



Corporate Parenting Committee

Tuesday 24 October 2017 at 5.00 pm

Members Suite - 4th Floor, Brent Civic Centre,
Engineers Way, Wembley, HA9 0FJ

Membership:

Members

Councillors:

M Patel (Chair)
Conneely
Hossain
Kansagra
Thomas

Substitute Members

Councillors:

S Choudhary, Crane, Dixon and
Hoda-Benn

Councillor:

Colwill

For further information contact: Tom Welsh, Governance Officer
020 8937 6607, tom.welsh@brent.gov.uk

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The press and public are welcome to attend this meeting

Please Note: members of the public can access the meeting room by contacting the officer named above or by speaking to a member of security staff at the Civic Centre.

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.

Item	Page
1 Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members	
2 Declarations of interests Members are invited to declare at this stage of the meeting, the nature and existence of any relevant disclosable pecuniary, personal or prejudicial interests in the items on this agenda and to specify the item(s) to which they relate.	
3 Deputations (if any) To hear any deputations received from members of the public in accordance with Standing Order 67.	
4 Minutes of the previous meeting To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record.	1 - 8
5 Matters arising (if any) To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.	
6 Update from Care In Action Representatives This is an opportunity for members of Care In Action (CIA) to feedback on recent activity.	
7 Presentation on Health Assessments for Looked after Children A presentation will be provided by Nikola Rickard (Lead Nurse for LAC – London North West Healthcare NHS Trust) on Health Assessments for Looked After Children.	
8 Looked After Children and Offending Behaviour This report outlines some of the common themes and considerations in working with Looked After Children (LAC) within the youth justice system and known to the Brent Youth Offending Service (YOS). The report sets out learning from the Youth Justice Board's response to the Laming	9 - 18

Report, considers the links with data held across the Children and Young People's Department, identifies areas of improved joint practice between the YOS and LAC teams and considers a recent YOS Critical Learning Review.

9 Fostering Service Quarterly Report (July 2017 - September 2017) 19 - 26

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 Adoption Service Six Monthly Report (April 2017 - September 2017) 27 - 32

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 2017– September 30th 2017.

11 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 60.

Date of the next meeting: Wednesday 7 February 2018



- 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.



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE Thursday 27 July 2017 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor S Choudhary, Conneely, Hossain, Thomas and Warren

Apologies were received from: Councillor M Patel (Chair), Councillor S Chouhdary was present in her place as substitute.

1. **Election of Chair**

Tom Welsh (Governance Officer, Brent Council) opened the meeting to explain that Councillor M Patel had given her apologies and that the Committee had no appointed Vice-Chair. He outlined that, in this instance, Members would need to formally elect a Chair for the duration of the meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** by Members that Councillor Thomas would Chair the meeting.

Before the substantive business of the meeting began, Councillor Thomas mentioned that Janet Lewis (the Council's Head of Virtual School) was due to retire in the near future. The Committee thanked her for all of her hard work at the London Borough of Brent.

2. **Declarations of Interests**

There were no interests declared by Members.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 April 2017 be approved as an accurate record.

4. **Matters Arising**

Janet Lewis provided further information on the strategies in place to address attainment, as requested by the Committee on page 3 of the previous minutes. She firstly explained how Lexia was a digital program designed to improve both the literacy skills and reading age of students in academic years 5, 6 and 7. Members heard that, as it was web-enabled, it could be accessed at school or at home and that teachers and carers could be given log-in details in order to assess how students were progressing. She noted that around 50 schools both inside and outside the borough had used the program and that very positive feedback and favourable outcomes had been reported to the Council.

She went on to provide an update on the 'Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children' (PALAC) pilot project. She outlined that this was a knowledge exchange programme which aimed to improve the educational attainment of Looked After Children (LAC) in the year 11 academic year. Members heard that the programme was based on teachers and members of staff giving specific one-to-one

feedback and mentoring to LAC in this age range. She noted that 5 schools in the borough had been part of the programme and that it had also drawn encouraging feedback from both teachers and students. She added that the Institute of Education were due to complete follow-up work to assess the results of the pilot, and that the effectiveness would be analysed after students received their results in August.

Janet Lewis also spoke on the work to assess absenteeism data which related to LAC, as mentioned on page 4 of the previous minutes. She outlined that a monthly report had been agreed to be drawn up and sent to all Social Care Managers which flagged up any children with attendance levels below 90%, in order to identify and address attendance issues quickly.

Gail Tolley (the Council's Strategic Director, Children and Young People) added an update on the Children and Social Work Bill, as mentioned on page 6 of the previous minutes. She informed Members that the Bill had recently received Royal Assent and had become law shortly before Parliament was dissolved for the June 2017 General Election.

Members welcomed the updates from Officers and it was **RESOLVED** that the Council's Virtual School team would continue to provide regular updates to the Corporate Parenting Committee on the strategies in place to improve LAC attainment levels (such as Lexia and PALAC).

5. **Deputations**

There were no deputations.

6. **Children in Care - Questions and Answers**

The Chair welcomed LM, CM and JB from Care in Action (CIA) to the meeting and invited them to provide their respective updates.

LM began and said that they had enjoyed attending two Corporate Parenting meetings with officers recently. Members heard that the first meeting had focused on youth offending and explored the possible background reasons for why young people in care commit crimes. LM said that they had found this very interesting, and that they had observed that petty crime was often the most common offence.

The second meeting LM attended focused on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) for LAC. LM explained how the questionnaire worked and outlined that they had taken an active role in the meeting by questioning some of the procedures of the SDQ. Members heard that this included: why in practice only one person tended to complete the questionnaire as this would not capture enough information about the child; whether social workers were qualified to score the results of the questionnaire; why an online version of the questionnaire had not been used; and why Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) support ended at age 18. LM was pleased that officers at the meeting had said that they would address these concerns. LM added that they felt happy to have been involved in the meetings and that their suggestions had been listened to as they wanted to help to make a difference to other young people in care.

CM spoke about how they had been happy to be asked to help to develop a 'Readiness for Practice' module for trainee social workers at Royal Holloway, University of London. They said that they had enjoyed giving suggestions to the tutor and that they felt glad that they had been able to contribute to potentially improving the lives of other LAC in the future. The Committee heard that CM had also been part of the start of the preparations for the 'Voice in a Million' concert at the SSE Wembley Arena which gave a voice to children in care all across the UK. CM was excited that monthly rehearsals for the choir performance at next year's event would begin in October 2017. CM also explained that they had been to a recent CIA meeting for LAC and Care Leavers attended by the Philosophy Foundation. CM said that they had been intrigued by discussions with fellow young people about their different beliefs on issues such as religion, god and hope.

