



Corporate Parenting Committee

Tuesday 20 July 2021 at 5.00 pm

Conference Hall – Brent Civic Centre, Engineer's Way,
Wembley, HA9 0FJ

**This agenda was republished on 13 July 2021 to include agenda item 9.*

Please note that this meeting will be held as a socially distanced physical meeting with all members of the Committee required to attend in person.

Guidance on the safe delivery of face-to-face meetings is included at the end of the agenda frontsheet.

Membership:

Members

Councillors:

M Patel (Chair)
Conneely
Gbajumo
Thakkar
Maurice

Substitute Members

Councillors:

Agha, Lloyd, W Mitchell Murray
and Sangani

Councillor:

Colwill, Kansagra

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

For electronic copies of minutes, reports and agendas, and to be alerted when the minutes of this meeting have been published visit: **www.brent.gov.uk/committees**

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.

Item	Page
1 Exclusion of the Press and Public	
<p>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.</p>	
2 Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members	
3 Declarations of interests	
<p>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.</p>	
4 Deputations (if any)	
<p>To hear any deputations received from members of the public in accordance with Standing Order 67.</p>	
5 Minutes of the previous meeting	1 - 6
<p>To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record.</p>	
6 Matters arising (if any)	
<p>To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.</p>	
7 Update from Care In Action and Care Leavers in Action Representatives	
<p>This is an opportunity for members of Care In Action (CIA) to feedback on recent activity.</p>	
8 Brent Care Journeys Programme: year one progress update	7 - 18

To provide the Corporate Parenting Committee a summary of activities undertaken by the Brent Care Journeys Programme since its inception in 2020 to date. The report also draws attention to key achievements, challenges within the Covid-19 context as well as areas of priority for 2021/22.

9 Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2020-21

19 - 57

To provide the Corporate Parenting Annual Report for 2020-21 to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

N.B. This item was published to the agenda on 13 July 2021.

10 Fostering Service Quarterly Report, Quarter 1 (Apr 2021 - Jun 2021)

59 - 69

To provide the Corporate Parenting Committee information about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes. The report details the activity of Brent's fostering service from 1 April – 30 June 2021.

11 Any other urgent business

Notice of items to be raised under this heading must be given in writing to the Head of Executive and Member Services or his representative before the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 60.

Date of the next meeting: Wednesday 13 October 2021

Guidance on the delivery of safe meetings at The Drum, Brent Civic Centre

- We have revised the capacities and floor plans for event spaces to ensure they are Covid-19 compliant and meet the 2m social distancing guidelines.
- Attendees will need to keep a distance of 2m apart at all times.
- Signage and reminders, including floor markers for social distancing and one-way flow systems are present throughout The Drum and need to be followed.
- Please note the Civic Centre visitor lifts will have reduced capacity to help with social distancing.
- The use of face coverings is encouraged with hand sanitiser dispensers located at the main entrance to The Drum and within each meeting room.
- Those attending meetings are asked to scan the coronavirus NHS QR code for The Drum upon entry. Posters of the QR code are located in front of the main Drum entrance and outside each boardroom.
- Although not required, should anyone attending wish to do book a lateral flow test in advance these are also available at the Civic Centre and can be booked via the following link:
<https://www.brent.gov.uk/your-community/coronavirus/covid-19-testing/if-you-dont-have-symptoms/>



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE **Wednesday 28 April 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

- Councillor Thakkar provided apologies for lateness.
- Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council)

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 3 February 2021 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 that Care Leavers in Action had been invited to take part in a piece of research looking into how young people had coped with COVID-19 with particular focus on care leavers. The Care Leavers in Action group had also had a talk about stop and search, and were still involved in the semi-independent provider project and care leaver inspection. The group had returned to a face to face meeting for the first time since COVID-19. There had also been a member of Care in Action attending virtually to tell the group of their experience during COVID-19 and share experiences together. In the March session the group had spoken about mental health and also began looking at the care leavers' offer from the Council, producing a summary document that

was young person friendly. The group of care leaver inspectors were at the final stage of their inspection and had drafted the report. They were also developing training sessions for providers of semi-independent living.

T (Care in Action) highlighted that during the last Care in Action session a social worker came to the session to talk about what to do if a young child ran away from home, they had celebrated International Women's Day, and played get to know each other games. L added that someone from the fostering team had spoken about what made a good foster carer and the feedback the group had given would be fed into training delivered for foster carers.

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. Update on European Union Settlement Scheme for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report, which brought the Committees' attention to activities undertaken to assist looked after children and care leavers with their applications to obtain European Union Settled Status (EUSS) and gave the Committee an opportunity to scrutinise and hold the Council to account regarding their responsibility to support those applications as part of post-Brexit requirements. He highlighted section 2 of the report which provided the national context and reason for the report, and section 3 of the report which detailed the activity of the Council and provided data and reassurance to the Committee around management grip and strategic scrutiny at director level.

In response to queries over what would happen to a person's settled status if they missed the application deadline, the Committee were informed that this had been discussed in a meeting with the Home Office who it was felt had been reticent about what would happen. All authorities were now pushing for all applications to be made by the deadline of 30th June 2021 and there was uncertainty about what the Home Office intention was in relation to those young people and families who may not have made their applications at that point. Onder Beter confirmed that the Council would continue to support those people and had already achieved huge successes with plans for all children and young people, but he highlighted that the issue was very dynamic and new children come into care every week. Very recently the Council had recruited a part time business support officer to ensure there was a single point of contact with capacity to assist children and families which the department were very grateful for.

In relation to how young people were being supported to obtain documents, Onder Beter advised that the Home Office had been supportive and proactive in order to get the matter sorted by the deadline. For example, the Home Office had been more receptive to supporting letters from local authorities as opposed to 2019 when the scheme first started. Many embassies and consulates had improved their support for citizens also. Regarding difficulties obtaining identification documentation, for example due to parents not co-operating, the Committee queried how the Council were responding to the challenge. Onder Beter advised that in those instances the Council would approach the relevant embassy or consulate and make a representation on behalf of the children, however for certain countries, for example Poland, consent was required from both parents for any identification documents to be acquired by the consulate. The Home Office had advised that in those circumstances a paper based application should be made and the Council should try its best to obtain anything that would prove the identity of the child in question. He added that they had been reassured by the Home Office that this circumstance in itself would not prevent or be an obstacle to status being granted, but that they needed to ensure everyone was doing their best to comply with the legislation.

In relation to those who had not made an application, Onder Beter advised that so far the Council had been successful in supporting most care leavers with their applications, but there were 2 young people who did not want any support from the Council. The service were trying to engage with them and encourage them to make applications. The young people had been made aware many times of the consequences and implications of not making an application, but the Council were not able to find out whether or not they had made an application as they had made it clear to the Home Office they did not wish for their information to be shared. As a result the Council would need to report them as young people who may not have made their applications. Nigel Chapman (Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes, Brent Council) added that the Council's responsibility to the care leavers was in their pathway plans, setting out exactly what they were doing, and why, and showing that the Council had gone the extra mile and while it would be the young person's choice the Council needed to put the implications of their decision in front of them regarding how it would affect them long term.

Highlighting section 3.2 of the report, the Committee were pleased to see 10 cases had been positively resolved but queried how long the remaining 4 would wait for their status. The Committee were informed there was no time frame given for a response once a decision had been made but there was confidence these would be resolved prior to the deadline. Those were the children that had recently come into care. The Committee were reminded that if a child had come into care 2 days ago and did not have their EU settled status resolved the Council were required to work with that child to make an application and that could take time, and therefore the situation could become quite complex. He advised that the Council had been given a specific number of a Home Office professional they could contact if there was concern on delays of status.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

9. Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 4

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 1st January – 31st March 2021.

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) outlined the report, highlighting section 5 which detailed online recruitment activity and an increase in the public interest of fostering, section 7 which detailed the online training and support offer to foster carers and added that there had been positive developments in the collaborative fostering project.

The Committee were pleased that the monthly online foster carer support groups were being viewed more positively following previous feedback that the sessions had sometimes been difficult to attend in person and child care would be a barrier. It was suggested that the Council considered holding these in hybrid format in the future to enable that flexibility. The Committee also asked for the feedback on training to be taken on board that some online sessions felt too long and could be broken up into smaller segments. Onder Beter agreed to take on the feedback.

In relation to the online training sessions, the Committee queried whether those who provided training were able to follow up with attendees after the session, for example with those who may have wanted to raise something they needed to talk about that they had not been able to raise in front of a group. Onder Beter noted that foster carers were provided 1

to 1 support primarily through their supervising social worker, and if anything needed to be picked up that could be done with the social worker and trainers.

Nigel Chapman (Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes, Brent Council) expressed that the importance of hearing from foster carers was key, and that some kinship carers may be invited to the next meeting to talk about their experience of foster caring. In relation to training, the Committee had heard that Care in Action feedback regarding what makes a good foster carer would be fed into training, and Nigel Chapman suggested that it might be useful to include in the next report the difference the feedback had made to how carers heard and listened to young people's experiences as well. The Committee heard that feedback from young people had also been used in the Council's recruitment and marketing of fostering.

The Committee highlighted that section 4.2 of the report detailed a decrease in the number of in-house foster carers, noting that this was the second quarter the Committee had seen a decrease and wanted assurance around this. Onder Beter advised the Committee that, while COVID-19 had impacted recruitment activity, the number of carers recruited to 2020-2021 was similar to the numbers of previous years. There had also been a decrease in the number of looked after children which would impact the data seen as some of those included at the time of reporting would no longer be in foster care.

In relation to the DfE decision to not allocate further funding to the collaborative fostering project in section 9.1, Nigel Chapman advised that the Council had challenged the DfE and asked for feedback for the decision, and while they had not been wholly satisfied with the response had to accept the decision. The team were planning to put forward proposals through funding made available for new and innovative pieces of work.

The Committee would be presented with a report regarding support provided to kinship carers at the next meeting, including a summary of findings of an audit activity reviewing kinship arrangements. The report would include information on the support to those kinship carers who may fall between the gaps, for example those who lived in another borough to where their kinship was arranged. The Committee were invited to email the team with any further points they would like in the future report.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

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

The purpose of this report was 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. Shirley Parks (Head of Forward Planning Performance & Partnerships, Brent Council) advised that the report detailed the work done to develop the new quality assurance framework with children and young people at its heart to ensure it responded to their experiences and how they thought it could improve. Shirley Parks also detailed the major consultation the government had done around semi-independent provision, and the fact government were preparing to introduce some national standards and a form of Ofsted quality assurance. The details of this were not specific yet, but the Council had put itself forward to have a conversation with the DfE about those standards. The Committee were advised that this work would remain in place alongside the national framework.

The Committee were grateful to see a report about semi-independent provision quality assurance in co-production with young people. They offered appreciation to those who worked in semi-independent provision and emphasised their expectation that providers needed high calibre experienced staff who understood the experience of young people and should be providing specialised training for those staff to improve their understanding of young people and trauma. Shirley Parks agreed and noted that as part of the process they had spoken to providers for their input into the framework and the key objective was to find providers completely aligned with the Council's aims and develop commissioning around that.

The Committee also felt it was important to consider the role regeneration and housing could play regarding how the Council understood the care leaving population to predict housing need for the future, and for the needs of care leavers to be considered when the Council considered housing projects in the Borough.

The Committee highlighted there were some children and young people placed in Brent by other authorities. Shirley Parks acknowledged that there was not a list of every semi-independent provider in Brent, but one thing the Council could do when they became aware of those providers on local patches was to invite them to the provider forums as the forums were not exclusively for those Brent Council had commissioned. There was an intention to set up a best practice forum and a training forum for all providers, and the invitation would be extended to those providers to help them understand Brent standards.

The Committee were advised that young people had been a really important part of the work to help the Council understand the key issues young people faced and had put things on the table that officers may not have thought about. Shirley Parks acknowledged that there was an action plan to implement the work and it would be reviewed regularly with young people to ensure it was fit for purpose, in the context of any national guidance that came out.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the content of the report.

11. Six-Monthly Adoption Report

The purpose of this report was to provide a briefing to the Corporate Parenting Committee in relation to adoption performance data for 1 October 2020 – 31 March 2021, the progress and activity of Adopt London West, and how good outcomes were being achieved for children. Debbie Gabriel (Adopt London West) drew the Committee's attention to some key points of the report, including performance data in section 5, recruitment data in section 7, feedback received in section 9, and training information in section 10.

The Committee thanked the report authors for the paper and were pleased there was a lot of activity happening such as the choir. They felt it was good to see the training work happening, noting that the trauma informed programme had been expanded and queried whether there were any other types of organisations that might benefit from the training if there were available spaces. Debbie Gabriel advised the Committee that if there were organisations that had an interest then they would be entitled to get in touch regarding the training, and the training was being promoted by school heads and to other organisations, and voluntary adoption agency partners had also been invited.

It was agreed that future reports would have a short section setting out the financial arrangements for the adoption service, including Brent Council's contribution and what Brent Council got in return.

The Committee queried how the adoption support fund worked and how it was apportioned across Boroughs. Debbie Gabriel advised that at the moment the funding was apportioned on a family by family basis rather than allocated across Boroughs, with social workers applying individually for individual families. Adopt London West were grateful for the fund but felt it was very prescriptive with a lot of therapy excluded. The Committee heard that the DfE were currently reviewing the fund for the first time, and Adopt London West were sending a report asking for the DfE to consider widening the brief to allow applications for training, and more leniency in allocating the funding, which might enable Adopt London West to directly commission services that families could refer themselves to.

In relation to the emergency fund, Debbie Gabriel confirmed that had now ceased and Adopt London West had tried its best within the Adopt London Partnership to provide ongoing funding for the “We are Family” service, so all Adopt London Partnerships contributed to that to ensure the webinar programme could continue. At the last partnership Board meeting it had also been agreed that the service would purchase Grandparents Plus membership for kinship carers.

The members of the Committee offered to promote adoption campaigns through their relevant online platforms including facebook, twitter, Instagram and next door. The details of the promotion materials would be emailed to members.

RESOLVED:


- i) To note the contents of the report.

12. **Any other urgent business**

Councillor Kansagra advised the Committee that this would be his final Corporate Parenting Committee meeting, and thanked all members and officers. The Committee thanked Councillor Kansagra for his contributions to the Committee.

The meeting closed at 7:00pm

COUNCILLOR MILI PATEL
Chair

 Brent	<p align="center">Corporate Parenting Committee</p> <p align="center">20th July 2021</p>
<p>A Joint Report from London Borough of Brent and Barnardo's</p>	
<p>Brent Care Journeys Programme: year one progress update</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:	Appendix 1 – Case Study of R
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Onder Beter Onder.Beter@brent.gov.uk Head of Service, Looked After Children and Permanency Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Brent 020 8937 4382</p> <p>Anna Willow Children's Services Manager Barnardo's Anna.willow@barnardos.org.uk 07885 478833</p>

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of activities undertaken by the Brent Care Journeys Programme since its inception in 2020 to date. The report also draws attention to key achievements, challenges within the Covid-19 context as well as areas of priority for 2021/22.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review and comment on the content of this report. This is in order to ensure that the support provided to Brent's looked after children and care leavers through the strategic alliance with Barnardo's is appropriately monitored.
- 2.2 The Committee is also requested to consider what support could be provided to the strategic alliance by elected members in order to achieve best outcomes for Brent children and young people.

