



Corporate Parenting Committee

Tuesday 25 October 2016 at 5.00 pm

Boardrooms 5&6 - Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way,
Wembley HA9 0FJ

Membership:

Members

Councillors:

W Mitchell Murray (Chair)
Conneely
Hossain
Thomas
Warren

Substitute Members

Councillors:

S Choudhary, Crane, Dixon and
Tatler

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The press and public are welcome to attend this meeting

Agenda

Introductions, if appropriate.

Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members.

Item	Page
1 Declarations of interests	
Members are invited to declare at this stage of the meeting, any relevant disclosable pecuniary, personal or prejudicial interests in the items on this agenda.	
2 Minutes of the previous meeting	1 - 4
3 Matters arising (if any)	
4 Deputations (if any)	
5 Feedback from Care in Action / Junior Care in Action	
This is an opportunity for members of the Children In Care Council (CIA) to feedback on recent activity.	
6 Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report	5 - 22
This Annual Independent Review Officer report describes the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to quality assuring and improving services for Children in Care. It provides qualitative and quantitative evidence relating to the IRO Service in Brent as required by statutory guidance for the year 2015/16.	
7 Brent Virtual School - 2016 Provisional LAC Outcomes	23 - 26
This briefing paper is intended to update the committee on the provisional outcomes for Brent LAC at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 4 (outcomes published nationally). Brent's published 2016 data, will be based on children in care for at least a year. This paper features the results of the 3 cohorts which will be included in the national data.	
8 Brent Adoption Service Report 1 April 2016 - 30 September 2016	27 - 34
The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the adoption service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children. This	

report details the activity of Brent's adoption service from April 1st – September 30th 2016.

**9 Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report
1 July - 30 September 2016**

35 - 42

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 second quarter of this reporting year

10 Any other urgent business

Notice of items to be raised under this heading must be given in writing to the Head of Executive and Member Services or his representative before the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 64.

Date of the next meeting: Wednesday 8 February 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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MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE **Tuesday 19 July 2016 at 5.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor W Mitchell Murray (Chair), and Councillors Conneely, Dixon (for Hossain) and Thomas

Also present: PE and HM (Care In Action)

Apologies were received from: Councillor Hossain

1. Declarations of interests

None made.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 28 April 2016 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. Matters arising

None.

4. Deputations

None.

5. Children in Care - feedback on the Brent Pledge

PE (Chair, Care In Action) updated the committee on activities since the last meeting. The committee heard that in May, Care In Action representatives had played a role in the interview process for three Children and Young People head of service posts which participants felt had been a valuable experience.

HM (Care In Action) advised that the Head of the Virtual School had visited the CIA members and given them an opportunity to comment on the PEP (Personal Education Plan) pack. CIA feedback had included requests for PEP meetings to take place outside school hours and with advance notice, the need for sensitivity over carers attending school meetings and more involvement in target setting. As a result, it had been agreed that the CIA's views would be included in the PEP guidance which would be shared with social workers and carers. There would be a follow up in late Autumn.

PE gave an update on the Brent Pledge and Care Leave Charter training. CIA members had been trained to deliver workshops to participants which included professionals, care workers, heads of service and nurses. The workshops were based on those trialled at the previous meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee. He outlined key points arising from the workshops which included the need to improve communication when children were moving placements and also improved communication between social workers. It was felt there should be meetings between the outgoing and a new social worker (not just reliance on case notes) and for meetings with social workers to take place in relaxed settings, for example, over lunch, ensuring the child was both listening and understanding. The LAC children had also requested earlier receipt of consultation forms and to ensure over 14 year olds were given the opportunity to comment on their Health Action Plan (part C form). The young people had also stressed that, in circumstances when there was a need to change arrangements, it was important to inform and explain to the child, the reasons why this was necessary. Regarding leaving care, the CIA had reminded that living alone could be daunting, lonely and depressing and the emphasis should be on making the change smoother. Discussion had also taken place on the qualities of a social worker and it was felt they should be fun and engaging, show love, respect, have both time and patience and be easily contactable by telephone. PE was pleased to report that the post workshop evaluation had been overwhelmingly positive, all had found the session useful, had valued the opportunity to hear the young people's views and more would be held in future.

Committee members welcomed the opportunity to hear about the workshops and congratulated the young people on their successful delivery. PE and HM added that participants had been very open, the event had flowed well and it had been a rare and valuable opportunity to work alongside social workers in an informal setting.

In discussion, Janet Lewis (Head of Virtual School) confirmed that updated guidance on the PEP process would be circulated and directed to designated teachers within schools. She agreed to feedback the need for after school meetings. In response to members' concern on hearing that young people were not consistently involved in target setting, Janet Lewis hoped this was rare and stated that PEP should be designed to bring about improvement and should be agreed jointly.

Chris Chalmers (Head of LAC and Permanency) added that efforts would be made to follow good practice and for advance visits to new placements to always be made.

6. An induction presentation for members regarding Corporate Parenting

Chris Chalmers (Head of LAC and Permanency) gave a presentation on Corporate Parenting, primarily for the benefit of the new members on the committee. She outlined the current LAC population, responsibilities of Corporate Parenting, additional support given to care leavers, the Brent Pledge, the role of the virtual school and factors impacting on educational achievement.

The committee welcomed the presentation and suggested that arrangements be made for a member development session on Corporate Parenting and for young people to be invited to be involved. In discussion, questions were raised on the

unaccompanied minors who were primarily from Afghanistan, Albania and Syria and the support available. Nigel Chapman referred to the process for age assessment and collaboration across the country. Gail Tolley (Strategic Director, Children and Young People) referred to local authorities' and Corporate Parents' moral responsibility to support. Regarding training, the committee heard that some was available to the 16/17 year olds and felt that key workers providing support were also in need of specialist training. Attention was drawn to work of Newman Catholic College whom, it was said, provided have a number of support programmes.

RESOLED:

- (i) that the presentation on Corporate Parenting be noted;
- (ii) that the Strategic Director, Children and Young People investigate the possibility of a Member Development Training Session on Corporate Parenting.

7. Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report 1 April - 30 June 2016

Chris Chalmers (Head of LAC and Permanency) introduced the Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring for April to June 2016 which provided information about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it was achieving good outcomes for children. This was in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011). She drew attention to the continued increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children, the number of fostering vacancies and the increase in enquiries following a recent recruitment campaign. Reference was made to the Annual Joint Training Day for fostering panel members and social workers which took place on 24 June 2016, highlighting continued collaboration. Chris Chalmers drew attention to the Key Stage 2 SATS results noting that those for punctuation and grammar had room for improvement. Good news was hoped for forthcoming GCSE results and Chris Chalmers was pleased to report 100% attendance at examinations with 20% projected to achieved the target 5+ A*-C grades. Additionally, 96% of the year 11 cohort had a guaranteed post 16 education place.

