



Corporate Parenting Committee

Wednesday 21 October 2020 at 5.00 pm
Online virtual meeting

Membership:

Members

Councillors:

M Patel (Chair)
Conneely
Gbajumo
Kansagra
Thakkar

Substitute Members

Councillors:

Lloyd, W Mitchell Murray and
Sangani

Councillor:

Colwill, Maurice

For further information contact: Hannah O'Brien, Governance Officer
020 8937 1339, hannah.o'brien@brent.gov.uk

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The press and public are likely to be excluded from this meeting.

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 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 and Care Leavers In Action Representatives

This is an opportunity for members of Care In Action and Care Leavers In Action to feed back on activities.

8 Update on Support Provided to Care Leavers During the Covid-19 Pandemic 7 - 10

To provide an update on the support provided to care leavers during the covid-19 pandemic.

9 Closure Report on Leaving Care Improvement Plan Post-Ofsted Focused Visit in November 2019 11 - 22

To provide a summary of the actions completed following the recommendations arising from the Ofsted focused visit on arrangements for care leavers that took place between 13 and 14 November 2019.

10 The Brent Pledge for Looked After Children and Brent Care Leavers' Charter - 2020 update 23 - 32

To present the proposed revised Brent Pledge for Looked After Children and Brent Care Leavers' Charter.
This was published as a supplementary item on 16 October 2020.

11 Fostering Service Quarterly Report, Quarter 1 (July 2020-September 2020) 33 - 42

To provide information about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children, in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011). The report details the activity of Brent's fostering service from 1 July 2020 until 30 September 2020.

12 Six-Monthly Adoption Report - Adopt London West (April-September 2020) 43 - 56

To provide a briefing in relation to adoption performance data for the period, the progress and activity of Adopt London West, and how good outcomes are being achieved 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 3 February 2021



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE Wednesday 15 July 2020 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor M Patel (Chair) (in remote attendance) and Councillors Kansagra (in remote attendance), Conneely (in remote attendance), Gbajumo (in remote attendance) and Thakkar (in remote attendance).

ALSO IN (REMOTE) ATTENDANCE: Councillors Kelcher and McLennan

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 for absence were received from Sarah Miller (Head of Inclusion, Brent Council).

3. **Declarations of interests**

None.

4. **Deputations**

None received.

5. **Minutes of the previous meeting - 5 February 2020**

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the last meeting held on 5 February 2020 be approved as an accurate record.

6. **Matters arising**

None.

7. **Update from Care In Action/care Leavers in Action Members**

S (Care Leavers in Action) expressed well wishes to the Committee and their families in light of COVID-19. The Committee heard S had been involved in a Women's Empowerment Group and Book Club and had taken part in 21 Days of Abundance. S had begun a podcast for care leavers and young people with care experience, and had been volunteering with the Youth Offending Service and Answer Youth Project. S was also taking part in an Entrepreneurship programme offered by Brent Council and helping with a migration programme for migrant children to help young children settle in the UK. Brent Council had been supporting S through a bereavement and reimbursed S for expenses.

M (Care Leavers in Action) updated the Committee that they had been involved in several Brent Youth Parliament events and a training session for Unicef Rise. M had the opportunity to do some public speaking for the London Children in Care Council in February and had since been invited on to the Children in Care Council Advisory Board. Brent Council had been supporting M to get new glasses and with drama classes.

A (Care Leavers in Action) highlighted that she had set up a cooking with care leavers Instagram page and wanted to do videos on how to cook in future. A had been conducting research for upcoming youth inspections and had also attended the Children in Care Council.

In response to how care leavers had coped during lockdown and managed to attend events, the Committee heard that events attended had been done virtually via Zoom and regular communication was done through a WhatsApp group with membership of around 50 care leavers. Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) advised that as soon as it was felt it was safe to do so physical gatherings could be arranged but it was important to follow the government guidance. It was noted that through the Whatsapp group a meet up at Nando's had been arranged with care leavers for the following Friday, and a committee structure had been formed for 5 care leavers to arrange activities, of which S was events co-ordinator.

Care leavers acknowledged that the beginning of the lockdown had been lonely but they had managed by seeing partners, friends and family as lockdown had eased, and going to the shops and exercising.

The Committee heard that care leavers had been supported to talk about Black Lives Matter online by Brent officers and it had made them feel comfortable and like they were having a mini-protest.

Care leavers had received laptops to ensure that their activities could continue, although it was noted that many applications required a student ID which not all care leavers had. Care leavers were advised to inform their Personal Advisers which applications they needed access to so that it could be coordinated.

The Committee thanked the representatives for the updates and RESOLVED:

That the updates by the representatives of Care in Action/Care Leavers in Action be noted.

8. Corporate parenting support during COVID-19 pandemic

Onder Beter, Head of Looked After Children and Permanency presented the report which provided a summary of the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on children in care, care leavers and foster carers, detailing Brent's response as a Corporate Parent during the period.

Members heard that robust risk assessments for all children and foster carers had been conducted separately to ensure their safety during contact between children and loved ones. Based on the outcomes of the risk assessments some children could not see parents, family or loved ones face to face and it was acknowledged how difficult that would have been. As the guidelines were gradually being relaxed members hoped to see more young people seeing family members face to face.

Foster carers had access to an online foster carer support group, and had been appreciative of Brent's support offer.

Brent were investigating further financial support for care leavers with a £20 supplement to the weekly allowance in line with Universal Credit increases, highlighted in the final paragraph of the report. Nigel Chapman (Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes, Brent Council) informed the Committee that this levelling up was something the Council would only be able to offer for the current year as it was a one-off in line with the position taken by government. Members of the Committee highlighted the difficulty of offering something and then taking it away and requested this was taken into consideration during budget setting in March 2021. Councillor McLennan (Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources, Brent Council) agreed that it was important to ensure what care leavers had was sustainable beyond March 2021 and they would see what could be done with the funding they had.

In relation to budget, members of the Committee heard that the overall position for the budget as a whole had been a challenge and the main cost was placements for children in care and agency social workers. Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) explained that Brent was the 5th lowest funded children's services in London so delivery needed to be impactful. There was placements budget pressure. Brent was now a place of choice for social workers therefore was much stronger on employment of permanent staff.

In response to member's questions, Nigel Chapman advised that there had been a small number of placement breakdowns as a result of COVID-19 mostly due to young people finding it difficult to adhere to the stricter guidelines of lockdown and the providers of those placements having concern about the impact on other young people in the placements. Where there were placement breakdowns in semi-independent providers this caused a strain on the placement budget due to the rates for the subsequent placements for those more challenging children. Gail Tolley highlighted that IFAs and semi-independent providers had sent letters asking for placement fee uplifts as a result of COVID-19, and there had been a firm rebuttal on that pan London.

Further discussing semi-independent and independent providers, members heard that overall Brent had maintained good liaison with semi-independent provision and had seen a greater level of flexibility than anticipated, but there had been some independent fostering agencies where Brent had experienced breakdowns which had been raised through commissioning colleagues as it was felt their tolerance level of behaviour and willingness to be flexible was limited.

Officers did not have the number of young people who had accessed the Safe Base programme for online therapy requested by members of the Committee but would be happy to bring a brief report to the next Committee that covered support for the emotional and mental health of care leavers. It was added that the hours and availability of the online therapy had been expanded and feedback had been positive.

Care leavers had not been asked to leave University accommodation by providers and some had preferred to stay in their accommodation. For those care leavers who wanted to return to London and be close to their networks the Council had provided financial support for accommodation.

Officers acknowledged that Brent had been able to work with health partners including the Designated Doctor for Safeguarding and Looked After Children to continue to conduct health assessments for looked after children, and members and officers expressed gratitude to colleagues and partners that had enabled this work to continue.

Members of the Committee noted the increased attendance and engagement from care leavers as a result of virtual meetings and suggested moving forward the approach could be a mixture of face to face and online virtual meetings.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the content of the report.

9. Annual Corporate Parenting Report 2019-20

This report provided a profile of Brent's looked after children and care leavers during 2019-2020, reporting on annual activity, highlighting strengths and areas for development in supporting looked after children and care leavers in Brent.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the content of the report.

10. Annual report from the Brent Virtual School for looked after children 2018-19

This report outlined the activity and impact of the Brent Virtual School (BVS) during the academic year 2018-19.

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) informed the Committee that Sarah Miller (Head of Inclusion, Brent Council) would be moving on from Brent and they would be sorry to lose her. Michaela Richards (Deputy Head Teacher Brent Virtual School, Virtual School) was present to introduce the report.

The Committee heard the positives and areas for improvement for the academic year 2018-19. Some positives included good outcomes for Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 and there had been no permanent exclusions that academic year. The overall attendance had increased from the previous year and multiple residential trips had taken place. Some of the challenges had been outcomes and attainment at Key Stage 4, which was a focus for the current year.

It was noted that young people often came into care late and in their teens therefore it was common to find some young people coming into care at Key Stage 4 with already complex behaviours to address and a disrupted education. To improve those outcomes the BVS had a full-time post-16 worker the previous year and another member of staff therefore they had been able to split the year groups and have more face to face involvement with the young people. While the BVS did not get any financial support for post-16 education they would support the areas they felt there was a need.

Regarding contact rate and engagement, the Committee were informed that up until June attendance had been 88% which had dropped to 80% in July which was believed to be due to the way data was being collected rather than an 8% drop. In relation to attainment outcomes as a result of COVID-19 the biggest concern was year 5s and year 10s. A package of support had been put together for when lockdown was eased involving more intensive tuition and mental health programs. Gail Tolley reminded members that all vulnerable children in the Borough had access to school throughout the lockdown and social workers and schools had been working closely together to have looked after children in schools. The responsibility for predicted grades and online learning lay with the actual schools and not BVS, which was there to provide additional support and supplement the work of schools.

Two initiatives had been arranged to ensure children were getting access to the internet. The initial initiative was for vulnerable children in year 10 and care leavers to be given access to 4G dongles and the allocation BVS was given had allowed them to spread them wider than the initial group. The second initiative was to increase Wi-Fi and broadband access to all young people in Brent schools in conjunction with BT. This was in the process of being rolled out and BVS hoped to disseminate passwords and licenses the following week.

Councillor McLennan (Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources, Brent Council) informed the committee of a new digital inclusion initiative due to be presented to Cabinet that would include setting up a credit union to give industry loans to residents and provide training and programs for people to access.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the content of the report.