3.0 Background of Brent's Partnership with Barnardo's Charity

- 3.1. Brent has an established history of working in partnership with the Barnardo's charity. For example, the Freeman Family Centre on Longstone Avenue NW10 is a partnership between the Iris and David Freeman Charitable Trust (the "Freeman Family Trust"), Barnardo's and the Council. The Freeman Family Trust agreed to fully fund the building and equipping of a centre for families and children on the site, owned by the Council. The Council agreed to lease the land to Barnardo's under a 100 year lease and to commission, through a Management Agreement, services to be provided by Barnardo's. The Management Agreement commenced in July 2007 and is for a 20 year term, renewable up to 100 years. Currently services for looked after children to have contact with their families are delivered from the site.
- 3.2. Prior to the establishment of Brent Family Wellbeing Centres, Barnardo's managed Brent's 14 children's centres under a 5-year contract between 2015 and 2020.
- 3.3. In 2017 Barnardo's and Brent CYP worked closely together to submit a bid to the Department for Education's Innovation Fund, focusing on improving outcomes for care leavers. Whilst this bid was unsuccessful, positive working relationships were established and a common approach agreed upon the issues that required addressing – namely the emotional health and wellbeing of care leavers and enhancing employment, training and skills opportunities.
- 3.4. In July 2018, Barnardo's approached Brent CYP for exploration of a collaboration under a project called 'Barnardo's Care Journeys Programme'. Then, Barnardo's had a number of strategic partnerships with local authorities in the UK; for example, Plymouth Care Journeys Programme was most similar in focus and collaborative agreement. Barnardo's wished to work with Brent as a potential partner given the positive historic relationship between Brent and Barnardo's, the shared vision to create systemic changes that address national inequalities for children in and leaving care and an ambition to strive for excellence beyond inspection frameworks.
- 3.5. In late 2019, the Council agreed to formally enter a collaboration agreement with Barnardo's with the view to improve outcomes for children in and leaving care, with

a particular focus on 19-21 year-olds. The formal collaboration agreement was signed in June 2020.

- 3.6. With collaboration from young people, Brent staff and partners, the programme began with an Inception phase (desk based research) which was followed with a discovery analysis; from this a number of 'problem' statements were generated. In partnership with young people, a decision was made that the first focus area for co-design and testing would be the experiences of 'late entrants' to care (young people who come into care age 16 and 17). This was partly because Brent has a high population of late entrants and there is also a shortage of nationally available research and data.

4.0 **Care Journeys Programme**

- 4.1 With 100% investment from Barnardo's voluntary funds, Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) is first and foremost a youth led programme which sets its sights on achieving 'positive destinations' for care experienced young people (CEYP). In this context 'positive destinations' is about working beyond statutory definitions of good outcomes and, instead, actively listening to young people about developing a goal which makes them happy. This, for example, could be to do with being a good parent, maintaining good physical and mental health or living independently.
- 4.2 BCJ has a strategic governance structure with six monthly steering group meetings that are attended by the Strategic Director of Children and Young People in Brent, Barnardo's London Regional Director and relevant other senior officers from both agencies to provide strategic steer, support and challenge as required. There are various other operational meetings that take place regularly by practitioners and managers in relation to service delivery.
- 4.3 BCJ works with relatively small numbers of young people in a meaningful, attentive and youth relevant way; with important short term outcomes for this cohort, but with clear ambition to create the conditions for change for large numbers of CEYP in the longer term.
- 4.4 BCJ has two core areas of activity: the first of these is a self-defined movement of approximately 35 CEYP who have been creatively engaged in a myriad of ways over the course of the past year. Some members have previously been involved with Brent's Care in Action and Care Leavers in Action groups but over half of these young people are engaging in this voice and influence work for the first time. BCJ invests significantly in these young people – the investment is in relationships, commitment, empowerment, opportunity and capability. BCJ believes that this approach will empower a self-sustaining network of support for CEYP in Brent with potential to achieve legacy long beyond the partnership itself. BCJ upskills and develops potential in these young people so that they may go on to inspire and develop a peer led network which touches the lives of, as well as decreasing loneliness and isolation for, Brent's growing population of care experienced young people.
- 4.5 The second core area of activity is a co-design workshop space called 'The Alpha Lab'. There are some key characteristics to this collaboration, namely that

‘expertise’ is redefined to elevate lived experience, hierarchy is de-constructed so that power is shared, and learning (as opposed to success) is key. BCJ therefore share power with these voices because it is understood that only in partnership with young people BJC is able to achieve the change that they want to see.

- 4.6 Brent Alpha Lab started at the end of February 2021, via zoom, in the third Covid-19 lockdown. The group is made up of up to ten care-experienced young people from Brent, Barnardo’s youth workers and one service designer. Young people are considered as *co-designers* in this space. A ‘multi-dimensional’ approach to expertise is applied which includes the perspectives of other professionals. Additional voices can be brought into the workshop space in a number of ways, for example through pre-recorded interviews, ad-hoc attendance and even pre-agreed ‘phone a friend’ arrangements.
- 4.7 Co-designers are a diverse group of young people. Some are studying or working, some are caring for their families, some have experience of the criminal justice system, while others have recently arrived in the UK as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). What they share is an experience of coming into care in Brent as adolescents, a passion for improving the children’s social care system in Brent and a way of ‘participating’ that works for them.
- 4.8 In order to further support an understanding of the lived expertise present in the Alpha Lab some basic data regarding the ten co-designers is below:

Brent care leaver and was previously a ‘late entrant’ to care	10
Currently living in semi-independent accommodation	3
Have previously lived in semi-independent accommodation	7
UASC	5
Historic involvement with YOS/Criminal Justice System (CJS)	2
Current involvement with YOS/CJS	2
Involvement in care proceedings as a parent	1

5.0 Progress to date

- 5.1. Whilst the work of the partnership is not focused on quantitative outcomes, it may be helpful to contextualise BJC’s approach and progress with a range of data. Over the course of the year (from June 2020) BCJ has:

- Engaged 90 care experienced young people in Brent; achieved integration into and trust from the local community. It is with regularity that BCJ project workers receive calls from new young people who have been recommended by a friend or who once received support during a period of hardship
- Established an equitable way of working with young people in which they are equal collaborators.
- Responded quickly and continuously to COVID with emotional support, bundle drops, food parcels, devices (laptops, tablets and phones - approx. 50) and mobile data
- Facilitated opportunities to try new things, build relationships and combat social isolation. These have included horse riding, meals out, go-karting, cinema trips, walks and home visits

- Mobilised The Alpha Lab during lockdown, totalling approximately 30 hours on line and, more recently, 20 hours of 'in person' meetings with CEYP.
- In the words of some of the participants:

"We are the service" we are "a place where your voice and ideas are appreciated".

5.2 The Alpha Lab

5.3 The Alpha Lab has completed a stage where young people are now beginning to develop *two* ideas for prioritisation and testing (with larger numbers of care experienced young people in Brent and relevant professionals)

- 1) A 'Welcome Pack' which gives young people age 16 and 17, who are coming into care, the items that they need when they are placed in semi-independent accommodation
- 2) An enhanced complaints process for getting help when things go wrong

5.4 **A 'Welcome Pack' which gives young people age 16 and 17, who are coming into care, the items that they need when they are placed in semi-independent accommodation**

5.5 This pack is more comprehensive than simply a box of items – co-designers (young people who are participants of the Alpha Lab) describe the gift as:

- An enabler of good relationships with key workers in semi-independent accommodation (SIA) placements
- A way in which conflict in homes can be decreased; co-designers have told us about sparsity of resources, challenges of getting set up on a tight budget and thefts of their personal items in SIAs – all of which can lead to conflict.
- A way to increase a young person's sense of self-esteem and pride; co-designers have told us that when coming into care at the age of 16 and 17 they felt 'second rate' compared to their non-care experienced peers (stigmatised by their disadvantage) and that the giving of a thoughtfully designed package would enhance their sense of self-worth,

5.6 The group has developed their idea in greater detail and, with the help of a Barnardo's visual designer, sketched out a first version paper prototype. Ideas of information to accompany the pack include:

- 1 page summary of the Brent Local Offer,
- Conversation guide to help professionals welcome young people into care
- A guide on what should be in every room.

5.7 The group has considered how they will test their ideas to find out:

- if they appeal to or might help other young people coming into care aged 16+
- professionals' perspectives on the challenges to putting these ideas into practice. The group has a plan to run a focus group and one to one interviews with young people and professionals to get feedback on their ideas.

5.8 The group's next steps are:

- Create prototypes in order to begin testing

- Organise the logistics of a focus group and interviews with other young people and Brent professionals.
- 5.9 The timeline for this work is for engagement work to be conducted with SIAs in early July with a view to beginning testing in mid/end of July. The timeliness of work has been impacted by ongoing impacts of COVID (lab members having to isolate and mental health impacts), court dates for some co-designers, work and parenting commitments for others.
- 5.10 **An enhanced complaints process for getting help when things go wrong**
- 5.11 It is important to note the fact that young people did not tell the group's facilitator that they wanted to be able to complain more, but that they wanted effective, youth relevant and transparent ways to communicate when they have a difficulty or when things 'aren't right'. After sketching out this idea in greater detail, the team decided that they needed to know more about how the process works now and created a list of questions that needed answers to. Several Brent staff agreed to be interviewed; these interviews were recorded and played back during the second workshop.
- 5.12 The group felt that, on paper, the process at the moment is exactly as they would want it to be. So attention was turned instead to understanding why, in practice, this experience had been different for the group members (see 4.8 for a breakdown of lived expertise in the lab and indication of which young people may be experiencing barriers when hoping to access advocacy or pursue resolution of a problem).
- 5.13 The biggest challenge identified by the group was lack of information about (a) how the system is meant to work for young people moving into semi-independent accommodations and (b) what support they are entitled to. As a result, the group are initially focussing on an awareness campaign, the first step of which is to prototype a poster to go in every room in semi-independent accommodations - to test if this would help overcome the barriers to increasing awareness. The next step is to create a first version paper prototype of the poster and a plan of how to test it.
- 5.14 **Employment of young people with lived expertise:**
- 5.15 As articulated earlier in this report, BCJ is built on the collaboration of 10 co-designers with lived expertise in our systems change lab and 35 young people with lived expertise within the BCJ Movement.
- 5.16 Recognition and reward schemes are in place to acknowledge the contribution of these young people. In addition to this, BCJ has long standing aspiration to formally employ people with lived expertise. The following milestones are important to report:
- New appointment of full time, waged Junior Project Worker with lived expertise (Brent care leaver)
 - Live advert for up to 10 paid BCJ Assistant Project Workers with lived expertise (Brent care leavers), employed on a flexible basis (London living wage).
 - 1 position (via Kick-start Employment Scheme) which goes live mid-July; targeted to Brent YP with lived expertise of the care system
- 5.17 **Additional investment for care experienced young people in Brent**

- 5.18 The Corporate Parenting Committee was provided with an update in April 2021 in relation to a quality assurance framework for young people in semi-independent provision. As referenced in that report, Barnardo's made additional, including financial, investment into the Commissioning and Resources Team within Brent CYP to assist developing a quality assurance framework for semi-independent provisions (currently unregulated).
- 5.19 This work was developed and enhanced by young people in the Alpha Lab, who were vocal and motivated to create positive changes in unregulated accommodation. Most recently BCJ funded development of a training package for key workers in unregulated housing. This training has been designed by Brent care leavers, based on their core belief that a 'placement' should be a home. It has just completed a pilot delivery stage; it was co-delivered with 4 Brent care leavers and has received feedback which included participants saying they have learned:

"About the importance of active listening"

"It's the little things that count"

"We need to ask questions less and listen more"

"We need to make our house into a home"

"We follow too much process and don't focus on the individual enough"

6.0 Evaluation and Impact

BCJ is externally evaluated by the Tavistock Institute for Human Relations. The annual report is due in July 2021.

7.0. Future areas for Development and Priorities for 2021/2022

Priorities for the year ahead are determined through a consolidation of direct youth voice and learning, professional observations, strategic vision, feedback from the Barnardo's Foundation (who award and govern the funding) and external evaluation. Although not an exhaustive list of planned operational activity, future development includes:

- Testing of the work that has been designed in the Lab and the 'Beta' phase - in which successful ideas are integrated or introduced into systemic processes for care experienced young people.
- Scanning of the wider funding environment to secure future support – the financial implications of COVID have had direct implications for BCJ who will be looking for additional investment to enable impactful change.
- Development of additional partnerships and engagement of relevant grassroots organisations.
- Continued development opportunities for young people within the 'Movement'.
- Wider collaboration with teams across the local authority so that the mission of the partnership is engaging and accessible.

- Explore ways in which Barnardo's and Brent staff can deepen and synthesise their work – to include opportunities to engage in learning together.
- Continue to develop BCJ communication plans e.g. introduction of a social media presence to engage more care experienced young people and further investment into the We Shine Bright Together website (with information which is supportive and enabling to young people) and mechanisms to utilise the social value posed by BCJ. For example, BCJ will be testing a 'Makers' page in which visitors to the website will be able to support the commercial enterprises of Brent care leavers.
- Tailored and informed induction packages for new staff who are transitioning from their identity as Brent care leavers into youth work professionals employed by Barnardo's. Learning and evaluation has been taken from other Barnardo's projects where 'experts by experience' have struggled with conventional induction processes.
- Review piloted training for unregulated housing providers and formulate delivery plan.
- Increase ways in which learning for professionals in Brent can be led by young people.

Onder Beter

Head of Service, Looked After Children and Permanency - Brent

Anna Willow

Children's Services Manager - Barnardo's

Appendix 1 Case Study of R (now aged 25)

Background and Initial Presentation

R came into care as a young child and grew up with a foster family. When R was a teenager, his friend was fatally shot in front of him. R says he has experienced feelings of guilt and intense anger ever since.

R was introduced to staff from Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) when in his early twenties, on the recommendation his Personal Advisor (PA), in the summer of 2020. His PA was concerned about the impact of COVID and resulting isolation on his mental health. When project workers first met R they were aware of his depression; he shared information that challenges with his mental health were long standing. Pre-dating engagement with BCJ, R was involved in the criminal justice system – both on remand and in prison as a young adult.

In conversation with BCJ staff R identified that meeting up with people and keeping busy was a positive measure for him. However, he quickly told staff that he didn't like being with other young people in groups as this can make him feel anxious.

R's foster carers left the UK when he became a care leaver; this seems to have compounded a sense of loss for him.

Initial involvement with R made project workers aware that he was struggling with living in poverty.

Activity

In the first instance BCJ staff would regularly engage R by phone, to chat and catch up. This was important to earn his trust and to get to know him better. After a while R began to express his gratitude for the communication, saying "an angel heard my cry". He told staff that he felt valued and that someone was listening. He also seemed to value how relaxed and informal the relationship was.

During acute periods of the pandemic in 2020, R was highlighted as someone who would benefit from Barnardo's fundraising campaigns. At various points he was given food vouchers and during Ramadan he enjoyed a delivery of a special meal. He was also given a laptop.

In September 2020 R was encouraged to accept a place on the BCJ residential camping trip. He was very anxious in the days building up to the trip and often during the stay. This was his first activity with BCJ staff and peers; it was a very successful engagement for R. R became reliable and engaged; he developed a powerful voice and gained influence as an ambassador for the work.

