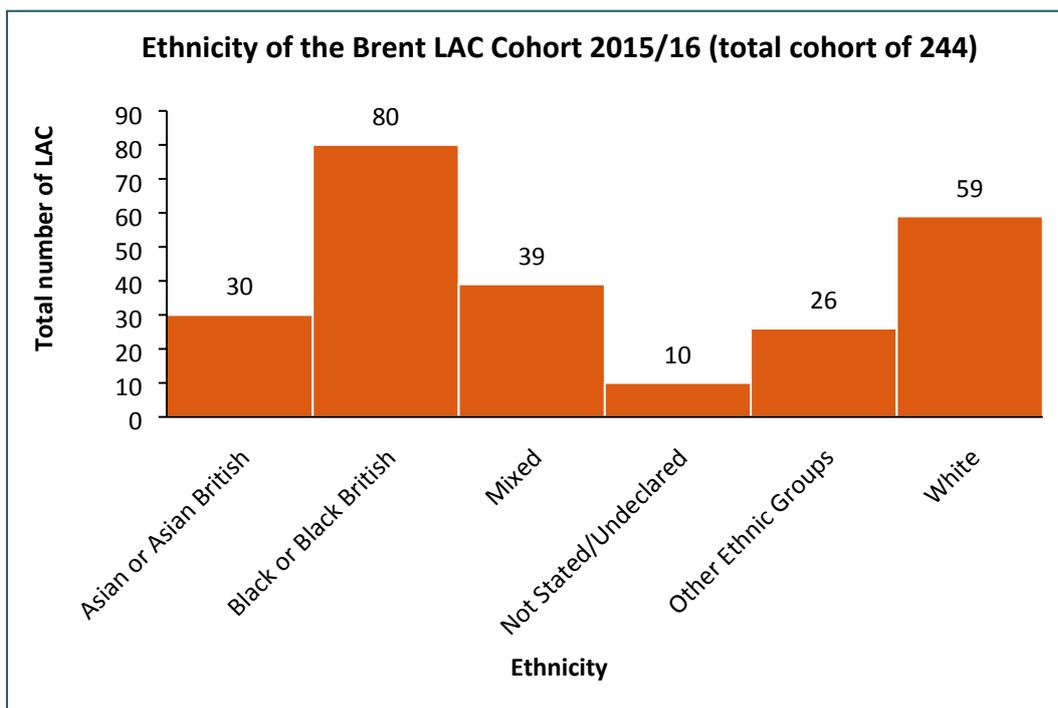
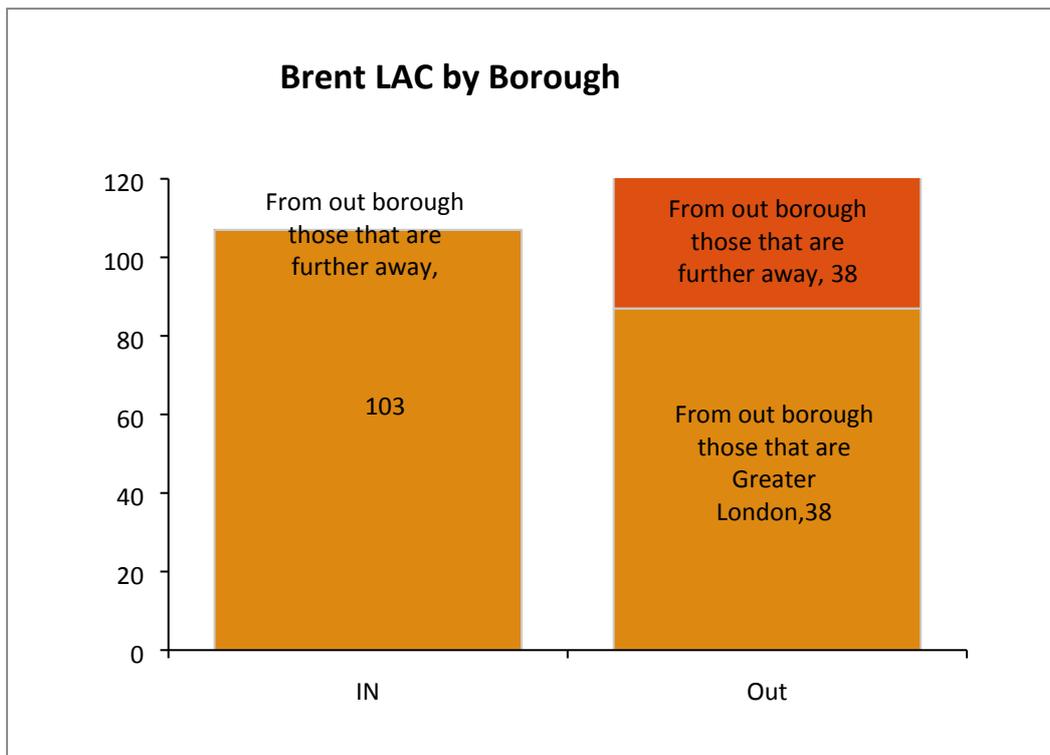
The Virtual School is currently governed by the Corporate Parenting Committee.

Following 3 external application rounds between March 2015 and May 2016 BVS finally appointed a substantive Deputy Headteacher, Sarah Miller, who joined the team in September 2016. Sarah brings a wealth of LAC and senior school leadership experience and is already making a significant difference to the range and quality of interventions in place to support LAC preparing for end of KS2 and 4 assessments.

5. Brent's Looked After Children Population 2015/16: Nursery to Year 11

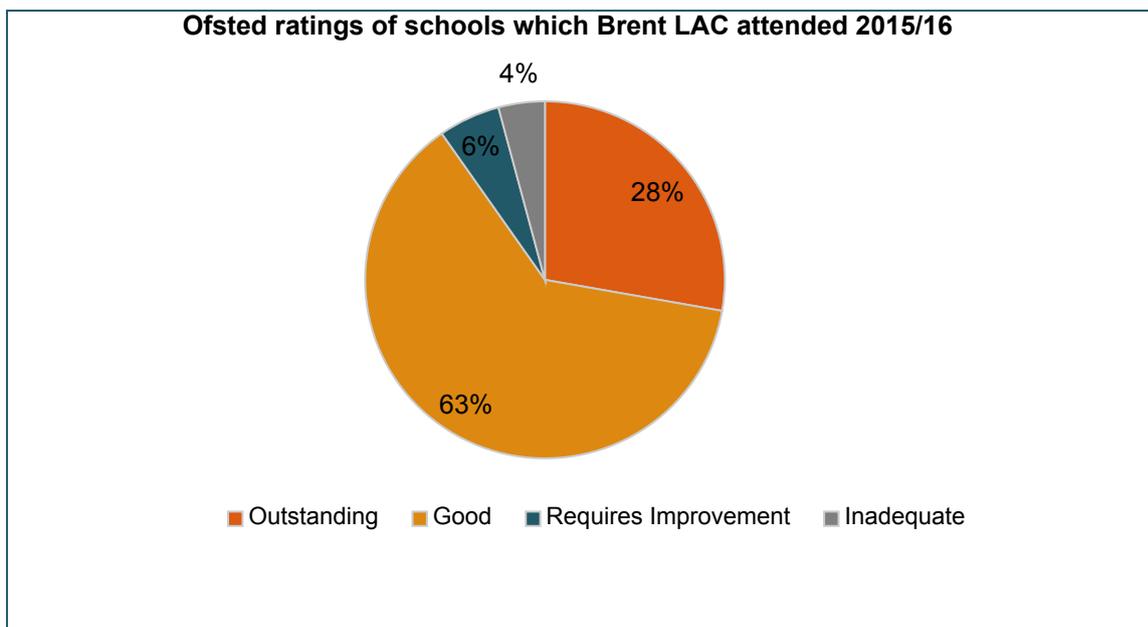
In July 2016 244 (Nursery- Year 11) children were looked after, 107 attending Brent schools and 125 attending schools outside the borough. Of these 125, 87 were in schools in greater London, with the remainder placed outside London, some at a significant distance.





The ethnic breakdown of the 2015/16 LAC cohort broadly reflects that of the general Brent school population.

In 2015/16 90% of statutory school aged LAC attended schools that were Ofsted rated as good or outstanding, 6% (12 LAC) attended schools that required improvement and 4% (9 LAC) attended an inadequate school. BVS works hard to get our LAC into the best possible school. During 2015/16 we asked the Secretary of State to direct an academy in Brent to admit a Year 10 LAC. This process took about 6 weeks to complete.



