

	<b>Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee</b> 28 April 2025
	<b>Report from the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development and the Corporate Director of Service Reform and Strategy</b>
	<b>Lead Cabinet Members:</b> <b>Cllr Gwen Grahl (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools), Cllr Neil Nerva (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Leisure)</b>
<b>Meeting the Adults and Children's Social Care Workforce Challenges</b>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	Non-Key
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>List of Appendices:</b>	None
<b>Background Papers:</b>	None
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Palvinder Kudhail Director, Early Help and Social Care Children, Young People and Community Development Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk  Claudia Brown Director, Adult Social Care Service Reform and Strategy Claudia.Brown@brent.gov.uk

## 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report presents an overview of the current workforce practices, challenges, and strategic responses relating to the recruitment and retention of social care professionals within Brent Council. A stable and well-resourced social care workforce is essential to delivering high-quality services to Brent's most vulnerable adults, children, and families.

- 1.2 The report outlines the specific and ongoing challenges Brent faces within both Children's and Adult Social Care services, particularly in relation to the recruitment and retention of regulated professionals, including social workers, occupational therapists, and rehabilitation officers for visually impaired people (ROVIs). These challenges are examined within the wider context of a significant London-wide and national shortage of skilled practitioners across the sector.
- 1.3 The report also provides a summary of the measures Children's and Adult Social Care services have implemented to address these workforce issues, alongside planned initiatives for the next 12 months. These include improvements to recruitment processes, enhanced support for newly qualified staff, retention payments, and the conversion of agency workers to permanent roles. Early evidence suggests that these strategies are beginning to have a positive impact on workforce stability across both Adults' and Children's Social Care.

## **2.0 Recommendation**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee note the activity being undertaken at a local, regional and national level to address the social care workforce challenges.

## **3.0 Detail**

### **3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities and Strategic Context**

This report relates to these relevant priorities within the Borough Plan:

- Thriving Communities – In adult social care, a permanent and well supported workforce enables residents to maintain their independence, participate in community life, and reduce the risk of social isolation. A consistent care presence fosters stronger relationships with residents, enhancing trust and engagement within local neighbourhoods.
- The Best Start in Life –In children's social care, a consistent workforce ensures continuity of intervention and support for families, improving outcomes across education, health, safeguarding and a range of indicators. A stable workforce across both children's and adult services also facilitates smoother transitions for young people with ongoing care needs, supporting improved long-term outcomes into adulthood.
- A Healthier Brent – The delivery of safe, high-quality, and personalised care is underpinned by a skilled and stable workforce. By investing in the professional development and wellbeing of staff, both adult and children's social care services are better equipped to meet the complex needs of residents, promoting physical and mental health across the life course.

## **4.0 Background**

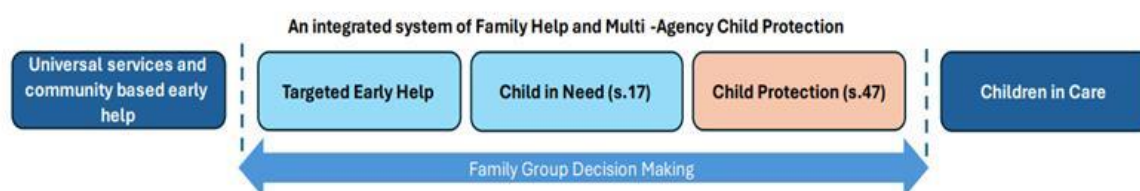
## Children and Young People

4.1 The Department for Education (DfE) retains responsibility for national development and support for the children's social work workforce. The new government has recently announced a reform programme for children's social care, contained within the Children's Wellbeing and Schools bill. This is informed by the 2023 policy document, *Stable Homes Built on Love* which was itself created following the Independent Review of Children's Social Care. There is now general national policy consensus on what the purpose of children's social care is and therefore what social workers should be focused upon:

- To give support to children, young people and families who need extra help
- To protect children and young people from harm
- To give care and a home to children and young people when needed.

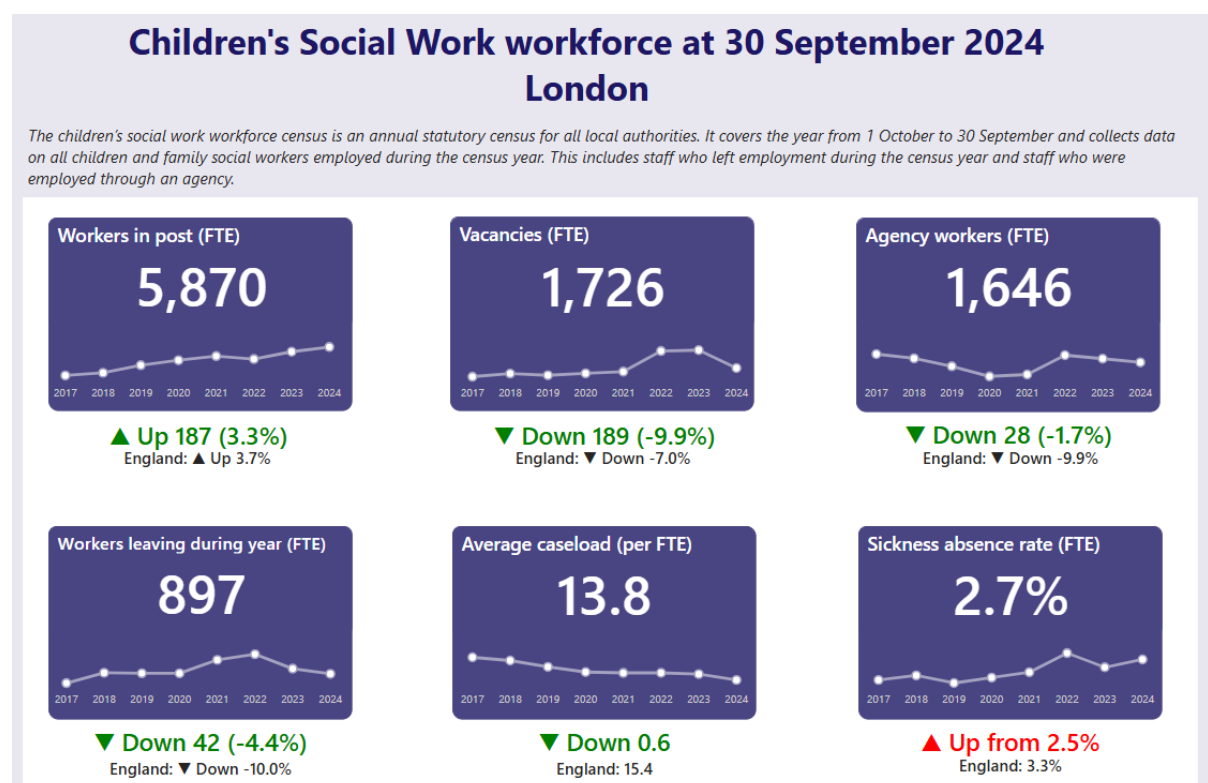
4.2 *The new national reform programme (Families First for Children Partnership programme)* outlines that 2025/26 will be a time of national change for the children's social care workforce and multiagency working. The programme guide defines expectations of safeguarding partners to implement reforms to family help, multi-agency child protection and family group decision making, stating that this builds on evidence of what works to support families to stay together and thrive, and ultimately reduce the number of looked after children, safely. The government envisions a transformed system, where practitioners from social work, police, health, education, and beyond work together to promote the wellbeing of children and keep them safe from harm. The vision for this reformed system is as below:

Figure 1: Our vision for a reformed system



4.3 The March 2025 publication of guidance about the reform programme marks the beginning of changes to how social workers have operated for many years. In anticipation of these reforms, Brent's Early Help and Children's Social Care services are implementing a restructure from May 2025. This first phase of system redesign aligns Targeted Early Help with Child in Need social work interventions into Family Support Teams. It will bring together early help practitioners, with social workers to provide a more seamless and integrated support offer for families with the intention of reducing hand offs between services. The intention is that the family will be able to feel that services are designed around them, rather than needing to move between services. A detailed learning and development offer is being created to support practitioners during this period of transition.

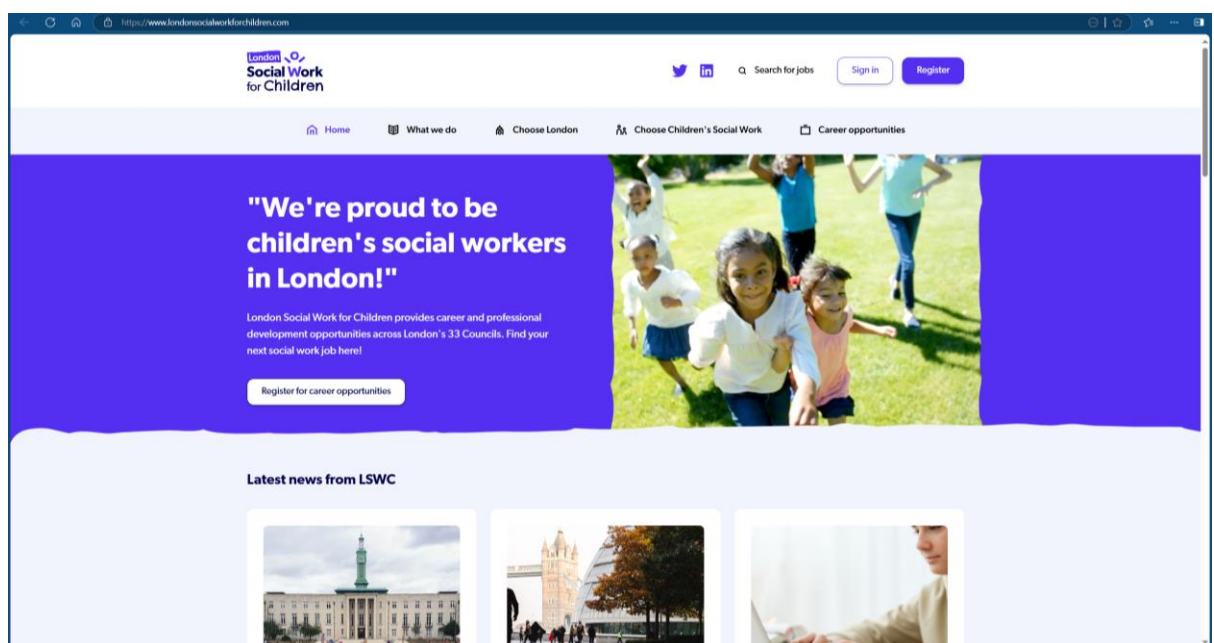
- 4.4 Brent CYP is also fully engaged in London-wide work to systematically address workforce issues. From 2023 to 2025, Brent's Director of Children and Young People chaired the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance Workforce Priority Workstream. A key focus has been to reduce reliance on agency workers and to improve rates of permanent staff within local authorities. The *London Pledge*, a memorandum of cooperation that committed all London local authorities to work collaboratively to avoid rising agency worker costs by agreeing regional pay rates has been very successful, leading to national agency social work rules being introduced in autumn 2024. One of the benefits of the London Pledge has seen a reduction in the turnover of agency workers, with longer levels of retention, supporting longer-term relationships with children and families.
- 4.5 The implementation of the Pledge and subsequent evaluations have provided the basis for accelerated learning through consistent engagement with the agency market and London boroughs directly to better understand the opportunities a regional framework could bring. The most recent DfE social work census (see table below) has seen the lowest number of agency social workers across the region since the implementation of the initiative. The overall Brent position in relation to an increase in permanent staffing and reduction in agency usage has also been seen (see table below).



Brent	2023/24	2022/23	Difference	% Difference
<b>Social workers in post at 30 September</b>	180.5	166.9	13.6	8.10%
<b>Vacancies</b>	50	74	-24	-32%
<b>Agency workers</b>	50	68	-18	-26.47%
<b>Social workers leaving during collection year</b>	20.4	24	-3.6	-15.00%
<b>Average Caseload</b>	15.2	15.1	0.1	0.66%
<b>Absence rate</b>	3.00%	2.50%	0.50%	0.5%

4.6 Other initiatives across London to improve the permanency and stability of the social work workforce include:

- Sustaining *London Social Work for Children (LSWC)* ([London Social Work for Children](https://www.london-social-work-for-children.com)) a dedicated website to bring all of London's recruitment activity together. This continues to gather strength. Since launching in 2023, LSWC has attracted over 204.7k visitors to 1,150 jobs posted. The platform continues to capture and celebrate London's practice and people through a vast range of stories and news shared by London's LAs. Brent posts all of its social work roles within the platform, helping to share local opportunities to a much wider audience.



