


| | |
|---|--|
|  | Corporate Parenting Committee 24 July 2019 |
| | Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People |
| Annual Corporate Parenting Report 2018-2019 | |

| | |
|--|---|
| Wards Affected: | All |
| Key or Non-Key Decision: | 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) | <p>Onder Beter Head of Service, Looked After Children and Permanency Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Brent Onder.beter@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Sarah Miller Head of Virtual School for Looked After Children Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Brent Sarah.miller@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Brent Nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk</p> |

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 An annual report about the outcomes for Looked After Children (LAC) in line with requirements of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010) has to be provided 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 2018-2019, reporting on annual activity, highlighting strengths and areas for development in supporting looked after children and care leavers in Brent.

- 1.2 Issues that were identified in the previous Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2017/18 were updated throughout the body of this annual report.

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 and support provided to Brent's LAC and care leavers are 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.
- 3.2 The notion of being a corporate parent has been enriched and strengthened by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which highlighted seven principles of being a corporate parent. These are:
- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being of those children and young people;
 - to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
 - to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
 - to help those children and young people 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 those children and young people;
 - for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
 - to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.
- 3.3 Brent has welcomed and embraced the above principles entirely. Elected members in Brent carry out their duty of corporate parenting through:

1. The Corporate Parenting Committee, chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Young People with cross party Member representation where service performance is scrutinised.
2. Attendance of CiA/CLiA representatives at the Corporate Parenting Committee.
3. Weekly liaison 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.
4. Regular meetings between representatives of Care in Action and Care Leavers in Action (CiA/CLiA; Brent's Children in Care Councils), with the Lead Member, Strategic Director, and Operational Directors.
5. Brent's 'Pledge' to looked after children, 'Care Leavers' Charter' and local offer for care leavers, approved by the Lead Member. See a copy of Brent's Pledge and Care Leavers' Charter in appendix 1, 2 and 3.
6. An annual, mandatory Member Learning and Development session on Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting.

3.4 In 2018-2019 the Corporate Parenting Committee provided scrutiny and challenge as follows:

- a. Members of the CiA and CLiA attended the Committee on a regular basis to report on their activity and present their views. Committee members noted the activities, made recommendations about further work and provided challenge to relevant service areas within the Local Authority following matters raised by CiA and CLiA.
- b. The Committee has continued to monitor and scrutinise management and delivery of Brent fostering service in their pursuit to achieve good outcomes for children and young people. Members heard and commented upon foster carers' recruitment and retention, service development as well as hearing directly from foster carers about their experience. In October 2018, 3 foster carers attended the Committee and provided positive feedback on the support they had been receiving from Brent and also made a suggestion regarding provision of more 'out of hours training for foster carers'. The service has listened to this suggestion and provided more training session for foster carers out of hours.
- c. Management and delivery of adoption services have also been monitored on a six monthly basis by the Committee. In addition, quarterly updates were received by Members regarding the 'regionalisation of adoption' and how Brent has been actively involved

in designing and development of the 'Adopt London West, West London's regional adoption agency.

- d. In July 2018, the Committee was presented with Brent's Annual Corporate Parenting Report 2017/18. The report provided a summary of the profile of looked after children and care leavers, social work activity and interventions including some case studies demonstrating how the Council meets the overall needs of children and young people as their Corporate Parent.
- e. In October 2018, the Committee reviewed and noted enrichment activities for looked after children and care leavers jointly provided by the Looked After Children and Permanency Service and Brent Virtual School for LAC. At the same meeting, Members reviewed and commented on the content of an annual report on Independent Reviewing Officers. Additionally, Members were presented with a report on the Stability Index (SI) for looked after children¹. The SI for Brent focused on data across three main domains: placement changes, school changes and changes in social workers. The Committee reviewed and commented upon the activity undertaken to improve the stability of lives of looked after children in Brent.
- f. In February 2019, Members were presented with an Annual Health Report for Looked After Children jointly by Brent Clinical Commissioning Group and Brent LAC Health Team – London Northwest University NHS Trust. The report included a summary of activity around looked after children's overall health, including initial and review health assessments, dental and optician checks as well as Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires that are used to assess emotional wellbeing.
- g. Members were presented a report regarding the Annual Bright Spots Questionnaire² and heard about Brent's response to the Survey in February 2019. The report detailed the actions taken following analysis of the previous year's survey, including review of contact arrangements, life story work, social work realignment to provide further continuity of relationship between social workers and looked after children.
- h. In April 2019, the Committee heard about the activity undertaken in the last quarter of the reporting year 2017/18. This included a report on 'the national protocol on reducing unnecessary criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers'. The report provided a summary on

¹ The Stability Index (SI) was launched in 2017 by the Children's Commissioner 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.

² Bright Spots Questionnaire is known as "Your Life, Your Care" Survey for 2018. The survey, delivered by Coram Voice, sought to measure the quality of Looked After Children's care experience and their sense of well-being. 33% of looked after children responded to the Survey.

activities and current practice in Brent in reducing looked after children's contact with the Youth Justice System.

4. Inspection of Brent's Children's Services - ILACS

4.1 Brent's Children's Services were inspected by Ofsted in May 2018. The inspection covered wide range of areas such as impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families, 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.

4.2 The Ofsted inspection in May 2018 graded overall effectiveness of services 'good'. The experience and progress of looked after children and care leavers were graded 'outstanding'.

4.3 In relation to the care and experiences of looked after children and care leavers, the Ofsted inspection identified the following areas of strength:

- Adoption is an area of best practice and performance remains one of the strongest in London and nationally.
- Permanency planning is effective and timely.
- Social workers build good, positive relationships with children and families using direct work and children are being seen and spoken to as per their care plans.
- The quality of court reports continues to be of a high standard, particularly those undertaken by the in-house Kinship Care Team.
- The majority of care plans are of good quality and timeliness of LAC reviews is good.
- Brent commissions good quality placements and suitable accommodation for looked after children and care leavers.
- Academic progress is good, evidenced by the high number of care leavers at university.
- Outcomes for care leavers are really good. Care leavers receive various enrichment activities and support assisting them to tackle isolation and loneliness, including an innovative phone-line, Safe Base, that provides counselling support to care leavers at university.
- There have been no tenancy breakdowns for care leavers for 2 years.

