



Corporate Parenting Committee

Wednesday 28 April 2021 at 5.00 pm

This will be an online virtual meeting.

Membership:

Members

Councillors:

M Patel (Chair)
Conneely
Gbajumo
Kansagra
Thakkar

Substitute Members

Councillors:

Lloyd, 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

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

6 Matters arising (if any)

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

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

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

8 Update on European Union Settlement Scheme for Looked After Children and Care Leavers 9 - 12

To receive a briefing in relation to the activities undertaken to assist Looked After Children and Care Leavers with their applications to obtain European Union Settled Status (EUSS).

9 Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 4 13 - 22

To provide information to the Corporate Parenting Committee 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).

10 Update on Semi-Independent Provision for Looked After Children and Care Leavers 23 - 30

To provide the Corporate Parenting Committee with an update on the quality assurance of semi-independent provision commissioned by the Council to accommodate Looked After Children (LAC) aged 16-18 and Care Leavers.

11 Six-Monthly Adoption Report 31 - 46

To provide the Corporate Parenting Committee information 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.

12 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.



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE Wednesday 3 February 2021 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 Present: Councillor McLennan (in remote attendance)

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**

None.

3. **Declarations of interests**

None.

4. **Deputations (if any)**

None received.

5. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the last meeting held on 21 October 2020 be approved as an accurate record.

6. **Matters arising (if any)**

None.

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

S (Care Leavers in Action) informed the Committee of the various volunteering projects she was involved in. S was an events planner for the Care Leaver Events Team and there had been a social event on 26 January 2021. S was a champion for the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum. The Committee were invited to the launch event for the care leaver podcast that S had created. Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) had sponsored Care Leavers in Action to undertake an inspection. Along with this Care Leavers in Action had been involved in training for providers of semi-

independent accommodation, and some were taking part in the Brent Youth Independent Advisory Group (IAG) working with the Metropolitan Police to shape the service. S expressed that the Care Leavers in Action Group had a family feeling with no judgement and free space for opinions and voices to be heard.

A (Care Leavers in Action) continued to discuss the sponsored inspection, informing the Committee that they had met with Gail Tolley and Brian Grady (Operational Director Safeguarding Performance and Strategy, Brent Council) to talk about expectations from the inspection and areas to look at in October 2020. The young people had received inspector training and held focus groups and a Care Leaver survey. The group were now looking at the findings and writing a report. A advised it had gone well and they felt they could shape the services Care Leavers received using the information collected. She felt it gave Care Leavers an opportunity to have their voice heard as all Care Leavers had been invited to get involved. Care Leavers had also been invited to take part in a new commissioning project to help shape procurement of services and align with Care Leavers best interests, and A was also involved with the Brent IAG. The IAG was due to meet with Police Officers and Community Officers in February 2021 to have their say and look at next steps.

T (Care in Action) highlighted the Care in Action Christmas session that had taken place in which they were given vouchers to order food and took part in virtual games and did an activity reflecting on 2020.

S (Care in Action) had taken part in the redesign of the stamp and had given lots of feedback during the sessions.

In response to queries from the Committee, Gail Tolley confirmed that the young inspectors report would be presented to the Committee and changes to the framework for semi-independent living would be brought to the Committee.

Onder Beter informed the Committee of an online exhibition that Brent young people had been involved in that was done in such a way that it felt as if the person was in a gallery. This would be shared with the Committee.

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. Responding to Health Needs of Looked After Children

The Committee received a presentation from Brigid Offley-Shore (Designated Nurse for LAC, Brent) and Dr Arlene Boroda (Designated Doctor for LAC, Brent) about the ways in which the Brent Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) had responded to the health needs of Looked After Children (LAC). During the presentation, the following key points were highlighted:

- Improved administration processes had facilitated more timely referrals from social workers to health colleagues. New processes had been put in place for out of Borough placements.
- There had been an increase in referrals for initial and review health assessments which the CCG were responding well to.
- Working Groups had been established to look at support for LAC with Long Term Conditions and the CCG were working with Adult Social Services in relation to transitions for those over 16 years old with Long Term Conditions.

- A health resource booklet had been created with input from stakeholders and young people, which would be included in future pathway plans and was available as a paper copy and digital resource.
- An audit had been undertaken of initial health assessments looking at the questionnaires given to parents, carers and young people following initial health assessments over the period 2019 to 2020. The findings showed service users were very satisfied with the service, with the only areas for improvement being the environment of the clinic rooms and choice of appointment times. Those findings had been taken on board over the past year.
- A second audit had been undertaken by Dr Boroda looking at arrangements for UASCs being referred to the Infectious Diseases Team at Northwick Park Hospital, which had resulted in a referral template being created for initial health assessments for UASCs. This template was now available from the Royal College of Paediatric Health and was fully agreed as a standard template across the 8 North West London CCGs. The audit had looked at a sample of initial health assessments covering the period of 2018-2019, who had been referred, what the standards of assessment were, and what was found from the assessments. The findings had been very clear that many UASCs coming into the country did not have vaccination records and this would, as a result, be reported as 'unknown if fully immunised'.
- A follow-up visit following a CQC Ofsted inspection of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) inspection undertaken in May 2017 had concluded that the local area leaders had worked effectively together to tackle the weaknesses identified at the initial assessment.
- LAC health assessments continued to be delivered during the pandemic but as time went on some review health assessments and out of Borough health assessments were conducted over the telephone and virtually as opposed to physical face-to-face assessments. During the pandemic, infection risk assessments for children and young people who required face-to-face health assessments were undertaken and LAC were prioritised. Infection control measures were also introduced with the use of PPE for face-to-face assessments.
- Dr Boroda shared some case studies that demonstrated how the CCG had continued with the service and demonstrated the new ways of working with one example of a face-to-face health assessment and one example of a telephone assessment with an interpreter. During the physical assessment example Dr Boroda had conducted a face-to-face initial health assessment for a baby who had recently been placed with a Foster Carer, in full PPE, and was able to help the Foster Carer register the baby with a GP online. During the telephone assessment Dr Boroda ensured she was as prepared as possible going into the health assessment and made sure to speak to the manager of the placement and social worker to gather as much information as possible for the telephone assessment to help it run smoothly. It appeared that the default position for many services going forward would be using remote platforms which feedback suggested was very user friendly.

Following the presentation the Committee queried whether virtual or telephone health assessments where physical / face-to-face assessments were not possible had the potential to miss signs that a physical assessment would not. The Committee were reminded that the health assessments being discussed were for children who had come

into care and were now in a safe place in care. Dr Boroda explained that for most initial health assessments children and young people were seen face-to-face, in person. If a child had alleged or there was concern of abuse they would be seen either in A&E, a primary care setting or by a community paediatrician and put in a safe place if needed. She added that clinicians were curious and if there was a concern the child would be seen and linked with other services, and across North West London there was a directive that if there was a concern the child would need to be seen face-to-face as soon as possible. She advised it was important to work around the team and what was the safest for the child, carers and health professionals to ensure infection control. Dr Boroda highlighted that, given the COVID-19 guidelines, a decision was necessary and where, for example, teens were placed very far away a virtual assessment would be the interim arrangement for the next steps. Dr Boroda had been redeployed to ensure the staffing was in place to deliver as best a service as possible under the guidelines. The Local Authority had been grateful for the support from Dr Boroda and her team.

Considering the new ways of working as a result of the pandemic, the Committee queried whether there would be subsequent to face-to-face, in person assessments when restrictions were lifted or whether the CCG were satisfied with the assessments done virtually. Dr Boroda advised that for review health assessments done by nursing staff, if there were other health needs of the child they would receive clinical care in addition to support from the Looked After Children's Service and would continue to access their paediatric services. Many services for children stopped face-to-face appointments unless it was a clinical emergency, but a directive had gone out to say face-to-face was a priority for the initial health assessments of Looked After Children. For children out of Borough who had telephone assessments, the CCG would follow up with the local service to do what was necessary, but Dr Boroda noted that a lot of services had now changed to virtual consultations, including primary care, therefore face-to-face now meant via remote platforms rather than in the same room in some circumstances.