- Finalise an international recruitment framework to enable local authorities to confidently recruit social workers from overseas to fill gaps within their existing workforce. Brent has in previous years recruited social workers from India, southern Africa and the Caribbean and intends to use this framework to explore a further round of international recruitment later in 2025.

- Listening to the workforce by supporting a cross-regional piece of consultation in the spring, *The Big Conversation*, building on a 2023 piece of research. This will enable local authorities to see what has changed and improved, providing valuable insights for Brent in the development of our own workforce strategy.

4.7 Social workers are employed within the Early Help and Social Care department of Children and Young People. Owing to the ongoing national shortage of social workers and a high number of social workers leaving the profession, coupled with increased demand for services since the pandemic, significant structural difficulties remain in recruiting and retaining more experienced social workers and first line social work management staff. Despite this, recent recruitment campaigns have attracted a favourable response, particularly for first line managers. However, some challenges remain within the Localities Service where agency employment is more embedded. Benchmarking with other NW London authorities on pay and conditions, completed in 2024, showed that Brent's offer to staff was in line with the average, or above average for the majority of roles.

## 5.0 Adult Social Care

5.1 Brent Adult Social Care continues to face substantial pressures in recruiting and retaining regulated professionals. While Adult Social Care has taken steps to reduce vacancy levels internally, it remains exposed to structural constraints beyond its control.

5.2 The government's publicised £500 million commitment to workforce development, initially proposed in the 2021 adult social care reform white paper, was subsequently reduced to £250 million ([House of Commons Library, 2024](#)). This has restricted the sector's ability to deliver career development pathways and continuing professional development that are vital to retaining specialist roles. While Brent has welcomed the Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund – Workforce Fund, which allocates £570 million across 2023–2025 across England, its short-term nature limits the borough's ability to embed sustainable training and career progression frameworks.

5.3 Mental health social workers present a particularly acute challenge. A 2024 national survey found that 87% of councils were struggling to recruit and retain AMHPs, identifying them as the most difficult to staff among all adult social care roles ([Community Care, 2024](#)). Brent is no exception; although proactive steps have been taken to convert agency AMHPs into permanent staff, recruitment remains volatile, with limited specialist candidates entering the workforce.

5.4 Collectively, national trends such as funding variability and skill shortages have limited Brent's ability to build and sustain a stable, long-term workforce of regulated professionals. In response, Adult Social Care has enhanced its local workforce offer. This includes the introduction of recruitment and retention



incentives, the development of the Adult Social Care Skills Academy, and the implementation of a refreshed career progression framework aligned with national best practice. Despite these efforts, the borough's capacity for long-term strategic workforce planning remains constrained by wider national uncertainties.

- 5.5 Brent's Adult Social Care department has made notable progress in stabilising its regulated workforce through proactive strategies focused on recruitment, retention, and professional development. However, structural challenges, particularly those linked to national funding uncertainties and regional workforce competition, continue to present barriers to sustained progress.
- 5.6 A continued focus on regional collaboration, internal development, and alignment with national best practice will be essential for maintaining a resilient, skilled, and supported workforce capable of delivering high-quality social care to Brent residents.
- 5.7 There are around 123 registered social workers based in Adult Social Care and this reflects a notable 23% increase compared to the previous year. This growth has been driven by targeted recruitment campaigns and the implementation of Golden Hello and Retention Payments, as outlined later in this report.
- 5.8 Despite the progress made, the current vacancy rate across regulated roles within Brent's Adult Social Care stands at 15%. This represents a modest improvement when compared with the most recent data from Skills for Care, published in September 2024. It is also broadly in line with the London average of 12.6%, as reported by Skills for Care. [Skills for care - Local area comparison](#)
- 5.9 The persistent vacancy rate indicates structural challenges in filling roles and maintaining a stable workforce. Recruitment of occupational therapists and ROVIs remains particularly challenging due to a limited specialist workforce and high regional demand. Anecdotal evidence from *ADASS London* regional networks indicates that boroughs across the capital are competing from the same limited talent pool. ([Reports & briefings Archives - ADASS](#)).
- 5.10 The number of agency workers rose slightly from 24 to 27, supporting continuity of service delivery during ongoing recruitment activity. During the same period, 12 regulated staff left the service, compared to four the previous year. This underscores the continued importance of robust retention strategies.
- 5.11 The average caseload per worker rose marginally from 12 to 13, remaining within a manageable range. As of 1 April 2025, no social worker held more than 20 cases, in line with Brent's target. Caseload levels over the past 12 months have remained stable, with an average of 13 cases per social worker.
- 5.12 These figures reflect steady progress in building workforce capacity, while highlighting the need for sustained focus on staff retention and workload management to ensure long-term service resilience.

## 6.0 Recruitment and Retention Challenges

### 6.1 Children and Young People

6.2 As referenced above, a previous piece of London-wide consultation, carried out in 2023 for social workers about their jobs (*The Big Listen*), helped better understand at a regional and local level the strengths and concerns of social workers. Brent's high number of responses to the consultation enabled a good picture of the local situation to be obtained and helped shape recent workforce planning. It focused specifically on the challenges local authorities experience in retaining and recruiting qualified social workers and managers.

6.3 According to this research, the top five reasons children's social workers chose to work for their local authority were:

- Location (58%)
- Role/specific job (41%)
- Team (23%)
- Career development (23%)
- Personal reasons (22%)

The top reasons social workers leave permanent local authority work were:

- High caseloads/workload (51%)
- Excessive hours (40%)
- Poor supervision/management (38%)
- Better pay (38%)
- Lack of career progression (25%).

6.4 As one approach to address these challenges, the Council's General Purposes Committee agreed recruitment and retention payments for Children and Young People's social workers in May 2023. As a result, there are now one-off payments of £5,000 to newly recruited permanent qualified social work staff on grades PO1 – PO7 and annual retention payments of £4,500 to qualified social work staff on grades PO1 to PO7 in hard to recruit teams. This has positively impacted on the recruitment and retention of social workers as we are now competitive with pay offers in London.

