



Corporate Parenting Committee

Tuesday 30 October 2018 at 5.00 pm

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

Membership:

Members

Councillors:

M Patel (Chair)
Conneely
Gbajumo
Kansagra
Thakkar

Substitute Members

Councillors:

Ezeajughi, W Mitchell Murray,
Patterson and Sangani

Councillors:

Colwill and Maurice

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

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

www.brent.gov.uk/committees

The press and public are welcome to attend this meeting

Notes for Members - Declarations of Interest:

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

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

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

***Disclosable Pecuniary Interests:**

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

****Personal Interests:**

The business relates to or affects:

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

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

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

or

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

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

Agenda

Introductions, if appropriate.

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, any relevant disclosable pecuniary, personal or prejudicial interests in the items on this agenda.	
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 - 6
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 Enrichment activities for older Looked After Children and Care Leavers - Summer 2018 This report informs the Corporate Parenting Committee about enrichment activities provided for Looked After Children and care leavers between June 2018 and September 2018.	7 - 12
8 Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 2: 1 July to 30 September 2018 The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-	13 - 22

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).

8a) Feedback from Brent Foster Carers

Brent Foster Carers will be in attendance at the meeting to provide feedback to the Corporate Parenting Committee with regard to their experiences as Foster Carers for Brent.

9 Children's Commissioner's 2018 Stability Index for Children in Care 23 - 100

The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the Children's Commissioner's 2018 Stability Index for Children in Care. This report also provides a summary of activities undertaken to achieve stability for looked after children in Brent.

10 Brent Council Children and Young People Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2017-2018 101 - 116

This report outlines the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers on quality assuring and improving services for Looked After Children. It also contains quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO provision in Brent as required by statutory guidance. This report includes feedback from Looked After Children gained through consultation with Care in Action, Brent's Children in Care Council.

11 Brent Adoption Service Report: 1 April - 30 September 2018 117 - 124

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 1 April – 30 September 2018.

12 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: Monday 4 February 2019



- 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 **Wednesday 25 July 2018 at 5.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor M Patel (Chair), Councillor Conneely (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Gbajumo, Kansagra and Thakkar

Also Present: Councillor McLennan (Deputy Leader)

1. **Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members**

None.

2. **Declarations of interests**

None.

3. **Deputations**

None.

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:

The minutes of the last meeting held on 26 April 2018 be approved as an accurate record.

5. **Matters arising**

None.

6. **Corporate Parenting Committee Induction: Role and Responsibilities**

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director, Children and Young People and Statutory DCS) introduced the report. She set out the legal framework governing Looked after Children (LAC) and the inspection framework for Local Authority Children's Services. She explained that LAC were children and young people under the age of 18 and being looked after by the Local Authority and that Care Leavers were LAC for at least 13 weeks from age 14 onwards. Members were advised that the quality of Children and Families work was inspected by Ofsted and covered wide areas including the following; impact of leaders on social work, the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection including children in care and care leavers and the overall effectiveness of the service. Members were pleased to note the highlights of the Ofsted inspection in May 2018 which graded the service areas good and outstanding. Gail Tolley referenced Brent's pledge to LAC and Care Leavers which was written in conjunction with Care in Action and endorsed by the Lead Member. The pledge was constantly being monitored to ensure that the Authority was keeping to its promises as a corporate parent.

Mr Nigel Chapman (Operational Director, Integration & Improved Outcomes, Children & Young People) advised that the 7 principles of corporate parenting as required by Children and Social Work Act 2017 applied to the whole Council. These placed a duty on all Councillors, Council staff and partner agencies to take on the role of corporate parent of LAC by the local authority and to take a keen interest in their wellbeing and development as any good parent would. It was noted that governance arrangements in Brent involved weekly meeting between Lead Member, Strategic & Operational Directors, Cross-party Corporate Parenting Committee, chaired by the Lead Member that met 5 times a year with additional elected Members on Adoption and Fostering panels.

Mr Chapman informed the Committee that as at March 2018 there were 317 LAC of which 61.5% were male with 16-17 year olds being the largest group (39.4%). He continued that Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) numbers remained high and made up 21% of the LAC population. This cohort would, in turn, impact on the care leaver numbers very soon as the majority were aged 16 and 17 years old. He continued that the service currently supported 323 care leavers with each care leaver allocated a support worker (Personal Advisor) so as to maintain regular contact with them throughout the three year period up until their 21st birthday. In addition, there was a national requirement to report on young people's progress on education, employment, training status and the suitability of their accommodation within four months of their 19th, 20th and 21st birthdays. The national requirement was enhanced with Brent's 'Local Offer' for care leavers (published April 2018) which offered support to those of age 25.

Members heard that with 65% of Brent's LAC were placed in foster care with the majority of other children placed in semi-independent and residential placements, the Council was adhering to its sufficiency duty. Mr Chapman clarified the options for permanency which included adoption, special guardianship, long term fostering and child arrangement order all of which were planned to ensure the children had a secure, stable and loving family to support them. He referenced the role of Virtual School and added that young people who had been in longer term care did better than those who had not and that changes in placement, school changes and school absences detrimentally affected the educational attainment of those children. Mr Chapman continued that all LAC had initial assessment on admission to care which was followed by annual health assessments and 6 monthly dental health monitoring.

The Care in Action (CIA) members then introduced an activity involving all members and officers at the meeting. They divided us into groups and each individual was asked to identify an occasion where a promise had not been kept and explain how they felt. CIA then reflected on the importance of keeping the promises in the Pledge and Charter to LAC and Care Leavers. This activity was well received by all Members and officers.

Gail Tolley added that in order to sustain Ofsted 'Outstanding' judgement in 3 years (2021 ILACS), regular and timely attendance at the Corporate Parenting Committee with a clear moral purpose as well as a legal responsibility was essential. In addition the needs of LAC and care leavers must be prioritised and using of collective resources, to fight for their best interests and make a difference for children in care and care leavers.

RESOLVED:

That the report on Corporate Parenting roles and responsibilities be noted.

7. Update from Care In Action Members

Representatives from Care in Action provided a detailed update on the activities of the group since the previous meeting of the Committee.

JM informed the Committee that, established in 2007, the main purpose of Junior Care in Action (JCIA), Care in Action (CIA) and Care Leavers In Action (CLIA) was to advocate on behalf of children and young people in Brent. Moreover it allowed children and young people to be part of key decision making that takes place. JM added that CIA, JCIA and CLIA continued to ensure that all young people can participate and express their views and scrutinise Children Services for service improvement. In this way, CIA helped to promote high aspirations amongst young people in care which may not be provided otherwise.

HS updated the Committee that the CIA members had worked on creating the Brent Pledge and Care Leavers' Charter as well as being involved in the recruitment and selection of senior managers and staff training. Members were also informed that CIA had worked with a service manager to develop the Local Offer for care leavers and supported the commissioning of semi-independent accommodation contracts to make sure that they were suited to the needs of young people. Members were impressed to learn that one member of CIA had been made the Deputy Chair of the London Children in Care Council, a bigger version of the local group.

BJ outlined a prom style event that CLIA members organised to celebrate the achievements of Care Leavers. Members heard that CLIA members solely arranged the colour scheme, designed the invites and chose the food, making the event a successful one, in particular, the opportunity to meet other care leavers.

SH explained that in March 2018, some members of CIA and some children who had been adopted participated in an event called Voice in a Million concerts that took place in the Wembley SSE Arena, with rehearsals in Thorpe in Surrey. The purpose of the event was to raise awareness about children in care who could be adopted. This was shown through songs such as "Help a child belong", "I want a mum" and a few other songs. It was noteworthy that the event not only helped SH and others who participated to achieve and accomplish her goals, but it also helped to build self-confidence.

RESOLVED:

That the update from Care in Action members be noted.

8. Annual Corporate Parenting Report 2017/18

Mr Nigel Chapman (Operational Director, Integration & Improved Outcomes, Children & Young People) gave a profile of Brent's looked after children and care leavers during 2017-2018. He reported on annual activity, highlighting strengths and areas for development in supporting looked after children (LAC) and care

leavers in Brent. Members noted that not only had the delivery of both the Adoption and Fostering Services been monitored by Committee members, statutory adoption service reports including the Adoption Panel activity had been scrutinised on a 6-monthly basis. He drew members' attention to participation of children and young people, and care leavers and added that all LAC and care leavers were visited regularly at their placements or homes and their wishes, feelings and views clearly recorded on their electronic case files.

He then detailed the profiles of LAC in Brent. As of 31st March 2018 Brent had 318 children and young people looked after, which represented 42 LAC per 10,000 head of child population against the rate for England of 62 per 10,000 head of child population. There had been a reduction in number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) - 18 fewer UASC in 2017/18 compared to 2016/17. Brent's UASC numbers have gradually decreased due to the number of new arrivals exceeded by those turning 18, as well as improvements to the government's national dispersal system. Despite lower number of UASC, Brent's overall number of children in care remained consistent compared to the previous year. Brent Children and Young People's Services continued to undertake effective prevention work, using Brent's Practice Framework including Signs of Safety to support children to remain within their families when it was safe to do so. The gender of the LAC population consists of 63% male and 37% female.

He continued that whilst there had been a reduction in number of LAC from White UK and Asian backgrounds, there had been a slight increase of children who were Black or Black British, though the figures were comparable with data from statistical neighbours. Members heard that although some improvement had been achieved around placement stability, this area remained a high priority for this reporting year.

Mr Chapman then reported on the statutory duty on the Council to undertake health checks including dental and immunisations for LAC who had been in care for more than 12 months. A slight reduction on the previous year's health assessment position was reported which Mr Chapman added would be a focus of attention of the Service.

Missing from care was known to increase the vulnerability of LAC and in the year ending 31st March 2018, 75 LAC were reported to be missing from their placements (120 in the previous year). This difference was partly related to Brent's sharpened approach in the recording of missing activity and also effective work undertaken with vulnerable adolescents both strategically and operationally using a contextual safeguarding approach which focused on understanding and responding to young people's experiences of significant harm in a range of social contexts such as friendships and peer relationships.

He referenced the work of Brent's multi-agency Vulnerable Adolescents' Panel that had a strategic overview of different forms of vulnerability including children missing from home or care. The Panel also ensured that the needs of vulnerable adolescents were understood at a strategic level in order to develop and improve services through an action plan. Research showed that children missing from care were at further risk of exploitation and risks experienced by young people.

The Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation Panel (MASE Panel) was a multi-agency forum which was established to ensure robust multi-agency plans were in place for

the protection of children who were at high risk of sexual exploitation. This included looked after children and young people.

The educational outcomes for looked after children for the academic year 2017/18 would not be available until January 2019. The data presented in this report refers to Brent Virtual School's Annual Report 2016/17 which was discussed at the Corporate Parenting Committee on 26th April 2018. He then highlighted the annual report from the Brent Virtual School.

In welcoming the annual report, members questioned the commitment of the Police on the MASE Panel and enquired as to what further resources would be required, going forward, in order to address the wider ramifications of the Panel's work. Mr Chapman responded that the challenges arose from greater demand and that under the new model involving Barnet, Brent and Harrow, there had been no impact on the Police's commitment to the work of the Panel.

RESOLVED:

That the annual corporate parenting report 2017/18 be noted.

9. Fostering Service Quarterly Report (April 2018 - June 2018)

Ms Roisin Hegarty (Service Manager) introduced the quarterly report ending June 2018. The report provided information to the Committee 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 set out the vision for fostering service and the merits of the current staffing arrangements and added that the service aimed to recruit and retain more foster carers in order to increase achieve a positive impact on outcomes for children and young people. This was being done via the creation of stronger relationships with social work teams through smaller team structures with a greater focus on staff learning and development.

She then referenced the figures for corporate placement performance targets for 2017/18 and drew members' attention to the graph in the report that showed placements as of 30/06/2018. It was noted that 80 children were placed with Brent foster carers, compared to 92 children as at 31st March 2018 (representing 25.6% of total looked after children) and 85 children were placed with IFAs, same as previous quarter (Jan – Mar 2018). This is 27.2% of the total looked after children population.

Members heard that recruitment and assessment produced 34 contacts for further information and 25 enquiries expressing serious interest in becoming foster carers. Of these, 10 possible referrals were identified and of those applicants, 7 people wished to continue the process and be visited by social workers. As of the end of Q1, there were 2 formal assessments in process – one in stage 1 and the other in stage 2. The target for the service was to recruit 5 net fostering placements within the reporting year once carer resignations or termination of approval were taken into account.

She reported on the training and support for carers for which the Fostering Development Co-ordinator had received positive feedback from the carers. She

also reported on monitoring, reviews, allegations and complaints. It was noted that all scheduled reviews had now been completed with one allegation made about a foster carer currently being investigated.

In response to members' questions, the Service Manager stated that although the absence of a member of staff which caused some of the reviews to be deferred did cause a strain, the situation was efficiently resolved.

RESOLVED:


That the Fostering Service quarterly report for the period ending June 2018 be noted.

10. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 6.00 pm

COUNCILLOR MILI PATEL
Chair

	Corporate Parenting Committee 30 October 2018
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services
Enrichment activities for older Looked After Children and Care Leavers - Summer 2018	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision: (only applicable for Cabinet, Cabinet Sub Committee and officer decisions)	For information
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Onder Beter, Head of Service Looked After Children and Permanency Integration and Improved Outcomes, CYPS Email: onder.beter@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Sarah Miller, Head of Service Inclusion and the Virtual School for Looked After Children, Integration and Improved Outcomes, CYPS Email: sarah.miller@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Nigel Chapman, Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Email: nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk</p>

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To inform the Corporate Parenting Committee about enrichment activities provided for Looked After Children and care leavers between June 2018 and September 2018.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 Isolation and loneliness stand as one of the major challenges experienced by older children in care and care leavers as they move into their own tenancies at a young age, struggle with taking on household responsibilities and often feel different from their peer group who do not face the same kind of issues.
- 2.2 Many of Brent's care leavers have not regularly met care experienced young people or been involved in leisure activities outside of their

school/college/employment environment. Brent's leaving care teams have a programme of independence workshops for care leavers that help in tackling isolation as well as assisting care leavers to be equipped with independent living skills. These workshops include tenancy management, money management and healthy relationships. From autumn 2018, more workshops will be offered on sexual health, physical health and substance misuse. However, as Corporate Parents, the Local Authority can do more to help care leavers and older Looked After Children, hence, an enrichment programme was designed to combat isolation and to build confidence and self-esteem.

2.3. The enrichment programme includes one-off activities as well as regular structured activities.

2.4. **One off activities**

Milly Day

- June 26th was 'Milly Day'. These are sponsored event days at a riverside property on the banks of the Thames in Buckinghamshire. The centre offers opportunities for those living with difficulties day in and day out, a chance to recharge (<http://millydays.org.uk/milly-days/>). 30 young people from Brent travelled on a coach to Buckinghamshire to spend the day at 'Milly's' country house. None of these care leavers had previously met but within a few hours many were taking part in a table-tennis tournament, playing football together, learning to drive a boat up and down the Thames and swimming.
- Some care leavers formed friendships with those care leavers they discovered lived nearby. In addition, it was an opportunity for many to experience activities out of their comfort zone – in an unfamiliar environment.

Tall Ships

- During a week in July, 10 of our Looked After Children and care leavers joined a Tall Ships voyage from Dorset along the English Channel and around the Isle of Wight. Young people were responsible for planning the navigation, cooking all the food and learning to sail the ship. Some took the challenge to climb the crow's nest and all of them bonded well during the week. Feedback from young people was very positive. Below is one example:

The Tall Ship, was an amazing experience that allowed us as young people to venture out in the wilderness and learn the life at sea. This provided us with the opportunity to see different parts of England that we may have never got the opportunity to do so"

2.5 Regular activities

Jamie's Farm

- Jamie's Farm welcomed 10 Looked After Children aged 14 – 16 for a week in the summer. This was a working farm in Monmouth, Wales, offering residential activities that aim to build the resilience and self-esteem of participants. Brent's children worked hard on the farm, taking on the challenges they faced – feeding and mucking out the animals, sheep handling, horticulture, farm maintenance, mountain climbing, and cooking. Perhaps the biggest challenge was the digital detox – as all participants had to agree to a “no phones” policy for the 4 days they were at the farm. This in itself gave the young people an opportunity to reflect on their life back in London, and consider life choices going forwards. One young person summed up the experience:

“I learnt that if you put your mind to something, you can achieve it no matter how hard you think it is and that team work makes the dream work”

- The next trip to Jamie's Farm is organised to take place during half term in October 2018.

Care Leavers' Hub

- The Hub is a youth club space for care leavers to meet each other on a more regular basis, to be involved in deciding which activities they want to participate in and to continue to build relationships and networks that will last, when professionals are no longer a part of their lives. The quote below shows that young people were keen to attend more regular activities

‘I would come if it was every fortnight’ ‘That’s funny, I was going to say every fortnight but I thought you guys would say that was too much.’

- The Hub started on 29th August 2018 at the Learning Zone, Wembley Stadium. 18 young people turned up for the first event where they enjoyed team games, board games and a chance to chat, listen to music and eat pizza.
- The feedback was very positive. Six of the young people from the Tall Ships trip attended and had the opportunity to see each other for the first time since the trip. Half the group were made up of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People and the atmosphere was inclusive and upbeat.

“We don’t get to see each other, we only get to see each other twice a year”

- Plans continue for monthly hub sessions, including a regular movie night, the first of which took place in September, bowling in October for National Care Leavers week and a Christmas event.

Football Club

- Weekly football began on 3rd September 2018 using the artificial pitches in Wembley Park. 14 Care Leavers participated in football facilitated by two Personal Advisers (PAs). Many young people attended who had never engaged with Care Leavers' workshops previously.
- Some of the young people now arrange to meet their PAs an hour prior to football for practical help in areas including budgeting, within an informal group setting.

WhatsApp Group

- A Care Leavers' WhatsApp group has now been set up. All Care Leavers must consent before being added to the group. There are currently 19 participants and it is growing daily. The group is used specifically to inform young people about these enrichment activities and consult with young people for feedback and views to improve ongoing events.
- The interaction has been very positive: Below is an example of interaction between young people:

"was good last night, are we going cinema next month?" 'I'm down for that' 'that's a good idea' 'yeah I'll come' 'can you share the photo from yesterday?'