4.4 Some of the quotes from the Inspection Report³ below highlights the strengths of the support provided by Brent as a strong corporate parent:

- *"The care for children and care leavers is outstanding..."*
- *"Strong leadership at a political level and throughout the council has prioritised support and care for children in care and care leavers..."*
- *"Corporate parenting is a real strength for the local authority. There is a strong focus on achieving positive outcomes for children in care and care leavers..."*

³ For Ofsted's full report visit <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80489>

- *“Staff and managers are ambitious for children and young people. The lived experiences of children and young people are at the heart of social work practice...”*
- *Excellent support is available for children and young people to help them achieve stability in their lives. Strong multi-agency work across partnerships is helping children and young people thrive...”*
- *“...Social workers and personal advisers demonstrate considerable empathy, understanding and compassion when talking about ‘their’ young people. This is valued by care leavers. In the words of one care leaver: ‘My PA [personal adviser] is like the mum I didn’t have. Her words encourage me to feel better and do better.’”*
- *“Great care is taken to ensure that care leavers only move into their own independent homes when they are assessed as able to maintain a tenancy. For this reason, there have been no tenancy breakdowns...”*

The Inspection identified the following as development areas

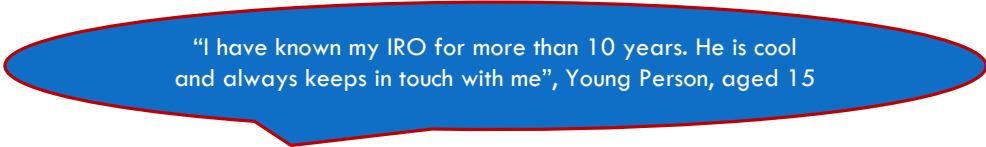
- Ensure that Care in Action and Care Leavers in Action involves a wider group of looked after children and care leavers in service development.
- Improve attendance and academic attainment at Key Stage 4.
- Further improve use of fostering to adopt options
- Improve use of return home interviews for children missing from home or care

4.5 In relation to the areas for development, an action plan was put in place and all of the above areas have been improved within 6 months after the Inspection.

5.0 Participation of looked after children, young people and care leavers.

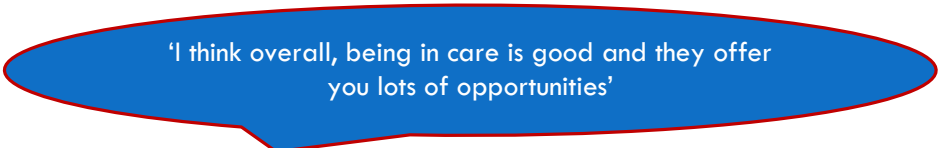
5.1 Looked after children and care leavers have been supported and encouraged to participate in decision making process that impact on their lives in several different ways in 2018/19. Children and care leavers been visited regularly in their placements or homes and their wishes, feelings and views were obtained and recorded.

5.2 Social work practitioners, from social workers to the independent reviewing officers use Brent’s Practice Framework to undertake direct work with children and young people. LAC review reports, care plans and pathway plans consistently include wishes and feelings of children and young people. In 2018/19, The majority of children and young people aged over 4 years (648 reviews – 66% of all) attended their review and spoke for themselves. The IROs have continued to play a vital role in developing relationships with children and young people. The following quote from a young person reflects the quality of this relationship:



"I have known my IRO for more than 10 years. He is cool and always keeps in touch with me", Young Person, aged 15

- 5.3 Similar to last year, in 2018/19, Brent's looked after children were invited to participate in a survey called the Bright Spots Questionnaire, "Your life, Your care". This is a survey for measuring the quality of Looked After Children's care experience and their sense of well-being. The survey was developed by Coram Voice and Bristol University with children and young people in and from care as part of the National Bright Spots Programme.
- 5.3.1 The survey was completed via an on line app with the support of an identified trusted adult such as a designated teacher or an IRO. The was promoted through CiA and CLiA, designated teachers of Looked After Children, social workers and foster carers. The eligible participation cohort of Looked After Children was 278. Of that number, 82 responded to the survey.
- 5.3.2 Compared to last year's Survey, the majority of the respondents to the 2018 survey were teenagers, whereas the respondents to the 2017 survey were mainly younger children. More responses were received from Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). Brent had specifically requested that responses were sought from Looked After Children in both local and out of borough placements to establish if there was any difference in their looked after experiences. There are a number of positive findings from Brent children and young people's feedback.



'I think overall, being in care is good and they offer you lots of opportunities'

- 96% (up from 85% last year) of children and young people felt that they had the opportunity to practice life skills.
- Every child aged 4-11yrs, along with the majority of young people, trusted their social worker. In addition, almost every child and young person knew that they could speak to their social worker.
- No children aged 4-11 years were found to report a low sense of wellbeing.
- Two thirds (65%) of young people talked regularly with their carers about things that mattered to them. This is a comparable proportion to the response from Looked After Children in other local areas.

- 92%, (up from 83% last year) reported that they engaged in similar positive activities as their friends.
- Children stated that they felt settled in their placements and that their carers paid attention to how they were feeling.
- Similar numbers of children and young people to those in the general population

5.3.3 Below were some of what children and young people said should be improved:

- 81% of young people trusted their carers which is lower than in other authorities where 96% trusted the adults they lived with. Brent has a proportionally older population of Looked After Children. They are likely to have experienced longer years of inconsistent parenting and less trusting relationships. As a result, they can therefore find it harder to settle and develop a trusting relationship with their carers.
- Contact with significant family members was a recurring theme. Progress on contact with siblings was a notable improvement from the 2017 survey and promotion of contact with other family members is a priority for 2019-20.
- High proportions of children aged 8-11yrs were worried about bullying, and young people (11-18yrs) in Brent were less likely to have a good friend than elsewhere. Brent's Virtual School for LAC is liaising with schools to provide additional information and support in order to address this area.
- Girls were more likely than boys to report that they disliked school.

5.3.4 An action plan was agreed to address the issues above and a report was presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee with Brent's response to the Survey in February 2019.

5.4 In January 2019, Brent's care leavers between the ages of 18 and 25 were encouraged to complete the 'Bright Spots' Survey that would provide an insight into care leaver's understanding of their journey after care. Over 130 Brent care leavers responded to the questionnaire, which was well above the 30% average response rate nationally. Results will be published in August 2019; feedback will be used to further improve Brent's support to care leavers.

5.5 Junior CiA, CiA and CLiA held a number of activities in 2018-19 to support participation and engagement:

5.5.1 Junior CiA continued to meet regularly to provide a positive forum for meeting other young people in care, develop a positive narrative about life in care and take part in activities which enrich their social and emotional development. A consistent group of eight young people attended throughout the year and a Brent care leaver supported

facilitation of the group. They have taken part in fun sports and drama activities.

- 5.5.2 CiA, Brent's Children in Care Council, is comprised of a small group of young people aged 11-17. Through fortnightly meetings, they provided advice and feedback to local agencies providing services, met with senior leaders including the strategic director and Lead Member and routinely attended the Corporate Parenting Committee to ensure young people's experiences were well understood and services are improved to meet their needs.
- 5.5.3 Care Leavers in Action (CLiA), a committed group of care leavers continued to meet fortnightly. Some representatives of CLiA also attended the Corporate Parenting Committee, actively participating in discussions. A representative of CLiA attended the Local Partnership Meeting for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, a multi-agency officers group to be the voice of care leavers.
- 5.5. A thriving weekly football night - started in September 2018 - which has engaged more than 25 care leavers as at 31st March 2019, sees staff, managers and leaders facing off with care leavers in a fun, relaxed and competitive game – fostering relationships and building trust. During National Care Leavers' Week, a group of staff, including senior managers played a football game against care leavers. This was a good engagement event and young people provided positive feedback about it. Below are two photos from the football activities for care leavers:

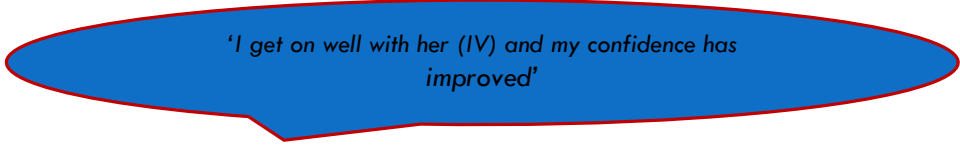


- 5.6 Additionally, a monthly care leavers hub, provided a forum for more than 30 care leavers to network, build relationships and discuss issues which concern them and provide challenge to managers and leaders on service provision. The hub has been used by care leavers as a forum to tackle isolation and loneliness and build supportive networks. The following quote from a care leaver shows good engagement in the hub activities:



'I would come if it was every fortnight'

- 5.7 Five children and young people (ages 6-18) were part of the Voice in a Million Choir that took place in March 2019 at the Wembley SSE Arena. The Brent group comprised three adopted children, one looked after child and a care leaver who also had a solo performance. This is an outstanding and high profile opportunity for young people to connect with other children in care from across the country while developing and showcasing their talent.
- 5.8 In 2018/19, advocacy services for children and young people were provided by a Children's Rights officer/advocate, who was appointed on a fixed term contract for a period of 12 months, and a commissioned provider (Aidhour). In 2018/19 there were 62 requests for advocacy. Referrals for advocacy were made either directly by the child or young person or through a social worker or other professionals such as an IRO, foster carer, teacher or a solicitor. During 2018/19 the advocate supported children and young people at their LAC review, meeting with solicitors, at school, during child protection conferences, and in making complaints. Advocacy services were provided regarding the issues raised include housing, finance, placement moves, disagreement with a proposed care plan and request for a change of social worker or personal advisor.
- 5.9 In addition to the advocacy service, Brent has a commissioned Independent Visitors Scheme to support children and young people. Between April 2018 and March 2019 10 young people were supported by Independent visitors throughout the year. The following feedback is from one young person, highlighting how the scheme is helping young people:



'I get on well with her (IV) and my confidence has improved'

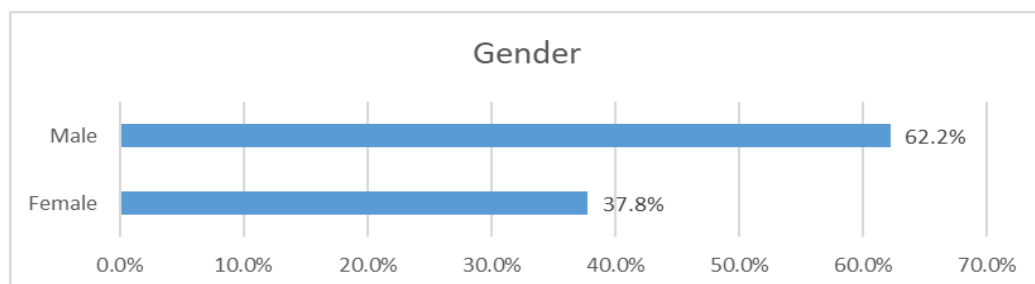
- 5.10 In 2018/19 Brent put in place a project to empower young people to achieve more positive outcomes by improving engagement, guidance and support through the digitalisation of pathway planning for care leavers. 19 older looked after children and care leavers have been actively involved through workshops in the ideation and design of a digital solution for the pathway plan. The final output design and functionalities are based on what care leavers developed and what they need to feel supported, empowered as well as engaged and what will enable them to learn and develop. The work is on-going with the view to be completed in 2019/20.

6.0 Profile of Looked after Children and care leavers

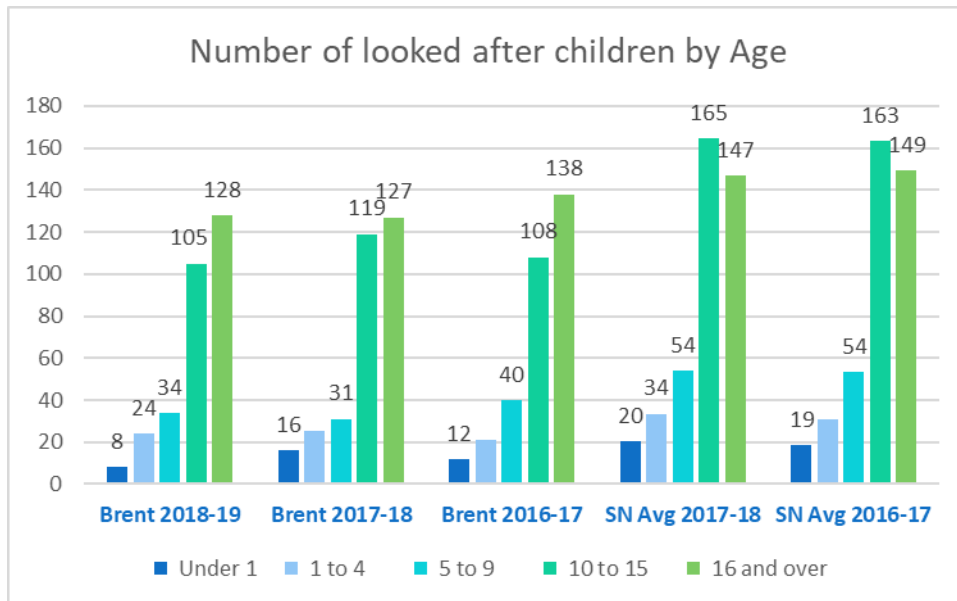
- 6.1 As of 31st March 2019 Brent had 299 children and young people looked after. This compares with 318 Looked After on 31st March 2018. This represents 38.5 LAC per 10,000 head of child population against the rate for England of 62 per 10,000 head of child population. The number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) remained the same in 2018/2019 compared to 2017/18. On 31st March 2019, the Local Authority looked after 56 UASC compared with 56 in March 2018. This represented 18.7% of the total Brent LAC population.
- 6.2 Brent Children and Young People's Services continue to support children remaining within their families when it is safe to do so. In 2018/19, 46 children became children looked after for a second or subsequent time, in line with statistical neighbours, compared to 49 in 2017/18. The below extract from the Ofsted Inspection in May highlights Brent's strong commitment to keeping children within their networks when appropriate:

"Consideration of kinship care is particularly strong. Social workers go to great lengths to identify safe family members with whom children can live. Often, there are complex international elements..."

- 6.3 The gender of the LAC population consists of 62.2% male and 37.8% female, consistent with the last year.