BVS monitors the progress and achievement of all LAC paying particular attention to those placed in schools that are less than 'good'.

LAC Not In School

At any-time there are a few children or young people who are not in school or an appropriate alternative provision. This will be for a number of reasons: newly arrived from abroad as an unaccompanied minor with no age assessment, change of care placement making it impossible for the child or young person to attend their current school or disengagement by the young person. Where a young person disengages, BVS works with social work colleagues and schools to plan programmes to support re-engagement. Mentoring often plays a critical role in this process.

BVS monitors this roll of LAC not in school weekly and works closely with social workers and carers to secure appropriate provision. The average time to get a child or young person into school is 4 weeks. In the meantime BVS arranges 1:1 tuition funded by the Pupil Premium Grant.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

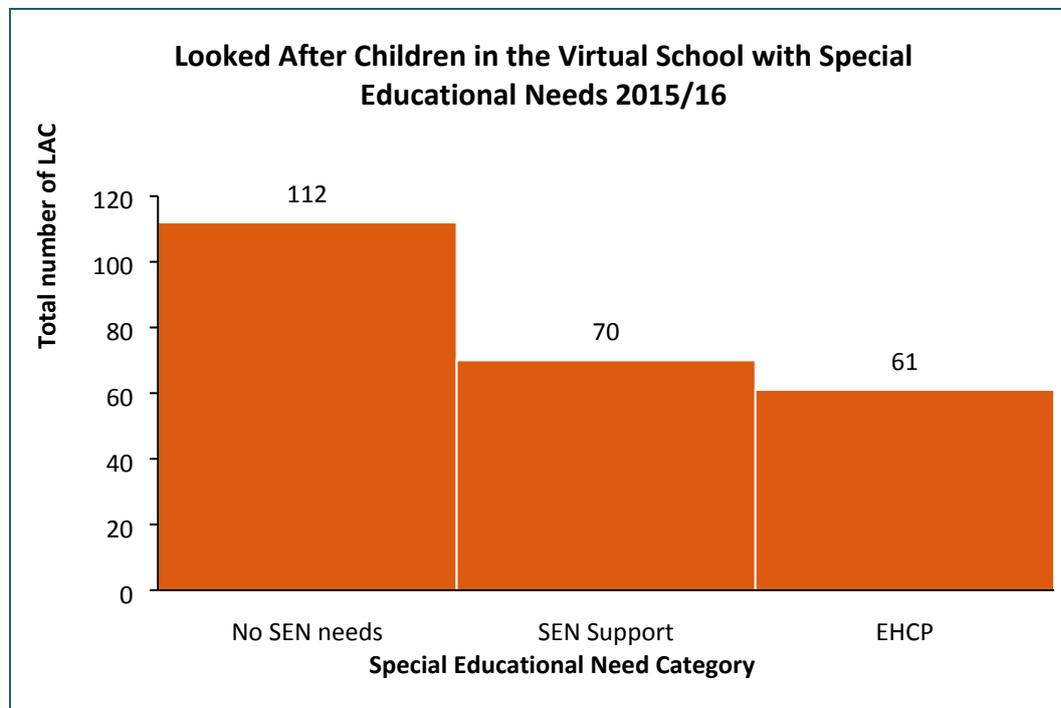
Over the past 2 years Brent has seen a significant rise in the number of UASC in care. In 2014/15 the Nursery to Year 11 LAC cohort comprised 16% UASC and in 2015/16 UASC comprised 23% of the LAC cohort.

Brent UASC come from a range of countries outside the EU, principally Afghanistan, Iraq, Albania and countries in Africa. Often they arrive without proof of age which can hamper a school admission. The majority of the UASC are in KS4 and if they are in care in the borough once their age has been agreed will be placed in the ESOL projects which are based at Queens Park and Claremont Schools. As their English improves they will be moved on to other schools in the borough. UASC in care outside Brent are referred to the relevant ESOL provision in their local area.

However it is unlikely that if they arrive in the UK during KS4 they will be eligible or able to follow GCSE courses. On the positive side many of our UASC are highly motivated to learn and some do extremely well. However they often face challenges regarding the right to remain in the UK and access to public funds once they become 18.

6. SEND

65% of the 2015/16 LAC cohort had identified SEND needs compared with 12% nationally. 28% had Education Health Care Plan (EHC plan) compared with 3% nationally; the same percentages as 2014/15. BVS tries where possible to combine annual reviews of statements or EHC Plans with PEP meetings. SEND and the meeting of these needs is a significant barrier to learning for many of our LAC.



Please note that the above graph represents LAC in Reception - Year 11

7. Brent's Looked After Children's Attainment 2015/16

Monitoring and improving outcomes for Brent LAC is a key priority for the BVS and although LAC numbers are relatively small, national and regional comparisons allow an understanding of educational and other outcomes achieved for children for which Brent Council are responsible as the corporate parent. Outcomes are reported for LAC who have been continuously looked after for at least 12 months up to and including 31 March 2016. Data is collated from the annual LAC return (SSDA903) and matched to attainment and school census data⁴.

Please note that new assessment measures have recently been introduced at Key Stages 1, 2 and 4 and that National Curriculum Levels no longer exist. Instead at KS1 and 2 children are expected to achieve at least a scaled score of 100 to meet the expected standard. Therefore comparisons of 2016 KS1 and 2 outcomes with those attained in 2015 are not appropriate. The outcome measures at KS4 (GCSE) also changed in 2016. The old measure of 5A*-C, including English and mathematics is no longer reported but for LAC purposes a comparison with 2015 GCSE outcomes is appropriate.

⁴ The national data included in this report is LAC only. Care must be taken when interpreting this information due to the small number of children and the volatility of these cohorts.

8. Early Years (Non Statutory) Provision 2015/16

1 LAC aged 2-4 years was eligible in 2015/16 to access nursery education.

2015/16 Statutory Attainment

The attainment of the Year 2 (Key Stage 1), 6 (Key Stage 2) and 11 (Key Stage 4) cohorts in 2015/16 is set out below. The national comparative data given is for 2015; the 2016 national data for LAC outcomes will not be released until May 2017.

9. Year 1 Phonics Test

The eligible cohort comprised 4 children of which 3 (75%) passed the test. The national average in 2016 was 81%. 2 further children re-took and passed the test in Year 2.

10. Key Stage 1 Statutory Attainment

Assessment for pupils in this key stage is conducted in the academic year pupils turn 7.

In 2016 a new set of KS1 curriculum tests was introduced. Schools were required to administer 2 tests for English reading and 2 for Maths (arithmetic and reasoning) during May. There is also an optional test in Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling (GPS).

At the end of KS1 teachers must make their teacher assessment judgements on reading, writing, mathematics and science for each eligible pupil using the interim teacher assessment framework. The outcomes were moderated locally. Schools are not obliged to publish the test results, and they are not reported to the government. However parents must be allowed access to their child's results on request.

In 2016 the LAC KS1 cohort comprised 13 children. Of that cohort only 4 children, eligible to take the tests, had been in care for more than a year.

KS1 TESTS for 2015-16 SFR Cohort (4 children)	Achieved Expected Standard	National Average All children
Reading, Writing and Maths	3 (75%)	60%
Maths	3 (75%)	73%
Reading	4 (100%)	74%
Writing	3 (75%)	66%

Key Characteristics of the Cohort:

- 50% (2) were in Brent schools
- 75% (3) had a change of placement in KS 1
- 50% (2) had a change of school placement during KS1

Analysis of the children who did not achieve the expected standard in KS:

- 50% had a placement move and change of school in 2015/16
- 25% of the children had an EHCP and 50% of the children were on SEN Support
- All had significant emotional and social needs relating to their LAC status.

11. Key Stage 2 Statutory Attainment 2015/16

Assessment for pupils in this key stage is conducted in the academic year that pupils turn 11.

In 2016 there were significant changes to national assessment at the end of KS2. These were:

- New curriculum and assessments
- Expected standard higher than previous Level 4
- Tests in reading and maths reported as scaled scores, not levels, with an expected standard of a scaled score of 100
- Writing teacher assessment; must meet all statements at the standard and below.

Please note that 2016 outcomes at KS2 cannot be compared with those of 2015.

The headline accountability measures for schools are:

- % achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths
- % achieving high standard in reading, writing and maths
- Progress score in each of reading, writing and maths
- Average scaled score in each of reading and maths.