11. **Fostering Service Quarterly Report , Q1 (April 2020 – June 2020)**

The purpose of this report was to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it was achieving good outcomes for children for the period from April 2020 to June 2020.

The Committee heard that there had been a reduction in the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers presenting to the service, detailed in page 89, paragraph 3 of the report. There was an assumption that this would increase from September onwards therefore services were preparing for that scenario.

In response to how the joint fostering project was proceeding, Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) informed the Committee that 3 Local Authorities had committed to the project. A business case approved by CYP directors and the 3 Local Authorities had been submitted to the DfE and they were awaiting a response on whether there would be any financial support. Officers were optimistic they could receive the funding to develop the model. Currently the service was looking to do some joint marketing activity with Ealing which they could do without DfE funding.

More foster carers had been recruited in the current financial year compared to the previous year, with the fostering service having a strong marketing presence online and through social media. It was noted that there had been an increase in male attendees at online open evenings which was hoped would be retained as part of recovery work.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the content of the report.

12. **Six-monthly Adoption report, 1 October 2019 – 31 March 2020**

The report provided a briefing to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee in relation to adoption performance data for the six month period and was presented by Debbie Gabriel. It was the first report since Adopt London West and looked at child related data, adopter recruitment, the support offer for adopters, feedback from families, application data and information about the agency, detailed in each section of the report. Debbie Gabriel expressed there had been a seamless transition moving to the new agency and the agency had been fortunate to benefit from the experience and skills of 3 Brent staff that transferred to the agency and the support operationally and strategically from Brent.

It was highlighted that a benefit of the wider group of Local Authorities was that it was possible to connect with colleagues more easily, placing children across the region with the potential to grow that activity.

Regarding the list of services funded detailed in section 14.3 of the report, Debbie Gabriel advised that those listed were just from COVID-19 funding. The terms of the funding were very specific and they needed to be commissioned quickly and delivered by the end of September. The DfE were considering allowing the agency to extend the use of the funding and they were waiting to hear back from ministers. In response to concern at the loss of these services once funding had gone Debbie Gabriel confirmed that as an agency they were committed to continuing the commissioning of the NVR 'Child to Parent' Violence training courses.

In response to concerns around losing COVID-19 funded services, Councillor McLennan (Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources, Brent Council) and Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) agreed to put together a list of emerging costs as a result of COVID-19 and which they would wish to continue after COVID-19.

Regarding the historic capacity and delay issues with court proceedings, Nigel Chapman (Operational Director for Integration and Improved Outcomes, Brent Council) advised that during COVID-19 with the use of technology the capacity has been freed up within the court system allowing cases to be dealt with more quickly. It was hoped that the court system would retain some of those new ways of working.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the content of the report.
- ii) To include in the next report data regarding the number of people interested in adoption and following through to application during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- iii) That Children and Young People colleagues would complete a list of COVID-19 funded services that should be continued after lockdown.

Any Other Business

The Committee expressed thanks to the outgoing Head of Brent Virtual School, Sarah Miller.

The Committee expressed thanks to all Children and Young People staff for the work done during the pandemic.

The meeting closed at 6.58 pm

COUNCILLOR MILI PATEL
Chair

	Corporate Parenting Committee 21 October 2020
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People
Update on Support Provided to Care Leavers During the Covid-19 Pandemic	

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 Onder.Beter@brent.gov.uk Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Nigel.Chapman@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 A previous report on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on care leavers and the corporate parenting support that had been provided was presented to the Committee in July 2020.
- 1.2 Further restrictions on social movement were introduced in September 2020. In light of the impact of isolation and loneliness on care leavers (reported to the Committee in July 2020), the Statutory Lead Member for Children and Young People requested an update to be presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in October 2020 about the support provided to care leavers.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review and comment on the content of this report.

3.0 Support Provided to Care Leavers since August 2020

- 3.1. In August 2020, Brent increased the weekly subsistence allowance for older children in semi-independent placements and eligible care leavers by £20 per week in line with the increase in Universal Credit. This change has been made until 31st March 2021 when it will be reviewed by the Council. This has been welcomed by young people, who fed back to Personal Advisors about the positive impact this additional financial support has had on their lives.
- 3.2. The enrichment programme has continued for care leavers throughout the pandemic. On 28th August, the Care Leavers Hub Events Committee organised a socially distanced visit to Crazy Golf, which 4 young people attended. Brent financially supported one young person to travel down from Manchester to be part of this.
- 3.3. The Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) group has continued with face to face meetings. On Thursday 17th September 2020, a face-to-face CLIA session was held in the Civic Centre. The group of nine young people managed the new social distancing rules very well throughout the session, which was also attended by the Strategic Director, CYP. The group worked on a health guide for care leavers, prepared by colleagues from the Clinical Commissioning Group and LAC Health Team. The group also worked on revising the Brent Care Leavers' Charter before going for a meal together. Another face-to-face session has been planned to take place on 20th October 2020.
- 3.4. As part of Brent's strategic alliance with Barnardo's to increase positive destinations for care leavers, Barnardo's have been running relevant activities since July 2020. For example, a group of care leavers attended a camping trip in September 2020 for a long weekend in Herefordshire, involving outside activities such as paintballing and quad biking. Four young people attended this activity which focused on team building skills, patience, resilience, motivation and confidence building among young people.
- 3.5. Barnardo's also held a workshop with young people called Pizza and Privilege including a discussion about race and the Black Lives Matter movement.
- 3.6. One care leaver shared their experience of another camping trip she had been on with a charity called 'Under the Sky', via the WhatsApp group, which led to a further 4 care leavers signing up to take part, all of whom greatly enjoyed the experience.
- 3.7. National Care Leavers' Week 2020 is taking place between 26th October and 1st November 2020. The week is an opportunity to showcase and celebrate the successes of care leavers nationally and also raise awareness of care experienced young people. The Leaving Care Teams are currently identifying young people to take part in the next Element Programme which will begin during National Care Leavers' week. Element is a charity providing workshops to care leavers using arts and crafts enabling young people to express themselves, enhance self-esteem and confidence and build networks of support. A number of young people from the Hub group have requested to join the programme alongside a number of other referrals from Personal Advisors.
- 3.8. A new programme to support young people into employment has also started including a 'Seeking employment' WhatsApp group. The group focuses on inspiring care leavers seeking employment to come forward and be supported to take the next step. There are 40 young people in the group. More recently, 4 care leavers have been interviewed for Level 3 IT and HR apprenticeship opportunities. 3 of them were shortlisted for the second round with final outcomes not yet known. Another young person was

interviewed in the second week of October 2020 for a year-long paid placement as a production runner in a top London advertising agency. Jobs are being posted every day and the Prospects advisors (Brent's commissioned provider supporting young people who are NEET) are part of the group, supporting young people with their CV and interview skills.

- 3.9. Brent currently has 43 care leavers in higher education. They have all been provided with the necessary support at the beginning of the academic year as follows:
- Making therapeutic support available through Safe-Base Brent
 - Regular contact and support from allocated Personal Advisors
 - IT support with dongles, laptops and Wi-Fi costs where necessary. One young person was recently provided with a printer to support with coursework.
 - Support with travel back to Staying Put placements or home at weekends when needed
 - Three young people are in student halls and are contacted regularly by Personal Advisors.
- 3.10. In the event of local lockdowns, young people will continue to have FaceTime visits, be offered any therapeutic support they might need and explore accommodation options if they need to return to London.
- 3.11. Since the end of September 2020, Personal Advisors have started to undertake face-to-face visits to see care leavers. This is the first time visits to care leavers have been carried out face to face for all young people. A small minority of visits are being conducted online following a risk assessment in each case that suggests a Covid-19 related reason that prevents a face to face visit.

4.0. Actions going forward

- 4.1. As outlined at the Committee in July 2020, the weekly subsistence allowance has increased CYP budget costs by approximately £100,000. Should the government decide to continue with the same rate of Universal Credit allowances post 31st March 2021, CYP leaders will consider reviewing these arrangements. This would however, create an unfunded pressure on the CYP budget.

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 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 21 October 2020
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People
Closure Report: Leaving Care Improvement Plan Post-Ofsted Focused Visit (November 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:	Appendix 1 - Closure Report on Leaving Care Improvement Plan Post-Ofsted Focused Visit
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Onder Beter, Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Onder.Beter@brent.gov.uk Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Nigel.Chapman@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This paper provides a summary of the actions completed following the recommendations arising out of the Ofsted focused visit on arrangements for care leavers that took place between 13th and 14th November 2019.
- 1.2 The Committee was presented with the findings of the focused visit in February 2020, detailing the recommendations for practice improvement: (<http://democracy.brent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=446&MId=5446&Ver=4>). It was agreed that a closure report, including an impact analysis of the improvement plan, would be presented to the Committee once the actions had been completed.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review and comment on the actions taken by the Children and Young People's Department.

3.0 Detail

3.1. Ofsted inspects local authority children's services under a system called 'Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services' (ILACS). Most local authorities will receive a full inspection once during a 3-year cycle, the scope of which being dependent on the previous grading of the authority. A shorter, 2-day focused visit on a particular area of practice is carried out within the three-year inspection cycle¹.

3.2. Brent received an ILACS inspection in May 2018 with the outcome being 'Good' overall with services for looked after children and care leavers being judged 'Outstanding'. Brent received a focused visit from Ofsted inspecting arrangements for care leavers in November 2019. The recommendations made by Ofsted following the focused visit were:

- To improve consistency in timeliness and quality of pathway plans
- To improve case recording including records of visits to care leavers, supervision records and management oversight and the management rationale for case closure
- To improve audit arrangements to consider the quality of work with care leavers
- To ensure there was risk assessments were in place to articulate measures to address and minimise risk.

3.3. An action plan, to ensure the recommendations were implemented over a 6-month period, was created and scrutinised on a monthly basis by the CYP Strategic Director. A Closure Report was prepared in July 2020 that included an analysis of impact of the quality assurance activity undertaken and confirmation that the recommendations had all been fully addressed.

3.4. The attached closure report details all activity undertaken to improve the above mentioned areas and confirmation that all actions have been completed.

