



Brent

Corporate Parenting Committee

15 July 2020

Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People

Annual Corporate Parenting Report 2019-2020

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 020 8937 4382</p> <p>Sarah Miller Head of Virtual School for Looked After Children Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Brent 020 8937 3813</p> <p>Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Brent 020 8937 4091</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. It provides a profile of Brent's looked after children and care leavers during 2019-2020, reporting on annual activity, highlighting strengths and areas for development in supporting looked after children and care leavers in Brent. The report also includes the Looked After Children and Permanency Service's priorities for 2020/21.
- 1.2 Issues that were identified in the previous Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2018/19 have been updated throughout the body of this report.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review and comment on the contents of this report. This is in order to ensure that the care and support provided to Brent's LAC and care leavers is appropriately monitored. This is in addition to other reporting and scrutiny requirements.

3.0 Corporate Parenting

- 3.1 The concept of Corporate Parenting was introduced by The Children Act 2004, which placed collective responsibility on local authorities to achieve good parenting outcomes for all children in public care. 'Corporate Parent' defines the collective responsibility of council elected members, employees and partner agencies to provide the best possible care for LAC and care leavers.
- 3.2 The notion of being a corporate parent was developed and strengthened by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which highlighted the following 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 Elected members in Brent carry out their corporate parenting duty as follows:

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. This occurs on a quarterly basis.
2. Attendance of CiA (Care in Action) /CLiA (Care Leavers in Action) 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 CiA and CLiA with the Lead Member, Strategic Director, and Operational Directors for Children and Young People
5. Brent's 'Pledge' to LAC, '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 2019-2020 the Corporate Parenting Committee provided scrutiny and challenge as follows:

- a. Members of CiA and CLiA attended the Committee on a regular basis to report on their activity and to give their insights. Committee members noted their views and discussed how these could be applied to future work or to challenge the current work of the Local Authority.
- b. The Committee continued to monitor and scrutinise the management and delivery of Brent's fostering service.
- c. The management and delivery of adoption services also continued to be monitored by the Committee on a six-monthly basis. Although Brent's adoption service joined 'Adopt London West' in October 2019, the Committee continues to monitor delivery of adoption services on a six-monthly basis. A relevant senior manager of Adopt London West will present future reports alongside Brent officers to ensure a high standard of performance is maintained.

- d. In July 2019, the Committee reviewed and commented on a report providing details of the quality assurance activity for semi-independent provision that is commissioned by the council to accommodate LAC and care leavers. The report included the findings from a recent multi-agency quality assurance audit.
- e. The Committee was also presented with Brent's Annual Corporate Parenting Report for 2018/19 in July 2019. The report provided a summary of the profile of Brent's LAC and care leavers and the work and interventions undertaken in the last year to support the needs of children and young people. The Virtual School Annual Report for 2017/2018 was presented that outlined the activity and impact of the Brent Virtual School during the academic year 2017-2018. Further, a report providing an overview of Brent's Local Offer to Care Leavers 2018/2019 was presented and the proposed Local Offer for care leavers for 2019/20 was reviewed.
- f. In October 2019, the Committee reviewed the Bright Spots 'your life beyond care' survey for care leavers. The report detailed the responses to the survey, the actions as taken because of last year's survey and the planned response to this year's survey. Officers pledged to work with CLiA to identify specific projects based on the results of the survey.
- g. At the same Committee, the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report was presented and discussed that outlined feedback from looked after children on the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs). This feedback was gained through consultation with CiA. Further, the findings of the annual 'Children's Commissioner's 2019 Stability Index' for Children in Care was reviewed by the Committee. The Committee was presented with a summary of activities undertaken to achieve stability for looked after children in Brent and activities put in place for further improvements as a result of the findings of the report.
- h. In February 2020, the Committee was presented with the findings of the Ofsted Focused Visit on care leavers, which had taken place in November 2019. The findings and recommendations following the visit were discussed. The Committee also reviewed the Health Annual Report for LAC covering April 2018-March 2019. The report detailed the performance of the service in meeting the health needs of LAC and the priorities for 2019/20.

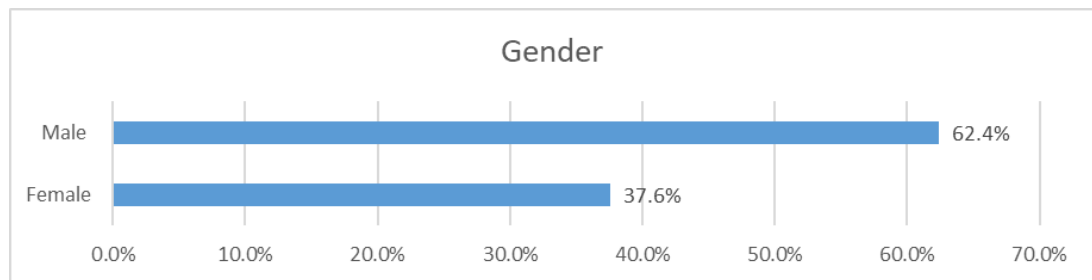
4.0 Profile of Looked after Children and care leavers

- 4.1 As of 31st March 2020 Brent had 298 children and young people who were looked after. This compares with 299 children on 31st March 2019. This represents 38.3 LAC per 10,000 head of child population against the rate for England of 62 per 10,000 head of child population. On 31st