JB spoke about a recent tour of St John's College at the University of Cambridge, which had been organised by the Virtual School. They told the Committee about how they had learnt about the University's history and JB said they had benefited from the visit because they no longer viewed University solely as hard work, and that it could also be an opportunity of fun for students. They also spoke about the recent 'Summer Fun Day' for CIA young people and their Foster Carers at the Poplar Grove Centre. The Committee heard that there were lots of activities for young people to enjoy, such as: an exotic insects display; being able to design their own t-shirts; learning to DJ; nail painting; egg and spoon races; and kickboxing. The CIA representatives said that they had all enjoyed the fun day, and they were happy that Foster Carers were also welcome to attend.

Members of the Committee thanked the representatives for their updates and collectively agreed that their presentations had been excellent. A Member of the Committee referenced the event which looked at youth offending and asked what conclusions could be drawn from this. LM responded that it appeared that moving placements had an adverse impact on a number of young people in care and that this could lead to an increased risk of crime. It was noted that petty crime appeared to be a particularly prevalent area for youth offences.

Questions also arose on what the representatives felt the effects were on LAC when their assigned social worker had changed. Members heard that this was felt to be very serious as constant change made it more difficult for the young person to form a proper relationship or sufficient level of trust with their social worker. Wider discussions followed on the cause of social worker changes and what the present workforce situation in this area looked like in Brent. Gail Tolley stated that changes had been made to address staff retention problems and that 66% of the social work staff at the Council were now permanent, as opposed to a similar percentage being non-permanent three years ago. She noted that there was a national shortage of social workers but that Brent had strived to make itself more attractive as a place to work through reducing social work caseloads and implementing more permanent management support arrangements. Nigel Chapman (the Council's Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes) added that Brent currently had a lot of newly qualified social work staff which had also helped to improve retention levels. It was agreed that a report which looked at the social care workforce in Brent in more detail be presented at the next meeting, as it related to Children in Care and Care Leavers.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- (i) The updates from the CIA representatives be noted; and
- (ii) A report which provided up-to-date data on the current social care workforce in Brent and more information on what action the Council had taken to solve any issues with staff recruitment and retention in support of both LAC and care leavers, would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

7. Presentation from the Lead Nurse for Looked After Children, London North West Healthcare NHS Trust

As Nickola Rickard (Lead Nurse for Looked After Children, London North West Healthcare NHS Trust) had given her apologies for the meeting it was **RESOLVED** the item would be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee and that the presentation would be combined with the LAC Annual Health Report.

8. Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report 1st April - 30th June 2017

Kelli Eboji (the Council's Principal Officer, LAC and Permanency) introduced the report which provided Members with information on the recent outcomes and overall management of the Council's Fostering Service for the first quarter of the new reporting year (Q1).

She ran through the key details within the report, and began by highlighting that in Q1 the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children who had approached Brent for support had stabilised and levelled-off. She explained that the Fostering Service had carried out 7 recruitment focused activities in order to raise awareness of fostering and to encourage more people to come forward as potential foster carers. Members heard that this recruitment drive had mainly taken place through 'Fostering Fortnight' and that the service had organised information stalls in Wembley and on Kilburn High Road. She noted that this had drawn 59 enquiries from members of the public and had resulted in 12 formal assessments as of 30 June 2017. She concluded by mentioning that the Fostering Panel had recommended five new fostering households for approval and that it was encouraging that this meant that the target had been met for the quarter.

Questions arose on the service values for 2017-2018 (as set out in section 3 of the report) and it was queried why the values were different on this occasion from the previous quarterly monitoring report. Nigel Chapman stated that a more coherent cross-directorate plan had been developed for the new reporting year which drew together outcome targets across all of the different service areas which affected LAC. Gail Tolley added that a senior management restructure within the Children and Young People's Department at the Council had reframed the department for future success and this had been reflected through an updated service plan. A Member of the Committee commented that the service values for 2017-2018 were an improvement, but that it would be important that progress on the values was monitored closely.

On training and support for foster carers, a Member questioned why there had been a drop in training spaces offered since the last reporting period. Nigel Chapman

posited that this was likely to be because the courses during Q1 were more specialist in content. He explained that more general training courses, such as First Aid Training, tended to draw a higher degree of interest from a wider range of foster carers. He confirmed that the drop in numbers had not been caused from training being cut back and highlighted that the number of sessions offered between quarters had remained the same.

A specific question was asked on how long the Fostering Development Co-Ordinator role had been vacant. Kelli Eboji outlined that the role had been vacant since the end of June 2017 but that the job description had been cleared and that the advertising process for recruitment to the post would begin imminently.

A Member of the Committee questioned why 5 annual reviews for foster carers had been cancelled (as set out under paragraph 9.1 of the report). Kelli Eboji said it was often the case that more information had been needed prior to be able to inform the review, but confirmed that the cancelled annual reviews had now taken place.

A representative from CIA questioned what the recruitment target for fostering placements would be for 2017-2018. Kelli Eboji stated that the target was for 20 fostering placements within the reporting year and re-iterated that five households had been recruited already.

It was **RESOLVED** that the content of the report be noted.

9. **Annual Corporate Parenting Report 2016-2017**

Nigel Chapman introduced the report which provided Members with an annual report on the outcomes for LAC, in accordance with the Council's statutory duties. He ran through each section of the report in-turn, highlighted some of the key aspects and offered an explanation to the Members on the statistical trends.

Members heard about: the specific role of the Corporate Parenting Committee; the Committee's work in providing scrutiny and challenge over the past reporting year; the work of CIA; the statistical profile of LAC in Brent, and how the overall number had fallen even further below the national average; placements having been slightly above the national average for the proportion of children placed more than 20 miles away from the borough; the number of care proceedings having risen within the last reporting year; Brent's record on different health outcomes for LAC; the specific work being undertaken to address absenteeism; the role of the Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) panel; education data from the Brent Virtual School; what the Council currently provided in terms of support to Care Leavers; and what areas the LAC and Permanency Service had prioritised for 2017-2018.

Members received the report positively and Councillor Warren specifically praised the use of quotes and case studies within the report content as he felt that this had made it more enjoyable to read. Questions arose on what the formal mechanisms were for reporting the detail within the annual report to both the Government and the Committee. Nigel Chapman specified that the Council had to submit a statistical data return for the borough to the Government by 30 June each year and that this was how national data was typically captured. Gail Tolley also explained that the basic dataset for the borough across LAC and permanency was reported to the Committee through the quarterly monitoring reports. She confirmed that the Council

had met its statutory obligations for 2015-2016 as the Council had published all of the required information through these monitoring reports, but that it had not been drawn together into one comprehensive report format. She outlined that, to avoid any risk of confusion in future, the Council would stick to the format used for 2016-2017 which involved the continued presentation of quarterly monitoring reports followed by an overarching annual report which pulled the key information together.

