



Corporate Parenting Committee

Wednesday 13 October 2021 at 5.00 pm

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

2 Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members	
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3 Declarations of interests	
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Members are invited to declare at this stage of the meeting, any relevant disclosable pecuniary, personal or prejudicial interests in the items on this agenda.

4 Deputations (if any)	
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To hear any deputations received from members of the public in accordance with Standing Order 67.

5 Minutes of the previous meeting	1 - 8
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To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record.

6 Matters arising (if any)	
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To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

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

8 Feedback from Looked After Children: Outcome of the Bright Spots "Your life, your care" survey 2020 9 - 14

To provide Brent Corporate Parenting Committee with information about the 'Your life, your care' survey, which was carried out with looked after children and young people in November/December 2020, and how the Council is responding to the results.

9 Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2020 - 2021 15 - 26

To provide Brent Corporate Parenting Committee with the Annual IRO report prepared by the Safeguarding and Review Service, in accordance with statutory requirements.

10 Support for Brent's Looked After Children and Care Leavers from Afghanistan 27 - 30

To provide Brent Corporate Parenting Committee with a summary of activity undertaken to support Brent's Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers who originate from Afghanistan.

11 Brent Virtual School Annual Report 31 - 46

To outline the activity of the Brent Virtual School (BVS) and the educational outcomes of Brent Council's Looked After Children (LAC) for the academic year 2019/20 and 2020/21.

12 Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Report, Quarter 2 (July 2021 - September 2021) 47 - 56

To provide Brent Corporate Parenting Committee with information about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children, in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011). The report covers activity from 1 July – 30 September 2021.

13 Six-Monthly Adoption Report (Quarter 1 and 2) 57 - 72

To provide Brent Corporate Parenting Committee with information on the activity and progress of Adopt London West for the period 1 April 2021 – 30 September 2021.

14 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 her representative before the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 60.

Date of the next meeting:

Wednesday 19 January 2022

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 current social distancing guidelines.
- Attendees will need to maintain the necessary social distancing 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/>

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MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE Tuesday 20 July 2021 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor M Patel (Chair) and Councillors Conneely, Gbajumo and Thakkar

Also Present: Councillor McLennan

1. Exclusion of the Press and Public

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

2. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

None.

3. Declarations of interests

None.

4. Deputations (if any)

None received.

5. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the last meeting held on 28 April 2021 be approved as an accurate record.

6. Matters arising (if any)

None.

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

C (Care Leavers in Action) advised that the Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) sessions were now in person on a socially distanced basis but with hybrid options, and expressed it was great to see everyone face to face again. The previous session had been focused on public speaking to practice for the care leaver inspection presentation to the Strategic Director of Children and Young People and councillors. The aim of the session was to help those with less experience of public speaking to do so more comfortably and fluidly. C expressed that the care leaver inspection CLIA members had been involved in was interesting to be a part of and all involved had done 2 months of training before undertaking the inspection. He added it felt that the group's comments had been taken on board well by senior members of staff and councillors and he was looking forward to seeing what the next steps would be.

S (Care Leavers in Action) had started attending CLIA sessions following the encouragement of another care leaver. S was also part of the care leaver inspection and felt they had done a really good job. The findings had been presented the previous day and a discussion was held about what had been put in place for future progress.

A (Care in Action) highlighted that at the last Care in Action (CIA) session they had spoken about the Brent Promise and consulted on what it should include. A was heavily involved in sport and had won many gold medals. A (Care in Action) felt the CIA sessions made her feel welcomed and warm. The first session she attended had focused on goals and how to reach them, which had made A nervous to talk about the future. A enjoyed attending the sessions to find friends in care and to give opinions and advice on how to improve the service for other children.

The Committee thanked the representatives for the updates, noting that a common theme from the speeches was how the children and young people had chosen to get involved in order to help other young people like themselves. It was RESOLVED:

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

8. Brent Care Journeys Programme – Year 1 Progress Update

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report, which was a joint report prepared by Brent Council and Barnardo's charity. Two colleagues from Barnardo's were also in attendance to present the report; Rajinder Nagra (Assistant Director Children's Services, Barnardo's London) and Anna Willow (Children's Services Manager, Barnardo's London). Onder Beter advised that the recommendations were set out in paragraph 2 of the report, which asked for comments on the content of the report, and for the Committee 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. The programme was a 5 year programme listening to children and young people, and bringing their voice into shaping services and creating system change so that children and young people could influence decisions and end up with better destinations. The definition of 'destination' was not just about being employed or attending school but was defined by young people around what would make them happy and fulfil their potential. For example, a care leaver may have a goal to be able to parent their child without the involvement of social workers for their child. In terms of the joint working with Brent and Barnardo's, several themes to work on had been identified. The major theme was around the challenge of young people coming into care late, as adolescents, and what could be done to create system change to ensure positive destinations for the cohort. A qualitative piece of work would be undertaken by young people who were designing 2 projects as detailed in the report. There was a group of 35 young people known as 'the Movement' who were supporting the work with participation, engagement, voice and influence. The Committee's attention was drawn to the case study at the end of the report which showed the impact of the programme on the lived experience of young people.

Anna Willow advised that a partnership between the statutory and voluntary sector would always be organic and there would be a need to learn as they went. The programme was not delivering pre-determined outcomes of what they thought was best for young people, but instead working with young people to create their best future with them. She advised that the programme aimed to work in equal partnership with young people, going into situations together. For example, the young people had co-designed training for key workers who worked in semi-independent provision, and that training had been delivered equally with young people and Barnardo's.

A young person who had been involved in the project shared their experience, expressing that the programme had helped them a lot and they had become the young person they wanted to be. They were now more confident and a better speaker. They joined to help other people and better themselves along the way. Another young person had been involved in the training designed and delivered to semi-independent providers. He advised that between 5 and 6 sessions had taken place to design the training and then two separate training sessions had been delivered to 12-13 providers for around 3-4 hours each session.