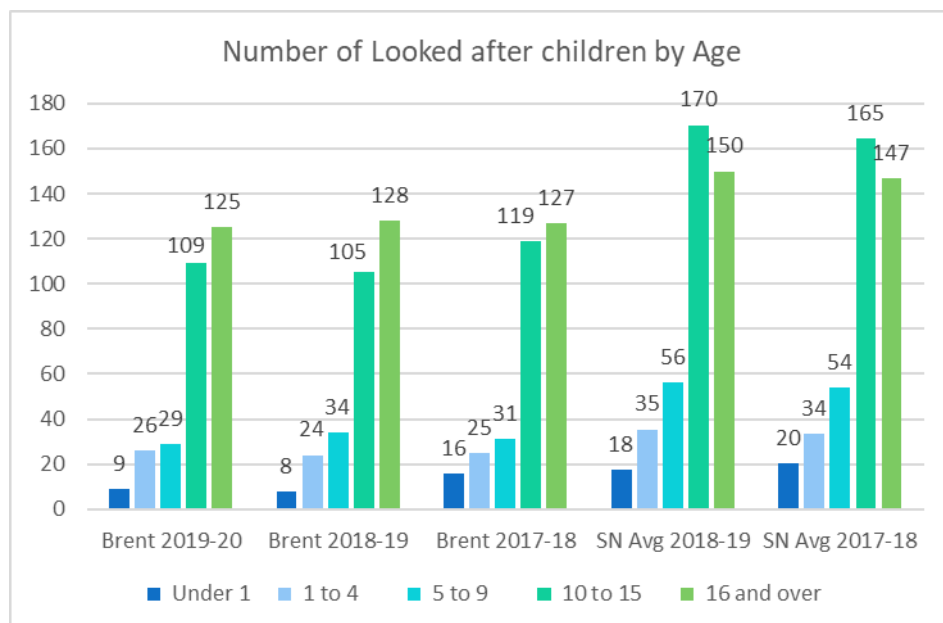
March 2020, the Local Authority looked after 60 UASC compared with 56 in March 2019. This represented 20.1% of the total Brent LAC population.

4.2 In 2019/2020, 47 children became children looked after for a second or subsequent time, in line with statistical neighbours, compared to 46 in 2018/19.

4.3 The gender of the LAC population consists of 62.4% male and 37.6% female, consistent with the position last year.



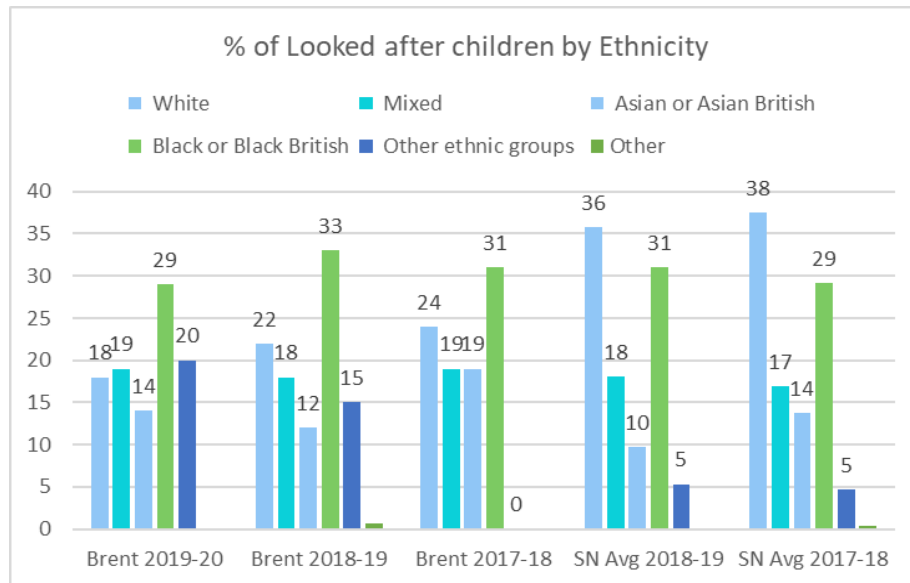
4.4 41.9% of the care population in Brent is aged over 16 years old, compared to 43% at the end of March 2019. Over 78% of the care population in Brent are aged 10 and over. Having a predominantly adolescent LAC population and associated risks present challenges around outcomes such as placement stability, education, employment and training.



4.5 Ethnicity of LAC

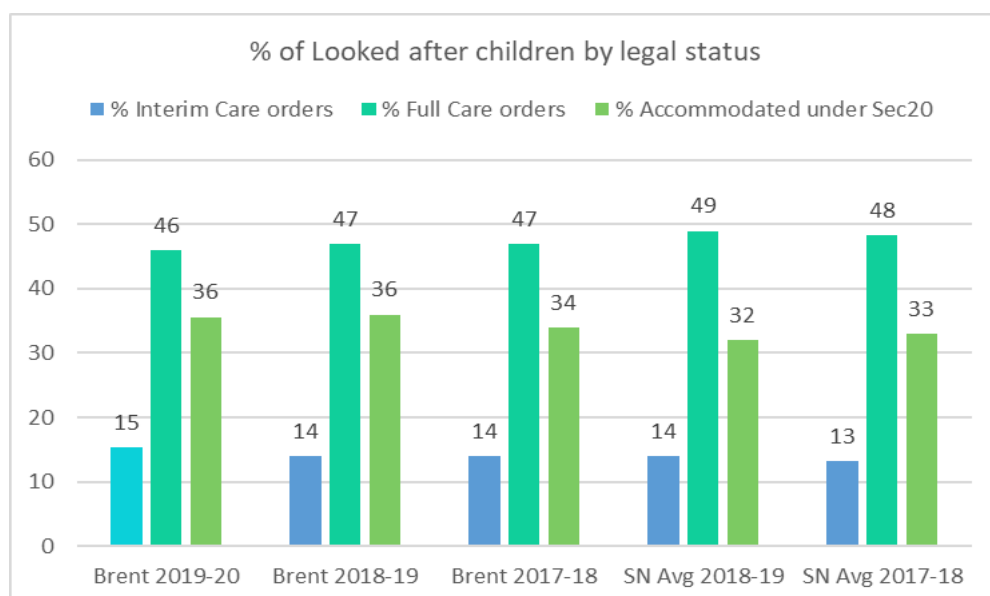
4.6 The ethnicity of looked after children broadly remained the same compared to the previous year. However, there has been a reduction in

the number of looked after children from White UK and Black or Black British backgrounds and an increase of children from Other Ethnic groups and Asian Background. The number of Black or Black British children and young people in care remains comparable with data from statistical neighbours.



