



Corporate Parenting Committee

Wednesday 30 October 2019 at 5.00 pm

Board Room 2 - Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way,
Wembley HA9 0FJ

Membership:

Members

Councillors:

M Patel (Chair)
Conneely
Gbajumo
Kansagra
Thakkar

Substitute Members

Councillors:

W Mitchell Murray, Patterson
and Sangani

Councillor:

For further information contact: Joe Kwateng, Governance Officer
020 8937 13554; joe.kwateng@brent.gov.uk

For electronic copies of minutes, reports and agendas, and to be alerted when the minutes of this meeting have been published visit:

www.brent.gov.uk/committees

Notes for Members - Declarations of Interest:

If a Member is aware they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest* in an item of business, they must declare its existence and nature at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent and must leave the room without participating in discussion of the item.

If a Member is aware they have a Personal Interest** in an item of business, they must declare its existence and nature at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent.

If the Personal Interest is also a Prejudicial Interest (i.e. it affects a financial position or relates to determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission, or registration) then (unless an exception at 14(2) of the Members Code applies), after disclosing the interest to the meeting the Member must leave the room without participating in discussion of the item, except that they may first make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to the matter, provided that the public are allowed to attend the meeting for those purposes.

***Disclosable Pecuniary Interests:**

- (a) **Employment, etc.** - Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit gain.
- (b) **Sponsorship** - Any payment or other financial benefit in respect expenses in carrying out duties as a member, or of election; including from a trade union.
- (c) **Contracts** - Any current contract for goods, services or works, between the Councillors or their partner (or a body in which one has a beneficial interest) and the council.
- (d) **Land** - Any beneficial interest in land which is within the council's area.
- (e) **Licences** - Any licence to occupy land in the council's area for a month or longer.
- (f) **Corporate tenancies** - Any tenancy between the council and a body in which the Councillor or their partner have a beneficial interest.
- (g) **Securities** - Any beneficial interest in securities of a body which has a place of business or land in the council's area, if the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body or of any one class of its issued share capital.

****Personal Interests:**

The business relates to or affects:

(a) Anybody of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management, and:

- To which you are appointed by the council;
- which exercises functions of a public nature;
- which is directed is to charitable purposes;
- whose principal purposes include the influence of public opinion or policy (including a political party of trade union).

(b) The interests a of a person from whom you have received gifts or hospitality of at least £50 as a member in the municipal year;

or

A decision in relation to that business might reasonably be regarded as affecting, to a greater extent than the majority of other council tax payers, ratepayers or inhabitants of the electoral ward affected by the decision, the well-being or financial position of:

- You yourself;
- a member of your family or your friend or any person with whom you have a close association or any person or body who employs or has appointed any of these or in whom they have a beneficial interest in a class of securities exceeding the nominal value of £25,000, or any firm in which they are a partner, or any company of which they are a director
- any body of a type described in (a) above.

• **Agenda**

Introductions, if appropriate.

Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members.

Item	Page
------	------

1 Exclusion of the Press and Public	
--	--

The committee is advised that the public may be excluded from meetings whenever it is likely in view of the nature of the proceedings that exempt information would be disclosed. Meetings of the Corporate Parenting Committee are attended by representatives of Care In Action (CIA), the council's Children in Care Council. The committee is therefore recommended to exclude the press and public for the duration of the meeting, as the attendance of CIA representatives necessitates the disclosure of the following category of exempt information, set out in the Local Government Act 1972: - information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.

2 Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members	
---	--

3 Declarations of interests	
------------------------------------	--

Members are invited to declare at this stage of the meeting, any relevant disclosable pecuniary, personal or prejudicial interests in the items on this agenda.

4 Deputations (if any)	
-------------------------------	--

To hear any deputations received from members of the public in accordance with Standing Order 67.

5 Minutes of the previous meeting - 24 July 2019	1 - 6
---	-------

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record.

6 Matters arising (if any)	
-----------------------------------	--

To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

7 Update from Care In Action/care Leavers in Action Members	
--	--

This is an opportunity for members of Care In Action (CIA) to feedback on recent activity.

- 8 Bright Spots Survey with Care Leavers** 7 - 10
- The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the Bright Spots "Your life beyond care" survey 2019 and how the Council plans to respond
- 9 Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2018/19** 11 - 28
- This report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in Brent as required by statutory guidance. The report outlines the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) on quality assuring and improving services for Looked After Children. This report includes feedback from Looked After Children gained through consultation with Care In Action, Brent's Children in Care Council.
- 10 Children's Commissioner's 2019 Stability Index for Children In Care** 29 - 36
- This report aims to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC) about findings of the annual 'Children's Commissioner's 2019 Stability Index' for Children in Care. This report contains Brent's response to the findings and provides a summary of activities undertaken to achieve stability for looked after children in Brent. This is to provide evidence that looked after children in Brent receive
- 11 Fostering Service Quarterly Report** 37 - 44
- The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011). This report details the activity of Brent's fostering service from 1st July – 30th September 2019
- 12 Adoption Six-Monthly Report** 45 - 54
- The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the adoption service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children.
- 13 Any other urgent business**
- Notice of items to be raised under this heading must be given in writing to the Head of Executive and Member Services or his representative before the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 60.

Date of the next meeting: Wednesday 5 February 2020



Please remember to set your mobile phone to silent during the meeting.

- The meeting room is accessible by lift and seats will be provided for members of the public.

This page is intentionally left blank



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE **Wednesday 24 July 2019 at 5.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor M Patel (Chair), Councillor Conneely (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Gbajumo, Kansagra and W Mitchell Murray

1. Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED: that under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the duration of the meeting, on the grounds that the attendance of representatives from the council's Children in Care council, necessitated the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 2, Part 1 of Schedule 12A, as amended, of the Act, namely: Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.

2. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

Apologies were received from Councillor Thakkar. Councillor Mitchell Murray attended as a substitute member.

3. Declarations of interests

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Deputations

There were no deputations.

5. Minutes of the previous meeting - 24 July 2019

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Wednesday 24 April 2019 were approved as an accurate record.

6. Matters arising (if any)

There were no matters arising.

7. Update from Care In Action / Care Leavers in Action Representatives

JBK advised that work was ongoing with the Junior Care in Action group to continue to build relationships and encourage membership. Recent activities had included visits to the theatre, a theatre workshop and bowling. Work was also underway to contribute to the development of the Pathway Plan App for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

SK had attended the All Party Parliamentary Group for LAC and Care Leavers and had found the experience enlightening but highlighted that they did not appear to be

focussing on the real issues that young people needed solutions to. The committee further heard that SK was also involved with Brent Youth Parliament and the London Borough of Culture via the Blueprint Collective.

The committee thanked the representatives for their update and extended congratulations to JBK who had recently won a Pride of Brent Award.

RESOLVED: That the Update from Care In Action / Care Leavers in Action representatives be noted

8. Annual Corporate Parenting Report 2018/19

The committee received the Annual Corporate Parenting Report for 2018/19 which set out a profile of Brent's Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers and reported on annual activity, highlighting strengths and areas for development. Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency) drew members' attention to the summary of committee activity detailed at paragraph 3.4 of the report, thanking members for the challenge and scrutiny provided over the year. Members were further reminded of the 'Good' overall Ofsted judgement received following the Inspection of Brent's Children's Services (ILACS) May and June 2018 and the 'Outstanding' judgement received with respect to the progress and experience of LAC and Care Leavers. Onder Beter noted that a variety of work had been undertaken to support LAC and Care Leavers to participate in the decision making process impacting their lives, including the continued use of the Bright Spots survey, which measured the quality of Looked After Children's care experience and their sense of well-being.

The Chair thanked Onder Beter for his introduction to the report and invited comments and questions from the committee.

Members welcomed the report and sought updates on the recruitment of permanent Social Workers and Personal Advisors and on the caseloads for Brent's social workers. The committee sought details of the percentage of Care Leavers progressing to university and requested that future reports include details of the number of the Care Leavers undertaking apprenticeships and include a breakdown by ethnicity and gender.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Corporate Parenting Report for 2018/19 be noted.

9. Update on Semi-independent Provision for looked after children and care leavers

The committee received a report on semi-independent provision for looked after children and care leavers. In introducing the report, Shirley Parks (Head of Forward Planning Performance and Partnerships) advised that approximately 60 Looked After Children (LAC) and 87 care leavers were accommodated by 35 providers. Providers were commissioned through various mechanisms, including a contract framework established by the West London Alliance. The council worked closely with the providers to ensure the needs of Brent's LAC and care leavers were met and that they felt safe and secure in the placement. Of particular note was the work with the provider, Centrepont. Brent had awarded a block contract to Centrepont in July 2018 for the provision of up to 60 placements, subject to identification of

suitable properties. Centrepont provided a high support unit and a range of additional resources and support and having a strong supplier relationship enabled greater influence over the quality of the provision. Concluding the introduction, Shirley Parks emphasised that semi-independent was seen as an equivalent to 'Stay Put' arrangements whereby a care leaver chose to remain in their foster home, and the expectation was that the young people would be supported in developing independence skills in a safe environment.

In the subsequent discussion, the committee welcomed the report, in particular noting the support provided to young people in semi-independent provision and the recognition of the importance of the relationship between commissioner and provider. Members sought further details about ongoing monitoring, including site visits and questioned whether officers had any concerns regarding provider engagement. Members further questioned which providers owned the properties where LAC and Care leavers were placed, noting that ownership would confer some leverage for providers, as the units would be lost to the council if the contracts were not maintained. An update was sought on the NHS Go app and the health passport. Further details were sought of the project with Barnardo's to support consistent commissioning of high quality semi-independent provision.

RESOLVED:

that an update report on semi-independent provision be provided to the committee in a year's time or sooner, if any issues of concern arise.

that a report on project with Barnardoes be brought to the committee in six months' time.

10. **Brent Virtual School Annual Report 2017/18**

Sarah Miller (Head of Inclusion) introduced the Brent Virtual School Annual Report 2017/18 to the committee, which summarised the activity and impact of the Brent Virtual School over the reporting period. Members heard that a high proportion of children and young people entering care had significant gaps in school attendance and learning. Through effective partnership working with schools, Brent's LAC were making good academic progress year on year, though it was important to acknowledge that each cohort varied and each year should be looked at in isolation. It was recognised that children often needed to make social and emotional progress before academic progress could be achieved and the Virtual School had worked with the LAC and Permanency team to fund a significant programme of enrichment activities, using in part the pupil premium. A large training programme had also been supported to ensure that education was a part of the thinking of all who worked with LAC including Independent Reviewing Officers, Social workers and Designated Teachers.

Outlining the educational attainment of Brent's Looked After Children for 2017/18, Sarah Miller advised that the KS1 and KS2 cohorts were very small and referred the committee to the report for the narrative around the results achieved. At Key Stage 4, 22% of the eligible cohort achieved at least 4 passes including English or

Maths and 13% of the eligible cohort achieved the benchmark of 5 passes (grade 4+) including English and Maths, which was consistent with LAC National data.

In the subsequent discussion the committee questioned why children were more likely to enter care between the ages of 11 to 16 years' old; what alternative provision was provided for the high number of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and how this was quality assured; and, the support provided for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, particularly with regard to learning to speak English.

RESOLVED:

That the Brent Virtual School Annual Report 2017/18 be noted.

11. Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 1: 1st April to 30th June 2019

The committee considered the Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report for Quarter 1, which covered the period, 1 April to 30 June. The report presented information about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it was achieving good outcomes for children, including staffing arrangements, placement activity, recruitment and assessment of foster carers, and learning and development. Onder Beter (Head of Looked After Children and Permanency) highlighted that a bid had been submitted with Ealing and Hounslow councils to undertake some viability work regarding combined needs-led and targeted marketing and recruitment and commissioning and integration. This bid had been successful and Brent would be leading on this work going forward.

