



**Brent**

**Corporate Parenting  
Committee**

27<sup>th</sup> July 2017

**Report from the Strategic Director  
of Children and Young People**

For Action

Wards Affected: All

**Annual Corporate Parenting Report 2016-2017**

**1.0 Summary**

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

**2.0 Recommendations**

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

**3.0 Corporate Parenting**

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

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

#### **4.0 Corporate Parenting Committee 2016-2017**

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

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

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

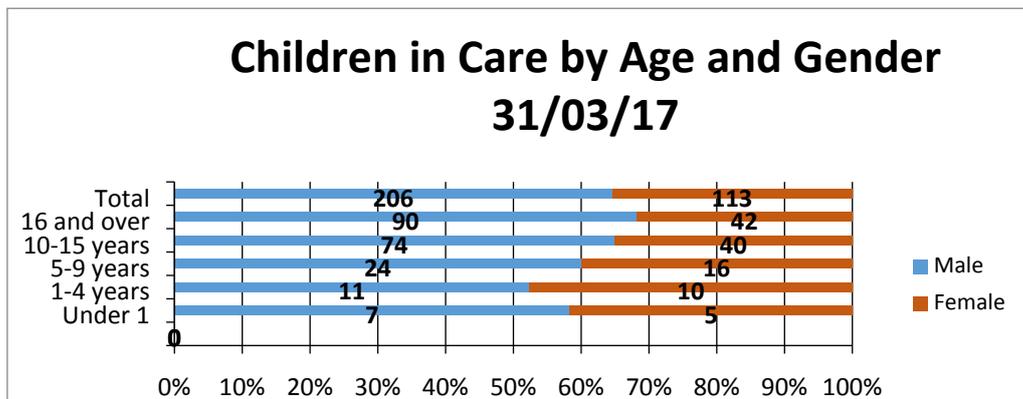
## **5.0 Participation of children and young people, and care leavers**

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

## **6.0 Profile of Looked After Children and care leavers**

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

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



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

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

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

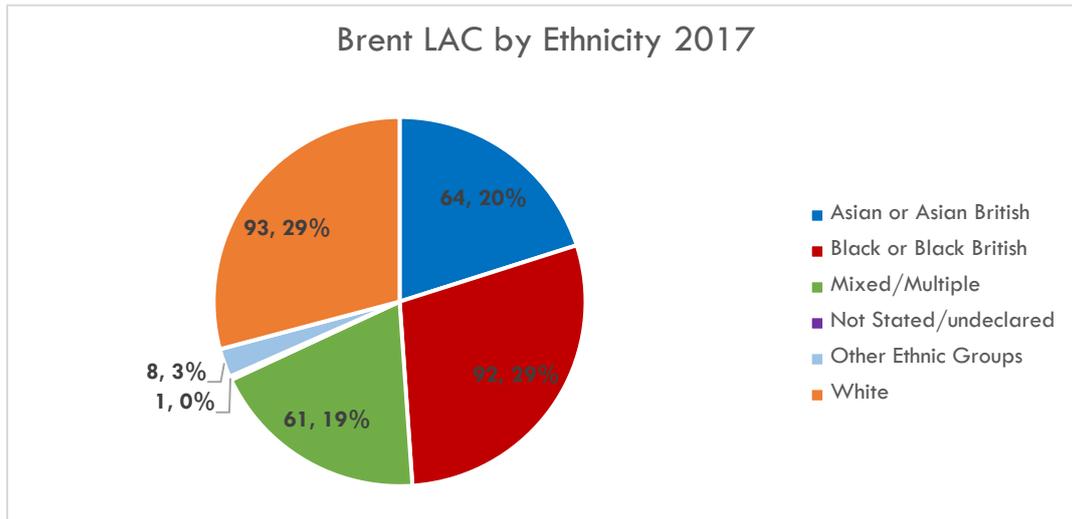
6.6. Despite many barriers our UASC have shown remarkable resilience and have been able to achieve outstanding successes. In the table below is a story of the achievements of one young person who came to the UK at the age of 16.