5 Legal Status of LAC

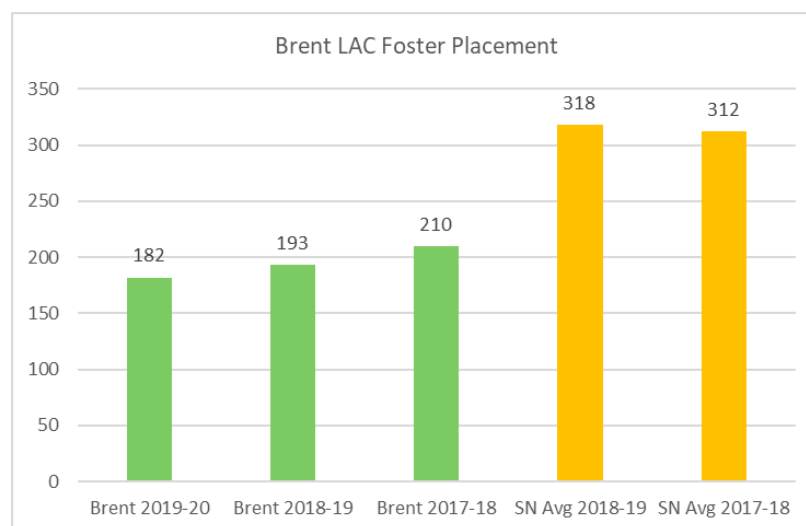
- 5.1 The majority of looked after children were subject to Care Orders under the Children Act 1989, representing 61.4% of all LAC in this reporting year. A further 106 children (35.6% of all LAC) were in care through a voluntary agreement with the parents/carers as pursuant to Sec 20 of the Children Act 1989. The number of children in care through a voluntary agreement with parents remained broadly consistent compared to the previous year.



- 5.2 The proportion of children placed more than 20 miles away from their home address as at 31st March 2020 was 20.5%, compared to 19% in 2018/19 (the national average is 14%). Brent Children's Services aims to place children closer to their families and local support networks. However, in many cases where children enter care in adolescence, young people may need to be placed out of borough for their own safety. Placement sufficiency issues in London are also evident as it is challenging to identify local placements for adolescents with highly complex needs. *Brent's Sufficiency Strategy 2020-22* identifies this issue as a local and regional issue, including measures to work in partnership with internal and external partners to broaden placement options for looked after children.

5.3 Placements of LAC in Brent

Most children resided within fostering placements (182) – 61.1% of all LAC, a decrease from the same point in 2019 (65%). This area of work remains a challenge for the service. Identifying foster placements for older LAC has continued to be a challenge due to lack of sufficiency in foster placement and the majority of LAC being teenagers (65.4% are over the age of 13 and 41.4% over the age of 16). Increases in late entrants to care coupled by a lack of foster placements for teenagers meant that many children were placed in semi-independent accommodation.



- 5.4. In 2019/20, 11 new fostering households were recruited, which is a significant improvement compared to last year's performance (2 new households were recruited in 2018/19). Brent Children's Services have a successful track record of placing children within kinship arrangements where it is safe to do so. This commitment has continued in 2019/20. The below case study is an example of Brent's tenacious work to identify and assess connected people in children's networks:

Case Study – Permanency with Kinship Carers

MC is the 6th child of her mother, with four older siblings adopted and one older sibling with a family member in a kinship arrangement. During her pregnancy, the local authority had concerns about MC's mother's drug use, mental ill-health (drug induced psychosis), homelessness, vulnerability to domestic and sexual abuse. These were the same concerns presenting in the care cases for her 5 older children. MC's father could not be traced.

As part of the permanency planning for MC, contact was made with adopters of the older siblings who all confirmed that they were not able to consider caring for her. Prior to MC's birth the social work team tried to make contact with an aunt who had been supporting mother. Despite maternal grandmother's refusal to be involved in planning for mother's previous 5 children and previous complaints made to the local authority making it clear that she did not want to be contacted about her daughter or her children, the social worker wrote to maternal grandmother to inform her about MC and provide contact details should she want to make contact with the local authority. This decision was made in MC's interest as maternal grandmother was our only known contact for MC's maternal family and as no father had been identified for MC, this meant that the maternal family were MC's only option to remain within her birth family.

At birth MC was placed into foster care, however during mother's labour she was supported by the aunt who the local authority had been trying to contact. Mother's aunt was actually a close family friend of the maternal family and put herself forward as a potential permanent carer for MC. Subsequently MC's maternal grandmother, maternal aunt and another close family friend came forward as potential carers for MC.

Whilst the local authority issued care proceedings in respect of MC, assessments were undertaken of all the potential kinship options. During the proceedings MC's maternal aunt made an application to have MC placed with her under an Interim Child Arrangement Order which was granted by the court. The local authority's final care plan for MC was for her to remain in the permanent care of the maternal aunt, which the court agreed with, and proceedings concluded with a Special Guardianship order being made to maternal aunt in respect of MC.