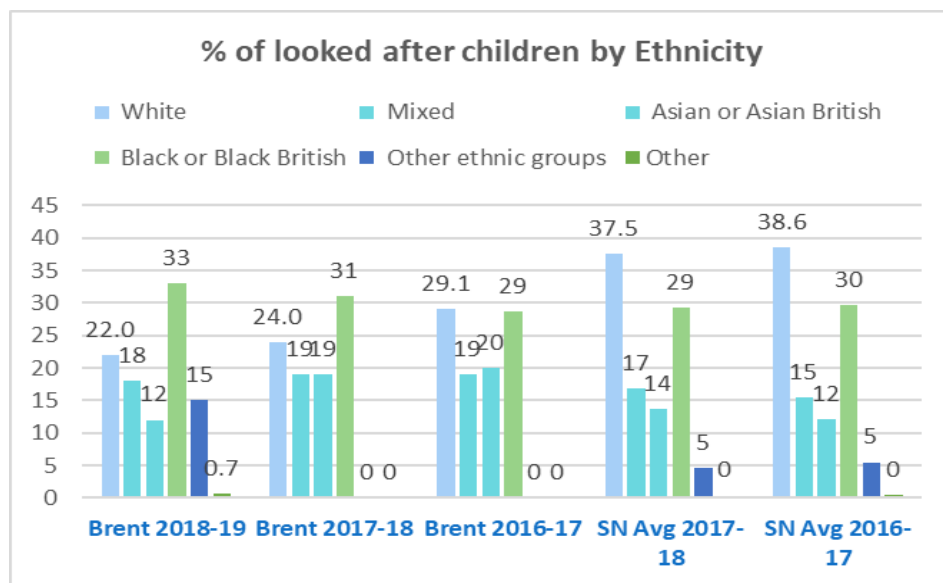


- 6.4 42.8% of the care population in Brent is aged over 16 years old, compared to 40% at the end of March 2018. Over 77.5% of the care population in Brent are aged 10 and over. This presents some challenges around having a predominantly adolescent LAC population and associated risks as well as pointing to a bigger cohort of leaving care population in coming years.



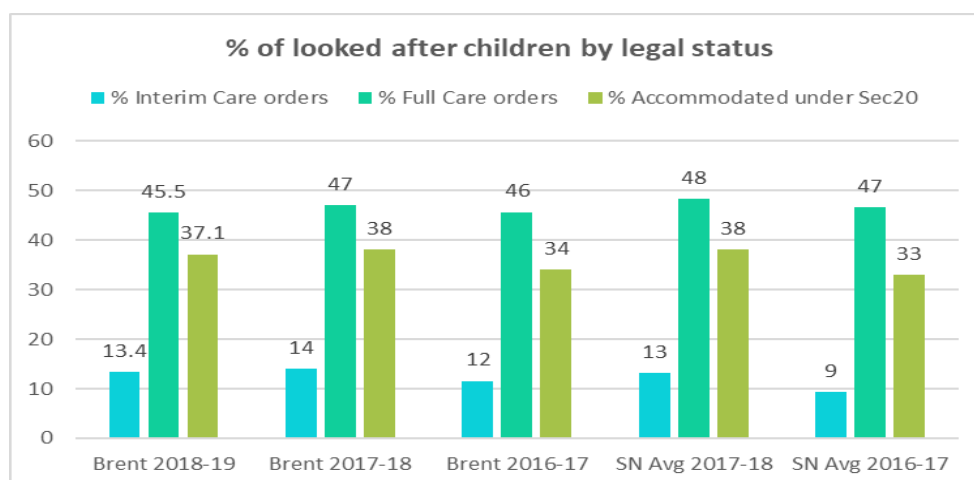
6.5 Ethnicity of LAC

6.6 Ethnicity of looked after children broadly remained the same compared to the previous year. The trend of a slight reduction in the number of looked after children from White UK and Asian background continued with a slight increase of children who are Black or Black British. The number of Black or Black British children and young people remains comparable with data from statistical neighbours.



7 Legal Status of LAC

- 7.1 The majority of looked after children were subject to Care Orders (Interim Care Orders and Full Care Orders) under the Children Act 1989, representing 58.9% of all LAC in this reporting year. A further 111 children (37.1% of all LAC) were in care through a voluntary agreement with the parents/carers as pursuant to Sec 20 of the Children Act 1989. The number of children in care through a voluntary agreement with parents remained broadly consistent compared to the previous year.



- 7.2 The proportion of children placed more than 20 miles away as at 31st March 2019 was 18.4%, compared to 19% in 17/18 (the national average is 14%). Brent Children and Young People's Services endeavour to place children locally, close to their families. However, in most cases of teenagers coming into care with multiple vulnerabilities, placing them out of borough was essential to safeguard them from associated risks such as gang, affiliation or county lines⁴. Additionally, the lack of sufficiency of local placement options for adolescents with complex needs was another reason for placing young people more than 20 miles away. *Brent's Sufficiency Strategy* identifies this as a national problem and includes measures to work in partnership with internal and external partners to broaden placement options for looked after children. An extract from the Ofsted Inspection Report in May 2018, highlights the careful planning that goes into placements of looked after children and reasons for out-of-borough placements:

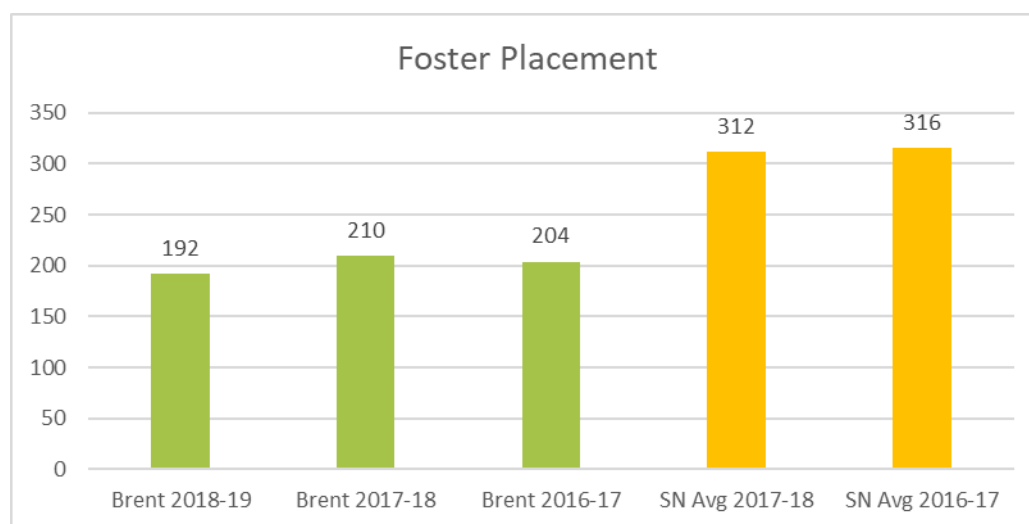
⁴ 'County lines' is a term used to describe an organised form of exploitation of children by gangs or crime networks. These children are made to travel across counties, and they use dedicated mobile phone 'lines' to supply drugs. See details at <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/news/958-county-lines-drug-networks-now-a-nation-wide-issue>

"Placement planning ensures that, wherever possible, children's homes are able to meet the unique needs of each child or young person. If they are placed out of borough, this is most often in response to a safeguarding or complex need..."

7.3 Placements of LAC in Brent

Most of our children resided within fostering placements (192) – 64.2% of all LAC, a decrease from the same point in 2018 (66.6%). This area of work remains to be a challenge for the service. The reasons for this are as below:

- Reduction in number of children in fostering households is partly due to an increased complexity of young people's needs, who enter the care system late, predominantly due to contextual safeguarding/extra familial risks⁵. Presenting needs are complex and associated risks are high and as such fostering households are not able meet the young people's needs.
- Lack of sufficiency of foster placements for teenagers in London and nationally plays a major role that impacts on this figure.
- Additionally, efforts to recruit and retain in-house foster carers have not been as successful as anticipated in 2018/19, mostly because of cessation of 6 assessments of prospective foster carers at a late stage due to various reasons including personal, fostering standards and safeguarding-related issues.