Nationally in 2016 53% met the expected standard in reading, writing and maths. In 2015 80% achieved the expected standard of L4+.

In 2016 the LAC cohort comprised 10 children. 1 of these was a UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child) and not eligible to take the tests and 1 was out of year (ie a year older) who took the tests but will not be counted in Brent's official results.

KS2 TESTS for 2015-16 SFR Cohort (8 children)	Achieved Expected Standard	National Average All Children	Brent Average All Children
Reading, Writing and Maths	4 (50%)	53%	55%
Reading	5 (62.5%)	66%	
Writing	5 (62.5%)	74%	
Maths	5 (62.5%)	70%	
Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling	3 (37.5%)		

- The KS2 cohort struggled to gain the expected standards across all subjects because they did not achieve the expected standard in the new Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (GPS) test, some missing the expected standard by very few marks
- 90 % of children who did not achieve the expected standard in a subject had scored 94 points or above
- Of the children who did not achieve all the expected standards, 57 % had an EHCP or Statement and 43% were on SEN Support.

Key Characteristics of the Cohort:

- 63% (5) were in Brent schools
- 63% (5) had at least 1 change of school placement during KS2
- 63% (5) had at least 1 change of care placement during KS2
- 88% (7) were identified as having SEND with 50% (4) with EHC Plans.

1 LAC had been out of school since February 2016; arrangements were made for him to take the tests with his previous school.

BVS Interventions and support for the Year 6 Cohort:

- 2 Easter holiday booster class days
- 1:1 tuition for children who needed to close the gaps in particular subjects
- Enrichment activities: visits to the Science Museum, the Roald Dahl Museum and author workshop, Wembley Legends Day, Thoughts and Sports week
- Primary/secondary transition training for foster carers
- Pre-PEP transition meetings with secondary schools
- Ensuring children who were out of school could sit their KS2 assessments
- Learning Mentors to support with transitions and placement moves.

Rates of Progress from KS1

- 25% of children exceeded expected rates of progress in Reading, Writing and Maths
- 37.5% exceeded the expected rates of progress in Reading and Maths
- 50% made the expected rate of progress across Reading, Writing, GPS and Maths
- 25% of children made the expected rate of progress in Reading
- 37.5% made expected rates of progress in Writing
- 25% of children made the expected progress in Maths
- 37.5 % made the expected rate of progress in GPS.

Children who do not reach the expected standard in KS2 are eligible for Year 7 Catch-Up funding in their first year at secondary school. BVS has ensured that additional support is being provided for our Year 7 LAC who did not reach the expected standards and this support is documented in their Autumn Term 2016 PEP.

12. Key Stage 4 Statutory Attainment 2015/16

Assessment for these pupils is conducted in the academic year pupils turn 16.

From 2016 assessment at KS4 places more emphasis on the progress of pupils and across a broader range of subjects than previously.

The headline accountability measures for schools in 2016:

- Progress 8 (progress in 8 qualifications)
- Attainment 8 (attainment in 8 qualifications)
- % achieving A*-C in English and maths
- % achieving the EBacc
- % entering the EBacc
- Destinations (% staying in education or training at post-16).

The 2016 Year 11 LAC cohort comprised a total of 51 pupils. Only 23 of this cohort had been in care for more than a year. A further 5 of these were not eligible to take GCSE. The SFR cohort was 18. Currently BVS is only able to report outcomes using the previous KS4 performance measure of 5A*-C grades including English and mathematics.

OUTCOME MEASURE for 2015-16 SFR KS4 Cohort (18)	Brent	LAC National 2015	National Average 2015 All Pupils
5A*-C grades incl En and ma	3 (17%)	13%	60%

Comparative national LAC data will be published in May 2017. The London network of virtual school headteachers has shared some 2016 KS4 data. Croydon and Newham 2 of our statistical neighbour boroughs reported 15% and 13% 5A*-C grades including English and mathematics.

In 2014 the eligible Year 11 Brent LAC cohort achieved 9% 5A*-C incl En and ma and 0% in 2015.

Key Characteristics of the Cohort:

- 28% (5) were in Brent schools
- 33% (6) had a placement change in Year 11
- 11% (2) had a school change in Year 11
- 61% (11) were identified as having SEND with 22% (4) with EHC Plans.

Levels of Attainment and Progress at Key Stages 2 and 4

At Key Stage 4, new measures: Attainment and Progress 8 will replace the old measure of 5A*-C including English and mathematics with measures that reflect pupils' attainment and progress in 8 prescribed subjects in single scores. A similar attainment and progress scale scored approach is used to report KS2 outcomes.

Currently we are unable to report our LAC outcomes at KS2 and 4 in this way. The DfE is engaged in work with the new National Association of Virtual School Headteachers (NAVSH) to introduce national progress comparative data for LAC.

Work on monitoring current LAC progress is a main part of our work in BVS, using termly data drops collected by Welfare Call (the company that provides our electronic Personal Education Plans: PEPs). Such monitoring is enabling us quickly to identify LAC at risk of under-achievement, to challenge schools and to work with the Designated Teachers in schools to provide appropriate individual support and adapt PEPs as appropriate.

Context and Impact on Outcomes

The educational attainment of LAC is measured against the educational attainment of all children. The majority of LAC face challenges and barriers to their overall achievement that the majority of other children do not.

Last year's BVS Annual Report reflected widely on the context and reasons why LAC, despite matching the same cognitive ability range as the rest of the pupil population, do so poorly by national attainment measures. The report highlighted the impact that changes of care placement and possible school changes can have on academic progress and achievement. Recent research into LAC attainment showed a close correlation between high attainment and good school attendance in a stable school placement especially across a key stage supported by a stable care placement.

The analysis highlighted also the significantly higher percentages of SEND (Special Education Needs and Disabilities) in the LAC population and the higher number of risk factors for LAC:

- 60% of LAC experience emotional and mental health problems: 4 times higher than children generally
- 66% of LAC have at least 1 physical health issue; are 3 times more likely to drink alcohol and/or smoke; 4 times more likely to take illegal drugs; more likely to become teenage parents
- Over 25% of LAC have an EHC Plan compared with only 3% of all pupils.

Brent's LAC reflect these national statistics. In addition the majority of Brent's LAC come into care between the ages of 11-16 at a time when the challenges faced by young people are more intractable and are more likely to result in placement breakdown and change of education setting.

In 2015/16 BVS began to highlight the growing international awareness of the impact that poor attachment in the early years of a child can have on developing brains and on a child's and young person's emotional capability and this work is continuing. BVS is making use of international research led by Harvard University focusing on key aspects of child

development including: early experiences and how they affect the development of brain architecture, toxic stress and the development of resilience which is critical to academic engagement and motivation. LAC, because of neglect and/or abuse in early childhood, are more likely to suffer long term consequences in terms of their ability to learn and form relationships. Their behavior which at times can be extreme and put them at risk of school exclusion is often directly related to these early attachment issues. Please visit <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/> for more details and helpful video presentations.

BVS is now attempting to educate schools about these issues and to encourage them to adopt attachment aware ways of interacting with our LAC which will be supportive rather than punitive. In particular it is funding, through the retained Pupil Premium Grant, Attachment and LegoTheraplay Training for schools. Please see Appendix 2 for further details of this training programme and the feedback received from schools. BVS is also planning a Conference in March 2017 on attachment that will feature a key note presentation by Dr Janet Rose a leading British researcher in this area. Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee are very welcome to attend on 9th March.

BVS is also for the first time from September 2016 using the Pupil Premium Grant to fund 3 schools in Brent; 2 secondary schools and a primary school which between them educate a significant number of our LAC, to receive CAMHs support through the Targeted Adolescent Mental Health Support (TAMHs), a school's resource which places a CAMHs counsellor in a school for a day or half a day a week. Initial feedback from the schools involved indicates that this resource is making a difference in helping our young people to understand and manage their emotions.

13. Key Stage Five Attainment 2015/16

BVS did not have a dedicated post-16 advisory teacher resource in 2015/16. This was removed when the team was re-structured in 2013 going from a team of 6: a lead advisory teacher (deputy head of BVS) and 5 advisory teachers to a team of 4: a lead advisory teacher (deputy head of BVS) and 3 advisory teachers. The number of LAC has remained constant and the raising of the participation age by government to 18 has accentuated the need to ensure that post-16 LAC's educational progress is monitored and supported. From September 2016 following the appointment of a substantive Deputy Headteacher for BVS, the postholder together with the BVS Headteacher has been offering limited support to post-16 LAC; focusing particular of those who are NEET (not in education, employment or training).