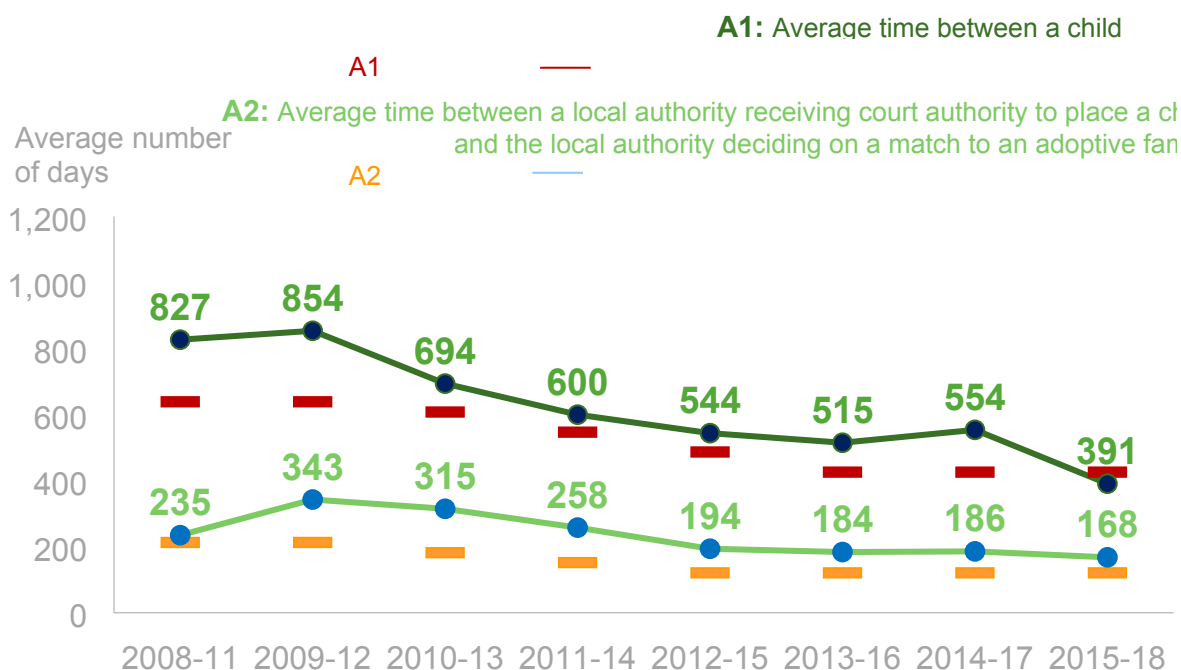
- 5.5 Recruitment and retention of foster carers remains a priority for 2020/21. In 2019/20, Brent led on a fostering feasibility study after a successful bid to the Department for Education for seed funding enabling three local authorities (Brent, Ealing and Hounslow) to work together with a charity (St Christopher's Fellowship) to produce a business case to DfE for a joint fostering service. The work is on-going in 2020/2021 with the aim to create a joint fostering service primarily aiming at increasing placement options for teenagers.

5.6 Placement Stability

- 5.6.1 As at 31st March 2020, 45 children had three or more placements in the year (15.3% of all LAC), which is an increase from last year (14%). Placement disruption has been unavoidable for some children and young people primarily due to the age profile of looked after children; high number of adolescents with multiple complexities and risks associated with late entry to care.
- 5.6.2 Placement stability continues to be a priority area for 2020/21. A weekly Placement Panel continues to monitor and track 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. The Head of Service for LAC and Permanency and the Head of Forward Planning, Performance and Partnerships are scrutinising requests for placement moves to minimise placement disruptions and the need for a placement change. Children and families, Brent Virtual School and IROs are consulted about placement changes prior to authorisation being sought. The Operational Director must approve any out of area placements and scrutiny is provided at this level of operational service decisions to ensure these are always made in the child's best interests.

5.7 Permanency Planning

- 5.7.1 Between 01/04/2019 and 31/03/2020 there were 5 children adopted and 21 children who left care through the making of Special Guardianship Orders. In addition, in this reporting period, 3 children were made subject of a Placement Order and 7 children were matched and placed with their adopters. As at 31/03/20 the provisional average time in days between a child entering care and moving in with his/her adoptive family was 392.6 days. This is a slight increase on last year (386.7 days) however remains in line with figures over the previous three years, which was 391 days in the March 2018 DfE published figures. The Corporate Parenting Committee provides six-monthly scrutiny on adoption performance.
- 5.7.2 This reporting period has seen the start of the new regionalised adoption and post order support with Adopt London West to carry out this work on behalf of Brent. Family finding for Brent children has continued to be a priority with ALW involved in permanency tracking activity on a monthly basis and leading on permanency planning meetings for children who have a care plan of adoption.
- 5.7.3 The chart below shows the latest available published data from the Department for Education, which shows strong adoption performance for Brent.



5.8 Care Proceedings

- 5.8.1 The number of care proceedings initiated by Brent has risen with a total of 73 cases being issued in 2019/20 compared to 51 cases in 2018/19. This increase is connected to the escalation of cases on Child Protection plans and in pre-proceedings. During this reporting year proceedings were concluded for 86 children.
- 5.8.2 The timeliness for *concluded* care proceedings cases in 2019/20 is in line with the national average at 32 weeks. This is an improvement on 38 weeks in 2018/19. Due to Covid-19 not all data was available for the reporting period.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Brent (Internal data 2019/2020)	29 weeks	35 weeks	38 weeks	32 weeks (CMS cases) 35 weeks (child cases)
London average (Baker Bulletin Q1 and 2)	29 weeks	31 weeks	33 weeks	37 weeks
National average (CAFCASS data for Q1, 2 and 3)	28 weeks	29 weeks	31 weeks	32 weeks

There continue to be multiple and complex reasons for cases that exceed the expected 26 week timeframe for proceedings and these include:

- Complexity within cases - new children born within proceedings, Fact Finding hearings and delays due to outstanding criminal charges/court processes.
- International elements, which require 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 7.8.5 for further explanation.

5.8.3 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 CYP managers and senior lawyers of the Local Authority. The meeting aims to quickly identify any issues that might cause or create delay within proceedings and rectify them.

5.8.4 A Social Work Practice Consultant (specialist in permanency planning and court work) has continued to support and develop social work practice in these areas by co-working court cases and working with looked after children teams to ensure that permanency planning is taking place for children in a timely manner. They have also been a pivotal link with Adopt London West.