7.4 Recruitment and retention of foster carers remains a priority for 2019/20. An action plan is in place including exploration of regional consortia and/or

⁵ "Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships", <https://contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/about/what-is-contextual-safeguarding>

neighbouring local authorities for combined, needs-led and targeted marketing and recruitment and commissioning and integration activities.

7.5 Placement Stability

7.5.1 As at 31st March 2019, 39 children had three or more placements in the year (13% of all LAC), which is a marginal decrease from last year (13.2%, 3 fewer children). Placement disruption is unavoidable for some children and young people; Brent has a high number of adolescents with multiple complexities and risks coming to care late. Due to mostly contextual safeguarding-related risks coupled by adverse childhood experiences, some young people find it hard to build relationships with their carers and struggle to settle in placements for the initial period of care.

7.5.2 Placement stability continues to be a priority area. A robust process is in place to manage planned and unplanned placement changes for children and young people. For example, a weekly Placement Panel monitors and tracks placement change requests and works in coordination with internal and external partner agencies to ensure the placement change is in the best interest of children. Children and families, Brent Virtual School and IROs are consulted about placement changes prior to authorisation being sought from the Head of Service. An extract from the Ofsted Inspection in May 2018 shows the rigour in practice around placement stability:

"Disruption rates are low but unavoidable for some children and young people. Good preventative support is provided if disruption is anticipated. Lessons are learned from reviews if placements break down..."

7.6 Permanency and Care Proceedings

7.6.1 Between 01/04/18 and 31/03/19 there were 6 children adopted and 21 children who left care as they were placed on Special Guardianship Orders. Continuous focus on early and effective permanency planning has improved timescales for adoption even further compared to previous years. As at 31/03/19 the provisional average time in days between a child entering care and moving in with his/her adoptive family was 386.7 days. This shows an improvement on the figures over the previous three years, which was 391 days in the March 2018 published figures and is expected to place Brent's performance above the national average by year end when the data is published. The Corporate Parenting Committee provides six-monthly scrutiny on adoption performance.

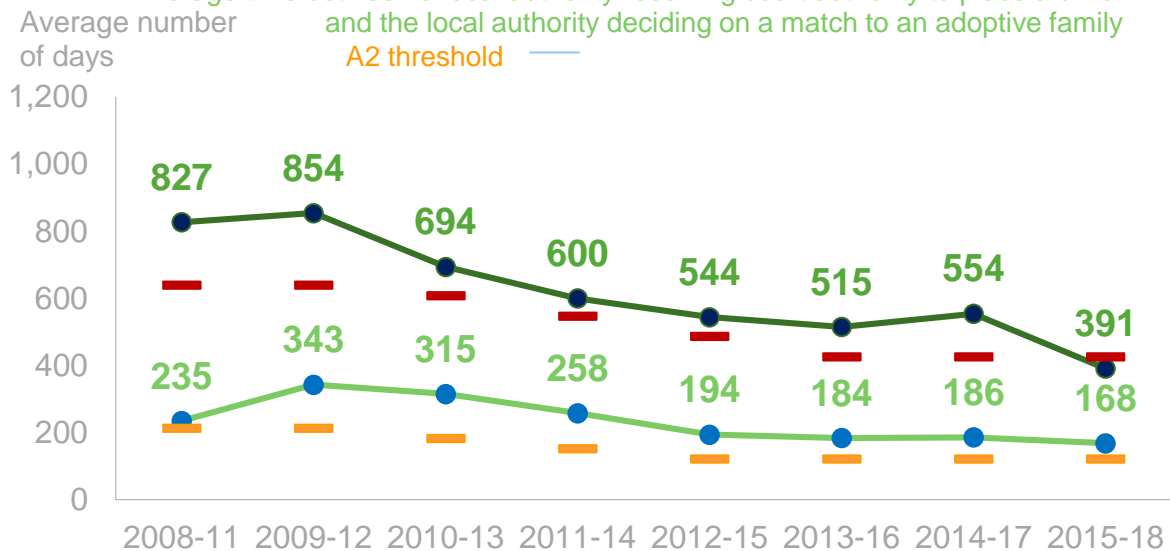
7.6.2 The chart below shows the latest available published data from the Department for Education.

A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family

A1 threshold —

A2: Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family

A2 threshold —



7.10 Care Proceedings

7.10.1 The number of care proceedings initiated by Brent has fallen again this reporting year, with a total of 51 cases being issued in 2018/19 compared to 57 in 2017/18. This could be attributed to the increase of families being worked with under a pre-proceedings framework⁶ during this reporting year.

7.10.2 The timeliness for the completion of care proceedings has lengthened, with an average time for 2018/19 of 38 weeks compared to 35 weeks-average of last reporting year.

| | 2015/16 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Brent | 31 weeks | 29 weeks | 35 weeks | 38 weeks |
| London average | 33 weeks | 29 weeks | 31 weeks | 33 weeks |

⁶ 'Pre-proceedings' is a term used to define a time period, prior to initiation of care proceedings, when the families are provided with a last chance to make changes in their parenting behaviour that causes the Local Authority to be concerned about their children. Family members are represented by their lawyers at this stage.

There continue to be multiple and complex reasons for the lengthening picture that include:

- A small number of cases which have been concluded in 50+ weeks which has had a significant impact on the overall average.
- Complexity within cases- new children born within proceedings, Fact Finding hearings and delays due to outstanding criminal charges/court processes.
- International elements which required travel, liaising with foreign authorities, legal bodies, and often prolonged, complex family assessments.
- A lack of court availability - leading to delayed final hearings. Please see paragraph 7.15 for further explanation.

7.10.3 A robust process was put in place in 2018/19 to further track care proceedings cases. The 'Care Proceedings Tracking meeting' continues to take place monthly, chaired by senior managers and legal representatives of the Local Authority. The meeting aims to quickly identify any issues that might cause or create delay within proceedings and rectify them.

7.10.4 The Service appointed a Social Work Practice Consultant championing the area of care proceedings and permanency over a portion of this past year with the aim of supporting and developing social work practice in these areas.

7.10.5 One of the issues contributing to delay in care proceedings was courts' lack of availability, and capacity issues. Brent raised this as a concern in Brent's bi-annual liaison meeting with West London Family Court during 2018/19. However due to the lack of progress, Brent has instigated a conversation with other West London authorities to explore a collective response and action plan to address this challenge. This work will continue in 2019/20 and remains a priority area.

8 Health of Looked After Children

8.1 Local Authorities, as the Corporate Parents, are 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.

| | 2016-2017 | | 2017-2018 | | 2018 - 2019 | |
|--|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|-------------|------------|
| Health care and development assessments | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| Number of Children looked after for more than 1 year and still looked after at 31/03 | 219 | 68.6% | 216 | 67.9% | 194 | 64.8% |
| Annual health assessment | 205 | 93.6% | 199 | 92.1% | 187 | 96% |
| Up to date immunisations | 157 | 72.6% | 145 | 72.8% | 137 | 71% |
| Number with an SDQ recorded | 149 | 94% | 67 | 47% | 149 | 90% |
| Teeth checked by a dentist | 194 | 88.5% | 181 | 90.9% | 160 | 82.5% |

- 8.2 There were 194 LAC who had been looked after by Brent for 12 months or more at the 31st March 2019. Of these 187 (96%) had an up to date health assessment, an improvement on the previous year's position (92.1%). Regular health quality assurance meetings are undertaken to improve performance further.
- 8.3 The percentage for dental checks and children with up to date immunisations slightly decreased in 2018/19 compared to 2017/18.
- 8.4 The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a tool that is completed by parents, carers or teachers, which measures behavioural difficulties of looked after children. This tool is designed to assist the carers as to whether the child has a well-being related problem. In this reporting year 90% of looked after children had an SDQ score recorded. This was a significant improvement compared to the previous year's score of 46%.
- 8.5 Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust provide Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for children aged 0-18. Tier 2 CAMHS service is known as Brent Emotional Wellbeing Team (BEWT) and it is co-located with social work teams. BEWT has continued providing clinical support via holding consultations with social workers and foster carers with

the aim to increase professional confidence, skill and knowledge in the areas of attachment, managing behaviour and reflective parenting. When the need arises for a Tier 3 CAMHS referral, clinicians support social workers in completing those referrals.