2.6 Upcoming events/activities

National Care Leavers' Week – 24th-31st October

- The Looked After Children and Permanency (LACP) Service proposes to display posters within the Civic Centre, showcasing examples of the young people Children and Young People's Services are proud of. Example text on a poster: *Meet A..., she is 20, she grew up in foster care and now she's at University studying to become a pilot. She's one of our 300 care leavers whose achievements we're celebrating during National Care Leavers' Week. Young people in and leaving the care system face many challenges and we need to make sure their achievements are recognised. Share our pride #celebratingbrentcareleavers.* The final version of these posters will be agreed with the Operational Director.
- The LACP Service proposes to organise a football match between care leavers and senior Brent officers.

2.7 Future thoughts:

- Consideration is being given to creating a group for our care leaver young parents and parents-to-be to meet.
- Separately a group for female care leavers is also being planned with our young people.
- Development activity is in progress to enable Care Leavers in Action to carry out their activities within the Hub in order to help improve general feedback on services and to make sure activity is focused and arranged efficiently.

4.0 Financial Implications


- 4.1 The costs of the summer activities for children in and leaving care were met through the Virtual School and some charitable grants. At present, work is being undertaken to apply for grants in order to sustain the current level of enrichment activities.

Report sign off:

GAIL TOLLEY

Strategic Director, Children and Young People

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	Corporate Parenting Committee 30 October 2018
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services
Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 2: 1 July to 30 September 2018	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision: (only applicable for Cabinet, Cabinet Sub Committee and officer decisions)	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Onder Beter, Head of Service Looked After Children and Permanency Integration and Improved Outcomes, CYPS Email: onder.beter@brent.gov.uk Nigel Chapman, Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Email: nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 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).

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 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 Detail

3.1 Service Values

The in-house fostering function is positioned within the LAC and Permanency Service of the Children and Young People's Department. The vision for the service as set out in the 2018-19 service plan is that:

- Caring and loving families will be found for children without delay and within their extended family network where appropriate.
- Diversity needs including disability, race, religion, language and culture will always be considered when placing a child.
- Placements will be well matched to children's individual needs. The best foster carers will be recruited for our children.
- 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 with the aim to have 5 net fostering households in the end of financial year taking into account termination of approvals and resignations.
- 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.

3.2 Staffing Arrangements

The Fostering Support and Assessment Teams consist of two team managers (the second manager post was successfully appointed into by an internal member of staff in August 2018), 10 social workers and one marketing and recruitment officer. The Marketing and Recruitment Officer left Brent during this reporting period and interviews are being held for a successor in October 2018.

Two social workers left the fostering service to take up new opportunities within Children and Young People's services. To support budgetary pressures elsewhere within the LAC and Permanency service the decision has been taken to keep these posts vacant until March 2019, as the workload can be safely managed until the end of the current financial year.

3.3 Placement Activity

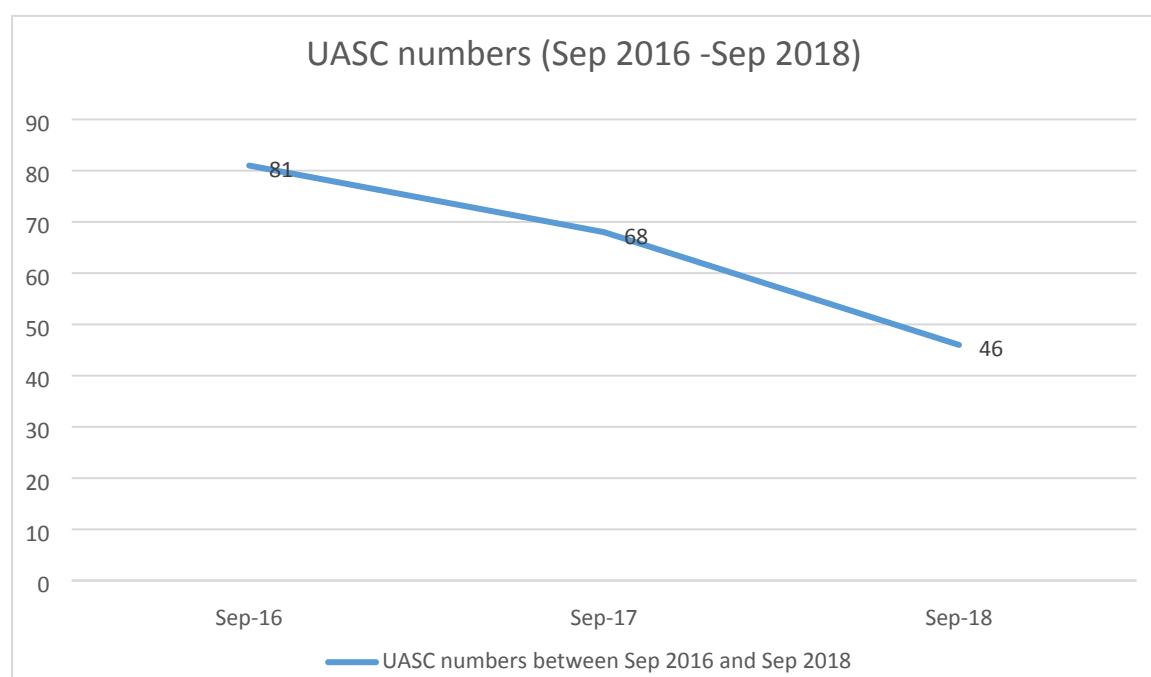
The total number of looked after children as at 30th September 2018 was 296 compared to 310 during the same period in 2017.

The corporate performance targets for 2018/19 were as below:

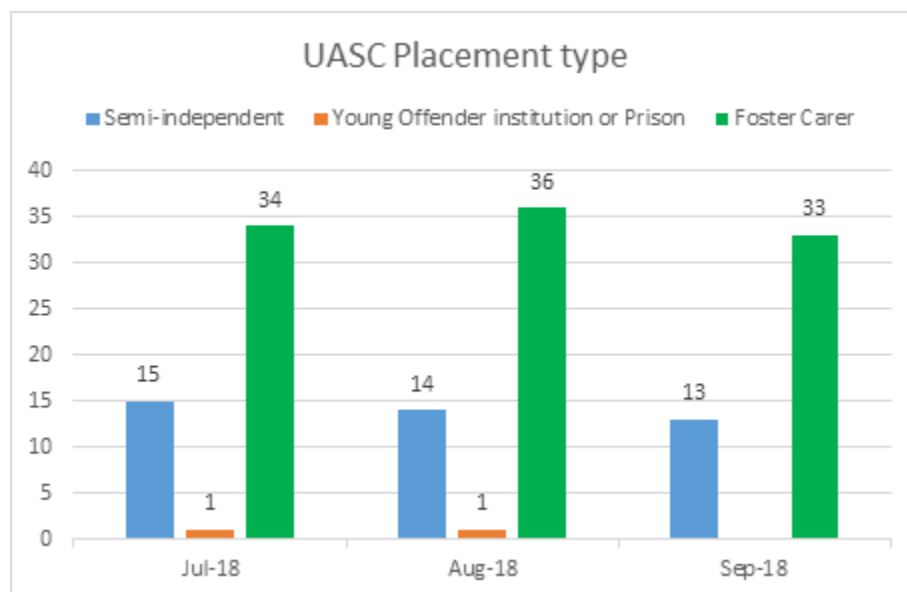
- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 35% - the actual percentage as of 30th September 2018 was 26% (77 children) compared with 26.7% (83 children) in the same quarter in 2017;

- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15% - the actual percentage as of 30th September 2018 was 13.9% (41 children) compared with 11.9% (37 children) in the same quarter in 2017;
- Percentage of looked after children placed in Independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 30th September 2018 was 28.7% (85 children) compared to 24.5% (76 children) during the same quarter 2017;
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 75% - the actual percentage as of 30th September 2018 was 69% (204 children). This is an increase from the same quarter in 2017, where the percentage was 64% of LAC (198 children);
- There were 43 looked after children in semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations) as at 30th September 2018, which represents 14.5% of all looked after children. This number is smaller than the same time period in 2017 when there were 60 children (19.3% of the total looked after population at the time). This reduction is due in part to some young people turning 18 and concerted efforts to place young people in fostering placements rather than semi-independent provision.

As of 30th September 2018 there were 46 UASC, 22 fewer than the same quarter last year.



13 UASC are placed in semi-independent accommodation and 33 are placed in foster care.



3.4 Recruitment and Assessment

The fostering service carried out 6 recruitment focused activities within the reporting period with the aim of raising awareness of fostering for Brent and encouraging potential foster carers to contact Brent Fostering Service. During this quarter, our main focus was on outreach events in local supermarkets (Tesco and Asda). We have also targeted our leaflet drops in Kensal Rise and Kensal Green in order to increase our presence in those parts of the borough as mentioned in the last quarter. We also attended the Chalkhill Festival; and we ran a new Facebook campaign, as well holding 2 recruitment events in the Civic Centre, with the aim of attracting local visitors to the building who may be interested in fostering. Additionally, there were 3 monthly information evenings at the Civic Centre, providing an opportunity to members of the public to find out more about the fostering role and to enable Brent to determine whether an individual or family has the potential to become a carer for Brent. We continue to feature in every edition of The Brent magazine. The service is attending *The Job Show* event in Wembley Stadium as part of the West London Alliance on Wednesday 10th October.

The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 22 contacts (telephone calls or emails requesting further information) and out of the 22, 10 people expressed a serious interest in becoming foster carers. Of these 10 possible leads, only 4 chose to continue with the initial assessment process with 3 people being visited by social workers and 1 applicant asking to be placed on hold for 6 months.

Last quarter we assigned one worker the specific task of contacting those people who had expressed an interest in fostering with Brent in the past but had not felt able to continue for various reasons. Many had decided that fostering was not for them but 4 expressed an interest in meeting a social worker for an initial assessment. From these contacts 1 person has progressed to a stage 1 assessment.

Therefore, as of the end of Q2, there are 3 assessments in stage 1 and one assessment is almost complete and due to be presented to Fostering Panel in December.

Given the decline in the number of ongoing assessments an action plan was devised to increase the monitoring of recruitment activity. Performance meetings were increased to weekly and the roles for each team manager were refocused. The immediate outcome of this change has seen in an increase in activity for the duty worker as they revisit prospective carers who wanted more time to consider whether to become foster carers.

3.5 Fostering Panel

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

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 or 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 service, including those of a Standards of Care issue and those exploring any allegations made;
- the termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a foster carer.

The panel 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 service and these recommendations are referred to the Agency Decision Maker who is the Head of Service, LAC and Permanency.

During the period 1st July – 30th September 2018, 3 panels were held with 10 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:

- 1 new 'family and friends' fostering household was recommended for approval;

- 5 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
- 2 fostering households' approvals were terminated due to a failure on the part of the foster carers to meet the required fostering standards;
- 1 fostering household resigned from their fostering role due to ill-health and a change in their family circumstances; and
- 1 fostering household's approval was reduced to nominated carer status for their daughter (who was approved last quarter with her husband as short term foster carers).

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

A joint annual training day for fostering panel members and the kinship care and fostering teams' staff is held as per statutory regulation; the next one is scheduled for December 2018, the focus of which will be a combination of the National Fostering Stocktake and the Government's response (see **3.8 New Developments** below), radicalisation in relation to the fostering role and criminal exploitation and county lines.

3.6 Training and Support to Foster Carers

The feedback regarding the courses offered continues to be positive. Some carers ask for more courses to be held in the evenings and at weekends as they work but it is felt that there are a reasonable number of courses offered outside of working hours.

During this reporting period, 20 individual training courses were offered ranging from diverse subjects such as 'Developing Good Bedtime Routines' to 'Keep Breathing – Emotional Resilience for Foster Carers'.

The carers' feedback has been positive for most sessions. Carers thoroughly enjoyed attending the Keep Breathing/Emotional Resilience training session. A number of carers sent emails individually, to praise the trainer in relation to the course content as well as the delivery. Carers also sent positive emails of praise about Safeguarding Children in a Digital World training course.

3.7 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints

Reviews:

A total of 26 foster carer annual review meetings were scheduled to take place in this period. Of this number, 20 were held within timescale but 6 were not. The reasons for the reviews not going ahead were primarily foster carer led (i.e. health problems or personal circumstances)

During this quarter, there were two new allegations made about foster carers – details of which, for reasons of confidentiality, cannot be shared in this report. Both allegations

were investigated by the Brent Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), with one being investigated by another local authority LADO. Both investigations have been concluded, which was followed by the respective carers having their annual review brought forward for consideration by the Fostering Panel.

The Agency Advisor and the ADM hold quarterly meetings to review all feedback received from the Fostering Panel to review learning to disseminate within the service to improve social work practice. In this period, the following actions were taken as a result of fostering panel feedback:

- Good practice examples and performance issues raised by the Fostering Panel were addressed by managers directly with the relevant workers;
- Investigations into possible Standards of Care are now done by peers within the team to provide an element of independence to the assessment.

Team Managers continue to discuss these cases as case examples in their team meetings to disseminate the learning and also use the cases within group supervision.

3.8 New Developments

Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)

Brent's Children's Services were inspected by Ofsted in May 2018. The *experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers* was graded 'outstanding'. A relevant section of the published report stated,

"An increasing number [of foster carers] are 'in house' due to successful recruitment activity. Efficient screening and assessment processes ensure that only the most appropriate carers are recruited. Enhanced payment incentives are appropriately provided for carers who support children with more complex and challenging needs. This includes support for staying put arrangements. Local recruitment campaigns have been particularly successful in recruiting carers from a wide range of backgrounds. Foster carers have good access to regular training and support." Ofsted, May 2018

Out of Hours support for Foster Carers

There has been only a small number of contacts made to the Out of Hours support line during this reporting period. An annual position will be provided on its efficacy at the end of this reporting year. Individual supervising social workers offer additional support when placements are particularly challenging. Workers are also making increased use of the Social Pedagogue to strengthen the skills of the foster carers.

Foster Care in England, 2018

Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers were appointed by the Secretary of State for Education to conduct a national fostering stocktake for England during 2017. Their report, [Foster Care in England](#), was published in February 2018. It contained 36

recommendations to the government about how the outcomes of children in foster care can be improved, including:

- Ensuring foster carers are supported and included in decision-making;
- Improving foster placement commissioning, and matching;
- Greater stability and permanence for children and young people in foster care.

In response, the government published *Fostering Better Outcomes* in July 2018 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/727613/Fostering_better_outcomes_.pdf and identified five overarching ambitions to address the 36 recommendations from the above report. These included:

- Children are listened to and involved in decisions about their lives;
- Foster parents receive the support and respect they need and deserve to care for children;
- There are enough high quality fostering placements, in the right place, at the right time;
- LAs commission placements according to the needs of the child; and
- Children experience stability regardless of permanence plan.

The implications for fostering in Brent have been considered by the two teams and senior management in the LAC and Permanency Service. Brent currently performs well regarding permanence planning, listening and responding to children and young people's views, offering children stable and high quality placements, providing well considered contact arrangements for children separated from family members and the support offered to young people who wish to remain with foster carers past the age of 18.

The current service plan addresses the areas that need to continue to improve in order to respond consistently to each of the ambitions set by the government. This includes:

- Improving the consultation of current and past looked after children to use their views to drive improvements;
- Improving the recognition of foster carers as valued experts who best know the children they care for across children and young people's services and with our partner agencies (this is the focus of an upcoming staff forum);
- Making our peer-to-peer support more structured for foster carers and their children;
- Developing partnership working and commissioning of placements to ensure that matching is driven by the needs of the child, not cost;
- Developing a creative approach to deciding which individual social worker is best placed to offer support to the foster family in long-term placements;
- Exploring the use of regional consortia and/or neighbouring local authorities for combined needs-led and targeted marketing and recruitment and commissioning and integration.


Regarding this final point, as part of the Council's published consultation on the 2019-20 and 2020-21 budget there is a proposal to explore the option of a shared fostering service with other West London authorities. Should this budget proposal be accepted by the Council then it will be progressed with a view to implementation during 2020-21.

Report sign off:

GAIL TOLLEY

Strategic Director, Children and Young People

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	Corporate Parenting Committee 30 October 2018
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services
Children's Commissioner's 2018 Stability Index for Children in Care	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision: (only applicable for Cabinet, Cabinet Sub Committee and officer decisions)	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	1
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Onder Beter, Head of Service Looked After Children and Permanency Integration and Improved Outcomes, CYPS Email: onder.beter@brent.gov.uk Nigel Chapman, Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Email: nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about The Children's Commissioner's 2018 Stability Index for Children in Care. This report also provides a summary of activities undertaken to achieve stability for looked after children in Brent.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 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 looked after children in Brent receive the appropriate stability of care arrangements, wherever they might be placed.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1** The Stability Index (SI) was launched in 2017 by the Children's Commissioner¹ as an annual measure of the stability of the lives of children in care. The SI aims to improve stability for looked after children by highlighting the issue of stability and providing data that allows stability to be monitored over time.

The 2018 SI primarily used the data from 2015/16 and 2016/17. It provides an analysis that is based on several data measures such as change of placements, change of schools and change of social workers for looked after children.

- 3.2** The 2018 SI found out that whilst many children in care had stable arrangements, too many experience instability in different aspects of their lives. Some children were reported to experience repeat changes of placements, of school or with social workers. The SI has established that some children are more likely to experience instability such as those with additional behavioural and emotional needs, who have recently entered care, whose legal status indicates higher risk or who are in pupil referral units. Some of the general SI² findings are below:

- Only 1 in 4 children in care experienced no placement move, no school move and no social worker change in 2016/17.
- Over 3,000 children (6% of those in care in both 2015/16 and 2016/17) experienced four or more placement moves over two years.
- Nearly 2,400 children experienced a placement move, a school move and a change in social worker all in 2016/17.
- Children who experience instability are at risk of having it compounded by more instability in future.
- Social worker changes remain significantly more common than placement or school changes. Around 1 in 4 children in care experienced two or more social worker changes in 2016/17.

4. Stability Index for Brent

- 4.1** The SI for Brent focused on data across three main domains: placement changes, school changes and changes in social workers.