Members raised questions on the placements of LAC outside of Brent and why Brent was slightly above the national average on this. Nigel Chapman explained that some LAC were moved out of the borough for their own welfare, such as the risk of drug or gang related exploitation. He said other moves sometimes took place in order for the child to be able to access a certain specialist service provision that Brent did not have the resources for. In response to an additional question from a Member about future reports containing direct data comparisons with neighbouring boroughs, he stated that there was a difference between geographically neighbouring boroughs and statistical neighbour boroughs. It was made clear that boroughs such as Harrow and Barnet could not be compared to Brent as they were not statistical neighbours. Members heard that Brent's statistical neighbours were detailed in the footnote of page 30 of the report.

A Member commented on problem of missing or absent LAC and what the Council had been doing to address this issue. Janet Lewis agreed that this was not acceptable but re-assured Members that it was a small minority of LAC and that the Council still attached a high priority to tackling this. She emphasised the work of the Vulnerable Adolescents' Panel which aimed to ensure that the needs of vulnerable adolescents were understood at a strategic level in order to develop an action plan and improve services further.

Questioning moved to care and placement orders and a Member of the Committee questioned how many of these tended to be challenged in court. Kelli Eboji specified that the majority were contested and Gail Tolley added that this was consistent with what tended to happen nationally.

Specific questions were asked on the proportion of children in care who had a form of autism and how this had been addressed. Nigel Chapman outlined that a significant proportion of LAC had Autism Spectrum Disorder and that specialist autism awareness training had been recently been introduced for staff across the Council and different partner agencies, as directed by the Vulnerable Adolescents' Panel.

The discussion moved to provisions for care leavers and what the Council had been doing to improve its support for this group. In response to a specific question from a Member of the Committee, Officers said that proposals put forward by the Children's Society on exempting Care Leavers from having to pay Council tax until age 25 were being considered. Responding to questions on housing arrangements, Nigel Chapman said that a lot of young people did not take up the option of 'staying put' but that the Council and carers had to assess what the best option would be. He explained that 75% of care leavers aged 19 to 21 were in suitable accommodation and that the Council would deem custody, bed and breakfast and 'whereabouts unknown' as examples of unsuitable accommodation. He also spoke about the risk of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people becoming uncontactable if they had their asylum application turned down upon reaching age

21. Members heard that the Council now had a responsibility to provide support to Care Leavers up to age 25, which included them being assigned a Personal Adviser. Mr Chapman specified in response to questions from CIA representatives that personal advisers were not the only source of support, and that the Council had different networks across Housing Needs and the Homelessness Persons team to provide additional support to Care Leavers on any issue, if necessary.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- (i) The contents of the report be noted; and
- (ii) A report which detailed what the Council currently provided in terms of support to Care Leavers, and additional support which could be included in the Council's local offer to Care Leavers in the future, be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.
- (iii) A report which provided a breakdown of the ethnic demographics for LAC in Brent, be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

10. **Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017**

Sonya Kalyniak (the Council's Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance) introduced the report which provided the Committee with information on the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) over the last reporting year (April 2016 to March 2017). She said that the report had taken on Councillor Warren's comments from last year's report and had included more case studies and relevant quotations from service users alongside statistical information. She also thanked CIA for having promoted the 'Bright Spots' survey which had had a 33% response rate.

She outlined that the report detailed both the positive aspects of the previous year, and the elements which could be improved. Focusing initially on the positives, Members heard that it was very encouraging that the vast majority of children in care felt that they were included in decision making about their lives. It was also felt that the development of functions of the Review, Engagement and Participation (REP) Team had helped the Council gain a more holistic understanding of the view of children and young people. Ms Kalyniak noted that 984 reviews had been chaired by IROs in 2016/17 and that the close collaboration between IROs, Aidhour and social workers had allowed the issues identified during these reviews to be resolved more quickly. She also referenced some of areas for improvement such as: addressing the continued high number of social worker changes and the need for timeliness of LAC reviews to be monitored more closely. She also said that the 'Bright Spots' survey had been a success and that it would be a priority to take forward the messages identified from young people within the survey to drive the service forward.

Questions arose on the specific role of IROs and at what stage they ultimately become involved in the care process. Gail Tolley explained that the final decision to take a child into care came via the court system. She said that IROs are assigned to young people once they come into care and provide oversight and monitoring of the child's care planning. Sonya Kalyniak added that IROs were qualified social

workers with significant experience which complimented the nature of their role. One of the CIA representatives commented that they had a very good relationship with their IRO and believed that their role was effective.

It was **RESOLVED** that:


- (i) The content of the report be noted; and
- (ii) A detailed summary which explained the role of IROs be included at the start of the 2017-2018 IRO annual report.

11. **Any Other Urgent Business**

There was no other urgent business to transact.

The meeting was declared closed at 6.43 pm

COUNCILLOR BOBBY THOMAS
Chair (Elected for this meeting only)

	<p>Corporate Parenting Committee 24 October 2017</p> <p>Report from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People</p>
<p>Brent Looked After Children and Offending Behaviour</p>	

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report will outline some of the common themes and considerations in working with Looked After Children (LAC) within the youth justice system and known to the Brent Youth Offending Service (YOS).
- 1.2 The report outlines learning from the Youth Justice Board's response to the Laming Report¹, considers the links with data held across the Children and Young People's Department, identifies areas of improved joint practice between the YOS and LAC teams and considers a recent YOS Critical Learning Review.

2. Data

- 2.1. Brent YOS data reflects the national picture showing the overrepresentation of Looked After Children within the youth justice system and in particular within BME categories. A significant number of LAC have an offending history, with the majority's involvement with the criminal justice system preceding their entry to public care.

Analysis of data from June 2017 shows there were 32 LAC young people who were subject of a youth justice court order and under YOS supervision. Of this group:

- 75% were male;
- 54% were aged 16 or 17 years;
- 53% were of black African or Caribbean heritage, compared to only 27% from this background in the overall LAC population;
- The YOS white LAC cohort of 18.5% is slightly less than the wider LAC white population (22.2%).
- Violent related offending and drug offences accounted for 50% of offences.

¹ <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/ProjectsResearch/CareReview>

- Ten looked after young people, who had been in care for more than 12 months, received a final warning, reprimand or conviction in 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16. This is lower than the national average of 14 throughout this three year period, although the 2016-17 figure has grown to 16. This reflects the late entry to care of a growing number of young people with multiple negative early life experiences.
- Of the 16-17 year cohort 60% were not in employment, education or training.
- The average number of placement moves for this cohort was five – reflecting the challenges in finding and retaining stable homes for older young people with offending behaviours.