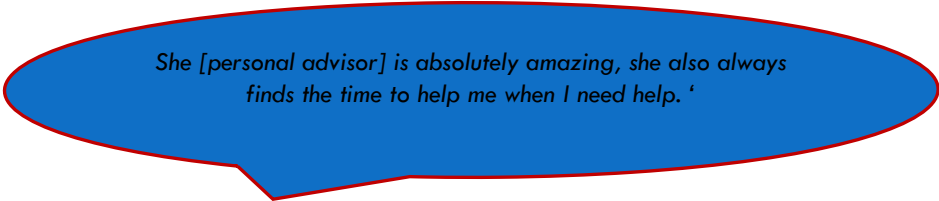
5.8.5 During the previous reporting year discussions were initiated with other West London authorities in order to provide a collective challenge to the West London Family Court regarding concerns about a lack of court availability and court capacity issues. A formal letter was sent to the court on behalf of West London authorities outlining concerns and suggested action plan. A formal response was received from the West London Family Court acknowledging the matters raised with ongoing work to increase the court's capacity. Actions to address this have been paused by the courts as a result of the covid-19 pandemic but it remains a priority for local authorities using the West London Family Courts.

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

6.1 Participation and engagement with looked after children and care leavers has continued to ensure their active involvement in decision making.

6.2 In 2019/20, in 65% of LAC reviews, the child/young person attended and spoke for themselves and 95% of reviews occurred within timescales, a similar position to 2018/19 when it was 68% and 95% respectively. Social workers and IROs ensured that care plans and pathway plans consistently included wishes and feelings of children and young people.

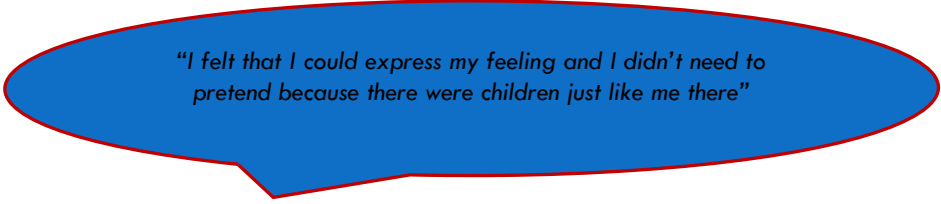
- 6.3 In 2019/20 care leavers participated in a Bright Spots Survey “Your life beyond care” which was a well-being survey for care leavers. The survey was developed with care leavers by Coram Voice and The University of Oxford. This was the first year the survey was completed by care leavers. Care Leavers completed the survey via an online app with the support of the Leaving Care Teams.
- 6.4 The Survey took place between February and May 2019 and results were made available to Brent Council in September 2019. The Survey’s findings highlighted many positives about care leavers’ experiences i.e. care leavers in Brent have very positive experiences with their leaving care workers; 93% could get in touch with their leaving care workers ‘some’, ‘most’ or ‘all’ of the time and 95% trusted their leaving care workers. As an example the following quote from a care leaver highlights the quality of relationships Personal Advisers have with care leavers:



She [personal advisor] is absolutely amazing, she also always finds the time to help me when I need help. ‘

- 6.5 The survey also reported some areas where care leavers need further support i.e. financial assistance and loneliness and isolation. The LACP Service along with multi-agency partners have translated findings of the survey into an action plan to ensure that a response was provided to care leavers. Similarly, CLIA reviewed the findings of the survey and decided that they could support care leavers with finance issues, an area of concerns for care leavers within the survey, through a ‘young person’s guide’. A small group of CLIA members have continued to work on developing a more comprehensive guide which will include information about finance, budgeting, health and wellbeing, education and training.
- 6.6 Junior CIA, CIA and CLIA held a number of activities in 2019-20 to support participation and engagement.
- 6.6.1 Junior CiA continued to meet on a monthly basis with consistent attendance of 12 children to support participation and engagement. Sessions included games and activities that help develop skills, build relationships and allow discussion around identified issues. The group has been involved in reviewing the Brent Pledge and will contribute to a revised ‘pledge’.

- 6.6.2 CiA is comprised of a small group of 10 young people aged 11-17. In 2019/20 CiA was involved in a number of activities to raise awareness about their needs and experiences. For example, the group attended a three-day drama project in October 2019 with 'The Big House' which allowed young people to discuss their experiences of being in care. Another example was that CIA members have also contributed to the planning of World Social Work Day, giving feedback on their experiences and questions they would like to ask social workers. The below quote from a CIA member shows why she is attending the sessions:



"I felt that I could express my feeling and I didn't need to pretend because there were children just like me there"

- 6.6.3 CLiA worked on several topics and contributed to decision making in many areas in 2019/20. Members of CLiA always attend Corporate Parenting Committee, voicing the views of care leavers in Brent and providing updates on their activities. They regularly contribute to the strategic direction of services. For example, their views contributed to a revised Staying Put Policy where their experiences and views were used to enhance the offer. They provided input into other key strategic pieces of work including a Health Booklet for Young People; Safer Brent Young People's Consultation and Borough of Culture 2020. Most importantly, they have played a key role in listening to the views of other care leavers through surveys and contributing to improvement activities. For example, following learning about financial struggles in independence, CLiA decided that they want to be involved in the type and content of financial information provided when young people leave care. They are actively working on a project ensure those leaving care have the financial information they need in an accessible way. Senior managers have regularly attended sessions with CLiA which has allowed young people to provide feedback about their experiences and ask questions about the service they receive.
- 6.6.4 A thriving weekly football night has continued throughout the year. Starting in September 2018 it has engaged more than 25 care leavers right up until COVID-19 lockdown began in March 2020. Senior managers have met with the Jason Roberts Foundation to discuss how to expand the work further to include a cross-authority football league, mentoring and EET opportunities that is combined with the weekly football fixture.