4. Going Forward

4.1. The Leaving Care Quality Assurance Group has been formed to continue tracking the quality of practice including case recording, case management supervision and pathway plans. The group is chaired by the Head of LAC and Permanency and attended by relevant managers who will undertake both

¹ Ofsted's inspection arrangements have changed following Covid-19 Pandemic. To see details of new inspection regime: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>

qualitative and quantitative audits on a monthly basis to ensure sustained improvement. Audit findings will be discussed with Leaving Care Teams and LAC Teams on a regular basis to disseminate learning as part of CYP Quality Assurance Framework.

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Appendix 1

Closure report on Care Leavers Improvement Plan

July 2020

Introduction

Following a Focused Visit on the issue of Care Leavers by Ofsted in November 2019, a Care Leavers Improvement Plan was put in place to respond to the four recommendations:

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

This paper confirms that all actions have been completed. There will be continuous quality assurance activity in all areas going forward to ensure the progress made is sustained.

Confirmation of action undertaken and the impact for children and families is set out for each improvement area below.

Recommendation 1: Consistency in timeliness and quality of pathway plans

Objective A: Timeliness of pathway plan completion and review is consistently above 90%, measured by 90% in April, May and June 2020.

Evidence of key actions completed

Previous staffing challenges were overcome by increasing the number of permanent Personal Advisers (PAs) and both Team Managers being in permanent roles. This has resulted in robust management oversight on timeliness of pathway plans; managers have used the pathway plan authorisation process to regularly feedback to PAs on the quality of their pathway plans and rejected some where the quality had fallen short of expectations. Regular workshops took place on pathway plans emphasising timeliness and quality. Using management information, both Head of Service (HoS) and the relevant Service Manager have closely monitored performance with Team Managers and identified PAs who required additional support.

Evidence of impact.

Pathway plan case audits and feedback from PAs and managers demonstrate a good understanding that pathways plans must be updated as a result of a significant change in circumstances and at the minimum requirement of six-monthly intervals.

In December 2019, timeliness of pathway plans was 84%. This increased to 91% in March 2020 and 95% at the end of June 2020. Managers in the service are aware of the small number of young people whose pathway plans are not up-to-date and the reasons for this.

Findings from thematic audits in July 2020 in relation to the quality of pathway plans evidence that pathway plans were timely in 94% of cases. The audit findings show that plans were reviewed if there were significant changes in the young person's life.

Objective B: All personal advisers, social workers and frontline managers in LACP receive training on SMART pathway planning for care leavers

Evidence of key actions completed

5 workshops have been offered to all PAs, SWs and managers in the Looked after Children and Permanency Service. 38 members of staff including all PAs in the leaving care teams attended. Workshops focused on the quality of pathway plans, SMART pathway planning and recording.

Evidence of impact

Feedback from participants has been positive and the recent audit findings have evidenced a good understanding of pathway plans from practitioners evidenced on case files. Regular workshops on pathway plans will continue as refreshers on a quarterly basis.

Objective C: Quality of pathway plans is improved to be consistently good

Evidence of key actions completed

A number of quality assurance activities were put in place to ensure there was consistency of good quality pathway plans:

- LAC Tracker Audit activity led by the HoS took place in February 2020 focusing on the quality of pathway plans using a targeted 'pathway plan audit form'. 12 pathway plans were audited. Findings have been shared with Leaving Care Teams and managers provided feedback to PAs in their supervision. Findings were used to shape delivery of workshops to PAs on pathway plans. Learning was also shared within the LACP Management Team.
- In July 2020, The Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service led audit activity that reviewed the quality of pathway plans. 13 audits were completed.
- Additional activity by Leaving Care Team Managers audited 17 pathway plans and reported to the HoS.
- Managers' regular reviews and sign-off activity. Both Team Managers continue to scrutinise the quality of plans when their authorisation is required. They have placed a case note on Mosaic when authorising plans. Good examples of plans have been shared in both teams and also used in workshops offered to PAs and SWs.
- Achieving consistency in the quality of pathway plans has been a target for all PAs in their annual appraisals.

Evidence of impact

Findings from both the LAC Tracker audit in February, the thematic audits in July 2020 and audits by team managers in relation to the quality of pathway plans evidence impact as follows:

- Improved efforts from PAs to engage young people and encourage co-production of pathway plans.
- Majority of pathway (75%) plans were graded as good by thematic casefile audits in July 2020.
- Voice of young people was clearly recorded, mostly in the first person.
- Pathway plans show evidence of a good relationship between young people and their PAs.
- Improved management oversight, supervision and guidance that improved the quality of pathway plans.
- Evidence of more analysis within pathway plans.
- Language is clear, simple and jargon-free in majority of plans.
- Plans are mostly realistic and appropriately ambitious.

Whilst the audit indicated improved practice, it highlighted the need for continuous improvement in consistent analysis of needs, reducing duplication in recording and evidencing direct work undertaken by the PAs. These areas were subsequently focused on for further improvement and formed the content of workshops and managers' conversations with PAs.

Recommendation 2: Case recording including records of visits to care leavers, supervision records and management oversight and the management rationale for case closure

Objective A: Case recording to be improved including recording of direct work with young people and all forms of communication such as text messages, photos and videos on MOSAIC.

Evidence of key actions completed

- Learning and Development Programme for PAs was revised to include case recording and analytical report writing in December 2019.
- PAs were included in a CYP Learning and Development Programme to improve writing and recording skills.
- 5 Workshops (3 virtually conducted) for staff to focus on improving case recording including one workshop taking place at the LACP Staff Forum in January 2020. All PAs have attended case recording workshops.
- Management meetings and supervision sessions focused on improving the quality of case recordings.
- LAC Tracker audit in March 2020 focused on the quality of visit records for LAC and care leavers. In total case records of 17 LAC and care leavers (9 LAC and 7 care leavers) were audited.
- Thematic audit activity in July 2020 included a section on reviewing the quality of case recording.

Evidence of impact.

Feedback gathered from practitioners who attended the workshops demonstrated that they were impactful. Team managers reported that they started to see more direct quotes from

young people being used in case recording and duplication in records has decreased with case recordings being more purposeful.

Findings from the Thematic Audit in July evidence improvement in case recording. In 94% of cases audited in July, use of language was appropriate. More than half of the cases audited had good quality case recordings.

Whilst improvement has been observed in the quality of case recording, in some cases, text messages and emails were not always recorded on the file. This area will need further focus. Additionally, work is underway to upskill PAs in critical thinking and recording analysis.

Objective B: Supervision records to be improved to include clear management oversight and reflection on progress made in each case and guidance for practitioners.

Evidence of key actions completed

- Workshop with front line managers took place on 27th January 2020 including providing examples of good quality supervision records.
- LAC Tracker audited the quality of case management supervision including recording of supervision. 16 cases of care leavers were audited.
- HoS and three Service Managers in the LACP observed 3 sessions of supervision each (12 supervision sessions in total) in February 2020 and provided feedback to both supervisors and supervisees. Senior managers also reviewed the case recording of the sessions observed and provided feedback to managers on the quality of recording.

Evidence of impact.

LAC tracker audits and observation of supervision evidence the following:

- In over 90% of all cases considered there was clear management oversight and grip.
- Improved practice around reflective supervision with managers appropriately steering the discussion
- Improved picture in relation to previous actions being reviewed
- Auditors and supervisors were able to get a good sense of the young person's lived experience

Additionally, findings from thematic audits undertaken in July 2020 show impact in this area as follows:

- Management oversight was present in almost all cases (94%) reviewed; there was evidence of regular purposeful supervision
- In the majority of cases audited (74%) the quality of case supervision and management was graded as 'good' or 'outstanding'.

Whilst, consistent improvement has been evident, more work is required to achieve greater consistency around recording of supervision which should evidence reflective discussions taking place in supervision.

Objective C: Management rationale for case closures are recorded in a timely way. Care leavers are provided with the rationale for case closures and their feedback is recorded.

Evidence of key actions completed

- Complaints reports and feedback from young people have been monitored regularly by the HOS for LACP.
- All case closures have been reviewed by the relevant Service Manager prior to case being closed to ensure adherence to Brent's practice guidance for social workers and personal advisers.
- The HOS undertook audit activity on all cases closed over a 3-month period in April 2020.
- Thematic audit on care leavers undertaken in July also audited closed cases.

Evidence of impact.

No complaints were received from care leavers regarding case closure since December 2019. Findings from the HoS audit activity show that in all cases, case files included evidence of case closures being discussed with young people whose views were recorded clearly. Management rationale was evidence on those casefiles. Findings of the thematic audit in July 2020 evidence the above. Two closed cases were audited and one of them was graded as 'outstanding'.

Objective D: Visits to care leavers are purposeful and recorded to reflect lived experiences of young people.

Evidence of key actions completed

- Leaving Care Team Managers and the Service Manager undertook deep dive checks to review quality of leaving care visits in March 2020.
- Planned practice observations had to be postponed due to the Covid-19 outbreak. In its place, an audit of quality of visit records was conducted on 26th March 2020 at the LAC Tracker. Findings were shared with all managers and practitioners. As a result of these audits and feedback from sessions with all managers, HOS and Service Managers have prepared 3 pieces of guidance for SWs and PAs when visiting LAC and care leavers:
 - 1) Practice Guidance for Personal Advisors Visiting Care Leavers who are Parents
 - 2) Case recording Guidance for SWs Visiting LAC
 - 3) Case Recording Guidance for PAs Visiting Care Leavers.
- Additionally, workshops on the quality of case recording focused on improving the quality of visit recording.

Evidence of impact.

The LAC Tracker audits and managers deep dive checks show an improvement in visits records, most evidencing young people's voice, lived experiences and present issues. Almost all visits were purposeful and timely.

Findings of the thematic audit in July 2020 evidence the above; in the vast majority of cases (64%) visit have been recorded as good. However, audit activity also shows the need to create greater consistency in content of visit records, which remains an area the Service will continue to work on.

Recommendation 3: Audit arrangements to consider the quality of work with care leavers

Objective A: LAC Tracker Meeting TOR to be reviewed with the view to include ILACS grading.

Evidence of key actions completed

- TOR for the LAC Tracker has been reviewed and updated to reflect a greater focus on quality of practice.
- An overview report of the LAC Tracker feeds into the Quality Assurance and Performance meeting on a 6-monthly basis to triangulate findings and plan service improvement actions. First report was in April 2020 reflecting October 2019 to March 2020 activity.
- All Case Reviews and minutes of the meetings from September 2019 onwards have been shared with Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service.
- Due to the narrow focus on specific themes being audited, it was agreed that a narrative grading/judgement based on ILACS criteria was more appropriate for this QA activity instead of actual grading.