3.0 Themes and case studies

- 3.1 Children in care are overrepresented in the youth justice system although the vast majority will not enter it. According to the Department for Education (DfE) there are currently about 70,000 children in care, 30,000 of whom are aged between 10 and 17 (age of criminal responsibility). Of these, between 6% and 8% (1800 – 2400 children) enter the youth justice system. While this figure suggests that most children in care will not enter the youth justice system, it is nevertheless more than double the 3% of children from the general population who offend.

In response to this overrepresentation, the YJB identified a number of recurring themes in their analysis, supported by the local Brent data. The Brent response to these challenges is detailed in section four below.

3.2 Theme 1: The complex emotional needs of young people

Children's early life experiences have a significant impact on their development and future life chances. As a result of their experiences before entering care, children are at greater risk of entering the youth justice system than their peers. Looked after children are more likely to be exposed to the risk factors established in research as associated with the onset of youth offending than the general population of children. Looking at the risk factors for youth crime and those leading to care they show particular similarities. These are backgrounds of deprivation, poor parenting, abuse and neglect – factors that together create risk for a range of emotional, social and behavioural difficulties, including anti-social and offending behaviour.

The Brent LAC / YOS cohort is representative of young people from such backgrounds as shown within both case studies in the attached appendix.

3.3 Theme 2: Multiple placement breakdown for teenagers leading to greater instability

Multiple placement moves are often cited as a reason for instability that is linked to an increased likelihood of offending. The State of the Nation report (Children's Commissioner - 2015) suggests that 50% of LAC children had

between 1 and 4 placement moves within the year and that teenagers were more than likely to experience multiple placement breakdown.

Brent's higher number of average placement moves for its looked after children who offend cohort suggests a greater complexity and severity in presenting behaviours. This is also likely to reflect more Brent young people coming into care at a later stage (15-17) with their needs not satisfactorily met whilst living with their birth families. Young people who enter care late and experience multiple placements are often less invested in substitute family arrangements and with a cycle of placement move it is challenging for key professionals such as social workers or caseworkers to build and sustain meaningful relationships. The second case study in Appendix 1 illustrates this particular point.

3.4 Theme 3: Young people living in areas of high crime and high deprivation.

Ofsted statistics (see appendix) show that just over one in four looked after children lived in areas of the country with much higher than average levels of crime, many of whom lived in semi-independent placements.

The report *Dying to Belong: An In-depth Review of Street Gangs in Britain (2012)* suggests that gangs are more likely to flourish where there are high levels of crime and deprivation and where gangs exist the impact upon young people is significant and involvement is often forced and coerced through fear of victimisation. Two of the case studies below illustrate the influence of gang and drug activity. The high numbers (over 50%) of violent related offending and drug offences in the Brent LAC cohort suggest a strong link with gang activity and sexual exploitation influenced by risk factors that include deprivation, poor parenting, abuse and neglect.

Furthermore the report also stated that children placed out-of-borough or in another county could be at greater risk of exploitation and gang affiliation. These risks can be compounded by frequent placement moves, changes of workers and inadequate monitoring of placements, all of which contribute towards an absence of healthy and trusting relationships with adults and increases the risk of negative outcomes.

3.5 Theme 4: Management of behaviour in residential homes varies resulting in inconsistent outcomes

The absence of agreed thresholds for engaging the police within residential settings can increase the risk of young people being drawn into the criminal justice system and result in children entering the justice system as a result of behaviour that would not attract a formal response had that occurred outside the care system. There are also associated risks of child sexual exploitation when children go missing from the care system and are targeted by street gangs to undertake drug dealing activity across the country.

3.6 Custody & Resettlement into the Community

The number of looked after children who enter custody is relatively small but they are significantly overrepresented. Within Brent the number sentenced and in custody currently is 11 of whom 5 (45%) are LAC. Reported issues in custody for this group included problems on arrival in custody, substance misuse and emotional and mental health problems.

The Pan London Resettlement consortium has set a number of principles and guidelines for the custodial and resettlement period, many of which have been adopted by Brent through our Resettlement and Aftercare Panel:

- 1) For Looked After Children, local authority social workers are to participate fully in resettlement planning, attend sentence planning meetings and keep young people and other professions updated about potential placements.
- 2) Establish agreement that no young person will be asked to present as homeless on release by requiring Children's Social Care and Housing Options services to participate in planning processes at an early stage.
- 3) Recognise that timely and appropriate arrangements for Employment Training and Education, constructive use of time and access to mental and physical health and substance misuse services are likely to be key mitigates of placement breakdown risk.
- 4) Commission a pool of preferred providers of resettlement accommodation and support to include requirements to:
 - Visit and engage young people in custody
 - Communicate via telephone with young people
 - Send young people information about their project or service including respective expectations
 - Work with partners to assist in delivering the Resettlement Offer including facilitating temporary release where appropriate
 - Pay the provider an 'Engagement' fee to cover the above
- 5) Increase levels and flexibility of support to maintain young people in accommodation and use effective contingency planning to sustain progression in the face of setbacks.

4.0 Response to the Identified Themes:

- 4.1 Both operationally and strategically, we have established a better joint working relationship between YOS and children's social work teams. The Brent YOS and social work teams have developed effective arrangements to jointly manage LAC and YOS young people within the youth justice system. These arrangements were positively received at a presentation to the Youth Justice Board earlier this year and have been placed on the YJB's Effective Practice Resource Hub.

There are a number of elements in place that underpin these practice developments and add value to the work case practitioners within both

services provide as well as the resources to meet the needs of young people.

4.2 The Joint Protocol between the YOS and social work teams covers three areas of activity:

- Joint working where young people are remanded to Local Authority accommodation;
- Providing joint support to young people who are transitioning from custody to the community upon release;
- Improved partnership working when children and young people are in the community and are receiving services from both teams.

This joint working provides a forum to agree arrangements as illustrated in third case study in appendix 1, key tasks and responsibilities and highlights the value of multi-agency panels to ensure effective assessment, joint planning and interventions.

4.3 Social work team and YOS case discussions are taking place at a monthly managers meeting. This enables joint planning and interventions to be monitored especially for children and young people who are in the community and for any difficulties to be managed effectively and promptly. The social work team manager will hold responsibility for the welfare issues; the YOS Case Manager will be responsible for the justice issues.

4.4 The monthly Resettlement & After Care Meetings involve managers from both services to allow robust operational planning for a young person's release from custody. This aids risk management and facilitates smooth transitions back into the community.

4.5 An escalation process is in place for high risk cases where the Heads of Service provide a briefing to the Operational Director and the Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services in their statutory role. The DCS and Lead Member are provided with regular updates and briefings about these cases by the Operational Director for IIO.