The Chair thanked the officers for their introduction of the report and invited questions from the committee. Members sought further information regarding Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) and the council's ability to provide appropriate and successful placements for older children coming into care.

RESOLVED:

That the Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 1: 1st April to 30th June 2019 be noted.

12. Brent's Local Offer for Care Leavers 2018-2020: a year on

Onder Beter (Head of Looked After Children and Permanency) introduced the report which provided an overview of the progress of the Brent Local Offer to Care Leavers during the period from 1 April 2018 – 31 March 2019 and presented an updated offer for 2019/20 for the committee's approval. Members were informed that the updated offer had not been subject to a full review but had been amended to reflect and respond to feedback received from Care Leavers via the Bright Spots Survey. This survey sought to better understand Care Leavers' experiences and sense of well-being.

RESOLVED:

That the update on Brent's Local Offer for Care Leavers 2018-2020 be noted.


13. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 6.30 pm

COUNCILLOR MILI PATEL
Chair

This page is intentionally left blank

	Corporate Parenting Committee 30 th October 2019
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services
Feedback from Care Leavers: Outcome of the Bright Spots 'Your life beyond care' survey 2019	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Brian Grady Operational Director, Safeguarding, Partnerships & Strategy Sonya Kalyniak Head of Service, Safeguarding & Quality Assurance

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the Bright Spots "Your life beyond care" survey 2019 and how the Council plans to respond.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review and comment on the contents of this report and our planned response.

It differs for different parts of life. But the way we are treated has improved although I think more should still be done for us.

3.0 Background to “Your life beyond care” survey 2019

- 3.1 “Your life beyond care” is a well-being survey for care leavers. It builds on a similar survey for children in care. The survey was developed with care leavers by Coram Voice and The University of Oxford. This is the first year the survey has been available for care leavers.
- 3.2 The aim of the survey is to hear from care leavers about their well-being, improve their care leaving experience and highlight the Bright Spots of practice that contribute to care leavers doing well. Brent has been working in partnership with Coram Voice to ensure care leavers are involved and benefit from this survey.
- 3.3 The areas of focus in the survey were:
- The people in your life
 - Being a care leaver
 - Housing
 - Living independently
 - Taking part in society
 - Feelings
 - Well-being

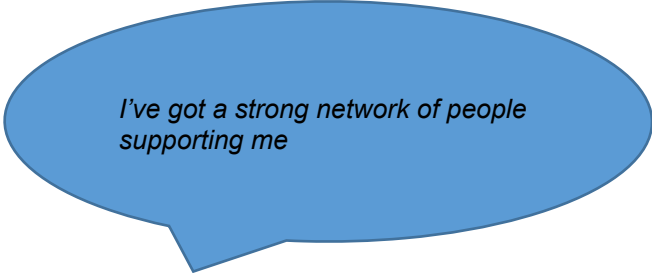
4.0 Summary of key messages from the “Your life beyond care” survey 2019

- 4.1 The survey completed via an online app with the support of the Leaving Care Teams. The survey took place between February and May 2019 and results were made available to Brent Council in September 2019. The eligible participation cohort of care leavers aged 16 to 25 years old was 436. Of that number, 103 care leavers responded to the survey which is a response rate of 30%.
- 4.2 Half (49%) of the respondents were aged between 18 and 20 years, most others (31%) were aged between 21 and 25 years. 65% of respondents were male and 35% were female. Before becoming a care leaver, over half (56%) of the young people who responded had been in care for more than four years and 12% had been in care for less than a year. Direct feedback from Care Leavers is included in quotations in this report

She [personal advisor] is absolutely amazing, she also always finds the time to help me when I need help. I couldn't be more grateful and I thank her for everything thing she has done for me.

- 4.3 What care leavers said has gone well:
- Care leavers reported 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 worker.
 - In Brent, care leavers experienced greater stability of worker than did young people (11-18yrs) in care.

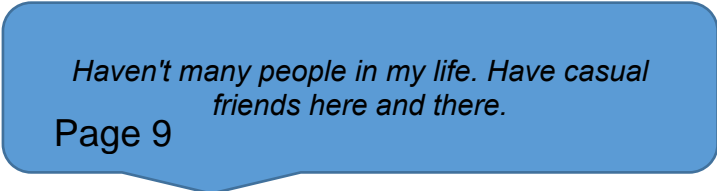
- Most care leavers reported a network of significant relationships. 92% had someone who listened, 91% had someone who praised them, 91% had someone who believed in them and 85% had someone they trusted.
- Care leavers in Brent were statistically more likely than care leavers in other LAs to have goals and plans for their future (97% vs. 86%). This is a Bright Spot of practice.
- Compared to the general population (ONS, 2018), care leavers in Brent were almost as likely to be living in households with Internet access (90% vs. 88%).



I've got a strong network of people supporting me

4.4 What care leavers said needs to improve:

- 31 (31%) of Brent's care leavers were identified as having low well-being (low scores on two or more of the well-being scales). Understanding the specific factors associated with low overall well-being amongst care leavers can help to identify young people who may need more intensive support. Factors with the strongest effect on low overall well-being included: high levels of anxiety, disliking one's appearance and/or not having a good friend.
- One fifth (19%) of care leavers wanted to know more about their care experience or felt that nobody had explained to them why they had been in care.
- Compared to peers in the general population, care leavers in Brent scored less favourably across a range of well-being measures, including happiness, life satisfaction and feeling that the things they did in life were worthwhile.
- A third (34%) of the care leavers did not 'always' feel safe in their home. 30% did not 'always' feel safe in their neighbourhood.
- A quarter (26%) of the young people were struggling financially. The same is true for 7% of 16-24 year olds in the general population. Compared to care leavers in other LAs, care leavers in Brent more often reported being unable to afford their mobile phone bills (38% vs 24%).



Haven't many people in my life. Have casual friends here and there.

I had very bad mental health problems last year, which landed myself into arrears with my rent and housing benefit. I was hoping that maybe I could get some financial help from the council, but no luck.

5. Brent's planned response the 'Your life beyond care' survey 2019

5.1 The detailed report from Coram Voice and The University of Oxford provides very rich material to help us to continue to improve services for care leavers based on their lived experiences. Planned activity based on the findings of the survey include:

- **Care Leavers in Action (CLIA):** The initial results were shared with CLIA on 15 October 2019. Members fed back that they are repeatedly asked for their views but do not feel these lead to action. They want to feel empowered to make changes to services. Officers will work with CLIA to identify specific projects based on the results of the 'Your life beyond care' survey 2019.
- **Local Partnership Meeting with Looked After Children and Care Leavers:** The results will be presented to the local partnership meeting in collaboration with CLIA to develop specific actions for service improvement based on the findings of this survey. Given the low wellbeing scores identified by the survey, the meeting will have representatives from the Central North West London NHS Trust, the CAMHS provider and the Adults Mental Health provider present. Actions identified will be owned by the partnership group. Areas of good practice will be highlighted to ensure we continue to focus on what care leavers say works well.
- **Corporate Parenting Committee:** A further report will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in spring 2020 to demonstrate the impact of the survey.
- **Feedback to care leavers:** As with the Bright Spots survey for children in care, Brent care leavers will be written to and thanked for their engagement and feedback. This will include key messages about service improvement based on the findings of the survey.

Sonya Kalyniak

Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance
Brent Children and Young People

**Brent Council Children and Young People
Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report**

Period of review: 01/04/18 to 31/03/19

This report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in Brent as required by statutory guidance. The report outlines the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) on quality assuring and improving services for Looked After Children. This report includes feedback from Looked After Children gained through consultation with Care In Action, Brent's Children in Care Council.

1. Summary of Key Messages

What has gone well?

- In 2018/19 99.5% of Looked After Children over the age of four communicated their views, wishes and feelings at their reviews.
- The majority of children (94%) tell us that their life is improving as a result of the support provided by their social worker and IRO.
- The majority of children and young people benefit from having the same IRO throughout their care journey and children and young people feedback positively about this.
- 94.5% of reviews are held well within timescales and managed in the way that best responds to the child's needs.
- IROs fulfil their challenge function, including escalation when appropriate, ensuring impact for children and evidencing good practice.
- IROs have worked closely with Child Protection Advisers to share good practice.
- IROs' knowledge and expertise ensures that IROs offer appropriate oversight and challenge to inform effective care planning and promote best practice.
- Social workers and managers understand the requirement for IRO scrutiny and challenge and welcome their independent perspective

'Further to S's LAC review, I am very impressed with the social worker and how she has supported S. Through the dedication and commitment of the allocated social worker S has been involved in Tiger Spike, is part of Care in Action and has Joined Brent Youth Parliament. This has helped S to develop a positive sense of herself and built her confidence'

Independent Reviewing Officer

'you are the person who makes sure I get good education and do well'

Young person, age 15
about their IRO

What can be improved?

- There continue to be some instances when IROs are not consulted prior to a change of a care plan. The Service Managers within Permanency and Care Planning Service have attended the IROs meeting and will monitor compliance and address the concerns.
- Social workers' reports and updated care plans are not always available before the review. This does not allow the child, carers, parents and the IRO time to fully prepare for the review.
- IROs need to become more involved in the scrutiny of Looked After Childrens' health and incorporate all health assessment recommendations within the review.

2. Purpose of the IRO Service

The Children Act 1989 and the Adoption and Children's Act 2002 make it a legal requirement for the Local Authority to appoint an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to each child in care. The IRO Handbook provides the statutory guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) and their employers on their functions in relation to the case management and reviews for Looked After Children. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of care planning for Looked After Children and challenging drift and delay.

The IRO's primary focus is to quality assure the care planning and review process for each child in care and to ensure that their current wishes and feelings are given full consideration. It is not the responsibility of the IRO to manage the case, nor supervise the social worker or devise the care plan. Although it is important for the IRO to develop a consistent relationship with the child, this should not undermine or replace the relationship between the social worker and the child.

The IRO has the authority, independent of their employing Local Authority, to refer cases to the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS) should they believe the Local Authority's plan for the child is not in their best interests. The Statutory guidance states that the IRO manager should be responsible for the production of an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of the Corporate Parenting Committee and the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

'The Independent Reviewing Officer must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment, or whether we are failing'

Mr Justice Peter Jackson, foreword: 'The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers in England' (NCB, March 2014)

3. Professional profile of the IROs

The IRO function sits within the CYP Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service. From Sep 2018, the IRO function was brought together with Child Protection Advisors who chair Child Protection conferences and the LADO (Local Authority Designate Officer) to form the Review and Safeguarding Team.

The Review and Safeguarding Team is managed by an experienced social worker. Brent directly employs two full time IROs and five Child Protection Advisors. The remainder of the IROs are experienced social work practitioners contracted through an independent agency, Aidhour (a not-for-profit company established 1998). All IROs are Disclosure and Barring Service checked, Health Care Professional Council registered and fully qualified (above the minimum requirements). Many of the IROs have been undertaking reviews for Brent for a number of years and know the children well. In some instances, the IROs have been the most consistent and trusted person in the child's life.

One of the in-house IROs was on an internal secondment from April 2018 to 31st of March 2019 and has now been successfully appointed on a permanent basis. Following a review of the current arrangement, Aidhour have been recommissioned to continue providing IROs for 2019/20. The current model of having in-house and commissioned IROs gives flexibility to respond to service demands while maintaining continuity and consistency for children and young people.

There are 12 IROs in Brent including those permanent and from Aidhour. The number has not changed from last year. There is a good representation of male and female IROs (6 males and 6 females). This overall high level of retention of IROs has led to continuity of IRO input, stability for many of our Looked After Children and a high level of scrutiny and challenge

The ethnicity of the IROs is less diverse than that of the looked after population.