The committee were pleased to hear the view that the Brent Fostering Panel was considered to be very professional, participative and with high calibre panel members. They also asked that their congratulations be extended to the GCSE exam entrants.

RESOLVED: that the contents of Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report, 1 April – 30 June 2016 be noted.

8. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 6.20 pm

W MITCHELL MURRAY
Chair

**Brent Council – Children and Young People Services
Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2015/16**

1. Introduction

This Annual Independent Review Officer report describes the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to quality assuring and improving services for Children in Care. It provides qualitative and quantitative evidence relating to the IRO Service in Brent as required by statutory guidance for the year 2015/16.

The IRO service is delivered in accordance with the statutory guidance set out in the updated national IRO Handbook introduced in April 2011. The Handbook describes the changed responsibility of the IRO from the management of the looked after children's review process to a wider overview of the looked after children's 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. The IRO Service in Brent consists of an IRO Manager and one IRO employed within the Council and a service commissioned from Aidhour which provides the majority of the direct IROs children in care.

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, written by Mr Justice Peter Jackson.

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.

2. Summary of key messages for 2015-2016**What has gone well?**

- 86% of children and young people participated in care planning either directly or through others at their reviews and gave feedback to their IRO. There was an increase in the number of children who physically attended their review and conveyed views verbally;
- 80% of children with a plan for adoption had decisions made in a timely way. IROs contributed to this improved performance by actively driving care planning;

- Issues raised by IROs are being resolved quickly by social workers and team managers;
- There has been a reduction in children who experienced three or more placements from 16% in 2014/15 to 12.5% children 2015/16. IROs are actively involved with any change of placement and escalate concerns when appropriate;
- Children have said that they value continuity of their IRO.

What are we worried about?

- Some children have fed back that they have experienced frequent changes of social workers;
- Some children have informed their IRO that they had a change of placement without consultation or a choice;
- Social workers' reports and up-to-date plans are not always available before the review. This does not allow time for the child, family or IRO to read the contents of the report before the review;
- Consistent recording by IROs is needed that demonstrates the child's voice in reviews, mid-way reviews and IRO activity;
- Pathway Plans need to be consistently available for all eligible young people at the review held on or around their 16th birthday.

3. Review of IRO Service priority actions 2015/16

The IRO Annual Report 2014/15 identified priorities and actions which have been completed as follows:

3.1 Closer monitoring and contract management of Aidhour IROs. A quarterly contract monitoring meeting will take place with the IRO manager.

Quarterly meetings have taken place throughout 2015/16. These meetings are held to resolve practical issues, offer training and look at areas which have led to escalations to reduce reoccurring issues.

3.2 The IRO group including permanent and Aidhour IROs will meet together bi-annually to discuss developments in the area of their work and be further updated on Children's Social Care in Brent.

Aidhour IROs working for Brent met as a group met twice and worked together for on key priorities such as incorporating the Signs of Safety model into the reviewing process. A meeting was held with the Operational Director and the Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services to ensure all IROs understand and feel part of Brent support for children in care.

3.3 Closer monitoring of timescales and midway reviews.

A total of 96 % of reviews were held within timescales. A sample of audits completed by the Aidhour director and the IRO manager demonstrates that there are increased numbers of midway reviews have been completed. This remains an area for monitoring.

3.4 Incorporate the Signs of Safety model to the review process.

The IRO manager has undertaken Practice Leader training for Signs of Safety and two of the Aidhour IROs are trained in the full Signs of Safety model. In addition three Aidhour IROs attended training on Signs of Safety specifically for IROs and Child Protection Advisors. This was a low attendance of IROs and this is being addressed with Aidhour. A draft LAC Review template incorporating Signs of Safety has been devised in consultation with practitioners, IROs and the project manager for Signs of Safety and will be introduced in November 2016 once consultation with the Children in Care Council is completed.

3.5 Increase the gathering of children's feedback to improve the quality and responsiveness of the service and individual reviews.

Themes and trends from children's feedback are more systematically being gathered to feed into learning and development and service improvement. This has built on monitoring of the escalation processes which has demonstrated that individual issues are being resolved promptly. The reduction of children being subject to three or more placement moves is an example of some of the progress being made.

3.6 The IRO manager continues to observe reviews of the in-house and Aidhour IROs. Any feedback themes discussed at the bi-annual meeting to support IRO development.

Each IRO was observed completing a LAC Review throughout the year. 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 of the observations, IROs spoke to children on their own and took their views on board. These observations identified that IROs were using two different templates for minutes. This has impacted on recording of the views of children and young people consistently and is being addressed with a new template being implemented for November 2016.

3.7 Children to be supported to write and present an annual report about their experiences of being in care in Brent.

Children were consulted as part of this report but have not written their own annual report and this will be an area of priority for 16/17. A young person's summary of this report is available and will be distributed to young people in care age 10-17 (Appendix 1).

3.8 Investigate further opportunities to strengthening the tracking system for children who have an adoption decision, so that the reviewing process supports swift action towards a child's final placement.

The IRO manager attends the tracking panel for children looked after and feeds back any concerns or issues raised. Timeliness of placements of looked after children for Adoption following best interest decision of Adoption was 80%. This is an increase of 23% from

2014/2015. IROs play a proactive role in monitoring and driving this process. The adoption service was judged as good during the 2015 Ofsted inspection.

3.9 Continuous learning from feedback from children and young people, parents, professionals and carers incorporated into the Learning and Development offer.

Key messages from children and young people are fed back to services. For example the high number of changes in social workers alongside placement moves without a full consultation or an opportunity to see the proposed placement first has been fed back to the relevant services and is being monitored by the IRO Service. Care in Action, Brent's Children in Care Council, have delivered training to staff to raise awareness about the Brent Pledge.

The IRO Annual Report 2014/15 identified two priorities where actions have been completed partially, as follows:

3.10 Increase parental participation in children's reviews by producing a 'guide to your child's review' and promote understanding and the use of an advocate for parents where necessary.

A booklet is drafted and planned for launch November 2016. We have promoted use of advocates, however this has not led to an increased take up. We are developing further options for advocacy through a commissioned service.

3.11 Revise the current review meeting template in partnership with the Children in Care council.

Through our developing Signs of Safety practice, we have developed a new template for review to optimise the voice of the child. This is being consulted with by the Children in Care council for launch before the end of 2016.

4. Professional Profile of the IRO Service.

The IRO Service sits within Brent Children and Young People's Service as part of the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service.