- 6.7 The monthly care leavers' hub has also continued with up to 30 young people attending. This year, 20 young people attended dinner and a theatre performance at the Kiln in Kilburn and there have been many other events including a cooking event where personal advisors supported a group of young people to cook a meal for the wider group. As at 31st March 2020, the Hub WhatsApp group has grown to over 45 young people who have conversations and entertainment.



- 6.8 In 2019/20, advocacy services for children and young people were provided by a commissioned provider (Aidhour). Children and young people have been supported by advocates on a variety of issues including age assessment disputes, communication with professionals and placement related matters. IROs routinely informed the children and young people to ensure that they knew about advocacy and how this could support them in having a say in decisions affecting their lives. They also check at each LAC Review whether an independent visitor would be needed and if there were any communication needs requiring additional or specialist support.
- 6.9 In addition to the advocacy service, Brent has a commissioned Independent Visitors Scheme to support children and young people. Between April 2019 and March 2020, 13 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:

"Having (X) as my Independent Visitor has changed me for the better", young person aged 15, matched for 4 years

- 6.10 The organisation 'Element' was re-commissioned in April 2019 to run an arts programme for a group of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and a second Element Programme was completed in March 2020 for LAC. Young people presented a showcase of their work to professionals and dignitaries. Many Brent young people joined other young creatives in a video about Element's network, which evidences one of Element's major values, that support must be long-lasting and offer tangible and ambitious progression routes.

7 Health of Looked After Children

- 7.1 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%

- 7.2 LAC Health data for 2019/20 has not yet been submitted to DfE as part of the statutory data reporting requirement and will not be submitted until August 2020. Invalidated data shows that health outcomes remain strong for looked after children.
- 7.3 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for children aged 0-18 are provided by Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust. Tier 2 CAMHS service is known as Brent Emotional Wellbeing Service (BEWS) and it is co-located with social work teams. Similarly with last year, BEWS 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 Multi-agency Partnership for LAC and Care Leavers

- 8.1 Brent had a key role in the establishment of Adopt London West (ALW) in October 2019. Unlike the other London RAAs, ALW also offers support to Special Guardians, a significant group requiring longer-term support.

Brent's focus on achieving adoption timely for the 'right children' continues to be a driving force in this multi-agency activity.

- 8.2 Brent has strong and effective multi-agency arrangements with external partners such as CCG, schools and various providers. The Children's Trust, chaired by the DCS has a strategic overview of partnership working. 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.
- 8.3 An operational multi-agency partnership meeting for looked after children and care leavers has continued to meet regularly with participation from 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 2020, 95 LAC were reported to be missing from their placements at least once. This represented 20.4% of all LAC looked after at any point during the year (n=466). This is in line with the number of children reported missing from care in 2018/19. 67 of the 95 had more than one missing incident in the year. In this reporting year 42 children were reported as being absent from their care placement compared with 50 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, 36 children were absent from their placement more than once.
- 9.2 Marked improvements were observed in the intervention provided to young people who are reported missing to LAC and Permanency Service in 2019/20 compared to 2018/19. This included the increased number of return home interviews, professional meetings and strategy discussions/meetings to safeguard adolescents.
- 9.3 Staff have been offered training on the contextual safeguarding approach to understand, and respond to, young people's experiences of significant harm that happen beyond their families. A social worker has taken up the role of a 'contextual safeguarding champion' in the service to promote the approach amongst peers.
- 9.4 A Vulnerability Risk Assessment tool has been in use with all contextual safeguarding headlines within CYP department for consistency. Since November 2018, the number of return home interviews for looked After Children has significantly increased, and missing children-related intervention has been robust. Social workers have been receiving one

to one support from a Social Work Practice Consultant who has a specialist role in supporting vulnerable adolescents. Social Workers have been reported to be proactive in completing the missing records in a timely manner. Multiagency working has also improved in providing ongoing support for young people who have been identified as a high risk group according to their risk assessments with contextual safeguarding headlines.

- 9.5 There are two panels in operation to improve multiagency collaboration in tackling contextual safeguarding issues including missing/absent from care; one is the Child Exploitation and Missing Panel (CEMP) and the other Violence and Vulnerability Programme (VVP).
- 9.6 The **Child Exploitation and Missing Panel (CEMP)**, chaired by Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service, meets monthly and is attended by various partners including Police, Health, Community Safety, Youth Offending Service. It was created by merging the Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation Panel (MASE) and Missing Operations Panel (MOP). There is an overlap between missing episodes, Child Sexual Exploitation and gang affiliation, particularly drug activity. The CEMP membership consists of several agencies it has oversight on local authority's collective response to children and young people who experience harm and abuse outside of their families. Social Workers have presented cases of LAC at the CEMP with multiple vulnerabilities.
- 9.7 The **Violence and Vulnerability Programme (VVP)** occurs fortnightly and is chaired by the Head of Community Safety. It focuses on reducing re-offending and serious violence through a multi-agency and intelligence- led panel for young people and young adults who reside in Brent. The programme focuses on groups not yet known to statutory services, increasing earlier intervention where needed and identifying unknown potentially younger groups. The programme consists of prolific offenders, weapon carriers, domestic abuse perpetrators and those affiliated, or at risk of affiliation, with gangs. This panel also looks at cases for 18 plus who are open to care leaver's teams; this is a recent development and is focused on transitional safeguarding.
- 9.8 A number of LAC and care leavers' cases have been presented to CEMP and VVP panels, which has influenced positively the way different agencies have collaborated together to support social workers to manage risks and provide advice on safety planning for young people. The support provided on multi-agency safeguarding responses has also helped to remove barriers to working across agency networks, helping to carry out agreed safety plans that require a multi-agency/layered approach. The panel reviews cases and supports practitioners where multi-agency escalation is required. It also decides which cases need to come back to panel for review and this is dependent on the level of risk.