R went on to develop a section of the BCJ webinar called 'On My Mind' where young people spoke about the impact of COVID on their mental health. He was also part of the group who organised activity for Black History month and who created youth led socio-educative materials about white privilege.

Observations

Attending the residential trip was not easy for R but was a huge personal achievement and a significant milestone. Staff have described this time together as "transformative" for him; both

he and they observed a shift in attitude. The residential was a key opportunity to have conversations about effective ways of managing anxiety. Whilst camping R was observed to employ self-regulation by periodically removing himself from the group and going for a walk, or sitting next to the camp fire. It was on the residential that R began to make friends – and these are friends with whom he connects and seeks out still.

BCJ staff are keenly aware of R's many 'ups and downs' during everyday life. What they say is striking, however, is his resolute commitment to BCJ and passion for its purpose. Further, R is noticed to be increasingly reflective about himself and where he has "gone wrong". Often this seems to be motivated by a fear of being "kicked out"; he has often checked in with staff to see whether there is an enduring connection. Staff are reflective that being a part of BCJ has been a positive force for R; his involvement seems to motivate him to keep trying, and supports him with an awareness of people who have hope for his future.

Learning and Reflections

When working with R we are mindful that it is very important to manage his expectations; he can become easily distressed and combative if he feels that he has been overlooked or that he is missing out on an opportunity. Frequent, transparent and clear communication is vital therefore.

Of key consideration is that fact that R was profoundly impacted by witnessing the murder of his friend. We do not currently collect or analyse any data regarding the number of young people that work with us whose lives have been impacted by serious youth violence, but it may emerge as a key theme.

R has responded well to responsibility which has developed a sense of purpose and pride in him. BCJ is developing R as a leader because, with support, he can effectively empower his peers and enable their involvement with our work. He is enthusiastic and heartfelt about our purpose. Developing this role for R seems to have alleviated his anxiety about not always being a participant. It has also been a positive way of supporting him beyond the systemic 'cliff edge', now that he is 25 years old.

Developments

In early 2021 R was arrested and given a custodial sentence. He was released in June 2021. On his second day of release he contacted his project worker from BCJ. He was very keen to relay the fact that whilst incarcerated he was frequently asking for help to make contact with her; in turn she was able to share information about her attempts to reach him. It felt urgent for R to know that he could be a part of our work going forwards. As a result, R is supporting a high profile Barnardo's fundraising event in July 2021 at which he will be a key speaker.


Upon release R found that his accommodation had been looted and vandalised. He has focused on cleaning this up and finding employment. R is currently in full time work. BCJ will be applying for an in-house grant to support R to purchase essential items, such as kitchen equipment and clothing.

Whilst in prison R turned 25. The Local Authority agreed to keep his case open until his release. BCJ and Brent Local Authority are now working together to manage a 'soft' closure, one which transitions into future opportunities for R to contribute positively to systemic change for care experienced young people. BCJ has strategic plans to test the creation of post 25 peer support networks in Brent and will be inviting R to shape this work. The team will also be encouraging R to apply for one of the currently live 'as and when' Assistant Project Worker

roles. Below is the quote from R reflecting his views of his involvement with Brent Care Journeys Programme:

"Whilst being a Brent care leaver I recently came across a service that was hosted by A [BCJ's Project worker] and Barnardo's. Initially I was sceptical to being part of the group due to past experiences. Since being part of the group I have overcome a lot of barriers and met a lot of people who fed me knowledge and life examples to be able to deliver this speech to you today. The reason why I joined the Movement properly and stayed committed was due to the energy and spirit of the group and as a team not giving up and pushing me to the limit to be able to achieve. Brent Care Journeys has played a huge factor in my life - especially A as she was very down to earth and truthful about what is holding me back".

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 Brent	<p align="center">Corporate Parenting Committee</p> <p align="center">20th July 2021</p> <p align="center">Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</p>
<p>Annual Corporate Parenting Report April 2020 - 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:	1. Brent Promise to Looked After Children 2. Care Leavers' Charter 3. Brent Local Offer for Care Leavers
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Onder Beter Head of Service, Looked After Children and Permanency Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Brent 020 8937 4382</p> <p>Sharon Buckby Head of Virtual School for Looked After Children Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Brent 020 8937 3813</p> <p>Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Brent 020 8937 4091</p>

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report fulfils the Council's statutory obligation to present an annual update to the Corporate Parenting Committee on outcomes for Looked After Children, in line with The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010). This paper summarises the activity, highlighting strengths and areas for growth in supporting looked after children and care leavers in Brent.
- 1.2 Progress against the previous year's priorities identified in the previous Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2019/20 have been updated throughout the body of this report. The report also sets out the priorities of the Looked After Children and Permanency service for 2021/22.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Committee review and provide comment on the contents of this report. This ensures the CPC are fulfilling their responsibility to monitor and scrutinise the activity of Brent's LACP service over the past year, thus ensuring that adequate care and support are being provided to looked after children and care leavers in the borough.

3 Corporate Parenting

- 3.1 The concept of Corporate Parenting was introduced by The Children Act 2004, which placed collective responsibility on local authorities to achieve good outcomes for all children in public care. The term 'Corporate Parent' defines the collective responsibility of elected members, employees and partner agencies to provide the best possible care for LAC and care leavers.
- 3.2 The notion of being a corporate parent was developed and strengthened by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which highlighted the following seven principles of being a corporate parent. These are:
 - to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being of those children and young people;
 - to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
 - to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
 - to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
 - to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;

- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

3.3 Brent has continued to be an active, strong and committed corporate parent during this reporting year. Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC), which is chaired by the Lead Member and attended by representatives from Care in Action and Care Leavers in Action groups, provides robust challenge to officers and partners. Brent's local offer for care leavers was refreshed in April 2020, taking into account feedback from professionals from a range of sectors including health, education and housing alongside the views of around a third of care leavers who participated in consultation activity prior to publication of the new offer. The revised offer was endorsed by the Lead Member in April 2020 on behalf of the CPC which could not meet during the first Covid-19 national lockdown.

3.4 Elected members in Brent carry out their corporate parenting duty as follows:

- a The Corporate Parenting Committee, chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Young People with cross party Member representation where service performance is scrutinised. This occurs on a quarterly basis.
- b Attendance of CIA (Care in Action) and CLIA (Care Leavers in Action) representatives at the Corporate Parenting Committee.
- c Weekly liaison meetings between the Lead Member for Children and Young People, the Strategic Director Children and Young People and other senior staff within the Local Authority as appropriate.
- d Regular meetings between representatives of CIA and CLIA with the Lead Member, Strategic Director, and Operational Directors for Children and Young People
- e By ensuring Brent's 'Promise' to LAC, 'Care Leavers' Charter' and Local Offer for care leavers is abided by. See a copy of Brent's Promise and Care Leavers' Charter and local offer at appendices 1, 2 and 3.
- f An annual, mandatory Member Learning and Development session on Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting.

3.5 One of the Corporate Parenting Committee meetings due to take place in April 2020 was cancelled as it coincided with the first Covid-19 national lockdown. The Meetings took place for the rest of the reporting year in a virtual way due to Covid-19 restrictions preventing face to face gatherings. During 2020-21, the Corporate Parenting Committee was presented with

reports on a variety of topics. The Committee provided support, scrutiny and challenge on the following areas:

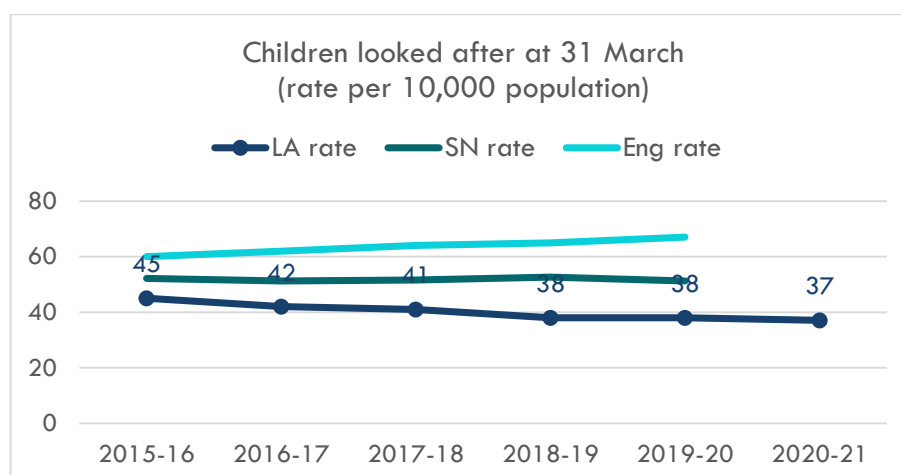
- a. Members of Care in Action and Care Leavers in Action continued attending the Committee to provide updates on their recent activity. These updates were noted and supported by the Committee.
- b. The Committee received quarterly updates from the Fostering Service, including on Brent's Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, the joint fostering project, and the recruitment of foster carers. The Committee noted that foster carers had been supported to cope with the demands of Covid-19.
- c. The Committee received six-monthly updates on the performance of adoption activity managed by Adopt London West. These reports were co-written by Adopt London West and Brent. The reports included information on activity on marketing/recruitment, assessment and approval of adopters; adoption scorecard information; family finding and matching; post adoption and post Special Guardianship Order (SGO) support including how Adoption Support Fund has been utilised. The Committee noted the success of the partnership but raised their concerns about services funded by Covid-19 sources being withdrawn. The Committee agreed to consider which services should continue to be funded by Brent after Covid-19 funding had ended.
- d. In July 2020, the Committee was presented with a report on the impact of the pandemic on children in care, care leavers, and foster carers. The report outlined that risk assessments had been implemented, and that increased support had been offered where needed. Financial support for care leavers was discussed, and the Committee highlighted the importance of sustainable funding. A further update on the impact of Covid-19 was provided to the Committee in October 2020. This included information on financial support and support to young people in further education.
- e. The Annual Corporate Parenting report for 2019/20 was presented to the Committee at the July 2020 meeting. At the same meeting, the Committee also reviewed the Annual Report from the Brent Virtual School, which outlined the activity and impact of the Virtual School during the 2018-19 academic year.
- f. In October 2020, the Committee received a report summarising the actions taken following the recommendations of the Ofsted focused visit on arrangements for care leavers. In the same meeting, the Committee was presented with the revised Brent Promise for Looked After Children,

and the Brent Care Leavers' Charter. The updated documents were endorsed by the Committee to proceed to final design stage.

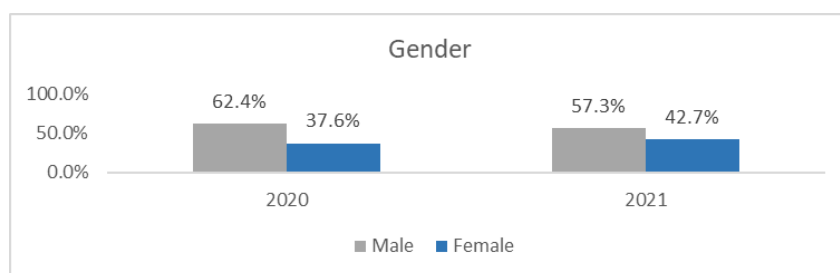
- g. In the February 2021 meeting, the Committee was presented with the Independent Reviewing Officers' (IRO) annual report (2019-20). This report outlined the contribution of IROs to the quality assurance and service improvement for Looked After Children, and provided qualitative and quantitative evidence of the impact.
- h. A report on the health needs of Looked after Children was presented to the Committee by Brent CCG in February 2021. This report provided an update on the current situation and recent improvements to the service. The Committee heard that an audit of initial health assessments showed that service users were very satisfied with the service.

4.0 Profile of Looked after Children and care leavers

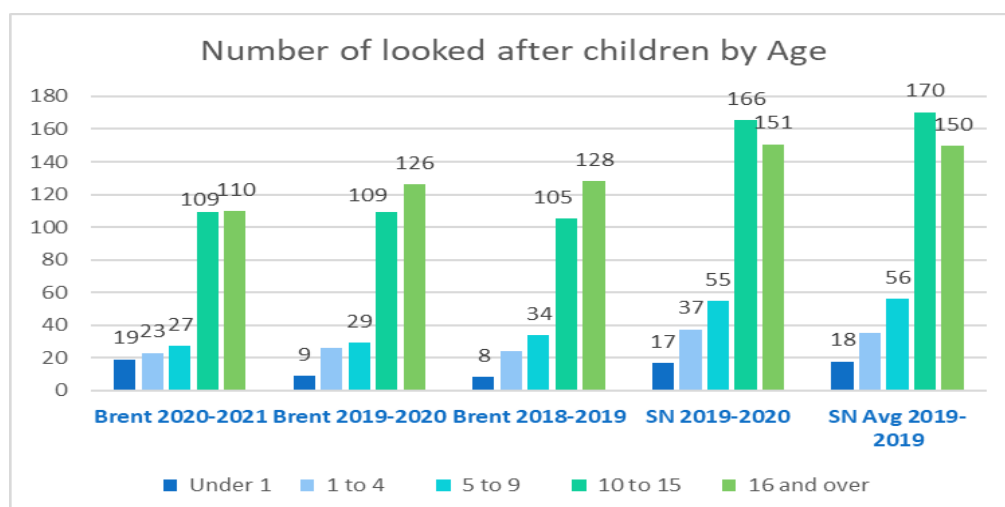
- 4.1 As of 31st March 2021 Brent had 288 looked after children and young people. This compares with 299 children on 31st March 2020. This represents 37.1 LAC per 10,000 head of child population against the rate for England of 62 per 10,000 head of child population.



- 4.2 On 31st March 2021, the Local Authority looked after 40 UASC compared with 61 in March 2020. This represented 13.9% of the total Brent LAC population. The number of UASC declined nationally due to the pandemic, as a result of restriction of movement across borders. Brent had fewer referrals from the National Transfer Scheme and Pan London rota and a reduction in self-presentation of UASC this reporting year. Additionally, some UASC ceased to be looked after by reaching their 18th Birthday.
- 4.3 The gender of the LAC population consists of 57.3% male and 42.7% female, which is different from the previous year 2019/2020 of 62.4% male and 37.6% female.



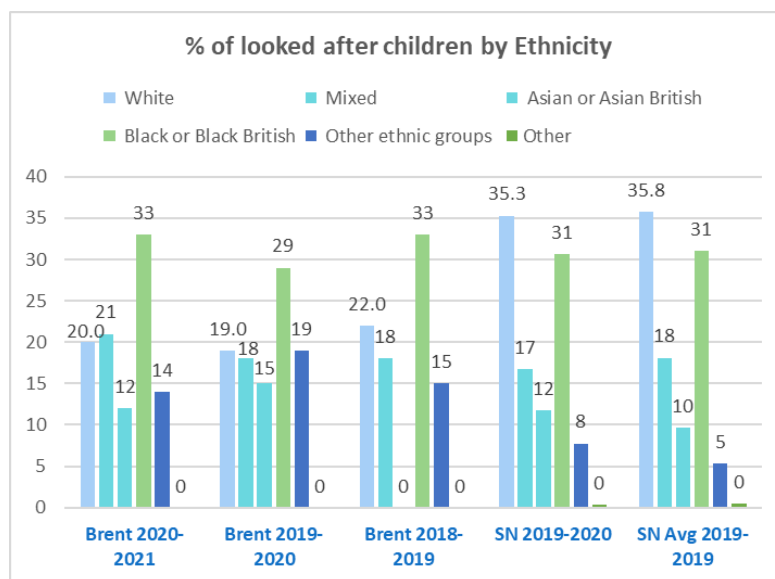
- 4.4 38.2% of the care population in Brent is aged over 16 years old, compared to 41.9% at the end of March 2020. Over 76% of the care population in Brent are aged 10 and over. There has been an increase in younger children coming into care during 2020/21, although Brent's LAC population continues to show a high proportion of young people entering care in their teenage years, many of whom have multiple vulnerabilities such as the risk of exploitation by gangs or CSE. At the end of March 2021, 21% of the LAC population was under the age of 10 compared to a similar percentage, 21.4% in March 2020 and 55% was aged over 13 years old (compared to 61% in March 2020). As at 31 March 2021, 38.4% were aged 16-18 (42.2% in March 2020).