It is not possible at this time to present a coherent set of Year 12 and 13 outcomes for 2016. Work continues with social workers on compiling this information and we hope to have this fully in place by the end of the Spring Term.

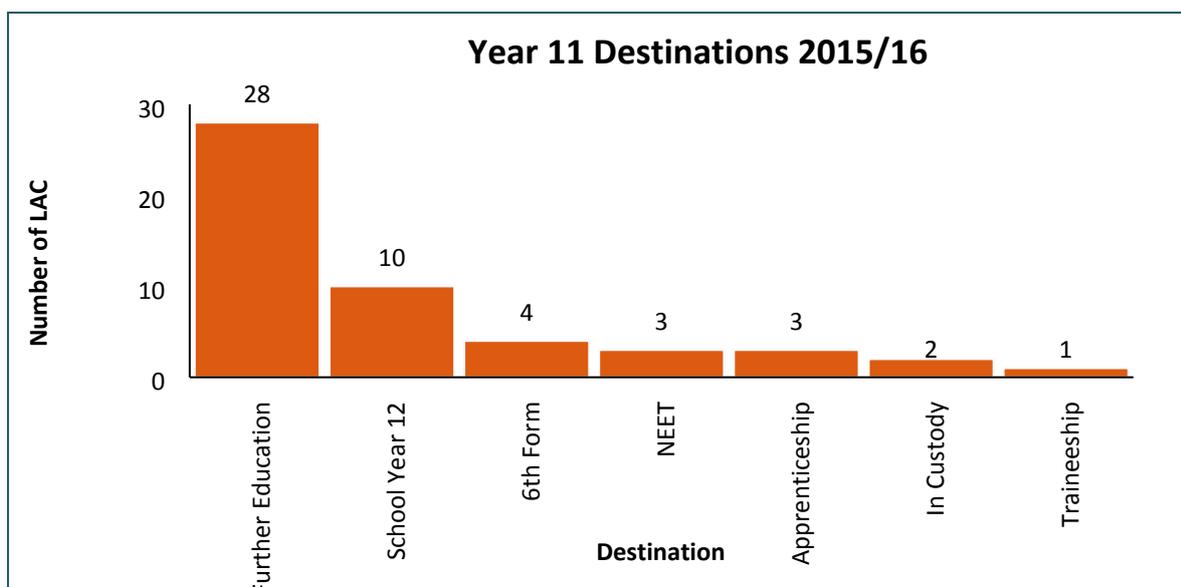
14. Destinations of LAC at 16+

The education, employment and training (EET) status of LAC in the September following completion of Year 11.

16+ LAC September Guarantees⁵

By July 2016 48 out of a total of 51 year 11 LAC had a September Guarantee. The graph below breaks this down into specific destinations.

⁵ The September Guarantee is an offer, by the end of September, of a suitable place in learning to young people completing compulsory education. The Guarantee was implemented nationally in 2007 for 16 year olds and extended to 17 year olds in 2008.



The 3 LAC identified as NEET continue to receive individual support and guidance from the BVS Life Coach.

15. Exclusions

No Brent LAC were permanently excluded in 2015/16. Fixed term exclusions were higher than in 2014/15 in terms of number of days lost to exclusion.

Please see below summary table for exclusions

Exclusion Data ⁶			
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Total number of fixed term exclusions- days	190.5	253	300
Number of pupils excluded- fixed term	38	35	45
Total number of permanent exclusions	1	1	0

In 2015/16 a number of LAC were at risk of exclusion and a proportion of KS4 LAC were directed to alternative provision to address their behaviour by their mainstream school. 4 LAC in Year 11 were in Alternative Provisions. BVS aims to work closely with schools to avoid the permanent exclusion of our LAC where possible by helping schools to find appropriate alternative provision.

16. Monitoring Attendance

Maintaining regular school attendance is fundamental to a young person achieving their potential at school. BVS recognises that monitoring LAC attendance is a key activity.

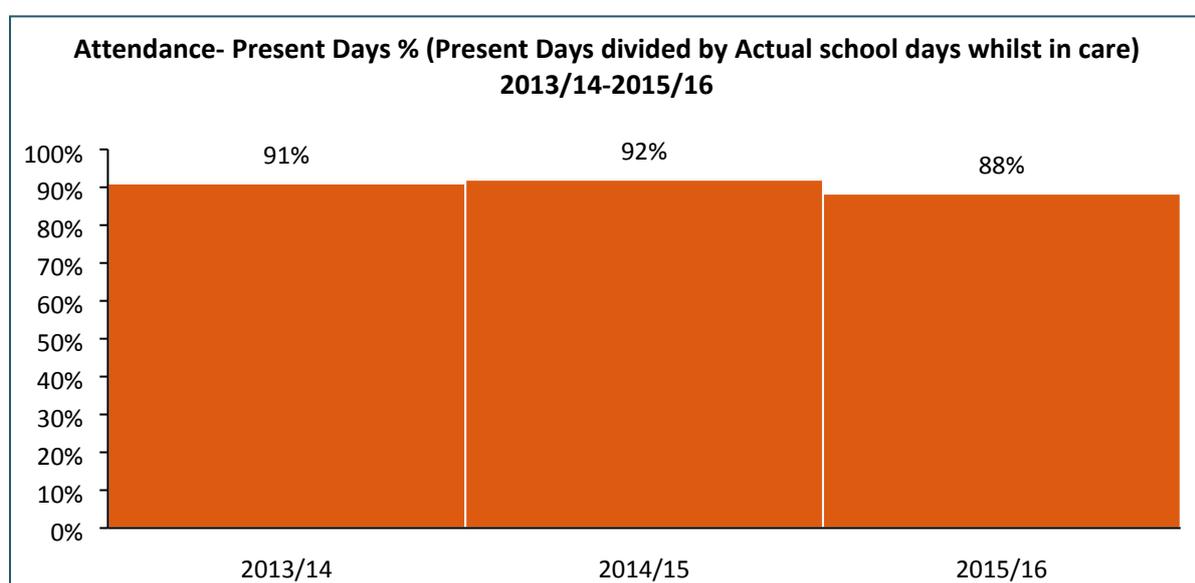
Since April 2012 the Welfare Call Service has been commissioned by the BVS to provide accurate data that enables it to monitor attendance, punctuality and exclusions for Brent LAC, wherever they live. The Welfare Call Service is used across the country by other local authorities and has an excellent track record in providing a variety of accurate [attendance/exclusion reports](#) and statistics on a daily basis.

⁶ Please note that the figures included above are collected by Welfare Call.

An important aspect of the service is the daily call to each school attended by Brent LAC. Once an attendance issue is raised, the Welfare Call Service ascertains whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised and the type (e.g. medical, exclusion) as well as alerting both the social worker and the carer.

BVS is able to access regular datasets regarding young people's attendance at primary, secondary, special and residential schools across the country. Welfare Call reports are sent daily to BVS. If any unusual absences or significant concerns are noted, the relevant advisory teacher will send an alert to the social worker, their manager and any involved person, for further investigation.

Attendance for Brent LAC, although below national averages, had shown significant improvement over the past 2 years. It has declined again in 2015/16. This decline reflects the increased challenge presented by larger numbers of older children entering the care system. In many cases poor school attendance is engrained. However BVS is not complacent about this and is continuously looking at ways to support better LAC school attendance.



17. Pupil Premium Grant

The Pupil Premium grant (PPG) for Brent LAC (£1900pa per LAC) is managed by the Headteacher of BVS.

The DfE provides the PPG on a financial year basis. In 2015/16 and 2016/17 BVS received £600,400 based on 316 LAC. The academic year spans 5 12ths of 1 financial year and 7 12ths of the following financial year.

BVS' policy is to provide schools with £1300 per LAC made in 1 annual payment in arrears; the £600 balance is retained for centrally funded support. Schools are asked to attach PPG spend to PEP targets which is then agreed by BVS as part of the quality assurance process of PEPs. Schools can bid for the whole £1900; each bid is approved on its merits.

In 2015/16 the retained, cumulative, balance funded the following BVS activity:

- Life Coach Ben Kwofie supporting Post-16 transition
- Easter Holiday and summer Half Term revision sessions for Year 6 and Year 11 LAC both in Brent and elsewhere
- Additional 1:1 tuition, mentoring sessions and additional support to a number of

individual LAC who were not in school for a variety of reasons or were between schools due to foster placement changes

- Attachment Training for schools provided by a national trainer.