6.5 The CYP workforce development plan is overseen through monthly meetings chaired by the DCS and a focus on recruitment and retention of social workers, informed by staff feedback and regional intelligence.

6.6 Brent CYP actively recruits and supports new graduates through the assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) programme. At a recent ASYE External Moderation Panel (July 2024), positive feedback was received that there continues to be '*great training, supervision and support made available*' for ASYEs.



- 6.7 The career progression framework, chaired by the Director (Early Help and Social Care) supports social workers move to more senior roles seamlessly and supports retention.
- 6.8 There is an ongoing focus on converting agency workers to permanent contracts with 14 conversions in 2023/24 and 18 conversions in 2024/25. Already in 2025/26, there are two social workers in the process of converting to permanent members of staff. Senior leaders are acutely aware of the impact of retention of social workers on children and strive to build a consistent workforce. This not only builds consistency for children and families but also saves money. As such, there has been a significant reduction of spend on agency social workers.
- 6.9 Benchmarking data on the use of agency social workers as of 30 September 2024 (see below) shows Brent had the 4<sup>th</sup> largest reduction across London over the previous 12 months.

**Table 1**

Local Authority	Agency rate (FTE)	Up/ down	Agency (FTE)	Vacancies at 30 Sep (FTE)	Agency cover (FTE)	Agency cover rate
Bromley	12.7% ↓	-18.9%	32	51	32	100.0%
Newham	24.4% ↓	-10.8%	76	75	75	98.7%
Hounslow	11.5% ↓	-9.6%	19	33	19	100.0%
Brent	21.7% ↓	-7.3%	50	50	50	100.0%
Bexley	8.8% ↓	-7.2%	19	41	19	100.0%
Wandsworth	8.7% ↓	-6.6%	18	42	15	85.2%
Lewisham	28.4% ↓	-5.1%	79	78	78	98.7%
Southwark	20.1% ↓	-5.0%	80	97	80	99.3%
Waltham Forest	28.6% ↓	-4.0%	62	62	62	100.0%
Kingston / Richmond upon...	19.0% ↓	-3.5%	35	35	35	100.0%
Haringey	20.8% ↓	-3.2%	52	52	52	100.0%
Barking and Dagenham	18.6% ↓	-3.0%	48	32	32	66.7%
Barnet	29.4% ↓	-2.9%	75	42	39	51.3%
Lambeth	43.6% ↓	-2.9%	132	132	132	100.0%
Hammersmith and Fulham	9.9% ↓	-2.5%	17	8	8	47.1%
Redbridge	7.8% ↓	-1.3%	16	43	12	74.4%
Camden	13.0% ↓	-1.1%	27	23	23	84.7%
Tower Hamlets	22.9% ↓	-0.7%	83	48	48	58.0%
Enfield	15.5% →	-0.4%	39	23	22	56.4%
Kensington and Chelsea					5	
Sutton	16.7%		24	33	24	100.0%
Westminster					1	
Merton	22.1% →	0.3%	34	41	33	97.1%
Greenwich	16.1% →	0.4%	44	47	44	100.0%
City of London	15.4% ↑	1.1%	2	1	1	50.0%
Croydon	30.8% ↑	2.3%	116	125	114	98.3%
Hackney	31.7% ↑	2.7%	83	93	83	100.0%
Ealing	27.8% ↑	4.2%	80	78	55	68.6%
Hillingdon	26.8% ↑	5.2%	59	77	59	100.0%
Islington	25.1% ↑	9.6%	80	90	80	100.0%
Havering	40.0% ↑	14.5%	100	108	100	100.0%
Harrow	37.1% ↑	20.5%	66	60	60	90.5%
Total	21.9%	-0.9%	1,646	1,726	1,484	90.2%

## Table 2

Local Authority	Turnover rate (FTE)	Starters (FTE)	Leavers (FTE)	Net change in FTE
Bromley	13.6% ↓	56	30	26
Southwark	14.4% ↑	66	46	20
Croydon	15.4% ↓	58	40	18
Lambeth	20.9% ↓	53	36	17
Newham	11.0% ↓	42	26	16
Barking and Dagenham	17.2% ↓	51	36	15
Waltham Forest	9.3% ↓	29	15	15
Brent	11.3% ↓	34	20	14
Kingston / Richmond upon...	12.5% ↑	31	19	12
Barnet	6.1% ↓	19	11	8
Hammersmith and Fulham	13.8% ↓	29	21	8
Greenwich	12.2% ↑	34	28	6
Tower Hamlets	8.1% ↓	29	23	6
Camden	16.3% →	34	29	5
Haringey	13.0% ↑	27	26	1
Westminster	16.7% ↑	26	25	1
Redbridge	23.0% ↓	42	43	-1
City of London	27.3% ↑	2	3	-1
Enfield	12.7% →	26	27	-2
Bexley	18.6% →	35	37	-2
Merton	24.6% ↑	28	30	-2
Hackney	14.3% →	24	26	-2
Kensington and Chelsea	11.5% ↓	16	21	-5
Hillingdon	21.0% ↑	28	34	-6
Sutton	18.2% ↑	15	22	-7
Ealing	16.3% ↓	27	34	-7
Hounslow	13.0% ↓	11	19	-8
Havering	22.2% ↑	25	33	-8
Wandsworth	17.3% ↑	22	32	-10
Lewisham	16.3% ↓	22	33	-11
Islington	18.3% ↑	29	44	-15
Harrow	28.9% ↑	11	33	-22
Total	15.3%	980	897	83