IRO Ethnicity	Number
White	9
Mixed	1
Asian or Asian British	1
Black or Black British	1

While it is noted that the ethnic composition of the IROs is not fully representative of the borough's Looked After Children population, services are provided within an equalities framework and all IROs, as qualified social workers, are expected to adhere to the Health and Care Professional Council code of conduct and Brent's internal policies and procedures. In addition to chairing LAC reviews, the 2 internal IROs also participate in undertaking audit and learning and development activity for staff and are part of the LAC tracking panel.

Profile of Brent's Looked After Children

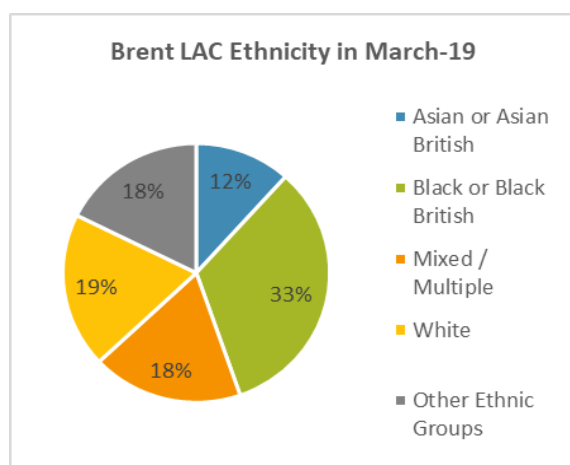
There has been a slight decrease in the number of Looked After Children in the 0 to 4 age range, 78% of Looked After Children on 31/3/2019 were over the age of 10 and 42% were 16 and 17 years of age.

	2017/18	2018/19
0 to 4 years of age	41	29
5 to 9 years of age	31	36
10 to 15 years of age	119	105
16 to 17 years of age	127	128
Total Looked After Children	318	298

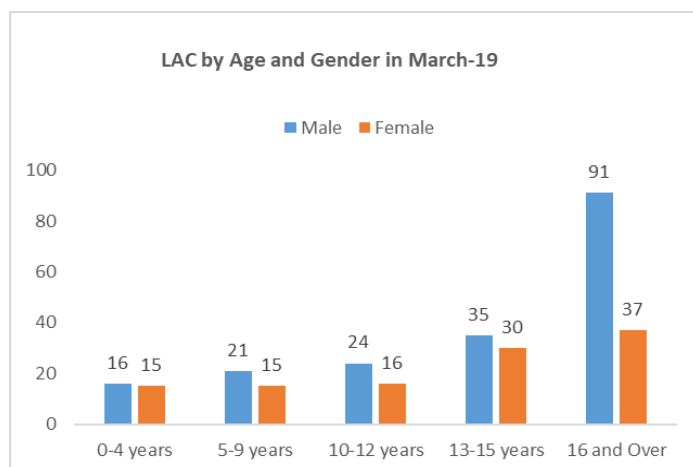
"I thought of you when I heard Eden Hazard was going to Real Madrid, I recommend you support Arsenal instead of Chelsea"
T, 15-year-old Arsenal supporter's advice to his IRO

The ethnicity of Looked After Children as of 31/03/2019 was as follows:

Ethnicity	2017/18	2018/19
White	77	57
Mixed/ Multiple	60	54
Asian or Asian British	59	36
Black or Black British	97	98
Other Ethnic Group	25	53
Total	318	298



LAC by age and gender as of March 2019 is summarised below



4. Referrals and allocations

The interim Review and Safeguarding Manager is responsible for ensuring children who come into care are allocated an IRO. Referrals to Aidhour are completed via the Aidhour Director who ensures children are promptly allocated to an Aidhour IRO, promoting effective communication and liaison with allocated social workers and the Review and Safeguarding Team. The team is supported by 0.5 post of a business support officer who processes invoices, liaises with Aidhour and allocated social workers and completes other administrative work as necessary.

Full time IROs carry a case load of 60 to 65 children at any given time. This case load is in line with national guidance and Ofsted recommendations. IROs are valued by social work staff as experts in the field of Looked After Children and as such offer guidance on care planning, as well as tracking individual plans through mid-way reviews.

Once allocated, IROs are expected to provide and maintain continuity and consistency in reviewing a child's care plan whilst they remain looked after. In addition, IROs complete midway reviews and liaise with the child's Guardian if there are court procedures as well as other professionals as and when required.

IROs carrying out review tasks have secure remote access to 'Mosaic', Brent's integrated children's services database, to input their reports and review the progress of a child's care plan. They are able to add a case note to a child's case record on Mosaic, record the midway review of care plans and identify any relevant issues that require escalation to senior managers for resolution. IROs also have secure remote access to the Brent internal e-mail system which facilitates confidential communication and information exchange, thus complying with data protection requirements.

5. Quality assurance and monitoring of the IRO service

The interim Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance and the interim Service Manager oversee the work of the Aidhour IROs through group supervision, quarterly contract monitoring, audits, meetings and direct observations. Group supervision takes place once every two months and contract meetings take place once a quarter. Practice improvement discussions are facilitated at this meeting through consideration of case studies.

The interim Service Manager and the two in-house IROs are also members of the LAC tracking panel, carrying out regular audits looking at the quality of Review minutes, participation of Looked After Children in the decision making process, any drift in the care plan, and identifying any health or education issues. The audits have evidenced that IRO oversight and escalation are having a positive impact on outcomes for Looked After Children. The audits also evidence IRO supported involvement of children and young people's views in decision making processes. 100% of the file audits have shown that children were spoken with on their own before their LAC review or on the day of the LAC review. Where children do not attend their LAC review, IROs contact children and young people between reviews to ensure that children and young people remain involved in their plan and review.

IROs also ensure that parents / guardians are involved where this is appropriate and in the best interest of the child.

Through the LAC tracking panel, audits were carried out focusing on areas including: immigration status, PEP (personal educational plan), appropriateness of placement and placement changes, education and health outcomes; vulnerabilities; quality of care plans and pathway plans; visits; quality of LAC review minutes. The audit identified good practice around participation of children and child-focused LAC review minutes. Areas for development for social work practice by teams included the timeliness of age assessments and some discrepancy in the way IROs have used the new letter format when writing minutes with lack of a consistent approach in this area.


Case Study: IH

IH is a 16-year-old unaccompanied asylum seeking child from Albania. Prior to coming to the UK, IH experienced trauma while travelling through Greece, Italy and France. IH was placed with a foster carer and settled well. IH was worried about his immigration status and the delay in making a decision to his application. The foster carer and the IRO were keen in supporting IH to get a decision on his status as this was having an impact on his emotional health. IH through his solicitor with the support of his IRO and foster carer applied for a judicial review on the basis of the delay in decision making by the Home Office. As a result, IH was given a decision and leave to remain for five years was granted. IH has remained with his foster carer where he is settled and happy and will be staying there under Staying Put arrangements.

IROs, both in-house and Aidhour receive bi-monthly group supervision following the Signs of Safety approach. These sessions are used to give IROs time to reflect on practice, highlight areas of good practice, raise any issues with managers and receive feedback on audit themes and outcomes. This space allows for reflection on how cases have been successfully escalated in the best interest of children and discuss practice themes and trends. As part of the development for IROs, guest speakers from services are invited - for example the London wide and Brent hosted Rescue and Response, launched in January 2019, attended a meeting in March 2019. The LAC health nurse and the Virtual school are invited to attend periodically.

IROs have commented on the good working relationships they have established with Child Protection Advisors. This has assisted in both IROs and Child Protection Advisors responding to the needs of children and young people who becomes looked after following a period of being subject to a Child Protection Plan, in a timely manner. Child Protection Advisors are invited to the initial LAC review of any child who becomes LAC after a period of being subject to CP plan with a view of contributing to robust care planning across the professional networks.

IROs are positive about the quality of permanency planning in Brent including involvement of the wider family network at the earliest possible stage of permanency planning and the joint working observed between the locality and care planning services.



'I am fine at my placement. It feels like home'
D, 11 years old

The interim Service Manager attends London IRO Managers and West London Children's Guardians Meetings. This ensures the service stays in touch with developments across authorities in respect of recent court judgements and meeting the expectations of the court in care planning cases in proceedings. These meetings look at local and national issues affecting Looked After Children as well as highlighting any learning that can be taken forward. Brent IROs have a good working relationship with Children's Guardians within West London Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS). Following Brent's Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services in May 2018 and the positive comments made about the IRO service, a number of local authorities have requested information so that they could adopt Brent's model of writing review minutes in a letter format. Managers from two Local Authorities visited and met with the interim Service manager and some of the IROs and looked at Brent's approach to LAC reviews. They gave positive feedback as to what they saw.

The annual meeting between the Strategic Director for Children and Young People and IROs took place on 20/01/19. IROs were updated on the outcome of the Brent ILACs inspection of May 2018 and the action plan devised following this. IROs were also updated on the continued drive to increase the number of permanent staff and the department's

direction. The Strategic Director clarified that no issues had been escalated to her in the past year. IROs were encouraged to escalate any unresolved issues if necessary.

Brent IROs have an established protocol with CAFCASS regarding good practice for Public Law work. This has helped to ensure cases in proceedings are subject to robust analysis and challenge about the matters of critical importance to the child's safety, wellbeing and permanency. Children's Guardians have provided positive feedback on both social work and IRO practice. In particular, Children's Guardians have stated that they have found Brent IROs responsive and independent.

Overall the quality of the minutes and how IROs chair and approach LAC reviews are assessed through audit to be good. Mid-way reviews and other activities such as escalations are visible on every file audited with some improvements required in the way some IROs upload their minutes on Mosaic.

6 Performance of the IRO service

Performance summary:

- A total of 776 reviews were chaired by IROs 2018/19, a decrease of 98 reviews compared to 2017/18.
- The vast majority of children and young people aged over 4 years (529 reviews) attended their review and spoke for themselves.
- On a month by month basis, 94.6% of Reviews are held within the statutory timescales. This represents an increase of 1% in comparison to 2017/18. The reasons for the lateness include late referrals and unavoidable last minute cancellations.

Reviews are responsive and managed in the way that best responds to the child's needs. Examples include:

- K, a LAC of 15 years of age, a Looked After Child who had frequent missing episodes. The IRO in discussion with K and other professionals identified that K would like more regular reviews than every six months. Reviews took place every three months and K actively participated in these reviews. The IRO also ensured they kept in touch in between reviews. The impact for K was a reduction in repeat missing episodes.
- An IRO identified a delay in achieving permanency with M, a new-born looked after child. The IRO identified improvements in case allocation processes which led to an allocation of the case to Looked After Children and Permanency service and a swift resolution of permanency planning.

7.1 Attendance and Participation of children

It is always preferable that children attend their review meetings and give their views. However, there are some children with additional needs and children who have suffered trauma that may impact on their behaviour who therefore may not be able to participate fully at their review meeting. IROs are sensitive to these children's needs and work with the allocated social worker and carer to listen to a child's views, wishes and feelings in a

way more suited to them and incorporate this into their care plan. Children and young people are allowed to say how and who should attend their review. The service has actively sought out best practice examples to improve participation of children and young people.

Case study: SK

SK is a 17-year-old who entered care at the age of 16. SK came in to care due to her mother's mental health concerns. SK was taking care of her mother and as a result has missed on her education and other social activities. Given the trauma SK went through as a young carer she lacked confidence and was finding it difficult to socialise with her peer group. Her IRO explored the possibility of SK joining Brent Care In Action and Brent Youth Parliament in order to help SK build her confidence and interact with other young people. SK was also recommended to get involved in Tiger Spike, Brent's initiative that is currently developing a pathway plan app in partnership with young people and practitioners. At her last review SK presented as a very confident person and stated her involvement with the different groups has helped in building her confidence and thanked her IRO.