4.5 Ethnicity of LAC

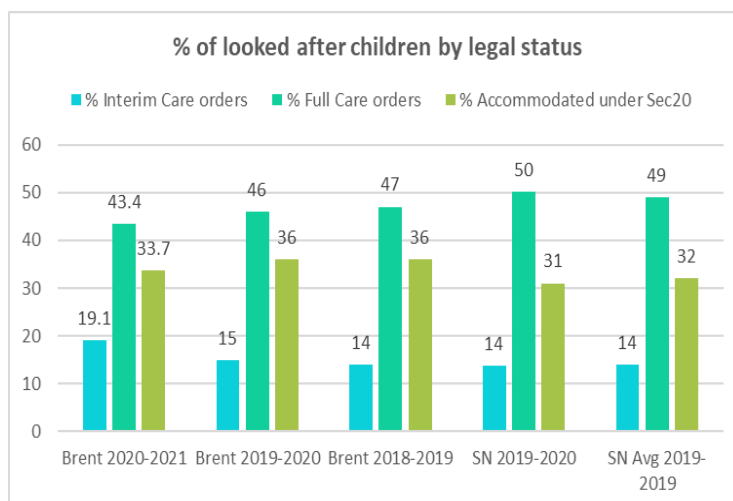
- 4.6 The ethnicity of looked after children broadly remained the same compared to the previous year. However, there has been an increase in the number of looked after children from a 'mixed' heritage and Black or Black British backgrounds, with a decrease of children from 'Other Ethnic' groups and of an Asian background. This is related to a lower number of UASC within the LAC population this year due to Covid-19 impacting on travel across borders.

The number of Black or Black British children and young people in care remains comparable with data from statistical neighbours.



5 Legal Status of LAC

- 5.1 The majority of looked after children were subject to Care Orders under the Children Act 1989, representing 62.5% of all LAC in this reporting year. A further 97 children (33.7% of all LAC) were in care through a voluntary agreement with the parents/carers as pursuant to Sec 20 of the Children Act 1989. The number of children in care through a voluntary agreement with parents decreased compared to the previous year (36%).

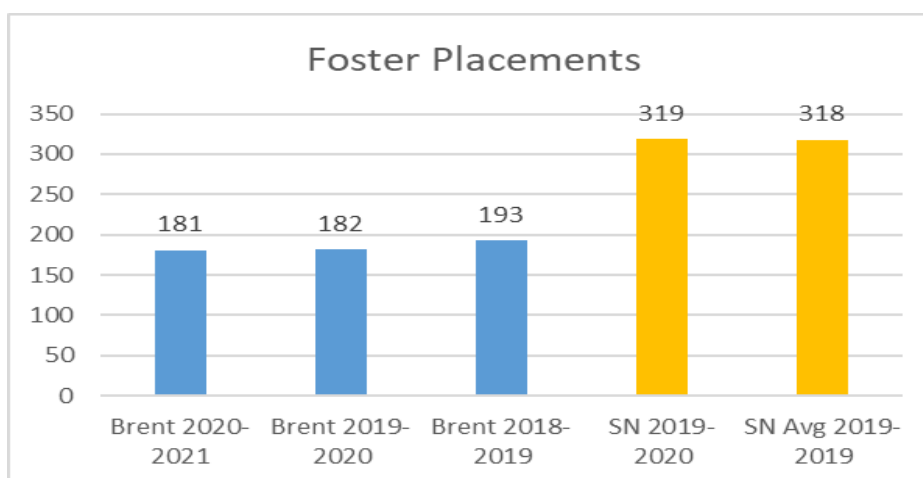


- 5.2 The proportion of children placed more than 20 miles away from their home address as at 31st March 2021 was 19.8%, comparable to 20% in 2019/20 (the national average is 14%). Brent Children's Services aims to place children closer to their families and local support networks and children are only placed away from Brent when it is in their best interests. All out of borough placements are scrutinised at relevant Panels chaired by senior

managers (such as the Entry to Care Panel or Children's Placement Panel) to ensure that children's needs will be met. As of 31 March 2021, 55.7% of LAC are placed outside of Brent compared to 57.8% in 2019/20. The sufficiency market for local placements for older children in care and provision for placements accommodating vulnerable adolescents is underdeveloped. Securing foster placements that meet the needs of Brent's most vulnerable adolescents remains a challenge. The Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2024 identifies this issue as a local and regional issue, including measures to work in partnership with internal and external partners to broaden placement options for looked after children and making sure LAC are placed in good quality local provisions.

5.3 Placements of LAC in Brent

- 5.4. Most children resided within fostering placements (181) – 63% of all LAC, an increase from the same point in 2020 (61%). Despite this slight improvement, this area of work has remained a challenge as identifying foster placements for older LAC has continued to be a struggle due to lack of sufficiency in foster placement and the majority of LAC being teenagers. Increases in late entrants to care coupled by a lack of foster placements for teenagers meant that many children were placed in semi-independent accommodation, although semi-independent accommodation can be the right placement option for young people as per their needs.



- 5.5. In 2020-21, 6 new fostering households were recruited, despite the impact of the pandemic. Brent Children's Services have a successful track record of placing children within kinship arrangements where it is safe to do so. There have been 11 connected persons' placements during 2020-21, compared to 6 in 2019-20. The below case study is an example of Brent's tenacious work to identify and assess connected people in children's networks:

Case Study – Permanency with Kinship Carers

DL is the first child of her mother and second child of her father. During her mother's pregnancy, the local authority had significant concerns due to repeated incidents of domestic abuse, initially between DL's parents. In addition, there were concerns about the impact of her father's drug misuse on his ability to parent and protect her from harm. The local authority worked closely with DL's family and professionals involved, however the incidents of domestic abuse continued.

As part of early permanency planning, contact was made with all family members put forward by DL's parents. Three maternal relatives were positively assessed at viability assessment stage, with two progressing to a full Special Guardianship Order (SGO) assessment.

After DL's birth, she and her mother were placed together in a parent and child foster placement. Unfortunately, due to DL's mother's abusive behaviour towards the foster carer, this placement broke down quickly. Despite finding new placements to try to keep DL and her mother together, her mother's behaviours resulted in repeated placement break-downs. The local authority sought to separate DL from the care of her mother following five placement breakdowns and DL was placed in the care of her maternal family members on separate occasions but both have not lasted due to mother's behaviour and efforts to disrupt placements. Eventually, DL was placed with a Brent foster carer. This was her 8th placement in 11 months.

The full assessments undertaken on all family members ended negatively. As adoption was the parallel plan, the local authority was granted a Care Order and Placement Order at the end of proceedings. An adoptive family was identified and introductions started. However, the local authority was then contacted by a couple, distant relatives of DL, who had just found out that DL was not in the care of her mother. The couple contacted the local authority immediately and made an application to the Court for an SGO assessment to be completed. Following a very positive assessment, the Court agreed to trial the placement with this couple as a foster placement for a period of three months. DL had significant attachment difficulties due to the numerous placement changes early in her life, however the kinship carers worked closely with DL's foster carer to manage an extended transition plan. The mother also agreed to an undertaking that she would not attend the local authority of the kinship carers (something she had previously not accepted).

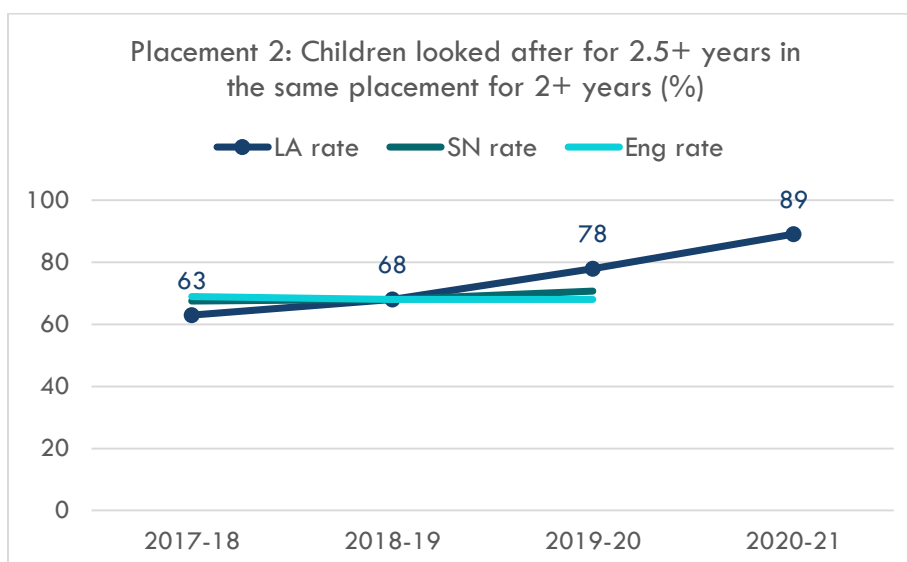
DL moved into the kinship placement after a successful transition period and at the final hearing beginning of 2021, the Court granted a Special Guardianship Order to the couple. DL continues to thrive in the placement.

- 5.6 Recruitment and retention of foster carers remains a priority for 2021/22. The plan, following a successful fostering feasibility study in 2020-21, to create a joint fostering service primarily aimed at increasing placement options for teenagers, continues in 2021-22. Brent, Ealing and Harrow have agreed to work together, initially in combining marketing, recruitment and training offers. Brent is leading this piece of work and four work streams (sufficiency,

placement stability, co-production and engagement and performance and finance) attended by the relevant managers in Social Care, commissioning and marketing are meeting regularly to plan for this.

5.7 Placement Stability

- 5.7.1 Stability has improved for children who have had 3 or more placement moves in a year. Brent's performance around 3 or more placement moves improved from 15.3% in March 2020 to 12% in March 2021, a reflection of strong joint working between social work teams and the Commissioning and Resources Team. Scrutiny of all placement change requests at the weekly Children's Placement Panel has ensured a robust process for decision-making around placement changes and ensuring that change is only supported when it is in the child or young person's best interest. This activity has resulted in more looked after children remaining in their long-term placements for more than 2 years.



- 5.7.2 A monthly placement stability meeting was established to track multiple placement changes and share learning with practitioners and foster carers with the view to support placement stability. A social work practice consultant with the focus on placement stability has provided support to practitioners and chaired placement stability meetings. There continued to be a number of children and young people with complex needs who found it difficult to settle and where placement moves have been necessary. The focus of work is identifying and commissioning the right intervention for each young person to support stability. Where a placement is at risk, placement stability meetings are held with key professionals. Individual placements are monitored by social workers and by IROs as part of LAC Reviews and by the LAC Tracking Panel, chaired by the Head of Looked After Children and Permanency.

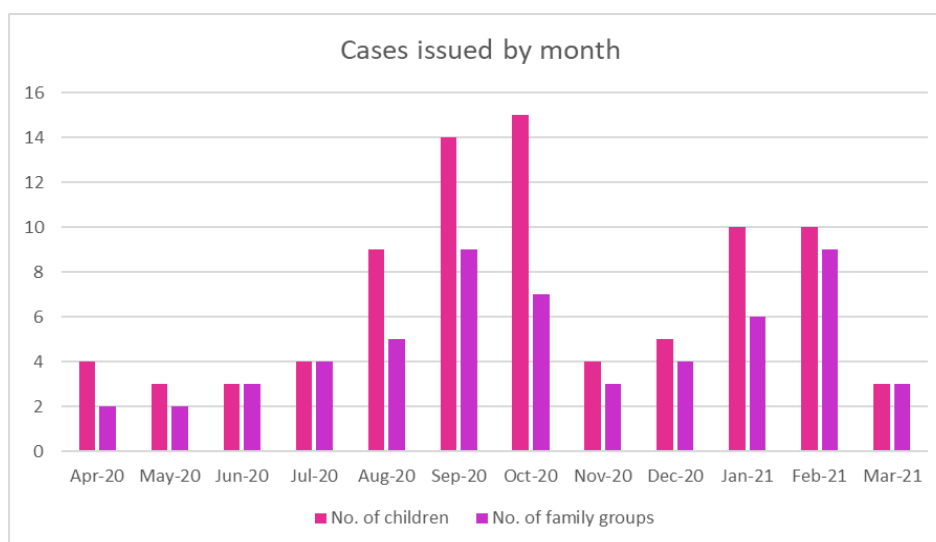
- 5.7.3 The Operational Director continued to approve any out of area placements and provided scrutiny at this level of operational service decisions to ensure placements meet the needs of children.

5.8 Permanency Planning

- 5.8.1 Between 01/04/2020 and 31/03/2021, there were 6 children adopted and 13 children who left care through the making of Special Guardianship Orders. In addition, in this reporting period, 3 children were made subject of a Placement Order and 4 children were matched and placed with their adopters.
- 5.8.2 The non-published data at the end of March 2021, in comparison to the published national and statistical neighbour averages, demonstrates that adoption timeliness remains strong when placing children for adoption once court authority to place has been granted. However, the average time taken for a child entering care to being placed for adoption is 450 days and compares less well against the Brent 2016-19 national average of 376 days and the statistical neighbour average of 370. This decrease in performance is due to a number of cases where parents' appealed Placement Orders leading to delayed completion of care proceedings - 5 cases that were contested and appealed by parents, extending the court proceedings and delaying the Placement Order applications. The average time taken from the local authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved is 169 days which compares favourably to the national average of 178 days and the statistical neighbour average of 203. The Corporate Parenting Committee provides six-monthly scrutiny on adoption performance.
- 5.8.3 Adopt London West (ALW), established in October 2019, continues to provide adoption and post-order support work on behalf of Brent. The regional adoption agency has been operational for 18 months and the evidence to date is that the service provided is of a high standard. Adopt London West is hosted by Ealing and works closely with the other three regional adoption agencies within the Adopt London group. Unlike the other London RAAs, ALW also offers support to Special Guardians, a significant group requiring longer-term support. Over the past year, the new arrangements have become embedded with effective services being maintained for Brent's children.
- 5.8.4 ALW works closely with staff in Brent Children's Services once permanence for a child is first discussed. ALW ensures that adoption plans and associated family finding are progressed quickly and a robust approval and matching process is in place for children. Family finding for Brent children has continued to be a priority with ALW involved in permanency tracking activity on a monthly basis and leading on permanency planning meetings for children who have a care plan of adoption.