Evidence of impact.

Feedback from LACP managers and PAs is positive about the learning coming out of the LAC Tracker audits that now have a specific focus on practice.

Objective B: CYP Quality Assurance Activity to include targeted audits of work undertaken with care leavers.

Evidence of key actions completed

The departmental audit programme included care leavers on a consistent basis from December 2019 onwards. The 2020/21 audit programme was revised and it includes targeted practice improvement work relating to care leavers.

Evidence of impact.

The Annual Quality Assurance Activity Report 2019/2020 included specific sections on audit activity relating to care leavers. In July 2020 thematic audit activity focused on all areas of practice requiring improvement as highlighted by the Ofsted Focused Visit. A Service Manager from the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance also attends the LAC Tracker

Objective C: Case transfer audits, completed by team managers to include practice grading with feedback provided to the social worker and manager.

Evidence of key actions completed

- Revised template developed and guidance provided to those completing transfer audits. Case transfer audits have been discussed at the LACP full management meetings with all team managers. Revised draft check list and guidance have been shared with team managers.
- The revised template includes a narrative judgement and rationale based on the ILACS framework rather than an actual 'indicative grading'.

- In March 2020 audit activity was undertaken by LACP Service Managers on case transfers.

Evidence of impact.

Findings from the case transfer audits show that transfer audits take place and this is helping cases transferred to Leaving Care Teams in an up-to-date manner. This has also increased dialogue between sending and receiving managers that has improved joint working arrangements.

Recommendation 4: Risk Assessments to articulate measures to address and minimise risk

Objective A: The Vulnerable Adolescents Risk Assessment tool is in place to define, measure and mitigate risk factors for young people as needed (i.e. custody releases, young people placed out of borough, gang affiliations, etc.).

Evidence of key actions completed

- Both Leaving Care Teams have started to utilise the established Vulnerable Adolescents Risk Assessment (VARA) as a tool when working with care leavers at risk.
- PAs were supported by a Social Work Practice Consultant (SWPC) whose role is to develop practice and staff in relation to vulnerable adolescents and transitional safeguarding.
- All PAs were provided with training on VARA in February 2020. Additionally, 10 PAs were provided with one to one training on the VARA by the SWPC.

Evidence of impact.

PAs and managers provided feedback to senior managers attending team meetings that the introduction of the VARA has supported their understanding of transitional safeguarding. They stated that they are now able to better understand the young person's own views on levels of risk and safety strategies.

Thematic Audits in July reviewed

- In majority of cases audited (62.5%) the quality of VARA was judged 'good' or 'outstanding'. The audits have evidenced a more common use of VARA as a tool to assess and mitigate risks.
- The form is also used to appropriately refer cases to multi-agency risk panels (CEMP or Violence and Vulnerability Panel).

Whilst VARA has been introduced and is being used in the majority of cases, the audits identified the need for further training for PAs around building analysis and critical thinking, understanding change and recognising risk patterns. Work is underway to start in September 2020.

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 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 21 October 2020
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People
The Brent Pledge for Looked After Children and Brent Care Leavers' Charter – 2020 update	

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:	Appendix 1 - Brent's Promises – draft 2020 update Appendix 2 - Brent Care Leavers Charter – draft 2020 update
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Sonya Kalyniak Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Children and Young People's Services sonya.kalyniak@brent.gov.uk 020 8937 4526 Brian Grady Operational Director, Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy, Children and Young People's Services brian.grady@brent.gov.uk 020 8937 4173

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. This report provides information to Corporate Parenting Committee on the revised Pledge for Looked After Children and the revised Care Leavers' Charter. All councillors are corporate parents to our looked after children. The pledge and charter detail the services and support that children in care and care leavers can expect from Brent Council as their corporate parent. The revised Pledge for Looked After Children and Care Leavers' Charter were informed and developed with Care in Action (CIA) and Care Leavers in Action (CLIA), Brent's Children in Care Council.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee endorse the revised Brent Pledge for Looked after Children (Brent's Promises) (Appendix 1) and the revised Care Leavers' Charter (Appendix 2).

3.0 The importance of the Brent Pledge for Looked After Children and the Care Leavers' Charter

3.1 As the corporate parents of children in care and care leavers, the whole of Brent Council is responsible for their well-being. As a good corporate parent this means being an advocate and helping looked after children become successful, well-rounded adults.

3.2 Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services (DCS) and the Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS) states that the DCS 'should have regard to the General Principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and ensure that children and young people are involved in the development and delivery of local services' (Department for Education, April 2012, Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and Lead Members for Children's Services).

3.3 CIA and CLIA represent the voices of children in care and care leavers through a variety of consultative mechanisms, influencing those who make decisions about services, and developing and monitoring the delivery of the Pledge. The Pledge, developed with input from children, ensures that children in care are aware of their rights and opportunities.

3.4 The Children and Social Work Act (2017) sets out seven corporate parenting principles to which local authorities must have regard when carrying out their functions in relation to looked after children and young people:

- to act in their best interests and promote their physical and mental health and well-being.
- to encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- to take into account their views, wishes and feelings.
- to help them gain access to and make the best use of services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- to promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for them.
- to ensure they are safe and have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work
- to prepare them for adulthood and independent living.

3.5 In addition to meeting our statutory duties, agreeing the Pledge and Charter demonstrates the commitment of the Council to listen to what is important to children in care and care leavers and commit to meeting their needs.

3.6 As background to the revised version of the Pledge and Charter, Care Matters (2007) outlined the expectation for every local area to develop a pledge for the children in their care. Following consultations with care experienced young people across London, London Councils launched the London Pledge for Looked After Children in November 2008. Since this time, each local authority has developed its own individualised pledge, which incorporates the views, priorities, and wishes of their own looked after children.

3.7 The Brent Pledge for Children in Care was initially developed in 2010 and was updated with the introduction of the Care Leavers' Charter in 2014. Both documents were refreshed in 2018.

3.8 Both the Pledge and the Charter set out a number of promises that children and young people have identified which, if delivered, make Brent Council a good corporate parent. The revised Pledge and Charter have been endorsed by the Corporate Management Team. Once endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Committee, the Lead Member signs both documents on behalf of elected members, officers and partners.

4.0 Views of children and young people

4.1 Ensuring that our looked after children and care leavers are able to influence and shape the services provided for them is both a statutory duty and a key priority. Both the Pledge and Charter have been reviewed with the participation of children and young people through CIA and CLIA. A total of 14 looked after children and 12 care leavers provided feedback.

4.2 The suggested amendments made by children and young people have been shared with the professional network through the local partnership meeting for care experienced children and young people, chaired by the Head of LAC and Permanency. The group supported the proposed amendments of both documents.

4.3 **Brent's Pledge for Children in Care** - Feedback from CIA was that children liked the content of the previous pledge and did not feel that any big changes were needed. However, they would like the title changed from "pledge" to "promises" as it is easier for children to understand. They suggested that placement stability be the first promise as this is very important to them. They requested that some language was changed to be more child focused, for example, changing "upon request" to "when you ask".

4.4 They also suggested some design changes. For example, they did not like the silhouettes because they did not have faces and you could not see if the people they represented were happy or sad. Instead, they would like pictures of real people.

4.5 **The Care Leavers' Charter** – Feedback from CLIA was that they wanted the charter to have a stronger reference to support with career and employment goals. They also suggested that both physical health and mental health were specifically referenced.

4.6 There were also some recommended design changes for the Charter. They suggested that the silhouettes were made more realistic and included someone graduating and someone working. They also suggested making the colour more vibrant.

4.7 The documents have been amended to reflect the changes requested by children and young people and are attached as Appendix 1 and 2 to this report.

5.0 Relaunching the Pledge (Brent's Promises) and the Charter

5.1 CIA and CLIA will support with the re-launching of Brent's Pledge (Promises) and the Care Leavers' Charter. This will ensure that every child in care and care leaver and the professionals working with them are aware of our promises to children in care and care leavers. The revised Pledge, renamed Brent's Promises, will be included in refreshed information provided to children entering care so that these children are aware of the

promises made to them. The Charter will be shared with children leaving care at their final LAC Review.

- 5.2 The Participation Officer will support CIA and CLIA members to present the revised Brent Promises and Charter at appropriate Foster Carers Support Groups, staff forums and team meetings to raise awareness. The revised Promises and Charter will be included in the Brent Council and CYP induction programme and will also be shared with the semi-independent provider forum and commissioned providers.
- 5.3 Independent Reviewing Officers will ensure children and young people are aware of the Brent Promises and Charter and will continue to quality assure practice to evidence that promises have been kept, escalating any concerns they may have.

6.0 Evaluating progress against the Pledge and Charter

- 6.1 In Autumn 2020, CLIA led inspections will take place. These inspections will focus on providing assurance that Brent Council is meeting its commitments to care leavers as per the Brent Care Leavers' Charter. The young inspectors group includes 10 current care leavers.
- 6.2 Planning is in progress for the first CLIA led inspection focusing on the offer to care leavers from within the Looked After Children and Permanency Service.
- 6.3 Based on learning from the CLIA led inspections, the process will be replicated for children in care with CIA groups in early 2021 to consider Brent's Promises to children in care. These wider inspections will take place from the Spring of 2021, and will consider the wider Council contributions to the delivery of the Brent Promises and Charter. The results of these inspections will be shared with the Corporate Parenting Committee by CLIA and CIA inspectors.
- 6.4 To further understand the experience of children and care leavers, the Bright Spots Surveys will take place once again. The survey for children in care will take place in November 2020 (two years following the previous survey). The survey for care leavers will take place in January 2021. These will provide a rich overview of children in care and care leavers' experience to test against the promises we have made. CIA and CLIA will present the findings of these surveys at future Corporate Parenting Committee meetings.

7.0 Legal Implications

- 7.1 Care Matters (2007) outlines the expectation for every local area to develop a pledge for the children in their care. The Children Act (1989), The Children and Social Work Act (2017) and Article 12 of the UNCRC outline the importance of children and young people being given the right to be involved in decisions that affect them. Both the Brent Pledge and Charter inform children and young people of their rights and highlight Brent Council's commitment to actively involving children and young people in decision making and the shaping of services.