The service is managed by an IRO Manager who manages one permanent in-house IRO and a commissioned service called Aidhour, which provides the majority of the reviews through contracted, experienced social work practitioners.

All of the IROs are Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checked, Health Care Professional Council (HCPC) registered, fully qualified (above the minimum requirements) and experienced. 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 service provided by Aidhour has remained stable, with two IROs leaving in the last 12 months. This high level of retention of IROs has led to continuity of IRO input and stability for many looked after children.

The IRO manager ensures the service stays in touch with developments nationally and across London, in respect of recent court judgement and meeting the expectations of the court in care planning cases in proceedings through DfE hosted London IRO manager network meetings. These meetings include regular updates with the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) on current issues.

During 2015/16, the IRO manager has contributed to wider service development including participation in the recruitment of social work staff, presenting at the Children & Young People's Service staff induction and attending regional and National events, ensuring this information and learning is fed back to the organisation.

In terms of gender diversity there is a mix of IROs within both the in-house and Aidhour IRO provision. The IROs, including those in-house and from Aidhour, comprised 8 (57%) males and 6 (43%) females. This is similar to our looked after children population at 31st March 2016 with 204 (61%) male and 133 (39%) female children in care.

The ethnicity of IROs is less diverse than that of the looked after population.

IRO Ethnicity	
White	10
Mixed	1
Asian or Asian British	1
Black or Black British	2

5. Profile of Brent's Looked After Children

- The Looked After population at 31st March 2016 was 337 in comparison to 326 at 31st March 2015.
- 29 children or 8.6 % were aged 0-4 years;
- 56 children or 16.6 % were 5- 10 years;
- 125 children or 37% were 0-15 years;
- 127 young people or 37.6% were 16 plus.
- The number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) who were Looked After by Brent at 31st of March 2016 was 64 comparing to 48 at 31st March 2015.
- 14 Looked After Children have significant or complex disabilities.

The ethnicity of the cohort of Looked After Children as of 31st March 2016 was as follows:

Ethnicity		
	Number	Percentage
White	88	26.26%
Mixed/ Multiple	73	22%
Asian or Asian British	59.18	17.5

Black or Black British	109	32%
Not stated	1	2.3%
Other	7	2%
Total	337	100%

Children looked after by Age and Gender		
	Male	Female
Under 1	6	7
0-4	17	12
5-9 years	30	26
10-12	15	16
13-15	57	35
16 over	83	44
Total	204	133

6. Referral and allocations

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 IRO Service.

Full time IROs carry a case load of 60-65 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 regular mid-way reviews.

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

IROs carrying out review tasks have secure remote access to Brent 'Mosaic', the 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.

7. Quality assurance and monitoring of the IRO service

Contract meetings take place quarterly and are attended by the Director of Aidhour, the Head of Safeguarding and the IRO manager. Agenda items for this meeting include practice and service developments. During 2015/16 these meetings took place on 15/07/15, 28/11/15 and 14/01/16.

Throughout the year, audit and observation of reviews have been undertaken by the IRO manager and Director of Aidhour. Each IRO has been observed once during the year and a number of audits were completed on the quality of review minutes and mid-way reviews. In addition to Brent's internal quality assurance systems, Aidhour Ltd also monitors the work of their IROs to ensure it is undertaken in line with the care planning regulations to agreed standards and deadlines.

Overall the quality of the minutes and how IROs chair and approach reviews are assessed to be good. However, mid-way reviews did not appear on every file audited and this is an area that requires improvement. In addition IROs do not always upload escalations and e-mail correspondence to children's files. Therefore it is at times difficult to see the IRO footprint in some case files. This has been raised with Aidhour at the quarterly meeting and will continue to be monitored.

IROs have direct access to the Operational Director of Children's Social Care and the Strategic Director of Children and Young People to raise issues in respect of Looked After Children should they require it. An annual meeting with the Strategic Director for Children and Young People attended by IROs took place on 14/01/16. IROs raised a number of issues including the impact of the turnover of social work staff. IROs were updated on action which meant that Social workers have reduced caseloads and closer supervision and support. IROs were also informed of the plan in place to increase the proportion of permanent staff.

The IRO Service has a protocol to escalate cases to CAFCASS. 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.

Brent Children's Services was inspected by Ofsted from 14th of September 2015 – 8th October 2015. A number of IROs were interviewed as part of the inspection individually and as a group. Inspectors also observed looked after children reviews, audited files, looked at sample of Looked After Children review minutes, the Brent escalation procedure and spoke to children and young people.

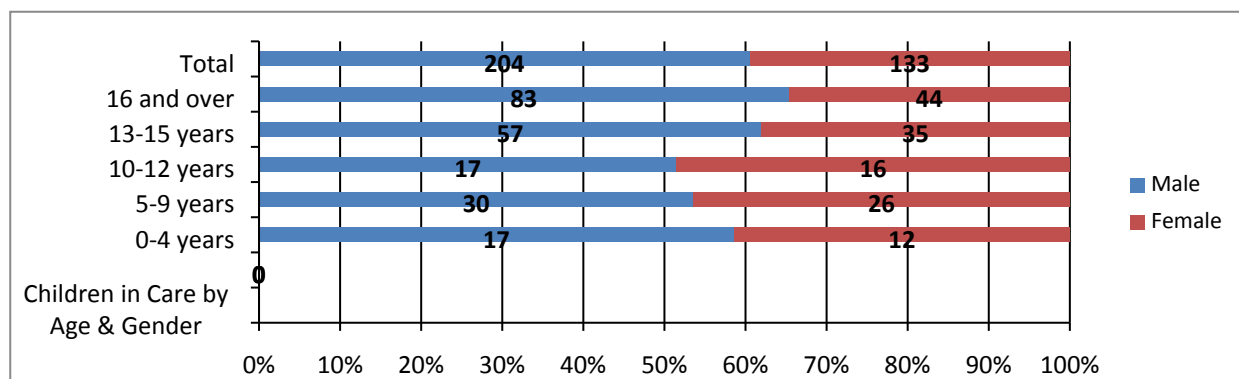
Comments made by the inspectors with regard to the IRO service included:

'The stable, long standing, independent reviewing officer (IRO) has continued to support children and has provided them with some stability during a period where there has been a significant turnover in social workers. A high percentage of children and young people attend their looked after children review.'

Inspectors saw *'evidence of appropriate use of the dispute resolution processes. In a minority of cases, recording of reviews and decision looked after children lacked sufficient clarity or relevant timescales for completion'*.