#### **CASE STUDY - UASC**

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

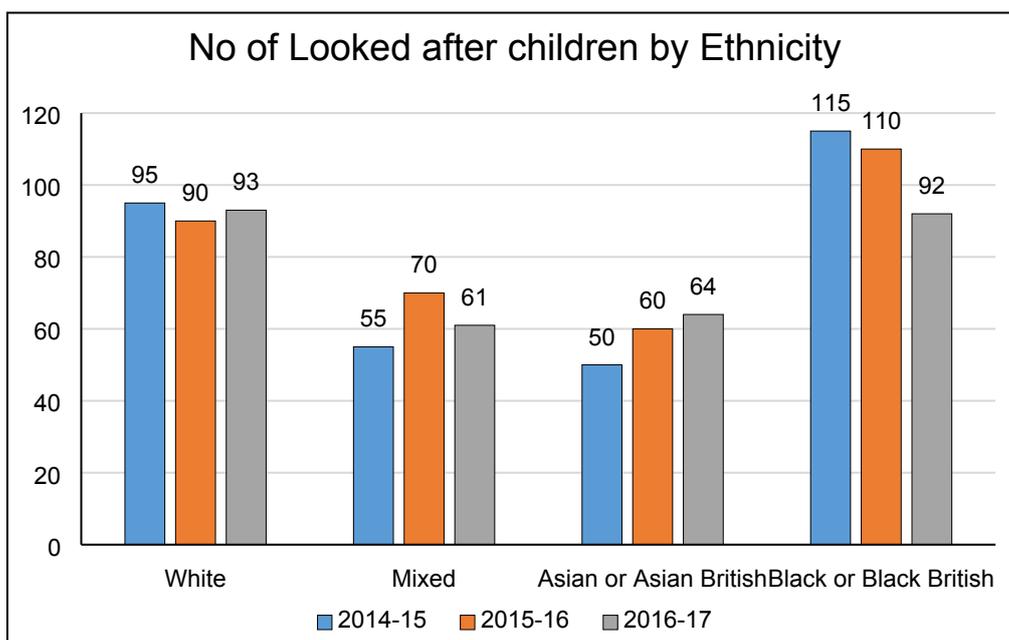
*and Quadrant in February 2017 and has created a lovely home. Keen to gather as much knowledge as possible, HA often researches business opportunities and is currently considering her options. Having turned 21 this year, HA is currently seeking employment opportunities for the summer.*

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



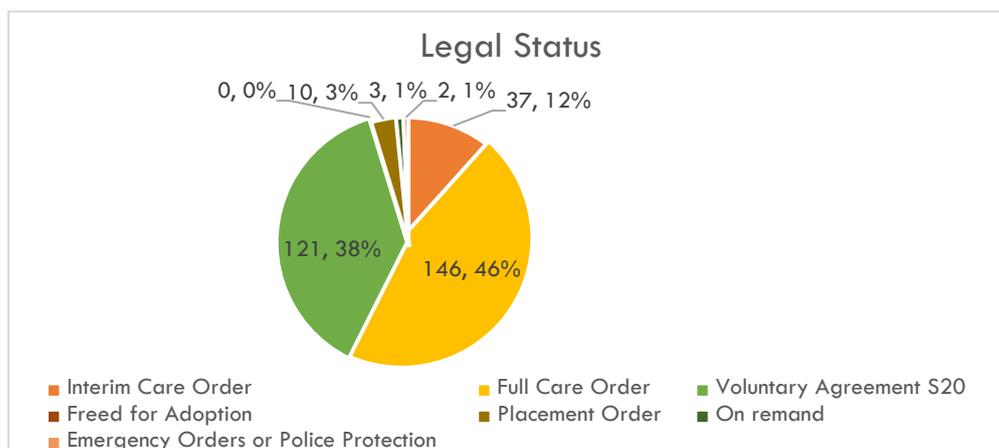
6.8. Over the last three years, there has been a reduction in Black or Black British LAC and an increase in Asian and Asian British children. There are 92 Black or Black British LAC compared to 115 in 2014/15. The number of children from an Asian and Asian British background increased from 50 in 2014/15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

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



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

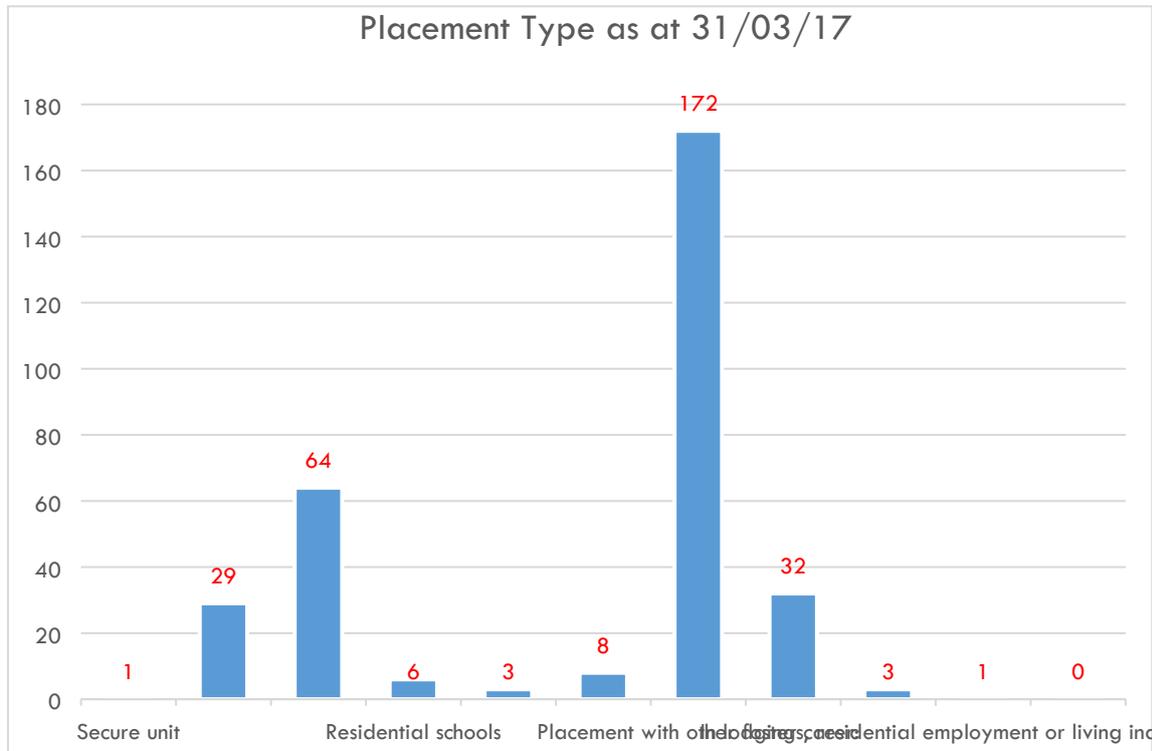
6.11. The chart below chart highlights the different legal status of our children.