5.9 Care Proceedings

- 5.9.1 The number of care proceedings initiated by Brent has fallen with a total of 57 cases being issued in 2020/21 compared to 73 cases in 2019/20. This decrease is connected to the Covid-19 pandemic and the significant periods of lockdown that were experienced in this reporting year. These lockdown periods were followed by “peaks” in proceedings activity in August, September and October 2020 and then again in January and February 2021.



- 5.9.2 Timeliness of care proceedings concluded in 2020/21 is 39.5 weeks. This points to a better performance than the national average at 41 weeks, a reflection of strong joint working between social work and legal teams as well as effective care proceedings tracking arrangements.

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Brent (Internal data 2020/2021)		35 weeks	38 weeks	35 weeks	39.5 weeks
London average (Baker Bulletin Q1 and 2)		31 weeks	33 weeks	37 weeks	Not available
National average (CAFCASS data)		29 weeks	31 weeks	32 weeks	41 weeks

- 5.9.3 There continued to be multiple and complex reasons for cases that exceeded the expected 26 week timeframe for proceedings and these include:

- Complexity within cases - new children born within proceedings, larger sibling groups, Fact Finding hearings and delays due to outstanding criminal charges/court processes.

- International elements, which require travel, liaising with foreign authorities, legal bodies, and often prolonged, complex family assessments.
 - There has been noted delay in this period related to difficulties in securing independent experts and completing expert assessments due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 5.9.4 Brent has continued to track care proceedings cases via an established monthly 'Care Proceedings Tracking meeting', chaired by senior CYP managers and senior lawyers of the Local Authority. The meeting aims to quickly identify any issues that might cause or create delay within proceedings and rectify them as well as provide advice and guidance to practitioners on complex court cases.
- 5.9.5 A Social Work Practice Consultant (SWPC - specialist in permanency planning and court work) has continued supporting and developing social work practice in these areas by co-working court cases. The SWPC also works with looked after children teams to ensure that permanency planning is taking place for children, including those with a plan of adoption, in a timely manner. They have also been a pivotal link with Adopt London West.
- 5.9.6 This year has seen a significant increase in the number of court hearings. Virtual court hearings have presented several benefits, like decreased time taken to travel to and from court, less sitting and waiting around at court. However, the change to virtual hearings has also presented some challenges: additional hearings, limited ability to discuss, negotiate and liaise with parties in person and a lack of physical support for parents during hearings.

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

- 6.1 Looked after children continued to have their voice heard and influence exerted during 2020/21. Their views have consistently been reflected in assessments and applications to court, gathered through direct work using Signs of Safety tools and through IROs who meet with children as part of the LAC review process. IROs continued to provide good independent oversight of decision-making. The child/young person attended and spoke for themselves in 59% of LAC reviews in 2020/21 and 93% of LAC reviews occurred within timescales.
- 6.2 In Brent children and young people who are the members of Brent's Children in Care Council call their groups 'Care in Action'. There are three groups who meet once a month as:
- Junior Care in Action (JCIA) (7-11 year olds)

- Care in Action (CIA) (12-17 year olds)
- Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) (18 – 25 year olds)

- 6.3 Due to the emergence of Covid-19 and subsequent lockdowns Care in Action groups became predominantly virtual sessions, a new experience for most participants and facilitators. Session leads had to adapt how to engage with participants to make sure that the groups remained informative, fun, interactive and rewarding and children and young people needed to engage in a new way through technology.
- 6.4 Feedback from group members is positive with members highlighting meeting others, helping to improve services, being listened to and having fun as consistent reasons for their attendance. The groups are directly promoted to children and young people through foster carers, social workers, personal advisors, the Virtual School and Independent Reviewing Officers. We also encourage children and young people to promote the sessions with their peers.

“I am a part of Care in Action because I feel like my views matter and I feel valued – I feel like a valued asset and I feel wanted. I'd encourage people to come because we are a friendly, open and honest group and we do lots of fun activities.” CIA Member, 16 years old,

“Care Leavers in Action provides an opportunity to make changes in the system. You also get to be around other likeminded people who understand our struggle. The Participation Team encourage us to implement change in all aspects. You encourage us to be honest and open and actually ask us for our opinions to make sure our views are heard.” CLIA member, 23 years old, March 2021

- 6.5 In the past year, the Strategic Director and Lead Member for Children's Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care and other senior leaders attended each of the groups. CIA/CLIA members have asked questions about their work and given feedback on their experiences.
- 6.6 Members of CIA/CLIA have attended every Corporate Parenting Committee meeting in 2020/21. They represent their peers and explain what each group has accomplished. The members take their responsibility to represent their peers seriously and support each other to prepare and represent themselves and their peers well. In addition, representatives of CIA/CLIA attended the

Local Partnership Meeting with LAC and Care Leavers and are members of the Voice and Influence sub-group of this meeting. The Local Partnership Meeting is a multi-agency meeting of partners working together to improve outcomes for LAC and care leavers. Participants include representatives from CCG, CAMHS, Central North West London NHS trust, Anna Freud Centre; Probation, various providers as well as Brent staff from Housing, YOS, Brent Virtual School for LAC, Localities, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance and Looked after Children and Permanency service.

6.7 Overview of all Care in Action Activity

6.8 Despite all the challenges due to Covid-19, members of CIA/CLIA remained focussed and engaged. Some of the key achievements include:

- Care in Action groups have been involved with commissioning new services, including a new Independent Advocacy/Independent Visitor service, Provision of Social Care Specialist Assessment as well as development of a quality assurance framework for semi-independent placements. The care leavers learned a lot from these processes and were supported to use these experiences on applications and in interviews to highlight their skills. Below feedback from a care leaver demonstrates the importance of young people being involved in commissioning arrangements:

"It is important for young people to be part of the process. If companies cannot engage with us through this process how can we trust that they will be able to engage with us once they have the contract "
CLIA member (24 years old) December 2020

- Care in Action groups developed an agreed way of demonstrating that they 'approve' documents they have been consulted on through the development of a digital stamp.
- Care Leavers in Action conducted their first youth-led inspection. Eleven Care Leavers came together to receive inspector training. The group then decided on the key areas they wanted the inspection to focus upon. They used the Care Leavers Charter and the latest OFSTED Reports as resources that allowed them to select key areas of service provision. The inspection covered the following themes:
 - Services and support
 - Pathway Plans
 - Education and employment
 - Being a lifelong champion

The findings of the inspection will be shared for learning in 2021/2022.

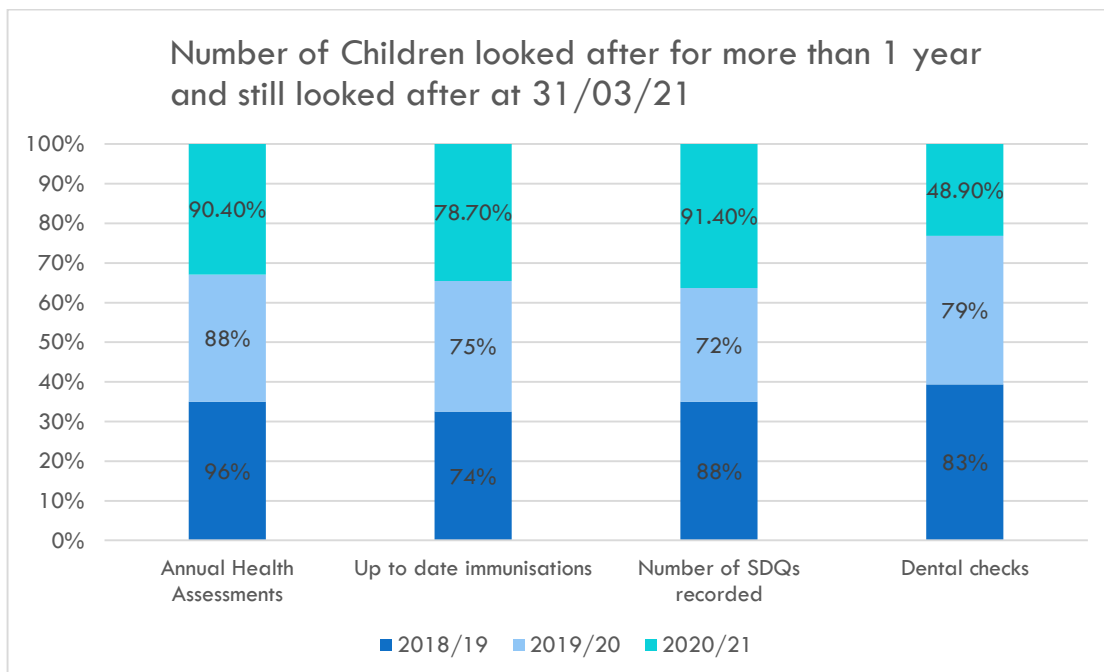
The below quote from a young inspector shows what it means to young people to be involved in such activity:

"I feel as though I've gained a lot of opportunities and experience through the group such as the inspections. Our views are valued." CLIA member (23 years old), March 2021

- Care Leavers in Action developed the Care Leavers' Financial Guide and this has been distributed to 16 and 17 year olds and professionals to support young people prepare for leaving care

7 Health of Looked After Children

- 7.1 Local Authorities, as the Corporate Parents, are responsible for ensuring that LAC receive regular health checks (six monthly for children under the age of 5 and annually for those over the age of 5), dental checks and appropriate immunisations. Statutory health data for LAC is reported for those children who have been in care for more than 12 months.
- 7.2 LAC Health data for 2020/21 has not yet been submitted to the DfE as part of the statutory data reporting requirement and will not be submitted until August 2021. Unpublished data shows that health outcomes remain strong for looked after children.



- 7.3 There has been a change in Tier 2 CAMHS service provision to looked after children in this reporting period with the Brent Emotional Wellbeing Service (BEWS) becoming the Brent Intensive Support Team (BIST). This provides support to children and young people with disabilities where there is significant risk of family breakdown and/or the child or young person has moderate/severe learning disability presenting with a significant behavioural challenge or emotional difficulties. Referrals for this service will be made by the Brent's Disabled Children and Young People 0-25 Team only. BIST continues to be provided by the Central North West London Health Trust.
- 7.4 The Wellbeing and Emotional Support Team (WEST) provides a targeted service for identified vulnerable groups, including Looked After Children, and is delivered by the Anna Freud Centre. The service provides support, clinical advice and training for professionals working with children and young people and a range of evidence based interventions working directly with children, young people and families in the identified priority vulnerable groups. Additional capacity has been built into this service from 1 October 2020 to support professionals working with vulnerable children, including social workers and foster carers. When the need arises for a Tier 3 CAMHS referral, clinicians support social workers in completing those referrals.
- 7.5 A CAMHS LAC and Transition Mental Health Care Coordinator was appointed in 2020/2021, who is co-located with LAC teams to work alongside social workers. The Coordinator will ensure that the emotional wellbeing and mental health needs of children and young people who are accommodated outside of Brent are met. This role has been put in place as part of a pilot project for 12 months, aiming to improve emotional and mental wellbeing of children placed out of borough. Feedback from social workers has been positive in early months about the impact resulting in out of borough CCGs acting more timely in relation to CAMHS assessments and interventions for some children.

8 Multi-agency Partnership for LAC and Care Leavers

- 8.1 Brent continued to have strong and effective multi-agency arrangements with external partners such as CCG, schools and other educational settings and various providers. The Children's Trust, chaired by the DCS has a strategic overview of partnership working. The Joint Commissioning Group (JCG), chaired by the Operational Director for Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy and reporting to the Children's Trust, continued monitoring the effectiveness of partnership working and commissioning arrangements for LAC and Care Leavers.
- 8.2 An operational multi-agency partnership meeting for looked after children and care leavers has continued to meet regularly with participation from CIA/CLIA, Brent colleagues from the Looked After Children and Permanency Service, the Virtual School for looked after children, YOS, Housing, Public Health and external partners from CAMHS, CCG, Probation, Anna Freud

Centre and other providers when required. The meeting promotes collective responsibility and takes a systemic approach to improve overall outcomes for children in care and care leavers.

9 Children Missing or Absent from Care

- 9.1 In the year ending 31st March 2021, 74 children in care were reported to be missing from their placements at least once compared to 94 in the previous year. This represented 15% of all LAC looked after at any point during the year (n=462) compared to over 20% in the previous year. There has been a reduction in number of missing incidents as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as some young people who were regularly going missing from their placements ceasing to be looked after. 46 of the 74 had more than one missing incident in the year. In this reporting year 34 children were reported as being absent from their care placement compared with 42 in 2020/21. An absence may be a situation where a child has not returned home at an agreed time but their whereabouts is known.
- 9.2 Children who are missing from care are offered return home interviews (RHIs). Learning from RHIs and data on missing children are reviewed weekly by the Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes and the rate of RHIs is being continuously monitored by senior management. Some of the learning from the RHIs in 2020/21 was that some looked after children go to see their parents outside of the arrangements made in accordance to their care plans; some wished to see friends despite Covid-19 restrictions; contextual safeguarding issues including county lines. Learning from the return home interviews is shared with partners as well as social workers, IROs and personal advisors.
- 9.3 A Vulnerability Risk Assessment tool has continued to be used to assess risk holistically and plan with multi-agency partners to reduce risk. A programme of training on Missing Children and the completion of Return Home Interviews is an integral part of the Learning and Development calendar. Social workers and Personal advisors have continued to receive one to one support from a Social Work Practice Consultant who has a specialist role in supporting vulnerable adolescents.
- 9.4 Brent has a collaborative approach to provide a coherent overview of the most vulnerable adolescents, including looked after children and care leavers. In order to enhance Brent's coordinated operational approach to vulnerable children, the Child Exploitation and Missing Panel was merged with the Violence and Vulnerability Panel, led by Police and Community Protection, to form the Exploitation, Violence and Vulnerability Panel. The panel reviews cases and supports practitioners where multi-agency escalation is required. It also decides which cases need to come back to panel for review and this is dependent on the level of risk. A number of LAC and care leavers' cases have been presented to EVVP panel, which has

ensured a collaborative approach from all partners to help reduce risk and safeguard children and young people.

- 9.5 A strategic overview of operational activity is provided by the Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Group - a strong multi-agency forum, supported by a Vulnerable Adolescents Data Analyst who triangulates data to identify children and young people at risk.

10. Education of Looked After Children

- 10.1. As the spring term 2019/ 2020 ended and the country moved into the first national lockdown. Brent Virtual School (BVS) reconsidered how services would be delivered for looked after children as well as how communication with foster carers, schools and social workers would maintain an on-going focus on children's attendance and their continued progress. From the start of the lockdown in March 2020 all carers and young people were contacted to ascertain their access to information technology and as a result over 50 devices were ordered and directly delivered to young people (learning resources were distributed as well as laptops, tablets and dongles).
- 10.2. Additionally, BVS led the IT and Wi-Fi rollout from the DfE for vulnerable young people and carers, which involved the distribution of over 750 laptops and tablets and over 150 wireless routers. BVS coordinated the pilot of 'Increasing internet access for children' which meant that a further 500 children were given access to BT Wi-Fi Hotspots.
- 10.3. In spite of the pandemic, working in partnership with settings, schools, social workers and carers, Brent Virtual School ^[1] (BVS) achieved the following for children and young people during the academic year 2019/20:
- Attendance prior to the first lockdown as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic had improved for the Virtual school pupil register as a whole, from 88% to 90%.
 - Fixed term exclusions significantly decreased for the Virtual school pupil register as a whole, from 26 pupils to 12 pupils. BVS had a personalised support offer for each of these children.
 - The number of days lost to fixed term exclusions reduced drastically by over 68%.
 - All 178 Looked after pupils received appropriate education, with 94% in Good or Outstanding schools, this is a 3% increase on the previous year.
 - All of the statutory cohort had access to appropriate IT and connectivity within the first 2 weeks of the first Covid 19 lockdown.
 - At Key Stage 4, 29% of the eligible cohort achieved a pass in both core subjects of English and maths. This was a considerable increase on

^[1] For detailed information on educational outcomes for looked after children in Brent, please see Brent Virtual School Annual Report 2019/20 presented at the Corporate Parenting Committee on 20th July 2021.

previous data and the highest recorded results for the Brent LAC cohort.