8. Performance information about the IRO service

- A total of 990 reviews were chaired by IROs in the year ending 31st March 2016. This is an increase of 60 reviews in comparison to the year 2014/15.
- The overwhelming majority of children and young people aged 4 years plus (602 reviews) attended their review and spoke for themselves
- On a month by month basis the majority of Reviews (96%) are held within the appropriate time scales.



8.1 Participation of children

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. It is always preferable that children attend their review meetings and give their views. In some cases, children may choose not to attend their review or professionals agree that this will not be appropriate. 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.

If a child does not want to attend the 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 children	% of total LAC Reviews
<i>Child physically attends and conveys verbally</i>	677	68%
<i>Child does not attend but is represented</i>	154	16%
<i>Child age under four</i>	88	9%
<i>Child does not attend but conveys through medium</i>	36	4%

<i>Child does not attend and is not represented</i>	13	1%
<i>Child attends but does not convey and is not represented</i>	12	1%
<i>Child attends and is represented</i>	7	1%
<i>Child attends and conveys symbolically</i>	3	0%
Total	990	100%

In 2015/16, the child attended and conveyed their views in 68% (677 review) of LAC reviews, an increase compared to 65% (608 reviews) in 2014/15. This increase has been a result of greater focus by the 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.

LAC review minutes are routinely distributed to relevant parties by social workers, however the reduction in administrative support has resulted service not holding central oversight on the distribution of minutes and the timeliness of this process. An interim solution is being developed to track timeliness using current team resources as there is a statutory requirement for decisions from reviews to be distributed within 20 days.

8.2 Placement moves

IROs are routinely consulted on placement moves and other significant events or changes to a child's care plan. During the year 2015/16 12.5% of children and young people looked after had three or more placement moves compared to 16% the year previous. An audit of the escalations shows that IROs has 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 to support the child and the placement which may have contributed to the reduction in placement move.

8.3 Health of looked after children

A sample audit of LAC review minutes has shown that IROs routinely check annual health assessments of Looked After Children, incorporate health within their recommendations and monitor progress. A total of 96.1% of Looked After Children had their annual health assessment completed within appropriate timescales.

8.4 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. At each review IROs consider whether an independent visitor or advocate 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 to the Advocacy Service was 41 representing 12% of the Looked After Children population.

The broad profile of children referred for advocacy as of 31st March 2016 include:

- Children with a registered disability;
- Unaccompanied asylum seeking children;
- Children whose first language is not English;
- Children in secure accommodation;
- Children placed at a distance from their home address.

The majority of advocacy requests related to 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;
- Reviewing a secure accommodation order.

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.

8.5 Timeliness of reviews

In 2015/16 96% of reviews took place within the statutory timescales. IROs completed some reviews in a series of meetings to ensure the relevant people were involved and the meeting remained child focused and friendly.

A small proportion did not take place within the required timescale for the following reasons:

- Late notification by allocated social workers
- IRO illness on the day of a review
- Unplanned change of placement on the day of the review

As a result of the number of late notifications for reviews, a new process has been put in place to ensure that social workers notify the IRO manager immediately when a child becomes Looked After.

8.6 Quality of care planning

IROs continue to monitor the quality of care plans. IROs report that most children have a child friendly care plan that is written in a clear and coherent manner. Children and young people can expect 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.

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

8.7 Activities between LAC reviews

IROs routinely contact social workers for updates on the progress of looked after children review decisions alongside visiting or phoning the young person between reviews. 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.

8.8 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. However, 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. As this is a significant change in the life of a child or young person, the IRO manager has raised this issue with service areas. There have been improvements in this area and this evidenced by a reduction in IROs raising this as an issue.

IROs have fed back a priority for development is clarity around young people moving to adulthood as social workers do not routinely provide Pathway Plans to review meetings in the timescale the young person needs. Pathway Plans should be developed with young people from the age of 15 and a half. This has been raised with service areas and feedback from IROs in contributing the development of a revised independent living assessment tool.

IROs are able to access children's case records and can track the progress of their Personal Education Plans and liaise with the Virtual School to support any actions required to enable Looked After Children to access their education.

8.9 Permanency outcomes

During 2015/16 the majority of children achieved permanency through returning home to their parents or a family member, followed by children achieving a permanency arrangement in long-term foster care. Audits of the work of the IROs and Ofsted feedback indicate that most children have the right care plan to meet their needs.

There has been an increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and this contributes to the number of Looked After Children over the age of 13. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children generally enter care at the age of 14-17 and do not generally have family connections in the UK.

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

Overall the experience reported by children of their IROs continues to be positive. Children and young people have told us that they appreciate the consistent approach of IROs, their independence and availability. Children and young people have told us that their IRO listens to their concerns and takes up issues with the relevant services where this is needed and that the issues are often resolved quickly.

Children and young people have fed back that they value the consultation forms given before the review but have asked to be given enough time to complete them and for the department to explore a creative and interactive way of getting feedback.

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

My IRO helped me to move to my Nan. I would like to see my family every day!

My IRO listens and helped me to remain in my placement

I cannot wait to go back home and my IRO is helping me!

My IRO sorted my bursary and Laptop.

I would like to become a publicist!

My IRO is the most consistent person!

I miss my previous IRO who knew me from a young age and I miss him, can I have him back?

10. Escalation 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 58 escalations were initiated by IROs in 2015/16.

Among the 58 case escalations raised by IROs the majority were resolved at the SW/Team Manager and Principal Officer level with the remainder at a Head of Service level. They include the following areas:

- Policy and procedures not being followed including incomplete paperwork
- Education issues, including timely securing of a school place for unaccompanied minors and completion of PEP for 16 – 18 year olds by sixth form colleges.
- Transition to semi-independent units.
- IROs not being consulted regarding a change of care plan

None of the issues raised required to be escalated to the Operational Director or the Strategic Director in 2015/16.

Following a court ruling on the use of section 20 (looked after with the voluntary agreement of a parent, or the young person if over 16) and in line with the national trend and scrutiny in monitoring cases by the courts, all IROs were given a briefing in this area by Brent Legal and the Operational Director Social Care. As part of this trend in court direction, a review took place of all looked after children subject to section 20 and care proceedings were initiated where necessary.

Under Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 the IRO has the authority to refer the case of any looked after child to CAFCASS if they are of the view that the child's human rights have been breached. In 2015/2016 there were no referrals made to CAFCASS by IROs in Brent.

The use of the escalation and dispute resolution protocol often proved successful in negotiating a positive outcome. An example of this was when a young person was unhappy about a proposed move and this was resolved through the intervention of the IRO.