## 7. Placements of LAC in Brent

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

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



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

### 7.3. Stability of placements:

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

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

#### **CASE STUDY**

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

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

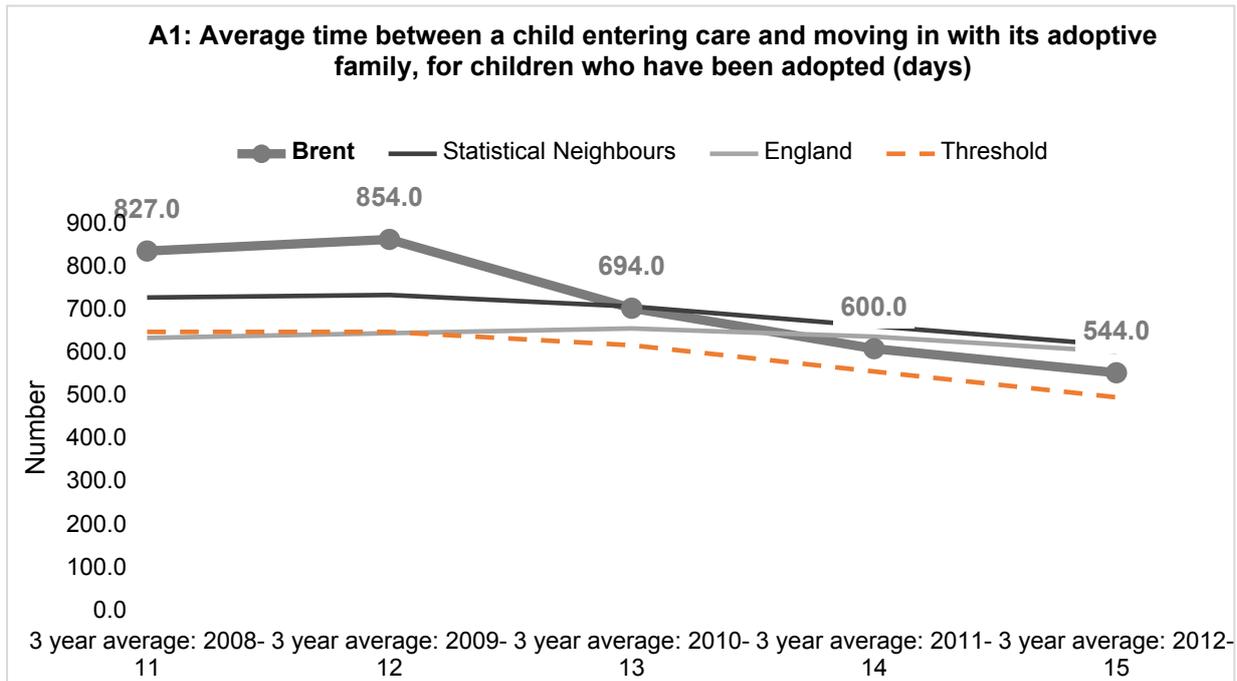
## **8. Permanency and Care Proceedings**