The impact of PPG on individual LAC outcomes is variable and sometimes it is difficult to link the funding to specific improvements. BVS works hard to hold schools to account for how LAC PPG is spent and recently has been directing more funding towards helping schools understand and then address the reasons why LAC tend to underperform.

The impact of the Year 11 Life Coach, funded by PPG, continues to make a significant contribution to the support our Year 11 LAC receive in helping them to make a positive post-16 transition.

18. Training and Advice

The Virtual School staff group provide training sessions to:

- Designated Teachers (termly DT forum sessions)
- Foster Carers (bi-annually)
- Fostering Team
- Safeguarding Teams
- LAC Teams in schools
- Newly employed Social Workers.

The content of these training sessions includes, PEP and PPG processes, attachment disorders and strategies, school application and admission processes, expected roles and responsibilities.

During 2015/16 members of BVS provided the following training:

- ePEP training
- Care Planning Staff Forum Training
- Brent Governors' Forum Training
- Foster Carer Training
- Social Worker Induction Training
- Social Care Staff Forum Training
- Designated Teacher Forum: Attachment and ePEP Training.

BVS will be working closely with the new substantive Head of LAC and Permanency (arriving February 2017) to ensure that social workers receive appropriate and timely training on how to hold schools to account for the progress and attainment of Brent LAC.

19. Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

PEPs are statutory and when done well are a key driver of LAC education improvement.

During 2015/16 further steps were taken to improve both the completion rate and overall quality of PEPs with the result that by the end of the Autumn Term 2016 96% of PEPs had been completed and all were rated good or better in terms of quality. The revision of the electronic PEP and enhanced training that focused on SMART targets has made a significant contribution to the improved quality. A PEP rated good or better should contain the following:

- Input by the child or young person about their education, what is helping them learn, what they would like further help with

- SMART targets that reflect the child's or young person's input
- Helpful comments and strategies based on the child's or young person's barriers to learning that will help staff meet their needs.

Moderation of PEP targets is held half termly and termly audits of PEPs are planned.

A key part of the revision of our PEP format and process was informed by the views of our young people. Please see Appendix 3: 'PEP Feedback from Brent Care in Action Group (June 2016)' for details of this feedback. Following the revision of the ePEP format BVS revised its guidance documentation and this was issued to Designated Teachers and social workers in September 2016.

Post 16 PEPS in 2015/16 were conducted by the Social Work teams.

20. Celebrating Achievement

Each year BVS organises a celebration event for LAC and invites nominations to recognise the achievements of the children and young people. The event to celebrate achievement in 2015/16 was held on 27th January 2017 in the Grand Hall in Brent's Civic Centre. 153 children and young people were nominated by their social workers, carers or designated teachers to receive a certificate of achievement. Certificates and prizes were presented by the Mayor of Brent, the Cabinet Member for Education and the Strategic Director of Children and Young People in Brent. The event, as ever, was a joyful occasion with a wide range of achievements being recognised. For the first time BVS made some special Key Stage awards for outstanding achievement.

21. LAC Enrichment

Following the re-structure of BVS in 2013 and the reduction in the team capacity enrichment activities declined. I am delighted to report that in 2015/16 the enrichment programme was revitalised and a number of our LAC benefitted from a wider range of activities. The programme for this academic year is even better. The feedback we receive from LAC following events helps us to shape future events.

During 2015/16, BVS supported LAC in a range of enrichment activities:

- The Letterbox Project – a literacy and numeracy project which promotes home learning. Feedback from pupils is very positive and foster carers report that receiving a book each month encourages greater interest in reading
- Arvon Writing Project, funded by the John Lyons' charity
- Visits to the Roald Dahl Museum and the Science Museum
- Thoughts for Sports Activity Week
- Visit to St John's College Cambridge for LAC and foster carers.

A recent successful bid to the John Lyons' charity means that more events are planned for this academic year. As ever such activities rely on the willingness of BVS Advisory Teachers to give up weekend and holiday time to support our LAC and I am delighted to say that the team are always happy to do this.

BVS is particularly keen to ensure that we are supporting our LAC to have the aspiration to progress to Higher Education. In 2017 we hope to be part of a DfE Innovations funded project 'New Beginnings' which is being sponsored by Lord Wills and will build on our visit in July 2016 to St John's College Cambridge.

22. Current Service Plan for Brent Virtual School

The current BVS Service Plan is attached as Appendix 3. The priority for BVS is to secure a suitable post-16 resource both to support and prevent LAC from becoming NEET and to raise aspirations for Higher Education.

Janet Lewis
Headteacher Brent Virtual School
February 2017.

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**Brent Council Children and Young People
Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report****Period of review: 01/04/16 to 31/03/17**

This report outlines the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) on quality assuring and improving services for children in care. It also contains quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO provision in Brent as required by statutory guidance. This report includes quotations gathered from a 'Bright Spots' survey carried out with looked after children and through consultation with the Care in Action, Brent's Children in Care Council.

*It's different but at the end of the day I can say that I got a home and a family.
– Child aged 11-18*

1. Summary of Key Messages**What has gone well?**

- Children and young people feel they are involved in decision making about their lives. In a survey conducted with 96 children in care, 90% of respondents aged 8-11 and 84% of respondents aged 12 to 18 said they felt included in decision making 'always' or 'sometimes'.
- A total of 76% of looked after children who responded said that an adult had explained to them why they are in care.
- When children were asked about whether they thought their lives were getting better, 77% of children aged 8-18 said their lives were 'a bit better' or 'much better'.
- Children have said that they value keeping the same IRO throughout their time in care.
- When children ask their IROs for support, there is evidence that issues are raised by IROs and resolved quickly avoiding escalation.

What can be improved?

- There continues to be a high number of changes in social workers for children. 66 children aged 11-18 responded to a question about how many social workers they had in the last year and 47% said they had three or more social workers.
- IROs need to become more involved in the scrutiny of Pathway Plans and preparation for independent living to prepare children for leaving care.
- Some IROs have fed back that they are not always consulted when children move. It is important for IROs to be involved when there are any changes to a child's care plan.
- Social workers' reports and updated care plan are not always available before the review. This does not allow the child, carers, parents and the IRO time to fully prepare for the review.
- There needs to be closer monitoring of the timeliness of LAC reviews to improve performance.

My IRO listens and helped me to move with a better carer, I am now very happy.

2. Purpose of the IRO Service

The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) provision in Brent is set within the national framework from the updated IRO Handbook, linked to revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance introduced in April 2011. The responsibility of the IRO has changed from the management of the looked after children's review process to a wider overview of the case including regular monitoring and follow-up between reviews. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of care planning for looked after children and challenging drift and delay.

The importance of the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer is captured in the foreword of the research conducted by the National Children's Bureau in 2014 that states: "The Independent Reviewing Officer must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment, or whether we are failing." The IRO service in Brent is committed to high standards of care planning for Brent's looked after children.

Case Study: Aasif

Aasif is a 14 year old unaccompanied child who was placed with an independent foster carer when he arrived in Brent. When Aasif's case responsibility changed to another local authority as part of the national dispersal scheme, Aasif was worried that he would need to move and told his IRO he wanted to stay with his foster carer. The IRO worked persistently with the new local authority to ensure Aasif remained with his foster carer where he is settled and happy.

3. Review of IRO provision priority actions

The IRO provision had 7 priorities to improve services and make an impact on positive outcomes for looked after children in 2016/17.

Priority 1: Closer monitoring of timescales for midway reviews and distribution of LAC review minutes to ensure plans for children are made and enacted within the agreed time scale for the child.

A sample of 25 case audits was completed which evidenced that there is an increasing number of midway reviews completed. This is not yet consistent across all cases and is an area requiring continued monitoring.

LAC review minutes are routinely distributed to relevant parties by social workers. Audit has identified some improvement in timeliness of distribution but more improvement is required in this area. Work is underway to identify resources through the Department administration review to support more effective coordination of reviews.

Priority 2: Incorporate and implement the Signs of Safety model to the review process to keep the long-term safety and welfare of children and young people at the heart of the review and build on family and carers' strengths.

All 11 IROs who conduct LAC Reviews for Brent are now trained with the Signs of Safety model. The feedback from IROs on using the model with LAC reviews varies. Although some find it useful when there are risks involved, including a risk of a placement breakdown, the benefits are less evident when children and young people are settled, stable and achieving. As a result of this feedback, a review will take place to determine how Signs of Safety can be better adapted to LAC Reviews and care planning.