11. Impact and outcomes

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

- Supporting the service to have greater placement stability by avoiding unnecessary placement moves.
- Actively promoting and driving permanent placements for children who cannot return to their birth parents
- Strengthening the challenge function by embedding the Dispute Resolution process. This an expectation in the IRO Handbook and an element of the service which Ofsted commented upon during the Inspection in 2015.
- Driving the importance of education in improving outcomes for children and young people and meeting with the Virtual School to ensure ongoing liaison and discussion and through monitoring of the Personal Education Plan (PEP).
- Accessing PEP reports in advance of LAC Reviews to enable good preparation for the meeting and providing challenge where necessary.

12. What the IRO Service plan to do in 2016/17:

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

1. Further incorporate the Signs of Safety framework in the LAC Review process to drive the use of this framework with social workers and partners. This includes revising the template for LAC Reviews in consultation with Brent's Children in Care Council.
2. Strengthen the challenge function of the IROs and ensure this is evidenced on case files
3. Ensure systems are in place to systematically gather themes and trends from children and young people, families, parents, carers, professionals and IROs to feed into organisational learning and service improvement.
4. Closer monitoring of midway reviews including ensuring these are completed in a timely way and capture the child's voice
5. Support the Children in Care Council to complete a Children's Report for 2016/17
6. Ensure there is a robust system in place for the distribution of LAC Review minutes within the statutory 20 day timescale

13. What Happens Next?

- This Annual Report will be presented to the Children and Young People Leadership Team and to the Children in Care Council for their comments and to agree on any actions arising.

- It will then be shared with the Local Safeguarding Children Board and with the Corporate Parenting Board for information and to inform multi-agency strategic planning
- The IRO Service Action Plan for 2016/17 will be amended with any feedback given for actions to be taken.

Author-Goitom Mebrahtu, IRO Service Manager

28th August 2016

Appendix 1: Young Person's Summary of the IRO Annual Report

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report, 2015/6 - Young People's Summary

As a child or young person in care, you have an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) who leads your review of your care plan and makes sure the right care plan is in place for you. The IRO checks to make sure everything agreed at the meeting happens. The IRO will also speak or meet with you between reviews.

What is an IRO Annual Report?

Every year the IRO Service writes an IRO Annual Report that outlines what is going well with the service and what needs to improve. The report includes what IROs have learned throughout the year and includes feedback from children and young people. The report is published on the Brent website. You can ask for full report if you would like to read it.

Participation and having a say

A key role of the IRO is to make sure that children and young people can have a say and that their views are listened to and taken seriously. Your IRO will always ask to speak to you before your review.

One of the ways we gather the views of children and young people is the consultation paper that you complete out before your review. This Annual Report was redesigned with the support of the Brent Care in Action Group, a group of children and young people in care who help us to improve services. Are you interested in joining the Brent Care in Action Group? You can call Shirley on 020 8937 4173 or send her an email: Shirley.ricketts@brent.gov.uk

Summary of key messages

What has gone well?

- We are really pleased to see that 86% of children and young people participated in care planning either directly or through others at their reviews and gave feedback to their IRO.
- We know that IROs make sure care plans are moving forward as agreed in the LAC Review. When they don't, or problems arise, we can see that issues raised by IROs are being sorted out quickly by social workers and team managers
- Children and young people should only move placements when they really need to. IROs monitor placement changes and have helped to reduce the number of children who have a lot of placement changes.
- Children and young people have told us that they value their IRO remaining the same person.

What are we worried about?

- Some children and young people experienced frequent changes of social workers
- Some children and young people have informed their IRO that they had a change of placement without consultation or a choice

- Sometimes reports and up-to-date plans are not always available before the review. When this happens, it does not allow time for you, your carer or the IRO to read the contents of the report before the review.
- Although we know that most IROs make sure your voice is heard, we want to make sure your voice is always captured
- Sometimes eligible young people do not have a Pathway Plan prepared at the review held on or around their 16th birthday.

What are we doing to improve things?

- IROs met with Gail Tolley, the Director of Children's Services, and let her know concerns raised by children and young people about too many changes of social workers. Gail knows this is important and is working to have more permanent social workers in Brent.
- IROs are working with social workers to make sure young people are consulted before any placement moves. IROs are also working with social workers to make sure reports are ready before the review and that young people have a Pathway Plan ready around their 16th birthday.
- We are developing the Care Plan and review process using a model called Signs of Safety, to ensure that children and young people's opinions are more regularly taken into account.
- The IRO Manager is working with all IROs to make sure your voice is captured during and in-between reviews.
- The IROs will continue to raise issues and concerns when things aren't right. Please make sure you let your IRO know if you need any help or support. The IRO can help to sort things out and improve services.

Would you like more information?

If you would like a copy of the full report, or find out more, please contact the IRO Manager Goitom Mebrahtu by telephone 020 8937 4563 or email goitom.mebrahtu@brent.gov.uk.

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Brent Virtual School

2016 Provisional LAC Outcomes

Briefing Paper for the Corporate Parenting Committee October 2016

1. Purpose

This briefing paper is intended to update the committee on the provisional outcomes for Brent LAC at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 4 (outcomes published nationally). Brent's published 2016 data, will be based on children in care for at least a year. This paper features the results of the 3 cohorts which will be included in the national data.

A fuller analysis of the confirmed outcomes for the complete cohorts, plus those for the Early Years Foundation Stage, will be contained in the Brent Virtual School Annual Report 2015/16 to be presented to the February 2017 meeting of the committee.

2. KS1 (Years 1- 2)

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 were 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
Reading, Writing and Maths	3 (75%)	60%
Maths	3 (75%)	73%
Reading	4 (100%)	74%
Writing Assessment	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

- 75% (3) were identified as having SEND and there were no children with EHC Plans.

3. Key Stage 2 (Years 3-6)

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.

The 2016 results are not comparable with those of previous years.

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
Reading, Writing and Maths	4 (50%)	53%
Reading	5 (62.5%)	66%
Writing	5 (62.5%)	74%
Maths	5 (62.5%)	70%
Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling	3 (37.5%)	

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.

4. Key Stage 4 (Years 10-11)

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 on the 2015 performance measure of 5A*-C grades including En and ma.


OUTCOME MEASURE for 2015-16 SFR KS4 Cohort (18)	
5A*-C grades incl En and ma	3 (17%)

Key Characteristics of the SFR 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.

Janet Lewis
Head teacher, Brent Virtual School
October 2016.

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	<p>Corporate Parenting Committee 25 October 2016</p> <p>Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</p>
<p>Wards affected: ALL</p>	
<p>Brent Adoption Service Report 1 April 2016 – 30 September 2016</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 adoption service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children.
- 1.2 This report details the activity of Brent's adoption service from April 1st – September 30th 2016.