## Table 3

Local Authority	Average caseload per FTE (inc agency)	Cases held
Havering	18.9	2,643
Redbridge	16.3	1,356
Croydon	16.0	3,186
Hillingdon	15.9	711
Waltham Forest	15.5	1,626
Brent	15.2	2,269
Newham	15.1	2,560
Barking and Dagenham	14.9	2,016
Harrow	14.7	1,429
Haringey	14.6	1,536
Sutton	14.4	1,160
Hackney	14.4	2,192
Barnet	14.2	1,604
Bexley	14.2	1,288
Bromley	14.0	1,706
Merton	13.8	975
Lewisham	13.6	1,813
Ealing	13.5	1,658
Wandsworth	13.3	1,279
Hammersmith and Fulham	13.0	1,232
Kingston / Richmond upon...	13.0	1,731
Southwark	12.9	2,085
Hounslow	12.8	1,097
Enfield	12.6	1,530
Westminster	12.2	700
Camden	12.2	1,029
Tower Hamlets	11.9	2,140
Lambeth	11.5	1,412
Greenwich	11.5	1,895
Kensington and Chelsea	10.9	569
Islington	10.7	1,715
City of London	9.6	67
Total	13.8	50,225

6.10 Additional benchmarking data regarding new starters and leavers as well as average caseload levels demonstrates that Brent compares generally favourably and data is progressing in a positive direction. The Director of Early Help and Social Care regularly reviews social worker workloads with the Heads of Service and targets resources to address workload pressures. Caseloads

are generally manageable overall with pressures in the Localities service (short term teams) in particular. In the Localities Service long-term teams there is a maximum 20 case target and as of 1 April 2025, no social worker held more than 20 cases. All of the above support social work recruitment and retention.

## **7.0 Adult Social Care**

- 7.1 Brent Adult Social Care employs a range of targeted recruitment approaches to attract and retain qualified professionals, particularly social workers and occupational therapists. These include external recruitment campaigns, internal development pathways such as the 'Grow Your Own' programme, through which internal staff undertake degree apprenticeships in either social work or occupational therapy and a structured approach to converting agency workers into permanent posts.
- 7.2 Brent Adult Social Care delivers an Assessed and Supported Year in Employment programme for newly qualified social workers, alongside an External Social Work Apprenticeship Scheme. The external apprenticeship scheme has been supported by one-off funding from the Department of Health and Social Care's Adult Social Work Apprenticeship Fund ([DHSC, 2024](#)), which Brent successfully applied for.
- 7.3 This funding has enabled Adult Social Care to support the recruitment of local residents into social work apprenticeship roles, targeting individuals with the appropriate skills and experience and offering them the opportunity to 'earn while they learn.' These initiatives are designed to increase the local supply of qualified social care professionals and to improve workforce retention by providing clear career development pathways.
- 7.4 Despite these initiatives, Brent faces significant barriers in attracting candidates to key roles. A major issue is the disparity in pay and benefits between local authority-employed staff and NHS colleagues, with NHS social care professionals receiving a 5.5% pay rise in 2024–25, compared to a 3–4% uplift offered by most councils, including Brent ([Community Care, 2024](#)). This pay gap is particularly acute in London, where high living costs further reduce the competitiveness of local authority roles. Moreover, London continues to experience the highest adult social care vacancy rates in England, in 2024 ([Skills for Care, 2024](#)). Brent is thus in direct competition with neighbouring boroughs for a limited pool of candidates, particularly in specialist areas such as mental health social work, where 87% of English councils report recruitment difficulties ([Community Care, 2024](#)).
- 7.5 To address workforce challenges, Brent Adult Social Care has undertaken a structured approach to identifying gaps and improving recruitment practices. Workforce data is regularly monitored to track vacancy trends and highlight hard-to-fill roles. Insights from staff engagement surveys and strengthened exit interviews have informed the refinement of Brent's recruitment offer.

- 7.6 As part of these initiatives, the General Purposes Committee approved the introduction of £5,000 recruitment payments and £3,000 retention payments for eligible permanent staff in November 2023. The implementation of Golden Hello and retention payments has had a positive impact on the recruitment of regulated roles within Adult Social Care.
- 7.7 Between January 2024 and March 2025, 26 individuals have been successfully recruited into regulated posts across various teams. Of these, 17 were previously agency staff who have now successfully converted to permanent roles, contributing to greater workforce stability and improved continuity of care. Additionally, a further 9 candidates are currently at the offer or onboarding stage.
- 7.8 A career progression pathway for regulated staff was launched in October 2024. CQC Inspection report dated August 2024, rated Brent Adult Social Care's continuous learning, improvement and innovation as Good and stated that *"Staff told us there was an inclusive and positive culture of continuous learning and improvement. Staff were able to access training and shadowing opportunities which they felt supported their role"* These actions align with recommendations from the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), which has called for greater investment in training, clearer progression routes, and improved employment terms to attract a sustainable social care workforce ([ADASS, 2023](#)).
- 7.9 In partnership with the North West London Health and Care Academy, Brent also contributes to cross-borough workforce planning and regional initiatives. This includes coordinated initiatives to increase placement opportunities, promote careers in social work and occupational therapy, and develop shared workforce frameworks. The Academy supports strategic alignment between health and social care partners across the region and sub-region and plays a central role in expanding the pipeline of qualified professionals ([NW London Workforce Programme, 2024](#)).
- 7.10 These collaborative approaches, combined with Brent's internal workforce strategy, are helping to mitigate some of the pressures caused by national workforce shortages. However, recruitment and retention challenges, particularly for experienced and specialist regulated practitioners remain significant. A continued focus on strategic workforce planning, regional collaboration, and investment in development and progression opportunities will be essential to maintaining a resilient, well-supported workforce capable of meeting the borough's growing adult social care needs.
- 7.11 Brent Adult Social Care continues to promote the borough as an employer of choice through a range of targeted engagement activities. These include a strong digital media presence, attendance at local and regional careers fairs, and partnership work with higher education institutions to attract newly qualified professionals. The service also makes use of social media to highlight positive workforce messages, such as celebrating World Social Work

Day and sharing events like the "Clap for Social Workers", which help raise the profile of the profession and attract high-quality candidates to Brent.

- 7.12 Retention of regulated professional's workforce remains a strategic priority. Adult Social Care challenges mirror national patterns, with the workforce under pressure from both structural and contextual factors. According to *Skills for Care (2024)*, the turnover rate for adult social workers in England stood at 14.5%, a modest improvement from the previous year's 17.1%. However, vacancy levels remain persistently high, with an average vacancy rate of 10.5% across adult services. London continues to experience the most acute shortages due to high living costs, competition from neighbouring sectors, and increasing service demand ([Skills for Care, 2024](#)).
- 7.13 Brent's position is broadly comparable to that of other London and neighbouring boroughs as indicated in Table 4 below. Data from the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS, 2024) indicates that London has the highest vacancy and turnover rates in England, with over 28,000 unfilled roles in adult social care.