The Committee queried whether Mental Health was being assessed with as much importance as physical health during initial health assessments. Dr Boroda advised that the initial health assessments were rigorous and clinicians were mindful of COVID-19, the lack of school and new stresses. The clinicians ensured they had a lot of time to review background information before seeing the child so that questions were not repeated and that they were sensitive, appropriate and accessible for the child. Links with necessary services would take place also. Dr Boroda advised that they had received wonderful support, for example social workers attending assessments, following up, and leaving no stone left unturned to support the emotional wellbeing of the child. She reflected that as some services were stopped as a result of the pandemic they had more time and less pressure meaning more availability which had been beneficial. They had been seeing children in a peaceful environment. Brigid Offley-Shore added that for any Looked After Child there was priority for the treatment required and she had received that assurance at a meeting the previous week. She highlighted that the number of referrals to a clinical psychologist had doubled. She reminded the Committee that Kooth was available online for young people not able to speak to somebody face-to-face.

In relation to the merger of the 8 CCGs in North West London into 1 CCG the Committee queried how confident the representatives were that their service provision would not experience any disruptions. Dr Boroda advised she could give assurance that they would try their best to minimise disruption and replicate the service they were currently delivering from 1 April 2021. She highlighted that a big benefit in Brent was the continuity of committed staff with organisational knowledge and memory. The arrangements for the merger had been transitioning over time and they had strongly resisted any dilution of the safeguarding and LAC Designates in the CCGs, and she noted that Brent was more resourced than other Boroughs for designated staffing. She had advocated for this resource in order to have a good service and things worked well between the CCG and

LAC health provider service and primary care. Local teams were staying as they were. The health provider service would change to a new trust and Dr Boroda advised that it was not within her gift to comment or influence but hoped it would bring positives and more joined up working. She felt that in the bigger context, following the pandemic, the way health services were designed and delivered was changing and they needed to ensure they were part of the design and delivery that embraced the change and new ways of working. The Chair requested that an update on this be presented the following year.

The health booklets had been rolled out and would be reviewed in six months' time. Young people had given input on the booklets including the size of print, colours and pictures. Onder Beter (Head of Looked After Children and Permanency, Brent Council) advised that there was a very good communications strategy in place for the booklets to reach young people. The young people involved had been very helpful and honest with their feedback meaning the booklet had been revised significantly and was a really good example of co-production.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the presentation received from the CCG.
- ii) To receive an update on the impact on the service after the 8 NWL CCGs merged into one.

9. **Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2019/20**

This report provided the Committee with details of the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to quality assuring and improving services for Looked After Children (LAC), as well as feedback from LAC gained through consultation with Care In Action. The Committee heard that Brent had 2 IROs employed by the Local Authority and commissioned the remainder of IROs through an independent agency, which had recently been recommissioned for an additional 4 years and who knew the children extremely well. It was expressed that sometimes the IRO could be the most consistent professional in a Looked After Child's life and they had a wealth of experience and skills. Each year they had between 800-900 reviews, and the LAC department met with IROs on a monthly basis to ensure good flow of information between the Local Authority and IROs. The Strategic Director for Children and Young People, Gail Tolley, attended those meetings on a yearly basis. Midway reviews also took place to ensure progress and acted as a crucial monitoring role. The report presented to Committee was from 2019 to March 2020 and provided reassurance the reviewing service was working well.

The priorities being worked on over the next year included transition planning for LAC with Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND), including proactive reviews of Education, Health and Care Plans and incorporating those into overall pathway planning, and using IROs to find other ways for young people to participate in the Care in Action groups. The IRO wrote a letter at the end of their reviews and was a nice way for children to understand what happened in the review, and this way of working had received good feedback from children and young people.

The Committee queried how the service would address areas for improvement listed in the report. Sonya Kalyniak (Head of Safeguarding & Quality Assurance, Brent Council) advised that part of her role in the service area was to ensure those actions got picked up, and to challenge and support the service. There was a regular meeting to ensure any actions for improvement took place, were monitored and included in forthcoming annual reviews.

In relation to what was being done to help social workers get promoted to IROs, Sonya Kalyniak advised that the IRO role was an important progression role, and anyone who

moved into that role must have been a team manager. There were 2 in-house roles filled by people who had worked within the department for quite a period of time and the other IROs were recruited through the commissioned service and they were actively working on diversity of recruitment within that service.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the content of the report and confirm the Committee were content that Independent Reviewing Officers were providing appropriate challenge to services for LAC.

10. **Fostering Service Quarterly Report, Quarter 3 (October 2020-December 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 October 2020 to December 2020.

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) hoped that the Committee would be pleased to see the increase in the digital profile of Brent fostering and recruitment and marketing. The service had adapted to new ways of working and had also supported Foster Carers with more online training. He highlighted the increase in the uptake of training now that there was a virtual learning offer available and the additional 150 places providing access to online courses detailed in section 7.1.5 of the report, which he expressed was good as access to training was a critical point for how Foster Carers chose which local authority to foster for.

Section 7.2.8 of the report detailed how Brent would celebrate the achievements of Foster Carers, as during the pandemic it had not been possible to do the usual annual awards event. The Lead member and Strategic Director of CYP would be asked to record video messages to Foster Carers and the Council would provide a voucher for each Foster Carer, which they were happy to do as a token of appreciation for Foster Carers. The Committee agreed that the video messages to Foster Carers would be shared at the start of the next meeting.

The Department for Education (DfE) had not agreed to fund the Joint Fostering Project that Brent had been working on with other Local Authorities but section 9.1 of the report detailed how Brent were aiming to take that work forward with one of the Local Authorities stepping back and another stepping up to be involved. The Committee would be kept up to date with future development.

The Committee queried what limitations and challenges the joint fostering project might be faced with now that there was no central government funding for the project. Onder Beter expressed that they were hopeful and there was director level consultation taking place with the 3 local authorities who were committed to a joint piece of work. The scope of the Project may not be at the scale they would have initially hoped but by end of February 2021 they would be clearer on the commitment of the local authorities.

In relation to section 4.2 of the report, the Committee asked about the decrease in young people in fostering placement and whether this was related to older teenagers and the challenge of finding placements for that age group. Onder Beter advised that this was partly due to the needs of the young people and lack of sufficiency around foster placement for teenagers. Onder Beter stated that older children coming into care late were placed in semi-independent provisions either in Brent or the neighbouring Local Authorities, noting that the decrease in placements was not substantial.

There had been a significant increase in placement stability in comparison to the previous year. Placement stability was measured based on the percentage of 3 or more placement moves the child had, and this had reduced from 17.3% to 12.3%. Onder Beter highlighted that considering the profile of children who were mostly older ages this was a good improvement, and Brent had recently increased stability of social workers for children in care. Work continued to improve the outcomes and stability for children.

The Committee queried whether there had been an increase in family breakdowns due to pressure from COVID-19 which had resulted in an increased LAC population. Onder Beter advised that there was currently no evidence to support the hypothesis that this was happening but it continued to be monitored. There had been an increase in the number of referrals, which in turn had increased the number of child protection enquiries and child protection plans, and from September 2020 up until the Committee meeting there had been a slight increase in the number of LAC coming into the care system, but there was no evidence it was due to the impact of COVID-19 on family relationships. Onder Beter stated that the number of Looked After Children was lower compared to the same time last year. Onder Beter advised that Brent had done well to keep the number of children in care at a steady rate and was not anticipating a significant increase for the current year.

The Committee noted the positive news on the uptake of courses by Foster Carers and noted it would be good to keep that under review. The recruitment drive had been well noticed by the Committee and other members, with the Leader passing on thanks to the team. They passed on their praise to the fostering team and felt it was clear that they had used a difficult period to massively expand the digital offer and support to Foster Carers.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the content of the report.

11. **Any other urgent business**

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) highlighted that the Council had increased the welfare benefits for all LAC and Care Leavers in line with the Government's decision to increase Universal Credit by £20 per week. At the time of the Committee meeting the government had not yet made a decision as to whether they were going to continue with that increase past March 2021 but the Committee would be kept up to date depending on the government position. Councillor McLennan (Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources, Brent Council) added that the issue had been raised at Cabinet and was being taken forward as a London Councils cross party campaign item.