BRENT'S PROMISES TO YOU – DRAFT 2020 update

Brent makes the following promises to all children and young people in our care.

These are things that we will do so that you have the best support and help possible.

We promise

To provide stability for you (put this as the first section)

- ✓ You will have your social worker's telephone number and know where they work so you can speak to them when you need to.
- ✓ If your social worker leaves you will be told when and know details of your new social worker and their manager.
- ✓ We will do our best to make sure you don't have too many changes of social workers and move too many times
- ✓ Your Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) will listen to you and make sure your views are heard

To respect and honour your identity

- ✓ We will respect your personal beliefs, values, culture and heritage.
- ✓ We will support who you are and who you want to be.
- ✓ We will provide you with information about your background that is appropriate for your age.
- ✓ We will support and encourage relationships between you and members of your family

To involve you in the decisions about your life

- ✓ We will actively listen to your views and opinions and involve you in decisions about your life.
- ✓ We will explain our decisions and make sure that you fully understand what has been decided.
- ✓ We will involve you in the planning of services that you receive.

To support you

- ✓ We will help you to manage challenging relationships.
- ✓ You can tell us how you feel and we will help you choose what you want in your life.
- ✓ We will support you to become the person you want to be.
- ✓ We will make sure you get to meet other children in care where you live and in other places so you can help each other and talk about the things you like and don't like.
- ✓ We will let you know about Brent's Care In Action participation groups, so that you can meet other young people in care to help each other and share experiences.
- ✓ Your social worker will come to see you and you can talk to them on your own every time they come.
- ✓ When we come to see you we will make sure you can be there and that you are not in school
- ✓ We will tell you and other people when you have done something really well.
- ✓ We will respect your right to privacy whilst doing everything possible to help you keep safe.
- ✓ We will ensure that you have access to an independent person (an advocate) when you ask.
- ✓ We will remember your birthday and other important days.

To provide you with a safe, stable and happy place to live

- ✓ We will ensure that your carer knows enough about you to be able to support you.
- ✓ We will support your carer to understand you and the things that you are going through.
- ✓ We will provide you with a safe place that you can call home.
- ✓ We will do everything possible so that you can meet your new carer before you move.

Work with you to achieve your goals and targets in education

- ✓ We will value your strengths, gifts, talents and encourage you to have high ambitions.
- ✓ We will support you to learn, help you to achieve your very best at school and support you when you are making decisions about your future.
- ✓ We will ensure that you have the things you need for your education including access to a laptop.
- ✓ If needed, we will find an advisor, life coach or mentor to support you.

To support you to be active and stay healthy

- ✓ We will provide you with opportunities to take part in fun activities such as sports, access to the outdoors and other activities you are interested in.
- ✓ We will support your physical and mental health and encourage you to make

healthy and positive choices for your life.

- ✓ We will make sure that your carer takes you to see your doctor, dentist and other healthcare professional when you need to visit them.
- ✓ We will provide you with information and advice about healthy eating, exercise, smoking, drugs and sexual health.

Preparing you for independence

- ✓ We will work to ensure that you are ready for independent living including how to manage money and how to cook.
- ✓ We will work with you on your Pathway Plan at the age of 16 so that you are clear about what will happen next and what support you will receive
- ✓ We will provide you with information about what you are entitled to and how to access your entitlements.
- ✓ We will consider your wishes to stay living with your foster carer after the age of 18.

Appendix 2 (amendments highlighted in green)

Brent Care Leavers Charter – DRAFT 2020 update

We will ensure that all young people in and leaving care have the right support to keep them safe and to help them grow into happy, healthy and fulfilled young adults who are optimistic about their future.

We promise:

To respect and honour your identity

- We will respect your personal beliefs and values and accept your culture and heritage.
- We will support you to become the person you want to be.

To believe in you

- We will value your strength, gifts and talents and encourage your aspirations and career goals.

To listen to you

- We will listen to your feelings and you can tell us what help you need to be a young adult.
- We will promote and encourage access to independent advocacy whenever you need it.
- We will provide easy access to complaint and appeal processes.

To inform you

- We will give you information that you need at every point in your journey, from care to adulthood, including information on legal entitlements and the service you can expect to receive from us. The information will be presented in a way that you want.
- We will make clear to you what information about yourself and your time in care you are entitled to see. We will support you to access this when you want it, to manage any feelings that you might have about the information and to put on record any disagreement with the content.

To provide you with information and support to help you have good physical and mental health

- We will encourage you to make healthy and positive choices for your life.
- We will provide you with information and advice about healthy eating, exercise, smoking, drugs, sexual health and mental well-being.

To support you

- We will help you manage changing relationships or come to terms with loss, trauma or other significant life events.
- We will help you to get support if you have any concerns regarding your physical, mental or emotional health.
- We will provide guidance on your next steps in life – in terms of education, finances, leaving care and more.
- As well as information, advice, practical and financial help, we will provide emotional support.
- We will make it our responsibility to understand your needs. If we can't meet those needs we will try to help you find a service that can.

To find you a home

- We will work alongside you to prepare you for your move into independent living only when you are ready. We will help you think about the choices available and to find accommodation that is right for you.
- We will do everything we can to ensure you are happy and feel safe when you move to independent living.

To be a lifelong champion

- We will provide you with support and guidance to equip you for independent living.
- We will do our best to support you until you are settled in your independent life.
- We will encourage you to achieve your career and employment goals.
- We will work proactively with other agencies to help you sustain your home.
- We will work to help you break down barriers you face when dealing with other agencies.
- We will work together with the services you need to help you establish yourself as an independent individual. These services can include housing, benefits, health services, training, providers, colleges and universities.

 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 21 October 2020
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People
Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 4: 1st July to 30th September 2020	

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

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 2020.

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 Priorities

The in-house fostering function is positioned within the LAC and Permanency (LACP) Service of the Children and Young People's Department. Relevant parts of the LACP Service plan 2020/21 set out the vision for fostering as below:

- Continue to improve the stability of children by providing more local and in-house placement options, minimising change of social workers and placements.
- Developing partnerships with neighbouring authorities to recruit and retain more foster carers
- Continuing to run targeted marketing and recruitment strategies to recruit fostering households for teenagers
- Continue to provide an excellent learning and development package for foster carers who will have permanent supervising social workers to supervise and support them.
- Be creative and innovative in engaging and supporting placements for children during the Covid-19 Pandemic to minimise any negative impact on children and young people.

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 (MRO) 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. All posts are filled with permanent members of staff.

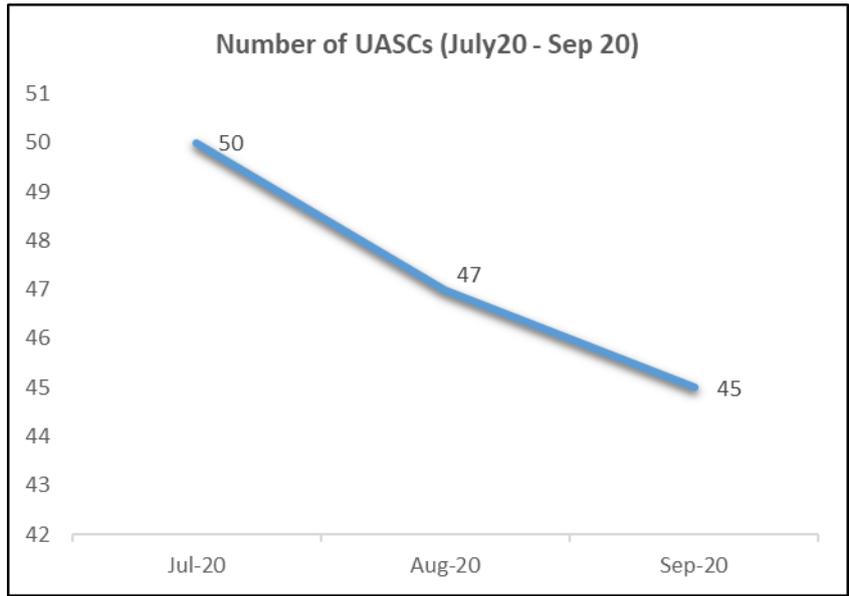
4.0 Placement Activity

- 4.1** The total number of looked after children as at 30th September 2020 was 298, which is an increase of 6 children from Q1 2020-2021 (292 children) and a decrease of 26 children from the same period in 2019 (324 children).

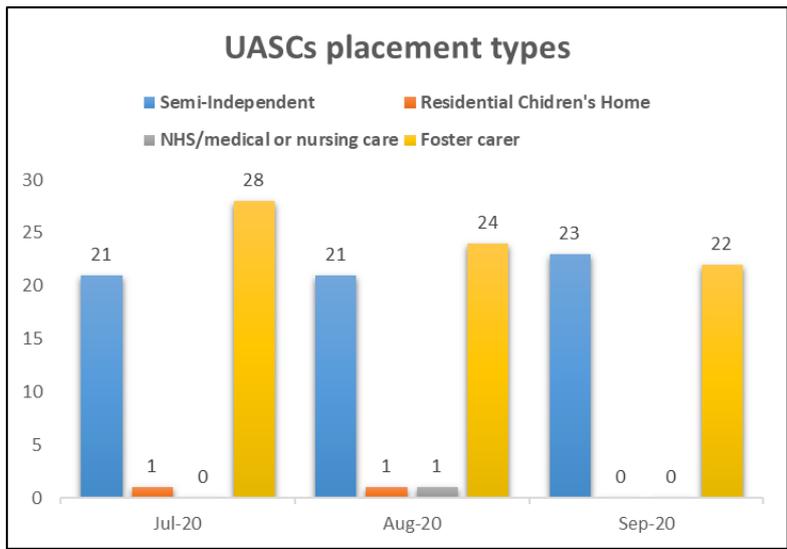
4.2 The corporate performance targets for 2020/2021 are as below:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 30% - the actual percentage as of 30th Sept-2020 was 23.5% (70 children), an increase by 0.5% from the previous quarter Q1 of 2020-2021, 23% (66 children).
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15% - the actual percentage as of 30th Sept-2020 was 14.1% (42 children), an increase from Q1 of 2020-2021 (12.7%, 37 children). Brent's commitment to place children within their family and friends' network has continued.
- Percentage of looked after children placed in independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 30th Sept-2020 was 26.5% (79 children); an increase from Q1 of 2020-2021 (25.7%, 75 children).
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 70% - the actual percentage as of 30th Sept-2020 was 64.1% (191 children), an increase by 3% Q1 of 2020-2021% (178 children, 61%).
- There were 50 looked after children in registered semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations) as at 30th September 2020, which represents 16.8% of all looked after children. This is a reduction from the 17.8% total at the end of Q1, 2020-2021

4.3 As of 30th September 2020 there were 45 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), 10 fewer than at the end of Q1 of 2020-2021. The Covid-19 pandemic has seen a nationwide reduction in the number of UASC presenting for assistance from local authorities. Additionally, a number of UASC have turned 18 in Brent, which had an impact on the decreasing numbers. This has resulted in an increase in number of care leavers who were previously UASC. Care leavers who are former UASCs make up 31% (n=121) of total leaving care population.