¹ The role of the Children's Commissioner was established under the Children Act 2004 which gave the Commissioner responsibility for promoting awareness of the views and interests of children. The Commissioner's remit includes understanding what children think about things that affect them and encouraging decision makers to take their best interests into account. The current Children's Commissioner is Anne Longfield OBE. The Children and Families Act 2014 further strengthened the remit, powers and independence of the Commissioner.

² For details of the findings see <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publication/stability-index-initial-findings-and-technical-report/>.

4.2 Placement Changes

4.2.1 The 2018 SI found out that children in care in Brent have experienced more placement changes compared to the national average. It was reported that 14% of children had two or more placements in Brent compared to 10% nationally.

- 14% had 2 or more placement changes in 2016/17; (10% nationally)
- 5% had 2 or more placement changes in both 2015/16 and 2016/17; (3% nationally)
- 30% had 2 or more placement changes over two years (2015/16 - 2016/17); (22% nationally)
- 44% had 2 or more placement changes over three years (2014/15 - 2016/17); (30% nationally)

4.2.2 Brent's Context and actions taken to improve stability for LAC

4.2.3 Looked after children achieve better outcomes when they are in stable placements. Placement stability figures in Brent are closely linked with a number of factors that have an adverse effect on life journey of children in care: traumatic childhood experience prior to coming to care; age of children at the point of entry to care, lack of placement sufficiency for young people with multiple vulnerabilities in adolescence including child sexual exploitation, gang affiliation, children exploited by drug dealers across the country known as county lines.

4.2.5 Late entry to the care system is one of the challenges faced by the Local Authority in reducing the number of placement changes for young people. In 2017/18 over 35% of young people who became looked after were over the age of 16. This figure was 63.5% for children and young people who were above the age of 13. As at 30th September 2018, approximately 41% of the care population in Brent is over 16 years old. In 2017/18, this figure was 35% in statistical neighbour authorities and 32% as the national average.

4.2.6 Coming into care at a late stage in their adolescence, these young people mostly present with high level of complex and additional needs. Such characteristics can manifest themselves in highly challenging and risk taking behaviours that foster carers and many residential homes are not equipped to manage. It takes time for young people to settle into their placements and start having positive relationships with their care givers.

4.2.7 In Brent, a team of clinicians, the Brent Emotional Well-being Team and a social pedagogue, offer consultation to foster carers and social workers in order to assist them in helping young people with complex behavioural and emotional difficulties. Currently foster carers and social workers receive around 20 consultations per month.

4.2.8 Late entry is only one of the reasons for placement instability but it is an important factor affecting placement options and stability for children. The

number of appropriately equipped placements (including fostering or residential settings) is scarce. This is a challenge nationally and locally in London. Brent's Sufficiency Strategy identifies this national problem and includes measures to address this for Brent's looked after children.

- 4.2.9 Dealing with the issue of placement stability was already contained within a priority list of areas for further service improvement. A number of activities are in place to ensure that children change placements in a planned way when possible. All emergency placement moves are scrutinised by senior managers to ensure that it is in children's best interest to move.
- 4.2.10 A robust weekly Children's Placement Panel (CPP), chaired by a senior manager has an oversight on all placement changes. CPP tracks and monitors placements and ensures that children do not experience unnecessary disruptions and that any new placements meet health and education needs. Where a placement is at risk, placement stability meetings are held with key professionals. Individual placements are monitored by social workers and by Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) as part of LAC Review.
- 4.2.11 Any potential placement move for children is carefully considered via a rigorous procedure. All placement change requests, overseen by Head of Service LAC and Permanency, ensure a placement change is in the child or young person's best interests. Children and young people, their parents and carer, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), Brent Virtual School for LAC and other professionals are consulted prior to placement moves.
- 4.2.12 Brent's ambition in achieving stability was recognised by the 2018 Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services. The 'outstanding' judgement for children in care and care leavers was based on Brent's focus on achieving longer term stability for looked after children: *"children's outcomes significantly improve when they become children in care. Practitioners and managers are highly effective at supporting the long-term stability for children, young people and care leavers during childhood and beyond."*

5 School Changes

- 5.1 The 2018 SI has found out that children in care in Brent experience fewer changes of schools compared to their peers nationally:
- 8% had a mid-year school move in 2016/17; (10% nationally)
 - 4% had at least one school move in both 2015/16 and 2016/17; (4% nationally)
- 5.2 Brent Virtual School for Looked After Children works hard to ensure that no looked after child is permanently excluded at statutory school age. BVS closely works with educational settings to ensure that children and young people receive adequate and appropriate level of support in their education as per their Personal Education Plans (PEP). Children, their care givers, social workers and teachers contribute to the PEP which is a document that sets goals for each individual child in relation to their education.

- 5.3 This issue was known to the Local Authority prior to the publication of the 2018 SI. In 2017, Brent commissioned a piece of work with Coram Voice in partnership with the University of Bristol, called 'Bright Spots'. The aim was to better understand the wishes and feelings of looked after children and took the form of an online survey with approximately 1/3 of eligible children taking part. The majority of children and young people stated that they were supported in their education and learning. 77% of them stated that their lives were improving since coming to care. The Survey was repeated again in 2018 and a similar number of children responded. 82% of the respondents felt that their lives were improving since coming to care.

6 Change in Social Worker

- 6.1 The 2018 SI has found that children in care in Brent experience more changes in their social workers compared to national data:
- 36% experienced 2 or more social worker changes in 2016/17; (26% nationally)
 - 11% experienced 2 or more social worker changes in 2016/17; (6% nationally)
- 6.2 Recruitment and retention of permanent social workers have been a corporate priority for Brent. Senior leaders in CYP have put in place a Workforce Development Strategy in order to increase the stability of social workers for all children including those who are in care. Whilst there has been a positive improvement in the number of permanent social workers, some children still experience too many changes in social workers. At present 75% of social workers in Looked After Children and Permanency Service (LACP) are permanent.
- 6.3 A realignment of CYP social work activity took place in January 2018 which has created new LAC Teams with the view to minimise transfer points for children and young people. In the former structure, children's cases were being transferred to LACP, were allocated to social workers depending on their ages and were then transferred again to different teams when they reached the age of 13. This created confusion when dealing with sibling groups with different ages. By creating new LAC Teams who are responsible for children between 0 and 18 years of age, this breaking point in relationship with social workers is prevented and better continuity for children and young people achieved. It is anticipated that this positive change will result in an increase in permanent staff within the Looked After Children and Permanency service and therefore greater stability for children when the report is next produced.
- 6.4 Whilst the structure helps to assist in achieving stability of staff, it is not the sole factor to attract permanent social workers. The aim is to create a workplace where children do not need to repeat their stories multiple times to different social workers. Therefore, currently a number of activities are underway to achieve successful recruitment and retention of social workers. This includes a clearer career development pathway for staff, focused training supported by the

Signs of Safety programme and enhanced pay and rewards for experienced social workers, social work practice consultants and team managers in hard to recruit to teams.

Appendix 1: Stability Index 2018 - Detailed Local Authority Report for Brent

Contact Officer

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Stability Index 2018

Detailed Local Authority Report for Brent

Children's Commissioner's Office

Official Sensitive

For further information on this report please contact

[Tom Clarke - CCO Senior Quantitative Analyst](#)

Executive summary

Summary: Overall levels of instability for looked after children in Brent

- The table below outlines the % of children looked after on the 31st March 2017 experiencing each key measure of instability in Brent compared to national, regional and (where possible) statistical neighbours

Key measures	Brent	National	London	Stability Index neighbours	DfE Statistical neighbours
Single year instability					
2+ placement changes 16/17	14% (46)	10%	12%	12%	10%
Mid-year school move 16/17	8% (12)	11%	11%	10%	11%
2+ social worker changes 16/17	36% (110)	26%	25%	NA	NA
Repeated instability					
2+ placement changes in 15/16 + 16/17	5% (11)	3%	3%	3%	3%
Any school move in both 16/17 + 15/16	4% (6)	4%	4%	5%	5%
2+ social worker changes in both 16/17 + 15/16	11% (35)	6%	6%	NA	NA

Note:

Bases vary across key measures as described in Appendix B. Numbers in brackets correspond to the number experiencing each form of instability. National social worker %s are based on returns from 78 LAs weighted to be representative of national profile of looked after children. LA and regional totals are unweighted.

Summary: Single year instability for looked after children in Brent

The previous table shows that in 2016/17:

Placement instability

- Brent had levels of single year placement instability 4pp higher than the national average and 3pp higher than its regional average. It is 2pp higher than its Stability Index neighbours.¹

School instability

- Brent had levels of single year school instability 3pp lower than the national average and 3pp lower than its regional average. It is 2pp lower than its Stability Index neighbours.

Social worker instability

- Brent had levels of single year social worker instability 10pp higher than the national average and 11pp higher than its regional average.

¹Note: pp = percentage points

Summary: Repeated instability for looked after children in Brent

The previous table shows that in 2016/17:

Repeated placement instability

- Brent had levels of repeated placement instability 2pp higher than the national average and 2pp higher than its regional average. It is 2pp higher than its Stability Index neighbours.

Repeated school instability

- Brent had levels of repeated school instability within 1pp of the national average and within 1pp of its regional average. It is 1pp lower than its Stability Index neighbours.

Repeated social worker instability

- Brent had levels of repeated social worker instability 5pp higher than the national average and 5pp higher than its regional average.

Detailed Findings

Interpreting this report

How to interpret this report

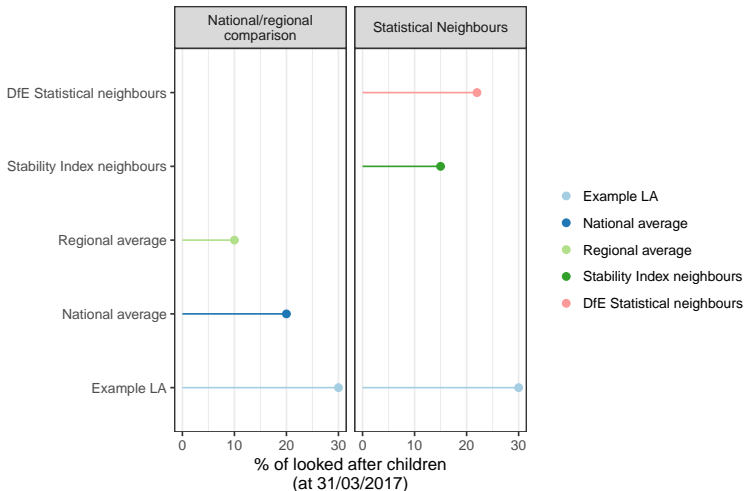
- These slides present information on the placement, school and social worker stability of children in care in Brent at the 31st March 2017 in a single year (16/17) and over two years (15/16 + 16/17).
- They include overall levels of stability as well as highlighting sub-groups that are at greater risk than national and regional averages. These should be read alongside local knowledge of the looked after children population. Note: Sub-groups smaller than 20 are not shown. We also advise caution where overall proportions are based on less than 50 looked after children.
- More detail on sub-groups and key measures is available in the [Stability Index 2018 technical report](#).
- Experimental comparisons are also made with the 5 most similar local authorities (termed 'Stability Index neighbours') based on key indicators of instability. More information about how these have been selected is available at the end of these slides.
- Comparisons are also shown with Brent's 5 nearest statistical neighbours as presented in [LAIT](#).

How to interpret this report

- The next 2 slides demonstrate examples of the charts used to highlight these differences.
- Key sub-groups with higher rates of instability are highlighted where 95% confidence intervals around these rates do not overlap with national or regional estimates. This is to reduce the risk of highlighting differences that may just be due to small numbers of looked after children.
- Note: comparisons for social worker data are based on the 78 local authorities that submitted data. As a result, comparisons are only made with this sample average (weighted to be representative of the full LAC population) and the 15 LAs that are within the same GORS region as Brent.

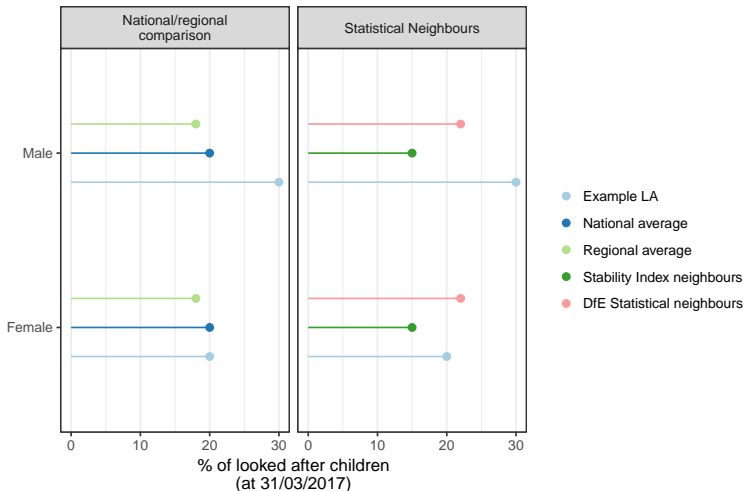
Example Charts - Overall levels of instability

- This chart shows the 'Example LA' had higher levels of instability than national/regional averages and its Stability Index neighbours in 2016/17



Example Charts - Instability amongst sub-groups of LAC

- This chart shows the 'Example LA' had higher levels of instability than national/regional averages and its Stability Index neighbours in 2016/17 for male looked after children but not female



Context: Characteristics of looked after children in Brent

Context: Brent's case mix compared to national and regional averages

- The table below demonstrates how Brent's case mix compares to England overall and to London's overall average on key indicators of instability.

Key indicator	National	London	Brent
Age at 31/03/2017: 12-15	29%	29%	29%
Age at earliest period of care: 12-15	21%	29%	35%
Initial legal status: FCO	44%	36%	39%
Initial legal status: ICO	17%	12%	10%
Initial legal status: s20	32%	44%	41%
Primary need code: Behaviour	2%	3%	3%
Rate of LAC per 10,000 children	68	51	42
SEN: Social, Emotional and Mental Health	12%	10%	7%
SW turnover rate: leavers per 100 social workers	15	18	22

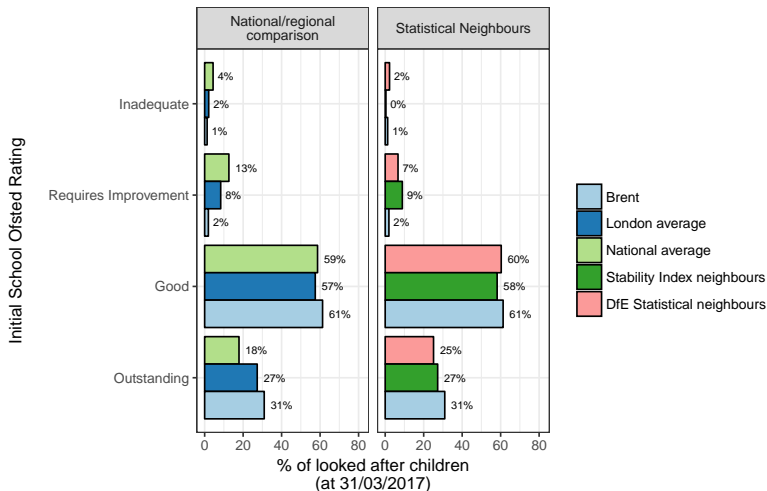
Brent's case mix compared to its statistical neighbours on key indicators of instability

- The table below compares Brent to an average of its 5 most similar Stability Index neighbours and its 5 most similar DfE Statistical neighbours
- Brent's 5 most similar Stability Index neighbours are: Camden, Barnet, Enfield, Merton, Bath and North East Somerset
- Brent's 5 most similar DfE Statistical neighbours are: Ealing, Waltham Forest, Croydon, Haringey, Enfield

Key indicator	Brent	Stability Index neighbours	DfE Statistical neighbours
Age at 31/03/2017: 12-15	29%	30%	32%
Age at earliest period of care: 12-15	35%	30%	32%
Initial legal status: FCO	39%	37%	38%
Initial legal status: ICO	10%	11%	10%
Initial legal status: s20	41%	43%	44%
Primary need code: Behaviour	3%	2%	3%
Rate of LAC per 10,000 children	42	39	56
SEN: Social, Emotional and Mental Health	7%	12%	11%
SW turnover rate: leavers per 100 social workers	22	21	17

Distribution of looked after children in Brent by school Ofsted rating

- The plot below demonstrates the Ofsted rating of looked after children in Brent's first school in 2016/17¹.



¹Note percentages may not sum to 100 as children in schools without an Ofsted rating are not included in the plot

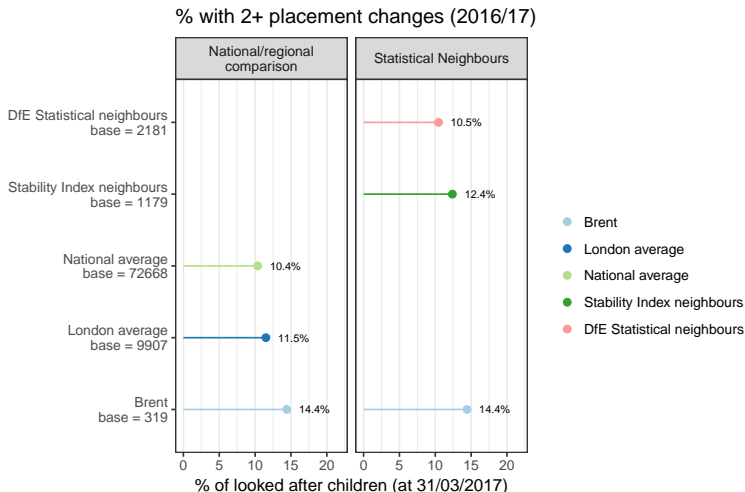
Detailed findings: Placement instability

Key measures of placement instability

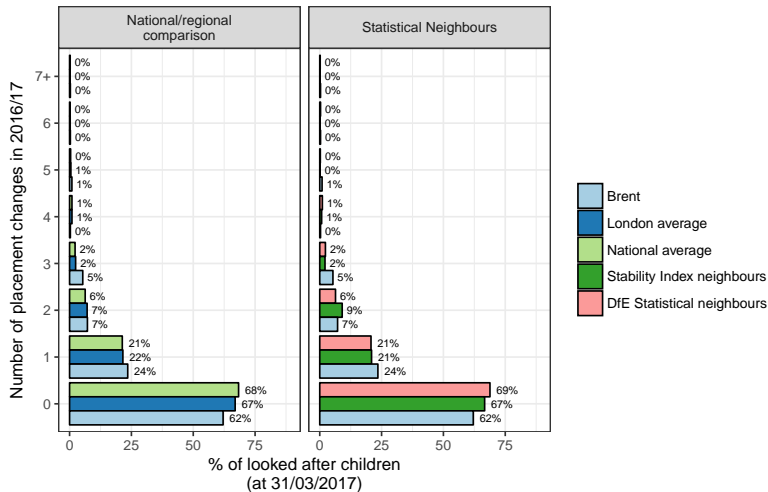
- **Single year placement instability:** % of children in care experiencing 2+ placement moves in 2016/17
- **Repeated placement instability:** % of children in care (in both 15/16 and 16/17) experiencing 2+ placement changes in both 15/16 and 16/17

Single year placement instability - Overall

- In 2016/17, Brent had levels of single year placement instability 4pp higher than the national average and 3pp higher than its regional average. It is 2pp higher than its Stability Index neighbours.