The Committee queried what the structure of the programme was. Anna Willow advised paragraph 4.4 explained what young people had defined it – ‘The Movement’. She advised that the projects within the programme would look like the movement of young people at the core, who had the ambition to drive youth led connections that sustained over time and built a legacy for people like them. She highlighted that the programme should be a co-designed space working with people who were the experts in that space as they had lived the issues they were serving. The projects that were being focused on were outlined in section 5.2 of the report. As the partnership thrived, the focus would evolve through phases. The starting point was research going through to design, which had now been done and so those projects had moved to the testing phase to see how the designs worked.

The Committee queried how quickly changes from engagement, feedback, design and testing of the current projects in the programme could be made. Onder Beter gave an example of the Quality Assurance Framework for semi-independent provision which the Committee spoke about at the last meeting. Brent Care Journeys had been involved in the work on that, through training of key workers, as well as now being a part of follow up visits and the Best Practice Forum. He felt this was an example of how the programme worked with young people to influence how the Council internally developed and how semi-independent provision could learn from that too. In addition, one care leaver had now been formally employed as a project worker as part of the semi-independent provision project. There was also an ambition to provide up to 10 young people some ‘as and when’ contracts so that their contributions could be financially incentivised. The Committee welcomed that recompense for the valued work young people provided. While the work of the programme was fluid and not necessarily quantifiable, officers felt that there were solid examples of impact.

In terms of engagement, the group had now delivered the prototypes of the welcome packs for people to give feedback on. Five young people had been given 2 weeks to try out the packs to see how they made them feel and what difference they made. The Committee queried who the welcome packs would be given to. Onder Beter confirmed that, for now, the packs were designed for 16-17 year olds going into semi-independent provision for the first time, as the expectation was that anyone going into a foster placement should have all items they needed available. The research for the project had showed there were variations in semi-independent provision and what providers made available for young people, particularly if their accommodation took place out of hours by emergency duty. The prototype pack had been designed to focus on the very practical elements of the first few nights of entering semi-independent provision. Within the pack were essential cooking items, toiletries, two sets of bedding, towels, a Deliveroo voucher, a £10 oyster card, a lock which was important for young people to feel safe, and the Brent local offer condensed to one page. Anna Willow highlighted the box was more than items, as it was also a gesture of welcome and the beginning of the relationship between a young person and a semi-independent provider. For that reason, a guide for a conversation between staff and the young person had also been provided including how to introduce yourself and what to do if something went wrong. Anna Willow highlighted that the design of the box gave hard evidence of how lived expertise mattered.

In relation to the two projects highlighted in the report (the welcome pack and the complaints process), the Committee queried whether these would be enshrined in the Quality Assurance Framework for semi-independent providers and form part of the monitoring process going

forward. Onder Beter confirmed that the aim was to do that and take the learning from the testing phase to enhance the Quality Assurance Framework. The ambition was to embed the projects into the Council's expectations of providers in their commissioning arrangements.

In relation to the financial impact of Covid-19 on the project, Anna Willow confirmed that the funding of the programme was from the Barnardo's project, which might increase if they could demonstrate that the programme was having an impact on the outcomes for children and young people. Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) added that during Covid-19 charity fundraising had significantly reduced and the fundraising events that might have led to significant donations were not able to take place, which had impacted these types of projects.

In searching for additional partners and engaging grassroots organisations, Anna Willow explained that the programme did not have additional resource, so they were looking at where they could bring additional resource in, together in partnership across the locality. She had explored several opportunities which had not come to fruition but would keep looking.

The Committee asked for further details about the bundles and food parcels provided to young people during the lockdown. Anna Willow explained that these had been donations from Barnardo's, and were very much about addressing someone's acute needs and building trust into a relationship. Onder Beter advised that the donations from Barnardo's to young people had been documented in the previous report to the Committee regarding support to care leavers during the pandemic.

The governance arrangements for the programme was a 6-monthly strategic steering group which included Gail Tolley, as the Strategic Director for Children and Young People, and the Programme Directors from Barnardo's, who provided support and challenge. The recommendation was for the Corporate Parenting Committee to receive an annual report about the progress of the programme, as well as an evaluation impact report.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

9. Brent Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2020 – 2021

The purpose of this report was 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).

The Committee heard that the number of children in care currently looked after by Brent Council was 298, and officers were expecting a slight increase as the country moved out of restrictions. The current number of care leavers being supported was 440 compared to 330 pre-pandemic, and cases had not been closed for young people struggling with isolation and loneliness even if normally those cases would have been closed. There had been a significant increase in the number of referrals and contacts to the Front Door with Covid-19 associated reasons. There was also an impact on young people waiting for decisions from the Home Office regarding their immigration status, as the Home Office had not made decisions. This meant young people had been left without clear status, therefore Brent was required to continue supporting those young people in semi-independent provision.

Onder Beter informed the Committee that, as discussed at a previous Committee meeting, the Home Office had placed a large number of adults seeking asylum within 3 different hotels in Brent, which had resulted in a number of those coming forward to claim to be under 18 years old and therefore classed as children. By law, if someone claimed to be under 18 years old

then as a local authority Brent would be expected to accommodate them, in some cases with any dispute about age needing to be assessed. Onder Beter explained this put a lot of pressure on capacity and they had received 27 referrals within the past 7-8 months from those seeking asylum claiming to be children. Some of those had been accommodated where the Council had agreed with their claimed age after initial screening or a full age assessment. Due to the financial implications, 2 locum lawyers had been recruited to assist the Council through potential judicial reviews, and there was agreement to recruit 2 additional social workers to conduct age assessments. When those who were judged to be children became looked after they were often 16-17 years old and therefore soon to become care leavers, and the Council had around 130 young people who they supported as care leavers who were former unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC).

