

 <b>Brent</b>	<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b> 21 October 2020
	<b>Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</b>
<b>The Brent Pledge for Looked After Children and Brent Care Leavers' Charter – 2020 update</b>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	N/A
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
<b>No. of Appendices:</b>	Appendix 1 - Brent's Promises – draft 2020 update Appendix 2 - Brent Care Leavers Charter – draft 2020 update
<b>Background Papers:</b>	N/A
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Sonya Kalyniak Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Children and Young People's Services sonya.kalyniak@brent.gov.uk 020 8937 4526  Brian Grady Operational Director, Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy, Children and Young People's Services brian.grady@brent.gov.uk 020 8937 4173

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. This report provides information to Corporate Parenting Committee on the revised Pledge for Looked After Children and the revised Care Leavers' Charter. All councillors are corporate parents to our looked after children. The pledge and charter detail the services and support that children in care and care leavers can expect from Brent Council as their corporate parent. The revised Pledge for Looked After Children and Care Leavers' Charter were informed and developed with Care in Action (CIA) and Care Leavers in Action (CLIA), Brent's Children in Care Council.

## 2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee endorse the revised Brent Pledge for Looked after Children (Brent's Promises) (Appendix 1) and the revised Care Leavers' Charter (Appendix 2).

### **3.0 The importance of the Brent Pledge for Looked After Children and the Care Leavers' Charter**

3.1 As the corporate parents of children in care and care leavers, the whole of Brent Council is responsible for their well-being. As a good corporate parent this means being an advocate and helping looked after children become successful, well-rounded adults.

3.2 Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services (DCS) and the Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS) states that the DCS 'should have regard to the General Principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and ensure that children and young people are involved in the development and delivery of local services' (Department for Education, April 2012, Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and Lead Members for Children's Services).

3.3 CIA and CLIA represent the voices of children in care and care leavers through a variety of consultative mechanisms, influencing those who make decisions about services, and developing and monitoring the delivery of the Pledge. The Pledge, developed with input from children, ensures that children in care are aware of their rights and opportunities.

3.4 The Children and Social Work Act (2017) sets out seven corporate parenting principles to which local authorities must have regard when carrying out their functions in relation to looked after children and young people:

- to act in their best interests and promote their physical and mental health and well-being.
- to encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- to take into account their views, wishes and feelings.
- to help them gain access to and make the best use of services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- to promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for them.
- to ensure they are safe and have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work
- to prepare them for adulthood and independent living.

3.5 In addition to meeting our statutory duties, agreeing the Pledge and Charter demonstrates the commitment of the Council to listen to what is important to children in care and care leavers and commit to meeting their needs.

3.6 As background to the revised version of the Pledge and Charter, Care Matters (2007) outlined the expectation for every local area to develop a pledge for the children in their care. Following consultations with care experienced young people across London, London Councils launched the London Pledge for Looked After Children in November 2008. Since this time, each local authority has developed its own individualised pledge, which incorporates the views, priorities, and wishes of their own looked after children.

- 3.7 The Brent Pledge for Children in Care was initially developed in 2010 and was updated with the introduction of the Care Leavers' Charter in 2014. Both documents were refreshed in 2018.
- 3.8 Both the Pledge and the Charter set out a number of promises that children and young people have identified which, if delivered, make Brent Council a good corporate parent. The revised Pledge and Charter have been endorsed by the Corporate Management Team. Once endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Committee, the Lead Member signs both documents on behalf of elected members, officers and partners.

#### **4.0 Views of children and young people**

- 4.1 Ensuring that our looked after children and care leavers are able to influence and shape the services provided for them is both a statutory duty and a key priority. Both the Pledge and Charter have been reviewed with the participation of children and young people through CIA and CLIA. A total of 14 looked after children and 12 care leavers provided feedback.
- 4.2 The suggested amendments made by children and young people have been shared with the professional network through the local partnership meeting for care experienced children and young people, chaired by the Head of LAC and Permanency. The group supported the proposed amendments of both documents.
- 4.3 **Brent's Pledge for Children in Care** - Feedback from CIA was that children liked the content of the previous pledge and did not feel that any big changes were needed. However, they would like the title changed from "pledge" to "promises" as it is easier for children to understand. They suggested that placement stability be the first promise as this is very important to them. They requested that some language was changed to be more child focused, for example, changing "upon request" to "when you ask".
- 4.4 They also suggested some design changes. For example, they did not like the silhouettes because they did not have faces and you could not see if the people they represented were happy or sad. Instead, they would like pictures of real people.
- 4.5 **The Care Leavers' Charter** – Feedback from CLIA was that they wanted the charter to have a stronger reference to support with career and employment goals. They also suggested that both physical health and mental health were specifically referenced.
- 4.6 There were also some recommended design changes for the Charter. They suggested that the silhouettes were made more realistic and included someone graduating and someone working. They also suggested making the colour more vibrant.
- 4.7 The documents have been amended to reflect the changes requested by children and young people and are attached as Appendix 1 and 2 to this report.

#### **5.0 Relaunching the Pledge (Brent's Promises) and the Charter**

- 5.1 CIA and CLIA will support with the re-launching of Brent's Pledge (Promises) and the Care Leavers' Charter. This will ensure that every child in care and care leaver and the professionals working with them are aware of our promises to children in care and care leavers. The revised Pledge, renamed Brent's Promises, will be included in refreshed information provided to children entering care so that these children are aware of the

promises made to them. The Charter will be shared with children leaving care at their final LAC Review.

- 5.2 The Participation Officer will support CIA and CLIA members to present the revised Brent Promises and Charter at appropriate Foster Carers Support Groups, staff forums and team meetings to raise awareness. The revised Promises and Charter will be included in the Brent Council and CYP induction programme and will also be shared with the semi-independent provider forum and commissioned providers.
- 5.3 Independent Reviewing Officers will ensure children and young people are aware of the Brent Promises and Charter and will continue to quality assure practice to evidence that promises have been kept, escalating any concerns they may have.

## **6.0 Evaluating progress against the Pledge and Charter**

- 6.1 In Autumn 2020, CLIA led inspections will take place. These inspections will focus on providing assurance that Brent Council is meeting its commitments to care leavers as per the Brent Care Leavers' Charter. The young inspectors group includes 10 current care leavers.
- 6.2 Planning is in progress for the first CLIA led inspection focusing on the offer to care leavers from within the Looked After Children and Permanency Service.
- 6.3 Based on learning from the CLIA led inspections, the process will be replicated for children in care with CIA groups in early 2021 to consider Brent's Promises to children in care. These wider inspections will take place from the Spring of 2021, and will consider the wider Council contributions to the delivery of the Brent Promises and Charter. The results of these inspections will be shared with the Corporate Parenting Committee by CLIA and CIA inspectors.
- 6.4 To further understand the experience of children and care leavers, the Bright Spots Surveys will take place once again. The survey for children in care will take place in November 2020 (two years following the previous survey). The survey for care leavers will take place in January 2021. These will provide a rich overview of children in care and care leavers' experience to test against the promises we have made. CIA and CLIA will present the findings of these surveys at future Corporate Parenting Committee meetings.

## **7.0 Legal Implications**

- 7.1 Care Matters (2007) outlines the expectation for every local area to develop a pledge for the children in their care. The Children Act (1989), The Children and Social Work Act (2017) and Article 12 of the UNCRC outline the importance of children and young people being given the right to be involved in decisions that affect them. Both the Brent Pledge and Charter inform children and young people of their rights and highlight Brent Council's commitment to actively involving children and young people in decision making and the shaping of services.