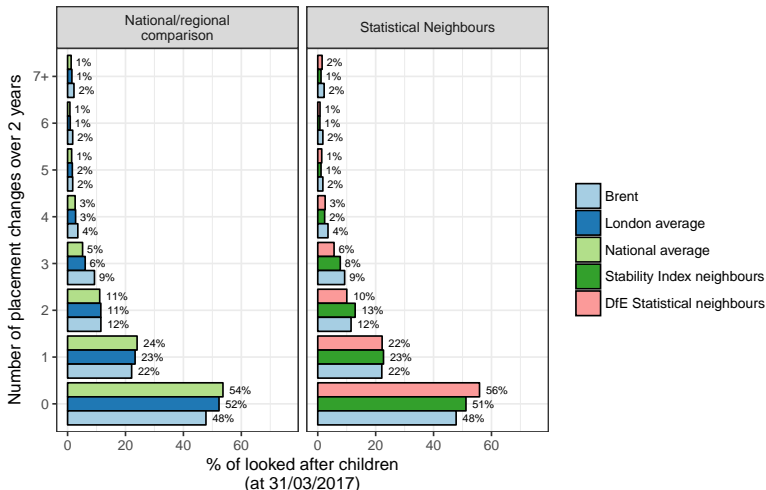


Single year placement change distribution

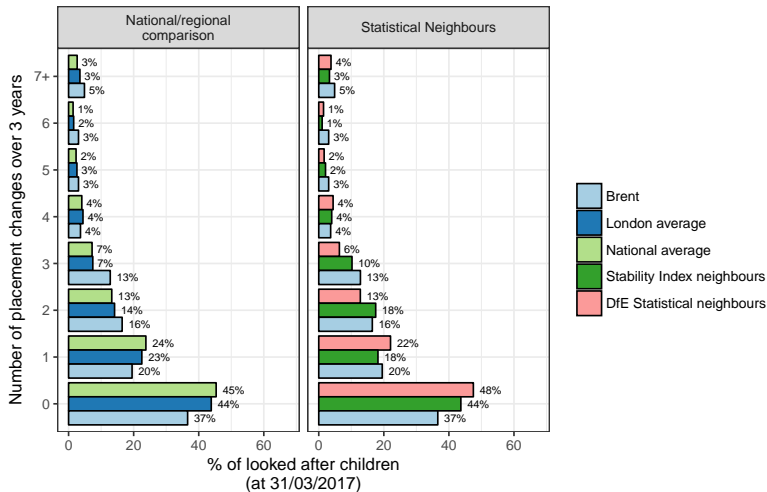


Two year placement change distribution

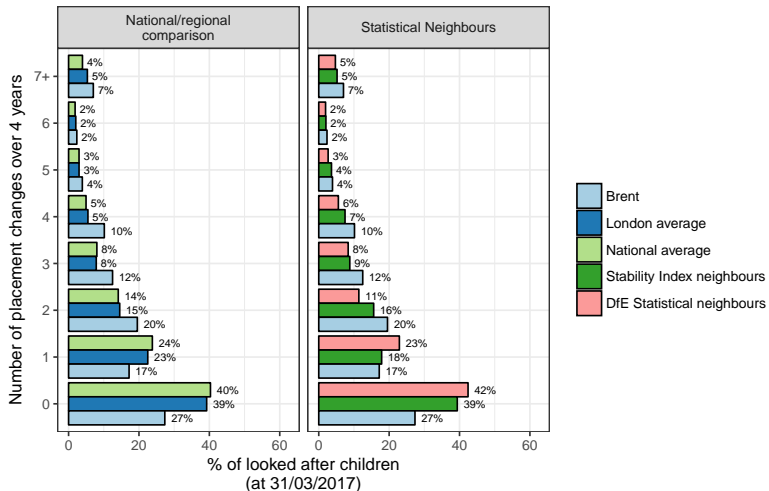
- In 2016/17, 30% of looked after children in care in Brent in both 15/16 + 16/17 had 2 or more placement changes over 2 years



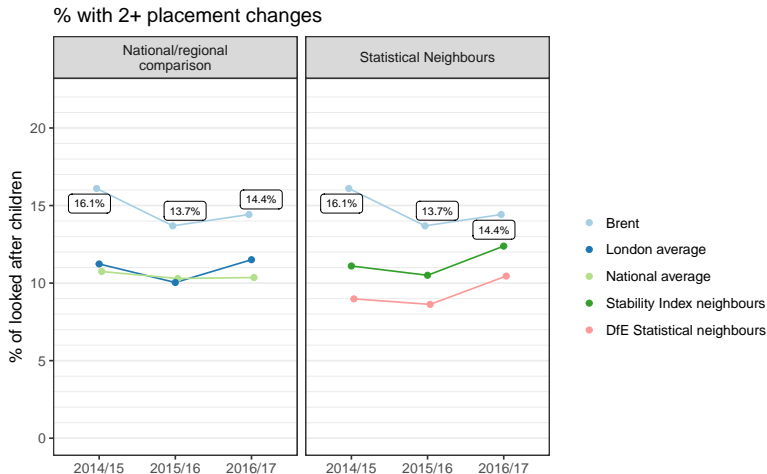
Longer term placement instability - placement changes over 3 years



Longer term placement instability - placement changes over 4 years



Trends over time: Brent's single year placement instability is within 1pp of its 2015/16 level

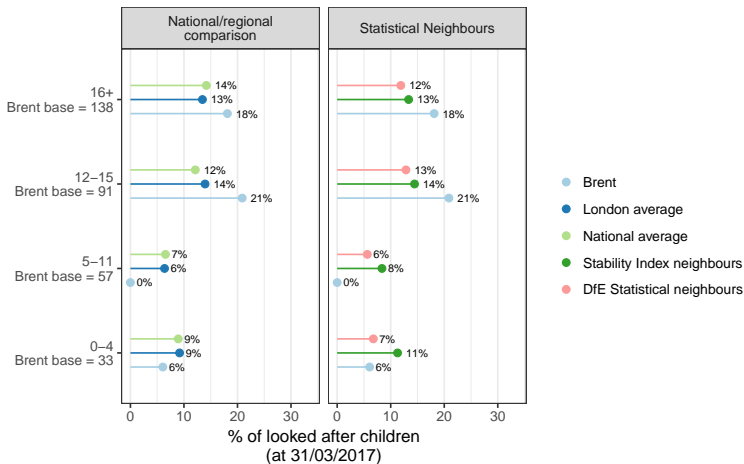


* = base less than 50, ** = base of 0

Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of single year placement instability than national/regional averages based on:

- Child's Age at 31/03/2017. Key differences: 12-15

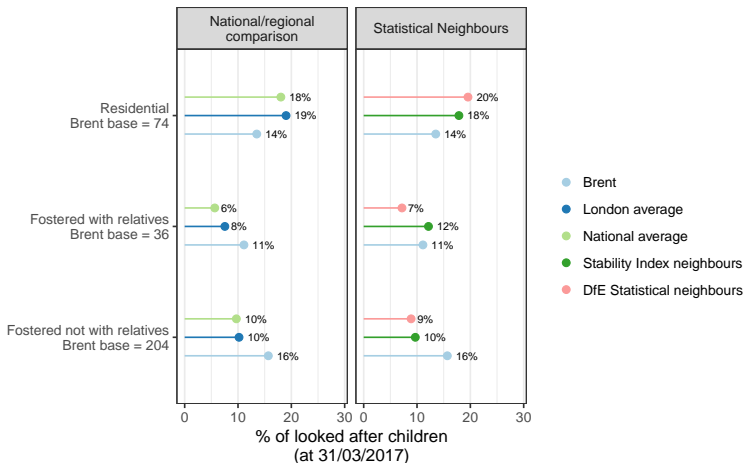
% with 2+ placement changes (2016/17)



Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of single year placement instability than national/regional averages based on:

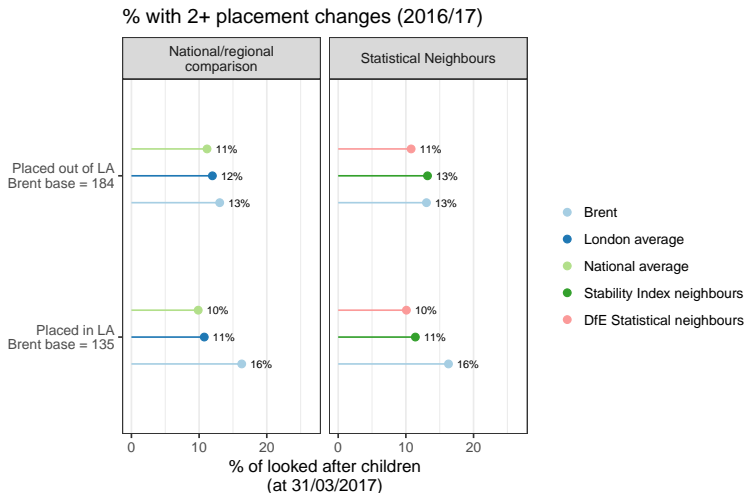
- Child's Initial placement type. Key differences: Fostered not with relatives

% with 2+ placement changes (2016/17)



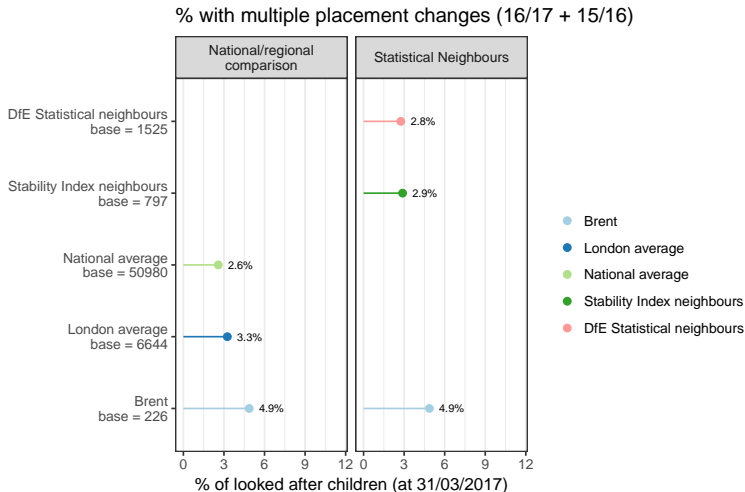
Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of single year placement instability than national/regional averages based on:

- Child's Placement In or Out of LA. Key differences: Placed in LA



Repeated placement instability - Overall

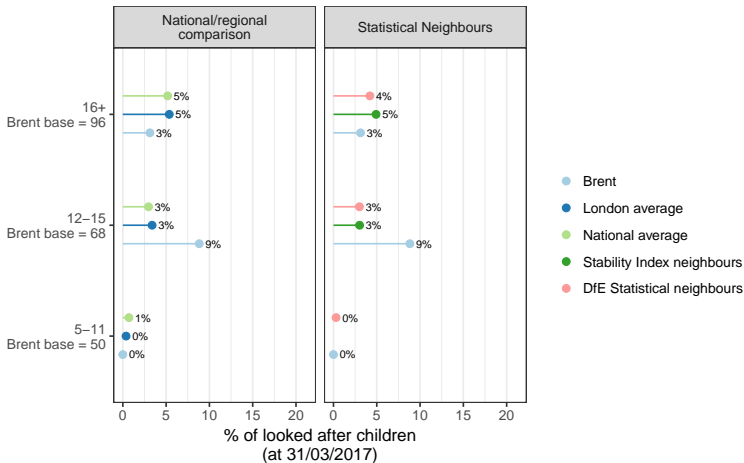
- In 2016/17, Brent had levels of repeated placement instability 2pp higher than the national average and 2pp higher than its regional average. It is 2pp higher than its Stability Index neighbours.



Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of repeated placement instability than national/regional averages based on:

- Child's Age at 31/03/2017. Key differences: 12-15

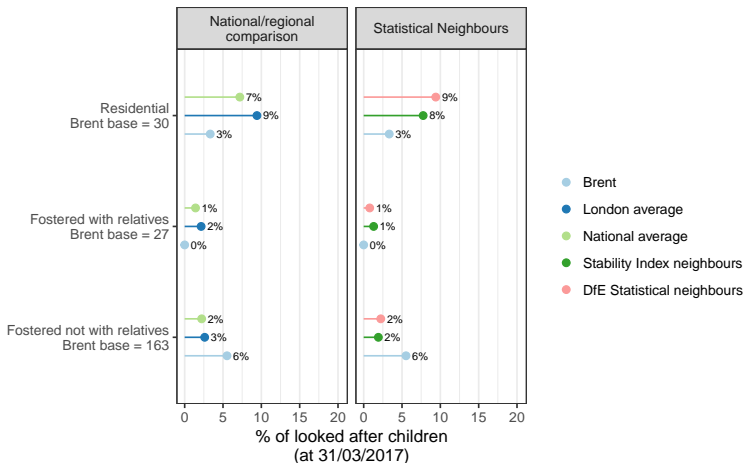
% with multiple placement changes (16/17 + 15/16)



Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of repeated placement instability than national/regional averages based on:

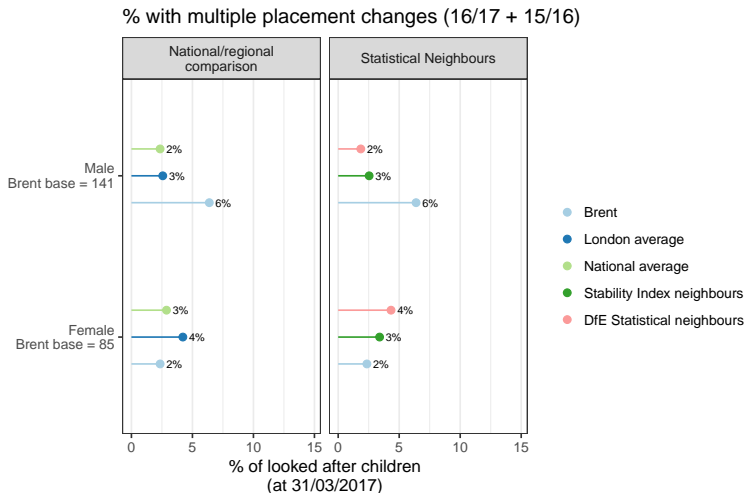
- Child's Initial placement type. Key differences: Fostered not with relatives

% with multiple placement changes (16/17 + 15/16)



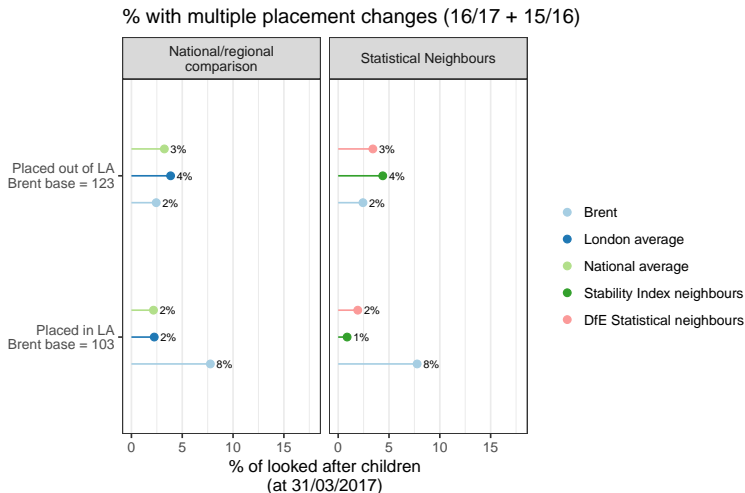
Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of repeated placement instability than national/regional averages based on:

- Child's Gender. Key differences: Male



Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of repeated placement instability than national/regional averages based on:

- Child's Placement In or Out of LA. Key differences: Placed in LA



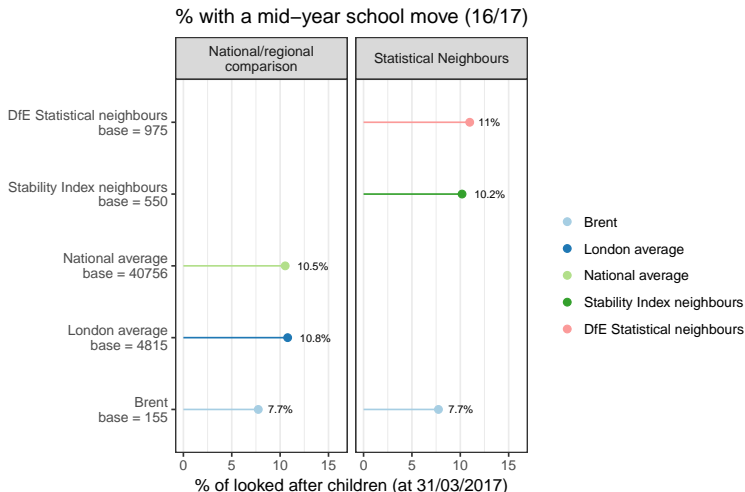
Detailed findings: School instability

Key measures of placement instability

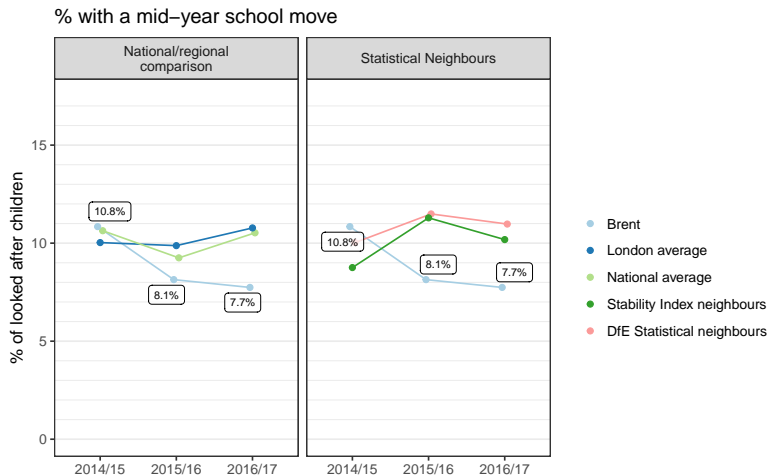
- **Single year school instability:** % of looked after children experiencing a mid-year school move in 2016/17
- **Repeated school instability:** % of looked after children experiencing a school move (of any sort) in both 15/16 and 16/17. Note this excludes those moving from primary to secondary school.