The meeting closed at 6:39 pm

COUNCILLOR MILI PATEL
Chair

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	<p align="center">Corporate Parenting Committee 28 April 2021</p>
	<p align="center">Report from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People</p>
<p>Update on European Union Settlement Scheme for Looked After Children and Care Leavers</p>	

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

1. Purpose

To brief the Corporate Parenting Committee in relation to the activities undertaken to assist looked after children and care leavers with their applications to obtain European Union Settled Status (EUSS). The paper draws attention to

the current challenges in making EUSS applications and the actions taken to mitigate these.

2. National Context

2.1 The EUSS was launched in 2019 by the Home Office to process the registration of EU citizens resident in the United Kingdom prior to its departure from the European Union. Successful applicants receive either 'Pre-settled status' or 'Settled status', depending on the length of time they have been resident in the United Kingdom. The EUSS covers children and young people who are European Union (EU), European Economic Area (EEA) or Swiss citizens who need to make an application to obtain settled or pre-settled status in the United Kingdom. Pre-settled status is usually granted for children and young people who have not been in the UK for more than 5 years.

2.2 Local Authorities, health and social care trusts received central government guidance in April 2020 regarding the EUSS and how it relates to looked after children and care leavers. The roles and responsibilities of local authorities are:

- To identify adequately trained resource to manage and make applications;
- To identify eligible children including all looked after children including those the authority has parental responsibility (PR), care leavers and any other children in receipt of local authority support, for example children in need;
- To identify signposting responsibilities and ensure signposting takes place;
- To determine if the authority will make an online application on behalf of children for whom the authority has PR;
- To keep an adequate record of each application made including relevant correspondence;
- To record plans for monitoring of the child's status, including future actions with deadlines and ensuring to incorporate these plans into children's care or pathway plans.

2.3 The UK immigration status granted to eligible applicants under the scheme will enable them to continue living in the UK after 30th June 2021. All applications must have been made before that deadline.

3. Brent's Position for LAC and Care Leavers

3.1 Achieving EUSS for Brent's children in care and care leavers has been a priority. Looked after children and leaving care teams within CYP are fully aware of the above mentioned duties. There have been multiple discussions at management meetings, within staff supervision sessions and at LAC Review Meetings, emphasising the urgency around resolving EUSS for relevant children and young people. A number of managers and practitioners within the

LACP Service have attended workshops arranged by the Home Office to receive the required level of training.

- 3.2 Since the start of the EUSS 14 looked after children have been supported to make an application to the Home Office. As at 31st March 2021, 10 of these cases have been positively resolved with the remaining 4 children's cases awaiting a decision by the Home Office. There were 6 looked after children who had not made their applications by that date. Brent has parental responsibility for 2 of these children as they are subject to Care Orders under Sec 31 of the Children Act 1989. Four children are looked after through parental consent pursuant to Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. All six children's cases are well known to senior leaders in CYP and plans are in place to resolve EUSS on their behalf before the deadline.
- 3.3 In relation to care leavers, as at 31st March 2021, 19 care leavers had been identified as eligible to apply for EUSS. Out of this group, 9 care leavers now have settled status and 2 have pre-settled status. Of the remaining 8 care leavers, 2 have submitted their applications with 6 outstanding. Out of this group of 6, 4 are in the process of submitting their applications with the remaining two being strongly encouraged by their Personal Advisors to progress this.
- 3.4 Brent CYP leadership has maintained management scrutiny and oversight of progress in ensuring EUSS applications for looked after children and care leavers are made. Regular reporting to the Strategic Director, Children and Young People has occurred. Service management within the LACP service continues to have oversight of all cases, receiving updates on progress made and undertaking checks on case files.
- 3.5 On the 5th February 2021, several managers including the Head of Service (LACP) met with two officers from the Home Office Vulnerability Programme, EUSS team. All cases where there were challenges to submitting applications were discussed and agreed plans made for individual case resolution.
- 3.6 The Head of LAC and Permanency has audited each case of children for whom an application for EUSS should be made. This activity resulted in an action plan recorded on each electronic case file. It was reassuring to see evidence on the case files that Independent Reviewing Officers had been monitoring the relevant children's EU settled status as part of their regular care or pathway plan reviews.
- 3.7 The current challenges in making applications for looked after children are mainly due to difficulties in obtaining identification documents such as passports or birth certificates, mainly from Eastern European countries such as

Poland, Romania and Slovakia. In these countries both parents' consent is required for identity documents to be released for children. Conflicts between parents or where one parent's location is unknown is proving a challenge to resolve.

3.8 The social work teams are in touch with relevant embassies and seek assistance from Brent's Legal Department when required. Additionally, such cases are raised with the Resolution Team within the Home Office to establish any support that is needed. The Brent Registration Office provides support to practitioners for relevant applications that can be made online on behalf of children for whom Brent has PR. Since the meeting with the Home Office in February 2021, it has been possible to initiate paper-based applications for those children and young people for whom we do not have the necessary identity documentation.

3.9 In order to expedite the process of applications for EUSS for looked after children and care leavers, the Council has provided additional financial support to allow recruitment of a part-time business support officer to ensure completion of applications prior to the deadline.

3.10 As the deadline approaches, some countries such as France have now issued guidance to their citizens residing in the UK around the support available to resolve their status and offered support to local authorities if it is required.

Report sign off:

GAIL TOLLEY

Strategic Director, Children and Young People

 <p style="font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold; margin-top: 5px;">Brent</p>	<p style="font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">Corporate Parenting Committee</p> <p style="margin: 0;">28 April 2021</p> <hr/> <p style="font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</p>
<p>Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 4: 1st January to 31st March 2021</p>	

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

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 January – 31st March 2021.

2. 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. Background

3.1. Service Priorities

The in-house fostering function is positioned within the LAC and Permanency Service (LACPS) of the Children and Young People's Department. Relevant parts of the LACPS 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 negative impact on children and young people.

3.2. Staffing Arrangements

This remains the same as reported in the previous update to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

4. Placement Activity

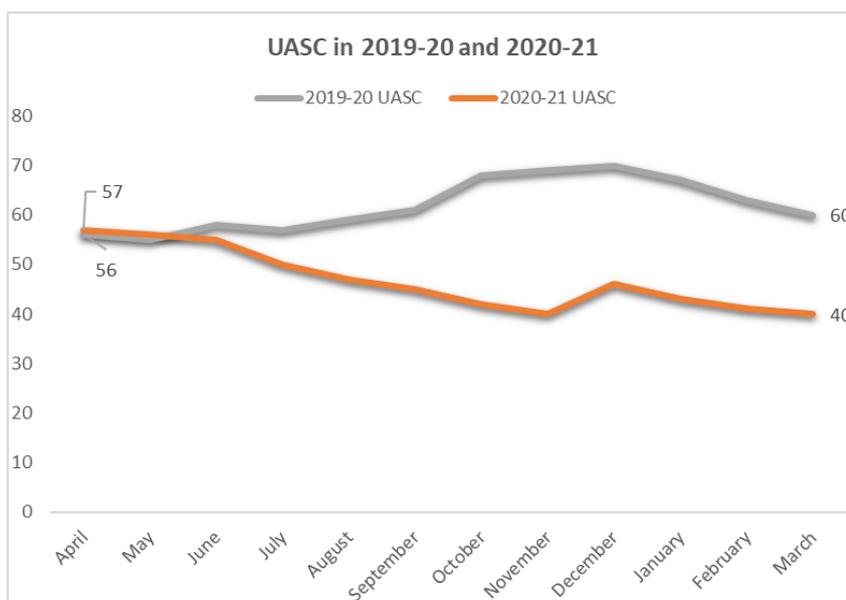
4.1. The total number of looked after children as at 31st March 2021 was 285, which is a decrease by 11 children from Q3, 2020-2021 (296 children) and a decrease of 9 children from the same period in 2020 (294 children).