4.6 On a strategic level, a number of other pieces of work and activity are being carried out to better understand and respond to the challenges of young people in care who offend:

- Two outcome based reviews (OBRs) looking at children and young people in gangs and those on the edge of care will report later this year on their findings with recommendations that will enhance working across the Council and partner agencies;
- The daily Integrated Risk Management Unit meeting has been in operation since January 2017 and brings police and Brent Council staff together to discuss immediate operational matters regarding children who are missing, at risk of exploitation or involved in the youth justice system.
- A Vulnerable Adolescents' Panel, chaired by the Operational Director for IIO meets monthly to share information amongst partners, confirm

children most at risk and to provide more effective responses to emerging themes and trends. For example a connection between undiagnosed learning needs and offending has led to a new training programme being introduced within the YOS.

- The West London Alliance is working across boroughs to increase the sufficiency and quality of the residential children's homes estate by creating a block contract. This will be in place in 2018 to provide children with a greater likelihood of being placed closer to home and with providers with the relevant skills to manage challenging behaviours.

5.0 Recent Critical Learning Review (CLR) The CLR was prepared in line with the Youth Justice Board's Community Safety & Public Protection Incidents (CSPPI) procedures. It has been discussed at recent YOS Management Boards, chaired by the Operational Director for Integrated and Improved Outcomes (IIO) as well as acknowledged and commented upon by the YJB.

This was prepared by the YOS in February 2017 and concerned a looked after child who was charged and later convicted of murder. This young person's early history reflects the pattern as described above, culminating in him becoming a looked after child in 2015. There followed a number of placements in various parts of the country including unplanned endings as a consequence of his very challenging behaviour.

His contact with the YOS since February 2015 started well with the completion of a short period on a Youth Conditional Caution. However over a six-month period offending escalated with growing violence, exacerbated by his increased use of drugs and involvement in gangs.

The case raised a number of important issues for joint agency working and partnership activity. Of the seven resulting actions, those that were specific to joint working between the YOS and social work teams have been implemented:

- i. The working protocol between YOS and social work teams has been updated;
- ii. Joint managers' monthly meetings are routinely held to discuss & monitor how partnership working is taking place on court orders between the teams;
- iii. YOS workers adhere to the transfer / caretaking process contained in the YJB - National Protocol for Case Responsibility;
- iv. Case managers highlight and report escalating serious risk / well-being & safety concerns immediately to a manager.
- v. The supply and quality of placements for young people is being addressed through partnership work within the West London Alliance as detailed above.

Broader areas for consideration by both service areas and partner agencies within the review included the extent to which professionals understand and can respond to cannabis use amongst young people; the influence of social

media and the impact on behaviour of this less visible world; Section 4 above details

6.0 Summary

This report has highlighted the key themes explaining the over representation of children in care within the Youth Justice system. There is a strong correlation between national research, Brent quantitative data, case studies and the Critical Learning Review described above. Services for children within Brent Council have been jointly working to improve outcomes for this complex cohort both within the secure estate and the wider community. A number of initiatives resulting from this joint working have been described and are leading to more effective interventions. However the challenges remain significant and continued concentrated efforts and resources are required to strengthen practice leading to improved outcomes.

References

YJB - National Protocol for Case Responsibility - Practice Guidance for Youth Offending Teams in England and Wales (May 2014)

Youth Justice Board's response to the Laming Report - 2015 - Keeping children in care out of trouble

OCC – State of the Nation Report, Children in Care and Leavers' Survey (2015)

Ofsted Official Statistics, Children Looked After by Local Authorities (2014)

Centre for Social Justice - 'Dying to Belong' Report (2009)

Pan London Resettlement Consortium – Accommodation Pathway

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APPENDIX 1

1st CASE STUDY

'E' is a 17 year old male who is in care and currently on a licence following release from a Young Offenders' Institute in August 2017. He has been in care for about 15-months in total. E is well-known to the police for being involved in drug dealing within the central and northern parts of the borough. Before entering care there were safeguarding concerns as E lived with his grandparents who found it very difficult to impose boundaries. He had previously lived with his mum but she was unable to care for him due to her own mental illness and drug use.

E's involvement with the YOS pre-dated him coming into care. He has been subject to numerous community penalties including curfews and exclusions. E is a very engaging and talkative young man but he continued to offend and also miss appointments which in the end led to a custodial sentence this year.

E has ADHD and does not take his medication regularly and therefore is very impulsive. He is vulnerable to being exploited by older gang members. He has also experienced a great deal of separation and loss as he misses his family and he also has previously experienced emotional abuse and neglect from his mother. He has missed out on considerable periods of education and he does have an EHCP (education, health and care plan).

E has been discussed regularly at the LAC / YOS managers' meetings to share information about his outstanding offences and his breaches as well as his placement information. In addition he was discussed at the Resettlement and Aftercare panel before he was released. Before release E expressed a desire to go back to his previous placement in Brent. The placement manager had also asked that E return to the semi-independent accommodation as he had previously settled well and many of his needs were being met. The YOS were able to support this plan. This has been a positive outcome. Also as part of the discussion at this meeting YOS were able to agree with the social work team about planning for the licence conditions, including being excluded from areas where he was previously drug dealing and being excluded from the Notting Hill Carnival. E has generally been complying with his licence conditions since release although he remains a high risk case and this is compounded by his not being in education, employment or training.

2nd CASE STUDY

'C' Is a 15 year old mixed black Caribbean/white British boy who entered care earlier this year shortly after receiving a 12-month Referral Order for a robbery offence. At the start of the Referral Order C was still living with his mother but was in a pattern of going missing, assaulting his siblings and being verbally abusive and aggressive to his mother. During this time he was making negative peer associations with children who had also been permanently excluded from school and were suspected of drug dealing. These concerns were passed to social work services and the YOS via the police and the daily Integrated Risk Management meeting (IRM).

When C entered care his needs were outlined as a child who found it very difficult to control his anger and who was dealing with complex family relationships regarding the identity of his father. These were compounded by regular cannabis smoking.


The YOS and social work team were unable to stabilise C and he had not even had a chance to start his referral order before he was arrested for further offences. It was at this point his case was discussed at the joint YOS/LAC managers' meeting. Actions included strategies to break the cycle of placement endings (as he had experienced 4 moves over a 2-month period) and ways to engage meaningfully. C was threatening to his social worker, necessitating a risk management plan. However strategies to intervene proved unsuccessful as C did not comply with his order and this resulted in him entering custody. Services have continued to work together to plan jointly for his release in November 2017 and to work with custody services to consider which interventions will be most likely to succeed.

3rd CASE STUDY

'S' is a 17 year-old female Looked after Child (LAC). She entered care due to the breakdown of her living arrangements as she was beyond parental control. She was frequently going missing from home and misusing alcohol.