The Committee queried the communications process between the Home Office and Council when those seeking asylum were placed in the Borough. Onder Beter confirmed that the Council were being told now, but when the first hotel had been commissioned they had not been informed. The Council now had weekly reports detailing all young people and families placed in the Borough, including children of families who would need school places. It was important to inform health colleagues also.

In terms of the Home Office policy, Nigel Chapman (Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes, Brent Council) explained the Home Office were trying to find space for adults and, due to the lack of tourism in Wembley during the pandemic, hotels had been available. He advised that there was pressure at entry points, giving the example of a big cohort of people arriving the previous day in Kent, so felt the Home Office's ability to make quick and accurate decisions was limited. Age assessment at the point of entry was crucial and there were not enough assessors in the country nationally. Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) added that the national transfer scheme was voluntary, but a significant number of local authorities were not participating. Brent were operating on a rota taking children through that system, and had dipped below the 0.07% nationally agreed as they did not take children directly due to the proportion of those individuals placed by the Home Office that would come forward to be classed as children that the Council had planned for. She added that Brent would soon be over the 0.07% agreed for under 18s and significantly over for care leavers.

In terms of the financial impact that the placement of asylum seekers was having, Onder Beter advised that the Home Office did not provide enough financial support to cover the costs. There was financial pressure on the placement budget for Looked After Children, and the 27 individuals recently assessed generated a large amount of work, meaning there was pressure on staffing and capacity, dealing with unplanned arrivals, legal issues and the logistics within the system. He highlighted that Brent had a very open minded approach and understood the trauma people seeking asylum would have experienced, which could sometimes make it more difficult to undertake an age assessment due to their needs. There was a need to ensure culturally sensitive practice, for example through the use of interpreters.

With regard to placement stability, the Committee noted the positive performance detailed in the report. As a Council, it felt that the department had done a large amount of work through the 3 lockdowns and made a lot of improvements, with placement stability one of them. The number of children who stayed in placements for over 2 and a half years had seen a significant improvement. The Committee highlighted other Boroughs had experienced some placement breakdowns so it was positive this had not been the case in Brent.

The Committee asked for further context to paragraph 5.1, which stated that the number of children becoming looked after through voluntary agreement with parents had decreased by 36% compared to the previous year. Nigel Chapman advised one particular reason for this was due to UASCs being accommodated under Section 20. He felt the figure also reflected

the approach the Council had taken to be more robust to actively seek care proceedings if it was felt a situation was not resolving where the Council had an agreement with the family. It also reflected the age of the care population.

The Committee raised paragraph 5.2 of the report to officers attention, asking if the statement meant that Brent were doing whatever it took, and paying whatever they could, to keep children in Brent, or whether Brent would need to place some young people out of Borough due to the lack of placement. They emphasised that the Council should not be being priced out of its own Borough. Onder Beter advised that the ambition was definitely to do the utmost to place children locally when it was in their best interest, but the Committee were right to highlight insufficient placements which would mean a proportion of children may not be able to remain local. This would be strongly connected to their complex needs and the risks involved. Officers agreed to look at the phrasing of the statement. Gail Tolley explained that a proportion of late entrants to care were gang related therefore children would be placed out of Borough for safety reasons, but there were children they would want to place in Brent who they could not. Officers would provide an update on this as a matter arising for the next Committee meeting.

The Committee queried the focus on finding a co-ordinator for CAMHS outside of Brent and why that had not also been a focus within Brent, which had a large waiting list. Onder Beter advised that the position for an out of Borough CAMHS co-ordinator was due to be filled 2 years ago and it had taken 2 years for the CCG to appoint to the position. He advised the Committee it had been valuable to have someone who was now doing hands on work for children where the Council had been concerned about their clinical need. Onder Beter agreed that assessments for LAC in Brent by CAMHS also needed to be prioritised, and assured the Committee local CAMHS was high on the agenda of the Brent Children's Trust and the Joint Commissioning Group meetings. Gail Tolley added that the topic of CAMHS was the substantive item on the Children's Trust agenda that day.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

10. Fostering Service Quarterly Report, Quarter 1 (April 2021 – June 2021)

The purpose of this report was to provide information to the Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it was achieving good outcomes for children, in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).

In relation to the Joint Fostering Project and Hounslow being interesting in re-joining, Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) explained that conversations were ongoing but it was not definite. The way the piece was being marketed focused on creating more local placements for children in West London, and a competitive package for foster carers in London who could take more challenging children.

The Committee were pleased there would be a hybrid option to provide sessions for foster carers, and asked for the next report to include a breakdown of sessions attended and the gender make-up of the sessions. Onder Beter agreed they had observed significantly more uptake in the online offer and would provide both online and in person training for the future, while taking government guidelines on Covid-19 into consideration.

The Committee highlighted section 7.2.1, which mentioned the effect Covid-19 had on the lived experience of Brent foster carers, asking what type of effect it had. Onder Beter advised that the primarily it was a negative impact, for example residents had lost loved ones due to Covid-19, some had Covid-19 themselves, and some had looked after children with Covid-19. The reason it had been included in the report was to highlight that Brent had been responsive to those experiences and supported foster carers accordingly. He reassured the Committee that they were acutely aware of the need to support foster carers. A number of foster carers had increased anxiety, particularly around social workers and professionals entering homes, and the Council were thinking about how they could best support foster carers through that anxiety including making testing mandatory for professionals entering homes or having had both Covid-19 vaccinations. The Committee noted that foster carers had been very resilient and committed during the pandemic.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the contents of the report.


11. Any other urgent business

The Committee queried where Brent Council was at with the EU resettlement scheme. Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) confirmed Brent had done well and received corporate financial support to recruit a part time worker on the issue. The department were communicating with families, children and care leavers. By the deadline of 30 June 2021 Brent had made applications for all Looked After Children, which the Strategic Director Children and Young People, Chief Executive and Lead Member had sight of. The Council were also clear about the process for new children coming into the system and were in regular communications with the Home Office Vulnerability Team. They had also linked with 8 care leavers whose cases had been closed as the Council saw they would usually be eligible, to check they had made applications.