- 97% of LAC had a destination school or college place secured for September 2020.

There were no Permanent Exclusions, as per previous year's data.

11. Care Leavers

- 11.1 The Local Authority has a dedicated Leaving Care Service that provides support and guidance to all young people who leave their long-term care from the age of 18 years (including those leaving care at age of 16 and 17) until they reach the age of 25, even if they are not in education or employment.
- 11.2 All care leavers have an allocated personal advisor who is introduced to them at the age of 17, before their transition to the leaving care service. This ensures that all those in care approaching 18 years of age, already know their personal advisor and have developed a positive relationship in working alongside their allocated social worker. Due to the impact of the Social Work Act 2017, there has been an expected increase in overall number of care leavers. In line with this growth in demand Brent has allocated additional resources to increase the capacity of Leaving Care Teams in 2021/22. With an increased capacity of leaving care, personal advisors will start work with all care leavers from the age of 16.
- 11.3 A personal advisor is not a qualified social worker but will have a background in working with young people in a variety of settings such as in youth justice, housing organisations or youth groups. In 2020/21, the staffing establishment of the Leaving Care Service consisted of two teams with 16 personal advisors supervised by two team managers. The teams also had co-allocated external partners such as Prospects, 2 part-time DWP workers as well as Barnardo's Care Journey's Team members.
- 11.4 As of 31st March 2021, Brent was responsible for the support to 307 Former Relevant Young People [aged 18 - 21] (an increase of 41% from 218 last year) and 108 young people aged 22-25 (a decrease of -17% from 130 last year). In line with the Social Work Act 2017, Brent offers a 21+ service providing support, advice and guidance to any care leaver who may wish to have this support up to the age of 25.

12 Brent's Local Offer for Care Leavers

- 12.1 The comprehensive local offer for care leavers, refreshed in April 2020, shows that the local authority is an ambitious corporate parent for care leavers. The local authority provides for appropriate tailored individual support, including 10 ring-fenced apprenticeships for care leavers, a traineeship programme, various workshops around vocational training and development opportunities. Care Leavers have access to a range of services including careers advice and guidance through daily drop-in sessions across

Brent, a dedicated Care Leavers Careers Advice worker and two life coaches as well as consultations with a DWP worker regarding financial support. Care Leavers who are parents are encouraged to be actively engaged in activities/programmes on offer in Brent's newly established Family Wellbeing Centres (former Children's Centres), including access to The Maternal Early Childhood Sustained Home-visiting (MESCH) through the Health Visitors Service. Care Leavers are supported by Brent Virtual School to achieve education outcomes. For example, the counselling phone line Safe Base has been made available to Care Leavers in Higher Education, to support with mental health issues and build resilience to stay the course. As part of Brent's Local Offer, 59 different commitments were made to care leavers. 8 of those commitments were statutory duties Brent needed to provide by law and 51 were additional, discretionary commitments made to care leavers.

- 12.2 DfE guidance suggests that the local authorities should review their local offers every 2-3 years. Senior leaders in Brent made a decision for the progress of the local offer to be reviewed on an annual basis with the view to revise it in a two yearly cycle. In this way, care leavers' needs continue to be kept on the agenda annually.
- 12.3 Brent has continued to meet its both statutory responsibilities as well as discretionary commitments to care leavers during the COVID-19 pandemic. During national lockdowns, the majority of care leavers were visited online and at times face to face when required. There has been significant impact on face-to-face activities such as the weekly football and monthly enrichment activities for care leavers.

13 Care Leavers' Enrichment Programme throughout the Pandemic

- 13.1 Throughout the pandemic, the enrichment programme for care leavers has continued through a hybrid mixture of online and offline events. Young people organised a social gathering event in July and a Crazy Golf event in August 2020 when Covid-19 safety guidelines permitted. During the national lockdowns, there were many online events including quizzes, bingo and two motivational speaker events (17th February and 23rd March 2021) which attracted up to 30 young people in each session. In addition, a group of care leavers attended a camping trip in September 2020 with Barnardo's Charity for a long weekend, involving outside activities such as paint balling and quad biking. Barnardo's also held a workshop with young people called 'Pizza and Privilege' including a discussion about race and the Black Lives Matters Movement.
- 13.2 One care leaver shared their experience of another camping trip she had been on with a charity, via the WhatsApp group, which led to a further 4 care leavers signing up to take part, all of whom greatly enjoyed the experience. Brent's enrichment programme jointly won the National Care Leaver Benchmarking Forum's Best Project 2020 award. The WhatsApp group has been used to share information, government guidelines, emotional support and practical tips through the pandemic.

'When I was in foster care I felt like I was the only one who had lived like I had for years because everyone I knew lived with their parents and had a normal life. It was only until I found out about the care leaver group chat/events that made me feel like I wasn't alone. I felt so free and normal when I realised how many other young people lived the same as me. This was something that helped me realise I wasn't weird and I had a normal life just like everyone else. Being able to still be in contact with care leavers now has been really good for my development as a young person. They've all helped me grow as a person' (KF, case closed but remains engaged in the Hub)

'It was an amazing event, having a motivational speaker share his struggles and how he was able to turn it around and share his story was so useful. It was suited to us as people in care and the opportunity to ask questions was great. Came out feeling very positive and wiser which is amazing. Really enjoyed it' (A, care leaver)

- 13.3 The Element arts programme was re-commissioned in autumn 2020 and took place weekly covering photography, drawing, mixed media, craft, poetry and drama with care leavers. Nine young people attended the project which was co-facilitated by a Brent care leaver, who is an Element Youth Champion and previous project participant. The plan was to run the sessions face to face but due to the announcement of the 2nd lockdown some of the sessions took place on-line. The group chose the name 'Agua La Vista' after expressing a strong interest in nature, particularly sea life, during the project. The artists joined a Zoom call, during one of the Element sessions and the young people developed and explored their ideas for what they wanted the online gallery to look like. It culminated in an online exhibition of the group's work on 14th December 2020. Since the project finished, 5 young people from the project have engaged in a various networking activities. This includes responding to creative challenges via a group in WhatsApp, attending an online Element group session and/or attending an online check-in with an Element member of staff, to work towards a Bronze Arts Award qualification. Feedback from young people participating the programme has been positive:

"I enjoyed the poetry in particular, I haven't written like that in years",
care leaver

"I have my mixed media piece up on my bedroom wall, I'm proud of what I made", care leaver

- 13.4 A new programme to support young people into employment has also started including a 'Seeking employment' WhatsApp group. Jobs are being posted every day and Brent's commissioned provider for EET, Prospects, are part of the group, supporting young people with their CV and interview skills. One young person successfully gained a place on the civil service year-long internship based on information in this group and many others have asked for support and more information on various roles.

14 Grand-mentors Programme

- 14.1 Brent Local Authority and Volunteers Matters commenced a new initiative to support young people with bespoke mentoring from September 2020. Grand mentors is an innovative project using the power of inter-generational mentoring to support care leavers who may be in challenging life circumstances. These mentors are volunteers aged 50 and over who use their wisdom, their energy and their life experience to help keep young people leaving care on track. The following case study demonstrates the impact grand mentors have on young people's lived experience:

Case Study – NN receives support from her grand mentor

NN, a care leaver, was referred by her personal advisor (PA) in November 2020. NN is a young person originally from a middle eastern country, who has no family residing in the UK. NN is in her first year studying at a London university. NN's PA felt that she was under stress with her course and suffering from isolation and loneliness.

During an exploration call with NN to see if she would be interested in having a grand mentor, she became very emotional and said that she wasn't sure if she would 'get anything out of having a mentor'. She felt generally low, unsupported and isolated and could not see how a grand mentor could offer her solutions that would alleviate that. It was suggested that she could think about it for a few days. When NN was spoken to again, she still was not hopeful but agreed to have an initial conversation with her matched grand mentor, who is an entrepreneur and business woman who once presented her own televised talk show.

NN and her grand mentor's first phone call was over an hour long and since then they have been in regular contact. NN reported that she is 'very happy with the support I have received so far'. She was struggling with her assignments and was stressed about submitting them on time. The mentor was able to provide intensive support to NN regarding her assignment including giving constructive feedback. NN has appreciated the feedback very much. She has now reported that she feels more confident in writing her university assignment knowing that she has someone she can get support from. In the interaction below, one can see how much NN has appreciated this support:



- 14.2 Feedback from another care leaver referred to have a grand mentor demonstrates the need for young people to have a mentor:

“...I have only met her virtually due to the pandemic, but we got on from day 1. Her positive vibrant energy is like I have known her forever! She has a motherly aura that is non-judgemental, caring, encouraging and supportive with professional boundaries. I feel less restricted and reluctant to share; it's almost like the cool aunt or big sister vibe that has your best interest at heart. I can go to for anything like a chat, advise, motivation, encouragement, and support...”

15 Care Leavers in Education, Employment & Training

- 15.1 There were 49 young people in higher education in 2020/21. These included 25 young people aged 19-21 at university, studying a variety of subjects from Social Work, to Business Studies and Law. Additionally, 14 care leavers aged between 22 and 25 were in higher education at the end of the reporting year. Brent had a higher percentage of care leavers in higher education than statistical neighbours and nationally. The table below highlights some of the comparative data for young people at university:

Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in Higher Education	Brent	Brent %	Statistical Neighbour average	Statistical Neighbour average %	National figure	figure %
2019-20	24	10%	20	8%	1,920	6%
2020-21	24	10%				

- 15.2 At the end of the reporting year, the percentage of young people aged 19-21 in education, employment and training was just over 53%, compared to 57% last year. The difference is mainly due to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic which has left some care leavers, particularly those working within the hospitality sector and on zero-hour contracts, unemployed. Brent's performance is in line with statistical neighbours and the national average. The national key performance measures as related to outcomes for care leavers in education, employment or training are as below:

Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in Education, Employment or Training	Brent	Brent %	Statistical Neighbour average	Statistical Neighbour average %	National figure	figure %
2019-20	137	57%	133	53%	16440	53%
2020-21	128	53%				

- 15.3 All care leavers attending University are provided with financial support that includes a Higher Education bursary [as endorsed by the Department for Education Charter for Care Leavers] of £2000 plus subsidised travel to assist with travel costs. In addition, as per Brent's local offer young people (subject to a financial assessment) received subsistence and rent payments from Brent Council during Christmas, Easter and summer vacations.
- 15.4 The case study below demonstrates Brent's commitment to support care leavers who aspire to attend higher education:

Case Study – A care leaver in higher education

JM is a 21-year-old care leaver; he is studying at university. He spends his holiday time with his Staying Put carer with whom he has a very strong relationship. When the pandemic started, he was unable to remain in accommodation on campus and he was supported to return to live with his carer whilst completing online lessons. Brent has continued to financially support the placement and JM.

Ongoing support allowed him to have stability and consistency from his support network whilst continuing to study and excel. He has now completed his second year and is waiting to see if he can return to face-to-face learning in September 21. He is involved in tango classes and chess club at university and despite having Asperger's, JM has 'thrown himself' into all aspects of university life. He has also taken up a job as a co-researcher for a few hours a week at university to top up his income.

16 Care Leavers' Accommodation

- 16.1 All care leavers in Brent are given priority housing banding due to their leaving care status. Young people are only put forward for a council tenancy when they are ready to move on. The PAs complete a vulnerability assessment with the young person and recommend that they should be able to manage a council or housing association tenancy. Young people also need to complete mandatory tenancy workshops or ASDAN independent life skills programme before they move to their tenancies. A 'setting up Home Allowance' of £2000 is provided for care leavers to furnish their homes and buy essential items.
- 16.2 A monthly housing panel reviews all requests for tenancy nominations for care leavers. Although the Covid-19 restrictions have limited face to face interactions around the life skills programme, over 60 young people have been provided with an ASDAN 'Living Independently' workbook since April 2020. Additionally, personal advisors have been offered training on how to support their care leavers in completing the workbook. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, face to face workshops to re-inforce learning in certain areas have not been conducted. However, Brent has continued offering workshops to young people to better manage their finance and tenancy. MyBank Charity that works with young people provided training to care leavers on money management and Housing colleagues provided tenancy workshops for young people who are ready to be nominated for a tenancy in March 21.

- 16.3 At the end of the reporting year, 83% of care leavers aged 19-21 were in suitable accommodation. This performance is equal to statistical neighbours and slightly below the national average. This is partly due to some care leavers who were former UASC, being refused leave to remain in the UK and choosing not to be in touch with the Local Authority¹

Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in suitable accommodation	Brent	Brent %	Statistical Neighbour average	Statistical Neighbour average %	National figure	National figure %
2019-20	197	82%	202	82%	26360	85%
2020-21	208	83%				

- 16.4 Care Leavers continue to be placed in appropriate and safe accommodation. Those who are not ready to move to independence are encouraged to stay put with their foster carers or in semi-independent accommodation until they are ready, with the expectation that carers identify how they will support transition to adulthood. The number of care leavers in semi-independent provision has increased from 106 in April 2020 to 136 in March 2021. This increase is partly due to the pandemic delaying young people's move into their tenancies. Additionally, there are several former UASCs who have been waiting for a Home Office decision which has been delayed due to the pandemic.
- 16.5 Brent has provided additional support to care leavers through the pandemic, including those who have had to remain in commissioned accommodation due to delays moving into their tenancies caused by the pandemic. The following case study demonstrates housing support offered to a care leaver who cannot live in Brent due to his previous involvement with gangs:

Case Study – Accommodation

TA is a 22 year old care leaver, an EU national originally from a country from Asia. He is married and has a daughter.

TA became looked after when his parents relinquished their care of him at age 16. He has had multiple placement moves and unfortunately has an offending history. In 2019 and 2020, Brent managed to re-engage with TA after tenacious attempts. The focus of the work was on enhancing his independent living skills. Following this work, TA secured his own council property.

Unfortunately, TA was arrested for assaulting his wife in summer of 2020 and remanded for 3 months. The court granted a restraining order effectively making TA homeless. This was an especially difficult time for TA and his family, particularly in relation to his emotional wellbeing. The Leaving Care Team provided him with a semi-independent placement whilst he sought to vary the terms of the restraining order. TA has made positive changes during this time. TA has secured a Business Administration apprenticeship in partnership with Brent

Works. He has 100% attendance and is waiting for the result of the first set of exams, he is hopeful he has done well.

The PA worked closely with his solicitor and provided the necessary evidence to the courts who recently varied the restraining order, which has allowed him to return to his tenancy. Brent continues to support TA as he seeks contact with his daughter as well as access to mental health support to manage his anger to reduce the risks of potential future violence.