Single year school instability - Overall

- In 2016/17, Brent had levels of single year school instability 3pp lower than the national average and 3pp lower than its regional average. It is 2pp lower than its Stability Index neighbours.



This single year school instability is within 1pp of its 2015/16 level



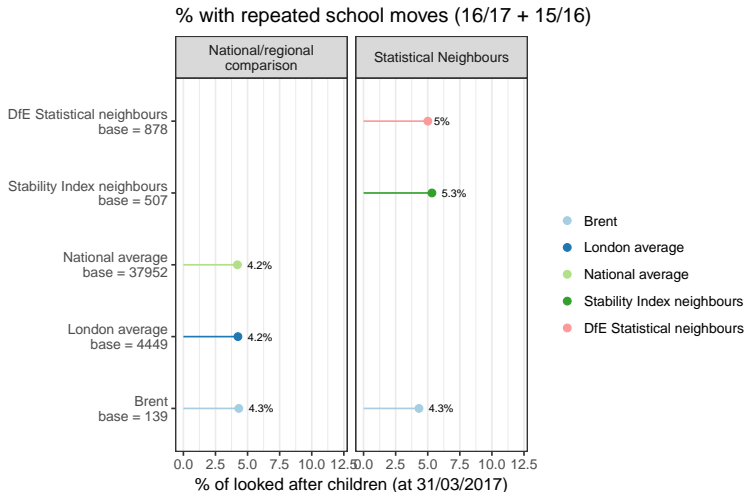
* = base less than 50, ** = base of 0

Single year school instability amongst sub-groups of looked after children in Brent

- We found no sub-groups of looked after children with significantly higher rates of single year school instability in Brent when compared to national and regional averages

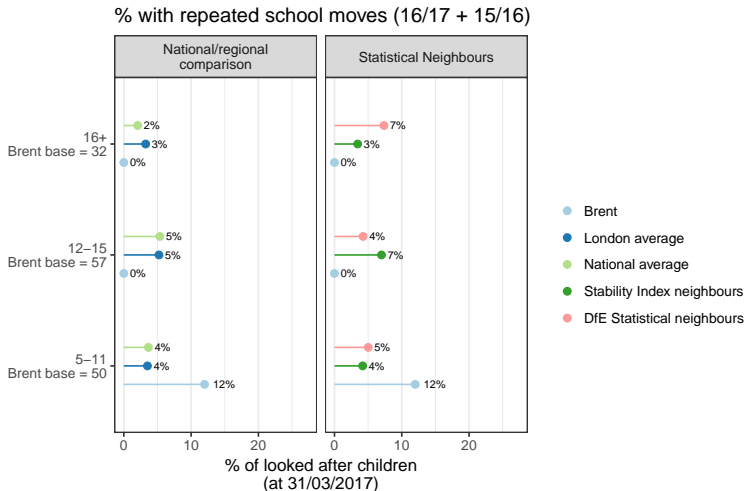
Repeated school instability - Overall

- In 2016/17, Brent had levels of repeated school instability within 1pp of the national average and within 1pp of its regional average. It is 1pp lower than its Stability Index neighbours.



Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of repeated school instability than national/regional averages based on:

- Child's Age at 31/03/2017. Key differences: 5-11



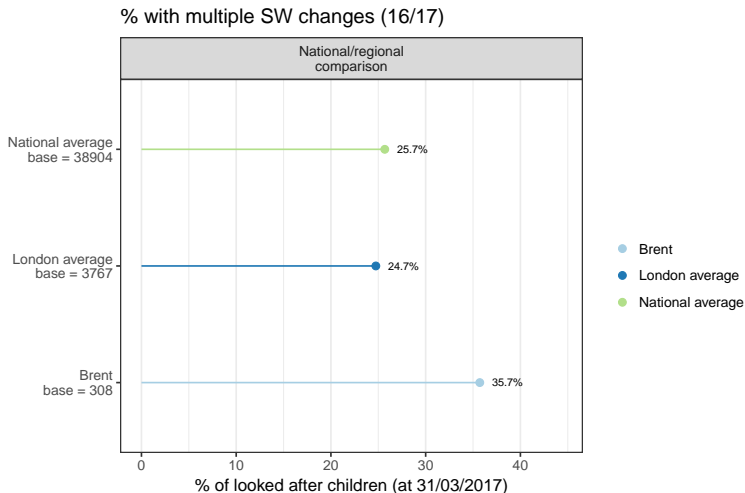
Detailed findings: Social worker instability

Key measures of social worker instability

- **Single year social worker instability:** % of looked after children experiencing 2+ social worker changes in 2016/17
- **Repeated social worker instability:** % of looked after children experiencing 2+ social worker changes in both 15/16 and 16/17

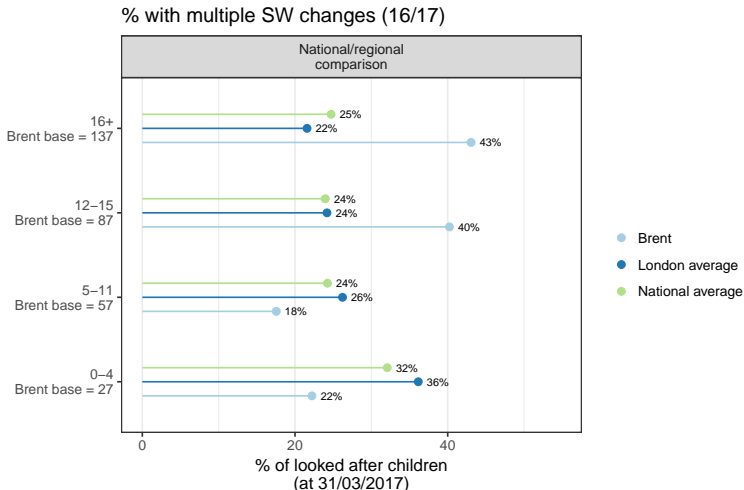
Single year social worker instability

- In 2016/17, Brent had levels of single year social worker instability 10pp higher than the national average and 11pp higher than its regional average.



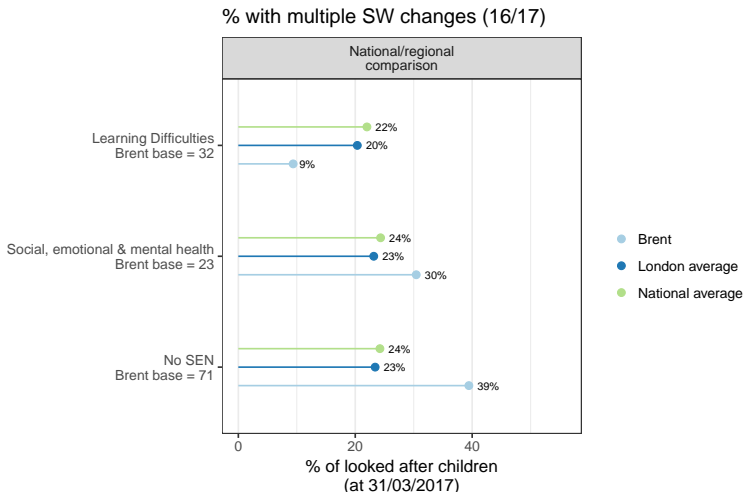
Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of single year social worker instability than national/regional averages based on:

- Child's Age at 31/03/2017. Key differences: 12-15, 16+



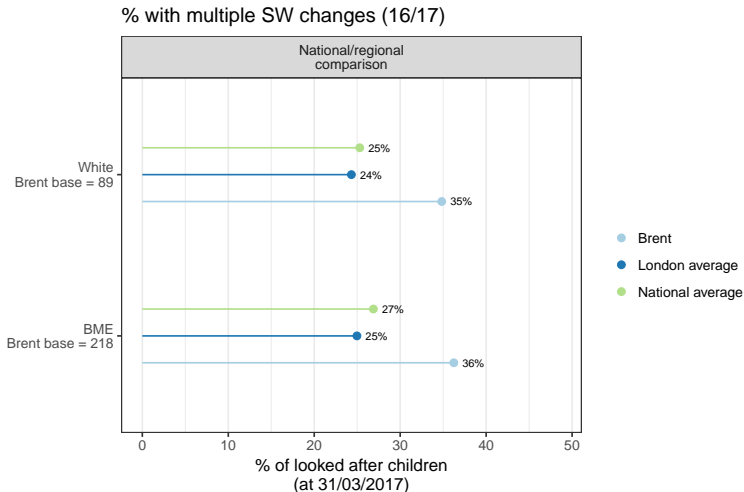
Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of single year social worker instability than national/regional averages based on:

■ Child's SEN. Key differences: No SEN



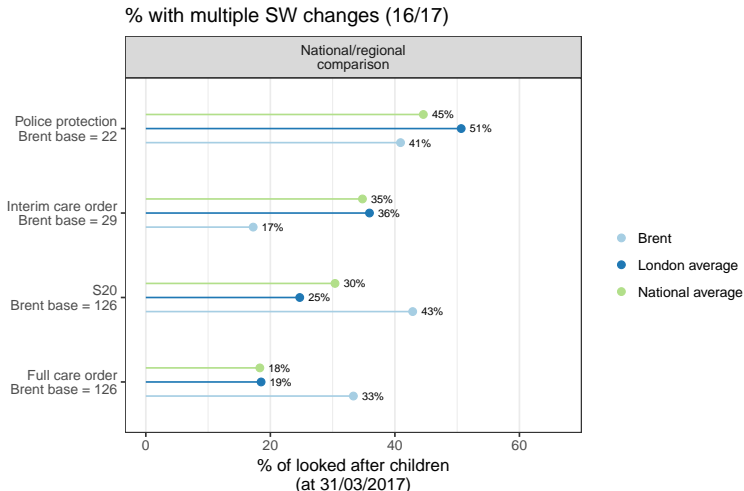
Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of single year social worker instability than national/regional averages based on:

■ Child's Ethnicity. Key differences: BME



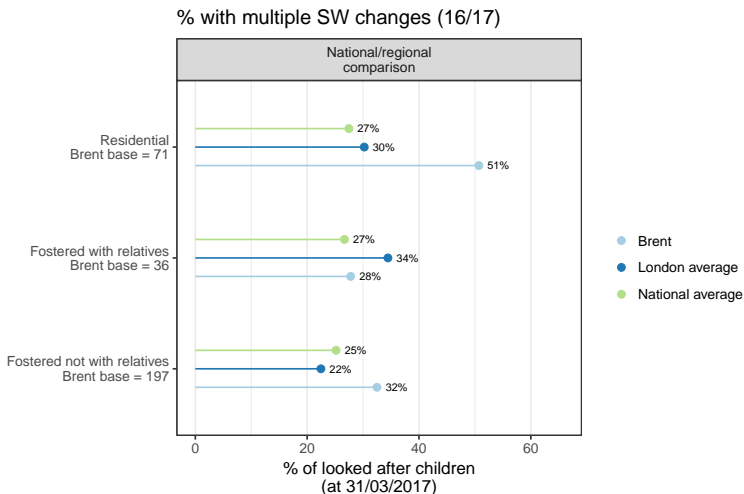
Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of single year social worker instability than national/regional averages based on:

- Child's Initial Legal status. Key differences: Full care order, S20



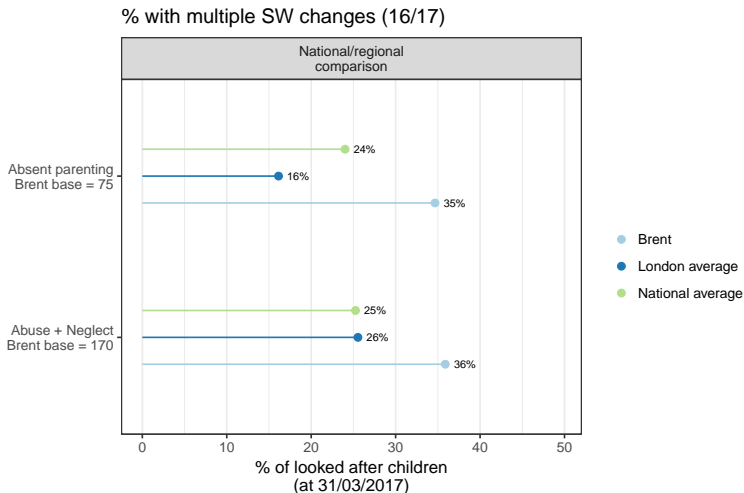
Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of single year social worker instability than national/regional averages based on:

- Child's Initial placement type. Key differences: Fostered not with relatives, Residential



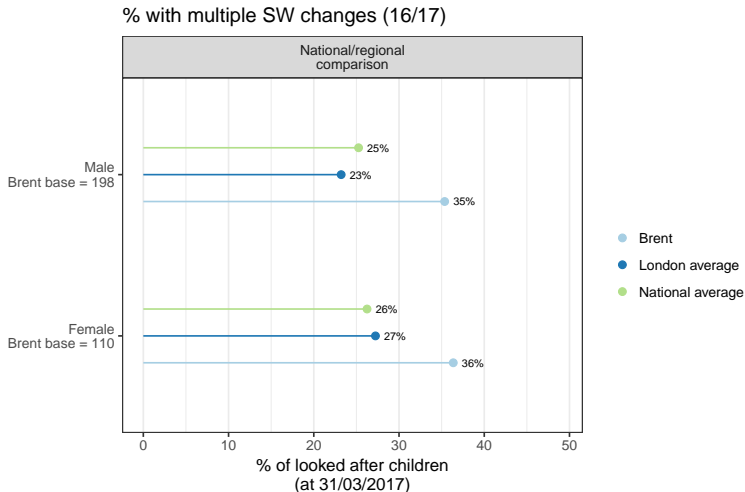
Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of single year social worker instability than national/regional averages based on:

- Child's CIN primary need code. Key differences: Absent parenting, Abuse + Neglect



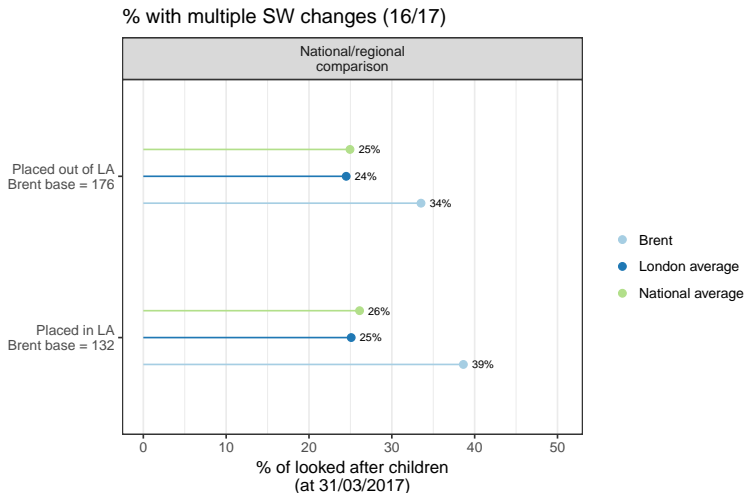
Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of single year social worker instability than national/regional averages based on:

■ Child's Gender. Key differences: Male



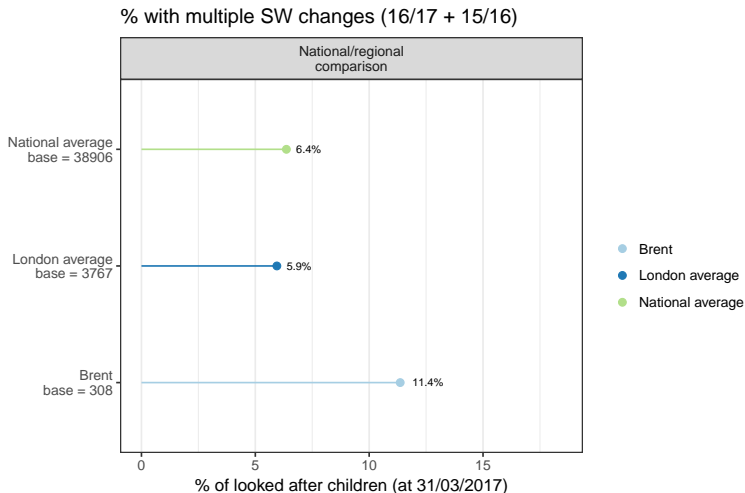
Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of single year social worker instability than national/regional averages based on:

- Child's Placement In or Out of LA. Key differences: Placed in LA, Placed out of LA



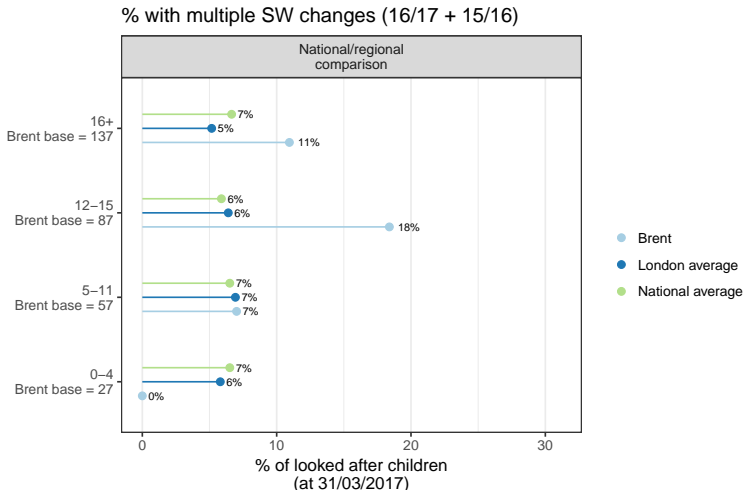
Repeated social worker instability

- In 2016/17, Brent had levels of repeated social worker instability 5pp higher than the national average and 5pp higher than its regional average.