The meeting closed at 18:51 pm

COUNCILLOR MILI PATEL
Chair

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	Corporate Parenting Committee 13 October 2021
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services
Feedback from Looked After Children: Outcome of the Bright Spots "Your life, your care" survey 2020	

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

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The Bright Spots "Your life, your care" survey was carried out with looked after children and young people in November/December 2020. The results of the survey were made available in April 2021. The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the survey and how the Council is responding to the results.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

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

I like the people who look after me but I would rather be at home with my brother and Mummy. I would like more toys to play with in my home and my room is too big – that's why I don't like it. I miss my Mummy a lot.

To be honest my carer has provided me with more than I need. (11-18 years cohort)

3.0 Background to “Your life, your care” survey 2020

- 3.1 “Your life, your care” is a well-being survey for looked after children. It builds on a similar survey completed in 2018. The survey was developed with looked after children by Coram Voice and The University of Oxford. Since 2016, a total of 56 local authorities have taken part in this survey, resulting in over 15,000 responses. This survey helps Brent Council have a deeper understanding of how Brent looked after children experience care. Where possible, Brent’s results have been compared with responses of children looked after by other local authorities and with data cited by Coram Voice regarding the wider, general population from other national and international published sources.
- 3.2 The aim of the survey is to hear from looked after children about their well-being, to improve their care experience and to highlight the ‘Bright Spots’ of practice that contribute to looked after children doing well. Brent has been working in partnership with Coram Voice to ensure looked after children are involved in and benefit from this survey.
- 3.3 The areas of focus in the survey were:
- Well-being
 - Resilience
 - Rights
 - Relationships
 - Recovery

4.0 Summary of key messages from the “Your life, your care” survey 2020

- 4.1 The survey was completed by looked after children online, coordinated by the Brent CYP Quality Assurance and Learning and Development Team. The survey took place in November and December 2020 and results were made available to Brent Council in April 2021. The eligible participation cohort of looked after children aged 4 to 18 years old was 261. Of that number, 95 children and young people responded to the survey, which is a response rate of 36%.
- 4.2 A total of 11 of the respondents were aged between 4 and 7 years (69% of their age cohort), 27 of the respondents were aged 8 to 11 (59% of their age cohort) and 57 of the respondents were aged 12 to 18 years (29% of their age cohort). 54% of respondents were male and 46% were female. The ethnic background of respondents was 34% Black, 21% White, 17% mixed, 13% Asian and 15% other. Direct feedback from children is included in this report.

I would like more opportunities to do different activities. (11-18 years cohort)

*I wouldn't change anything
because I'm happy with the
way things are now.
(11-18 years cohort)*

4.3.1 What children and young people said has gone well:

- Looked after children in Brent are more likely than children in the general population to report that they 'always' felt safe where they were living – 92% overall compared to 75% of children in the general population (data from the “Children’s Worlds Survey” cited by Coram Voice).
- Having a trusted adult has been shown to be the main factor in helping children recover from traumatic events. Nearly all Brent respondents aged 4-18 years trusted the adults they lived with. 100% of children aged 4-7 years, 96% of children aged 8-11 years and 95% of young people aged 11-18 years said they trusted their carers.
- Most Brent looked after children aged 8-18 years had a trusted adult in their lives. 96% of children aged 8-11 years and 91% of young people aged 11-18 said that they had a trusted adult in their lives.
- 94% of Brent looked after children aged 4-18 years knew who their social worker was compared to 91% of children looked after by other LAs. 100% of Brent children aged 4-7 years, 96% of Brent children aged 8-11 years and 89% of Brent young people aged 11-18 years said they trusted their social worker. 80% of Brent children aged 8-11 years and 100% of Brent young people aged 11-18 years knew they could speak to their social worker on their own.
- 40% of Brent young people aged 11-18 reported that they had one social worker in the past 12 months, compared to 16% reporting they had one social worker in the past 12 months in the last survey in 2018. 92% of Brent looked after children aged 4-18 reported that their social worker was easy to contact, compared to 80% in 2018.
- Of the cohort of Brent looked after children aged 11-18 years, 88% liked school or college ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’. This is higher than the response of children looked after by other LAs (78%) and data cited by Coram voice regarding the general population from the “Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey” 2015 (80%).

- 100% of 8-11 year olds and 95% of 11-18 year olds reported that the adults they lived with showed an interest in their education. This was a comparable response to young people aged 11-18 years looked after by other local authorities (96%) and is higher than data cited by Coram Voice from the “Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey” 2015 regarding the general population of 11-15 year olds (90%).
- The percentage of Brent looked after children who reported being scared of bullying has decreased compared to the 2018 survey. Although a lower percentage of Brent young people aged 11-18 years (14%) reported that they were afraid to go to school because of bullying, bullying was still an issue for one in 10 Brent young people. The majority of these Brent young people (88%) reported that they felt they were getting support with bullying.
- Studies have shown that poor body image is associated with low self-esteem, depression and self-harm. 80% of Brent looked after children aged 11-18 years reported that they are happy with appearance compared to 51% of Brent looked after children who responded to the 2018 survey and 64% of children looked after by other LAs who responded to the current survey. 4% of Brent young people had a low score identifying unhappiness with their appearance. This was a lower percentage than reported by young people looked after by other LAs (15%) and children in the general population, (10%: data cited by Coram Voice from the Children’s Society 2019).
- 4% of Brent looked after children aged 11-18 years reported that they had been embarrassed by adults for being in care, compared to 7% of Brent looked after children in 2018 and 12% of children looked after by other LAs.
- When asked if children and young people were happy yesterday, 91% of Brent looked after children aged 4-7 said yes (compared to 83% of Brent looked after children in 2018), 74% of 8-11 year olds said yes (compared to 67% in 2018) and 76% of 11-18 year olds said yes (compared to 48% in 2018).