10. Education of Looked After Children

10.1. In partnership with settings, schools, social workers and carers, Brent Virtual School¹ has achieved the following for the children and young people in its care during 2018/19:

- Attendance has improved for the Virtual school pupil register as a whole, from 86% to 88%, which was a key priority from previous year.
- All 203 Looked After pupils received appropriate education, with 91% in Good or Outstanding schools, consistent with previous year.
- There were no Permanent Exclusions, as per previous year's data.
- Improved performance data at KS1, (note: small pupil cohort): 100% Good Level of Development (GLD) at EYFS; 100% achieved expected standard in Year 1 phonics test.
- At Key Stage 2 Reading reached the expected standard for 40% of the cohort.
- At Key Stage 4, 15% of the eligible cohort achieved a pass in both core subjects of English and maths.
- 89% of LAC had a destination school or college place secured for September 2019.
- Brent Celebration event welcomed over 150 LAC at Brent Civic Centre, with speeches and performances from several young people.

11. Care Leavers

- 11.1 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.
- 11.2 All care leavers have an allocated personal advisor who is 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, already know their personal advisor and have developed a positive relationship in working alongside their allocated social worker. 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 two teams with 16 personal advisors supervised by two team managers.
- 11.3 As of 31st March 2020, Brent was responsible for the support to 218 Former Relevant Young People [aged 18 - 21] (a drop of -31% from 317 last year) and 130 young people aged 22-25 (an increase of 165% from 49 last year). In line with the Social Work Act 2017, Brent offers a 21+

¹ For detailed information on educational outcomes for looked after children in Brent, please see Brent Virtual School Annual Report 2018/19 presented at the Corporate Parenting Committee on 15th July 2020.

service giving support, advice and guidance to any care leaver who may wish to have this support up to the age of 25.

11.4 Brent's Local Offer for Care Leavers

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 (Section 2 of the Act) introduced a new obligation for local authorities to publish a local offer for care leavers to include their support and guidance to care leavers. It requires each local authority to consult on and publish an enhanced local offer for its care leavers. The local offer should provide information about all the services and support that are available to care leavers from the local authority, including information about both their statutory entitlements and any discretionary support from the local authority chooses to provide.

11.5 DfE guidance suggests that it would “expect the local offer to be reviewed every 2-3 years”, although this was not “prescriptive”, it would be for the local authorities to decide. Senior leaders in Brent made a decision for the progress of the local offer to be reviewed on an annual basis with the view to revise it on a two yearly cycle. In this way, care leavers’ needs will be kept on the agenda annually.

11.6. In March 2020 we consulted with young people and stakeholders; over 100 care leavers participated in a consultation process, which included face-to-face dialogue, and completing on-line questionnaires. The feedback received from the consultation enabled us to review and amend the local offer.

11.7 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 was presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in May 2020.

12. Care Leavers in Education, Employment & Training

12.1 There were 41 young people in higher education in 2019/20. These included 24 young people aged 19-21 at university, studying a variety of subjects from Aerospace Technology with Pilot Studies, to Business Studies and Sociology. Additionally, 15 care leavers aged between 22 and 25 were in higher education at the end of the reporting year. Brent had a higher percentage of care leavers in higher education than statistical neighbours and 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	figure %
2018-19	20	8%	24	9%	1,860	6%
2019-20	24	10%				

12.2 At the end of the reporting year, 57% of young people aged 18-25 were in education, employment and training. The figure is 57% amongst care leavers aged 19 to 21, which is slightly above 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	figure %
2018-19	131	56%	147	54%	15,640	52%
2019-20	137	57%				

12.3 All care leavers attending University are provided with financial support that 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.

12.4 The case study below demonstrates Brent's commitment to support care leavers who aspire to attend higher education:

Case Study – A care leaver in higher education

TS is a 22-year-old care leaver. He has remained in the same Staying Put placement for many years and has a very close relationship with the foster carer. After he left Uxbridge college, he was offered a place to study Journalism and creative writing at 4 universities.

Recently he graduated from Hertfordshire University. He was supported during the time to stay on campus but to return to his Staying Put carer for

holidays. TS has epilepsy and his carer has been vital in supporting him with appointments. During TS's final year, he wanted some work experience and the team manager explored links in her personal network and secured TS with a work placement at a London audio production company. TS loved the experience and the company were so positive about him that they invited him to come back on numerous occasions for further experience. They also invited him for a job interview but unfortunately, he was unsuccessful as someone else had more experience.

When TS graduated in 2019, he was looking for his first job in media. TS was again supported by the Leaving Care team to send his CV to a London animation company. TS passed the interview and obtained a 6-month contract, which he currently continues to work at home during lockdown. He is really enjoying the role and is confident that it will shortly turn into a permanent position, which will give him the confidence to leave his Staying Put placement and make the transition into his own tenancy.

- 12.5 Between February and March 2020, a group of care leavers and looked after children by Brent participated in a project called 'Creative Space' 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. The theme for this year's project was that beautiful things can evolve when young people are given the time and space to create, and in 2020's Borough of Cultures our young creatives were given the opportunity to experiment with painting, photography, poetry, drama, craft and more. Brent Council officers, foster carers got the chance to view the results and tried their hand at creating their very own piece of art, led by the Element Young Creatives. The project was led by the 'Elements' project but co-hosted by Youth Facilitator (Brent young person who participated in previous Element project) which involved training in facilitation, session design and other relevant skills and the young person was paid for doing the work. Below is feedback from a young person;

'I liked when we showed the work at the showcase because it was really fun to show what I did, and to teach and show adults that they don't know everything!'

13. Care Leavers' Accommodation

- 13.1 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.