TA has repeatedly expressed his gratitude for our support during this time *"I am determined to move forward from the negativity and criminal convictions of my past I am so grateful for you guys who believed I could do this and all the support you given me ."*

Leaving Care staff have remained aspirational for TA, and demonstrated a belief in him that he was not accustomed to. Our partnership with Brent Works has been instrumental in supporting TA to access education and training despite his criminal history. We continue to support TA and his family.

17 Priorities for Corporate Parenting Partners 2021/22

- Improving access to mental health support services, particularly specialist CAMHS support for looked after children and targeted support for care leavers in the light of the impact of COVID-19
- Increasing the number of looked after children and care leavers in education, employment and training including late entrants to the care system and Key Stage 4 pupils.
- Ensuring that the voice of looked after children and care leavers is seen within all service development initiatives.
- To ensure there continues to be effective multi-agency strategy meetings to shape a coordinated, collaborative safety plan for vulnerable adolescents. This will include commitment to raise further awareness on transitional safeguarding to ensure continuity of services for the most vulnerable young people after their 18th birthday.
- All partners to ensure potential increase in demand for services – in line with the impact of Covid-19 – does not have a negative impact on outcomes for looked after children and care leavers

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes

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BRENT'S PROMISES TO YOU

Brent makes the following promises to all children and young people in our care. These are things that we will do so that you have the best support and help possible.



WE PROMISE

TO PROVIDE STABILITY FOR YOU

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

TO RESPECT AND HONOUR YOUR IDENTITY

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



TO INVOLVE YOU IN THE DECISIONS ABOUT YOUR LIFE

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

TO SUPPORT YOU

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

TO PROVIDE YOU WITH A SAFE, STABLE AND HAPPY PLACE TO LIVE

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

WORK WITH YOU TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS AND TARGETS IN EDUCATION

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

PREPARE YOU FOR INDEPENDENCE

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



Updated Spring 2021



Brent

Councillor Mili Patel
Brent Council's Cabinet
Member for Children and
Young People Chair, Corporate
Parenting Committee

BRENT CARE LEAVERS' CHARTER

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

WE PROMISE

TO RESPECT AND HONOUR YOUR IDENTITY

- ✓ We will respect your personal beliefs and values and accept your culture and heritage.
- ✓ We will support you to become the person you want to be.
- ✓ We will make clear to you what information about yourself and your time in care you are entitled to see. We will support you to access this when you want it, to manage any feelings that you might have about the information and to put on record any disagreement with the content.

TO BELIEVE IN YOU

- ✓ We will value your strengths, gifts and talents and encourage your aspirations and career goals

TO LISTEN TO YOU

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

TO INFORM YOU

- ✓ We will give you information that you need at every point in your journey, from care to adulthood, including information on legal entitlements and the service you can expect to receive from us. The information will be presented in a way that you want.



TO PROVIDE YOU WITH INFORMATION AND SUPPORT TO HELP YOU HAVE GOOD PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

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

TO SUPPORT YOU

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



TO BE A LIFELONG CHAMPION

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



TO FIND YOU A HOME

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





Offer to Care Leavers 2020 - 2022

1. Introduction

As your corporate parent, Brent Council continues to be responsible for you after you turn 18. We must make sure that you are safe, healthy and are achieving your goals as described in your pathway plan and, if you are disabled, in your Care and Support Plan as well as the pathway plan. As any good parent, we want to make sure you have the best possible support to help you thrive as you grow older.

We will do our best to help you achieve your full potential. We know that it is a big step when you move out of care and start living on your own. If you are disabled the transition plan will be carefully planned with you and the people who support you. Being a good parent means keeping in touch and providing you with the support you need to meet your individual needs.

Just because you are leaving care, or have already left care, we haven't stopped caring about you. We want to make sure that you and people who support you feel safe and supported and know where and who to go for advice and help.

This local offer is made by Brent Council to all care leavers and sets out how we will support you.

To be able to get the support set out in this offer, you must have been in care for at least 13 weeks between the ages of 14 and 16 (including your 16th birthday) or for 13 weeks after your 16th birthday. Your personal advisor will talk with you about the information in this offer.

2. Support we must provide by law

Following changes introduced through the Children and Social Work Act 2017, you can ask for support from your personal advisor until you reach the age of 25. This is to make sure care leavers receive similar support that young adults who live with their families would normally expect.

- **Personal Advisor**

Once you turn 18, in most cases, you'll no longer have a social worker, so your personal advisor, we call them PAs, will make sure you get the services you need and help co-ordinate your pathway plan and reviews.

Your PA is there to help you to think about your future, what you are studying, what you want to do in the future and your independence skills. Your PA will talk to you and other people who are important to you to find out more about you and your needs.

Your PA can help you with lots of things in your life. The main things they will do are:

- Be involved in understanding your needs and preparing your Pathway Plan so that you can get a good idea of what you want to do with your life;
- Review your Pathway Plan at least every six months to help you to stay on track and achieve the things you want from life;
- With your agreement, seek the views of our partner agencies when completing your pathway plan. This may include housing, education, training and employment providers, benefits and health services. PAs will also liaise with youth offending services and probation if needed.
- Even if your case has been closed you can still get in touch with us before your 25th birthday and we will assess what help or assistance we may be able to give you.
- If you are a disabled care leaver and have been assessed to have eligible needs under the Care Act 2014, a social worker will review regularly your Care and Support Plan to ensure that the right support is in place to meet your assessed needs. The Care and Support Plan must be reviewed at least once a year.

2. Support we offer

• Education, Employment and Training

Good parents want to help their children achieve the best qualifications, training and skills to enable them to succeed in life. As your corporate parent, we want to make sure you have this solid foundation so that you are able to find the right career and job that goes with it. To do this we will make sure you have good advice, support and assistance.

If you have an Education Health and Care Plan, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice 2014 states that your plan will need to be maintained and reviewed by our Special Education Needs team until you reach the goals set out in the plan, or your 25th birthday.

The law says that we provide you with assistance with expenses linked with employment, education and training, if you cannot access assistance from any other agency. In particular:

- We will provide you with a Higher Education (HE) bursary of £2,000 if you go to University, to help with books and materials. The payment will be paid in instalments over the duration of your course.
- We will provide somewhere for you to stay during your summer University holiday (or funding if you would prefer to make your own arrangements) if you are in higher education or in residential further education. We will only pay your rent if you cannot claim housing benefit or universal credit. During the Christmas and Easter term time your maintenance and student loan should cover your rent. If you think this will cause you financial hardship, please contact your personal advisor who might be able to help.

Our other education and training support offer to you includes:

- A guaranteed offer of a careers appointment with Brent Virtual School to discuss your career options post 18.
- All apprenticeship vacancies within the school and local business advertised on a web recruitment system and details circulated to you and your personal advisors through various channels such as WhatsApp group and care leavers' hub.
- Support to meet your transport costs when travelling to training, school/college, apprenticeships or job interviews if not available from elsewhere i.e. DWP or College;
- Support to buy tools, equipment, essential clothing and books, if you cannot get them from your local college or through the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

- Support and advice if you choose to go to university, such as helping you apply for tuition fees and maintenance loans;
- In partnership with Brent Works we will send your Personal Advisor employment, training and apprenticeship opportunities to help you get into employment, training or an apprenticeship scheme within the Council or elsewhere;
- A Department for Work and Pensions worker seconded to the leaving care team who will assist you in claiming benefits and avoid you getting undue benefit sanctions;
- A celebration event to share the positive education and training experiences of care leavers once a year.
- Up to 10 apprenticeships arranged by the council on an annual basis;
- A traineeship programme offered twice a year in partnership with Brent Employment Skills & Enterprise for all care leavers who do not have the required qualification and skills to apply for an apprenticeship scheme;
- Volunteering opportunities for care leavers.
- An annual review of your education health and care plan in line with SEND Code of Practice.

- **Accommodation**

Your PA will help you to find suitable accommodation. We will work with you to ensure you are provided with the most suitable housing options. Our accommodation support offer to you includes:

The law says the following about how we must support you with your accommodation:

- We will encourage you to stay in care until you are 18, but if you choose to leave care before the age of 18 we must provide you with suitable accommodation.

Our other accommodation support offer to you includes:

- Supported accommodation if you are not ready to take up your own tenancy yet;
- Supporting you to remain with your foster carers under what's called a 'Staying Put' arrangement when it is assessed to be in your best interest. This will be reviewed every six months to make sure it is meeting your needs;
- Supported lodgings if you have a disability and have been assessed to have eligible needs under the Care Act 2014.
- Return to your family if it is safe for you to do so and if you have a disability and have been assessed to have eligible needs under the Care Act 2014, a care package to support you and your parents.
- Residential Care if you have a profound disability and have been assessed to have eligible needs under the Care Act 2014.
- Once you have reached the stage where you can live independently and maintain your tenancy, you will have the option to apply to Brent Council for social housing (this is accommodation managed by us or a housing association). As a care leaver you will be given priority. Your PA will speak to the nominated housing officer, who works with the leaving care team, when you are ready to live on your own;
- Access to a nominated tenancy officer who can assist you with your tenancy;
- Workshops to receive advice about holding down a tenancy, including avoiding rent arrears, paying bills and budgeting effectively;
- A 'Setting up Home Allowance' of £2,000 (based on assessed need) for items you need to set up home like appliances, bedding and furniture.
- If you don't want to live in Brent because you have friends, family or connections elsewhere you will need to talk to your PA. Your PA can make contact with the Local Authority where you wish to live to see if they are able to assist you.

- A decorating allowance if housed in a Brent Housing property, such as to buy paint or wallpaper;
- To give you advice to prevent you from becoming intentionally homeless in Brent and being given a second chance if you run into problems with your tenancy.

• **Your Health and Wellbeing**

Looking after your physical health and mental wellbeing is extremely important as you get older. The Leaving Care Team and your PA will arrange advice and support for you to encourage you to lead a healthy and active lifestyle. Our health and wellbeing offer to you includes:

- Providing you with a health passport at your last statutory health check before turning 18;
- Support to register with a GP;
- Providing information on healthy living including 'Staying Healthy' sessions;
- Use of the Kiln Theatre: care leavers will have free tickets to events;
- If you need someone to talk to your PA or keyworker can refer you to counselling including offering 'talking therapies' or for general advice to The Mix (Freephone 0808 808 4994);
- A referral to Safe Base Brent offering both telephone and face to face therapy to care leavers
- A Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service consultation before turning 18 for social workers and PAs so that they can be better equipped to assist you in relation to your health and well-being;
- If you are a young parent, being referred to a local children's centre for help;
- We will, depending on assessment of need, provide assistance towards certain medical costs if they are not covered by the NHS. This particularly applies to young people with no recourse to public funds.
- All young people in custody are provided with resettlement and aftercare support.
- If you are assessed to have eligible needs under the Care Act 2014 because you have been diagnosed with ASD or Learning Disability an annual health check will be completed by your GP.

• **Finances**

We will provide you with support to become financially independent, in a similar way to how other parents support their own children.

The law and the guidance says:

- We can, depending on assessment of need, provide financial assistance towards expenses relating to education, employment or training and also access to other sources of funding such as college or university funds or from the Department for Works and Pensions.

Our additional support offer to you includes:

- Being exempt from paying Council Tax, only after you have maximised the council tax rebate because you are on a low income or receiving universal credit;
- Providing you with relevant money management courses;

- Information on how to access your Junior ISA, if you have one (a fund of money set aside by the government and the council);
- Support to open a bank account
- Support to apply for welfare benefits;
- Support to gain important identification documents, such as a passport, National Insurance number and/or provisional driving licence, before your 18th birthday;
- Signpost to relevant charities or organisations where you could obtain advice on immigration matters
- Financial support in exceptional emergencies based on an assessment undertaken by your PA.
- We will work together with CLIA to update the current leaving care guide in accordance to the feedback received from young people.

- **Relationships**

As well as support from a Personal Advisor, we will offer you additional practical support, such as:

- Signpost you to an advocacy service if you need one;
- If you have already had an 'independent visitor before the age of 18, continuing to support to maintain contact with your 'independent visitor'
- Help to maintain or regain contact with people special to you or who cared for you in the past, like former foster carers or social workers;
- Life skills workshops that will focus on practical skills and managing relationships;
- Group work for young parents regarding healthy relationships;
- Group work with former Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children regarding relationships to minimise risks of isolation;
- Workshops for care leavers with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities by Brent Outreach Autism Team regarding relationships;
- Support around relationship building with your family and/or support networks via our Networks for Life Coordinator who will work with you and your PAs.

- **Participation in Society**

We want our care leavers to be active members of society, and to have all the chances in life that other young adults have. We can help you participate in society in the following ways:

- Workshops to inform you more about participation in society and having your voice heard, led by the Chief Executive of the council.
- Encouraging and helping you to enrol on the Electoral Register, so you can vote in elections;
- Providing information on groups and clubs you may wish to join;
- Development of a website for care leavers and an app to support independent living arrangements;
- Seats on Brent Youth Parliament;
- Informing you about voluntary work that you may be interested in;
- Giving you advice and helping you to challenge any discrimination you face as a care leaver;

- You will have access to our Children and Young People's participation service called Care Leavers in Action (CLIA), where you can get involved in decision making on matters that have impact on children in care and care leavers or join an interview panel when recruiting senior staff and commissioned services to the council.
- Monthly Hub events which are organised by care leavers and personal advisors
- Weekly football practice for all care leavers in Brent.

3. Who can help?

As a care leaver, there is a range of support services available to you. We have put together a list of useful contact details. If there is anything you do not understand or need further information about then please speak to your PA.

Brent Leaving Care Team

Where to find the Leaving Care Team: Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley.
 When are we open: Monday to Friday 9 a.m. – 5.00 pm
 Duty Number 0208 379 4612 or 4613 during office hours, 24-hour emergency number 0208 863 5250

Independent Advocacy: You have a right to support from an independent advocate if you are thinking about challenging decisions about the care we give you. An advocate is someone who is independent of the council who can inform you of your rights and help you to be heard in meetings. For advocacy, we use an independent agency called Aidhour that provides advocacy services for looked after children and care leavers. To find out more you can contact the manager of this service, Goitom Mebrahtu, Goitom.Mebrahtu@brent.gov.uk or your personal adviser.

Brent Works: This is a no cost service providing job and apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers, across a range of sectors, including construction.

The service gives you:

- One-to-one advice and guidance towards finding work
- Opportunity to work with training providers to upskill and provide you for employment.

You can have a one-to-one consultation with an advisor which can be arranged through your personal advisor or you can contact Brent Works directly on 0208 937 6295.

Participation Service (Care Leavers in Action) – email: Samantha.Dottin @brent.gov.uk or Phone: 07867 139969

Safe Base Brent: Promotes Social, Emotional and Mental Health and Wellbeing Dr Verity Alexis is available on 0208 937 3063 or email: Verity.alexis@brent.gov.uk.