*My social worker
[name] is amazing!
(11-18 years
cohort)*

*It helps me with my
work. I am supported
with school and other
parts of my life.
(8-11 years cohort)*

4.4 What children and young people said needs to improve:

- 74% of Brent looked after children reported feeling settled all or most of the time. This is lower than children looked after by other LAs (96%).

The survey asks about pets as children and young people said they are important in focus groups. In Brent, 41% of 8-11 year olds and 31% of 11-18 year olds had a pet. This is lower than children looked after by other LAs (72% and 59%).

- For Brent 11 to 18 year olds, 60% spoke to adults they live with about things that mattered to them. This is lower than children looked after by other LAs (70%).
- A looked after child knowing their personal history and having an understanding of the reasons that led to them becoming looked after has been shown to help children recover from abuse and neglect. When asked if an adult had explained why they were in care, only 18% of Brent looked after children aged 4-7 said yes (compared to 83% in 2018 and 51% of children looked after by other LAs). 70% of Brent looked after children aged 8-11 said yes (compared to 83% in 2018 and 67% of children looked after by other LAs) and 72% of Brent looked after children aged 11-18 said yes (compared to 79% in 2018 and 82% of children looked after by other LAs).
- Overall, responses showed that Brent looked after children wanted more family time. For 8 to 18 year olds, 20% said they had too little contact with their mother. 50% of 8-11 year olds and 25% of 11-18 year olds said the contact with their mother was “just right”. 35% of 8-11 year olds and 60% of 11-18 year olds had no contact with their father.

They don't ask me much about going home. I want to know more about what is going on.
(11-18 years cohort)

I would like to see them more, particularly my brother. (8-11 years cohort)

I just want to go home. (11-18 years cohort)

5. Brent's planned response the 'Your life, your care' survey 2020

5.1 The detailed report from Coram Voice and The University of Oxford provides rich material to help us to continue to improve services for looked after children based on their lived experiences. Activity based on the findings of the survey include:


- **Junior Care in Action:** Junior Care in Action reviewed the findings of the Bright Spot Survey on 18 September 2021 to better understand the views of their peers. Most of the young people remembered doing the survey and had suggestions to get more people involved in the future. JCIA reflected that they wanted to explore the topic of bullying. They discussed that bullying is real and happens, and it takes place more and more on social media. JCIA suggested support groups for children and offering self-defence classes to improve confidence in dealing with bullying. JCIA said that they want social workers and foster carers to develop their skills in understanding bullying and talking to children about this.
- **Care in Acton (CIA):** The initial results of the survey were introduced to CIA at a residential trip in August and further explored on 14 September 2021. Care in Action members were interested in children and young people's views around feeling settled in placements and time with their family.
 - To feel settled in their placement, young people were interested in the idea of having a pet. Young people said that a pet provides support and comfort. They thought it would be a good idea for young people to have a pet that moved with them when they moved placement. They also thought hobbies are a good way for young people to feel settled and that these should be promoted.
 - Regarding time with families, CIA members said that Brent should advocate for family time without supervision. They suggested doing checks with family members so they could oversee contact. Some feedback was that they sometimes feel forced to have contact with family and that social workers should talk to them about what to do if they don't want to attend contact.
- **Local Partnership Meeting with Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers:** The results were considered at the Local Partnership Meeting with LAC and Care Leavers in June 2021. A follow up workshop across CYP services on 11 August 2021 was held to discuss the survey results, celebrate good practice and consider development areas. An action plan has been developed focussed on: 1) children understanding why they are in care 2) children feeling settled in placements and 3) time with birth families (contact arrangements).

The action plan incorporates views by JCIA and CIA and is owned and driven by the Local Partnership Meeting with LAC and Care Leavers, chaired by Onder Beter, Head of LAC and Permanency.

Report sign-off:

Gail Tolley

Strategic Director Children and Young People

 <p>Brent</p>	<p align="center">Corporate Parenting Committee</p> <p align="center">13th October 2021</p> <hr/> <p>Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</p>
<p>Brent Council Children and Young People Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report</p> <p>Period of review: 1st April 2020 to 31 March 2021</p>	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Sonya Kalyniak Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Sonya.Kalyniak@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Sandra Cornwall Interim Service Manager, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Sandra.Cornwall@brent.gov.uk</p>

The Annual IRO Report is prepared by the Safeguarding and Review service in accordance with the statutory requirements to inform the Corporate Parenting Committee and senior leaders regarding the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) on quality assuring and improving services for Looked After Children (LAC).

1. Profile of the Safeguarding and Reviewing Team

The Safeguarding and Reviewing Team consists of:

- An experienced interim service manager
- Two full time IROs and five Child Protection Advisors
- One LADO
- One Contextual Safeguarding Lead
- The remainder of the 12 IRO staff are commissioned through Aidhour, an independent agency

Aidhour are commissioned to perform IRO duties. All are experienced qualified social workers. All the IROs are Disclosure and Barring Service checked and Social Work England Registered. Many of the IROs have been undertaking IRO duties for a number of years and know their children well. In some instances, the IROs have been the most consistent and trusted person in the child's life.

Aidhour are commissioned to provide IROs until October 2023 where the contractual arrangements will be reviewed.

There are a total of 14 IROs in Brent. There is an equal representation of male and female IROs (7 males and 7 females). However, the ethnicity of the IROs does not reflect the diverse population of our looked after children. Overall the high level of retention of IROs has led to continuity of IRO input for many of our Looked After Children.

Table 1: IRO Ethnicity

IRO Ethnicity	Number
White	10
Mixed	1
Asian or Asian British	1
Black or Black British	2

Foot note: Black or Black British includes Black Caribbean, Black African, Black Angolan, Black, Congolese, Black Ghanaian, Black Nigerian, Black Sierra Leonean, Black Somali, Black Sudanese, Black European, Black North American and Any other Black background.