**Table 4**

Turnover rate			Vacancy rate		
Region	Local authority	%	Region	Local authority	%
London	Sutton	36.5%	London	Barking & Dagenham	18.9%
	Hounslow	31.6%		Hackney	17.5%
	Wandsworth	31.0%		Brent	17.2%
	Havering	30.4%		Newham	17.0%
	Richmond upon Thames	26.8%		Hounslow	16.9%
	Bexley	25.2%		Camden	16.8%
	Tower Hamlets	24.6%		Ealing	14.5%
	Newham	23.2%		Sutton	14.0%
	Kingston upon Thames	23.0%		Waltham Forest	12.9%
	Harrow	22.1%		Hillingdon	12.5%
	Hammersmith & Fulham	20.2%		Bexley	12.3%
	Lewisham	19.6%		Croydon	12.1%
	Waltham Forest	19.2%		Enfield	11.2%
	Hackney	19.1%		Merton	11.2%
	Islington	19.1%		Kingston upon Thames	9.4%
	Merton	18.5%		Haringey	8.7%
	City of London	18.0%		Redbridge	8.6%
	Barnet	17.5%		Southwark	8.5%
	Bromley	17.2%		Bromley	8.4%
	Brent	17.2%		Wandsworth	8.2%
	Croydon	16.9%		Kensington & Chelsea	8.1%
	Southwark	16.4%		Havering	7.9%
	Kensington & Chelsea	15.9%		Hammersmith & Fulham	7.7%
	Westminster	15.2%		Greenwich	7.6%
	Ealing	15.0%		Westminster	7.4%
	Lambeth	14.7%		Harrow	7.3%
	Redbridge	14.4%		Barnet	6.4%
	Hillingdon	13.2%		Islington	6.2%
	Enfield	13.0%		Richmond upon Thames	6.2%
	Greenwich	12.2%		Tower Hamlets	6.1%
	Haringey	11.8%		Lewisham	5.9%
	Camden	10.2%		City of London	5.1%
	Barking & Dagenham	8.5%		Lambeth	5.1%

Data Sourced from [Skills for Care Workforce Intelligence](#), September 2024

7.14 Locally, Brent's estimated turnover rate for social workers in Adult Social Care stands at 17.2%. This places the borough within the mid-range when compared with other London boroughs and within the North West London sub-region. The rate is slightly below the London average of 18.5%, as reported by Skills for Care.

7.15 Brent, as an Outer London borough, faces additional pressures in attracting and retaining skilled professionals. Despite offering a lower cost of living than Inner London, Brent competes with boroughs that can often offer higher pay or incentive packages. These disparities are exacerbated in roles such as Approved Mental Health Professionals and Occupational Therapists, where recruitment remains particularly difficult.

7.16 Key Factors Contributing to Workforce Attrition:

- Nationally reported trends are in-part reflected in Brent's local experience. A 2024 Community Care survey revealed that 87% of councils cited recruitment and retention of mental health social workers as the most significant workforce challenge across adults' services (Community Care, 2024).
- Workload and Burnout: 79% of social workers identified excessive workload and burnout as the primary challenges they face. Among local authority-employed staff, this figure rises to 87%, indicating the persistent strain on frontline teams (Community Care, 2024).
- Mental Health and Wellbeing: The emotional demands of the role have contributed to worsening staff wellbeing, with 52% of respondents reporting that the impact of their work on mental health was a key reason for considering leaving the profession (Social Work England, 2024).
- Career Progression: According to Social Work England, 35% of experienced social workers (with over 10 years in practice) cited limited progression opportunities as a major factor in their dissatisfaction, compared with 25% of those earlier in their careers.
- Work-Life Balance: The professional demands of ASC roles continue to compromise personal time. More than half of those surveyed (55%) said that unmanageable workloads and work-life balance were driving their intention to seek alternative employment (Community Care, 2024).

7.17 Job Satisfaction and Regional Dynamics:

- Although Brent-specific job satisfaction data is limited, national insights are informative. A 2024 YouGov and Community Care poll revealed declining morale across the social care workforce, with fewer professionals willing to recommend the profession than in 2020. Job satisfaction was found to be particularly sensitive to perceived support from leadership, access to supervision, and opportunities for meaningful career advancement.
- For Occupational Therapist and ROVIs, recruitment challenges are compounded by limited national pipelines and fewer local training pathways. Brent's position as an Outer London borough has made it harder to compete

with Inner London authorities that benefit from centralised recruitment pools and infrastructure.

#### 7.18 Strategic Response and Pan-London Collaboration:

- Brent is a signatory to the London ADASS Memorandum of Understanding which aims to address regional workforce instability by curbing agency inflation and creating a more consistent approach to staffing across the capital. This agreement has moderately reduced the rate of agency dependence and contributed to longer-term planning for permanent recruitment.
- In addition, Brent's Adult Social Care department has implemented a number of initiatives to retain and support its regulated workforce which have been highlighted in this report.
- Brent ASC Skills Academy: This internal programme supports staff development across professions, including social workers, Occupational Therapists, and ROVIs, with CPD opportunities, mentoring, supervision, and a career progression framework.
- Wellbeing and Support Culture: Reflective practice, reflective supervision, and access to mental health support are embedded in day-to-day practice. The Director of Adult Social Service (DASS) holds monthly wellbeing session for staff across Adult Social care. These measures are designed to reduce burnout and improve morale.
- Retention of the adult social care workforce in Brent, particularly for regulated professionals, is central to maintaining safe, high-quality services. While Adult Social Care has made strategic progress through financial incentives, workforce development, and pan-London collaboration, continued focus is needed to address ongoing recruitment challenges, support career progression, and foster long-term workforce resilience.