Due to her offending behaviour (including assault and criminal damage) she is on a 12-month Youth Rehabilitation Order with Intensive Supervision and Surveillance. At the beginning of 2017, there were concerns regarding her well-being due to cannabis and alcohol misuse. In March 2017 the social work team were concerned about her risk-taking behaviour including missing episodes and possible sexual exploitation.

In response to these concerns S was moved to an address outside of London to help break the cycle of risk taking behaviours and associations. Subsequently through good partnership working between YOS, Police and social workers, S's plan of care and her YOS interventions have been tailored to safeguard her and to ensure that she desists from further offending. As a result S has successfully engaged with her YOS Order, and completed work around consequential thinking, substance misuse, role models, decision making and peer relationships. She has also completed sessions around healthy relationships and personal safety. S successfully completed her exclusion requirement and her curfew, engaging well with YOS and has not committed any further offences.

 Brent	<p>Corporate Parenting Committee 24 October 2017</p> <p>Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</p>
<p>Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report 1st July – 30th September 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 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 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/de-registrations 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

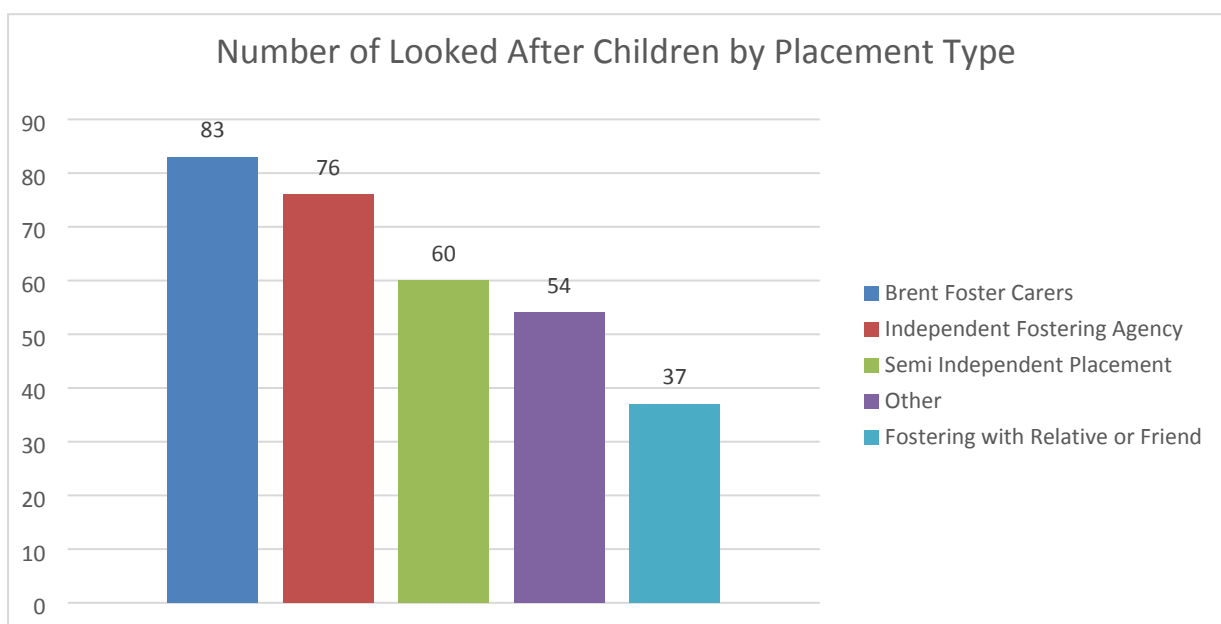
- 4.1 The primary in-house fostering functions are distributed across two teams within the LAC and Permanency Service:
- The recruitment and assessment of foster carers is completed within the Placements Assessment and Recruitment Team.
 - The ongoing support and supervision of foster carers is the responsibility 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.
- 4.3 A consultation process regarding proposed changes to the delivery of social work services within the department (including fostering) was initiated in September 2017 with this due to conclude in October 2017. The next report to this committee will provide further details in this area.

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 reduced to 311 on 30th September 2017. This is a 5.5% reduction in the figure at 30th June 2017 (329). The number of LAC as at 30th September 2017 was 310.

As of the 30th September 2017:

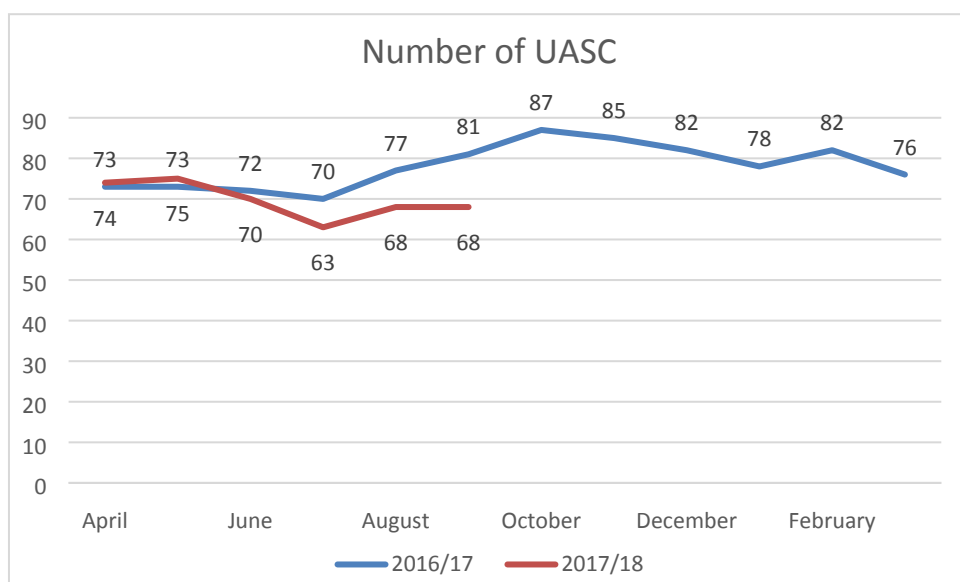
- 83 children were placed with Brent foster carers. This represents 26.7% of total looked after children.
- 76 children were placed with IFAs. This is 24.5% of the total looked after children population.