Priority 3: The IRO Group including permanent and Aidhour IROs to continue to meet together bi-annually to progress development in the area of their work and be further updated in about services for children in care in Brent

The IROs met twice in July 2016 and January 2017. IROs were updated of the direction and development of Brent by the Strategic Director and the two Operational Directors. This was also used as an opportunity to raise any issues the IROs may have. IROs are aware of Brent's escalation procedure and have direct access to the Strategic Director and the Operational Directors should the need arise. IROs can also seek independent legal advice when required and are supported by Brent legal services in pursuing this.

Priority 4: Increase the gathering of children's feedback to improve the quality and responsiveness of the service and individual reviews and ensure we adhere to the principle of 'nothing with us, without us'.

The Review, Engagement and Participation (REP) Team Manager regularly attends Care in Action, Brent's Children in Care Council events and uses these opportunities to gather feedback on the IRO function. Feedback is summarised in this report.

In early 2017, CYP worked with the Bright Spots programme, a partnership with the University of Bristol and Coram Voice, that aims to improve the experience of care for looked after children, give children a voice on their own well-being and highlight the 'bright spots' of practice. The REP Team coordinated a survey in close collaboration with Care in Action that led to 96 children and young people responding to age appropriate questions relating to relationships, resilience, rights, recovery and well-being. Planning is underway to fully disseminate the findings and incorporate these findings into service improvement activities.

Being in care has its upsides and downsides. For me mostly upsides. I have experienced a lot however, I think that if I hadn't been in the position that I'm in now then I would be in the positive I'm in currently which is very stable and secure -Child aged 11-18

Priority 5: Recruit a permanent IRO to the vacant position to increase the capacity of the service

A permanent IRO was appointed in September 2016 and is integrated into the service.

Priority 6: The IRO manager to observe reviews of the in-house and Aidhour IROs using the EARS and Appreciative Inquiry Signs of Safety model to reflect learning back. Any feedback themes will be discussed at the bi annual meeting to support IRO development

Eight observations of reviews for looked after children were undertaken. Overall IROs demonstrated a high level of understanding of the review process ensuring that the child's voice is at the centre of decision making. In all the observations IROs spoke to children on their own and took their views on board. As a result of the observation, a Signs of Safety refresher was arranged for all IROs and this took place on the 18th Jan 2017.

Priority 7: Continuous learning from feedback from children and young people; parents, professionals and carers will be fully incorporated into the Learning and Development offer.

The REP Team Manager regularly visits LAC and Permanency Teams to share learning about how services can be improved. Over the last year, this has focussed on looking at care planning from the child's perspective, making sure reviews are child focussed and the importance of sharing the care plan in advance of the review. As a service improvement initiative, Care in Action delivered training to foster carers on the importance of placement stability from a child's perspective.

The CYP training offer for social workers in 2017/18 includes two sessions on 'Effective Placements and Care Planning' alongside other topics of relevance to social workers working with looked after children.

4. Professional Profile of the IROs

The IRO function is part of the Review, Engagement and Participation (REP) Team that sits within the CYP Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service. The REP Team includes IRO functions, the Participation Officer for looked after children and Youth Engagement Officer who is responsible for Brent Youth Parliament. The core functions of IROs are reviewing care plans for looked after children and monitoring the Local Authority in respect of its corporate parenting and safeguarding responsibilities. As a whole, the REP Team promotes participation and hearing children's voices across CYP and ensures children's voices are incorporated into service improvement initiatives.

The REP Team is managed by an experienced social worker who is able to undertake reviews when necessary. Brent has directly employed one full time IRO since September 2016. The remainder of the IROs are experienced social work practitioners contracted through an independent agency, Aidhour (a not-for-profit company established 1998). All IROs are Disclosure and Barring Service checked, Health Care Professional Council

registered and fully qualified (above the minimum requirements). Many of the IROs have been undertaking reviews for Brent for a number of years and know the children well. In some instances, the IROs have been the most consistent and trusted person in the child's life. The IRO contract with Aidhour was extended to 31 March 2018 and a review is being undertaken to plan for the future of the service.

IRO provision has remained stable overall; however, two IROs have left Aidhour in the last 12 months for personal reasons. This overall high level of retention of IROs has led to continuity of IRO input and stability for many of our looked after children.

There are 11 IROs in Brent including those permanent and from Aidhour. There is a good representation of male and female IROs, including 6 males (54.5%) and 5 females (45.5%). This is similar to our looked after children population on 31 March 2017 where there were 206 (65%) male and 113 (35%) female children in care.

The ethnic make-up of the IROs is less diverse than that of the looked after population.

IRO Ethnicity	Number
White	6
Mixed	1
Asian or Asian British	1
Black or Black British	3

While it is noted that the ethnic composition of the IROs is not fully representative of the borough's looked after children population, services are provided within an equal opportunities framework and all IROs, as qualified social workers, are expected to adhere to the Health and Care Professional Council code of conduct and Brent's internal policies and procedures.

5. Profile of Brent's looked after children

Although there is a slight increase in children in care in the 0 to 4 age range, 77% of children in care on 31/3/2017 were over the age of 10 and 41% were 16 and 17 years of age.

Children in care by age

	2015/16	2016/17
0 to 4 years of age	29	33
5 to 9 years of age	56	40
10 to 15 years of age	125	114
16 to 17 years of age	127	132
Total children in care	337	319



There is a significant disproportion of children in care by gender, with males accounting for 65% of Brent's children in care population. This is particularly notable for 16 to 17 year olds in care, where 68% of children in care are male.

I've been in care most of my life and I feel like I'm getting raised better than I would be with my parents – Child aged 11-18

Children in care by age and gender

	Male	Female
0 to 4 years of age	18	15
5 to 9 years of age	24	16
10 to 15 years of age	74	40
16 to 17 years of age	90	42
Total by gender	206	113

The ethnic identity of the cohort of children looked after as of 31 March 2017 was as follows:

Children in care by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Number	%
White	93	29.15%
Mixed/ Multiple	61	19.1%
Asian or Asian British	64	20%
Black or Black British	92	28.8%
Other	9	3.3%
Total	319	100%

What would make care better?

Get my carer more involved in decisions involving school and my life. – Child aged 8-11

6. Referral and allocations

The REP Team Manager is responsible for ensuring children who come into care are allocated an IRO. Referrals to Aidhour are completed via the Aidhour Director who ensures children are promptly allocated to an Aidhour IRO, promoting smooth communication and liaison with allocated social workers and the REP Team. The service is supported by 0.5 post of a business support officer who process invoices, liaises with Aidhour and allocated social workers and completes other administrative work as necessary.

Full time IROs carry a case load of 60 to 65 children at any given time. This case load is in line with national guidance and Ofsted recommendations. IROs are valued by social work staff as experts in the field of looked after children and as such offer guidance on care planning, as well as tracking individual plans through mid-way reviews.

Once allocated, IROs are expected to provide and maintain continuity and consistency in reviewing a child's care plan whilst they remain looked after. In addition, the IROs complete midway reviews and liaise with the child's Guardian if there are court procedures as well as other professionals as and when required.

IROs carrying out review tasks have secure remote access to 'Mosaic', Brent's integrated children's service database, so that they can input their reports and review the progress of a child's care plan. They are able to add a case note to a child's case record on Mosaic, record the midway review of care plans and identify any relevant issues that require escalation to senior managers for resolution.

IROs have secure remote access to the Brent internal e-mail system which facilitates confidential communication and information exchange between IROs and Brent social workers and managers, thus complying with data protection requirements. This promotes a joined up approach in order to achieve the agreed care plan for the child and ensure that the required standard is maintained.

The REP Team Manager attends London IRO Managers Meetings held every quarter at the Department for Education (DfE). This ensures the service stays in touch with developments across the sector in respect of recent court judgement and meeting the expectations of the court in care planning cases in proceedings. The DfE meetings look at local and national issues affecting looked after children in addition to having a regular slot for a senior manager from the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) who makes a presentation on current and relevant issues.

7. Quality assurance and monitoring of the IRO service

The REP Team Manager and Director of Aidhour carry out regular audits looking at the quality of minutes, participation of looked after children in the decision making process, and any drift in the care plan, health or education issues. The audits have revealed clear evidence of IROs taking on board children and young people's views in the decision making process. 100% of the files audits have shown that children are spoken with on their own before their LAC review or on the day of the LAC review. The quality of the minutes is good overall but requires consistency as some minutes did not to cover all the areas required.

The Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance and the REP Team Manager in Brent oversee the work of the Aidhour IROs through quarterly contract monitoring, audits, meetings and direct observation of their work by the IRO manager. Contract meetings take place once a quarter and are attended by the Director of Aidhour, the Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance and the REP Team Manager. Agenda items for this meeting include practice and developments. The agenda is agreed prior to the meeting.

The annual meeting between the Strategic Director for Children and Young People and IROs took place on 18/01/17. IROs raised a number of issues including the impact of the turnover of social workers. IROs were updated on the plan Brent has in place to increase the proportion of permanent staff against agency and the setting up of a separate Leaving Care team with additional resource being allocated for this. They were informed that although the challenge of recruiting experienced and permanent social workers continues to be present, the turnover of social work staff has reduced with the proportion of permanent staff increasing. Social workers also have reduced caseloads and closer supervision and support.

I was happy living with foster mother. I am happy with my social worker. Thanks helping with me.

- Child aged 11-18

The IRO provision in Brent has a protocol for CAFCASS and Independent Reviewing Officer Good Practice for Public Law Work embedded in practice. This has helped to ensure cases in proceedings are subject to robust analysis and challenge about the matters of critical importance to the child's safety, wellbeing and permanency.

The IRO manager is part of Brent's Permanency Tracking Panel to monitor the progress of all children who are looked after for more than 2 months who are not permanently placed.

Overall the quality of the minutes and how IROs chair and approach looked after children reviews is assessed to be good. Mid-way reviews and other activities such as escalations are visible on every file audited with some improvements required with one particular IRO's case file. This has been raised with Aidhour at the quarterly meeting and will continue to be monitored.

In addition to Brent's internal quality assurance systems, Aidhour also monitors the work of IROs to ensure it is undertaken in line with the care planning regulations to agreed standards and deadlines.

8.0 Performance information about the IRO service

Performance summary:

- A total of 984 reviews were chaired by IROs 2016/17, a decrease of 6 reviews compared to 2015/16.
- The overwhelming majority of children and young people aged over 4 years (648 reviews) attended their review and spoke for themselves.
- On a month by month basis, 91% of Reviews are held within the statutory timescales. This represents a decrease of 5% in comparison to last year. All cases where the review took place late have been audited and an action plan put in place. The reason for the lateness include late referrals and unavoidable last minute cancellations.

8.1 Participation of children

It is always preferable that children attend their review meetings and give their views. However, there are some children with additional needs and children who have suffered trauma that may impact on their behaviour who therefore may not be able to participate fully at their review meeting. IROs are sensitive to these children's needs and work with the allocated social worker and carer to listen to a child's views, wishes and feelings in a way more suited to them and incorporate this into their care plan. Children and young people are allowed to say how and who should attend their review.



It can be fun, but on the downside of living in care, you don't actually have fun with your parents, instead you get carers who are just getting fed info about your life when you know you're not this/that. Whereas your parents knew you since you were born for a limited time gaining more info than the foster carers do. So my point is foster carers (no matter how they are towards you) aren't your real family they are just there to please your life and support you when you need support. – Child aged 11-18

Case study: Adrian

Adrian is a 14 year old who entered care due to difficulties in his family life. His relationship with his father wasn't very good and Adrian felt blamed for all the problems in his family. In preparation for Adrian's first LAC Review, the IRO looked at Adrian's journey and discussed the review process with him. The IRO wanted to make sure Adrian could express himself freely and felt it would be best to have a separate meeting with Adrian and with his parents. Although his parents and some professionals were concerned with this decision due to ongoing court proceedings, the IRO strongly advocated for Adrian's voice to be heard in the LAC Review to determine a plan that Adrian would support and work with.

8.2 Attendance and participation at reviews

Reviews offer an important opportunity for children to have their say about their care plans and for professionals and carers to listen and take children views into account. IROs encourage children to attend their reviews. If a child does not want to attend their review he/she can participate in a number of other ways. Participation types are recorded against the following heading listed in the chart below.

Type of participation	Number of reviews 2015/16	% 2015/16	Number of reviews 2016/17	% 2016/17
Child physically attends and conveys verbally	677	68%	648	66%
Child does not attend but is represented	154	16%	158	16%
Child age under four	88	9%	109	11%
Child does not attend but conveys through medium such as an advocate	36	4%	32	3.3%
Child does not attend and is not represented	13	1%	22	2.2%
Child attends but does not convey and is not represented	12	1%	10	1%
Child attends and is represented	7	0.7%	3	0.3%
Child attends and conveys symbolically	3	0.3%	2	0.2%
Total	990	100%	984	100%

The majority of children and young people aged over four years (648 or 66% of reviews) attended their review and spoke for themselves, marking a slight reduction from the previous

year (677 or 68% of reviews). This appears to do be due to a small increase in the number of reviews conducted for children under the age of four and a slight increase in the number of reviews where children did not attend and were not represented.

Children's participation continues to be a strong focus of IROs and the social workers to ensure that the child's voice is heard and that reviews are held at a time and place to facilitate the greatest opportunity for attendance.

8.3. Placement moves

IROs are routinely consulted on placement moves and other significant events or changes to a child's care plan. An audit of escalations shows that IROs have been pro-active in advocating on behalf of young people and preventing moves where this is assessed to be in the young people's interest and their expressed wish. In the majority of the cases there is clear evidence of agencies working collaboratively in partnership.

Case study: Moshood

Moshood is a 16 year old who is living in semi-independent accommodation. He was well settled and due to start college when another young person moved into the accommodation who he didn't get along with. After a serious incident, the provider proposed that Moshood move. Moshood called his IRO who worked with the social worker to challenge the provider. As a result, the other young person moved out and Moshood remained in his placement. Moshood is happy and attending college as planned.

IROs have raised that in a small number of cases they are not consulted in advance of a placement change. The REP Manager is actively working with managers across CYP to ensure IROs are always part of the care planning process.

8.4 Health of looked after children

An audit of a sample of looked after children review minutes has shown that IROs routinely check annual health assessments of looked after children, incorporate the findings within their recommendation and monitor progress. Out of the 20 files audited, it was evident that IROs ensured that the action plans of LAC health assessment were at the forefront of discussions. It was clear that IROs followed up on recommendations around the physical as well as emotional health of children and drew attention to any outstanding tasks. This audit demonstrated that of the cases reviewed, 95% of the actions/recommendations from the most recent health assessment had been followed through within the agreed timescales.

8.5 Advocacy Service

IROs routinely check that children and young people know about advocacy and how it can support them in having a say in decisions affecting their lives. They also check at each review whether an independent visitor is needed and if there are any communication needs requiring additional or specialist support.

The advocacy service for looked after children is provided through a contract with Aidhour and commissioned on an individual basis when required. The total number of children referred for advocacy support in 2016/17 was 45 representing 14% of the looked after children population. In addition, 13 children had an independent visitor allocated.

The broad profile of children referred for advocacy as of 31st March 2017 include children with a disability, unaccompanied asylum seekers, children who are unhappy with overall service provision and children in secure accommodation.

The majority of advocacy requests related to children and young people's concerns in the following areas:

- Entitlement to pocket money and other funds for activities
- Choice of placements and wanting a certain type of location or placement.
- Contact with family members, particularly children wanting an increase in contact.
- Reviewing a secure accommodation order



I don't want to see Mummy but I would like to see Daddy more.
-Child aged 8-11yrs

Children placed in secure accommodation for their own safety under s25 of the Children Act 1989 are always provided with an advocate as a matter of course. This ensures that their views are transmitted to each Review to consider if they should be immediately released.

8.6 Timeliness of reviews

In 2016/17 91% of Looked after Reviews took place within the statutory timescales representing a reduction in performance of 5% from 2015/16.

Reasons for the late reviews include the following:

- Late notification by allocated social workers
- An emergency or illness leading to the review being cancelled
- Child or young person not being available on the day due to emergency.
- Miscalculation of dates (a number of reviews were out of timescale by 1 day)

An audit of the late reviews has also highlighted that the majority of the reviews out of timescale are allocated to a particular IRO. An appropriate action has been taken to address this and monthly monitoring systems put in place.

8.7 Quality of Care Planning

One of the IROs primary function is to monitor the quality of care plans. IROs report that most children have a child friendly care plan, written in a clear and coherent manner. Children and young people are supported to contribute to their care plan and receive their own copy. IROs routinely check the care planning process has helped children and young people to have their say on matters important to them and help them to understand what is happening and why.