### 8.0 Training and Development

#### 8.1 Children and Young People

#### 8.2 The February 2023 Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services found the below:

*'Workers benefit from comprehensive and up-to-date operational policies that promote good practice. They have access to a regular programme of learning, training, and opportunities to develop themselves in their careers. Succession planning is used well to retain and progress workers within the organisation. Staff emulate the core values of children's services and feel they 'belong' in Brent. They value the very considered approach and openness of senior leaders and have confidence in their leadership. Many staff are committed to working in Brent and enjoy working in teams who become like a family to them. They have a strong and influential voice and feel listened to in service design and improvement work. They feel well supported and supervised by managers.'*



- 8.3 Since this time, the Brent CYP Learning Academy was launched in 2024. The aims are to develop clear career progression pathways across Brent CYP. An enhanced support offer pilot for ASYEs launched in October 2024, with plans to build more capacity for a higher number of ASYEs joining (and staying) in Brent. The retention of ASYEs is good, with 30/38 ASYEs staying in Brent over the past four years.
- 8.4 As an example of specialist opportunities for social workers, Brent has 4 social workers who have recently completed a Child Sexual Abuse Practice Leads training, facilitated by the Centre of Expertise on Sexual Abuse. This was a 10-month programme with the vision to create a network of practice across West London local authorities which will also allow a pooling of resources to offer best practice for children and their families who experience child sexual abuse.
- 8.5 There is a comprehensive learning and development programme in place for social workers that is generally well-attended. Training has been put in place over the past six months to equip social workers to undertake their own parenting and other related assessments, (rather than outsourcing these) with anticipation that this will mitigate against delays in some court related work as well as better providing staff with professional expertise.
- 8.6 In 2024, a revised supervision framework was launched for social workers and managers to allow sufficient time for outcome focussed reflective space. The quality of supervision is being overseen by regular dip-sample audits and demonstrates improvements in practice.

## **9.0 Adult Social Care**

- 9.1 A strong and continually evolving training and development offer remains central to Brent Adult Social Care's ability to attract, retain, and professionally support its regulated workforce. The importance of this approach was clearly acknowledged in the Care Quality Commission's most recent inspection, which specifically commended the service's sustained commitment to learning, development, and innovation.
- 9.2 The CQC found that "staff had access to a well-structured training programme and were encouraged to engage in continuous learning." It also highlighted Brent's approach as one that "creates a reflective, open, and supportive learning environment that promoted high standards of care and practice innovation" (CQC, 2024).
- 9.3 At present, Brent offers a broad and structured range of training and professional development opportunities for regulated staff. These include mandatory courses, continued professional development, and post-qualification training enabling staff to undertake statutory roles such as Approved Mental Health Practitioner and Best Interests Assessor. In addition, specialist courses are available, including training in safeguarding adults in

complex cases, trauma-informed practice, and capacity and risk assessments under the Mental Capacity Act 2005.

- 9.4 The training programme is coordinated and overseen by the Brent Adult Social Care Skills Academy. This ensures effective delivery, promotes strong uptake, and evaluates the impact of learning across all levels of the workforce, from newly qualified practitioners to senior staff.
- 9.5 Newly qualified social workers receive structured support through Brent's well-regarded Assessed and Supported Year in Employment programme. This includes protected learning time, tailored one-to-one supervision, and group reflective supervision led by experienced Practice Development Leads. The ASYE programme continues to receive consistently positive feedback from both participants and external assessors and remains a key part of Brent's strategy for developing confident, well-prepared social workers. Over the past two years, 18 ASYEs have successfully completed the programme, with 17 remaining in employment in Brent.
- 9.6 In addition, Brent Adult Social Care is currently undertaking a refresh of its Practice Framework. This work is intended to align local practice more closely with national standards, particularly the *What Good Looks Like* framework developed by Partners in Care and Health. This national framework sets out a shared vision for high-quality practice and identifies the knowledge, skills, and behaviours expected of a high-performing adult social care workforce.
- 9.7 The refreshed framework will enhance the link between professional supervision, training, and service delivery. It will also embed a values-based, person-centred approach to practice that promotes reflective learning, ethical decision-making, and strength-based working, ensuring consistency with sector-wide expectations.
- 9.8 In terms of day-to-day support, staff benefit from a clear and reliable supervision structure. This includes monthly one-to-one supervision, team-based reflective discussions, access to a comprehensive Employee Assistance Programme, and a growing range of wellbeing initiatives. These include mindfulness sessions, clinical supervision, and stress management workshops. Feedback from staff surveys conducted in 2023 and 2024 shows that frontline professionals particularly value the dependability and structure of their supervision arrangements.
- 9.9 The learning environment in Brent is further enhanced by a strong culture of innovation and co-production. Staff are encouraged to engage in pilot projects, contribute to service redesign, and take part in leadership development initiatives. The CQC specifically praised the service's "evidence of learning from feedback, audits, and service reviews," noting how this learning is actively used to improve training and operational delivery.

- 9.10 Overall, Brent Adult Social Care's training and development infrastructure is robust, evidence-led, and increasingly aligned with national best practice. It plays a critical role in meeting the complex and evolving demands of adult social care, while supporting staff wellbeing, promoting excellence in practice, and enabling long-term workforce retention.

## **10 Feedback from staff**

### **10.1 Children and Young People**

- 10.2 ASYE Student, Newly Qualified Social Worker - *'My ASYE journey as a newly qualified social worker has been an incredibly rewarding and transformative experience. I've had the privilege of working in Brent, a culturally diverse area, which has enriched my understanding of different communities and their unique needs. Throughout this journey, I've been fortunate to have incredibly supportive managers who have provided invaluable guidance and encouragement.'*
- 10.3 *I've had the opportunity to learn from a range of teams within social care, including the Children with Disabilities team, Youth Justice Team, Early Help team, and Looked After Children (LAC) team. Each team has broadened my knowledge and helped me develop a more holistic approach to social work, teaching me how to work with diverse groups and navigate complex situations.*
- 10.4 *The support throughout my ASYE has been outstanding. I've had regular reflective sessions that have allowed me to assess my practice, learn from experiences, and continually improve my skills. I truly feel I've grown both personally and professionally during this year, and I'm grateful for the continuous support that has shaped my development as a social worker.'*
- 10.5 **Head of LAC and Permanency** – *'My 20 years in Brent have been anything but dull, and I've loved every step of the journey. As Head of Service for Looked After Children, Care Leavers, and Permanency, I remain a social worker at heart, dedicated to supporting vulnerable children and young people. I'm proud to be part of a service that prioritises their needs and excited to continue enhancing our support for them and their families.'*
- 10.6 **Social Worker, Localities Team** – *'What I love about Brent is that's it's a culture enriched organisation. Staff are friendly and supportive. The hierarchy structure is not obvious. Service managers sit with staff. The continued professional development learning is amazing, and I enjoy case discussions with other teams. We support one another and share the responsibilities of our families, and you are never alone.'*