8.6 Multi-agency Partnership for LAC and Care Leavers

- 8.6.1 Brent's strong and effective multi-agency arrangements with external agencies such as CCG, schools and various providers ensures good outcomes for children in care and care leavers. The Children's Trust and Local Safeguarding Children's Board drove information sharing across partner agencies in 2018/19, aimed at consistency of approach and improving safeguarding for children and access to services. The Joint Commissioning Group (JCG), chaired by the Operational Director for Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy and reporting to the Children's Trust, continued monitoring the effectiveness of partnership working and commissioning arrangements for LAC and Care Leavers.
- 8.6.2 An operational multi-agency partnership meeting for looked after children and care leavers has continued to meet regularly with participation from the CiA, Looked After Children and Permanency Service, the Virtual School for looked after children, health professionals, CAMHS, CCG, YOS, Public Health and other providers when required. The meeting promotes collective responsibility and takes a systemic approach to improve overall outcomes for children in care and care leavers.

9. Children Missing or Absent from Care

- 9.1 In the year ending 31st March 2019, 78 LAC were reported to be missing from their placements once. This represented 16.5% of all LAC looked after at any point during the year (n=474). This is in line with the number of children reported missing from care in 2018/19.
- 9.2 58 of the 78 had more than one missing incident in the year. In this reporting year 50 LAC were reported as being absent from their care placement compared with 68 in 2018/19. 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, 33 children were absent from their placement more than once.
- 9.4 The Ofsted Inspection in May 2018 highlighted this area as requiring further improvement. Even though Brent's strategic response was found to be sound, further work was required operationally to provide a well-coordinated response. Additionally, more return home interviews were needed to be undertaken with children and young people. The inspectors stated below:

"While the strategic response when children go missing from home and care is good, the pace of improvement in operational practice has been too slow..."

- 9.5 Post-inspection an action plan was put in place to achieve the required improvement swiftly. As part of this action plan, a multi-agency Operational Missing Panel was established to bring all professionals working together with the relevant children and young people. This has resulted in a better coordinated operational response to the children and young people. As a result of the action plan, data quality has also improved with more return home interviews being offered to and taken by looked after children.
- 9.6 Children who go missing from care receive a robust response from their allocated social workers and partner agencies. A daily Integrated Risk Management Meeting, chaired by the Police is used to ensure effective strategies and timely response when a child goes missing. The Strategic Director, Children and Young People, in her role as the Statutory Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for children and young people receive weekly updates on children going missing.
- 9.7 Brent's Vulnerable Adolescents' Panel, chaired by the Operational Director for Integration and Improved Outcomes is a multi-agency forum with a strategic overview of different forms of vulnerabilities including children missing from care. The Vulnerable Adolescents Panel considers links between children missing and other areas of vulnerability such as:
- 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 mutilation or forced marriage.

10. Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE)

- 10.1 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. This includes looked after children and young people. The Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance 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.

- 10.2 The exploitation of children and young people has evolved to include child criminal exploitation (CCE), commonly referred to as county lines. This means that there are often interconnected risks associated with children going missing, CSE and CCE, a range of harm that occurs outside of the family home and is generally non familial. The MASE Panel started to use the term contextual safeguarding in recognition of this. The Panel requires agencies to consider the associations, environments and community that a child or young person engages with, as factors that can contribute to risks of harm.
- 10.3 In 2018/19 there were 23 looked after young people who were known to the MASE Panel. Of these, a total of 14 (4.9%) had been previously known to Panel and a further 9 young people have been identified through the Child Referral and Section 47 enquiry work-steps on Mosaic, electronic recording system as being at risk of CSE in 2018/19.

| Age | Total | Percentage |
|--------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 13 | 2 | 8.7% |
| 14 | 3 | 13.0% |
| 15 | 5 | 21.7% |
| 16 | 3 | 13.0% |
| 17 | 10 | 43.5% |
| Grand Total | 23 | 100% |

- 10.4 Of the total 23 Looked After Children identified as at risk of CSE, 73.9% are female, and 26.1% are male. Young people of Black or Black British ethnicity are over-represented in the cohort, at 47.8%. The average age is 16.

| Ethnicity | Total | Percentage |
|------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Black or Black British | 11 | 47.8% |
| White | 7 | 30.4% |
| Asian or Asian British | 3 | 13.0% |
| Other Ethnic Groups | 1 | 4.3% |
| Mixed / Multiple | 1 | 4.3% |
| Grand Total | 23 | 100% |

- 10.5 In response to this issue a number of actions have been undertaken to enhance the partnership response:

- The prioritisation of identifying funding opportunities to provide increased one-to-one support to children at risk of CSE. Safer London were funded in 2018/19 to work directly with young people at risk of CSE and provided short term intervention to a small cohort of young people using their Empower Programme.
- The Metropolitan Police has developed ways to track offenders and the MASE Panel is aware of potential offenders living in Brent, even if the victim is overseen by another local authority's MASE Panel. This has allowed for a greater understanding of trends happening in Brent and enabled disruption activities to be put in place.
- As part of targeted intervention and preventative work, MASE actively looks at locations where CSE has occurred or that are linked to CSE and develops activity to make these areas safer for children. In March 2019 the Metropolitan Police carried out an Operation Griffin refresher in 3 boroughs during CSE awareness week. The last day was spent in Brent, during which 5 hotels in the Wembley area were inspected, out of which only one passed the test. This replicated the poor pass rate as result of the same operation undertaken in September 2018, when only one hotel of 11 passed the test. In the debrief with hotels, the high turnover of staff working on Reception desks was cited as a key issue, with different policies in each hotel. In response, the Police will carry out regular spot checks on hotels every 3 months and give training to staff

11. Education of Looked After Children

11.1. The educational outcomes for looked after children for the academic year 2018/19 will not be available until January 2020. Details of educational outcomes in 2018 can be seen in the Virtual School annual report presented to the July 2019 Corporate Parenting Committee. Some of the Virtual School's achievements during 2017/18 are summarised below:

- All 204 children received appropriate education, including 96% in Good or Outstanding provisions.
- There were no Permanent Exclusions.
- Fewer Looked After Children were excluded from school – 20 compared with 29 in the previous academic year.
- At Key Stage 4, 22% of the eligible cohort achieved at least 4 passes including English or Maths.
- 13% of the eligible cohort achieved the benchmark of 5 passes (grade 4+) including English and Maths, which is consistent with LAC National data.
- At Year 12, support with retakes resulted in one previously disengaged student achieving the required grades to allow him to access A level studies.