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

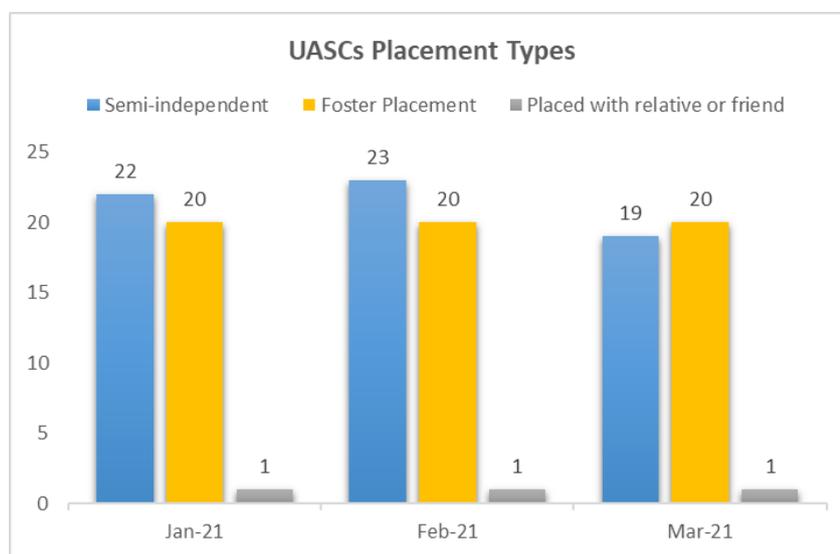
- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 30% - the actual percentage as of 31st March 2021 was 20.4% (58 children), a decrease by 0.2% from the previous quarter Q3 of 2020-2021, 20.6% (61 children).
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15% - the actual percentage as of 31st March 2021 was 13.3% (38 children), a decrease by 0.2% from Q3 of 2020-2021 (13.5%, 40 children).

- Percentage of looked after children placed in independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 31st March 2021 was 30.2% (86 children); an increase by 2.5% from Q3 of 2020-2021 (27.7%, 82 children).
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 70% - the actual percentage as of 31st March 2021 was 63.9% (182 children), an increase by 2.1% Q3 of 2020-2021(183 children, 61.8%).
- There were 41 looked after children in registered semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children’s Home Regulations) as at 31st March 2021, which represents 14.4% of all looked after children. This is a drop of 4.9% from the end of Q3, 2020-2021 (19.3%, 57 children)

4.3. As of 31st March 2021, there were 40 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), 6 fewer than at the end of Q3 2020-2021. The Covid-19 pandemic has seen a nationwide reduction in the number of UASC presenting for assistance from local authorities.



4.4. The number of UASC placed in semi-independent accommodation is 19, 6 fewer than at the end of Q3, 2020-21, none are placed in residential children’s homes and there are the same number of UASC placed in foster placements as at Q3 (20 UASCs).



5. Recruitment and Assessment

- 5.1. Marketing and recruitment activities continues to take place successfully online. The efforts of Brent's Marketing and Recruitment Officer (MRO) have been generating enquiries and information evening sign-ups every month. During every month of the reporting period, a constant number of approximately 15 people signed up to attend each event, with participants varying between five and 10 for each session.
- 5.2. All marketing activity during this period has been carried out online through the Brent Council website, the Brent Council e-newsletter, the fostering newsletter, and social media, and offline via articles in local publications. Interested parties made enquiries by phone or online and the team carried out initial visits and assessments virtually, via video calls, ensuring that the experience for prospective carers was '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. The consistent positive feedback has led to plans for these virtual events to continue post-pandemic.
- 5.3. In addition to online recruitment activities, Brent Fostering has appeared in The Brent Magazine and the Brent and Kilburn Times. The story about a baby's transition to adoption from fostering mid-lockdown was featured in the Brent magazine, while Brent and Kilburn Times wrote an article about the need for foster carers after noticing a press release published by the MRO regarding a drop in the number of fostering enquiries nationwide and a spike in referrals. The two articles rose the profile of Brent Fostering and provided free media coverage for the service. These efforts generated at least two direct enquiries, which cited 'Advert in newspaper/magazine' as their source.
- 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 has increased

to 3,400 from 2,600 during the previous reporting period. With a very low unsubscribe rate of around five users per email, we can confirm that subscribers are finding the information useful. Each of the newsletters sent out during the reporting period has recorded an open rate of around 20% and a click-through rate of between 8% and 9%. In March, a new information campaign was launched to educate readers on aspects of fostering such as the application and assessment, the type of service to choose, and the relation with the supervising social workers. So far, the two emails sent in the last two weeks of March recorded unexpected success.

- 5.5. More content is constantly being created to satisfy the need of the audience for useful fostering-related information that will eventually convert readers into fostering applicants. A new article about the impact of fostering on carers' lives was created, which recorded 53 views since its publishing date on 19 March.
- 5.6. The MRO also repurposed the content generated by our carers during interviews and fostering events and published it anonymously and with the permission of the speakers on other channels like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.
- 5.7. 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 organic posts and by sharing information about fostering in small community groups. The MRO has continued to develop the service's Instagram presence, which resulted in an increase in the number of followers; Brent's Fostering Facebook page is counting 260 followers and the Instagram account 131 followers, up from 113 in December 2020. While social media is rarely generating direct enquiries, it is providing visibility for the service and recommendations from members of the public to friends and family who meet the fostering requirements to apply for fostering. During the last quarter, five enquiries had 'Friends/family' as their source and two had 'Internet search'.
- 5.8. This marketing activity has produced 32 enquiries, up from 22 in the same period last year, and 38 information evening bookings, three more compared to the previous period. 22 people attended the information evenings, up by eight during the previous quarter. This led to 5 initial visits taking place during the reporting period, one more than in the previous three months.
- 5.9. Of the 5 initial visits undertaken:
 - 3 resulted in the applicant being recommended for stage 1 of the assessment process, with 1 subsequent withdrawal for personal reasons.
 - 2 ended in a negative outcome due to not being suitable.
- 5.10. The 1 applicant identified in last quarter's report who is transferring from an Independent Fostering Agency remains in stage 2 and their application will be presented to Brent's Fostering Panel in the first quarter of this reporting year.

- 5.11. The assessment reported in the last reporting period as being in stage 1, remains in stage 1. The applicant requested to be on hold due to changes in their personal circumstances that required further exploration. The assessment has recently resumed.
- 5.12. Of the 6 assessments reported as being in stage 2 in the last quarter, 1 was recommended for approval at panel on 26th March 2021 and 1 was recommended for approval at panel on 12th March 2021. The other 4 remain in stage 2. Of these, 2 assessments are currently on hold due to applicants being affected by Covid-19.
- 5.13. In this reporting period overall there are 7 assessments in process:
- 3 assessment in stage 1; and
 - 4 assessments are in stage 2.

6. Fostering Panel

- 6.1. The LACPS 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. With experience, panels now run more smoothly and do not take longer than face-to-face panels any more, as was previously reported.
- 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 January – 31st March 2021, 5 panels were held with 20 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:
- 2 new fostering households were recommended for approval;
 - 2 new 'family and friends' fostering households were recommended for approval;
 - 12 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;

- 2 'family and friends' fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
- the approval of 1 fostering household was terminated due to standards of care concerns; and
- 1 fostering household resigned from their fostering role for Brent and moved to an Independent Fostering Agency. When asked, they declined to explain the reasons for this decision.

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

7. Training and Support for Foster Carers

7.1. The Learning and Development Programme

Brent's learning and development team continue to keep the training offer under review in light of the easing of lockdown restrictions and look forward to offering some face-to-face sessions once it is safe to do so.

- 7.1.1. 7 courses were offered virtually during the period under review, using Zoom:
- Helping Children Manage Anxiety, the Impact of Trauma and Attachment were delivered in January;
 - Traffic Light Tool, (which focuses on managing online safety) and LGBT+ awareness were offered in February; and
 - LADO training, Digital Safety and Transitions for Schools were offered in March.

Foster carers' comments about the sessions were generally positive:

"The [Helping Children Manage Anxiety] training gave me an overall overview about anxiety and general ways to deal with it. For me, this was mainly a refreshing exercise. Thank you."

"The course [Impact of Trauma and Attachment] allowed me to look out for signs that something is wrong like behaviour or emotional problems growing up."