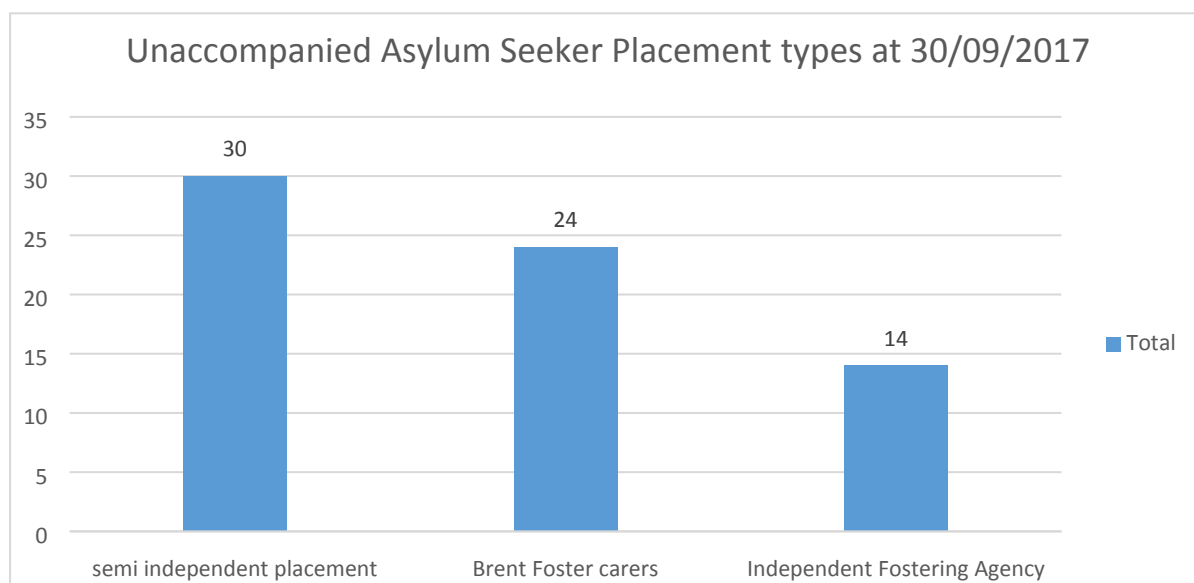
Please note '**other**' includes Children's homes (including secure), residential schools, hospitals, placement with parents, other local authorities and placed for adoption with placement order not with current foster carer.

- There are 60 looked after children (aged 16-18) in semi Independent accommodation (Residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations) as at 30/09/17, which represents 19.3% of all looked after children.
- 37 children were placed with a relative or family friend on a fostering basis. This is 11.9% of total looked after children as at 30/09/17.
- 198 looked after children were living within a fostering setting at 30/09/17. This is 63.87% 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. It is a significant challenge to identify foster placements to accommodate older teenage young people.

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



- 5.4 As of 30/09/17 there were 68 UASC, 13 less than the same period last year. The 68 UASC represents 21.9% of all LAC as at 30/09/2017. This is one percent lower than the same period last year. 30 UASC are placed in semi-independent accommodation and 38 are placed in foster care.



6.0 Recruitment and Assessment Activity

- 6.1 There were 5 new fostering approvals (with capacity for 6 children) in the first quarter of 2017-18 and a further 3 fostering household approvals (with capacity for 4 children) have been approved in the second quarter. The service is currently meeting the targets set for 2017/18.
- 6.2 The fostering service carried out 13 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 (over the summer months) our main presence was at local community festivals and events with stalls as well as local supermarkets.

- 6.3 The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 53 enquiries. These enquiries resulted in 10 initial visits. As of the 30th September 2017 there were 7 formal assessments in process under the 2-stage fostering assessment.
- 6.4 Monthly information evenings continue 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.

7.0 Fostering Panel

- 7.1 The aim, functions and operation of the Fostering Panel have been set out in previous reports to the Corporate Parenting Committee.
- 7.2 During the period 1st July – 30th September 2017, 4 panels were held with 19 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:
- 3 new fostering households were recommended for approval;
 - 1 new “family and friends” fostering household was recommended for approval;
 - 6 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
 - 1 fostering household was found suitable to continue as long-term foster carers following allegations made by children in placement;
 - 3 foster households’ suitability to foster was terminated due to their resignation from the role: 2 wanted to focus more on their family life and 1 described the breakdown in their relationship with the department as their reason. This was in relation to our response to concerns reported about the standard of care provided. As a result, training on how to handle and respond to allegations has been provided to social work teams and fostering panel members.
 - 5 “family & friends” fostering households approval as foster carers ceased: 3 due to the child in placement turning 18 and 2 due to a Special Guardianship Order being granted.

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

8.0 Training and Support to Foster Carers.

- 8.1 Brent has a Learning and Development offer to foster carers and as part of this we provide a range of mandatory and identified training courses including sessions in evenings and at weekends.

During the period 1st July to 30th September 2017, 12 individual training courses were offered providing 95 training spaces.

The Fostering Development Co-ordinator (FDC) role is currently vacant, but recruitment is underway and it is anticipated that the post will be filled by mid-November. There is a full training calendar in place and the service is managing the training arrangements within existing resources until the new FDC takes up post.

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 33 annual reviews out of a possible 38 during this period. Of those uncompleted:
- 1 was cancelled as an investigation into a standard of care issue required completion before the review was held;
 - 2 were postponed due to staff sickness;
 - 2 were postponed by foster carers due to other short-term commitments.

These have all been re-scheduled where necessary.

- 9.2 During the reporting period there were three formal allegations made against a fostering household. All of these were investigated through the Local Authority Designated Officer process (the formal arrangements within which allegations against professionals or volunteers working with children are considered). Two have concluded as unsubstantiated. One is pending. The carers' annual reviews have all been brought forward and will be taken to the Fostering Panel for consideration.

There are currently two allegations that pre-dated this reporting period and remain outstanding. In the first case the Fostering Panel considered a carer's position in June 2017 with the matter deferred until November 2017 pending further assessments. In the second case the panel recommended in March 2017 that more work was required to assess whether the carers have the capacity to meet a young person's long-term needs. This matter will be concluded at the November 2017 Fostering Panel.

During this quarter 5 complaints were received from fostering households. Three have been resolved to a satisfactory manner and two remain outstanding. The complaints related to issues such as a payment dispute, a difference of opinion with the child's social worker, information not being shared by a child's social worker, arrangements regarding respite care and a lengthy wait to obtain a child's passport.

In these situations the Head of Service reviews each complaint and considers service improvement measures. With the role encompassing both children's social work and fostering services there are clearer methods through which improvements in systems between the two areas can be made.

We are constantly learning from complaints/feedback and improve practice. For example, one of the complaints made was in relation to children's passports

which highlighted some difficulty we have when applying for Polish passports due to different domestic law in the UK and Poland. This has resulted in an action to review the immigration status of our LAC who are not British citizens. This work has now commenced. This piece of work will allow us to be more proactive in resolving immigration matters early.

10.0 New Developments

- 10.1 The Social Pedagogue started work within the Fostering Service within this reporting period. Previous committee reports have explained the social pedagogy role of the social pedagogue.

Fostering social workers who previously received introductory training to social pedagogy now have the opportunity to undertake a Level 3 Diploma in Social Pedagogy as part of the Children and Young People's Department's commitment to enhancing practice. It is anticipated that the training will start in January/February 2018 and will last 28 weeks.