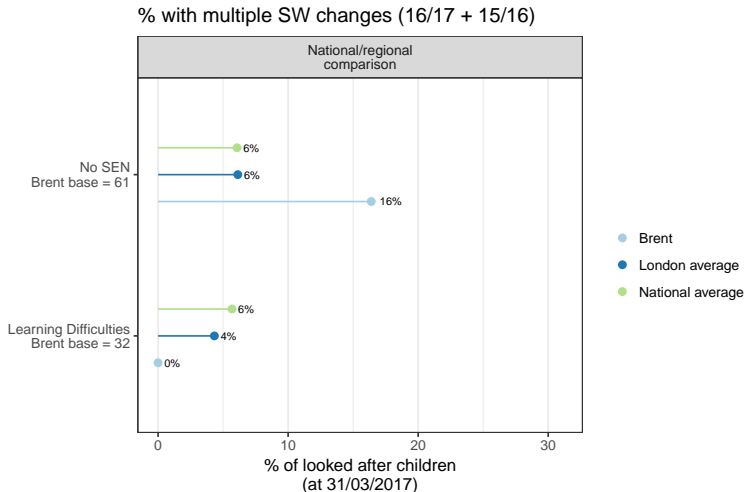
Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of repeated social worker instability than national/regional averages based on:

- Child's Age at 31/03/2017. Key differences: 12-15



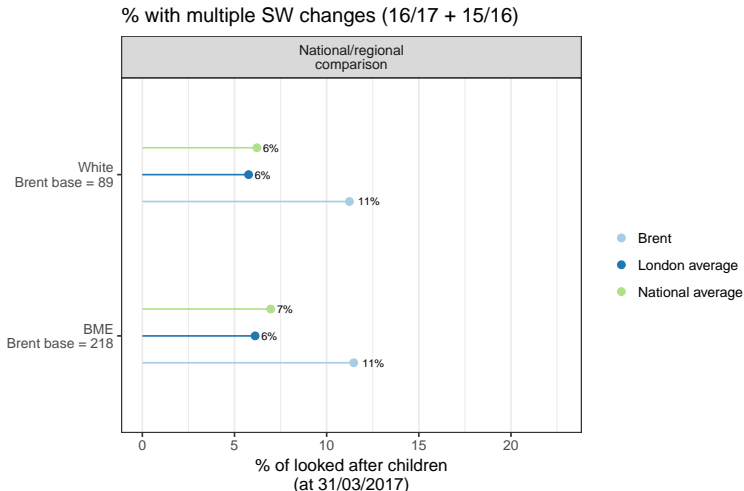
Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of repeated social worker instability than national/regional averages based on:

■ Child's SEN. Key differences: No SEN



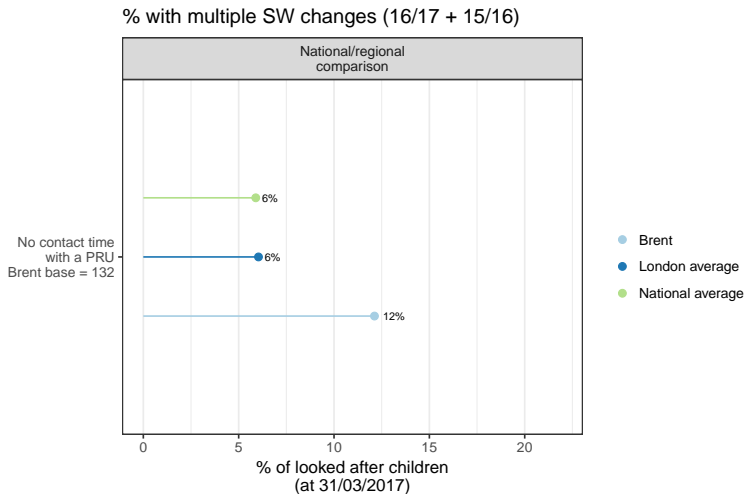
Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of repeated social worker instability than national/regional averages based on:

■ Child's Ethnicity. Key differences: BME



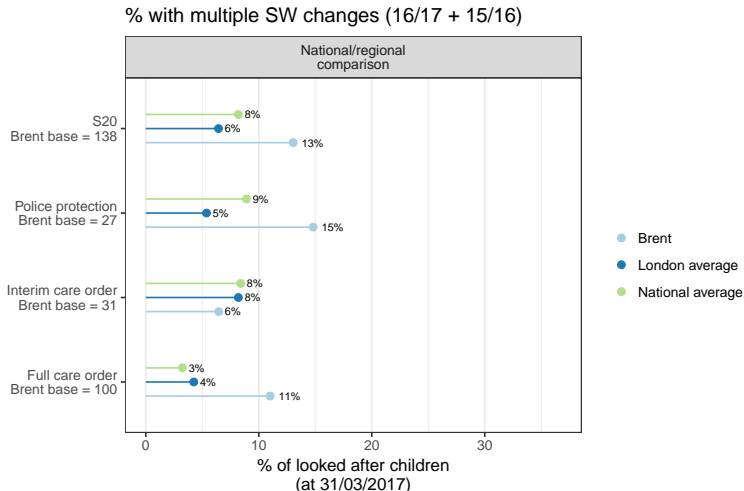
Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of repeated social worker instability than national/regional averages based on:

- Child's Contact time with PRU. Key differences: No contact time with a PRU



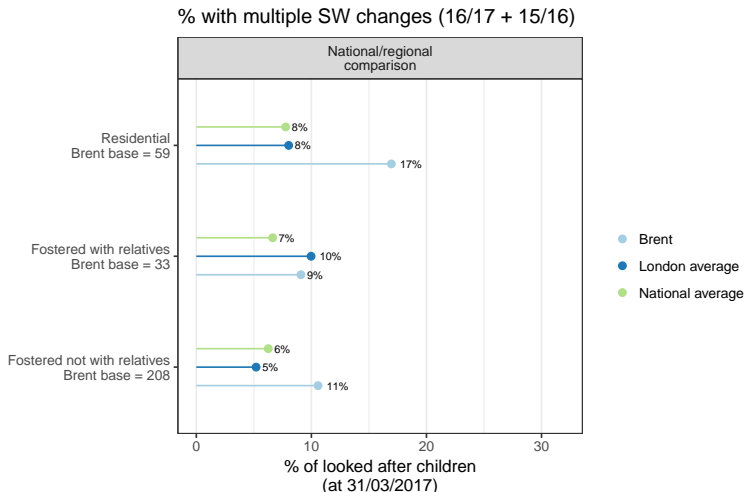
Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of repeated social worker instability than national/regional averages based on:

- Child's Initial Legal status. Key differences: Full care order, S20



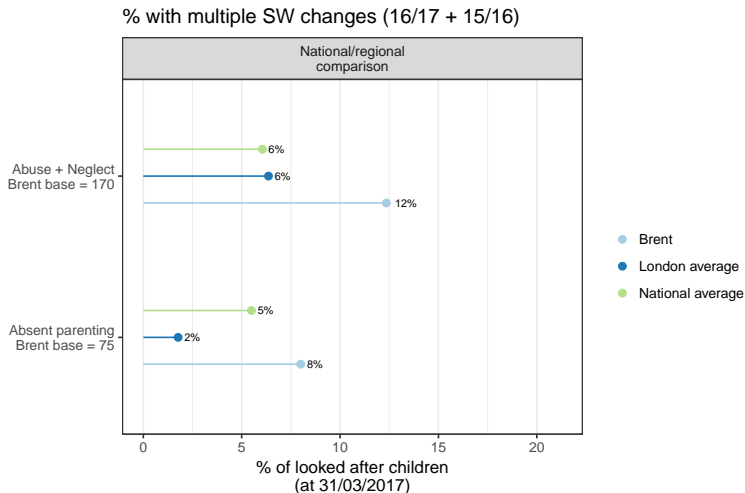
Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of repeated social worker instability than national/regional averages based on:

- Child's Initial placement type. Key differences: Fostered not with relatives



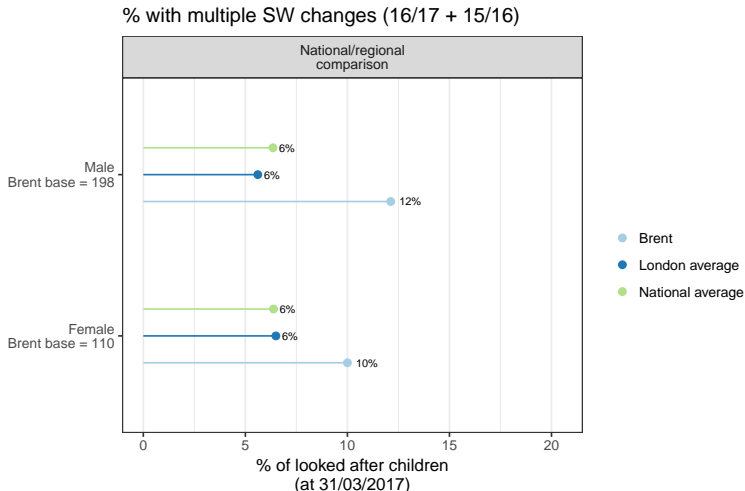
Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of repeated social worker instability than national/regional averages based on:

- Child's CIN primary need code. Key differences: Absent parenting, Abuse + Neglect



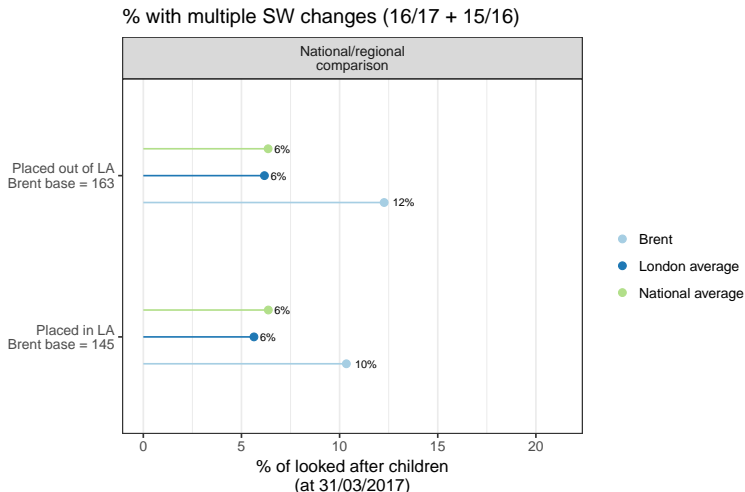
Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of repeated social worker instability than national/regional averages based on:

■ Child's Gender. Key differences: Male



Sub-Groups: In 2016/17, Brent had higher rates of repeated social worker instability than national/regional averages based on:

- Child's Placement In or Out of LA. Key differences: Placed out of LA

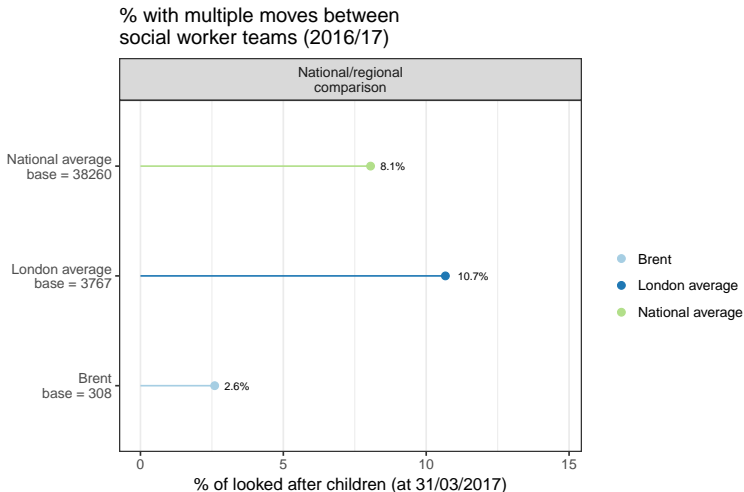


Multiple moves between social worker teams

- Multiple social worker moves between teams highlight where a child's change in social worker is due to moving between social work teams within an LA rather than (for example) a social worker leaving
- These are more likely to be changes due to a change in the child's circumstances and so are more likely to reflect a planned change of social worker

Multiple moves between social worker teams

- In 2016/17, Brent had levels of multiple moves between social worker teams 5pp lower than the national average and 8pp lower than its regional average.

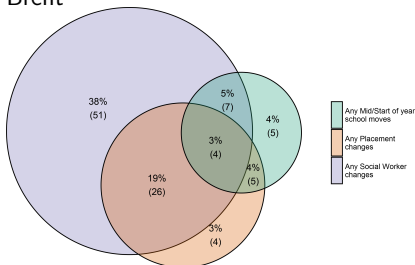


Detailed findings: Combinations of instability

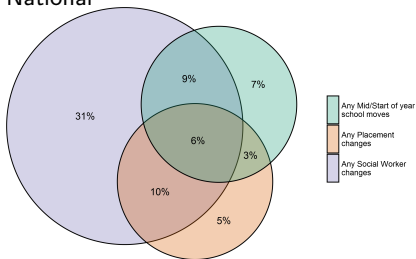
Brent's overall single year stability picture - any changes

- These Venn diagrams demonstrate the proportion of looked after children in Brent experiencing combinations of any type of change in 2016/17¹. Note these proportions are based on looked after children that are enrolled in school

Brent



National

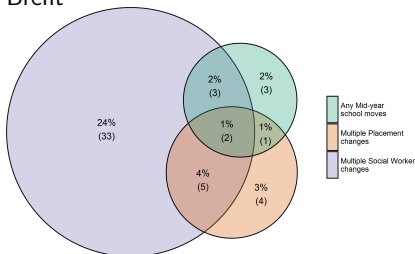


¹Frequencies in brackets

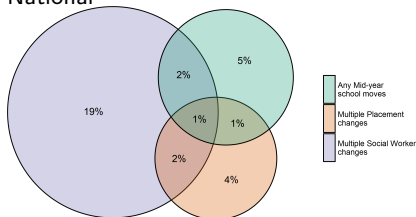
Brent's overall single year stability picture - multiple changes and mid-year school moves

- These Venn diagrams demonstrate the proportion of looked after children in Brent experiencing combinations of multiple placement moves, multiple social worker changes and mid-year school moves in 2016/17¹. Note these proportions are based on looked after children that are enrolled in school

Brent



National



¹Frequencies in brackets

Brent's overall two year stability picture

- The four groups below represent a summary measure of instability experienced by children in care (in both 2015/16 and 2016/17) in Brent. More information on their construction is available in the [Stability Index technical report](#) (pg 19).

2 year instability groups	Brent	National
1st year instability	6%	5%
High instability	5%	5%
Stable	85%	83%
Stable except SW team	4%	7%

Appendix A - Constructing Stability Index neighbours

Appendix A - Constructing Stability Index neighbours

- Stability Index neighbours come from clustering local authorities based on key indicators of instability highlighted in the [Stability Index 2018 technical report](#)
- The Stability Index neighbours represent the 5 LAs with most similar values on these 10 measures based on euclidean distance (after rescaling)
- These measures are shown on the next slide

■ These indicators are:

- Rate of looked after children (per 10,000 children),
- % CLA aged 12-15 at earliest care entry,
- % CLA aged 12-15 at 31st March 2017,
- % CLA with primary need code of child's behaviour,
- % CLA with a S20 initial legal status,
- % CLA looked after under a full care order,
- % CLA looked after under an interim care order,
- % CLA initially in a school rated 'Requires Improvement/inadequate'
- % CLA with a Social Emotional and Mental Health primary SEND code
- 2016/17 social worker turnover rate

Appendix B - Bases for key measures

Appendix B - Bases for key measures

- The basis for the sample analysed in these reports is Looked After Children in Brent at the 31st March 2017. However, this group contains children that have been in care/school for varying amounts of time. For example, not all children will be in care/school in both 15/16 and 16/17 and so not all can have placement changes/school moves in both years
- To address this we have restricted our 2 year measures of school and placement instability to those in care/school in both 15/16 and 16/17. Exact definitions are provided on the next slide and more detail is available in the [Stability Index 2018 technical report](#)

Appendix B - Bases for key measures

■ Bases for key measures:

- 2+ placement moves in 16/17: Children in care at 31st March 2017 (LAC)
- 2+ placement moves in 15/16 + 16/17: LAC in care in both 15/16 + 16/17
- Mid-year school move 16/17: LAC matched to both Autumn and Summer 16/17 School Censuses
- Any school move in 15/16 + 16/17: LAC matched to both Autumn 15/16 and Summer 16/17 School Censuses
- 2+ social worker changes 16/17: children matched to Looked After Children Census from social worker data return
- 2+ social worker changes in 15/16 + 16/17: children matched to Looked After Children Census from social worker data return

**Brent Council Children and Young People
Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report**

Period of review: 01/04/17 to 31/03/18

This report outlines the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) on quality assuring and improving services for Looked After Children. It also contains quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO provision in Brent as required by statutory guidance. This report includes feedback from Looked After Children gained through consultation with Care in Action, Brent's Children in Care Council.

1. Summary of Key Messages

What has gone well?

- Children and young people tell us that they feel they are involved in decision making about their lives (section 7).
- IROs have consistently commented on the strong working relationships between social workers and the Youth Offending Service, contributing to robust care planning across professional networks (section 6).
- IROs are positive about the quality of permanency planning in Brent including involvement of the wider family network at the earliest possible stage of permanency planning (section 6).
- When children ask their IROs for support, there is evidence that issues are raised by IROs and resolved quickly avoiding escalation (sections 7, 8.3 and 10).
- Social workers and managers are receptive to IRO challenge, leading to reflection on the IRO's position and changes in care plans where appropriate (section 12).
- Children's Guardians have commented positively on social work and IRO practice (section 6).
- IROs are involved in scrutinising Pathway Plans and preparation for independence when young people reach age 16 (see sections 3 and 7).
- Children have said that they value keeping the same IRO throughout their time in care (section 11).