"[Traffic Light Tool] taught me to identify the signals of sexualised behaviour and the ways we could address it through the traffic light system."

"Learning about managing allegations against people that work with children is important to know for carers. The Brent LADO training is informative and the course aims were met."

"This training [Digital Safety] made me realise the need to be aware about the benefits of various digital platforms for communication and development, risks

and dangers resulting from wrongful use of them and the need to ensure that they are used for right purposes...I think the training is a bit long for Zoom as it is difficult to look at a screen non-stop for 3 or 4 hours.”

- 7.1.2. All carers additionally have access to an online training package provided by an external provider. The training courses offer a range in topics from ‘The role of the foster carer’ to specialist educational needs courses, such as Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and Autism. The courses can be accessed at any time of the day, or at the weekend, in response to carers asking for more flexible training times. Feedback from foster carers has been positive for all training commissioned and sign up has increased. Currently 60 carers have online accounts, with more being encouraged to sign up as the year progresses.
- 7.1.3. Supervising social workers continue to emphasise the importance of attending training to foster carers in their visits. The Quality Assurance Learning Officer regularly advertises the training brochure of courses on offer via email, in the fostering newsletter, and at foster carer support groups.
- 7.1.4. 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. In 2021/22 the team intend to expand the variety of training courses provided 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 (SSW)

- 7.2.1. Alongside recruitment, 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 according to their feedback in Fostering Panel presentations and in their annual reviews below. 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 health conditions. Despite this, 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 carers continues to be appreciated. A number of compliments have been received during this period:

“I just wanted to thank the team for all the support they have offered me over the years we have worked together and I extended this to all the SWs I have worked with.”

T, foster carer for Brent since 2000, now fostering along with her son since 2019.

"I am happy and proud to consider Brent Social Care as my second home."
M, foster carer for Brent since 1994.

- 7.2.2. To keep foster carers engaged and informed, the fostering service rely 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 continue to 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 Covid vaccines now being available for those aged 50+ in Brent and support with sharing information electronically on a confidential basis. All email messages are followed up by a text message alerts to ensure foster carers are notified whenever a new email reaches their inbox.
- 7.2.3. In December 2020, all foster carers switched from using the Brent carer emails to SharePoint, which is a secure information-sharing platform. Foster carers were offered three training sessions during October and November 2020 to prepare them for using the platform, starting 1st December. The feedback from the foster carers has been varied, with some users enjoying the platform while others need more time to adjust to it. The service will monitor how SharePoint is received and make changes and improvements accordingly. The MRO is always on hand to offer support where needed.
- 7.2.4. 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 on a range of topics from current digital transformation within the department, to issues about staying put arrangements, entitlements for foster carers, Covid-19 lockdown, difficulties with schooling and home learning, Covid-19 vaccinations and children's savings. Foster carers lead 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.
- 7.2.5. The topic of the virtual support meeting held in January 2021 focused on E-vouchers that had been provided to carers as a thank you from the department and feedback on Christmas arrangements. Foster carers were informed that during the lock down their SSWs would be contacting them weekly on a virtual basis until restrictions were eased. Carers felt reassured by this support offer.

7.2.6. At the support group in February 2021, the Head of Service (HOS), acknowledged the foster carers' hard work and support they provide to the children and young people over the year. The HOS updated foster carers around local Covid-19 cases and conveyed the local authority's concern and support to those who had been directly affected. The foster carers were encouraged to participate in Brent's Covid-19 vaccination programme.

7.2.7. The support group in March included discussion and advice on children's savings, holiday entitlements, respite and staying put arrangements.

8. Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints

8.1. A total of 34 foster carer annual review meetings were conducted during the period with 31 taking place. The 3 that did not take place were rescheduled at the request of the foster carer.

8.2. During this quarter, there were no complaints or allegations made by or against any Brent foster carers.

9. New Developments

9.1. Update on Collaborative Fostering Project

As outlined in previous reports, the Department for Education (DfE) did not allocate any further funding for this project to move to the next stage. As such, the focus remains on developing closer working arrangements with interested neighbouring local authorities to improve placement stability and choice and prevent children from being placed into residential care. Heads of Service in Brent and Ealing have remained in communication and are considering alternative models of joint working and co-operation. Early conversations with equivalent senior leaders in Harrow suggest that they are interested in joining Brent and Ealing in a collaborative arrangement, considering at an initial stage how to enhance the marketing and recruitment elements of each fostering service. Further updates will be provided to the Committee as this progresses.

Report sign off:

GAIL TOLLEY

Strategic Director, Children and Young People

 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 28 April 2021
	Report from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People
Update on Semi-independent Provision for looked after children and care leavers	

Wards Affected:	ALL
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Key
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:	None
Background Papers:	None
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Brian Grady Operational Director Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy Brian.grady@brent.gov.uk Shirley Parks Head of Forward Planning, Performance and Partnerships Shirley.parks@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report provides Corporate Parenting Committee with an update on the quality assurance of semi-independent provision commissioned by the council to accommodate looked after children (LAC) aged 16-18 and care leavers.

2.0 Recommendations

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

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 Local authorities have a duty to assess and meet the needs of young people aged 16+ who are looked after and who are care leavers as set out in the Children Act 1989 and 2004, the Children Leaving Care Act 2000 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017. It is the local authority's responsibility to ensure all LAC and care leavers are properly prepared for transition to adulthood in a planned and effective way to achieve the best possible outcomes for the individual young person. To support this duty, the council commissions a range of semi-independent living accommodations for looked

after children aged 16+ and care leavers aged 18–21, as an alternative to staying put arrangements in foster placements or as a step-down from residential provision.

- 3.2 At the end of March 2021, there were 183 young people in placed in semi-independent provision, of whom 42 were looked after children (aged 16-18) and 141 were care leavers aged 18+. The number of young people in Brent placed in semi-independent provision has doubled over the past five years (from 90 in April 2016 to 183 in April 2021). In part this reflects the older age profile of Brent looked after children, many of whom enter care as teenagers. It also reflects an increasing number of care leavers who are not ready to move into their own tenancies and require ongoing support. As a result of Brent's approach to supporting care leavers until they are considered to be ready for independence, there have been no tenancy breakdowns among the care leaver population living in Brent over the past 4 years. CYP is working closely with colleagues in Housing to provide a tenancy for Care Leavers when they are ready, as set out in the corporate offer to Care Leavers, but we anticipate that this may become a challenge as housing stock supplies reduce.
- 3.3 The council commissions a range of semi-independent placements from 25-30 providers at any point in time. This includes supported placements that have 24-hour onsite support, shared placements with different levels of day time support and independent accommodation with floating/visiting support. Brent commissions the majority of its semi-independent placements (82%) through a contract framework (a Dynamic Purchasing Vehicle) established by the Commissioning Alliance (previously known as the West London Alliance), a commissioning partnership of London local authorities. Brent continues to have a block contract with Centerpoint, who are currently providing 20 placements, 5 of which are high support placements. Brent also spot-purchases placements to meet the needs of individual young people.
- 3.4 The type of semi-independent placement commissioned is based on assessment of the needs of the individual young person. Brent expects all semi-independent providers to provide a settled and safe environment for young people and to support access to education, employment or training and to help young people build a range of life skills that will enable them to make a successful transition to independence.