Reviews offer an important opportunity for children to have their say about their care plans and for professionals and carers to listen and take children's views into account. IROs encourage children to attend their reviews. If a child does not want to attend their review he/she can participate in a number of other ways. Participation types are recorded in the chart below:


Type of participation	Number of reviews 2017/18	% 2017/18	Number of reviews 2018/19	% 2018/19
Child physically attends and conveys verbally	575	66.6%	529	68%
Child does not attend but is represented	17	2.5%	7	0.9%
Child aged under four	102	11.83%	83	10.6%
Child does not attend but conveys through medium such as an advocate	139	16.8%	130	16.7%
Child does not attend and is not represented	21	2.62%	6	1.5%
Child attends but does not convey and is not represented	15	1.82%	9	1.1%
Child attends and is represented	4	0.68%	6	0.7%
Child attends and conveys symbolically	1	0.2%	3	0.3%
Total	874	100%	776	100%

The majority of children and young people aged over four years (529 or 68% of reviews) attended their review and spoke for themselves. This is an increase of 2% from 2017/18.

Children's participation continues to be a strong focus of IROs and the social workers to ensure that the child's voice is heard and that reviews are held at a time and place to facilitate the greatest opportunity for attendance. Seven LAC chaired or co-chaired their review in 2018/19. IROs are increasingly encouraging children and young people either to chair or co-chair their reviews.

Case study: RS

RS is a 4-year-old who came into the care of the Local Authority at the age of two. RS became Looked after due to concerns of significant neglect from his mother who struggled with chronic mental health issues. RS was placed with a Brent foster carer. RS soon felt part of the family and over time developed close relationships with members of the foster carer's family. RS social worker engaged RS with play therapy early on and helped him to open up about his experiences at home with his mother. Through the help of school RS was able to continue this therapeutic work and his teachers supported RS to shift his focus back onto his school work. He soon started to excel and surpassed expected progress. As part of the permanency plan RS's Aunt on his mother's side who lives in Amsterdam was identified as a possible carer. RS's social workers reached out to her and following a positive assessment, all including RS agreed that he would be best placed with his Aunt. RS has recently returned from a visit to his Aunt where he met his cousins for the first time. RS told his IRO that he was very happy to be reunited with his extended family and he is looking forward to moving there permanently.



*'I found my review helpful by setting out plans and committing people to specific tasks'
P, a 15-year-old young person who co-chaired her review*

7. Advocacy Service

IROs routinely check that children and young people know about advocacy and how it can support them in having a say in decisions affecting their lives. As part of the initial LAC review children and young people are given information on Brent's advocacy and complaint service by their IRO. They also check at each review whether an Independent Visitor is needed and if there are any communication needs requiring additional or specialist support.

In April 2018 Brent appointed a Children Rights officer on a fixed term contract to support advocacy for Looked After Children, with Aidhour commissioned on an individual basis as and when required. The total number of children referred for advocacy support in 2018/19

was 62, an increase of 8 from 2017/18 and representing 21% of Looked After Children. In addition, 10 children had an Independent Visitor allocated. This is a reduction of 3 from last year.

The Children's Rights Officer undertook Return Home Interviews for Looked After Children who go missing from care and has worked closely with IROs to ensure that IROs are more actively engaged with monitoring the support and intervention for Looked After Children who have gone missing.

The majority of advocacy requests related to children and young people's concerns in the following areas:

- Support required to progress their immigration status.
- Young people not happy with their proposed care plan.
- Choice of placements and wanting a certain type of location or placement.
- Contact with family members, particularly children wanting an increase in contact.

Children placed in secure accommodation for their own safety under s25 of the Children Act 1989 are always provided with an advocate.

8. Quality of Care Planning

One of the IROs' primary functions is to monitor the quality of care plans. IROs report that most children have a child friendly care plan, written in a clear and coherent manner. Children and young people are supported to contribute to their care plan and receive their own copy. During 2018/19 seven young people either chaired or co-chaired their LAC review with the support of their IRO. These young people were identified by their IROs. Five of the young people are placed in long term permanent placements and all have known their IROs since coming in to care. The young people have stated that they found the experience very positive as this gave them control and ownership of their care plan. IROs routinely check the care planning process has helped children and young people to have their say on matters important to them and help them to understand what is happening and why.

'I enjoy seeing them (social workers) and see them just enough'

Anonymous young person's response to the Bright Spots survey

9. Progress between reviews

IROs keep regular contact with social workers and monitor progress on permanency and care plans through a mid-way review conducted either by meeting with the social worker or via a telephone call or e mail with the social worker. The two in-house IROs take part in the LAC tracking panel and feedback to the wider group of the IROs at the IRO meeting of any emerging themes and patterns for all IROs to consider.

All Looked After Children are given a child friendly leaflet entitled 'My Independent Reviewing Officer' at their initial review. The leaflet has details of their IRO's name, contact number and email address. Children often contact their IROs directly to discuss issues worrying them.

'My current placement is very supportive of my hopes and dreams. I love being there'
F, young person age 16

10. Oversight of care plans

IROs continue to monitor the quality of social work reports to ensure that reports meet the expected standard with attention paid to the child's progress in physical health, emotional wellbeing, school life and academic attainment, permanency and identity needs. Social workers' reports and updated care plans are not always available before the review. This does not allow the child, carers, parents and the IRO time to fully prepare for the review.

LAC have given feedback to indicate that they are not always consulted when decisions are made about a placement move. IROs are also not always informed or their views sought. A change of placement is a significant change in the life of a child or young person. IROs provide challenge and support to social work practice by advocating for children and young people to be fully consulted before any placement change takes place. There continue to be some instances when IROs are not consulted prior to a change of a care plan.

IROs continue to drive social work practice by ensuring that young people have a Pathway Plan provided in a timely way and escalating concerns if this is not in place. This includes promotion of Housing Vulnerability reports and encouraging an exploration of Staying Put arrangements.

When children subject of a Child Protection Plan become looked after, IROs work closely with Child Protection Advisors to bring forward the Child Protection Conference and avoid dual plans. This area of practice will continue to be developed and monitored.

11. Children's views about their IRO and their review process


Overall the experience reported by children of their IROs continues to be positive. The interim Service Manager regularly receives feedback from the Looked After Children's Participation Officer and attends Care in Action, Brent's Children in Care Council. Children and young people state that they appreciate the consistent approach of IROs alongside their independence and availability. Children have also said that their IRO listens to their concerns and takes up issues with the relevant services where this is needed and that the issues are often resolved quickly.

In 2018/19 99.5% of Looked After Children over the age of four communicated their views, wishes and feelings at their reviews. This may have been through their attendance, through correspondence or completing a consultation form, by briefing an advocate, or through discussion with the IRO. IROs report that young people contact them between reviews by email or phone to share information or request support. IROs support children to chair or co-chair the meetings if they wish to do so.

The 2018/19 Bright Spots survey said that 94% of Looked After Children who responded to the survey stated that their life is improving, as a result of social work and /or IRO support.

Children and young people say that they do not always agree with their proposed care plan with some still experiencing frequent change of social workers. In some cases, children and young people have also experienced change of placement without proper consultation or not having the opportunity to view the proposed placement beforehand. There has been a marked increase in social workers consulting IROs prior to placement move and this has resulted in better understanding and a more consistent approach. Children and young people said that they prefer and appreciate the face to face discussion they have with their IRO prior to their review than having to complete consultation forms. Children and young people have said that having to complete consultation forms is not interactive enough. Children and young people also appreciate access to advocacy which is always granted upon request by children and young people or other professionals such as allocated social workers, IROs and foster carers.

The following examples are taken from the feedback from children and young people from their reviews:



'My IRO is alright you know'.

'My IRO helped me to get involved'

'My IRO is fantastic'.

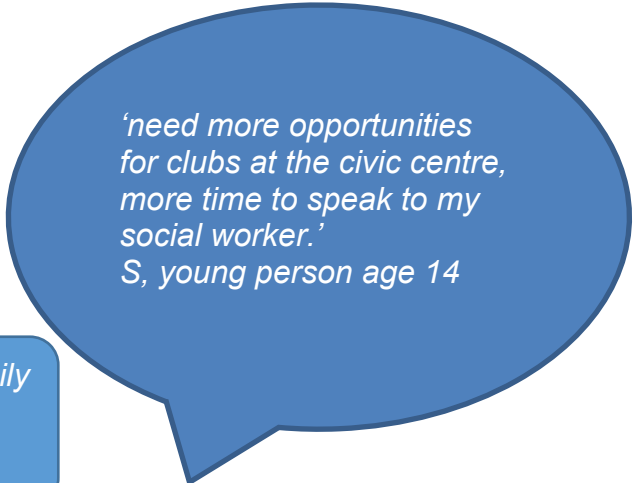
'I have known my IRO for more than eight years'.

12. Escalations and conflict resolution

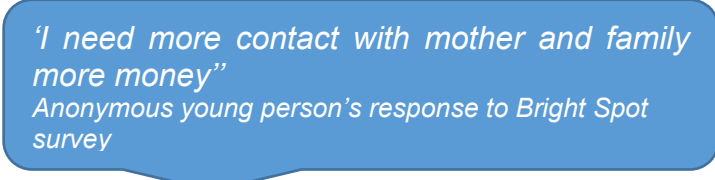
One of the key functions of the IRO is to identify and resolve problems arising from the care planning process. In Brent this is called the Looked After Children Escalation Management Process. The IRO will, in the first instance, seek to resolve the issue informally with the social worker and the social worker's manager. If this is unsuccessful the IRO escalates this to the Team Manager and Service Manager. If the issue is not resolved, the IRO will escalate further to the Head of Service.

Information elicited from the issues identified in escalation is used to target support and challenge practice to make improvements. Young people have reported that they feel supported when IROs raise concerns and alerts about practice or plans.

A total of 49 escalations were initiated by IROs in 2018/19 compared to 47 escalations in 2017/18.



'need more opportunities for clubs at the civic centre, more time to speak to my social worker.'
S, young person age 14



'I need more contact with mother and family more money'
Anonymous young person's response to Bright Spot survey

Of the 49 case escalations raised by IROs, all but three were resolved at the social worker, Team Manager, Service Manager and Head of Service levels. Three reached the Operational Director level. The three cases dealt by the Operational Director concerned lack of clarity on a care plan for a baby, an unplanned placement move regarding a young person who had repeated missing episodes and a request for the Local Authority to consider secure accommodation. The overall issues raised in escalations include the following areas:

- Unplanned placement move
- Drift and delay in progressing care plan.
- Care plan and review paperwork being incomplete and young people often not having sight of this before the review.
- Transition to semi-independent units and the completion of housing vulnerability reports.
- Safeguarding concern such as CSE and young people going missing
- Delay in completion of age assessments for unaccompanied minors
- Contact with siblings and wider family members.

The use of the escalation processes proved successful in resolving issues in the vast majority of cases. In a small number of escalations, complexities of the case meant that the response to the issues raised by the IRO did not fully resolve the IRO's concern. In these cases differences of opinion were acknowledged and senior management oversight ensured there was clear Local Authority decision making in the best interests of the child. One example of this is when an IRO disagreed with the care plan to return two siblings home following a short period of being in care. The IRO recommended the return home timescale be extended but the Social Care view was that this would not be in the children's best interest. The Head of Service, in line with the escalation processes, reviewed the decision making. The children returned home to their parents' care and remain there. The IRO was kept informed that the children settled well back in their parents' care.

13. Review of IRO provision priority actions

The IRO provision had 7 priorities to improve services and make an impact on positive outcomes for Looked After Children in 2017/18.

Priority 1. Identify at least five young people who can chair their LAC review and provide training to pilot this approach.