White includes White –British, White-Cornish, White-English, White-Scottish, White-Welsh, White-Irish, Traveller of Iris heritage, Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, Greek, Italian, Kosovan, Portuguese, White Eastern European, White Western European, Gpsy/Roma, Turkish, Serbian, any other white background

Mixed includes White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Pakistani, White and Indian, Asian and any Black, Asian and Chinese, Black and Chinese, Chinese and any other ethnic group, White and Chinese, Any other mixed background)

Asian or Asian British includes (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, African Asian, Nepali, Sri Lankan, Any other Asian background)

2. Legal context and Purpose of the Service

The Independent Reviewing Service has been a statutory requirement since 2004. In 2010 the government published the 'Independent Reviewing Officer's Handbook', which is statutory guidance for IROs and local authorities. This was implemented in April 2011 and was linked to the revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance (2010). The responsibilities of the IRO have been broadened to include not only the management of the review process but a wider overview of the case, including regular monitoring and follow up between reviews.

The statutory duties of the IRO [section 25B (1), 1989 Act] are to:

- monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's case;
- participate in any review of the child's case;
- ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority; and
- perform any other function which is prescribed in regulations.

The core tasks of the IRO include:

- Ensuring the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child. As corporate parents, each local authority should act for the children they look after as a responsible and conscientious parent would act.
- Monitoring the performance of the local authority's function as a corporate parent and to identify any areas of poor practice. This should include identifying patterns of concern. Where IROs identify more general concerns around the quality of the authority's services to its looked after children, the IRO should alert senior managers. Equally important, the IRO should recognise and report on good practice

Update on last year's priorities (for 2019/20)

- 1. IROs to provide additional scrutiny in the transition plan for children with SEND, including proactive review of the Education Health and Care Plan and incorporating this into the Care Plan and Pathway Plan.**

IROs ensured additional scrutiny took place in this area and provided appropriate support and advice.

2. IROs to promote Care in Action and Junior Care in Action and the Brent advocacy offer at every review.

IROs have ensured they promote these services at every review and have encouraged attendance.

3. IROs to monitor completion of reports and distribution of LAC Reviews and where this is not happening in a timely manner, escalate to the appropriate Service Manager.

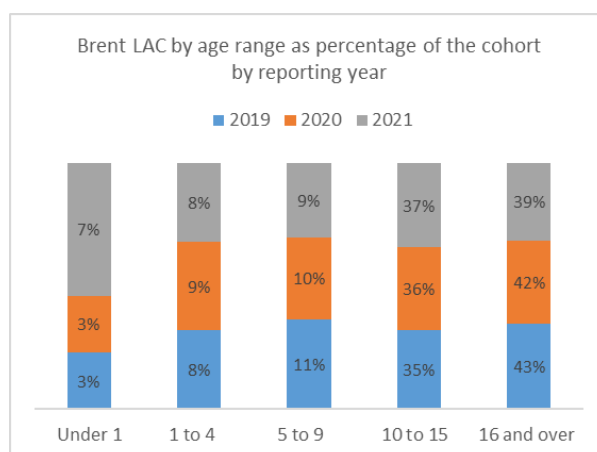
IROs have been actively raising escalations to the appropriate managers to ensure timely practice.

3. Profile of Brent's Looked After Children

As of 31st March 2021, Brent had 288 Looked After Children, a decrease of 11 in comparison to March 2020 when the LAC population was 299. This figure is lower than Brent's statistical neighbours and England in March 2020.

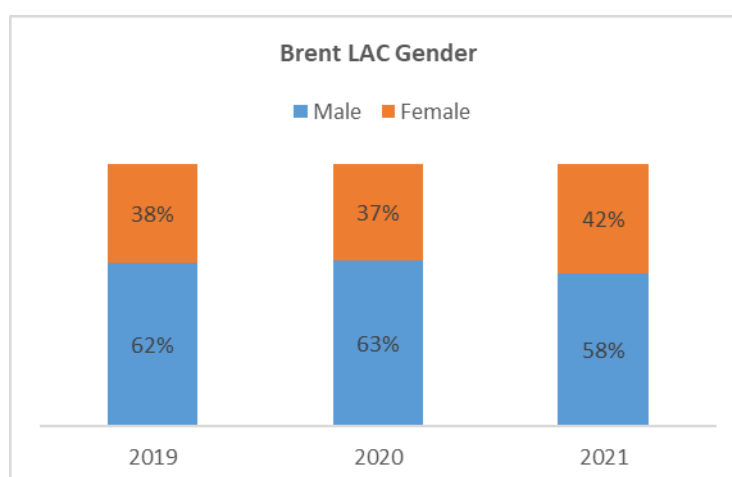
In March 2021, 64% of LAC were aged over 13 years old compared to 65% in March 2020 and 39% were aged 16-18, compared to 42% in March 2020. This age profile is partially linked to external factors, such as the number of young people entering the UK as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).

Table 2: Brent LAC by age range



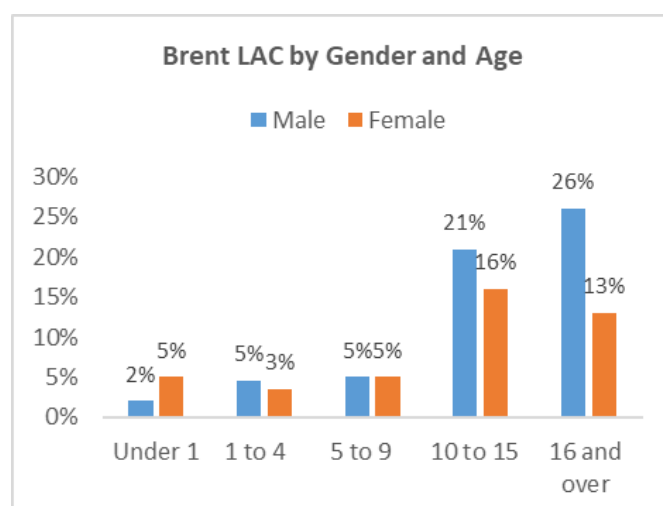
As of 31st March 2021, 58% of Brent LAC were male, fewer by 5% from March 2020 and 42% female, an increase by 5% from March 2020. Gender disproportionality is more marked with older children who have become looked after, which may relate to the number of UASC who are predominantly male.