4.0 The Brent Quality Assurance Framework of Semi Independent provision

- 4.1 Semi-independent placements are not currently regulated. There are, therefore, no regulatory or national minimum standards for what constitutes "good" quality semi-independent provision. Unregulated provision is currently allowed in law and is for children usually over the age of 16 who need support to live independently rather than needing full-time care. As semi-independent placements are not regulated, local authorities are responsible for quality assuring the provision they commission.
- 4.2 Working in partnership with Barnardo's, Brent has developed a new Semi-Independent Quality Assurance Framework that has care experienced young people at its core. The aims of the framework are:
- To develop a quality assurance approach that is informed by care experienced young people and regularly refreshed with their input
 - To provide guidance to Brent staff, key workers, and providers, on Brent's expectations of semi-independent provision and the support that should be provided to support care-experienced young people as they move towards independence
 - To empower young people who are living in or moving to semi-independent accommodation to speak up when they feel that these standards are not being met

- To identify providers that can meet Brent's requirements, so that the local authority narrows the number of providers commissioned giving greater influence over quality.
- 4.3 The framework builds on the range of technical and compliance quality assurance checks that are routinely undertaken to ensure that young people are living in a safe, clean environment and have appropriate support to meet their needs. This includes ensuring current gas and electric safety certificates are in place; current DBS check status; current COVID risk assessment and status; up to date fire risk assessments, HMO licence; staff vacancy and turnover information, placement turnover information, including emergency placement endings and the number of child protection enquiries, complaints and missing episodes within the last 12 months. Commissioners also discuss safeguarding information, including information about other young people placed in the provision, when commissioning a placement for a young person to ensure appropriate matching. Where placements are being considered in semi-independent settings that have not been used before, references are sought from two other local authorities who have placed children there.
- 4.4 The new Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) is informed by what young people in care and care leavers have told us about their experiences of semi-independent provision. The focus of consultation was to understand young people's views of placements in terms of the quality of the accommodation and support available (eg. staff/the role of the key worker). Consultation has also been undertaken with social work teams. Consultation with providers focused on how the QAF could help them ensure that young people's needs are being met and that they are contributing to improving the outcomes and life chances of children in care and care leavers.
- 4.5 The QAF is structured around five core themes that group the issues raised by young people and providers during the consultation phase of the project. These have been agreed by young people:
- Entering Semi-Independent Placements.
 - Staff and Key Workers.
 - Communities, Neighbourhoods and Support.
 - Building Quality.
 - Communication and Wellbeing
- 4.6 Under each theme, the QAF identifies the issues raised by young people and providers, details the expectations that Brent has of semi-independent providers and professionals supporting young people (Table 1) and lists 'solutions' or what needs to be consistently implemented for these expectations to be met.

Table 1: QAF Expectations

Entering Semi-Independent Placements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people should be involved in the placements process wherever possible. Social workers and personal advisors should discuss and note their preferences upon entry into care, or prior to a planned move to a semi-independent placement, and pass this information on to the Placements Team. • Young people’s voices should be listened to and accounted for at every stage of the placements process. Particular support should be given from known professionals, e.g. their social worker, whilst the young person settles into the placement. • All relevant professionals – placement staff and managers, social workers, and personal advisors – should ensure good communication with the young person leading up to, and in the weeks following, a placement move. They should ensure that young people are supported through the practicalities of moving in and provide help and support where needed. • A placement starter pack, including information on Brent’s Care Leaver Offer, as well as essential items such as home and kitchenware, must be provided upon first entry into semi-independent placements.
Staff and Key Workers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff motivations and experience should be properly interrogated at interview. • Placement staff should be regularly supervised and monitored in order to deliver the best service possible. • Staff should provide weekly reporting and updates on the young people that they are working with. This allows for smooth handovers. Comprehensive safeguarding forms should be kept up to date alongside this. • Staff and key workers should establish trusted relationships with the young people that they are working with, through individual conversations, taking an interest in their lives and hobbies, and ensuring that they listen to their concerns. • Providers are encouraged to share individual experiences and suggestions of best practice with one another, to allow for peer learning and improvement.
Communities, Neighbourhoods and Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers should work to foster a sense of community within the placement and supporting young people to develop positive relationships with neighbours and the community within which they live with. • Young people’s opinions on mixed gender and age placements should be discussed with them before entry into semi-independent placements, to ensure that they can live somewhere that they feel comfortable.
Building Quality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers should offer secure, comfortable, high-quality accommodation that provides a homely and safe environment for young people.
Communication and Wellbeing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers should ensure that they are prioritising the wellbeing of young people throughout their work with them, and that they are communicating their rights and entitlements with young people effectively. • Providers should ensure that they treat the young people within the placement as young adults, working on a basis of mutual respect and trust when it comes to things such as curfews and complaints.

4.7 Feedback during the consultation phase from both young people and providers highlighted the importance of collaborative working. The QAF includes a commitment to continually engage with and support care-experienced young people and providers to ensure that provision is continuously improving through the following initiatives:

- A quarterly best practice support and training group, (facilitated and co-chaired by Brent staff) for all semi-independent providers
- Training for semi-independent providers co-produced with and delivered by young people and care leavers, as they are the 'experts by experience'
- The involvement of care leavers in monitoring/inspection visits to providers alongside officers (as paid casual workers)

4.8 Semi-independent accommodation providers are key partners in Brent's contextual safeguarding approach that requires agencies to work together to deliver interventions to manage the challenges and risks of safeguarding incidents, related to county lines, knife crime and the risks of vulnerable young people missing from care. The first Best Practice Group meeting took place in March 2021 and included training from the Metropolitan Police on the Philomena Protocol (an initiative aimed at helping to locate and safely return a young person as quickly as possible when they are missing) and support in regard to missing young people in general. Guidance was also provided on the production of Local Area Risk Assessments. A separate training session on the production of a shared generic Local Area Risk Assessment at the request of providers also took place in March 2021. The next Best Practice Group in July 2021 will include a presentation by The Rescue and Response Project on County Lines.

4.9 The first co-produced training delivered by young people is taking place in May 2021. Young people are being supported by officers and Barnardo's to co-produce the training.

4.10 Young people will be joining the CYP Commissioning Team's rolling programme of semi-independent monitoring visits to help assess providers against the QAF, once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. It is anticipated that they will provide invaluable insight on the quality of the accommodation and they will be adept at engaging with young people living in the accommodation to get their feedback. The local authority is planning to employ care leavers to undertake this work on an hourly paid basis, which would enable them to cite this as paid employment on their CVs. It is hoped that the first cohort of care leavers undertaking these monitoring visits will inspire future generations of care leavers to become part of the quality assurance monitoring process.

4.11 Since July 2020, 20 virtual monitoring visits of semi-independent accommodation have taken place and a further 10 are scheduled by the end of April 2021. Once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, the expectation under the QAF is that all semi-independent providers used by Brent will be visited twice a year. The key focus for site visits will be to assess if the QAF expectations are being met - the standard/condition of the accommodation and the community environment, staff records and supervision records, to assess how the young person is being supported to achieve their goals and positive outcomes and to develop their independence skills.

4.12 When monitoring visits are undertaken, an action plan is agreed with the provider to address any identified concerns. Visits to 6 providers since July 2020 identified areas for improvement that included facilities that needed to be redecorated or repaired and the need for additional equipment, such as mini fridges in each bedroom at one unit, bike storage arrangements at another and gardens that needed to be maintained. As the QAF becomes embedded it is anticipated that action plans will reflect more robust monitoring of qualitative activity.

5.0 Quality Assurance Monitoring through the Commissioning Alliance DPV

5.1 The Commissioning Alliance's new Semi-Independent Dynamic Purchasing Vehicle, hosted by Hammersmith and Fulham Local Authority, went live in August 2020. All

DPV providers undergo a tender process to join the DPV and there is also an accreditation scheme that runs alongside the DPV. To become accredited, a provider is inspected by the Commissioning Alliance in respect of: a) a fit and proper person test for directors and the named responsible individual and b) paperwork in regards to safer recruitment; DBS checks; training and policies and procedures. A third stage of extensive property visits is due to shortly be rolled out by the Commissioning Alliance.

5.2 Brent expects all providers to be working towards delivering the outcomes for all young people placed with them that are set out in The Commissioning Alliance Semi-Independent DPV specification. Brent encourages all semi-independent providers to join the Commissioning Alliance DPV, as this gives further reassurance to the quality of provision:

- “The young person enjoys good physical, emotional, mental and sexual health; has a healthy lifestyle, and has access to information about health issues that allows them to make informed choices.
- The young person is physically safe, stable and emotionally secure. They are protected from ill-treatment, neglect, violence and sexual exploitation; they are free from bullying and discrimination; and are protected from social exclusion through involvement in crime, anti-social behaviour and other risk-taking activities.
- The young person attends and fully engages in education, training or employment and receives encouragement and recognition for their achievements.
- The young person positively participates in their own development and with the local community; they are actively involved in making decisions about their future; they develop self-confidence and can deal with change and other life challenges; they understand the effects of racism and discrimination and are able to challenge this behaviour; they demonstrate enterprise and a will to contribute to the well-being of others.
- The young person is equipped with all the skills they require and supported to move into permanent independent living, making smooth and successful transition into adult life.”