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 adoption service is being monitored and challenged in order to promote good outcomes for children. This is in line with standard 25.6 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards (2014).

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Our Adoption Statement of Purpose highlights the outcomes that the service aims to support:
 - Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.
 - Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
 - Children, birth parents/guardians and families, and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.

3.2 In Brent adoption services are delivered through two teams:

- A Placements Assessment and Recruitment Team – responsible for the recruitment, assessment and training of prospective adopters, as well as family finding and support for them post approval up until Adoption Order.
- An Adoption and Post Permanency team – responsible for family finding for children with an adoption plan; statutory social work responsibility for children subject to a Placement Order up until Adoption Order; supporting adoptive families, Special Guardians and birth families and providing a counselling and intermediary service for adopted adults and their birth relatives.

4. Performance Data

4.1 The most recent set of national adoption scorecards were published in March 2016, covering the 3-year period 2013-2015. The next round of national adoption scorecard data will be released in December 2016.

4.2 Brent performance against the two most significant indicators has continued to improve:

- **A1** (The time taken from a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 544 days. This is a 9% improvement against the previous reporting period and compares against a national average of 593 days.
- **A2** (The time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 194 days¹. This is a 37% improvement against the previous reporting period and compares against a national average of 223 days.

4.3 Internal projections for the next 3-year average (2013-14 to 2015-16) have been produced. As at 30th September 2016 the indicators were as follows:

- **A1:** 536 days.
- **A2:** 184 days.

4.4 Child related data – 1st April 2016 – 30th September 2016

- In the first six months of this reporting year 3 children were adopted.

¹ The DfE confirmed the published scorecard did not reflect the accurate A2 position for Brent (194 days). This anomaly is captured within the scorecard.

- At the 30th September there were 11 Looked After Children with an adoption plan who had not yet been adopted. The details of these children's cases are as follows:
 - Four children are placed for adoption.
 - Three children are due to be matched at the Adoption Panel in November 2016 with a view to being placed for adoption during the same month.
 - Four children are not yet placed or as yet have an identified adoption match; family finding is in process for these children.
- As stated in previous reports, all Local Authorities continue to report a reduction in the number of children being made subject to placement orders. A placement order is the court authorisation that a child can be formally placed with approved adopters.

4.5 Adopter Recruitment

- At 30th September 2016 Brent had 7 approved adoptive households for children where a child had not yet been matched or placed. The number of children requiring adoption and not yet matched or placed continues to be lower than the number of approved adopters.
- During the reporting period the service received 20 enquiries about adoption. Many people following this enquiry were signposted to our monthly information evenings. The enquiries received have resulted in 6 ongoing adoption assessments (1 being a step-parent assessment) and 0 adoptive households being approved during the reporting period. Of the 6 on-going adoption assessments 5 are in stage one of the process, 1 is in stage two of the process.
- 5 Brent approved adoptive households were matched to children within this reporting period. One of the households waited between 3-6 months after approval. In the other cases the adopters waited more than 12 months for a suitable match with 2 of the 5 households waiting 2 years or more, although there had been extensive support offered to assist with family finding. The lengthy waits which some adopters are experiencing reflect the reduction in children awaiting adoption nationally and the large number of adopters across the country awaiting placements.
- Brent continues to attract adopters from a diversity of backgrounds in order to best meet the variety of needs of our Looked After Children. However, in line with the general profile of adopters nationally, the majority of Brent adopters currently waiting to be linked or matched to children are of white British or Asian heritage. We continue to assess

adopters who more closely reflect the needs of those children awaiting adoptive placements. We receive early notification of children's possible plans for adoption through Initial Permanency Planning meetings, PLO and Looked After Children tracking meetings. This gives the Adoption Service the opportunity to start tentative identification of likely adoptive families at an early stage.

4.6 Adoption Support

- In the last six months, 78 families received a post-adoption support package (not one-off advice). This support was primarily provided through financial allowances which are reviewed and means tested but also includes life story work, strategies for managing difficult behaviour and advice on managing emotional issues within families brought about through contact with birth families.
- In the six months between 1st April, 2016 and 30th September 2016, 6 new families have requested post adoption support. During this period, seven applications to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) were successfully approved to support the therapeutic needs of Brent families. Thirty-six adopted adults also received adoption support. This was in the form of provision of access to their records, linking them with members of their birth family, and providing counselling support around issues related to adoption.

5. The Adoption and Permanence Panel

- 5.1** The purpose and role of the Adoption and Permanence panel was set out in detail within a previous Brent Adoption Service Report to the Corporate Parenting Committee.
- 5.2** The Panel continues to meet once a month in respect of all matters concerning adoption and to consider all long-term fostering matches. During the period under review two panels were cancelled due to lack of cases. This was due in part to the national shortage of children available for adoption and also to Brent's early linking and matching of those children who have a current adoption decision (the details of which are outlined elsewhere in this report).
- 5.3** A joint annual training day for adoption panel members and the adoption team staff is held as per statutory regulation; the last one was delivered on 23rd May 2016 by Brent's Agency Advisor. The focus was on independent scrutiny, minimising disruptions and identifying particular areas of learning for Brent. The next training day will be in 2017.
- 5.4** A central list of panel members, in line with statutory guidance, is used on a rotating basis to ensure members maintain regular links with Brent and

current issues in adoption. The central list consists of an independent chair, an independent vice chair, other independent members including: a birth mother with experience of adoption; an adopter; a previously fostered adult, a former Looked After Child and a foster carer from another Local Authority. There are also panel members employed by Brent, including: representatives from Social Care; the virtual school; health; the probation service; Children's Centres; and an elected member. All panel members receive an annual appraisal and have the opportunity to attend any additional relevant training provided by Brent and the West London Adoption Consortium.

5.5 Panel feedback from prospective and approved adopters and presenting social workers has remained consistent in confirming good or excellent comments regarding the panel process and conduct. Feedback concerning the performance of the social work casework is provided to the Agency Decision Maker (Operational Director – Integration and Improved Outcomes, Children and Young People's Services) who ensures this is given to the Head of Service (LAC, Permanency and Care Leavers) for follow up with individual staff or, should the issues be more systemic, broader service improvement.

5.6 During the period 1st April – 30th September 2016 four panels were held with fifteen specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:

- Three households were recommended as suitable to adopt;
- Three children were recommended to be placed for adoption with specific carers;
- The long-term fostering matches of five children were discussed (one individual child and two sibling groups of two);
- Six prospective adopters were recommended as remaining suitable to adopt following annual review; and
- One prospective adoptive couple resigned due to not having been matched with a suitable child in the three years since their approval.