*The learning and support provided is great as my manager is an advocate for promoting wellbeing. She communicates effectively and is always available to support her team.'*

- 10.7 **Residential Care Officer, Ade Adepitan Short Break Centre** - *'I have been with Brent Council for over 10 years, and it has been a rewarding experience.*

*Overall, my work has been fulfilling, especially seeing the young people I support grow, develop, and overcome challenges related to their disabilities. While working with them can sometimes be challenging, I'm grateful for the strong support from my team.'*

- 10.8 **Deputy Manager, Ade Adepitan Short Break Centre** - *I work for Brent at AASBC because I am passionate about making a meaningful difference in the lives of children with disabilities and complex care needs. In AASBC, we provide a safe, nurturing environment that supports each child's growth and potential. Seeing the resilience and progress of the children we care for inspires me daily, and I take pride in being part of a team dedicated to creating opportunities and fostering independence for some of the most vulnerable young people in our community.*

*As Deputy Manager, I actively support and guide the team to ensure they have the tools, training, and encouragement they need to provide high-quality care. By fostering a positive and collaborative environment, I strive to empower the team to deliver tailored support that helps the children thrive and achieve their goals, no matter how complex their needs.'*

## 11.0 **Adult Social Care**

- 11.1 **Occupational Therapist, Hospital Discharge Team** – *'My team are an absolute dream, like a little family...and the way the Occupational Therapy Service is run is such a breath of fresh air (I know lots of the OT's feel the same way)'*

- 11.2 **Social Worker, Mental Health Team** – *'My social work practice upholds social work values and safeguarding. I always seek to reflect on a strength-based approach to ensure I am continually developing my professional skills and knowledge. From my experience working with Brent's mental health team, I have seen growth opportunities available to all who are dedicated and committed, and you get good support from the management. Brent Council embraces transformation, growth, diversity, and empowerment.'*

## 12.0 **Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement**

- 12.1 Both Lead Members are kept regularly updated on social work workforce issues through briefings and attendance at meetings with staff. Staff consultation for a recent redesign of early help and social care services was extensive with significant co-design work undertaken. At a regional level regular liaison occurs with social work employment agencies, the university sector and government bodies in devising strategies for implementation across London.

- 12.2 Stakeholder consultation has been an integral part of the development of workforce proposals within Adult Social Care. Engagement has included

regular staff forums, surveys, and targeted workshops with regulated professionals such as social workers, occupational therapists, and rehabilitation officers. Feedback gathered through exit interviews and staff engagement sessions has also directly informed recruitment and retention initiatives. In addition, the department has engaged with key external stakeholders, including Skills for Care, regional social care networks, local higher education institutions, and employment agencies, to ensure alignment with national workforce strategies and to contribute to the shaping of a London-wide response to workforce challenges.

- 12.3 Staff engagement has also been central to recent changes in Adult Social Care services, with a comprehensive programme of consultation and co-design workshops conducted across all levels of the workforce. Engagement also included feedback from our customers and partner agencies to ensure service changes were informed by those with lived experience.

### **13.0 Financial Considerations**

- 13.1 The report is for noting the work being undertaken to address the workforce challenges and there are no additional commitments. The cost of producing the report is met within existing budgets.
- 13.2 The agency staff costs in the Children and Young People directorate has experienced a significant reduction since the beginning of the 2024/25 financial year. In April, the weekly cost of agency staff in CYP was £119K and the estimated head count was 95. By the end of February 2025 (March figures are not available yet), the weekly cost had reduced to circa £67K and the numbers had dropped to an average of 52 agency staff.
- 13.3 For Adult Social Care, the average headcount for agency staff was 73 in April 2024, with an average cost of £91k per week. In March 2025, the average headcount remained broadly in line with April 2024 at 72, however the average weekly cost dropped to £88k per week. Within Adult Social Care, the cost of agency staff has fluctuated throughout the financial year.

### **14.0 Legal Considerations**

- 14.1 This is a national initiative to stem the shortage of Social Workers. No legal implications arise in this regard.

### **15.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations**

- 15.1 Brent, alongside other local authorities across the country, including those in London is tackling significant workforce challenges and seeking to maintain a sufficient, well-resourced and quality social care workforce. The council has taken numerous Brent-specific and collaborative actions in relation to our workforce such as a redesign of Early Help and Social Care model to align with the Government's vision, London Pledge, London ADASS MoU and Golden Hello and Retention Payments. Feedback from the CQC inspection and testimonies from staff demonstrate the positive environment and progress we

have made, and our training and development offer demonstrates how we will ensure our staff's practice is appropriate for our communities.

15.2 Within Children and Young People - in line with anti-racist practice, Brent CYP has developed a disproportionality dashboard for key indicators for children and young people and the workforce and using this to actively build equality. There is also an equalities dashboard that has been developed for staff to build a truly representative workforce at all levels of the organisation.

15.3 Brent was a pilot site for the Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard (SC-WRES), which has helped to highlight disparities and promote greater equity within the workforce, supporting a more inclusive culture in Brent's social care services and there is continued participation in this important initiative.

## **16.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations**

16.1 There are no specific climate change and environmental considerations within this report.

## **17.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)**

17.1 The main body of the report contains content relevant to Human Resources issues.

## **18.0 Communication Considerations**

18.1 Communication campaigns to support the recruitment of both children's and adult social workers have been undertaken at both the London-wide and local levels. These have included coordinated regional campaigns led by London Councils, as well as targeted local initiatives aligned with Brent's recruitment strategy. In Adult Social Care, communication initiatives have focused on promoting Brent as an employer of choice through digital media, careers fairs, and partnership work with higher education institutions. For Children's Social Care, the campaigns have aimed to attract experienced practitioners and newly qualified social workers, supported by clear messaging on career development opportunities and the benefits of working in Brent. Further detail on these activities is provided within the main body of the report.

### **Report sign off:**

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*Rachel Crossley*

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