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

### **8.2 Adoption and Special Guardianship:**

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

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



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

**CASE STUDY - Adoption**

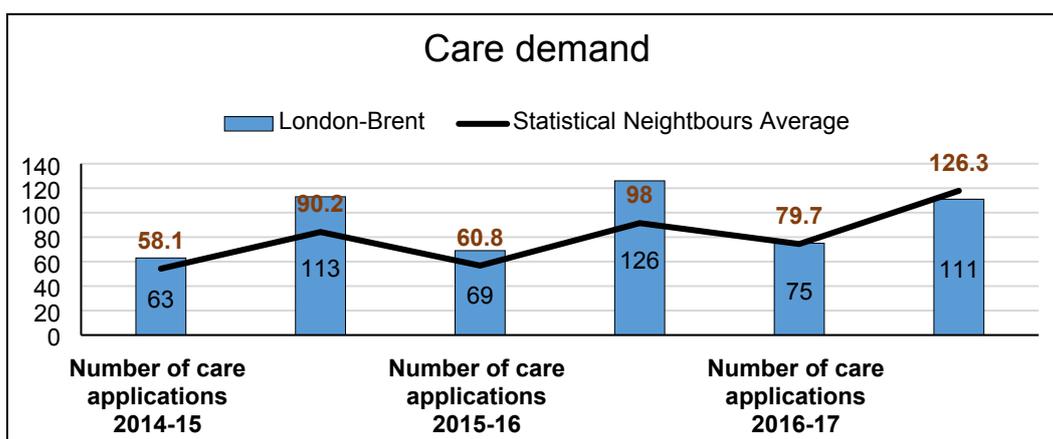
*A and S are two of the children placed for adoption in this reporting year. They are twins, a boy and a girl, whose birth parents both have a long history of substance misuse. The twins were born prematurely and because of their mother's chronic drug and alcohol use throughout the pregnancy, there were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

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

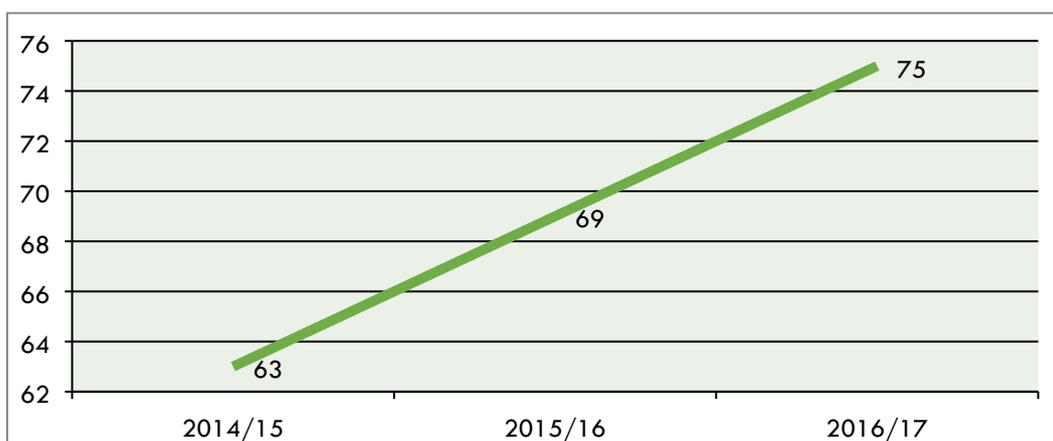
*The children have made tremendous strides in their progress in all areas of their development since being placed in their adoptive placement. Their adopters are delighted with their progress, are completely committed to them, whatever the future holds, and love them unconditionally.*

## 8.6. Care Proceedings and care demand

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



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



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

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

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

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

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

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

## 9. Health Outcomes for Looked After Children

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

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

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

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

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

**CASE STUDY - E**

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

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

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

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

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

## **10. Missing and Absent Looked After Children**

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

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

mutilation or forced marriage.

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

## **11. Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE)**

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

## **11.4. Multi-Agency Professional Meetings**

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

## **12. Education Data**

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

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

- The post-16 Education Employment and Training (EET) data was positive. In July 2016, 48 of the total cohort of 51 (94%) had a September Guarantee<sup>1</sup>. However the current EET figure in Year 12 (January 2017) is down to 81%; the 11 young people currently NEET (not in education, employment and training) are receiving intensive support from the BVS;
- Overall school attendance declined from 90% to 88%. This is primarily due to poor attendance in KS4. The higher numbers of LAC in KS4 also affects this average;
- There were no permanent exclusions in 2015/16 although the number of fixed term exclusions rose;
- The BVS has been working to a service improvement plan that has focused on improving the completion and quality of PEPs (see above) and the raising of LAC outcomes at KS4. As was stated in the BVS report, the varying numbers and backgrounds of children in care at KS4 present many challenges in ensuring there is a steady and continuous upward improvement in outcomes.

### **13. Care Leavers**

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

### **14. Care Leavers in Education, Employment & Training**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **CASE STUDY- Story of SJ, care leaver**

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

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

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

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

## **16. Summary**

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

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

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

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

## 17. Priorities for 2017-18

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

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

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

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

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