- 87% of LAC had a destination school or college place secured for September 2018, and a new post-16 worker ensured all post 16 students had ePEPs.
- Brent Celebration event welcomed over 150 LAC and heard from a post 16 student who spoke passionately about his academic “turnaround” and the support he received from his school Designated Teacher and Brent Virtual School.
- A diverse and exciting enrichment programme took place across the year and included a week long residential at Jamie’s Farm, a Tall Ships sailing trip, Theatre trips, ESOL (English as a Second Language) enrichment programme focusing on British values and culture, and further university visits.
- Designated teachers for LAC (a statutory role), came to the Civic Centre to attend termly VS training; over 20 schools attended across the year, from in and out of borough. A Designated Teachers Conference was held in June 2018 at the Civic Centre welcoming 33 delegates from 9 schools.
- HEBB (Harrow, Ealing, Barnet and Brent) Virtual Schools joint network meeting was hosted by Brent in May 2018, at Wembley Learning Zone. This enabled neighbouring virtual schools to share and compare best practice, moderate PEPs and plan a joint enrichment programme. This joint Virtual School format is being piloted amongst the wider London network for a pan-London Virtual Schools’ conference during 2019.
- Children’s services were inspected by Ofsted in May 2018, and this included a review of the Virtual School. The report praised Brent’s focus on education for its Looked After cohort, stating: *“Senior managers place high priority on ensuring that children and young people in care attend good schools or alternative provision. A high proportion of children and young people come into care with significant gaps in their learning and attendance, many with complex needs and substantial barriers to overcome. Despite this, they are making better progress in care than they were previously. This is the result of highly effective partnership working.”*

12. Care Leavers

- 12.1 The Local Authority has a dedicated Leaving Care Service that provides support and guidance to all young people who leave their long-term care from the age of 18 years until they reach the age of 25, even if they are not in education or employment.
- 12.2 All care leavers have an allocated personal advisor who are introduced to them at the age of 17, before their transition to the leaving care service. This ensures that all those in care approaching 18 years of age, receive a consistent offer to progress the next steps of their journey. A personal

advisor is not a qualified social worker but will have background in working with young people in a variety of settings such as in youth justice, housing organisations or youth groups. The current establishment of the Leaving Care Service consists of 2 teams with 16 personal advisors supervised by 2 team managers.

- 12.3 As of 31st March 2019, Brent was responsible for the support to 317 Former Relevant Young People [aged 18 - 21] and 49 young people aged 22-25. In line with the Social Work Act 2017, Brent offers a 21+ service giving support, advice and guidance to any care leaver who may wish this support up to the age of 25.

12.4 Brent's Local Offer for Care Leavers

Brent's Local Offer to care leavers 2018/19, published on 1st April 2018, was one of the first published in the country. Brent consulted with senior leaders in the Council, members of staff, partners and most importantly young people in the development of the local offer. Young people played a vital role in the development of the offer. 119 care leavers participated in a direct consultation process which included face to face dialogue, workshops and a questionnaire being used.

- 12.5 The Local Offer agreed by Cabinet in 2018 included both an exemption for care leavers from Council Tax living in Brent and financial support to cover any Council Tax costs for Brent care leavers living outside of Brent from April 2018.

- 12.6 As part of Brent's Local Offer, 60 different commitments were made to care leavers. 8 of those commitments were statutory duties Brent needed to provide by law and 52 were additional, discretionary commitments made to care leavers. An analysis of impact of the local offer will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in July 2019.

13. Care Leavers in Education, Employment & Training

- 13.1 There were 46 young people in higher education in 2018/19. These included 20 young people aged 19-21, in university, studying a variety of subjects from Aerospace Technology with Pilot Studies to Business Studies and Sociology. Additionally, 26 care leavers aged between 22 and 25 were in higher education at the end of the reporting year. Brent had the same percentage of care leavers in higher education as statistical neighbours and more than nationally.

The table below highlights some of the comparative data for young people at university:

| Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in Higher Education | Brent | Brent % | Statistical Neighbour average | Statistical Neighbour average % | National figure | National figure % |
|---|-------|---------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 2017-18 | 31 | 14% | 24 | 9% | 1,750 | 6% |
| 2018-19 | 20 | 9% | | | | |

- 13.2 At the end of the reporting year, 74% of young people aged 18-25 were in education, employment and training. The figure is 56% amongst care leavers aged 19 to 21, which is in line with statistical neighbours, and better than the national average. 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 % | |
|--|-------|---------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--|
| 2017-18 | 111 | 50% | 144 | 55% | 14,640 | 51% | |
| 2018-19 | 131 | 56% | | | | | |

- 13.3 All care leavers attending University are provided with financial support which includes a Higher Education bursary [as endorsed by the Department for Education Charter for Care Leavers] of £2000 paid in 4 instalments plus subsidised travel to assist with travel costs. In addition, as per Brent's local offer young people (subject to a financial assessment) received subsistence and rent payments from Brent Council during Christmas, Easter and Summer vacations.
- 13.4 The case study below demonstrates Brent's commitment to support care leavers who have aspirations to attend higher education:

Case Study – A care leaver in higher education

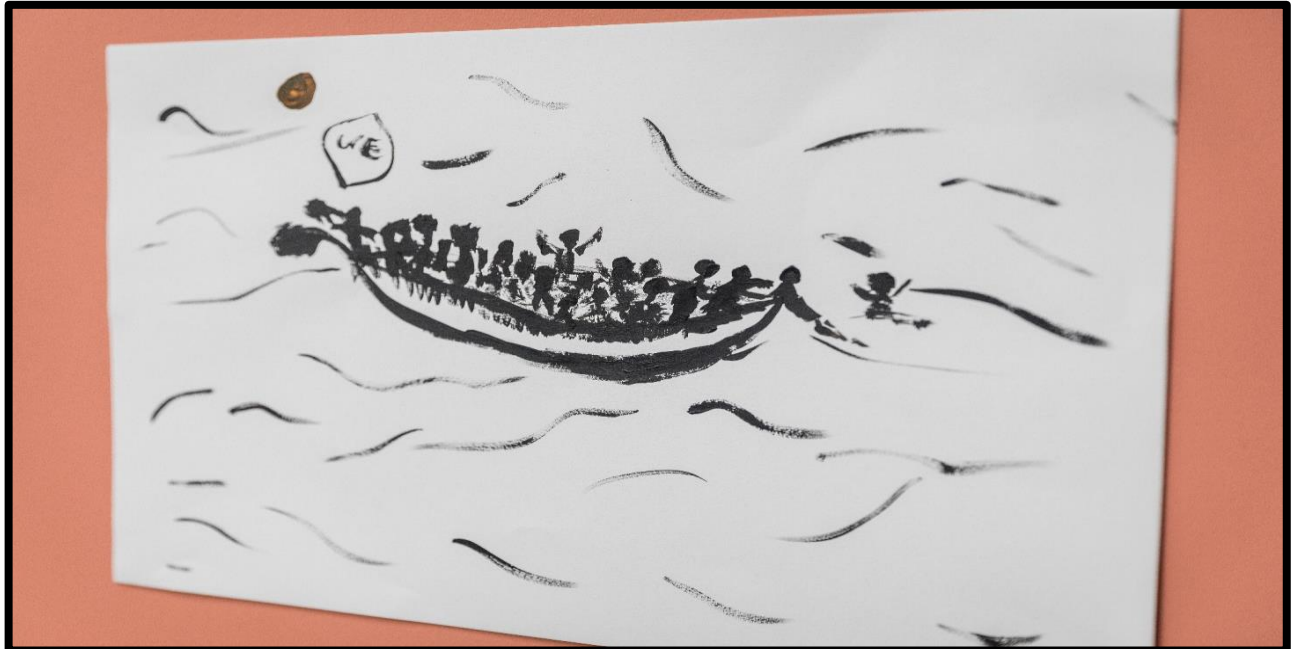
YV is a refugee from an Asian country. She was referred to Brent Social Care under the Home Office Referral System and was accommodated in June 2009.