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

6. Service Improvement

6.1 Over the last six months, the service has continued to improve outcomes for children with adoption plans in the following ways:

- Through effective tracking of timescales at initial and monthly permanency planning meetings at a team manager level, supplemented by quarterly tracking at Head of Service level for children with an adoption plan. This effective oversight continues to contribute to a reduction in the

period of time from a child becoming Looked After to being placed for adoption.

- By ensuring that adoptive families have been assessed and then enabled to access the ASF. This has provided families with targeted therapeutic support when it has been most needed.
- By refining and improving the preparation training for prospective adopters in conjunction with other West London Local Authorities.
- By providing our adopters waiting for a suitable child with a regular support group whereby they can meet with other families to discuss concerns, hear other experiences and ensure we provide services appropriate to individual families' needs.

6.2 Adoption Support As described earlier in this report, a number of successful applications have been made to the Adoption Support Fund in order to support families requiring help with their parenting.

6.3 Involving Adopters

Many adopters continue to remain closely involved with the service.

- Approved adopters are involved in speaking to prospective adopters at information evenings and preparation groups.
- Adopters are invited to attend relevant training for foster carers where there are crossover issues.
- As described above, in response to the expressed need for adopters waiting for a match we established our 'Next Steps' support group. This takes place bi-monthly and covers a range of issues relevant to the adoption process.
- A bi-monthly Adopters' Support Group for families with children is well established and feedback is positive about the supportive nature of the group. A crèche is provided for this group. Many of the participants in the group attended and enjoyed our 2016 Summer Picnic for adopters

6.4 Adopter Feedback

During this reporting period there have been no complaints received from adopters. There has been one complaint by an adopted adult and this was in relation to their dissatisfaction with the communication between the service and themselves. The complaint was resolved at Stage One of the corporate complaints' process.

6.5 Staff Engagement Staff continue to take responsibility for the delivery of adoption preparation courses in conjunction with colleagues in the West London Adoption Consortium.

Staff members regularly participate in bespoke training, which includes in-house training opportunities and also external training offered by the West London Alliance, Making Research Count and other providers.

Staff deliver Life Story Work training to foster carers and also a regular, separate Life Story Work training to social work colleagues across Children's Social Care. Managers set up and ran a training workshop on Permanency Planning for social workers in the Locality and Care Planning Teams

7. Broader adoption issues and the future

7.1 On the 7th October 2016, just after the end of this reporting period, we were notified of the immediate changes being made to the allocation of Adoption Support Fund (ASF) monies. As of the 7th October 2016 the ASF have capped the amount of financial support available to individual children. Prior to this date the Adoption Support Fund imposed no restriction on the amount of funding requested. This will impact on adoptive families as their therapeutic support packages are frequently more than £5k and LB Brent will have no means of funding this additional cost. The current support packages that are in place or being processed are being analysed to help to quantify future need. Once this is established we will work with our Consortium partners to explore more cost effective means of delivering therapeutic services.

7.2 Following the publication of the DfE paper, *Regionalising Adoption* (June 2015), the Department invited councils and Voluntary Adoption Agencies to submit Expressions of Interest in becoming part of new regionalised arrangements. In response, the Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS) submitted a London proposition, which was approved for development in a 'scope and define' phase. Through the development of regional agencies, the DfE and ALDCS aspire to speed up matching, improve adoption support and achieve cost efficiencies.

A number of possible models for the London Regional Adoption Agency have been explored. ALDCS have recommended the creation of a new local authority owned entity operating in a hub and spoke approach. The model is expected to retain a strong local link. It is recognised that local knowledge and relationships will be essential. The current recommended model is based on a not-for-profit community benefit society, jointly owned by all of the LAs. This model is quicker and cheaper to set up, and retains close VAA partnership working.

Each London Borough is now being asked by ALDCS to reach their own decision on whether to join, in principle, the London Regional Adoption Agency. A cabinet report is being prepared for December 2016 that will seek a decision on the following points:


- To agree, in principle, to join a London Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), subject to detailed financial analysis; and
- To authorise the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, to progress arrangements relating to the development of the Agency model.

It is anticipated that the London RAA would be operational within the 2017/18 financial year, subject to agreement from the DfE.

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GAIL TOLLEY
Strategic Director of Children and Young People

 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 25 October 2016 Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People
Wards affected: ALL	
Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report 1 July – 30 September 2016	

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 second 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 new LAC and Permanency Service of the Children and Young People's Directorate. The vision as set out in the 2016-17 service plan is that:
- The best foster carers are recruited for our children.
 - All placements receive high quality support, effectively targeted according to need and providing good value for the Local Authority.
 - To increase the number of children placed closer to home with our in-house foster carers.
 - Children are found permanent families without delay and within their extended family network where appropriate.

4.0 Staffing Arrangements

- 4.1 These remain the same as those provided to the Corporate Parenting Committee in the Brent Fostering Service Quarter One Monitoring report (April-June 2016).

5.0 Placement Activity

- 5.1 The corporate performance targets for this year relating to fostering are as follows:
- Percentage of LAC placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 35%.
 - Percentage of LAC placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15%
 - Percentage of LAC placed in Independent Fostering Agencies – annual target 25%.
 - Percentage of LAC overall within foster placements – annual target 75%

- 5.2 The overall LAC population increased slightly during the first quarter from 352 on June 30th 2016 to 353 on September 30th 2016.

As at the 30th September 2016:

- 97 children placed with Brent foster carers. This represents 27.5% of total LAC.
- 47 Children placed with a relative or family friend on a fostering basis. This is 13.3% of total LAC
- 90 children placed with IFAs. This is 25.49% of total LAC.
- 67.14% of children live within a fostering setting at 30/09/16

- 5.3 The most recent reporting period has continued to see an increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) approaching the borough for support. There were 72 as at 30/06/16 and this number has already risen to 81 as at 30/09/16, which represents 22.9% of all looked after children in Brent compared to 20.5% in June 2016. There are 18.7% LAC in Semi Independent accommodation as at 30/09/16, an increase from 15.6% in June 16. This reflects the older age range of young people entering the care system within Brent which includes an increase in entry of older aged UASC.

- 5.4 The service operates with few fostering vacancies so that the majority of available space with foster carers is maximised. As at 30th September 2016 there were 12 fostering households with at least one bed space available for fostering. This is approximately 10% of the total capacity of non-related households. The current carers with vacancies have a range of approval categories.