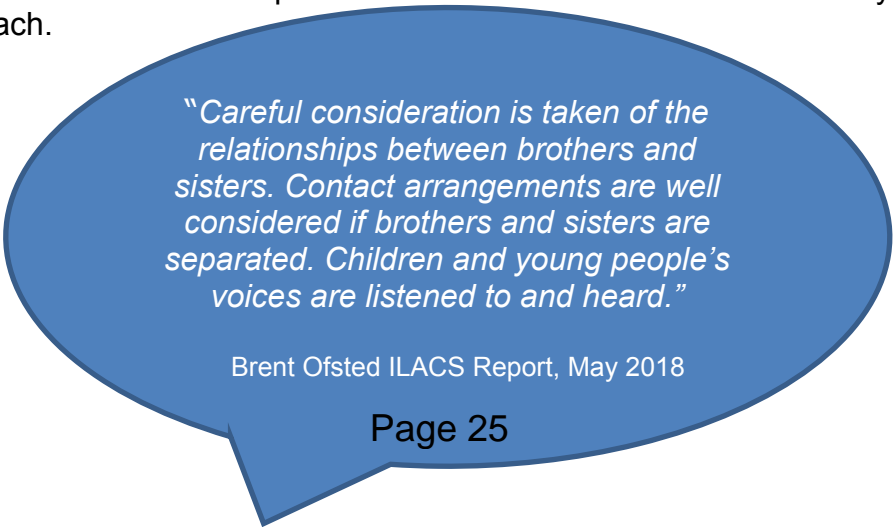
Seven young people were identified by IROs and either chaired or co-chaired their LAC review. Young people have stated that they have found this experience rewarding as this gives them control and ownership of their care plan.

Priority 2. Take forward the messages from the 2018 'Bright Spots' survey, working with children to develop services and monitoring impact.

The outcome of Bright Spots survey was presented to Brent's local partnership group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers meeting where a representative of Care In Action and the interim Service Manager for Review and Safeguarding are present. Actions taken included increasing life story work and addressing sibling contact were put in place. These were monitored throughout the year.

Priority 3. Continue to monitor and ensure the application of the Signs of Safety model in LAC reviews is fully embedded.

The application of the Signs of Safety model has been fully embedded in LAC reviews, this includes reviewing the way minutes are written by IROs. Children have given feedback that they find IRO practice child friendly. This has been identified as a good model by a number of local authorities who have requested use of Brent materials so that they can adopt a similar approach.



"Careful consideration is taken of the relationships between brothers and sisters. Contact arrangements are well considered if brothers and sisters are separated. Children and young people's voices are listened to and heard."

Brent Ofsted ILACS Report, May 2018

Priority 4. Increase IRO involvement in the scrutiny of Looked After Children going missing from care by monitoring and ensuring that national and local procedures are followed.

Thematic audits on identified issues including IRO scrutiny of children going missing from care have showed an increased involvement and liaison of IROs with the Children Rights officer and referring and raising issues in a timely manner. As a result, IROs are increasingly attending professional and Missing strategy meetings and work closely with social workers and other partner agencies.

Priority 5 Evidence that continuous learning from feedback from children and young people, parents, professionals and carers is fully embedded into the Learning and Development offer.

Feedback, themes and trends from LAC reviews are collated and shared regularly with Localities and the LAC and Permanency Services. These themes have also been incorporated into the Learning and Development offer for both social workers and foster carers. This has led to young people co-delivering training on matters that are important to them. For example, young people are involved in delivering training on child-centred care planning.

Priority 6. IROs to work closely with Child Protection Advisors in particular where children become looked after following a period of being subject to a Child Protection Plan

The IROs and Child Protection Advisors are now part of one team and work closely in particular where children become looked after, after a period of being subject to a Child Protection Plan. Prior to the first LAC review the IRO and CPA liaise with each other. Child Protection Advisors attend the initial LAC review and consideration is given as to whether the child should remain subject to a Child Protection Plan or the Plan should be ended. Social workers have found this approach more effective avoiding duplication of meetings for children and families.

Priority 7. Monitor timeliness of LAC reviews to reach a target of at least 95% reviews being completed within timescale.

Monthly performance reporting is now in place to drive timeliness of LAC reviews. As of 31 March 2019 timeliness of LAC reviews was 94.6%, an increase of 1.5% from 2017/18. The majority of the late reviews were due to last minute cancellation owing to sickness of either the social worker, IRO or a foster carer. This is being monitored closely with a view to increasing the percentage to above 95%.

14 Impact and outcomes

The IRO service has contributed in bringing positive outcomes in the following areas:

- Scrutiny of care plans and avoiding drift. IROs have supported the outcome of increased permanency for children, in particular Special Guardianship Orders and long-term fostering.

- Young people given more control to decide and lead their Looked After Children review, contributing to feedback from children that they feel they are involved in decision making.
- The IRO service has worked closely with social workers, Child Protection Advisers, Children's Guardians, and the Children Rights officer to ensure that children's voices are heard and are central to decision making. IROs will continue to encourage young people to chair their reviews where this is appropriate and in line with the child and young person wishes and feelings.

15. What the Review and Safeguarding Team plans to do in 2019/20


The Review and Safeguarding Team focuses on hearing children's voices and ensuring actions are taken based on what children say. Planned activity to improve the IRO functions for 2019/20 are as follows:

1. Complete the appointment of a permanent Service Manager by Autumn 2019.
2. Monitor timeliness of LAC reviews to reach a target of at least 95% of reviews being completed within timescale.
3. Increase the number of LAC chairing or co-chairing their review from 7 to 14 in 2019/20.
4. Work with social work teams to ensure social work reports and updated care plans are available before a LAC review and IROs are consulted of any proposed change to the care plan prior to the change been implemented.
5. Ensure IROs demonstrate consistent scrutiny of Looked After Children's health and incorporate health assessment recommendations into LAC reviews.
6. Evidence that continuous learning from feedback from children and young people, parents, professionals and carers through LAC reviews is fully embedded into the Learning and Development offer.

Goitom Mebrahtu, Interim Service Manager Safeguarding and quality Assurance
Janice Altenor, Interim Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance

July 2019

This page is intentionally left blank

 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 30 th October 2019
	Report from the Head of Looked After Children and Permanency.
Children's Commissioner's 2019 Stability Index for Children in Care	

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:	0
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Onder Beter, Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report aims to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC) about findings of the annual 'Children's Commissioner's 2019 Stability Index' for Children in Care. This report contains Brent's response to the findings and provides a summary of activities undertaken to achieve stability for looked after children in Brent. This is to provide evidence that looked after children in Brent receive the appropriate stability of care arrangements, wherever they might be placed.
- 1.2 A previous report including the summary of the 2018 Stability Index and Brent's response was presented to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee in October 2018.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 The CPC is requested to review, comment on and question the contents of this report.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 The Stability Index (SI) was launched in 2017 by the Children's Commissioner¹ as an annual measure of the stability of the lives of children in care. The Children's Commissioner's intention in publishing the SI is to highlight the importance of promoting long-term relationships for children in care. Research evidences that outcomes are stronger for children who remain in the same placement for longer, at the same school and are supported by social workers who know them well.

- 3.2 The 2019 SI provides the latest national data available, by local authorities in England as at 31st March 2018. The report includes an analysis of the previous two years (2016/17 and 2015/16) against three data measures:

- change of placements for looked after children
- change of schools
- change of social workers.

- 3.3 The 2019² SI found out that there has been little change in stability for looked after children (LAC) at a national level over the last 12 months. Some of the national key findings are as follows:

- 7,900 children (10.4%) experienced multiple placement changes in 2017/18.
- Multiple placement changes are more common amongst Looked After Children with complex needs. Complex needs are seen to be the key determinants of a local authority's rate of placement change. The SI 2019 has clustered a number of complexities which have an impact on placement stability such as children in contact with Pupil Referral Units, children in residential or secure placements at their first placement, children who are remanded due to criminal activity, children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder or those with education health and care plans.

¹ The role of the Children's Commissioner was established under the Children Act 2004 which gave the Commissioner responsibility for promoting awareness of the views and interests of children. The Commissioner's remit includes understanding what children think about things that affect them and encouraging decision makers to take their best interests into account. The current Children's Commissioner is Anne Longfield OBE. The Children and Families Act 2014 further strengthened the remit, powers and independence of the Commissioner.

² For further details of 2019 Stability Index, please click on the following link:
<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publication/stability-index-2019/>

- Children with complex needs are more likely to move into private/residential care within 2 years. These placements are generally of much higher cost due to a child's complexity of presenting need.
- There has been a small decrease in the rate of mid-year school moves amongst LAC, from 13% in 2016/17 to 11% in 2017/18. However, the percentage of LAC experiencing school moves over a two-year period remained the same at 3%. The rate of school placement instability is influenced by the complexity of a local authority's LAC cohort.
- Around 1 in 5 LAC currently attend schools judged as 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate'.
- Around 1 in 4 LAC experience multiple changes of social workers. When moves across social work teams are discounted, i.e. a child moving from a short-term to a long-term team, it still remains the case that 10% of LAC experience multiple changes of social workers.

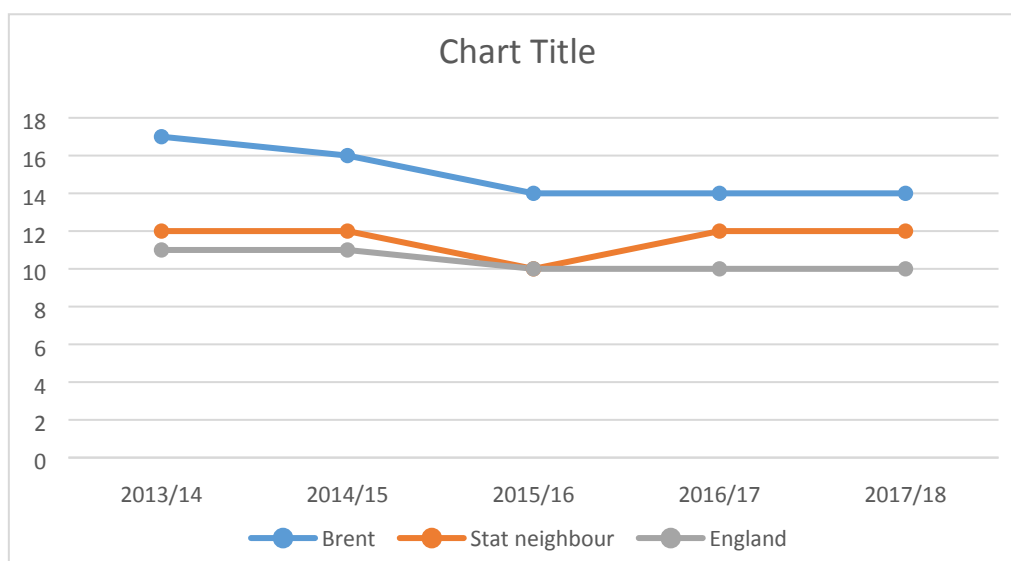
4. Stability Index for Brent

- 4.1 The SI 2019 contains a comparison of national data, with Brent's local context being compared to statistical neighbours across the three domains described in paragraph 3.2 above.

4.2 Placement Changes in Brent

- 4.3 The placement stability rate for looked after children in Brent has gradually improved and stabilised over the last 5 years even though it remains higher than statistical neighbours and the England average. The 2019 SI findings have confirmed this and showed that children in care in Brent have experienced more placement changes compared to the national average. 14% of Brent LAC had 2 or more placement changes over a 12-month period in 2017/18, an improvement of 1% from 2016/17, but higher than Brent's Statistical Neighbour average of 12%.

Table 1: 3+ Placement moves for looked after children



4.4 **Brent's Context and actions taken to improve placement stability for LAC**

4.5 The placement stability rate in Brent is linked to a number of factors that have an adverse effect on the life journey of children in care: traumatic childhood experiences prior to coming into care; the age of children at the point of entry to care and the multiple complex vulnerabilities in adolescence when many of Brent's children enter care including child sexual exploitation and gang affiliation. The challenges in ensuring a sufficient range and quality of foster care and residential provision for children with the most complex needs also impacts upon the indicator.