"Based on several reviews, I am really impressed with the social worker. She is clear, consistent and provides appropriate explanations for her decisions. She manages challenges well and does not shy away from addressing difficult issues. I anticipate positive outcomes for some of the young people we are working with."
Independent Reviewing Officer

"I have known my IRO for more than 10 years. He is cool and always keeps in touch with me"

Young person, age 15

What can be improved?

- There continues to be a high number of changes in social workers for children (section 6).
- Social workers' reports and updated care plan are not always available before the review. This does not allow the child, carers, parents and the IRO time to fully prepare for the review (section 8).
- IROs need to become more involved in the scrutiny of Looked After Children going missing, monitoring and ensuring that national and local procedures are followed (section 8).

2. Purpose of the IRO Service

The Children Act 1989 and the Adoption and Children's Act 2002 make it a legal requirement for the Local Authority to appoint an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to each child in care. The IRO Handbook provides the statutory guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) and their employers on their functions in relation to the case management and reviews for Looked After Children. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of care planning for Looked After Children and challenging drift and delay.

The IRO's primary focus is to quality assure the care planning and review process for each child in care and to ensure that their current wishes and feelings are given full consideration. It is not the responsibility of the IRO to manage the case, nor supervise the social worker or devise the care plan. Although it is important for the IRO to develop a consistent relationship with the child, this should not undermine or replace the relationship between the social worker and the child.

The IRO has the authority, independent of their employing Local Authority, to refer cases to the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS) should they believe the Local Authority's plan for the child is not in their best interests. The Statutory guidance states that the IRO Manager should be responsible for the production of an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of the Corporate Parenting Committee and the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

"It is vital that children's care plans are reviewed by individuals who are not directly involved in providing support to either the child or the foster carer. IROs need to be objective, to scrutinise and hold to account the individuals and agencies who are charged with meeting the needs of the child."

BASW 2018

3. Professional profile of the IROs

The IRO function sits within the CYP Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service. From Jan 2018, the IRO function was brought together with the Brent Youth Parliament and Brent Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information and Advice Service (SENDIAS) to form the Review, Engagement and Participation (REP) team in order to promote best practice in engagement with children and young people and their parents.

The REP Team is managed by an experienced social worker who is able to undertake reviews when necessary. Brent directly employs two full time IROs. The remainder of the IROs are experienced social work practitioners contracted through an independent agency, Aidhour (a not-for-profit company established 1998). All IROs are Disclosure and Barring Service checked, Health Care Professional Council registered and fully qualified (above the minimum requirements). Many of the IROs have been undertaking reviews for Brent for a number of years and know the children well. In some instances, the IROs have been the most consistent and trusted person in the child's life.

The IRO contract with Aidhour was extended to 31 March 2019 following a review of the current arrangement. The current model of having in-house and commissioned IROs gives flexibility to respond to service demands while maintaining continuity and consistency for children and young people.

IRO provision has remained stable with two permanent and 10 Aidhour IROs being in place. This overall high level of retention of IROs has led to continuity of IROs' input, stability for many of our Looked After Children and a high level of scrutiny and challenge.

There are 12 IROs in Brent including those permanent and from Aidhour which is an increase of 1 IRO from last year. There is a good representation of male and female IROs (6 males and 6 females).

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

IRO Ethnicity	Number
White	7
Mixed	1
Asian or Asian British	2
Black or Black British	2

While it is noted that the ethnic composition of the IROs is not fully representative of the borough's Looked After Children population, services are provided within an equal opportunities framework and all IROs, as qualified social workers, are expected to adhere to the Health and Care Professional Council code of conduct and Brent's internal policies and procedures. In addition to chairing LAC reviews, the 2 internal IROs also participate in undertaking audit and learning and development activity for staff.

Case Study: AW

AW is a 14 year old unaccompanied child from the horn of Africa. Prior to coming to the UK, AW experienced trauma while travelling through the Sahara desert and across the Mediterranean Sea. When AW was placed with a Brent foster carer he was in a state of confusion and the carer was not experienced in supporting young people with this of trauma. The IRO requested that an advocate to be appointed and asked for a professionals meeting to take place. This resulted in AW being better supported in this placement, which was culturally appropriate. AW has remained with his foster carer where he is settled and happy.

4. Profile of Brent's Looked After Children

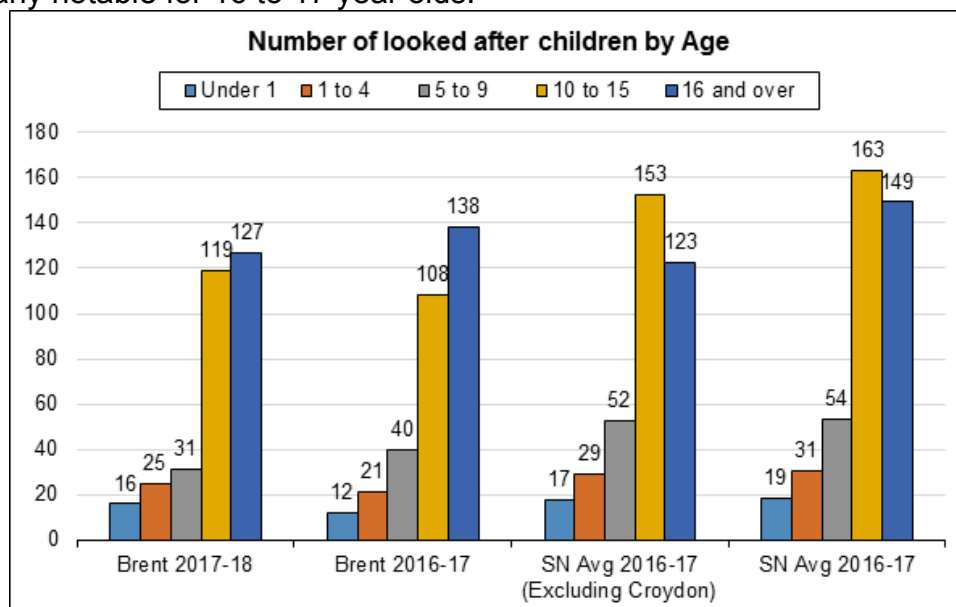
Although there is a slight increase in Looked After Children in the 0 to 4 age range, 77% of Looked After Children on 31/3/2018 were over the age of 10 and 41% were 16 and 17 years of age.

Looked After Children by age

	2016/17	2017/18
0 to 4 years of age	33	41
5 to 9 years of age	40	31
10 to 15 years of age	114	119
16 to 17 years of age	132	127
Total Looked After Children	319	318

"I enjoyed the Brent Celebration of Achievement Awards and sitting at the same table as my IRO."
Young person, age 16

There is a significant disproportion of Looked After Children by gender, with males accounting for 63% of Brent's Looked After Children population and females at 37%. This is particularly notable for 16 to 17 year olds.

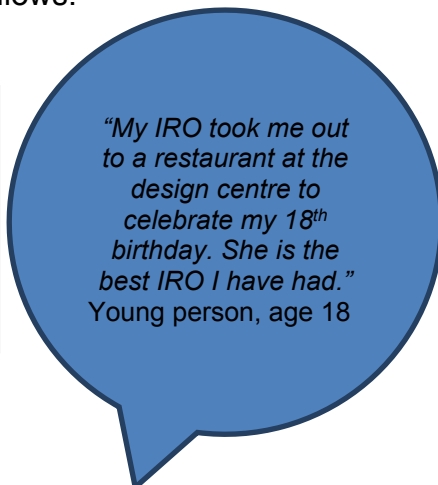


Looked After Children by age and gender

The ethnicity of looked after children as of 31/03/2018 was as follows:

Looked After Children by ethnicity

Ethnicity	2016/17	2017/18
White	93	77
Mixed/ Multiple	61	60
Asian or Asian British	64	59
Black or Black British	92	97
Other	9	25
Total	319	318



"My IRO took me out to a restaurant at the design centre to celebrate my 18th birthday. She is the best IRO I have had."
Young person, age 18

5. Referrals and allocations

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

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

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

IROs carrying out review tasks have secure remote access to 'Mosaic', Brent's integrated children's services database, to 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 also have secure remote access to the Brent internal e-mail system which facilitates confidential communication and information exchange, thus complying with data protection requirements.

6. Quality assurance and monitoring of the IRO service

The Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance and the REP Team Manager in Brent oversee the work of the Aidhour IROs through group supervision, quarterly contract monitoring, audits, meetings and direct observations. Group supervision takes place once every two months and contract meetings take place once a quarter. Practice improvement discussions are facilitated at this meeting through consideration of case studies.

The REP Team Manager and Director of Aidhour carry out regular audits looking at the quality of minutes, participation of looked after children in the decision making process, and any drift in the care plan, health or education issues. The audits have evidenced IROs' oversight and escalation having a positive impact on outcomes for looked after children. The audits also evidence IROs' involvement of children and young people's views in decision making processes. 100% of the files audits have shown that children were spoken with on their own before their LAC review or on the day of the LAC review. Where children do not attend their LAC review, IROs contact children and young people between reviews to ensure that children and young people remain involved in their plan and review.

Through the LAC tracking panel, audits were carried out focussing on 7 areas including: appropriateness of placement and placement changes, education and health outcomes; vulnerabilities; quality of care plan pathway plans; visits; quality of LAC review minutes and immigration status. The audit identified good practice around participation of children and child-focused LAC review minutes. Areas for development for social work practice by teams included the timeliness of age assessments and the completion of SDQs.

IROs receive bi-monthly group supervision. These sessions are used to give IROs time to reflect on practice, highlight areas of good practice, raise any issues with managers and receive feedback on audit themes and outcomes. This space allows for reflection on how cases have been successfully escalated in the best interest of children and discuss practice themes and trends. For example, IROs have consistently commented on the strong working relationships between social workers and the Youth Offending Service, contributing to robust care planning across professional networks. They are positive about the quality of permanency planning in Brent including involvement of the wider family network at the earliest possible stage of permanency planning.

The REP Team Manager attends London IRO Managers and West London Children's Guardians Meetings. This ensures the service stays in touch with developments across the sector in respect of recent court judgements and meeting the expectations of the court in care planning cases in proceedings. These meetings look at local and national issues affecting looked after children as well as highlighting any learning that can be taken forward. Brent IROs have a good working relationship with Children's Guardians within West London Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS).

The annual meeting between the Strategic Director for Children and Young People and IROs took place on 18/01/18. IROs raised a number of issues including the impact of the turnover of social workers. IROs were updated on the increase in permanent staff and the Department's direction, including the realignment of social work in Localities, Looked After Children and Permanency and Safeguarding and Quality Assurance. They were informed that although the challenge of recruiting experienced and permanent social workers continues to be present, the turnover of social work staff has reduced with the proportion of permanent staff increasing. IROs were encouraged to escalate any unresolved issues to the Strategic Director if necessary.

Brent IROs have an established protocol with CAFCASS regarding good practice for Public Law work. 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. Children's Guardians have provided positive feedback on both social work and IRO practice. In particular, Children's Guardians have stated that they have found Brent IROs responsive and independent.

Overall the quality of the minutes and how IROs chair and approach LAC reviews are assessed through Brent internal audit to be good. Mid-way reviews and other activities such as escalations are visible on every file audited with some improvements required in the way some IROs upload their minutes on Mosaic.

"Plans are mostly clear and reviews are timely and effective. There is good evidence of Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) scrutiny and challenge with good impact."

Brent Ofsted ILACS Report May 2018

7. Performance of the IRO service

Performance summary:

- A total of 874 reviews were chaired by IROs 2017/18, a decrease of 115 reviews compared to 2016/17.
- The vast majority of children and young people aged over 4 years (648 reviews) attended their review and spoke for themselves.
- On a month by month basis, 93.5% of Reviews are held within the statutory timescales. This represents an increase of 2.5% in comparison to 2016/17. The reason for the lateness include late referrals and unavoidable last minute cancellations.

7.1 Participation of children

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

'We get to talk to the Director directly. She helped me get a problem sorted and she actually cares about young people. You can tell by her actions. She comes to CIA meetings when she doesn't have to. She is really appreciative of us. One time she sent me an email to say thank you for something I had done. I think it was for when I was on the interviews'

Young person age 16

chairing of reviews by the young person as an innovation with positive impact. CIA was consulted about this proposal which will be trialled in 2018/19.

Case study: JB

JB is a 15 year old who entered care at the age of 8 and is part of group of 4 siblings. Since entering care JB has had 13 social workers. JB's behaviour became a concern to all professionals with frequent missing episodes, placement breakdowns and offending behaviour. JB's IRO has been the IRO for all the children in the family for the past 8 years and is the most consistent professional in JB's life. In preparation for JB's latest review, the IRO looked at JB's journey with a view of giving him the opportunity to express himself and draw up a tight care plan and contract with him, focussing on reducing JB's missing episodes. The IRO also referred JB for an advocate and agreed to be contacted should JB need to talk to him.

7.2 Attendance and participation at reviews

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

Type of participation	Number of reviews 2016/17	% 2016/17	Number of reviews 2017/18	% 2017/18
Child physically attends and conveys verbally	646	66%	575	66.6%
Child does not attend but is represented	158	16%	17	2.5%
Child aged under four	109	11%	102	11.83%
Child does not attend but conveys through medium such as an advocate	33	3.3%	139	16.18%
Child does not attend and is not represented	22	2.2%	21	2.62%
Child attends but does not convey and is not represented	10	1%	15	1.82%
Child attends and is represented	3	0.3%	4	0.68%
Child attends and conveys symbolically	2	0.2%	1	0.2%
Total	984	100%	874	100%

The majority of children and young people aged over four years (575 or 66.6% of reviews) attended their review and spoke for themselves. This is a similar percentage to 2016/17 (646 or 66% of reviews).

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

Case study: WW

WW is a 17 year old who is living in semi-independent accommodation outside of London. He was well settled and had developed his network and secured a college place. Shortly after he started college, WW experienced bullying. WW and the provider proposed to move WW to resolve the issue. Upon being contacted by WW, the IRO called for an early review and objected to the move. As a result, the provider agreed to support WW to maintain his placement, allowing WW to settle and continue with his education.

8. Advocacy Service

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


The advocacy service for looked after children was provided through a contract with Aidhour and commissioned on an individual basis when required. Since the end of March 2018 Brent has appointed a Children's Rights Officer who carries out advocacy for looked after children. The total number of children referred for advocacy support in 2017/18 was 56, an increase of 9 from 2016/17 and representing 18% of looked after children. In addition, 13 children had an independent visitor allocated.

The Children's Rights Officer also undertakes Return Home Interviews for Looked After Children who go missing from care and these interviews have been the main source of the increased number of children being offered advocacy. Return Home Interviews have identified an action for IROs to be more actively engaged with monitoring the support and intervention for looked after children who have gone missing.

The broad profile of children referred for advocacy as of 31st March 2018 include children with a disability, unaccompanied asylum seekers, children who are unhappy with overall service provision and children in secure accommodation.

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

- Communications and relationships with their social worker.
- Choice of placements and wanting a certain type of location or placement.
- Contact with family members, particularly children wanting an increase in contact.
- Reviewing a secure accommodation order.



"I wanted to see my sister every weekend, my IRO helped me with this."
Child, age 8

Children placed in secure accommodation for their own safety under s25 of the Children Act 1989 are always provided with an advocate.

9. Quality of Care Planning

One of the IRO's primary functions is to monitor the quality of care plans. IROs report that most children have a child friendly care plan, written in a clear and coherent manner. Children and young people are supported to contribute to their care plan and receive their own copy. IROs have stated that they do not always receive a completed review and care plan document on Mosaic but this is improving with more than 80% being received on time. 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.

10. Progress between reviews

IROs contact social workers for updates on the progress of looked after children review decisions. This is conducted mid-way through the review period by visiting or phoning the young person. Children have reported they would like the number of their IRO directly so they can contact them more easily when they wish and this is now routinely provided. 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.

Case Study: JB

JB is a 17 year old young person placed in a semi-independent unit who works fulltime. JB, together with his siblings, was made subject to a full care order and placed together until JB moved to his current placement in October 2017. James contacted his IRO raising concern about contact with his sister and also worried he may not be able to see her for Christmas. The IRO called an early review, agreed a clear contact plan and Christmas arrangements resulting in James seeing his sister regularly.

11. Oversight of care plans

IROs continued to monitor the quality of social work reports to ensure these meet the expected standard with 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 they are not always consulted when decisions are made about a placement move. A change of placement is a significant change in the life of a child or young person. IROs provide challenge and support to social work practice by advocating for children and young people to be fully consulted before any placement change takes place.

IROs continue to drive social work practice by ensuring that young people have a Pathway Plan provided in a timely way and escalating concerns if this is not in place. This includes promotion of Housing Vulnerability reports and encouraging an exploration of Staying Put arrangements.

Case Study: IB

IB is an 18 year old who lives in semi-independent accommodation to prepare for adulthood. He has a good rapport with his IRO who has been a consistent person in his life. At IB's last review a decision was reached for him to move in to independent living, but only if he viewed the new accommodation and was happy with it. IB called his IRO to say he wasn't happy with the offer of a flat, but felt pressured to move. The IRO escalated the matter and ensured IB had advocacy support to plan any transition.


When children subject of a Child Protection Plan becomes looked after, IROs work closely with Child Protection Advisors to bring forward the Child Protection Conference and avoid dual plans. This area of practice will continue to be developed and monitored.

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

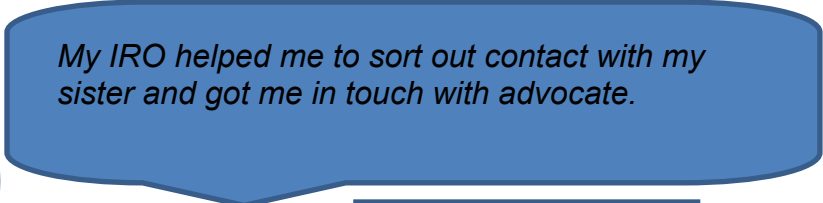
Overall the experience reported by children of their IROs continues to be positive. The REP Team Manager regularly attends Care in Action, Brent's Children in Care Council. Children and young people state that they appreciate the consistent approach of IROs alongside their independence and availability. Children and young people have also said that their 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. The majority (82%) of children (8-11yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) who have given their feedback to the service stated that their lives were getting better.