6.0 Recruitment Activity

- 6.1 The fostering service carried out 10 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. As this quarter encompassed the summer holiday months we were busy with summer community festivals and fun days, and had a presence at the Chalkhill Fun Day, the South Kilburn Family Fun Day, the Harlesden Community Festival, the New Life Christian Family fun Day and Queen's Park Day. We also took part in National Fitness Day at Vale Farm and Bridge Park

Leisure Centres, the Wates Living Space event, and a LGBT Community event in Harlesden. These events were in addition to our usual outreach activity in local supermarkets, leisure centres and within the communal spaces in the Civic Centre.

- 6.2 In addition to our usual recruitment activity, the fostering service participated in the Macmillan coffee morning. This outreach activity alone produced 12 fostering enquiries.

In line with our Recruitment Strategy, and our commitment to ensuring that our fostering recruitment utilises a broad range of mediums, we have also engaged in a second social media campaign in collaboration with Net Natives during the month of September. For information on Net Natives please visit <https://netnatives.com/about-us/>.

- 6.4 The monthly information evenings have continued to be held 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.

- 6.5 Our improved recruitment and marketing activity has seen a significant growth in enquiries to the service in 2015-16 compared to 2014-15. The service received 307 enquiries in 2015-16, compared to 203 in 2014-15. From our own historical data as well as comparisons with other boroughs and IFAs on average 10% of enquiries move ahead to a formal application to foster, with approximately 5-6% of enquiries resulting in an approved fostering household.

The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 61 enquiries for fostering. These enquiries resulted in 11 initial visits. As at the 30th September 2016 there were 16 formal assessments in process under the 2-stage fostering assessment process.

- 6.6 The target for the service in 2016-17 is to recruit twelve to fifteen non-related foster carers during the reporting year; with a net growth of 5 fostering households once carer resignations and terminations of approval are taken into account. We are currently reviewing our retention of foster carers and are comparing our allowance and support provision against other London local authorities and agencies. We will report on this in the next quarterly report. There continue to be some ongoing delays in approval of foster carers due to the slow return of information from the Disclosure and Barring Service. This is a systemic issue affecting all fostering agencies within London and has been signalled as a priority area to be resolved by the Metropolitan Police.

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 central list of Panel members that includes an elected member, currently Cllr Dixon. The panel chair and vice chair are independent people with professional experience of fostering. Recent demand has risen and three panels have been 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.
 - The termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a Foster Carer.
- 7.3 The panel has a quality assurance role and monitors the standard of reports presented to it and relays any issues or concerns to the relevant manager. The panel makes recommendations to the fostering service and these recommendations are referred to the Agency Decision Maker who is the Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes (Nigel Chapman).
- 7.4 During the period 1st July 2016 – 30th September 2016, 5 panels were held with 27 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:
- 1 new 'Family and Friends' foster carer household was recommended for approval.
 - No new fostering households were recommended for approval.
 - 9 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review.
 - 3 'Family and Friends' fostering households were found suitable to continue as carers for specific children following review.
 - 3 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following Standards of Care concerns.
 - 1 fostering household was found suitable to continue following an allegation.
 - 1 fostering household's approval was recommended for termination due to a list of concerns which left panel feeling unsatisfied that the fostering household remained suitable.
 - 'Family and Friends' fostering households' approval were terminated due to the child in placement turning 18.
 - 2 fostering households' approval were terminated due to a breakdown in communication between the carer and the department which made panel felt unsatisfied that the fostering household remained suitable.
 - 5 fostering households resigned from their fostering role. Reasons included relocation outside London, Special Guardianship Order for another child in placement which left no capacity to continue to foster.
- All of the recommendations made to the Agency Decision Maker were ratified.
- 7.5 The feedback from the fostering panel chair has been constructive to the service as it develops. The department now more effectively deal with the issue of complaints or allegations against carers to support the reintegration of the household to fostering. The issue of children's social worker attendance at panels also continues to improve.

8.0 Training and Support to Foster Carers.

- 8.1 All of Brent's foster carers are allocated to a Supervising Social Worker who carries out monthly supervision and support visits, ensures carers provide a good standard of care and creates an important link between the child's social worker and the foster carer.
- 8.2 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. During the period July 1st to September 30th, 9 training courses were offered and a total of 75 carers attended these training courses within the period.
- 8.3 Every month a foster carers' support group is held, facilitated by Supervising Social Workers but informed by the needs of carers. The groups are generally attended by a small group of carers and the Fostering Support Team are working to improve attendance as they provide an important communication link between carers and the Placements' Service.
- 8.4 Senior managers have continued to meet during this reporting quarter to consider the continued development of social pedagogy throughout the service. This is referred to in the future developments section below.
- 8.5 The fostering teams are currently planning our Annual Foster Carer Conference for late November 2016 with a theme of "Developing Resilient Foster Carers". The conference will also provide an opportunity for foster carers to review the Looked After Children Pledge.

9.0 Monitoring Arrangements

9.1 During the reporting period there were no formal allegations made against a fostering household. During the previous reporting period we had had two outstanding allegations. Both carers had their annual reviews brought forward and each was subsequently presented to the Fostering Panel, where their suitability to continue to foster was considered. Each carer was reapproved to continue fostering.

There was one Standard of Care/Serious Concern meeting held during this quarter. This matter has been partly resolved and the carer's review is to be presented to the Fostering Panel in due course. The carer is currently placed on hold at her request due to some personal issues. It is anticipated the matter will be resolved by December 2016.

- 9.2 There were no formal complaints received from Brent foster carers during the reporting period.
- 9.3 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 25 annual reviews during this period.

10.0 Future Developments

- 10.1 An initial social pedagogy programme commenced in October 2015. This comprised of a training programme that included foster carers and social workers. The next stage of the project has been the appointment of a principal social worker and steering group to progress the project plan. It is planned to appoint a social pedagogy social worker, who will be based within the Fostering Service, and then to deliver a second training cohort in early 2017.
- 10.2 We continue to work collaboratively with our west London neighbours to deliver joint foster carer preparation training and we also agreed from April 2016 to offer the same carer benefits' package to foster carers which is delivered through the Fostering Network.
- 10.3 The main activities for the fostering teams within the newly formed LAC & Permanency Service from April 2016 are as follows:
- To use the opportunity from a newly formed service to listen effectively to the voice of children and young people and embed their views into improving the quality and consistency of our fostering service.
 - To ensure that the recruitment of in-house carers continues to improve and that the impact of the digital campaign is evaluated.
 - To finalise the survey of current foster carers and to compare this with exit interviews completed in December 2015 to identify trends and to support service planning.
 - To ensure the foster carer training offer is monitored and the impact reflected within foster carer supervision and care of children.
 - To ensure feedback from fostering panel is embedded into quality assurance work and development areas are progressed by team managers.

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/>

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