4.4 The majority of UASC are placed in semi-independent accommodation (23, 1 fewer than at the end of Q1, 2020-21, none in residential children’s home and seven fewer than at the end of Q1, 2020-21(29 UASCs).



5.0 Recruitment and Assessment

5.1 Brent’s Marketing and Recruitment Officer (MRO) has continued focusing on online fostering recruitment activity, which suits the present climate of a reduction in face-to-face work. There has been no drop in the number of attendees to the virtual fostering information evening, and a slight increase in the number of fostering applicants.

- 5.2** All marketing activity during this period has been carried out online through the Brent Council website, the Brent Council newsletter, the fostering newsletter, and social media. Interested parties made enquiries via telephone or online and the team carried out initial visits and assessments through video calls, ensuring that the experience by prospective carers was for 'business as usual'. The monthly fostering information evenings took place online via Zoom, which attendees reportedly enjoyed and found more convenient than having to travel to a venue to hear more about fostering. The consistent positive feedback has led to plans for more virtual events moving forward.
- 5.3** During this period a new type of event was promoted – an online fostering coffee morning – that will be taking place on 1st October 2020. This was heavily promoted on social media and through the fostering newsletter and will be reported in the next Committee meeting.
- 5.4** Engagement has continued with all fostering supporters (those who have expressed an interest in fostering but are not yet ready to commit to being assessed) through the fostering newsletter. The number of subscribers to the newsletter almost doubled during July and September, reaching 2,140 recipients. The focus has also been on creating informative blog articles to populate media channels and to educate potential applicants on certain aspects of fostering. The topics included: 'how to choose the right fostering service'; 'what experienced foster carers say about fostering'; and 'what you need to look after babies'. The content produced has generated 1,000 additional website visits on top of the 1,200 recorded by users visiting the fostering information pages.
- 5.5** Out of all the social media channels used, Facebook remains the top one. On Facebook, the MRO engages with members of the Brent community through posts and by sharing information about fostering in small community groups. The MRO has also launched an Instagram page in order to compete with other fostering agencies who have a prominent presence on this network.
- 5.6** The marketing activity resulted in 18 information evening bookings and 13 information evening attendees. Overall there were 15 formal enquiries to foster and 12 initial visits took place during this reporting period.
- 5.7** Of the 12 initial visits undertaken 9 resulted in the applicants being recommended for stage 1 of the assessment process. Some of the reasons for other applications not being progressed were due to the lack of availability of the prospective carer and the need to ascertain more information prior to proceeding.
- 5.8** From the initial visits undertaken in the last reporting period, 3 have moved on to stage 1 of the assessment process and one of the assessments that was in stage 1 has progressed to stage two.

- 5.9** Of the remaining 7 assessments that were in stage 1 in the last reporting period 4 remain in stage 1 and 3 did not proceed due to reasons such as issues with applicants' suitability and a change in personal circumstances.
- 5.10** Of the 2 assessments reported in the last reporting period as being in stage 2:
- 1 assessment was presented to the fostering panel in September 2020 and successfully recommended to foster and;
 - 1 assessment remains in stage 2 and is scheduled to be presented to the fostering panel in November 2020.
- 5.11** In this reporting period there are 9 assessments underway:
- 7 in stage 1 (the remaining 4 applicants will move to stage 1 once they have completed their application)
 - 2 in stage 2

6.0 Fostering Panel

- 6.1** The LACP 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** Fostering Panels have been conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams since 3rd April 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Panels take a little longer due to having to "invite" applicants and workers into the meeting at different times via the application but some practices have been condensed in order to compensate for this so this way of working may be retained for less complex cases.
- 6.3** 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; and
 - the long-term fostering matches of all children below the age of 12.

- 6.4** During the period 1st July – 30th September 2020, 3 panels were held with 9 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:
- 1 new fostering household was recommended for approval;
 - 2 new ‘family and friends’ fostering households were recommended for approval;
 - 1 fostering household was found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
 - the approval of 1 fostering household was terminated due to standards of care concerns;
 - 1 fostering household was found suitable to continue fostering following a standards of care investigation;
 - 1 fostering household was found suitable to continue fostering following an allegation made against them by the young person in their care; and
 - 2 fostering households resigned from their fostering role, citing a natural end to their fostering career. They have both committed to continue supporting the service through mentoring new carers in Brent in the future.

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

7.0 Training and Support for Foster Carers

7.1 The Learning and Development Programme

- 7.1.1** Two training courses were offered virtually during the period under review using Zoom, “managing stress in a time of crisis” and “child sexual exploitation (CSE)”, both in September. The feedback in relation to these courses was extremely positive:

“All of the [managing stress in a crisis] course will help to improve and give me a better understanding about stress and how to cope when looking after my children in care.”

“I think the [CSE] course equips carers to look out for looked after children’s behaviours which may indicate their interest to access dangerous websites / wrong friends and emphasises the need for us to share information with CSWs / SSWs / other partners working together.”

- 7.1.2** All carers additionally have access to an online training package provided by an external provider. The training courses offered range in topics from Safeguarding and Child protection skills to therapeutic courses such as life story work and can be accessed at any time of the day and at the weekend in response to carers

asking for more flexible training times. Feedback from foster carers has been positive for all training commissioned. Uptake regarding the online training has been positive and as a result an additional 150 places have been commissioned with the agreed training provider.

7.1.3 During this time of uncertainty, Brent continues to meet the statutory duty to commission and facilitate learning events for foster carers. The learning and development team engage foster carers with innovative ways of offering learning and development. The online courses include mandatory, core and specialist training modules specifically designed for foster carers. Moving forward, the team intend to expand the variety of training courses through Zoom. They have increased additional support to carers by offering basic IT workshops once a month for those struggling to understand IT processes.

7.2 Support from supervising social workers

7.2.1 Retention of foster carers is a priority for the team and the support offered to foster carers forms a large part of why carers remain committed to Brent. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the lives of all Brent's foster carers. The cohort of carers is diverse but many are in a high-risk category by nature of their ethnicity, age or pre-existing health conditions. They have continued to support the children and young people in their care by agreeing to take additional placements, at very short notice. The support offered to the carers has therefore never been more crucial or appreciated:

"I would like to personally thank you for all the hard work, time, patience and support you've given me over the years. Without all your input, I wouldn't have been a Brent Foster Carer today so thank you!" N, foster carer.

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

"We have always felt that you have been a great support to us and we really feel that this is the most important thing... 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. This helps us to feel that you really are there for us and have our best interest at heart. You really do make it a joy to be a foster caring family." K and J, foster carers.

7.2.2 To keep foster carers engaged and informed, the fostering service relies on two main communication channels: email and mobile text messaging. A monthly newsletter, which includes generic updates in relation to council and fostering matters is sent out at the beginning of each month, and several other one-off emails go out every time the service has new important updates to share with

the cohort of foster carers. Recent examples of this include: the communications about children returning to school post-lockdown; and updated government guidance in relation to exemptions from the 'Rule of 6'. All email messages are followed up by text message alerts to ensure foster carers are notified whenever a new email reaches their inbox. Using text messages, the service has managed to increase the open rate of all emails.

7.2.3 The monthly foster carers' support group continues to be facilitated virtually in response to the need to socially distance. Foster carers' feedback that they find these online sessions useful and this view is supported by the increasing number of attendees each month – a shared view is that it is easier to commit to such a group without having to leave home to attend. To enable more carers to attend, the groups alternate between daytime (10am – 12pm) and evening (5:15 – 7:15pm) slots. The support groups that took place during the reporting period focused topics ranging from current digital transformations within the department to the annual foster carers' celebration. Foster carers led the sessions and put forward ideas for content and then the fostering teams arrange for guest speakers to attend. The carers proactively use the sessions to inform and update themselves as well as network and meet carers previously unfamiliar to them.

7.2.4 The topic of the virtual support meeting held in July focused on 'finance for foster carers'. At the session, participants shared information on how to register as self-employed and how to do their taxes. Valuable contributions were made from within the collective where one foster carer, with professional experience in the field, volunteered to offer free-of-charge support on using the HMRC services in relation to fostering. A professional from Brent's Virtual School attended the July session to talk support carers about the concerns they had in relation to children returning to school – foster carers received advice on what to do to assess the health risks around this and how to mitigate them.

7.2.5 At the session in August, participants were informed that the annual face-to-face end-of-year celebration is unlikely to go ahead due to Coronavirus restrictions. There have been discussions around organising a get-together that people can attend and carers can feel celebrated without putting their health at risk; it is likely this is going to be an online event. Carers were encouraged to put forward ideas of the form they would like this event to take.

8.0 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints

8.1 A total of 18 foster carer annual review meetings were conducted during the period.

8.2 During this quarter, there was no complaint or allegations made by or against Brent foster carers.

9.0 New Developments

9.1 Update on West London Fostering Project (*Joint Fostering Feasibility Project*)

The Committee has previously been informed about the work Brent has been leading on following a successful bid to Department for Education (DfE) seed funding to scope work using a regional approach to fostering in partnership with Ealing and Hounslow Councils. As mentioned in a previous report, the Covid-19 pandemic has created a delay to the DfE progressing the next stage of this work. Brent has taken the lead on submitting a business case for the next stage of this project. The outcome of the bid is awaited from DfE.

The business case was used to devise a pilot project based on the findings from the Fostering Feasibility Study undertaken earlier in the year. The focus remains on developing closer working arrangements to improve placement stability and choice for adolescent children in the care system between Hounslow, Ealing and Brent. The authorities have proposed the initial work to be on recruiting foster carers for the more challenging 11 – 15 year-olds to prevent them being placed in residential units or independent fostering households.