Children and young people say that they experience frequent change of social workers. In some cases children and young people have also experienced change of placement without proper consultation or not having the opportunity to view the proposed placement beforehand. This reinforces the importance of IROs being informed of any placement move and any other change, such as extension of Reg 24 assessments. Children and young people said that they value the consultation forms given before the review but most appreciate being seen and spoken with on their own. Children and young people also appreciate access to advocacy which is always granted upon request by children and young people or other professionals such as IROs and foster carers.

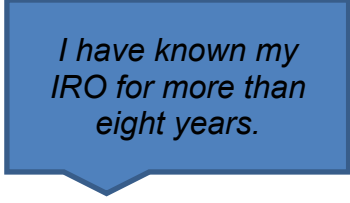
The following examples are taken from the feedback from children and young people from their reviews:



My IRO helped me to move placement.



My IRO helped me to sort out contact with my sister and got me in touch with advocate.



I have known my IRO for more than eight years.

13. Escalations and conflict resolution

One of the key functions of the IRO is to identify and resolve problems arising from the care planning process. In Brent this is called the Looked After Children Escalation Management Process. The IRO will, in the first instance, seek to resolve the issue informally with the social worker and the social worker's manager. If this is unsuccessful the IRO escalates this to the Team Manager and Service Manager. If the issue is not resolved, 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 47 escalations were initiated by IROs in 2017/18 compared to 50 escalations in 2016/17.

Of the 47 case escalations raised by IROs, all but two were resolved at the social worker, Team Manager, Service Manager and Head of Service levels. Two reached the Operational Director level. Issues raised include the following areas:

- SDQs not being completed.
- Regulation 24 assessments not completed within the required 16 week period and/or lack of consultation with IROs on extension of the timescales.
- Care plan and review paperwork being incomplete including Pathway Plans.
- Delay in the process of transfer of unaccompanied minors to another borough.
- Transition to semi-independent units and the completion of housing vulnerability reports.
- Delay in completion of age assessments for unaccompanied minors
- Contact with siblings and wider family members.

The use of the escalation processes proved successful in resolving issues in the vast majority of cases. In a small number of escalations, complexities of the case meant that the issues raised by the IRO could not be fully resolved and compromises were reached or differences of opinion acknowledged.

14. Review of IRO provision priority actions

The IRO provision had 7 priorities to improve services and make an impact on positive outcomes for Looked After Children in 2017/18.

Priority 1. Close management and monitoring timeliness of LAC reviews with the aim of increasing this to at least 95%.

Monthly performance reporting is now in place to drive timeliness of LAC reviews. As of 31 March 2018 timeliness of LAC reviews was 93.5%, an increase of 2.5% from 2016/17.


Priority 2. Work closely with the business support officers on a more effective system and coordination of reviews. Identify resource through the Department administration review to support more effective coordination of reviews.

From January 2018, there has been a dedicated administration support for LAC reviews. A weekly performance monitoring meeting takes place to scrutinise the effective co-ordination of LAC reviews.

Priority 3. Taking forward the messages from the 'Bright Spots' survey, working with children to develop services and monitoring impact through an annual survey with a target of 40% of Looked After Children responding.

The outcome of the Bright Spots survey was distributed to all Looked After Children and an action plan developed with the Looked after Children and Care Leavers partnership meeting, chaired by the Head of Looked After Children and Permanency. As an example, one action was to review contact arrangements between siblings. This led to an increase in direct work with children on the contact arrangement they wanted with their siblings and wider family. The Ofsted ILACS inspection in May 2018 commented positively on contact arrangements with siblings.

Brent has worked with Bright Spots to carry out a second survey in April/May 2018 which has achieved a 29% response rate. This is in line with other local authority response rates and an improvement from the 2017 return rate of 25%, although short of the target of a 40% response rate. The outcome and analysis of the survey will be presented to the Looked after Children and Care Leavers partnership meeting once it is made available.



"Careful consideration is taken of the relationships between brothers and sisters. Contact arrangements are well considered if brothers and sisters are separated. Children and young people's voices are listened to and heard."

Brent Ofsted ILACS Report, May 2018

Priority 4. Thematic audits on identified issues including IRO scrutiny of Pathway Plans and independent living, timeliness of LAC review paperwork and IRO involvement in placement moves. Learning and Development initiatives to be put in place following these audits as required.

Thematic audits have been undertaken evidencing robust IRO scrutiny of Pathway and Care Plans, with an increase in escalating issues as appropriate. The inputs from IROs

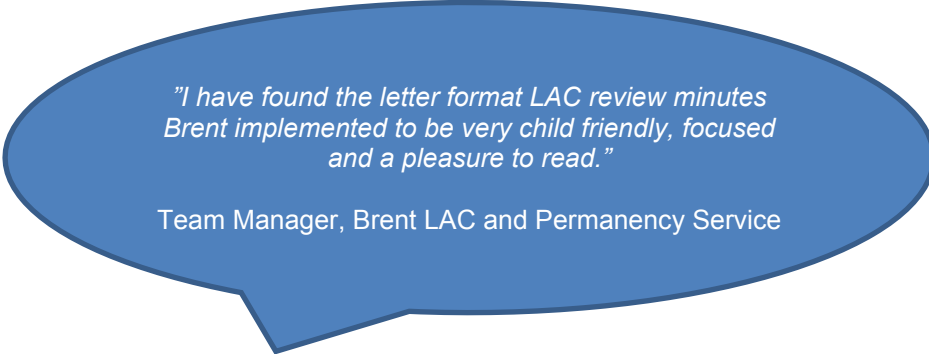
have been seen to be measured and sensitive to the needs of Looked After Children. Some areas for development such as early identification of CSE were identified in audit activity and training provision was made available to all IROs. The Ofsted ILACS inspection in May 2018 acknowledged the scrutiny and challenge by IROs as having a positive impact.

Priority 5 Consult and decide upon the future arrangements for the IRO functions of the service and have these in place for 1st April 2018.

A consultation was undertaken with Care in Action, IROs, Team Managers and social workers on the future of the service and looked at all the options available. The model of having a part permanent and part commissioned service with an additional in-house IRO was agreed to be the preferred option. This increased the number of in house IROs from 1 to 2. A second IRO was recruited in April 2018.

Priority 6. Review the application of the Signs of Safety model in LAC reviews. This is to ensure that the use of Signs of Safety in LAC reviews becomes a more impactful and helpful approach for all Looked After Children, their carers, social workers and IROs.

Work was undertaken with IROs on the application of the Signs of Safety model in LAC reviews and ways of making minutes child and young person centred, with the minutes to be written in a letter format to the child or young person. Children and young people were involved in making these changes. The new way of working was piloted in January/February 2018 and implemented across all LAC reviews from the 1st of March 2018. Children and young people have said that the new way of writing the review minutes has made the experience of reviews more personal and given them a feeling of ownership and control. Professionals have also responded positively.

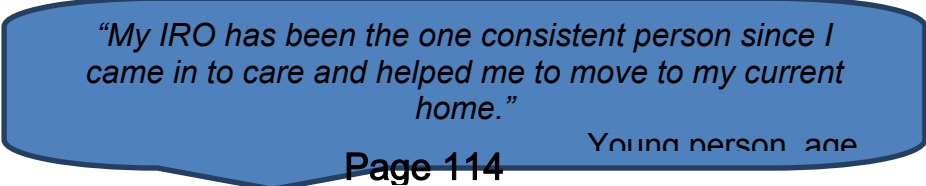


"I have found the letter format LAC review minutes Brent implemented to be very child friendly, focused and a pleasure to read."

Team Manager, Brent LAC and Permanency Service

Priority 7. Evidence that continuous learning from feedback from children and young people, parents, professionals and carers is fully embedded into the Learning and Development offer.

Feedback, themes and trends from LAC reviews are collated and shared regularly with Localities and the LAC and Permanency Services. These themes have also been incorporated into the Learning and Development offer for both social workers and foster carers. This has led to young people co-delivering training on matters that are important to them. For example, young people are involved in delivering training on child-centred care planning.



"My IRO has been the one consistent person since I came in to care and helped me to move to my current home."

Young person age

15. Impact and outcomes

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

- Scrutiny of care plans and avoiding drift. IROs have supported the outcome of increased permanency for children, in particular Special Guardianship Orders and long-term fostering.
- Young people given more control to decide and lead their looked after children review, contributing to feedback from children that they feel they are involved in decision making.
- The IRO Service has worked with social workers and Children's Guardians to ensure that children's voices are heard and are central to decision making during care proceedings.

16. What the REP Team plans to do in 2018/19


The REP Team focuses on hearing children's voices and ensuring actions are taken based on what children say. Planned activity to improve the IRO functions for 2018/19 are as follows:

1. Identify at least five young people who can chair their LAC review and provide training to pilot this approach.
2. Take forward the messages from the 2018 'Bright Spots' survey, working with children to develop services and monitoring impact.
3. Continue to monitor and ensure the application of the Signs of Safety model in LAC reviews is fully embedded.
4. Increase IRO involvement in the scrutiny of Looked After Children going missing from care by monitoring and ensuring that national and local procedures are followed.
5. Evidence that continuous learning from feedback from children and young people, parents, professionals and carers is fully embedded into the Learning and Development offer.
6. IROs to work closely with Child Protection Advisors in particular where children become looked after following a period of being subject to Child Protection Plan
7. Monitor timeliness of LAC reviews to reach a target of at least 95% reviews being completed within timescale.

Goitom Mebrahtu, Review, Engagement and Participation Principal Officer
Sonya Kalyniak, Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance

October 2018

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	Corporate Parenting Committee 30 October 2018
	Report from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People
Brent Adoption Service Report 1 April – 30 September 2018	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision: (only applicable for Cabinet, Cabinet Sub Committee and officer decisions)	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Onder Beter, Head of Service Looked After Children and Permanency Integration and Improved Outcomes, CYPS Email: onder.beter@brent.gov.uk Nigel Chapman, Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Email: nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk

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 1st April – 30th September 2018.

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 The 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 Since the realignment within Brent's Looked After Children (LAC) and Permanency Service in early January 2018, adoption services are fully delivered by the Adoption and Post Permanence Team. This team is 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 and the undertaking of step parent and private adoption assessments as directed by the Court.
- Family finding for children with an adoption plan; statutory social work responsibility for some children subject to a Placement Order up until Adoption Order (all new cases now remain held by social workers within the care planning teams); 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 May 2018, covering the 3-year period 2014-2017.

Adoption Scorecards (published [here](#))

4.2 The non-published data for the period 2016-2018 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): 354.6 days. This is a 6.4% improvement against the previous reporting period (378.7) and compares against a national average of 520 days and our statistical neighbour average of 560.

- **A2** (The time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 150.1 days. This is a 7.4% improvement against the previous reporting period (162) and compares against a national average of 220 days and our statistical neighbour average of 220.

4.3 Child related data

In the first six months of this reporting year (1st April – 30th September 2018) three children were adopted. In the second six months of this reporting year (1st October 2018 – 31st March 2019) it is anticipated that up to five more children will be adopted. There are currently three ongoing adoption applications in Courts, with two more expected to be submitted in the next reporting period. As at 30th September 2018, there were twelve 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
- The plan for one child is to be adopted by his current foster carers.
- One child is waiting for a match with extensive family finding in progress.
- The six remaining children are still being considered within the court arena and although an adoption decision has been made by Brent's Agency Decision Maker plans cannot be progressed until a Placement Order is made by the courts.

4.4 Adopter Recruitment

As of 30th September 2018 Brent had 5 approved adoptive households waiting for an adoptive placement and where a child had not yet been matched or placed.

During this reporting period the service received 23 general enquiries about domestic adoption resulting in one couple, who are already Brent approved adopters for a Brent child, proceeding to a full assessment as 'second time' adopters. There were 5 further enquiries related to step-parent adoption. As in the previous reporting period, Brent is continuing to see an increase in the volume of step-parent and private adoption applications, which is also the experience of other local authorities in the West London Consortium. Inter-country adoption referrals 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 either of Asian, African Caribbean, African or White European heritage.

There has been one new adoptive family approved during this reporting period.

As of the 30th September 2018 there was:

- 1 assessment in Stage One of the process
- 2 assessments in Stage Two of the process
- 4 ongoing step-parent/private adoption assessments

Also, in this reporting period, one Brent adoptive household was matched in April 2018 with a sibling group of two children from another local authority. The children were placed with them in May 2018. In September 2018 another Brent adoptive household had a child from another local authority within the Consortium placed with them on a 'Fostering for Adoption' basis.

Increasing adopter numbers

The national picture in adoption for some time has been an imbalance between the number of children waiting for adoptive placements and approved adopters, with an extremely large number of adopters waiting for a relatively small number of children. As such, many local authorities slowed their recruitment activity to redress the balance. Given the plans for Regionalisation of adoption services across England (see **7.2 Adoption Regionalisation** below) this has now changed and all local authorities are open for new enquiries. To support ongoing recruitment an advertising campaign on the J C Decaux boards is planned to coincide with National Adoption Week (15th – 21st October 2018).

4.5 Adoption Support

In the six months between 1st April – 30th September 2018, 3 new families requested post adoption support bringing the total number of families being actively worked with to 26. During this period, 17 new applications to the DfE Adoption Support Fund (ASF) were successfully approved to support the therapeutic needs of Brent families. In the past 6 months a number of DfE ASF applications have been completed on behalf of a wide age-range of children. 5 of these applications were in relation to adoptive families, who had not previously accessed therapeutic support from Brent. 2 of them were for young people under a Special Guardianship Order, who also receive

support from the team and are eligible for this government funding. There are currently 2 adoption support assessments and one SGO assessment in process, which will be resulting in applications for therapeutic intervention for these families in the next few months. 13 kinship placements are being supported by the team.

27 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. There were a further 26 enquiries from other Adoption Agencies seeking information on whether files were held by Brent.

As stated in the previous report to the Committee, the DfE has capped the amount of financial support available to individual children through the Adoption Support Fund. This has had an impact on some 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. Although the cap on the Adoption Support Fund continues to be an issue for some families with a very high level of need, most adopted children are able to receive relevant therapeutic input within the £5,000 limit.

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** 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 in Brent remains the same as recorded in previous reports to the Corporate Parenting Committee, with the addition of a new council representative following the local elections in May 2018. 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.
- 5.3** A joint annual training day for adoption panel members and the adoption team staff is held as per statutory regulation; the next one is scheduled for December 2018, the focus of which is the role of local authorities in adoption moving forward, given the Regionalisation agenda set out by the government and coming into force by April 2019.

- 5.4** 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 and Permanency) and Service Managers for follow up with individual staff or, should the issues be more systemic, broader service improvement.
- 5.5** During the period 1st April – 30th September 2018 only 2 panels were held with 2 specific adoption cases discussed during these sessions. The panel also considers long-term permanency arrangements for children who will remain in foster care. The low numbers of panels within this period reflects the reduction in Looked After Children numbers and the ongoing relatively low numbers of children for whom an adoption plan is recommended.

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

6.0 Service Development

- The Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) that includes consideration of adoption services took place in May 2018. The feedback from the Inspector who spent a day with the team was very positive, especially in relation to the high quality of Life Story Work for children with an adoption plan and the direct work that is undertaken in preparation for a child’s transition to an adoptive placement. The overall graded judgement for Children in Care and Care Leavers, within which adoption is considered, was ‘outstanding’.
- **Regionalisation of adoption:** the work to establish a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) between Brent, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster, Hounslow, Ealing and Hillingdon councils is on-going with the rate of progress increasing significantly during this reporting period. Ealing has agreed to host the project, with Brent taking a leading role by co-ordinating a number of planning meetings to ensure there is direct involvement in every aspect of the creation of the model. These included staff engagement meetings where staff were informed about the developments and how this work would affect their employment status.
- An information and engagement session was held for Lead Members across London and senior leaders in October 2018 to ensure details of progress was

shared. Brent's Lead Member, Strategic and Operational Directors attended this session.

- Currently the detailed business plan is being developed by a project co-ordinator on behalf of the 7 boroughs with the intention that this will be presented to Brent's Cabinet in January 2019. The new RAA model will be implemented incrementally from April 2019.
- Given that all decisions regarding permanency will remain in-house for each local authority but all prospective adopters will be assessed and supported in the RAA, the links between Brent and the RAA are vital. Logistical meetings with HR and IT leads have been held and the model is being finalised.
- The West London RAA will include support for SGO carers that will enable better joint commissioning of post-permanency support services in order to achieve more cost effective service delivery.
- **Support for special guardians and kinship carers:** The Adoption and Post-Permanency Team holds quarterly support groups for Special Guardians (SGO carers). Those attending have fed back positively. Consultation is taking place with current kinship carers to establish how they would prefer to obtain support from each other – whether this by through group attendance or online forums.
- **Brent's first Child Appreciation Day** was held in May 2018 for a child who was matched with an adoptive family at May's Adoption Panel. 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. The day was a great success and feedback received from everyone who attended was very positive. Lots of very special anecdotal information was shared about the child and her birth family, which the adopter will be able to pass on to her in the future. As well as the detailed information that was shared on the day, a beautiful notebook was passed round for each attendee to write their special thoughts and feelings about the child, which will be part of the contents of her memory box for the future. Everyone who attended talked about how invaluable the day had been and these days are certainly something that Brent will be repeating with other children being placed for the adoption in the forthcoming months.

6.1 Involving Adopters

- Picnics were held for Brent's adopters and Kinship Carers during the summer months. These were very well attended and received positive feedback from the adults and children. Face-painting, water fights and two youth workers kept the children engaged at the Adopter's Picnic, whilst the Kinship Carers had henna tattoos and an adventure playground to entertain everyone. The adults enjoyed the opportunity to speak with each other and both events continued significantly beyond the expected finish time.
- Many Brent adopters and also some local authority adopters who have adopted Brent children are involved in 'buddying' up with other adopters, which provides invaluable support.

6.2 Adopter Feedback

During this reporting period, Brent Adoption Service has continued to receive very positive feedback from the service users. No complaints were made about the Adoption Service during this reporting period.

Report sign off:

GAIL TOLLEY

Strategic Director, Children and Young People