5.3 Brent is driving work with Commissioning Alliance partner authorities to develop an agreed set of due diligence and safeguarding questions at the point of placement; to share monitoring information as well as soft intelligence more widely and to develop more robust accreditation and monitoring reports.

6.0 Future changes

6.1 In June 2020, the Department for Education undertook a consultation on semi-independent accommodation and subsequently published a report ‘Reforms to unregulated provision for children in care and care leavers’ in February 2021 that summarises the consultation and reforms of the sector.

6.2 The proposed changes include: the introduction of national standards and providers being registered and inspected by Ofsted and a ban on the placement of under-16s in semi-independent provision with Ofsted given additional powers to take enforcement action against illegal unregistered providers. The DfE is engaging with local authorities to understand the impact of these changes, which will come into force from September 2021, and how best to manage implementation. The Brent QAF will be reviewed against the national standards once further information is available.

Related documents:

- Report to Corporate Parenting Committee July 2019 on Semi-independent Provision for Looked After Children and care leavers

Report sign off:

GAIL TOLLEY

Strategic Director, Children and
Young People

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 <p>Brent</p>	<p align="center">Corporate Parenting Committee</p> <p align="center">28 April 2021</p>
	<p>Report from Adopt London West and Brent's Looked After Children and Permanency Service</p>
<p>Brent Adoption Report</p> <p>6-monthly report: 1st October 2020 to 31st March 2021</p>	

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

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 October 2020 – 31st March 2021;
- the progress and activity of Adopt London West;
- how good outcomes are being achieved for children.

Information and child level data contained in sections 5 and 6 of this report was provided by Brent; the content from section 7 onwards was provided by Adopt London West.

1.2 This is the third 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 provides 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. 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 August 2020, covering the 3-year period 2016-2019.

Adoption Scorecards (published [here](#))

5.1.1 The non-published data for the period under review demonstrates that performance against one of the most significant indicators has continued to strengthen (see below A2) in comparison to the published national and statistical neighbour averages whereas there has been a decrease in average time taken for a child entering care to being placed for adoption (A1):

- **A1** (The average time taken for a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 450 days. This is a 7% increase on the previous reporting period (420 days) and compares less well against the 2016-19 national average of 376 days and the statistical neighbour average of 370. The reason for the increase was due to 5 children's cases that were contested and appealed by parents, drawing out the court proceedings and delaying the Placement Order applications.
- **A2** (The average time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 169 days. This is a 4% decrease on the previous reporting period (176 days) which is less than the 2016-19 national average of 178 days and compares favourably to the statistical neighbour average of 203.

6.0 Child related data

6.1 In the second six months of this reporting year (1st October 2020 – 31st March 2021) there were no Adoption Orders granted.

6.2 As at 31st March 2021 there are two adoption applications in progress; applications are likely to be made for the three other children placed for adoption within the next quarter.

- 6.3** As at 31st March 2021 there were six children with an adoption plan who had not yet been adopted. The details of these children's cases are as follows:
- Five are placed for adoption;
 - One child remains subject to ongoing care proceedings, likely to conclude towards the end of 2021.

7.0 Adopter Recruitment

- 7.1** ALW approved 8 Adopter households in the period 1st October 2020 – 31st March 2021 and a total of 20 households in the full reporting year April 2020 – March 2021. 45% of Adopters approved are from BAME communities and 25% identify as LGBTQ.
- 7.2** As at 31st March 2021, ALW have 35 approved adoptive families: 15 of whom already have a child placed with them, 15 are still in the active family finding stage, 1 family is formally matched with a child and 2 others are linked to children. 2 families are on hold due to personal circumstances.
- 7.3** During this reporting period (Oct 20-Mar 21) the service received 189 general enquiries about adoption. During the full reporting year 421 families have been invited to attend 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, during 2020/21 only 40% of assessments were completed within expected timescales. This was largely due to the effects of the pandemic - some families have faced financial and employment uncertainty and have needed to pause their assessments, in addition several families have suffered bereavements.
- 7.6** As at 31st March 2021, there are 19 families in the formal stages of assessment, 10 in Stage 1 and 9 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 run by voluntary adoption agency PACT that provides training and resources to adopters. 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 a year. The group is co-facilitated by an Educational Psychologist and an ALW Social worker, 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.

The subject of the most recent support group in March 2021 was "Adolescence: How the brain changes and impacts behaviour in school". It was attended by 19 Adopters, 8 of whom were from Brent. Below is feedback from one of the families:

"I found the session on adolescence last week REALLY helpful as our two adopted boys (from Brent) are now 12 and 13 and therefore getting into adolescence. I particularly liked the format where it was a mix of educating by you and the educational psychologist on different aspects, and interactive periods to help us reflect and share with the group about own experience of adolescence. I appreciated being able to ask questions relevant to one of our sons at the end too. Our 12-year-old has been having increasing periods of frustration/anger outbursts, although not at school so far, and hearing your advice then as well as tonight will help us shape up what support we can get and who to contact. It is a relief to know that in itself. Thank you once again for these extremely useful sessions".

- 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 Adopt London's partnership with We are Family (WAF) an Adopter led peer support organisation; a series of evening webinars have been delivered:

- **6/10/20:** Personal experience of Transracial Adoption.
- **20/10/20:** Helping Children manage contact with their birth family and make sense of their Adoption – Julie Young, Senior Researcher, University of East Anglia.
- **12/11/20:** Introduction to NVR, the non-violent resistance parenting approach – Rachel Braverman.
- **24/11/20:** The Why, what, and how guide to understanding the effects of trauma on our children – Helen Oakwater.
- **5/1/21:** Executive functioning – what is that? How to support our children in a school system that doesn't understand them – Seth Perler.
- **12/1/21:** Therapeutic Parenting, why it is critical for our children's wellbeing – Zach Gomm.
- **26/1/21:** The importance of maintaining self-care and resilience for Family Wellbeing – Randhiraj Bilan.
- **9/2/21:** Managing difficult sibling relationships for children who have shared a traumatic history – Sarah Naish & Rosie Jeffries.
- **23/2/21:** Attachment – Graham Music.
- **March:** weekly Webinars with each Adopt London region, "Adoption Support What you can expect" facilitated by ALW on 30/3/20.

All webinars are recorded and form an online library of resources available to WAF members.

8.6 Special Guardianship Support

ALW remains the only Adopt London region that has Special Guardianship support as part of the core offer. London's Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board is committed to improving support services to Special Guardians across London as a key priority for 21/22.

The Special Guardianship Support group in ALW is now co-facilitated with a Brent Special Guardian, who has already taken proactive steps to reach out to the community of Special Guardians in Brent and across the West London partnership to increase engagement and membership of the group. In addition, this person has been invited to join a national working group convened by the Chair of the national ASGLB who is also determined to improve the quality of service offered to Special Guardians across the country.

The National organisation "Kinship" (formerly Grandparents Plus), provides advocacy, peer support and expert advice and information to Special Guardians. ALW were able to commission services from Grandparents Plus funded by the Emergency ASF Covid fund.

It is widely recognised that many children who cease being looked after by the Local Authority to live within their extended family or kinship network benefit from improved outcomes. Therefore it is essential that the Special Guardians who care for them are offered comprehensive, appropriate support that is often different to that needed by Adopters.

ALW partner LAs are working together to agree a funding proposal to continue to offer some support to Special Guardians from “Kinship”. Feedback from Brent Special Guardians:

“The service is good, and I would use them again if I needed to.”

“Grandparents Plus would call me every week without fail and when things were really bad, they would call me on a daily basis to check if I was ok which was really supportive to me.”

“Grandparents Plus has been brilliant for me and my boys and I feel that although contact has been reduced as things have been a little better it is a service; I will always wish to have access to.”

“Kinship Care has been a fantastic organisation of support”

“Through this engagement I have been able to link up with other Special Guardians within Brent which has really helped as I am now able to gain support from others who are in the exact same position as myself.”