Further updates will be provided to the Committee as this progresses.

 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 21 October 2020
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People
Brent Adoption Report Six monthly report: 1st April to 30th September 2020	

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

1.0 Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a briefing to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee in relation to:

- adoption performance data for the period 1st April 2020 – 30th September 2020;
- the progress and activity of Adopt London West; and
- how good outcomes are being achieved for children.

Information and commentary presented in paragraphs 5 and 6 of this report were provided by Brent; the rest of the report was completed by Adopt London West.

1.2 This is the second 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
- 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.

1.3 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 has been a 'live' RAA since October 2019.

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 – Adopt London West

- 3.1** Adopt London West (ALW) Regional Adoption Agency, became operational on 1st September 2019 with a formal launch in October 2019.
- 3.2** A comprehensive partnership agreement forms the basis of the ongoing partnership arrangements. The partnership board on which the Strategic Director, Brent CYP sits, will continue to provide the necessary oversight to ensure that the shared service is appropriately scrutinised and supported to deliver improved outcomes for children and adopters.
- 3.3** As part of the national RAA implementation and development programme a network of RAA leaders has been established and monthly meetings are facilitated by the DfE delivery partner Deloitte. Meetings are attended by senior DfE officials and provide an opportunity to learn from the early RAAs and also to consider wider sector collaboration and influence.
- 3.4** It is acknowledged from evidence gained from the first cohort of national RAAs to become operational, that the first 12 - 18 months after going live for an RAA is one of transition and transformation to a new delivery model. Performance has been noted to dip in the early stages of operation, therefore the Partnership Board and Heads of Service meetings are closely monitoring practice and performance as a new and developing service.

4.0 Responsibilities

- 4.1** As delegated in the partnership agreement between Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham and Hounslow, Ealing (as the host Local Authority for ALW) is responsible for ensuring that children whose permanence plan is adoption in all four partner Local Authorities are matched in a timely way with adopters who best meet the needs of those children. This involves featuring children in various profiling events, via national linking websites, supporting them in adoption activity days and networking events with other Regional Adoption Agencies in London and nationally. ALW is also responsible for the preparation and assessment of prospective adopters, supporting adopters with family finding following approval and the on-going post placement support to adopters and special guardians. ALW is also responsible for the provision of services to adopted adults and all those affected by adoption who request a specific service or an assessment of need.
- 4.2** ALW also provides a service to Brent residents who wish to make a private application to adopt their partner's child, referred to as step-parent adoption, or special guardians who may wish to adopt the child in their care. The team is also involved in completing adoption reports on children who may have

travelled from and been adopted abroad; there is a legal requirement for these adoptions to be made lawful in the UK.

- 4.3** 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** Statutory social work in relation to children needing adoptive placements remains the remit of Brent CYP. The care plans for children are formulated by the social work teams and agreed by Head of Service for LAC and Permanency. The Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes then considers and ratifies any adoption plans.

5.0 Performance Data

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

Adoption Scorecards (published [here](#))

- 5.2** The non-published data for the period under review demonstrates that performance against the two most significant indicators has continued to perform strongly in comparison to the published national and statistical neighbour averages:

- **A1** (The time taken from a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 420 days. This is a 7% increase against the previous reporting period (392) but still compares favourably against a national average of 486 days and the 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): 176 days. This is an 8% decrease against the previous reporting period (192 days) which is less than the national average of 201 days and compares favourably to the statistical neighbour average of 228.

6.0 Child related data

- 6.1** In the first six months of this reporting year (1st April – 30th Sept 2020) Adoption Orders were granted for six children.
- 6.2** As at 30th Sept 2020 there are no adoption applications in progress, although applications are likely to be made for the two children placed for adoption within the next quarter.

6.3 As at 30th Sept 2020, there were three children with an adoption plan who had not yet been adopted. The details of these children’s cases are as follows:

- Two are placed for adoption;
- One child remains subject to ongoing care proceedings, likely to conclude towards the end of 2020.

7.0 Adopter Recruitment

7.1 Since its inception in September 2019, ALW has approved 22 adoptive households, with 12 of these being in the current reporting period.

Adopters Approval per Month				
Month	Total Approvals	BAME	LGBTQ	Single Adopter
Oct-2019	1	1	1	0
Nov-2019	2	1	1	0
Dec-2019	4	1	1	1
Jan-2020	1	1	0	0
Feb-2020	1	0	0	1
Mar-2020	1	0	1	0
Apr-2020	2	2	2	0
May-2020	4	0	1	0
June-2020	1	0	0	0
July-2020	1	1	0	1
Aug-2020	2	0	0	1
Sep-2020	2	2	1	1
Total Cumulative	22	9 (40%)	8 (36%)	5 (22%)

7.2 As at 30th September 2020, ALW had 37 approved adoptive families, 14 of whom are still in the active family finding stage, 3 families are formally matched and 6 linked to a child/ren. 4 families are on hold. Of the 4 families on hold some are taking a break due to personal circumstances and others’ situations are under review following their disengagement from the process.

7.3 During this reporting period (Apr-Sept 2020) the service received 329 general enquiries about adoption, 299 of these related to domestic adoption. 151 prospective adopter households attended an information session.

7.4 The adoption assessment process comprises 2 stages, Stage 1 assessments should take place within 2 months - this stage is described as “adopter led”, where adopters work through exercises and complete various tasks that contribute to a full and thorough assessment of their suitability.

7.5 Stage 2 should take a maximum of 4 months and is a detailed assessment that is both reflective and analytical. In total, the comprehensive assessment process should be completed within 6 months. However, the average length of time for assessments in 2019/20 was 8 months. Delays were due to the transitioning of workers to the new service and, in some cases, changes in assessing social workers.

7.6 As at 30th September 2020, there were 19 families in the formal stages of assessment, 14 in Stage 1 and 5 in Stage 2.

8.0 Adoption and Special Guardianship Support

8.1 Throughout the assessment and post approval process of searching for the right child to join their family, prospective adopters are informed about support services available to them and are encouraged and supported to attend the *Foundations for Attachment* training course, a course that offers adopters insight and strategies to meet the needs of children who are likely to have experienced developmental trauma.

8.2 An internal mentoring scheme is in place to offer support to any new adopters, or those who may need some additional empathic support. ALW have a contract with **Adopter Hub** an online support forum and adopter community that provide training and resources to adopters run by PACT, a voluntary adoption agency. In addition, a peer support organisation **We are Family** organise frequent training events and social groups. ALW have a contract for services delivered by **PAC-UK** that offer sensitive and independent therapeutic support.

8.3 ALW has an 'education support group', which meets six times throughout the year. The group is facilitated by an Educational Psychologist and provides a forum for families to receive support and guidance on how to engage with their child's school and a range of education related issues.

8.4 In addition, adopters receive regular newsletters that outline relevant research, learning materials, advice and tools to support parenting strategies as well as training opportunities, seminars and specialist support groups. There are also adoption related evening seminars that take place at least 4 times a year.

8.5 As part of the new Adopt London partnership with We are Family (WAF) an Adopter led peer support organisation, a series of evening webinars have been delivered:

- 7th July – Attachment Sense: the sensory side of Attachment, facilitated by Caireen McGlashen;

- 14th July – The role of the Virtual School Head, facilitated by 3 VS Heads;
- 21st July – Therapeutic Parenting: 17 Tips for Survival and Thrive-al, facilitated by Sally Donovan;
- 8th and 15th August – Practical support for families that live with childhood violent and aggressive behaviour, facilitated by Al Coates;
- 13th August – Preparing and managing return to school – what parents and children can do, facilitated by Stuart Guest;
- 20th August – Five strategies for parents of children who have difficulty managing their aggression, facilitated by Tosha Schore;
- 8th September – Reflective Parenting – what makes me the Parent I am?, facilitated by Katherine Mauther; and
- 22nd September – The benefits of self-compassion which support us during our most challenging times, facilitated by Dr Clair Burley.

Further webinars are planned for October/November.

9.0 Adopter and Special Guardians feedback

9.1 Below is a selection of recent feedback from families receiving a service from ALW, such as an assessment, intervention or taking part in any online/virtual support session:

- *“the support has been immense and being able to access support online has been beneficial to get as much support as possible”;*
- *“a swift and flexible support which has been very valuable to us”;*
- *“The social worker’s input was really insightful, and we enjoyed the course she recommended. Thanks. Things are still calm at home and we are enjoying being a family”;*
- *“Many thanks for support and contributions. Also, for the effort in finding us a therapist the BEST suits us as a family and the recommendation for further training. Once again, THANK YOU for your continual support”.*

10. Casework

10.1 Currently ALW is supporting 31 Brent families.

10.2 There are 77 contact cases open relating to Brent families: 13 direct contact arrangements and 64 active letterbox exchanges.

10.3 There have been 26 requests for access to records in relation to Brent records, out of a total number of 62 requests received by ALW during this period.

11.0 Adoption Support Fund

- 11.1** Families who require specialist therapeutic support are assessed by a social worker and an application submitted to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) for funding to cover the costs of the therapeutic services.
- 11.2** Applications to the fund have declined during this period due to the availability of additional therapeutic services provided through the Emergency ASF Covid fund that families can access directly without the need for a social work assessment (see paragraph 14 below). However, any individual applications that have been requested have been actioned without delay. There are currently no families waiting for an application to the ASF; all assessments for support are allocated.

12 Adopt London

12.1 ALW is one of 4 Regional Adoption Agencies that make up “Adopt London” a wider collaboration of 23 boroughs that form Adopt London:

- **Adopt London North** - a partnership between Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey and Islington, hosted by Islington;
- **Adopt London South** – a partnership between, Achieving for Children (Richmond and Kingston) Croydon, Lambeth, Lewisham, Merton, Wandsworth, Southwark and Sutton, hosted by Southwark;
- **Adopt London East** – a partnership between Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Newham and Tower Hamlets, hosted by Havering; and
- **Adopt London West** – a partnership between Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham and Hounslow, hosted by Ealing.

12.2 In order to ensure the best possible services for children and families across London, Adopt London West collaborates closely with the other 3 Adopt London regions. A key priority for Adopt London will continue to be to maximize the opportunities and efficiencies across shared priority areas.