Table 3 Brent LAC by gender



A breakdown of Brent Looked After Children gender and age in March 2021 is below.

Table 4 Brent LAC by Gender and Age



The ethnic profile of Brent Looked After Children has changed over the past 3 years. The percentage of White children has decreased from 22% in March 2019 to 19% in March 2020 and March 2021. The percentage of Black or Black British children increased by 4% to 33% in March 2021 compared to 29% in March 2020. The percentage of LAC with an ethnicity categorisation of “other ethnic groups” has decreased.

The total Brent children and young people population has increased to 77,687 according to the ONS 2019 mid-year population estimates. During the last national census in 2011, 31.8% the proportion of the young people population in Brent was Asian or Asian British, 25.7% was Black or Black British, 25.2%; White, 9% Mixed/ Multiple and 8.3% other Ethnic group. There is an over representation of children in care from a Black and Black British and White ethnicity and an under-representation of LAC for an Asian or Asian British ethnicity.

Table 5 Ethnicity of LAC

Ethnicity	Brent			Previous Statistical Neighbours		Current Statistical Neighbours		England	
	Mar-19	Mar-20	Mar-21	Mar-19	Mar-20	Mar-19	Mar-20	Mar-19	Mar-20
% White	22	19	19	36	35	38	37	74	74
% Mixed	18	18	22	18	17	18	17	10	10
% Asian or Asian British	c	15	12	10	12	12	15	4	4
% Black or Black British	33	29	33	31	31	26	27	8	7
% Other ethnic groups	15	19	14	5	8	6	10	4	4

Foot note: White includes (White –British, White-Cornish, White-English, White-Scottish, White-Welsh, White-Irish, Traveller of Iris heritage, Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, Greek, Italian, Kosovan, Portuguese, White Eastern European, White Western European, Gpsy/Roma, Turkish, Serbian, any other white background)

Mixed includes (White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Pakistani, White and Indian, Asian and any Black, Asian and Chinese, Black and Chinese, Chinese and any other ethnic group, White and Chinese, Any other mixed background)

Asian or Asian British includes (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, African Asian, Nepali, Sri Lankan, Any other Asian background)

Black or Black British includes (Black Caribbean, Black African, Black Angolan, Black, Congolese, Black Ghanaian, Black Nigerian, Black Sierra Leonean, Black Somali, Black Sudanese, Black European, Black North American and Any other Black background.

Any other ethnic group includes (Afghan, Arab, Egyptian, Filipino, Iranian, Iraqi, Japanese, Korean, Kurdish, Latin American, Libyan, Lebanese, Malay, Moroccan, Polynesian, Thai, Vietnamese, Yemeni, Refused, Information not yet obtained)

4. Quality assurance and monitoring

Caseloads for full IROs are between 60 to 65 children in accordance with national guidance and Ofsted recommendations. Social work staff value the expertise and knowledge of the IRO in the field of Looked After Children. IROs are utilised to offer guidance on care planning. IROs complete midway reviews and liaise with the child's Guardian where appropriate in court proceedings as well as other professionals as and when required.

The interim Service Manager oversees the work of Aidhour IROs through group supervision, quarterly contract monitoring meetings, audits and direct observations. Group supervision takes place once every two months and contract meetings take place once a quarter. These meetings are also used as a forum of communication for IROs to raise any issues they may have with senior leaders. Invitations for internal staff and external professionals include:

- The Strategic Director of Children and Young People
- The Head of LAC and Permanency
- The Head of the Virtual School
- Service managers in LAC and Permanency, including those responsible for Leaving Care, Fostering and Adoption and the service manager for Children with Disabilities
- Brent YOS
- Brent CYP Commissioning and Resources Team
- the London wide Rescue and Response Service
- Barnardo's
- CAFCASS

IROs, both in-house and Aidhour, receive bi-monthly group supervision following the Signs of Safety approach. These sessions are used to give IROs time to reflect on practice, highlight areas of good practice, raise any issues with managers and receive feedback on audit themes and outcomes.

The interim Service Manager is a member of the LAC tracking panel and entry into care panel. Through the LAC tracking panel, audits are undertaken to focus on areas such as:

- Pathway Planning
- Personal Educational Plans
- Permanency planning
- Education and health outcomes
- Visits
- Quality of LAC review minutes

IROs continue to foster good working relationships with social work teams and work closely with Child Protection Advisors. This has assisted both IROs and Child Protection Advisors to respond to the needs of children and young people who become looked after following a period of being subject to a Child Protection Plan, in a timely manner. Child Protection Advisors are invited to the initial LAC review of any child who becomes LAC after a period of being subject to CP plan with a view of contributing to robust care planning across the professional networks.

The interim Service Manager attends London IRO Managers and West London Children's Guardians Meeting. These meetings look at local and national issues affecting Looked After Children as well as highlighting any learning that can be taken forward. IROs continue to have a good working relationship with Children's Guardians within West London Children and the Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS).

The annual meeting between the Strategic Director, Children and Young People and IROs took place on 12/01/21. IROs were updated on the continued drive to increase the number of permanent staff and the Department's strategic priorities. The Strategic Director confirmed that no issues had been escalated to her in the past year and IROs were encouraged to escalate any unresolved issues if necessary.