Contacts with other Local Authorities who are implementing Social Pedagogy have been initiated. It is envisaged that by mid-November potential Level 3 Social Pedagogy Learners will visit Surrey County Council.

Further development work in the second half of the reporting year will focus on embedding proposed changes to the staffing structure within the fostering assessment and support teams, considering amendments to how information evenings are conducted and ensuring managers within the service undertake visits to carers' homes with social workers to observe practice.

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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Strategic Director, Children and Young People

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 Brent	<p>Corporate Parenting Committee 24 October 2017</p> <p>Report from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People</p>
<p>Brent Adoption Service Report 1st April 2017 – 30th September 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 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 2017– September 30th 2017.

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 Adoption services are delivered by two teams within the Looked After Children (LAC) and Permanency Service:

- 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.

4.0 Performance Data

4.1 The most recent set of national adoption scorecards was published in April 2017, covering the 3-year period 2014-2016. The next round of national adoption scorecard data will be released in December 2017.

Adoption Scorecards (published [here](#))

4.2 Our non-published data for the period 2015-2017 indicates that 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): 384.5 days. This is a 25% improvement against the previous reporting period (515) and compares against a national average of 558 days and our statistical neighbour average of 578.
- **A2** (The time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 160 days. This is a 13% improvement against the previous reporting period (184) and compares against a national average of 226 days and our statistical neighbour average of 222.

4.3 Child related data – 1st April – 30th September 2017

- In the first six months of this reporting year seven children were adopted. In the same reporting period last year there were three children adopted. Nine children are projected to be adopted by the end of December 2017.
- At the 30th September 2017, there were eleven Looked After Children with an adoption plan who had not yet been adopted. The details of these children's cases are as follows:
 - Five children are placed for adoption;
 - One child is due to be matched for adoption with his current foster carer at the October Panel;
 - One child is due to be matched with the adopters of her older sibling at the October Panel;
 - Adopters have just been selected for one child and they are booked in to attend November Panel;

- Proactive family finding is being undertaken on the remaining three children with a view to matches being presented to the Adoption Panel within the next three months.
- It was stated in previous reports that Local Authorities across England had been reporting 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. This trend now seems to be shifting with an increase in the number of children needing adoptive homes during the last 6 months. This is reflected in the numbers above.

4.4 Adopter Recruitment

At 30th September 2017 Brent had 6 approved adoptive households waiting for an adoptive placement and where a child had not yet been matched or placed. The number of children requiring adoption, but not yet matched or placed, continues to be lower than the number of Brent approved adopters.

During the reporting period the service received 25 general enquiries about adoption with two proceeding to full assessment. The other 9 enquiries related to step-parent adoption, kinship and inter-country adoption. The last of these are referred to the Inter-Country Adoption Centre, a specialist Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) with whom a service agreement is in place.

Brent strives to attract adopters from a diversity of backgrounds in order to best meet the variety of needs of our Looked After Children. Brent adopters currently waiting to be linked or matched to children are mainly of Asian and African Caribbean heritage.

Towards the end of this reporting period, an increase has been seen in the number of children likely to need adoptive homes and therefore active recruitment for adopters has recommenced.

There were 2 adopter approvals during this reporting period.

At 30th September 2017, there were:

- 4 assessments in Stage One of the process.
- 3 assessments in Stage Two.

Also in this reporting period two Brent adopters received children matched and placed with them from other local authorities and one Brent adopter was matched to a Brent child.

One approved adoptive couple stated their intention to end their commitment during this period and their approval will be formally ended at the Adoption and Permanency panel in the next reporting period.

4.5 Adoption Support

- In the six months between 1st of April 2017 and 30th September 2017, six new families have requested post adoption support. During this period, fourteen applications to the DfE Adoption Support Fund (ASF) were successfully approved to support the therapeutic needs of Brent families. In the past six months a number of DfE ASF applications have been completed on behalf of a wide age-range of children. We have also seen a significant increase in applications, from eight to fourteen, in this period, due primarily to an increased awareness in relation to the availability of the ASF. Most of these applications were on behalf of children known to us, however we have had contact with some new families also following increased awareness raising of the fund.
- Fifty-one 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.

5.0 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 During the period 1st April 2017 – 30th September 2017, 4 panels were held with 6 cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:
- Two households were recommended as suitable to adopt;
 - Four children were recommended to be placed for adoption with specific carers (one sibling group of two and two single children)

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

6.0 Service Improvement

- Alongside bi-monthly Adopters' Support Groups, we have now set up quarterly support groups for carers with Special Guardianship Orders (SGO). The first support group was well attended and received. It is planned to build upon this early success and to establish a strong group to provide mutual support.
- At the request of the SGO carers we arranged a picnic where they attended with the children they care for. This was also a successful event that will be repeated next year.
- We are exploring 'child appreciation days' for children placed for adoption. These days aim to bring all professionals working with the child

to meet with prospective adopters, share information and show appreciation of the child's journey. This is going to be an important part of the child's life story.

- In this reporting period, we explored with the West London Adoption Consortium whether we could jointly commission post-permanency support services in order to achieve more cost effective service delivery. This work is on-going.

6.1 Involving Adopters

- The Adoption and Post Permanency team are currently planning our annual Christmas children's party, and have decided to split the adoption party into two separate events, one for younger children and the other for older, more active children. They have also planned a separate Christmas party for Special Guardians and their children as there has been a really positive response to our SGO support group over the past 12 months and these families are beginning to build a support network for themselves.

6.2 Adopter Feedback

During this reporting period, Brent Adoption Service received positive feedback from the service users. No complaint has been made against the Adoption Service in this reporting period.

7. Broader adoption issues and the future

- 7.1 As stated in the previous report to the Committee, the DfE has capped the amount of financial support available to individual children through the ASF. This has had an impact on some of our families as the projected therapeutic support package costs are in excess of £5k, meaning that support arrangements in these cases have to be modified and renegotiated as the Local Authority has no additional resource capacity to make up any shortfall. Although the cap on the Adoption Support Fund continues to be an issue for some families with a very high level of need most of our adopted children are able to receive relevant therapeutic input within the £5,000 limit. The therapeutic agencies that we are currently using are trying to be accommodating by stretching the available funding to make it work.

7.2 Adoption Regionalisation

- 7.2.1 The work to establish a London Regional Agency (LRAA) is on-going. The LRAA Project Team has paid a visit to Brent and we have provided feedback about how the regional service could be developed. Feedback received from all Local Authorities that sign up to LRAA will help to design the Outline Business Case for the new Regional Adoption Agency.

The London Adoption Board is undertaking further exploration of how the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) is serving London's adoptive and special guardian families with plans being taken in October 2017 for ratification by the Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS).

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