- 13.2 As part of the review of the service level agreement with Brent Housing the service ensured that young people participated in an independent life skills programme and attended Tenancy Workshops. An ASDAN 'Living Independently' Short Course was recently introduced, which young people will work through and receive a certificate. This will further evidence their readiness to be nominated for a tenancy.
- 13.3 Brent has continued offering workshops to young people to better manage their finance and tenancy. MyBnk [charity that works with young people] provided training to care leavers on money management and Housing colleagues provided tenancy workshops for young people who are ready to be nominated for a tenancy.
- 13.4 At the end of the reporting year, 82% of care leavers aged 19-21 were in suitable accommodation. This performance is equal to statistical neighbours and slightly 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 Authority².

Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in suitable accommodation	Brent	Brent %	Statistical Neighbour average	Statistical Neighbour average %	National figure	National figure %
2018-19	190	81%	219	82%	25,050	85%
2019-20	197	82%				

- 13.5 The following case study demonstrates housing support offered to a care leaver who cannot live in Brent due to his previous involvement with gangs:

Case Study – Accommodation

EC has a history of gang affiliation and is a victim of knife crime where he sustained serious injuries that required surgery in 2019.

Since then, EC has been able to make changes that minimised the risk of repeated criminal activity and gang affiliation. Despite his age of 21, Brent has maintained his placement and worked closely with Safer London and Housing to identify a reciprocal arrangement for him to be relocated to another borough. Remaining in a Brent tenancy would have increased the likelihood of reoffending and gang affiliation. It has been a long and frustrating journey for EC however; he now has a viewing for his potential new home.

² 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.

The multi-agency work is a testament to joint working with Safer London, the police, Brent housing department, the leaving care team and housing department in the receiving borough, all of which was happening during the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought its own challenges.

Professionals have had to be creative whilst adhering to government guidance around social distancing to progress EC's housing situation. For EC this new home is not only a home, it is hope for his future, he has engaged in voluntary work with a local business and had successfully applied and secured a part time job with an agency providing warehouse staff to businesses in North London. During his rehabilitation, EC has volunteered and worked with The Manhood Academy to share his experiences about being involved in gang culture in an effort to dissuade young people from joining gangs

The following quote from EC explains how the multi-agency group helped him ***“to have hope again”***

14. Focused Visit by Ofsted in November 2019

14.1 Ofsted inspected arrangements for care leavers as part of the Inspection of Local Authorities Children Services (ILACS) framework in November 2019. Inspectors reviewed the quality of service provided to care leavers as well as leadership and management arrangements. Outcomes for care leavers were scrutinised around suitability of accommodation; education, employment and training; health including emotional and mental health; quality of overall practice incorporating quality assurance arrangements.

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

- Robust partnership arrangements to support care leavers.
- Recent Transitional Safeguarding Workshop was well attended by partners to further develop pathways for transition into adult services.
- Senior managers know their services well and address areas of practice where improvement is required.
- Work undertaken by senior managers to stabilise workforce was praised.
- Staff are aspirational for care leavers.

- ‘Accredited life skills programme’, ‘group work’ and ‘Networks for Life’ are ambitious programmes aimed at building resilience and equipping young people with skills they need in adulthood.
- The majority of care leavers are in suitable accommodation as a result of effective partnership working and commissioning arrangements. No tenancy breakdown for care leavers in the last three years were noted.
- A strong focus ensuring that care leavers access education, employment and training. Most care leavers receive help in developing skills to promote their independence; 10 care leavers in apprenticeships and the council working with partners to increase the number of care leavers in apprenticeships.
- Health assessments are conducted regularly and are of good quality. Mental health support to care leavers provided by Safe Base Brent was deemed to be a strength.
- The voice of young people is listened to via various mechanisms such as the Bright Spots Survey, Care in Action, Care Leavers Hub and other enrichment activities.
- UASC (unaccompanied asylum seeking children) receive timely and sensitive support which is a strength. UASC in all cases seen by the inspectors were receiving appropriate support with focus

14.3 The following quotes from the Focused Visit feedback letter highlight the strengths of the support provided by Brent as a strong corporate parent:

“Care leavers are provided with a varied range of social and enrichment opportunities, which they appreciate and value...”

“Care leavers continue to be a council-wide priority in Brent. A comprehensive local offer, together with strong corporate and political support and engagement with partners and the young people themselves, enables senior managers to focus on developing services to improve outcomes for care leavers...”

“Care leavers benefit from being exempt from paying council tax, whether they live in or out of the authority, an initiative that was developed with full council and political support as part of the comprehensive local offer...”

“The majority of pathway plans are completed collaboratively with care leavers. This means that most care leavers are involved with and participate in planning for their futures. ..”

“There is a strong focus on ensuring care leavers access education, employment and training...”

The Inspection identified the following as development areas:

- Need for consistency in the timeliness and quality of pathway plans
- Case recording including records of visits to care leavers, supervision and management oversight and the management rationale for case closures
- Audit arrangements to consider the quality of work with care leavers
- Risk assessments to articulate measures to address and minimise risk

14.4 In response to the above recommendations, an action plan was developed, targeting the above improvement areas. The action plan has been scrutinised on a monthly basis by the Strategic Director of Children and Young People and will have been completed by July 2020. A completion report will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in October 2020.

15 Priorities for Corporate Parenting Partners 2020/21

- 15.1 CYP and Police to lead on the response to vulnerable adolescents, decreasing the number of children and young people at risk of exploitation and missing from care.
- 15.2 Work in partnership between Brent Employment Enterprise and Skills, Prospects and Brent Virtual School for Looked After Children to increase the number of looked after children and care leavers in education, apprenticeships, employment and training in line with the published local offer for care leavers.
- 15.3 Brent Housing and CYP to ensure that suitable accommodation pathways for care leavers are well established and they meet their needs.
- 15.4 Health commissioners and providers to enable looked after children and care leavers to access physical, emotional and mental wellbeing services with particular focus on those affected by Covid-19.

- 15.5 CYP to further improve the stability of children by providing more local and in-house placement options, minimising changes of social workers and placements as well as developing partnerships with neighbouring authorities to recruit and retain more foster carers.

Onder Beter
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