Case Study: Cristina

Cristina is a 16 year old who entered care at the age of 6 and has had the same IRO throughout her time in care. Her IRO actively ensured that Cristina was matched with a long-term foster carer who has helped her have stable care. Cristina describes her IRO “the one consistent person who has helped me grow mature and is always there when I need him”. Cristina is expected to achieve good GCSEs and has ambitions to attend a Russell Group university.

8.8 Progress between reviews

IROs routinely contact social workers for updates on the progress of looked after children review decisions. This is conducted mid-way through the review period by visiting or phoning the young person. All looked after children and young people are given a child friendly leaflet entitled ‘My Independent Reviewing Officer’ at their initial review. The leaflet has details of their IRO’s name, contact number and email address. Young people often contact their IROs directly to discuss issues worrying them. Children have reported they would like the number of their IRO directly so they can contact them more easily when they wish.

Case Study: Abdul

Abdul is an unaccompanied minor who did not speak any English when he arrived in the United Kingdom. He said he was very scared to go out of the unit, attend college or socialise. Abdul’s allocated IRO spoke his mother tongue, which created an instant connection. Following the first review, the IRO met Abdul for coffee and encouraged him to register at college and get in touch with a local church football club. Abdul is now in college and describes his IRO as his ‘second Dad’ who has always responded when he needed him.

8.9 Management oversight of care plans

The revised statutory guidance states that operational social work managers must consider the decisions from the review before they are finalised. This is due in part to the need to ensure any resource implications have been addressed. Once the decisions are reached, the manager has five days to raise any queries or objections. Instances of this are rare, which indicates that managers are overall satisfied with the recommendations and decisions at reviews.

IROs have continued to monitor the quality of social work reports to ensure these meet the expected standard with most attention paid to the child’s progress in physical health, emotional wellbeing, school life and academic attainment, permanency and identity needs.

IROs and children and young people have given feedback to indicate that sometimes they are not consulted when decisions are made about a move of placement. This is a significant change in the life of a child or young person and this is an area where guidance and training for staff involved may be helpful.

IROs have fed back an area for development is clarity around young people moving to adulthood as social workers do not routinely provide Pathway Plans to reviews in the timescale the young person needs. Pathway Plans should be developed with young people from the age of 15.5. This is an area that requires further action.

Case Study: Karim

Karim is a 17 year old who lives in semi-independent accommodation to prepare for adulthood. He has a good rapport with his IRO who has been a consistent person in his life. At Karim's last review a decision was reached for Karim to move, but only if he viewed the new accommodation and was happy with it. Karim called his IRO to say he wasn't happy, but felt pressurised to move. The IRO escalated the matter and ensured Karim had advocacy support to plan any transition.

8.10 Permanency Outcomes

During 2016/17, the majority of children have achieved permanency through returning home to their parents or a family member, with the second highest number of children settled in a permanency arrangement in foster care. In order to monitor the high number of children who are looked after over the age of 13 and to monitor permanency, a Permanency Tracking Panel has been established and is chaired by the Head of Looked After Children and Permanency. The REP Team Manager attends and contributes to this panel and ensures information sharing when needed between the panel and IROs

9. Children's views about their IRO and their review process

Overall the experience reported by children of their IROs continues to be positive. The REP Team Manager regularly attends Care in Action, Brent's Children in Care Council. Children and young people state that they appreciate the consistent approach of IROs alongside their independence and availability. Children and young people have also said that their IROs listen to their concerns and take up issues with the relevant services where this is needed and that the issues are often resolved quickly. In the Bright Spots survey, 90 % of Children age 8-11 and 84% of young people age 11-18 who took part reported that they felt included in decision making.

Children and young people say that they experience frequent change of social workers. In some cases children and young people have also experienced change of placement without proper consultation or not having the opportunity to view the proposed placement beforehand, reinforcing the importance of IROs being informed of any placement move to promote good transitions. Children and young people said that they value the consultation

forms given before the review but most appreciate being seen and spoken with on their own.

The following examples are taken from the feedback from children and young people to their reviews:



10. Escalations and conflict resolution

One of the key functions of the IRO is to identify and resolve problems arising from the care planning process. In Brent this is called the Looked After Children Escalation Management Process. The IRO will, in the first instance, seek to resolve the issue informally with the social worker and the social worker's manager. If this is unsuccessful the IRO escalates this to the Team Manager and Principal Officer. If the issue is not resolved by the Team Manager or Principal Officer the IRO will escalate further to the Head of Service.

Information elicited from the issues identified in escalation is used to target support and challenge practice to make improvements. Young people have reported that they feel supported when IROs raise concerns and alerts about practice or plans.

A total of 50 escalations were initiated by IROs in 2016/17 compared to 58 escalations in 2015/16.

Among the 50 case escalations raised by IROs the majority were resolved at the social worker, Team Manager, Principal Officer and Head of Service levels. One situation reached the Operational Director level. Issues raised include the following areas:

- Frequent change of social workers, including one child who had a different social worker at every review.
- Care plans not progressing in a timely way, including policy and procedures not being followed around staying put and savings and recommendations of previous reviews not being carried out.

- Care plan and review paperwork being incomplete including Pathway Plans.
- Education issues, including delay in securing a school place for unaccompanied minors and completion of PEP for 16-18 year olds by sixth form colleges.
- Transition to semi-independent units and the completion of housing vulnerability reports.
- IROs not being consulted on a change of placement and care plan.
- Request for respite to prevent placement breakdown.

The use of the escalation management process often proved successful in negotiating a positive outcome.

11. Impact and outcomes

The IRO service has contributed in bringing positive outcomes in the following areas:

- Stability and choice of placements and avoiding frequent moves. IROs have supported the outcome of increased permanency for children, in particular Special Guardianship Orders and long-term fostering.
- Young people given more control to decide and lead their looked after children review, contributing to feedback from children that they feel they are involved in decisions.
- Improved timeliness of progression of care plans through a strengthened challenge function and embedding the escalation management process.
- The IRO Service has worked with social workers and the Virtual School to support young people to continue in education post 18 with a number of care leavers applying to attend (Further education) FE colleges and universities.

Case Study: Shannon and Ciara

Shannon and Ciara are 10 and 11 year old sisters who were placed with a foster carer outside of Brent when they entered care. Their IRO met them before the review and they said they were really unhappy. The IRO was concerned about what they told him and immediately escalated this, leading to Shannon and Ciara moving to live with a new foster carer. At the last LAC Review they told their IRO that they are happy and want to stay with their new foster carer forever.

12. What the REP Team plans to do in 2017/18

The REP Team joining together the IRO functions alongside engagement and participation has brought an increased opportunity to ensure that the child's voice becomes central to decision making and service improvement. The REP Team focuses on hearing children's voices and ensuring they are active participants in decision making about their lives and their services. One example how joint working is supporting children in care is that there are now two looked after children on Brent Youth Parliament, supported by participation and

engagement work. Information obtained by children and young people through participation initiatives is now actively shared with all IROs to support and inform their practice.

Planned activity to improve the IRO function of the REP Team and make an impact on positive outcomes for looked after children for 2016/17 are as follows:

1. Close management and monitoring timeliness of reviews with the aim of increasing this to at least 95%. Monthly performance reporting is now in place to drive timeliness.
2. Identify resource through the Department administration review to support more effective coordination of reviews.
3. Taking forward the messages from the 'Bright Spots' survey, working with children to develop services and monitoring impact through an annual survey with a target of 40% of children in care responding.
4. Thematic audits on identified issues including IRO scrutiny of Pathway Plans and independent living, timeliness of LAC Review paperwork and IRO involvement in placement moves. Learning and Development initiatives to be put in place following these audits as required.
5. Consult and decide upon the future arrangements for the IRO functions of the service and have these in place for 1st April 2018.
6. Review the application of the Signs of Safety model in LAC Reviews. This is to ensure that the use of Signs of Safety in LAC Reviews becomes a more impactful and helpful approach for all looked after children, their carers, social workers and IROs.
7. Evidence that continuous learning from feedback from children and young people, parents, professionals and carers is fully embedded into the Learning and Development offer.

13. What Happens Next?

- This report will be presented to senior leaders and Brent Care In Action for their comments and to agree on any actions arising
- This report will then be shared with the Corporate Parenting Committee
- The REP Team Service Plan for 2017/18 will be amended with any feedback

Goitom Mebrahtu, Review, Engagement and Participation Team Manager
Sonya Kalyniak, Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance

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