“The service overall is fantastic, and I really recommend that all Special Guardians use this service.”

9. 0 Adopter and Special Guardians feedback

9.1 Some examples of recent feedback received from Brent children and families receiving a service from ALW, who were involved due to an assessment, intervention, an access to records request or because they have taken part in any online/virtual resources:

“N and I would both like to say a huge Thankyou to you all, for your help and support with A's high school application. We were touched by your communication and quick response on the matter.”

November 2020

Foundations for Attachment October/November 2020 for Adopters

“Thanks to you and Jane for hosting the course. We both got an enormous amount out of it, as well as really enjoying the sessions and we were sad to see it all come to an end.”

Foundations for Attachment February/March 2021 for Special Guardians

The course was delivered on Microsoft Teams twice a week (10am to 12pm) for 9 weeks.

"it was good and helpful"

"I thoroughly enjoyed this course. It has given so much more insight to care for my 3 little cousins"

"well organized, the leaders well prepared and empathetic!"

"helpful, understanding, thought it was amazing"

"Really enjoyed session"

From a 13-year-old young person who has been receiving support from an ALW Social Worker, whilst waiting for ASF funded therapy to begin:

"even if mum doesn't listen to me or read my notes you have helped me to talk about how I feel and get things off my chest....I'm not used to adults listening to me in the way that you do"...

From a grandmother caring for her granddaughter thanking the ALW support worker:

"we wanted to let you know how lovely, responsive and helpful x has been and how much we have appreciated her help. Most notably when she took over the contact with M's maternal birth mother, and literally helped get her present to M in just 24 hours around Christmas time! We had one very happy little girl and Nanna! 😊"

Finally, supporting families to make sense of their Adoption story at any stage of their life is an important service provided by ALW. Below is a message of thanks from a family whose father was Adopted 100 years ago.

"I want to write to you to say how much we appreciated M's assistance. We are very grateful she was proactive in following up a message left on my father's file and made inquiries to see if it had been acted upon. My father died after many years of searching for understanding regarding his adoption. In the process he was loaned a file of adoption correspondence and I remember his joy and sadness surrounding the pieces of discovery. The handwritten notes from his birth mother and an adoption agent describing her indecision and underlying torment at giving him up. Her subsequent requests for information about him. All of which gave my father some peace to know she had not abandoned him so easily. He wanted to copy the letters before returning them but because of the expense at the time just did a select few at a copy shop and we still have these.

I found these copies while sorting out his paperwork and started to wonder about the others that my father couldn't copy. I rang Bernardo's and was told that as his adoption was in the 1920s it was possible they would be destroyed given that 100

years was about to pass. Every request I made was fairly received but it was always explained to me how difficult it would be.

Almost two years passed and I had given up hope, when out of the blue I received an email from M, she said she was new to the post and had found my application and did I want to pursue it. I was amazed at her proactivity. She could have easily ignored or overlooked my old request. I am sure anyone else would have taken this easier course. When I replied that I did want to continue trying, M found a solution and explained what she could do.

My sister and I are so grateful to have someone take an interest and help us get access to this file. It is so much more than just a bundle of correspondence and M seems to understand this.

Thank you!"

Received from the Daughter of an adopted Adult seeking access to Records – Feb 2021

10.0 Casework

10.1 Currently ALW is supporting 47 Brent families - 24 are receiving a Social Work service and 23 are currently receiving an ASF therapeutic service that is under review.

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 49 requests for access to records in relation to Brent records, out of a total number of 115 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. 29 applications have been made to the ASF on behalf of Brent families in this review period.

11.2 There are currently no families waiting for an application to the ASF; all assessments for support are allocated.

12.0 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/activities for Adopt London in the next six months include:

12.3.1 Birth Parents Counselling

ALS host, Southwark Council, is leading on the commissioning of a new counselling service for birth families. 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.

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.

A “Families for London Children” working group of Adopt London Heads of Service and Voluntary Adoption Agency colleagues has been established to specifically look at the sufficiency of Adopters for London and consider creative family finding initiatives. A conference has been arranged by the group on 16th June for Adopt London Social Workers. The keynote speech will be from the “America’s Kids Belong” project in the US, an organisation that has had particular success in Adoption for older children. It will be an opportunity to consider an alternative practice model and to see if there are lessons to be learned for London.

12.3.3 Further Development of the partnership with WAF (We are Family)

The popular and successful Webinar programme of online training and support to Adopters will continue and a series of new Podcasts will be launched in May/June 2021. The partnership with WAF enables Adopt London to hear directly from Adopters what services are helpful to them, and to explore with them the most useful mediums to offer online/virtual support which has proven to be much more accessible to Adopters than more traditional face to face services.

12.3.4 Trauma Informed Schools

A working group has been established for London to coordinate and further develop a network of Trauma Informed schools; this includes Virtual School Heads and VAA partners. ALW is hosting a Trauma Informed Schools training event on 28th May 2021 (10 places will be available to Brent).

12.3.5 Website development

Continuous improvement and development of the Adopt London website is an ongoing priority. Plans now include:

- Increasing the frequency and quality of informative and supportive blogs for all affected by or interested in Adoption.
- Increasing the functionality to support self-guided information, help, resources and learning.
- 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.

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

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

12.3.6 Adopt London Choir

An Adopt London Choir was established in the summer of 2020 to provide Adopters with the opportunity to have fun, establish connections with other Adopters and as a means of support during the pandemic. The choir has proved to be hugely popular and a network of Adopters across London who have never met in person has been established. Due to its popularity it has been agreed that Adopt London will continue to fund the project. The most recent video of the Choir performing can be viewed using the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hA5neFhHTqY&list=PLXqYv3251hsfg6dK4xLkDDqOiHSmOeRI-&index=1>

13.0 National and Regional Recruitment

13.1 #YouCanAdopt National Recruitment Campaign

The government allocated £1m to fund the first nationwide adoption recruitment campaign. #YouCanAdopt launched on 16th September 2020 and ran until 8th December 2020. This phase of the campaign has now concluded. The next phase due to launch in May/June is aimed at adoptive parents who may consider adopting older children, sibling groups and those with complex health needs or a disability.

13.2 An evaluation of the first phase has concluded and Government are indicating that further funding may be allocated to continue a National campaign approach.

13.3 Adopt London continues to regularly feature campaigns and targeted posts on social media, specifically Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Recent posts have included the need for more adopters for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, LGBTQ +, Black History Month, #YouCanAdopt national campaign, support services including WAF Talks, the Adopt London Choir's new video and song 'Colour my World', Safer Internet Day, Mother's Day, International Women's Day and other Adopt London various events.

Many of the social media posts link to a blog on the Adopt London website or to external resources where more information can be found.

14.0 Adoption Support Fund Covid-19 Emergency Fund

14.1 The DfE welcomed the approach to joint commissioning of services taken by Adopt London and praised the innovative services it jointly commissioned. Funding has now ceased and apart from some subscription services which continue until May 2021, all services have now ended.

14.3 Impact of and response to Covid 19 Emergency ASF funding

The positive impact of this support has been reported by families as being primarily that they received immediate help and advice, including therapy on request without the need for an assessment. All service providers reported measurable improvements experienced by families because of interventions.

14.4 An independent evaluation of Adopt London's use of the ASF Covid funding has been completed and the report shared with the Executive Board and with the 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 it to the ALW adoption team colleagues and panel members for their consideration.

Prior to each panel meeting, 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, and 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 8 adoptive families. A total of 20 households were approved in the full year. 4 Brent looked after children were matched during this time and a total of 6 children have been matched in the full year.

15.5 Annual training for panel members is a regulatory requirement, and joint training with ALW Social workers is planned for 21st and 25th May 2021. The topic is Transracial Adoption and will be delivered by the Inter Country Adoption Centre, a voluntary Adoption Agency and experts in this area.

Contact Officers

Debbie Gabriel, Head of Service, Adopt London West Regional Adoption Agency
Perceval House, 14-16 Uxbridge Road, London W5 2HL

Tel: 0208 825 8815

Email: gabrield@ealing.gov.uk

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

Tel: 020 8937 1228

Email: onder.beter@brent.gov.uk

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