4.6 The majority of Brent's LAC population consists of older children, some of whom have multiple vulnerabilities that play a role in placement changes. In some cases, children and young people are moved to out of borough placements for safeguarding reasons such as breaking their links with local gangs. In 2017/18, 63.5% of Brent's LAC population was aged over 13, with 40% being over 16. Children entering the care system at an older age is one of the most significant factors to explain multiple placement moves. In 2017/18, 35% of new entrants to care were over the age of 16. The majority of these young people have experienced complex trauma and extra-familial abuse prior to becoming looked after. For example, some of them are already out of education or having additional needs. These complex needs and vulnerabilities may result in highly challenging behaviours that foster carers and many residential homes are not equipped to manage. It takes time for young people to settle into their placements and start having positive relationships with their care givers.

4.7 Identifying a suitable placement for an older young person with complex needs has become challenging due to the national insufficiency of appropriately

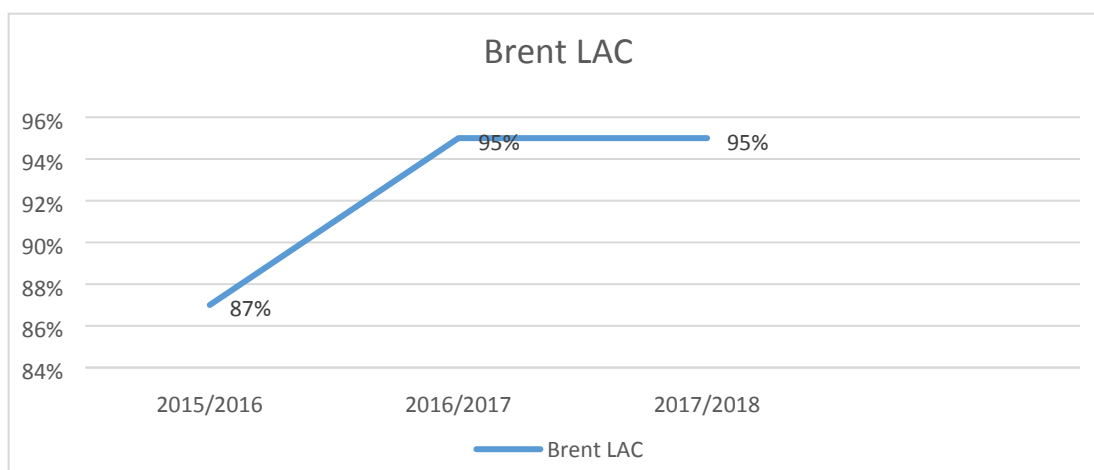
equipped foster or residential placements. In addition to that, the national availability of secure accommodation is scarce, that means identifying a secure accommodation for a vulnerable adolescent could take a long time due to a waiting list and in the meantime young people could have different placement moves. The DfE has initiated a Residential Leadership Board to look at and find solutions to the issues of quality and sufficiency in the residential children's home market.

- 4.8 Clinical case consultation is offered to social workers and foster carers of LAC in Brent by the Brent Emotional Well-being Team and a social pedagogue. This is to assist professionals and carers to help young people with complex behavioural and emotional difficulties. Foster carers and social workers' feedback is positive about the impact of this consultation.
- 4.9 Achieving better placement stability for LAC continues to be a priority for the CYP department. Robust processes are in place to ensure procedures are adhered to when a placement change is requested. This is to ensure all placement requests result in a well-planned move involving young people and their carers. All emergency placement moves are scrutinised by senior managers to ensure that it is in children's best interest to move.
- 4.10 A weekly Children's Placement Panel (CPP) takes place, chaired and attended by senior managers. The CPP has scrutiny on all placement changes with monitoring and tracking arrangements to ensure that children only move placements when it is in their best interests. Individual placements continue being monitored by social workers and by Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) as part of LAC Review.
- 4.11 The Head of Service, LAC and Permanency, has oversight of all placement change requests. It is a requirement that children and young people, their parents and carer, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), Brent Virtual School for LAC and other professionals are consulted prior to placement moves. Additionally, the Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes in CYP scrutinises any placement change requests for out of borough placements consistent with the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.

5 School Changes

- 5.1 Children in care in Brent experience fewer changes of schools compared to their peers nationally: 9 % of Brent LAC had a midyear move in 1 year, below the statistical neighbour average of 10% (range 5% -16%). In 17/18, 94% of Brent LAC were placed in 'Good' or 'Outstanding' schools compared to an average of 87.2% across statistical neighbours. 31% of Brent LAC were in Outstanding schools, an increase from 28% in 16/17. Brent ranks joint 2nd within the statistical neighbour cohort for the proportion of LAC in 'Good' or 'Outstanding' schools. Table below shows the progress for the last three years of published data:

Table 2: Proportion of LAC in 'Good' or 'Outstanding' Schools.



- 5.2 Brent Virtual School for Looked After Children works in partnership with social work teams to ensure that no looked after child is permanently excluded at statutory school age. Over the last 2 years, no LAC of statutory school age has been permanently excluded. Social workers, foster carers and schools work with BVS in completing a Personal Education Plan (PEP) that sets out educational targets based on individual circumstances and required standards.

6 Change of Social Workers

- 6.1 The 2019 SI reported data suggested that children in care in Brent experience more changes in their social workers compared to national data. There is however a wide variation in local authority reporting on this figure that makes meaningful comparison difficult.
- 6.2 The 2018 Brent figure of 25% has improved from the previous year when it was 36%. The rate of permanent social workers in the Looked After Children and Permanency Service has increased to 90% in 2019 from 75% last year. This is more likely to have a positive impact on stability for children. The impact of positive long-term relationships for children in care in Brent was recognised by Ofsted in the 2018 inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS).
- 6.3 In supporting recruitment and retention of permanent social workers for children, the Council's General Purposes Committee agreed in 2018 to introduce initiatives such as offering retention bonuses and 'golden hello payments' to new staff in hard to recruit posts. Some of the other activities that have assisted in creating an improvement in the number of social workers are:
- Having a comprehensive support package for newly qualified social workers known as the Assessed Year in Practice (ASYE) programme where newly qualified social workers are supported via more frequent supervision, mentoring, reflection time and protected caseloads

- Recently developed career progression pathways for social workers that allows social workers to progress in their career within the local authority rather than seeking these opportunities elsewhere.
- Participating in specific programmes to recruit social workers such as 'step up to social work programme' that provides a social work qualification to individuals with a first degree other than social work.
- The focus on international recruitment of social work staff in 2019 that resulted in 14 social workers being recruited from southern Africa and India.


Contact Officer

Onder Beter, Head of Service, LAC and Permanency.
Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 0FJ.

Tel: 020 8937 1228

Email: onder.beter@brent.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank

	Corporate Parenting Committee 30 th October 2019
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People
Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 2: 1st July to 30th September 2019	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Onder Beter, Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).
- 1.2 This report details the activity of Brent's fostering service from 1st July – 30th September 2019.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review, comment on and question the contents of this report. This is to provide evidence that the management

of the fostering service is being monitored and challenged in order to promote good outcomes for children.

3.0 Background

3.1 Service Values

The in-house fostering function is positioned within the LAC and Permanency Service of the Children and Young People's Department. The 2019-20 service plan set out the vision for the service as below:

- Family finding for looked after children will be timely and within their extended family network where appropriate.
- Children's individual needs, including diversity needs such as disability, race, religion, language and culture will always be considered when placing a child.
- We will increase good quality local placements for children by securing more in-house fostering placements. We will recruit, assess and approve new foster carers with the aim to have 5 net additional fostering households in the end of financial year taking into account termination of approvals and resignations.
- There will be a decrease in the number of resignations/de-registrations of foster carers as a result of appropriate support and well-established, positive relationships with foster carers.
- We will continue to provide an excellent learning and development package for foster carers who will have permanent supervising social workers to supervise and support them.

3.2 Staffing Arrangements

The Fostering Support and Assessment Teams consist of two team managers, 12 social work posts and one marketing and recruitment officer post. The workload within the teams continues to grow as new carers are approved and need to be allocated for support when they care for children. As reported last quarter, a social worker has now joined the team as part of the international recruitment initiative.

4.0 Placement Activity

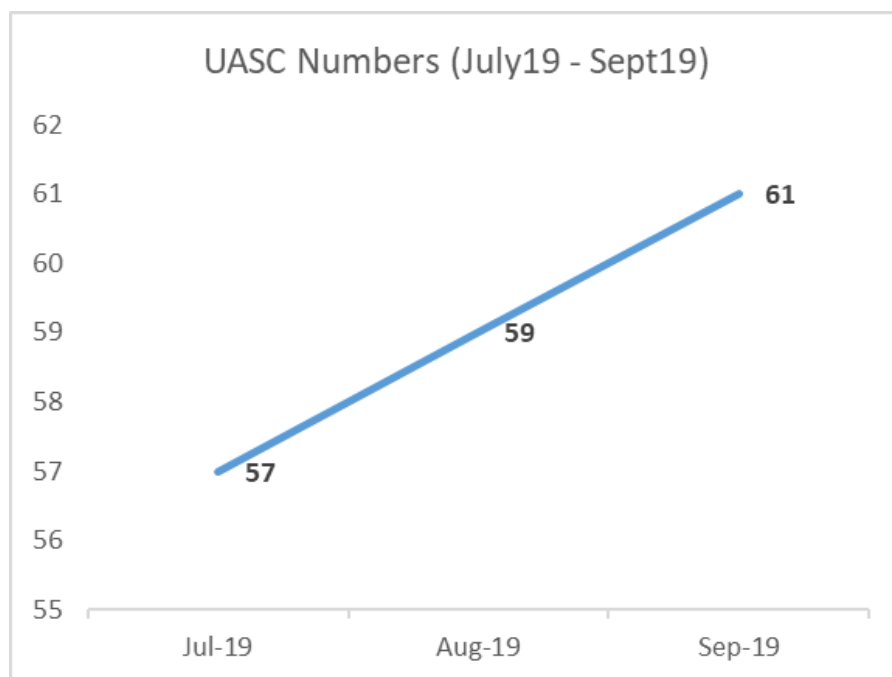
4.1 The total number of looked after children as at 30th September 2019 was 324, which is an increase from the end of Q1 of 18 children and also an increase of 28 children from the same period in 2018.

4.2 The corporate performance targets for 2019/20 are as below:

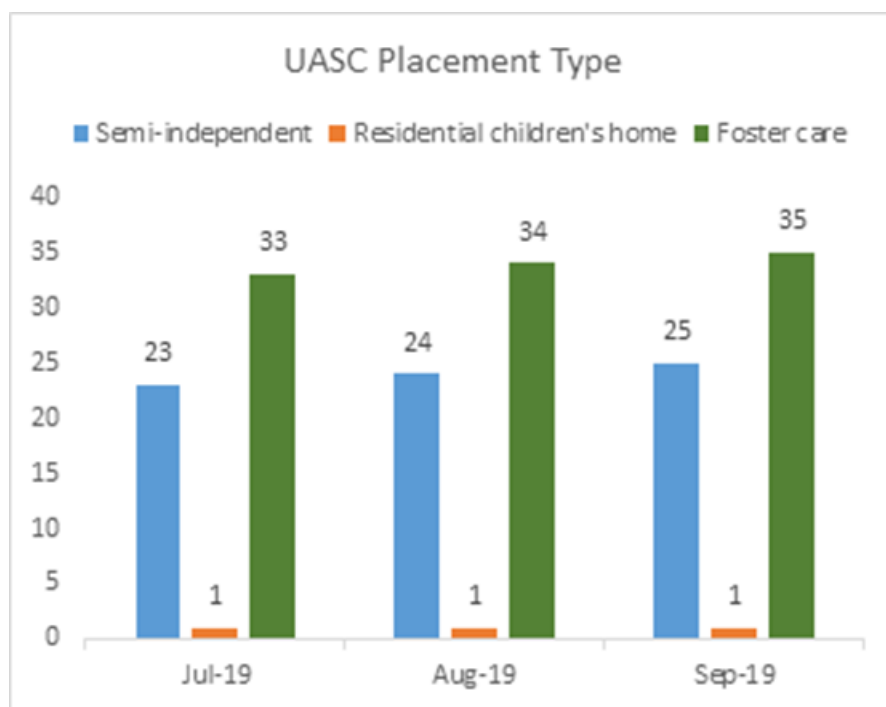
- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 30% - the actual percentage as of 30th September 2019 was 22.2% (72 children), same as the previous quarter 22.2% (68 children).

- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15% - the actual percentage as of 30th September 2019 was 9.9% (32 children) compared to 10.5% (32 children) at the end of Q1, 2019-2020
- Percentage of looked after children placed in independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 30th September 2019 was 27.8% (90 children); same as at the end of Q1, 2019-2020 - 27.8% (85 children).
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 75% - the actual percentage as of 30th September 2019 was 60.2% (195 children) compared to 60.8% (186 children) at the end of Q1, 2019-2020.
- There were 61 looked after children in semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations) as at 30th September 2019, which represents 18.8% of all looked after children. This number is a decrease from 62 at the end of Q1, 2019-2020 (20.3%).

4.3 As of 30th September 2019 there were 61 UASC, 3 more than at the end of Q1, 2019 – 20.



4.4 25 UASC are placed in semi-independent accommodation (no change from the end of Q1, 2019-20), 1 is placed within a residential children's home and 35 UASC are placed in foster care compared to 32 at the end of Q1, 2019 – 20.



5.0 Recruitment and Assessment

- 5.1** Within the reporting period Brent's Marketing and Recruitment Officer (MRO) and the fostering teams continued to carry out recruitment focused activities with the aim of raising awareness of fostering for Brent and encouraging potential foster carers to make enquiries with Brent Fostering Service. Following on from the last period's focus on comparing interest raised from online and offline recruitment activities, it was clear that Brent's digital presence seemed to be creating more interest from people seeking further information about fostering.
- 5.2** With regards to physical outreach, team members attended a host of community events mainly during the summer months, led by various services in the community: the police, Brent Housing, Brent Start – managing employment opportunities for residents - and the employee engagement team. The fostering team have found that attending targeted events encourages more interest than going to different locations in the borough with a pop-up stand, as people attending already have the mind-set to discover and engage with local services.
- 5.3** The MRO continues to develop the presence of fostering in Brent by increasing the presence on social media, using both Facebook and Twitter. The MRO is currently implementing a content strategy with the aim of informing, educating and inspiring people who are interested in fostering but not ready to take action. The content consists of profiles of and interviews with current carers, articles about support and training available, social media posts summing up information from the website. Other agencies have found that this encourages people to recall the service and come back when they are ready to progress to assessment.

- 5.4** During this quarter, the team continued to facilitate information evenings at the Civic Centre (one per month), providing an opportunity to members of the public to find out more about the fostering role and to enable Brent to determine whether an individual or family has the potential to become a carer for Brent.
- 5.5** The recruitment activity during the reporting period produced 36 enquiries (website, telephone calls or emails requesting further information). Out of the 36, 19 attended the information evening sessions in July, August and September. Of the 19 possible prospective carers 9 were considered suitable to progress to initial visit. Common reasons for not progressing enquiries further included: planning to move away from London and people only seeking information about fostering at this stage rather than wishing to be assessed.
- 5.6** Of the initial visits undertaken 6 were considered suitable to progress to stage 1 of the assessment process.
- 5.7** 2 of the 3 assessments recorded in the last quarterly report as being in stage 2 are noted in paragraph 6.3 below as having been to panel, receiving positive recommendations for approval as foster carers.
- 5.8** Of the 3 assessments in stage 1 in the last reporting period:
- 2 have progressed to stage 2;
 - 1 has remained in stage 1 as some information needed further clarification.
- 5.9** 1 fostering household that resigned from Brent to move to an independent fostering agency in 2017 has subsequently approached the team to request re-assessment due to the lack of support received from the agency. They have been fast-tracked to stage 2. This is of particular importance to the team as they have 3 Brent children in placement.
- 5.10** In this reporting period there is a total of 11 assessments underway: 7 in stage 1, and 4 in Stage 2.

6.0 Fostering Panel

- 6.1** The fostering service has a Fostering Panel constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The service maintains a diverse and highly experienced central list of panel members that includes an elected member. The panel chair and vice chair are independent people with professional and personal experience of fostering and panel members include those with personal experience of the fostering system. Current demand requires three panels to be held every two months.
- 6.2** The functions of the fostering panel are to consider:

- each application and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a foster carer or Connected Person(s) (Family and Friends foster carer) and the terms of their approval;
- the first annual review of each approved carer and any other review as requested by the service, including those of a Standards of Care issue and those exploring any allegations made;
- the termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a foster carer.

6.3 During the period 1st July – 30th September 2019, 4 panels were held with 17 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:

- 1 'family and friends' fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
- 7 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review, 2 of whom increased their approval numbers thus providing possible additional placements;
- 1 fostering household was found suitable to continue fostering after a standards of care investigation;
- 1 fostering household resigned from their fostering role wishing to retire;
- 2 fostering households were put on hold following concerns raised in panel about the carers' understanding of the impact of trauma on the children in their care;
- the approval of 2 'family and friends' foster carer were terminated due to the child in their care leaving the placement;
- 1 new 'family and friends' fostering household was recommended for approval; and
- 2 new fostering households were recommended for approval.

All of the recommendations made above were ratified by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who is the Head of LAC and Permanency.

6.4 The panel has a quality assurance role and monitors the standard of reports presented to it and relays any issues or concerns and any suggested practice improvements to the ADM. The Agency Advisor and the ADM continue to hold quarterly meetings to review all feedback received from the fostering panel to review learning to disseminate within the service to improve social work practice. The next meeting is due in December 2019 and the findings will be reported in the next quarterly report.

7.0 Training and Support for Foster Carers

7.1 The Learning and Development Programme

The feedback regarding the courses offered as part of the learning and development programme for our foster carers continues to be positive. The Fostering Development Coordinator, who arranges training for foster carers, has reported that foster carers' attendance at training has increased in the past 6 months. During this reporting period, 25 individual training courses were offered on a variety of topics ranging in diversity from 'the Impact of Fostering on Birth Children', to 'Missing Children' and 'Managing the challenges of conflict'.

- 7.1.1** The carers' feedback has been positive for most sessions in relation to the training format and content. Carers particularly enjoyed the session on Childhood Trauma and Attachment, and have asked for the session to be offered again later in the year.
- 7.1.2** In response to the above, colleagues in the Early Help service are offering 3 training days in Spring 2020 on the topic of 'trauma informed approaches' for foster carers, 'family and friends' foster carers and relevant staff members.
- 7.1.3** The constructive feedback received in relation to the 'managing and de-escalating conflict' course resulted in the addition of suggested practical anger management techniques that carers can share with the young people in their care. The next session will be held on 28th November 2019.

7.2 Social Pedagogy

The monthly 'Social Pedagogy Learning Space' continues to run and various foster parents have attended. The focused use of the social pedagogue, with newly approved foster parents and/or at the beginning of new placements, is now in place. Suitable foster carers are identified by the fostering team managers and referred to the Social Pedagogue.

The Social Pedagogue's role has become more focused, with specific carers being referred with the aim of improving their skillset and shifting the focus away from crisis intervention to development. Initially, 6 families were referred to the Social Pedagogue – 3 newly approved carers and 3 more experienced carers. The aim of the work with the new carers is in preparing them for their first placement and then supporting them in the early days of that placement and the sessions with more experienced carers are focused on those carers who can be stretched further – helping get them to the next stage of taking on slightly more challenging placements.

7.3 Support from supervising social workers

The feedback received from foster carers is consistently positive in relation to the support they receive from their allocated supervising social workers, their managers and the wider fostering service. Some examples of the feedback received are as below:

"Thank you for all your support and understanding in some very difficult moments over the past year. You truly are a peacemaker!"

"We have always felt that you have been a great support to us and we really feel that this is the most important thing from a SSW. Even though you are busy, I always feel that I can call you and you will do what you can to help us and take the time where needed to support us all. You really do make it a joy to be a foster caring family".

"You always come back to me so quickly with any queries or help and always keep me updated if you don't have an answer for us straight away. This helps us to feel that you really are there for us and have our best interest at heart. You also know that we were going through a difficult time with our daughter

over the last few months and I have really felt supported by you during this time”.

- 7.4 A very successful coach trip was organised for foster carer families to Brighton, organised and planned by the carers themselves. Their feedback was positive: “we love being given the opportunity to have fun by the sea with our peers” and “we look forward to this trip every year and thank you Brent for letting us choose where we want to go”.
- 7.5 Preparations for the foster carers’ annual celebration and awards event continue. The event is scheduled for Saturday 30th November.

8.0 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints

- 8.1 A total of 17 foster carer annual review meetings were held during the period under focus. This work is now commissioned from AidHour, covered by the same reviewing officers who chair children’s LAC reviews and tracked by the Review, Engagement and Participation Officer.
- 8.2 During this quarter, there were no allegations or complaints made by or about Brent foster carers.

9.0 New Developments


9.1 Fostering Steering Group

Following the successful bid for Department for Education seed funding to scope work using a regional approach to fostering a steering group, led by Brent is being established. The intention of the 6-month project is to scope the potential for closer working arrangements and, with the agreement of the involved authorities (Ealing, Hounslow and Brent) to consider how these arrangements could be delivered during 2020/21. The overall intention is to improve placement stability and choice for adolescent children in the care system. Updates will be provided to subsequent committees regarding progress.

Contact Officer

Onder Beter, Head of Service, LAC and Permanency.
Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 0FJ.
Tel: 020 8937 1228

Email: onder.beter@brent.gov.uk

 <p>Brent</p>	<p align="center">Corporate Parenting Committee 30th October 2019</p> <p align="center">Report from the Head of Looked After Children and Permanency</p>
<p>Report Title:</p>	<p>Brent Adoption Service Report 1st April – 30th September 2019</p>

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:	0
Background Papers:	0
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Nigel Chapman, Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Onder Beter, Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency

1.0 Summary

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the adoption service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children.

- 1.2** This report details the activity of Brent's adoption service from 1st April – 30th September 2019.
- 1.3** This will be the last report presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in this format as Cabinet gave approval in April 2019 for Brent council to:
- a) Join the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) *Adopt London West* consisting of the London boroughs of Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith and Fulham for the provision of Adoption services and Special Guardianship Support; and to
 - b) Delegate authority to the Strategic Director, Children and Young People, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care to agree and enter into a Partnership Agreement with participating boroughs.
- 1.4** The Key Decision was made on 2nd September 2019 and, following the TUPE of those Brent staff members who chose to move to Ealing, Adopt London West went 'live' as an RAA on 3rd October 2019.
- 1.5** Brent Corporate Parenting Committee will receive future six-monthly reports on adoption activity, which will incorporate information from Adopt London West and Brent CYP as Brent will continue being responsible for children with care plans of adoption.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1** The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review, comment on and question the contents of this report. This is to provide evidence that the management of the adoption service is being monitored and challenged in order to promote good outcomes for children. This is in line with standard 25.6 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards (2014).

3.0 Background

- 3.1** The Adoption Statement of Purpose highlights the outcomes that the service aims to support:
- children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond;
 - adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life; and

- children, birth parents/guardians and families, and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.