YV has a good relationship with her Personal Advisor (PA) and engages well with the leaving care service as well as the Refugee Support Network. YV has mental health needs. She also experiences periods of debilitating anxiety and will resort to alcohol to manage stress and anxiety. YV was arrested when she was involved in a serious offence. An in-time asylum application had been submitted to the home office who advised that the decision for YV to remain indefinitely in the UK is dependent upon the outcome of the crown prosecution service (CPS) decision on the current criminal case.

The CPS took two years to decide that YV was a victim of DA and the charges against her were dropped to no further action. During this period YV was supported by her PA to transfer accommodation, access mental health services with the joint support of her GP, Refugee Support Network, student welfare, immigration solicitor and criminal solicitor. With support, she was able to remain focused on her studies. YV undertook work experience in a major fashion house and was recently involved in London fashion week. She was also invited to take part in fashion events in Milan and Paris but, at the time she did not have access to her passport. YV will be graduating from university in July 2019. The home office has now granted YV indefinite leave to remain. YV is now proactive in managing any issue that arises and no longer resorts to alcohol. YV has also been offered employment at notable fashion houses after graduation.

- 13.5 The Virtual School for LAC continues to monitor and track educational attainment for all looked after children and young people. Prospects [Connexions Provider for Brent] have a personal advisor who is based with the Virtual School 2 days a week. The advisor works in partnership with the Virtual School and the allocated social workers to identify appropriate routes to further education, employment or training.
- 13.6 Between February and March 2019, 16 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Looked After by Brent participated in a project called 'The Element Creative Arts Project' which was designed to improve their confidence and self-esteem, to support them in building new relationships and provide a creative outlet to express their feelings. There were eleven sessions delivered, covering the following art approaches: portraiture, collage, drama, card-making and calligraphy, graphic art, creative writing, photography, animation and dance. The project had a number of guest artists, some from migrant background themselves. At the end of the project the young people presented their work at an event at the Yellow in Wembley Park. In attendance were representatives from Brent children's services, Brent councillors, and representatives from arts organisations and youth

organisations. Below is a sample of some of the work that was showcased at the event.



13.7 Feedback from UASC attending the Element Project has been very positive.

"For this group of young people the council is like their family. We don't have our family here in the UK so the council is what we have. I have to say thank you to Brent council for offering projects like Element to us, and providing opportunities to work on creative things."

"We have travelled, travelled, travelled very far to get here, and now it is nice to meet some new people and make some good friends."

14. Care Leavers' Accommodation

- 14.1 All care leavers are given priority banding due to their leaving care status. Young people are only put forward for a council tenancy if the personal advisor after completing a vulnerability assessment with the young person agrees that he/she would be able to manage a council or housing association tenancy. A 'setting up Home Allowance' of £2000 is provided for care leavers to furnish their homes and buy essential items.
- 14.2 Brent has continued offering workshops to young people to better manage their finance and tenancy. MyBank [charity that works with young people] provided training to care leavers on money management and our colleagues in housing provided tenancy workshops for young people who are ready to be nominated for a tenancy.
- 14.3 A multi-agency audit of semi-independent provision was carried out with representatives from Leaving Care, virtual school, CYP commissioning, Brent CCG, Designated Professionals for looked after children and CYP Safeguarding and Quality Assurance. The audit took place between September 2018 and February 2019. It included interviews with young people, key-worker staff and social workers. All the young people interviewed felt they were safe. The audits identified some areas for improvement for which an action plan was put in place to address those, led by Brent's CYP Commissioning Team.

- 14.4 At the end of the reporting year, 81% of care leavers aged 19-21 were in suitable accommodation. This performance is slightly above statistical neighbours, but still below the national average. This is partly due to some care leavers who were former UASC, being refused leave to remain in the UK and choosing not to be in touch with the Local Authority⁷.

| Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in suitable accommodation | Brent | Brent % | Statistical Neighbour average | Statistical Neighbour average % | National figure | National figure % |
|---|-------|---------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 2017-18 | 167 | 76% | 203 | 80% | 23,510 | 84% |
| 2018-19 | 190 | 81% | | | | |

- 14.5 The following case study demonstrates transitional support offered to a care leaver following his release from prison:

Case Study – Accommodation

STF has a history of offending behaviour and received a 15-month sentence for breach of his probation in September 2018. He was released into an 'approved premise unit in March 2018, temporarily.

STF has mental health related difficulties namely a diagnosis for depression and anxiety. Prior to his release, the professional network came together to plan the support he would need in his transition back into community. The network consisted of his personal advisor, a team manager from leaving care team, representatives from the approved premises unit, probation service and Brent housing service.

Via careful and timely planning, the professional network ensured that all partner agencies worked together around a plan of transition for STF. He was placed in supported living where he receives advice and support to improve his employability prospects; having secure accommodation also reduces the likelihood of re-offending.

STF was supported to be in receipt of all of his benefit entitlements. The following quote from STF explains how the multi-agency group helped him to ***“land on his feet after prison, as I was so worried that I would be forced back in to my old life”***

⁷ Care leavers who came to the UK as unaccompanied minors need to apply to the Home Office to regulate their immigration status. Those who exhaust their appeal right to apply for leave to remain in the UK may choose to remain illegally and therefore lose touch with their PAs. In addition, a small group of care leavers in custody chose not to be in touch with the Local Authority although they have an allocated PA.

15. Service Priorities for 2019/20

- 15.1 Increasing the number of looked after children and care leavers who are in education, employment and training. This includes improving attendance and academic attainment for LAC, especially in Key Stage 4.
- 15.2 Further improving the stability of children and young people by providing more local and in-house placement options, minimising change of social workers and placements as well as developing partnerships with neighbouring authorities to recruit and retain more foster carers.
- 15.3 Working in partnership with other partner authorities in establishment and running of Adopt West London as West London's regional adoption agency.
- 15.4 Offering more return home interviews for children and young people who go missing from care (recommendation from the Ofsted Inspection)
- 15.5 Providing support to looked after children and care leavers in building healthy relationships and supportive networks to tackle isolation and loneliness after leaving care. Putting in place a 2 year-long project called 'networks for life' which aims to link LAC and care leavers with their families and support networks.
- 15.6 Implementation of an accredited life-skills programme for LAC and care leavers to assist better transition into adulthood.

Report sign off

GAIL TOLLEY
Strategic Director Children and
Young People.