12.3 Key priorities for the next six months include:

12.3.1 Birth Parents Counselling

To progress the plan to commission a new counselling service for birth families, a ‘meet the market’ event is planned for October 2020. The draft service specification has been informed by conversations with PAUSE, Joanne Alper from Adoption Plus and Professor Beth Neil (UEA). The shared ambition is to commission an innovative service that will operate using an assertive outreach model; co-production with birth parents will be integral to

the service design. ALS/Southwark have agreed to lead on Commissioning of the new service.

12.3.2 Family finding initiatives

Adopt London teams are working together to increase the number of virtual “Stay and Play” opportunities. Activity days and exchange days are offered across London as a way of facilitating more interactions between adopters and children to promote links with children waiting for an adoptive family. The benefits to this approach are widely recognised as they promote and encourage “softer” chemistry links that appear to be more successful for those children who are harder to place.

12.3.3 Adopt London team working

Further developing the network of working groups of social workers and managers across the Adopt London partnership to strengthen and harmonise practice and identify further areas for collaboration and service improvement.

12.3.4 Website development

Further development of the website is an ongoing priority. Plans now include:

- increasing the functionality to support self-guided information, help, resources and learning;
- adding an adoption readiness tool to support families to think about whether adoption is right for them;
- adding a link to Family Action’s website *Family Connects* for adopted adults to begin their search for adoption records; and
- devising specific resources aimed at special guardians with links to the *Kinship Connects* service offered by Grandparents Plus.

Please see the link below for Adopt London’s website.

<https://adoptlondon.org.uk/>

13.0 National and Regional Recruitment

13.1 #YouCanAdopt National Recruitment Campaign

The government allocated £1 million to fund the first nationwide adoption recruitment campaign, #YouCanAdopt, launched on 16th September, which will run until 8th December. One of the primary aims of this is to encourage potential adoptive parents to consider adopting older children, sibling groups and those with complex health needs or a disability.

13.2 A film has been released online and across social media for the duration of the campaign. The film seeks to dispel some key misconceptions about adoption using a recurrent theme – “you can adopt”.

13.3 An additional specialist element of the campaign targets potential parents from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. *Home for Good* are managing these enquiries, providing a triage service and information sessions to families before allocating the enquiries to 3 local RAA/VAAs' to follow up.

A new website has launched to enhance the campaign - <https://www.youcanadopt.co.uk/>

13.4 Adopt London are supporting the campaign with social media marketing
<https://adoptlondon.org.uk/>
<https://twitter.com/adoptlondonuk>
<https://www.facebook.com/adoptlondonuk>
<https://www.instagram.com/adoptlondonuk/>

13.5 Across Adopt London, weekly 'meet the adopter' events are being held in addition to the standard monthly information sessions.

13.6 Black History Month and Adoption Week take place during the campaign. The Adopt London Choir performance will be released on social media during this period alongside other articles and features of particular interest to support the campaign.

14.0 Adoption Support Fund Covid-19 Emergency Fund

14.1 The government allocated £8 million additional ASF funding to RAAs nationally to support adopters and special guardians during the pandemic. Adopt London was awarded as follows:

RAA	£ awarded
Adopt London South	350,109.00
Adopt London East	173,907.84
Adopt London North	280,651.27
Adopt London West	165,470.19
TOTAL	£970,138.30

14.2 A decision to commission the majority of services jointly as Adopt London was agreed by the ALW Partnership Board in recognition that a wider range of services could be provided by pooling the allocated grant funding. The DfE have welcomed this approach and praised Adopt London for the innovative services it has jointly commissioned.

14.3 The services listed below have all now been approved by the ASF and services have commenced, or training dates booked. LB Havering, the host local authority for Adopt London East, agreed to manage the financial and commissioning arrangements on behalf of Adopt London, including:

- annual membership of the National Association of Therapeutic Parents for 500 adopters and special guardians;
- annual membership of Adopter Hub for 500 adopters and special guardians operated by PACT, a voluntary adoption support agency;
- annual membership to Grandparents Plus for all special guardians across the 23 Adopt London local authorities;
- 7 Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) 'Child to Parent' Violence training courses for adopters and special guardians;
- provision of a counselling helpline service from PAC UK/Family Action charity offering evening and weekend support services; and
- a range of therapy services offering up to 6 sessions for families from Adoption Plus, a voluntary adoption support agency.

14.4 In addition, from the retained local grant allocation to ALW of **£32,984**, specialist courses were delivered for adopters and special guardians – two courses of “The Great Behaviour Breakdown” and a Non-Violent Resistance group dealing specifically with child to parent/carer violence.

14.5 Three virtual direct work groups have been secured for children and young people. Body and Soul, an arts-based organisation specialising in services to children who are adopted, or the subject of Special Guardianship Orders, will facilitate these.

14.6 The additional funding has provided the opportunity to deliver a wide range of services to families that are not usually funded through the ASF. Feedback from families on the quality and effectiveness of these services will enable the commission of more focused and targeted services in the future.

14.7 Impact of and response to Covid 19 Emergency ASF funding

The positive impact of this support has been reported by families as being that they received immediate help and advice, including therapy on request without the need for an assessment. Families have responded quickly to the additional offer of assistance created by this fund resulting in the following:

- very high demand for NVR (Child to Parent Violence) and Great Behaviour Breakdown training interventions, the response being that further courses are planned across the Adopt London partnership;

- high demand for DDP parent consultations and sensory integration therapy from Adoption Plus;
- the formation of a comprehensive webinar programme developed by We Are Family in partnership with Adopt London - WAF Talks – as previously mentioned; and
- the Kinship Response service from Grandparents Plus gaining momentum, with ALW actively promoting take up of this service.

Adopt London's Heads of Service monitor the contracts. Agreement about aligning the evaluations of each service is currently being finalised, with the report due in December. This will be shared with DfE at their request.

15.0 ALW Adoption Panel

15.1 The role of ALW's panel is as follows:

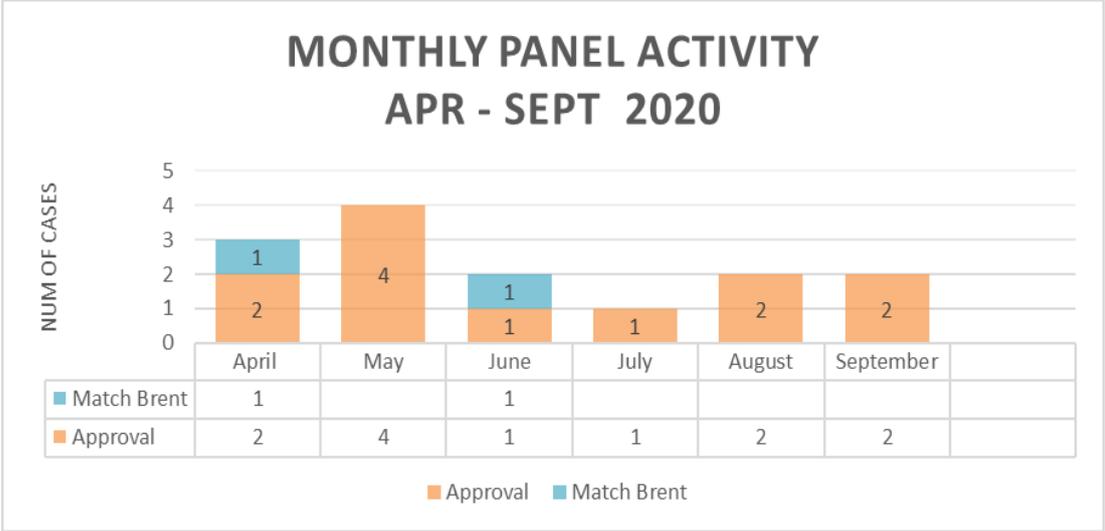
- to consider the presentation of approvals, reviews and terminations of adopters' suitability to adopt, following which a recommendation is made by panel members and sent to ALW's Agency Decision Maker (Head of Service) for ratification/challenge;
- to consider whether a relinquished baby from Brent should be placed for adoption, following which a recommendation is made by panel members but sent to Brent's Agency Decision Maker (Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes, Children and Young People's Services) for ratification/challenge; and
- to consider adoption matches between Brent children and their prospective adopters, following which a recommendation is made by panel members and sent to Brent's Agency Decision Maker (Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes, Children and Young People's Services) for ratification/challenge.

15.2 Feedback from ALW to Brent (and back) is considered by the Heads of Service quality assurance group and the Partnership Board and shared with Service Managers in Brent after each panel presentation in order to aid service development and quality assure the work of the RAA.

15.3 In response to the Covid-19 restricted movement phase, since 20th April 2020 the ALW Panel has taken place virtually via Microsoft Teams. This decision was taken to maximise business continuity and minimise delay for children being placed with adoptive families and the approval of adopters across the region. The Panel Adviser prepared guidance around this and circulated this to the ALW adoption team colleagues and panel members for their consideration.

Prior to the panel, the Adviser liaises with the applicants and external professionals to support them to access Microsoft Teams to reduce the risk of delay on the day, explain how the panel day will run and confirm that they are able to access the meeting confidentially. The Panel Adviser sets up a panel member check-in to join Microsoft Team to ensure that everyone is able to join securely, without delay and with ease. Panel members also complete and return a confidentiality self-declaration, attesting to this for the duration of the panel meeting.

15.4 During the period under review, 7 adoption panels were held in ALW resulting in the successful approval of 12 adoptive families. 2 Brent looked after children were matched during this time period.



15.5 Panel feedback from prospective and approved adopters and presenting social workers has been consistently good; some examples are listed below:

- *“I felt the work done by the team around the child was duly acknowledged and the fact that this case was presented in very good time scale highlighted by the chair”;*
- *“The adopters were made to feel very comfortable and able to contribute freely”;*
- *“[I] was made to feel very relaxed and was very grateful to hear the positive comments”;*
- *“My panel was done virtually so I am sure it is a very different experience than doing it in person. However, everyone on the panel was very nice and made me feel at ease. If this is how it is done in person then that’s brilliant”;*
- *“Compared to my previous approval as a foster carer, having done this panel from home felt more relaxing and easy. The pre-panel meet with the Panel Adviser was useful to set the scene and know what to expect”;* and
- *“The panel was virtual due to the Covid restrictions however, panel was punctual and seamless”.*

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