3.2 Responsibilities

3.2.1 Adoption services were delivered by the Adoption and Post Permanence Team within the Looked After Children and Permanency Service within this reporting period. This team was responsible for two main areas of work:

- In relation to adults – the recruitment, assessment and training of prospective adopters, as well as family finding and support for them post-approval up until Adoption Order, the undertaking of step-parent and private adoption assessments as directed by the Court and providing a counselling and intermediary service for adopted adults and their birth relatives.
- In relation to children – family finding for children with an adoption plan, statutory social work responsibility for one child subject to a Placement Order up until the Adoption Order (all new cases now remain held by social workers within the care planning teams) and supporting adoptive families, Special Guardians and birth families.

3.2.2 The above regulated activity remained the responsibility of Brent's Adoption and Post Permanence Team until the RAA went live on 3rd October 2019. After this point the adults work in its entirety, plus all family finding for children with an adoption plan and support (in the form of advice and guidance) for adoptive families, Special Guardians and birth families affected by adoption, transferred to Adopt London West.

4.0 Performance Data

4.1 The most recent set of national adoption scorecards was published in March 2019, covering the 3-year period 2015-2018.

Adoption Scorecards (published [here](#))

4.2 The non-published data for the period 1st July – 30th September 2019 demonstrates that performance against the two most significant indicators has continued to perform strongly in comparison to national and statistical neighbour averages:

- **A1** (The time taken from a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 392 days. This is a 1.4% increase against the previous reporting period (387) but still compares favourably against a national average of 486 days and statistical neighbour average of 552.

- **A2** (The time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 208 days. This is a 14.8% increase against the previous reporting period (181 days) which is longer than the national average of 201 days but compares favourably to the statistical neighbour average of 228.

4.3 Child related data

4.3.1 In the first six months of this reporting year (1st April – 30th September 2019) Adoption Orders were granted for two children: one child was adopted by his Brent foster carers; and another was adopted by a ‘second time’ approved adopter from a different local authority.

4.3.2 There are currently five adoption applications that have been submitted to Court, with another three in process and it is anticipated that these will result in Adoption Orders within the next reporting period. Of the five adoption applications that have been submitted to Court, two are from foster carers applying to adopt the Brent children for whom they have been caring for a significant length of time.

4.3.3 As at 30th September 2019, there were ten children with an adoption plan who had not yet been adopted. The details of these children’s cases are as follows:

- Eight children are already placed for adoption;
- One child, with a complicated life history and resulting behavioural difficulties, is due to be matched at the first Adopt London West Panel on the 14th October 2019.
- One child’s case is still within the court arena. Active family finding is therefore delayed until a Placement Order is made by the Court.

4.4 Adopter Recruitment

4.4.1 As at 30th September 2019, Brent had seven approved adoptive households waiting for an adoptive placement and where a child had not yet been formally matched or placed. However, of these seven households, two families are being reviewed with a view to terminating their approval for reasons related to health issues and disengagement with the adoption process.

4.4.2 During this reporting period the service received 17 general enquiries about domestic adoption, resulting in one couple being accepted for Stage 1 of the adoption assessment process and another couple, who are already approved adopters (with another local authority) who adopted a Brent child, proceeding towards a full assessment as ‘second time’ adopters. As of 3rd October 2019, both these families are transferring to Adopt London West for full assessment.

4.4.3 Since 9th May 2019, in a move towards Adopt London West going live in October, monthly joint Adoption Information Evenings have been held, facilitated by Brent, Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith and Fulham Adoption Social Workers. These have been helpful in enabling workers from the four local authorities to have the opportunity of working together and building rapport.

4.4.4 As in the previous reporting period, Brent has continued to see an increase in the volume of step-parent and private adoption applications, which has also been the experience of other local authorities in the West London Consortium. From 3rd October 2019, any new assessments of this nature will be undertaken by Adopt London West. Inter-country adoption referrals continue to be referred to the Inter-Country Adoption Centre, a specialist Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA), with whom a service level agreement is in place.

4.4.5 Brent has continued striving to attract adopters from a diverse range of backgrounds in order to best meet the variety of needs of looked after children. This ethos will continue with Adopt London West. Brent adopters currently waiting to be linked or matched to children are either of African Caribbean, African or White European heritage.

There have been four adoptive families approved at panel during this reporting period.

4.4.6 As of 30th September 2019 there were:

- 2 assessments in Stage One of the process, which will transfer to Adopt London West for Stage Two of the process;
- 1 assessment of 'second time' Brent adopters in Stage Two of the process;
- 1 ongoing private adoption assessment;
- 2 ongoing step parent adoption assessments.

4.4.7 In this reporting period, one Brent adoptive household was matched in June 2019 with a Brent child and the child was placed for adoption in early July 2019. In September 2019 a second Brent adoptive household was matched with a Brent child, for whom they were already caring as foster carers. Both adoptive households have already submitted their adoption applications for these children.

4.5 Adoption Support

4.5.1 During the period under review, 39 families accessed ongoing social worker assistance from the team and 8 new families requested post permanency support. 3 further adoption support assessments are in progress.

4.5.2 Adoption support fund (ASF)

Applications were made on behalf of 5 new families to the ASF for individual therapy or therapeutic parenting courses. 9 applications were made for families that we were already working with, bringing the total of ASF applications for this period to 14.

4.5.3 There was a slight drop in services requested by adopted adults, with 26 people receiving access to birth records, intermediary services or counselling around these issues. However, there was an additional 21 requests from other adoption agencies to explore whether the service held records on cases of interest to them.

4.5.4 Much of the adoption team's work during the past six months has been dedicated to closing cases where needed and alerting all service users to the move to Adopt London West. This has been more challenging with birth families, who can often change phone numbers and home addresses more frequently.

4.5.5 During the last six months, the team organised an annual picnic for adopters. There was a large turn-out of both longstanding and newly approved adopters. Many of the adopters have expressed an interest in forming a 'Brent Adopters' network which will carry on after regionalisation.

4.5.6 There were several workshops and seminars during this period. The first two were organised in partnership with the West London Alliance and the most recent one in September was the first to be facilitated by Adopt London West. Adopt London West plans to continue the tradition of bi-monthly evening seminars for adopters, with an occasional focus on issues specific to Special Guardians, as well. The topics covered during the last six months were:

- an introduction to the therapeutic parenting programme 'The Great Behaviour Breakdown';
- attachment-friendly schools; and
- an interactive session on exercises and activities to do with a child to help emotionally regulate them.

4.5.7 The post-LAC education advice resource ended in September and the RAA will be providing a continuation of this service in the new arrangements. In this reporting period the post-LAC education resource facilitated a number of daytime and evening forums on educational issues, that were well attended.

4.5.8 Adopt London West has an 'Education Support Group', which will be meeting six times throughout the year and looking at different relevant topics each time. They plan to hold general support groups in addition. Adopt London West also has a contract with PAC UK (specialised adoption agency) where adopters, birth parents, and adopted adults can access up to six sessions of therapeutic

input, if needed. This is in addition to having a part-time clinical psychologist who can offer consultation to adopters or to social workers.

4.5.9 The ALW is staffed by very experienced social workers and support staff from across all four local authorities. They have a robust plan in place for continued post permanency support and Brent residents will continue to receive a high level of support.

5.0 The Adoption and Permanence Panel

5.1 The purpose and role of the Adoption and Permanence panel was set out in detail within a previous Brent Adoption Service Report to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

5.2 A central list of panel members, in line with statutory guidance, is used on a rotating basis to ensure members maintain regular links with Brent and current issues in adoption. The central list in Brent for 1st July – 30th September 2019 has remained the same as recorded in previous reports to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

5.3 Panel feedback from prospective and approved adopters and presenting social workers over the period under review has remained consistent in confirming good or excellent comments regarding the panel process and conduct. Feedback concerning the performance of the social work casework is provided to the Agency Decision Maker (Operational Director – Integration and Improved Outcomes, Children and Young People's Services) who ensures this is given to the Head of Service (LAC and Permanency) and Service Managers for follow up with individual staff or, should the issues be more systemic, broader service improvement.

5.4 During the period 1st July – 30th September 2019 3 panels were held with 5 specific adoption cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:

- one couple and one single applicant were recommended as suitable to adopt;
- one couple were recommended for continued approval following their annual review;
- one child was matched with prospective adopters; and
- one child was matched with their foster carers for long-term fostering.

The low numbers of panels within this period continues to reflect the reduction in Looked After Children numbers and, more specifically, the ongoing relatively low numbers of children for whom an adoption plan is recommended.

All of the recommendations made to the Agency Decision Maker were ratified.

5.5 With the regionalisation of adoption services, panels are moving to sit within RAAs. As such, the last Adoption Panel was held in Brent on 30th September 2019. The Lead Member, Children's Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care attended at the end of this panel to provide her thanks and appreciation for the work of the panel and its members.

5.6 The roles of the RAA and the local authority from 3rd October 2019 onwards are as follows:

- approvals, reviews and terminations of adopters' suitability to adopt will be heard at Adopt London West's panel, where a recommendation will be made and sent to their own Agency Decision Maker (Head of Service) for ratification/challenge;
- consideration of whether a relinquished baby from Brent should be placed for adoption will be heard at Adopt London West's panel, where a recommendation will be made but this will be sent to Brent's Agency Decision Maker (Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes, Children and Young People's Services) for ratification/challenge;
- adoption matches between Brent children and their prospective adopters will be heard at Adopt London West's panel, where a recommendation will be made but this will be sent to Brent's Agency Decision Maker (Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes, Children and Young People's Services) for ratification/challenge.

5.6 The process of feedback from RAA to Brent and back to aid service development and quality assurance of the work of the new RAA will be replicated in Adopt London West, with feedback being shared with Service Managers in Brent after each panel presentation.

6.0 Service Development

6.1 Regionalisation of adoption

As mentioned throughout this report, the adoption and post-permanence teams in Brent, Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith and Fulham have joined forces and created *Adopt London West* regional adoption agency. Ealing has been secured as the host of the RAA but Brent have taken a leading role by co-ordinating a number of planning meetings to ensure there is direct involvement in every aspect of the creation of the model. As previously mentioned, Adopt London West will include support for SGO carers that will enable better joint commissioning of post-permanency support services in order to achieve more cost effective service delivery.

- 6.1.1** A report was presented to Brent's Cabinet on 15th April 2019 and approval was given for Brent council to join the RAA *Adopt London West* consisting of the London boroughs of Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith and Fulham for the provision of Adoption services and Special Guardianship Support; and for delegated authority to be given to the Strategic Director, Children and Young People, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care to agree and enter into a Partnership Agreement with participating boroughs.
- 6.1.2** This decision was followed by a period of 30 working days' consultation for all the staff in scope – a total of 9. As part of this process, three members of Brent's adoption and post-permanence team decided to join Adopt London West, two employees took early retirement, one resigned and three elected to remain employees of Brent in alternative social work roles.
- 6.1.3** The Key Decision was made on 2nd September 2019 and, following the TUPE of those Brent staff members who chose to move to Ealing, Adopt London West went 'live' as an RAA on 3rd October 2019.
- 6.1.4** Regular quality assurance meetings are scheduled for heads of Service of each of the 4 local authorities to discuss any snagging issues and develop the service. The first one is taking place on 22nd October 2019.
- 6.1.5** The Strategic Director (CYP) attends the RAA board to ensure that the new arrangements are meeting the needs of Brent's children as set out within the partnership agreement. Updates will continue to be provided to the Corporate Parenting Committee on a 6-monthly basis in relation to decisions about children with an adoption plan and the development of Adopt London West.

7.0 Adopter Feedback

During this reporting period, Brent's Adoption and Post-Permanence Team has continued to receive very positive feedback from service users. No complaints were made about the team or the service during this reporting period. Many Brent adopters have continued very willingly to attend preparation training groups and information evenings as 'guest speakers' and have given very honest, balanced accounts of their respective adoption journeys, which is commonly reported as the highlight of the sessions for the participants attending.

Contact Officer

Onder Beter, Head of Service, LAC and Permanency.

Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 0FJ.
Tel: 020 8937 1228

Email: onder.beter@brent.gov.uk