Brent Care Leavers Charter

Disabled Children and Young People Service Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley
 When we are open Monday to Friday 9 a.m. – 5.00 p.m.
 How to contact us Duty number

Other places you can go for help:

- Rees: The Care Leavers Foundation <https://www.reesfoundation.org> Provides small grants for care leavers aged 18-25;
- The care leavers association <http://www.careleavers.com> A charity aimed at improving the lives of care leavers;
- Become <http://www.becomecharity.org.uk> Online advice and information for care leavers;
- Propel <http://propel.org.uk/UK> Information on what support is available for care leavers at university;
- Shelter <https://england.shelter.org.uk> Provides housing advice;
- National government benefits calculator <https://www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators> Information on benefits;
- Citizens Advice Bureau <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk> Information about money, benefits, your rights, employment, housing and the law.

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 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 20 th July 2021
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People
Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 1: 1st April to 30th June 2021	

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

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).
- 1.2 This report details the activity of Brent's fostering service from 1st April – 30th June 2021.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1** The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review, comment on and question the contents of this report. This is to provide evidence that the management of the fostering service is being monitored and challenged in order to promote good outcomes for children.

3.0 Background

3.1 Service Priorities

The in-house fostering function is positioned within the LAC and Permanency Service (LACPS) of the Children and Young People's Department. Learning from our Covid-safe practice developed in the past year and constructive feedback from our foster carers, commitment has been given to developing the fostering service in the following priority areas:

- To re-introduce the use of recruitment drives that include an element of direct interface between the fostering teams and prospective foster carers as restrictions around social distancing ease, in line with government guidance
- To enhance the support offer to Brent's foster carers and kinship carers with a mixture of virtual and face-to-face contact in social work and peer support
- To develop the training and development programme for carers to include a permanent, ongoing mix of virtual and face to face courses and seminars
- To consider hybrid working a permanent feature of the fostering panel, with a mix of hearing cases virtually and in person dependent upon the complexity of the issues being considered
- To continue improving 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.

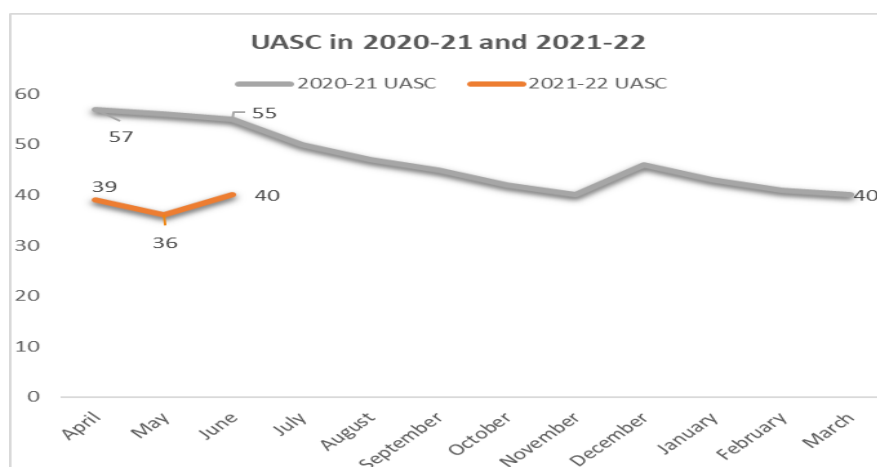
3.2 Staffing Arrangements

The Fostering Support and Assessment Teams consist of two team managers, 12 social work posts and one marketing and recruitment officer (MRO) post. The workload within the teams continues to grow as new kinship and foster carers are approved and need to be allocated for support when they care for children. All posts are filled with permanent members of staff.

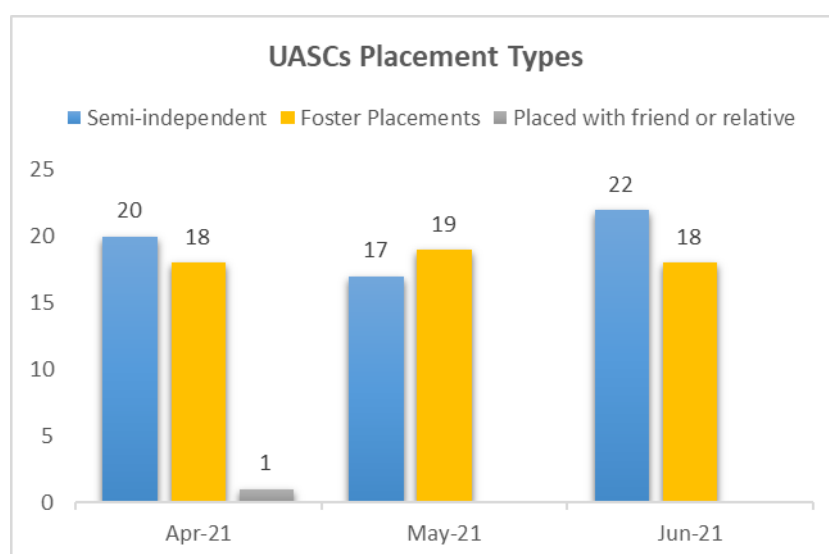
4.0 Placement Activity

- 4.1 The total number of looked after children as at 30th June 2021 was 297, which is an increase by 9 children from Q4 of 2020-2021 (288 children) and an increase by 5 children from the same period in 2020 (292 children).
- 4.2 The corporate performance targets for 2020/2021 were mostly retained as similar to the last year's targets as below:
- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 30th June 2021 was 19.9% (59 children), a decrease by 0.6% from the previous quarter Q4 of 2020-2021, 20.5% (59 children).
 - Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15% - the actual percentage as of 30th June 2021 was 13.5% (40 children), an increase by 0.3% Q4 of 2020-2021 (13.2%, 38 children). Brent's commitment to place children within their family and friends' network has continued.
 - Percentage of looked after children placed in independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 30th June 2021 was 31.6% (94 children); an increase by 2.4% from Q4 of 2020-2021 (29.2%, 84 children).
 - Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 70% - the actual percentage as of 30th June 2021 was 65% (193 children), an increase by 2.2% from Q4 of 2020-2021 (62.8%).
 - There were 50 looked after children in registered semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations) as at 30th June 2021, which represents 16.8% of all looked after children. This is an increase by 2.6% from the end of Q4, 2020-2021 (14.2%, 41 children).
- 4.3 As of 30th June 2021, there were 40 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), the same as at the end of Q4 of 2020-2021. The Covid-19 pandemic has seen a nationwide reduction in the number of UASC presenting for assistance from local authorities. However, Brent has been dealing with the impact of the Home Office placing a large number of adult asylum seekers in hotel accommodation in Wembley (two different hotels at the end of June) over the last 12 months. Brent received 21 referrals from the hotel residents with the claim to be under 18. Brent has taken an open-minded approach to deal with these referrals in line with an agreed Pan-London protocol. However, this surge in referrals has placed significant pressure on resources to ensure appropriate and effective assessment and legal liaison work takes place to ensure the best

decisions are made for this group of young people. It is anticipated that numbers of UASC in Brent's care will increase over the summer period



- 4.4 The number of UASC placed in semi-independent accommodation is 22, 2 more than at the end of Q1, 2020-21. No children are placed in residential children's homes and the same number of UASC are placed in foster placements as Q1 (18 UASCs).



5.0 Recruitment and Assessment

- 5.1 The efforts of Brent's Marketing and Recruitment Officer (MRO) continued to take place online during this reporting period. However, there has been a slight decrease in people making enquiries since the increase in spread of the Delta variant of Covid-19 and anxieties around this.

- 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 by prospective carers was for 'business as usual'. The monthly fostering information evenings took place online via Zoom, which attendees reportedly enjoyed, and found more convenient than having to travel to a venue to hear more about fostering. The consistent positive feedback has led to plans for these virtual events to continue post-pandemic.
- 5.3 During the reporting period, the MRO has created more content to go on the website and on social networks. The MRO produced two articles based on discussions with children in care about 'what makes a good foster carer'. One of the articles was shared on the Brent website and on social media and more posts will be scheduled to go out during the summer. The MRO also filmed an interview with a newly approved foster carer about the application and assessment process to be shared online.
- 5.4 The MRO continued to deliver the fostering newsletter to Brent residents who are interested in fostering. Six emails were sent during a period of six weeks educating people on aspects such as: finding the right fostering agency; the relationship between a foster carer and professionals; what being a foster carer entails; and the positive impact of fostering on people's lives and on the lives of local children. The average open rate for these emails was 20%, with an average click-through rate of 3.5% (this is lower compared to other emails but still higher than industry averages). In the current absence of the MRO (maternity leave), the above is currently being managed by supervising social workers whilst we recruit a temporary placement who holds the specialist knowledge essential for this role. The newsletters are being paused whilst recruitment is underway and only essential information shared.
- 5.5 The number of subscribers to the fostering newsletter has reached 3719 sign-ups. There are currently 295 Facebook followers and 272 pages likes. The Instagram page has 147 followers, the Twitter account 236 followers and the YouTube account 19 subscribers. These social media accounts allow for the MRO to share information quickly and keep individuals interested in Brent's fostering events.
- 5.6 Foster Care Fortnight, The Fostering Network's annual campaign to raise the profile of fostering and show how foster care transforms lives, took place 10th – 24th May 2021. The MRO received quotes and videos from foster carers about 'why they care' about local children, as per the central theme of the campaign. The MRO also produced a press release that went on the website to promote the

campaign. This offered a good opportunity to raise awareness about fostering and look at the motivation people have to foster.

5.7 The marketing activity produced 19 enquiries during this current period, which is a decrease in comparison to the last period but the quality of the enquiries is higher than pre-Covid in that the conversion rate from enquiry to initial visit is higher. 11 people attended the information evening and 6 initial visits took place during this reporting period, which is a slight increase from the previous period.

5.8 Of the 6 initial visits undertaken:

- 1 has yet to return their consent form so cannot proceed to stage 1 as yet;
- 3 resulted in the applicants being progressed to stage 1 of the assessment process; and
- 2 ended in a negative outcome due to not being suitable for health reasons and other wider family factors.

5.9 An applicant, who had previously withdrawn to consider their commitment to fostering has returned and is now being assessed in stage 1.

5.10 Of the 3 assessments reported in the last reporting period as being in stage 1, 2 remain in stage 1 and one has progressed to stage 2.

5.11 Of the 4 assessments reported as being in stage 2 (including those on hold) in the last quarter, one applicant is to be presented to the fostering panel on 9th July 2021. The other 3 remain on hold, 2 due to being affected by Covid-19 and 1 due to the applicant needing some support prior to presenting at the panel. This presentation has been rescheduled for September 2021 fostering panel.

5.12 In this reporting period, there are 11 assessments underway. Of these:

- 6 are in stage 1
- 5 are in stage 2

6.0 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 April – 30th June 2021, 5 panels were held with 21 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:
- 6 new ‘family and friends’ fostering households were recommended for approval;
 - 9 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
 - 1 fostering household was found suitable to continue after a serious concerns investigation;
 - the approval of 3 ‘family and friends’ were terminated – 2 due to the young person returning home and 1 due to the young person reaching the age of 18; and
 - 2 fostering households resigned from their fostering role for Brent – 1 due to health reasons and 1 as they realised they could not fulfil the fostering role.

There were 3 non-kinship foster carers due to be considered by the Fostering Panel in this quarter. However, 2 asked to be put on hold due to COVID-related anxiety and the 3rd applicant needed further support before transferring from the IFA to Brent.

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

7.0 Training and Support for Foster Carers

7.1 The Learning and Development Programme

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.

7.1.2 Eight courses were offered (all virtual) during the period under review, using Zoom:

- Roles and responsibilities of the professional network and working with birth parents – 9th April and 14th June
- Safeguarding and safer caring – 13th April
- Coercion and financial abuse: the impact on children 22nd April
- Domestic abuse – 22nd April
- Covid–19: the impact on placements, LAC and families – 4th May
- Serious case reviews – 14th May
- Emotional resilience – 7th June
- First aid – 22nd June

Carers comments about the sessions were mainly positive but they have mentioned that they are missing face-to-face interaction with their peers.

Comments on ‘the roles and responsibilities of the professional network and working with birth parents’:

“Knowing that there are many professionals who can continue the care, development and wellbeing of the child along with you and support us all the way... These topics it was nice to hear (about).”

Comments on ‘Safeguarding and Safer Caring’:

“The course helped me to understand the difference between Safeguarding and Child Protection.”

Comments on ‘Emotional Resilience Training’:

“It is a good reminder of all the areas one needs to think about when building up resilience in a young person and self-reflection was included.”

Comments on Covid – 19: the impact on placements, LAC and Families.

“This training made me realise I wasn’t alone in facing challenges.”

7.1.3 All carers have access to an online training package provided by an external provider, additional to the core learning and development offer. The online training courses offer a range of topics from ‘*children and domestic abuse*’ to specialist educational needs courses such as ‘*promoting the achievement of looked after children in education (for parents and carers)*’. 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 stayed consistent with carers regularly requesting the online training. Currently 60 carers have accounts with

the commissioned provider, with a view to having more signed up as the year progresses.

7.1.4 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.

7.1.5 Despite the Pandemic, Brent continues to meet the statutory duty to commission and facilitate learning events for foster carers. The expectation is that Brent foster carers partake in 4 learning events per year. The learning and development team engage foster carers with innovative ways of offering learning and development. The online courses include mandatory, core and specialist training modules, specifically designed for foster carers. Moving forward, the team intend to expand the variety of training courses through zoom. First Aid Training continues to remain a face-to-face session to allow carers to partake in the CPR exercises and other demonstrations integrated within the course.

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 feedback in Fostering Panel presentations and in their annual reviews. The Covid-19 Pandemic has affected the lives of all Brent's foster carers. The support offered to the carers has therefore never been more crucial or appreciated.

7.2.2 To keep foster carers engaged and informed, the fostering service rely on two main communication channels: email and mobile text messaging. Several one-off emails continue to go out every time the service has new important updates to share with the cohort of foster carers.

7.2.3 The monthly foster carers' support group continues to be facilitated virtually in response to the need to socially distance. Foster carers' feedback is 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.

7.2.4 The topics of the virtual support meetings in the reporting period covered a range of important issues for carers such as staying put allowances, savings of looked after children, opening bank accounts for UASCs, need to support some foster carers with IT equipment and general queries around support. In

May, a member of staff from the Commissioning and Resources team attended in response to carers concerns in April about payment of fostering allowances and 'Staying Put' allowances (support to foster carers who continue to care for their young person after the age of 18). An Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) attended the support group in June 2021. This was well received by the foster carers in attendance as the IRO spoke about processes pertaining to looked after children reviews and foster carer annual reviews.

8.0 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints

8.1 April

Booked reviews – 14 (3 were for couples)
Took place – 12
1 cancelled due court hearing on 9th April
1 rescheduled due to availability

May

Booked reviews – 9 (2 were for couples)
Took place – 8
1 cancelled due to Carer resignation

June

Booked reviews – 12 (4 were couples)
Took place - 11
1 rescheduled due to availability

Totals for April 2021 to June 2021:

Booked reviews – 35 (9 were couples)
Took place – 31
Cancelled/rescheduled - 4

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

9.0 New Developments

9.1 Update on Collaborative Fostering Project

This work continues between Ealing, Harrow and Brent, with Brent leading. Two work streams meet weekly (virtually), with an initial focus on sufficiency and placement stability. These meetings provide an opportunity for workers in marketing and recruitment to come together and share ideas and start working together. As part of the project, a social event to bring foster carers together is being planned for the end of the summer in a Brent park. Further updates will be provided to the Committee as this progresses.

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Report sign-off

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