Thematic audit activity has highlighted the quality of the minutes to be good. Surveys have also highlighted how IROs conduct reviews is good. The IRO "foot print" on children's files is evident through mid-way reviews and other activities such as escalations. This continues to be an area of focus for the Safeguarding and Reviewing service.

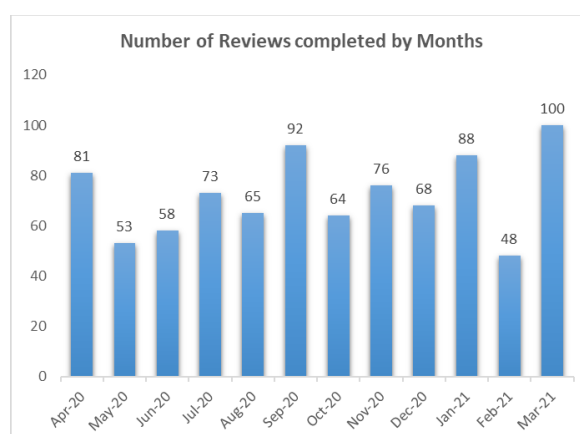
The IRO response to the Covid-19 pandemic continues to be child focused. Although the majority of LAC Reviews were virtual meetings, they quickly moved to a hybrid format when assessed as safe to do so. This enabled the IRO to visit the home and see the child/ young person to conduct the reviews with the child and carer present, with professionals attending virtually. Children continue to feedback they like the way the reviews are working. There has been an increase in participation at LAC Reviews. In the last 12 months this way of working has been adopted well by children and professionals.

5. Performance of the IRO service

Performance summary:

- A total of 866 reviews were chaired by IROs in 2020/2021, 9 reviews more than 2019-2020 (857 reviews).
- The vast majority of children and young people aged over 4 years (508 reviews) attended their review and spoke for themselves.
- On average there were 72 reviews chaired each month with peaks of 92 in Sept-2020 and 88 in January 2021. Less busy months were February 2021 (48 reviews) and May 2020 (53 reviews). This variation is largely due to availability of children and young people, professionals, carers and family members in lockdown and holiday periods.

Table 6 Number of reviews per month



Overall, 97% of Reviews in 2020/21 were held within the statutory timescales.

6. Attendance and Participation of children

It is always preferable that children attend their review meetings and give their views. However, there are some children with additional needs and children who have suffered trauma which may impact on their behaviour who therefore may not be able to participate

fully at their review meeting. Children and young people are allowed to say how and who should attend their review. The service has actively sought out best practice examples to improve participation of children and young people.

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

Table 7: Participation types

Type of participation	Number of Reviews in 2019-20	% of Reviews in 2019-20	Number of Reviews in 2020-21	% of Reviews in 2020-21
Child physically attends and conveys verbally	559	65.23%	508	58.66%
Child does not attend but is represented	45	5.25%	75	8.66%
Child aged under four	100	11.67%	125	14.43%
Child does not attend but conveys through medium such as an advocate	128	14.94%	134	15.47%
Child does not attend and is not represented	17	1.98%	18	2.08%
Child attends but does not convey and is not represented	6	0.70%	2	0.23%

Child attends and is represented	2	0.23%	4	0.46%
Child attends and conveys symbolically	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Total	857	100%	866	100.00%

The majority of children and young people aged over four years (508 or 58.66% of reviews) attended their review and spoke for themselves.

Children's participation continues to be a strong focus of IROs and the social workers to ensure that the child's voice is heard and that reviews are held at a time and place to facilitate the greatest opportunity for attendance.

7. Advocacy

IROs routinely check that children and young people know about advocacy and how it can support them in having a say in decisions affecting their lives. As part of the initial LAC review children and young people are given information on Brent's advocacy and complaint service by their IRO.

From April 2021 all advocacy for Looked After Children and Care Leavers is provided by Coram Voice.

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

- Support required in the choice, type and location of placement
- Young people not happy with their proposed care plan
- Support required against a decision of age assessment for UASC
- Contact with family members, particularly children wanting an increase in contact

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

8. Quality of Care Planning and progress between reviews

The IROs' main responsibility is to monitor the quality of care plans. IROs report that most children have a child friendly care plan, written in a clear and coherent manner. Children and young people are supported to contribute to their care plan. Children and young people receive their own copy of their care plans.

The role of the IROs is to monitor progress on permanency and care plans through a mid-way review conducted by meeting with the social worker. This is either by a Teams call or meeting. All Looked After Children receive a child friendly leaflet entitled 'My Independent Reviewing Officer' at their initial review. The leaflet

contains their IRO's name, contact number and email address. Children often contact their IROs directly to discuss issues worrying them.

IROs also ensure young people have a Pathway Plan. They will ensure it is provided in a timely way and will escalate concerns if this is not in place. This includes promotion of Housing Vulnerability reports and encouraging an exploration of Staying Put arrangements.

When children subject of a Child Protection Plan become looked after, IROs work closely with Child Protection Advisors to bring forward the Child Protection Conference and avoid dual plans.

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

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

In 2020/21 97.9% of Looked After Children over the age of four communicated their views, wishes and feelings at their reviews. This has been attained by different mediums:

- Through their attendance,
- Through correspondence or completing a consultation form,
- By briefing an advocate, or through discussion with the IRO.

IROs have reported young people contact them between reviews by email or phone to share information or request support. IROs support children to chair or co-chair their review meetings if they wish to do so.

10. Escalations and Practice Alerts

One of the key functions of the statutory role of the IRO is to seek resolution to any problem or disagreement arising out the care planning process. It is a core part of their role to scrutinise practice and challenge the Local Authority and hold them to account in relation to achieving good and timely outcomes for children. To do this, IROs must establish good working relationships with social workers and their managers in order to be able to effect a good dispute resolution process and with good support of this process by senior managers. Alongside this responsibility, IROs in Brent also have a role in identifying good practice so learning from what works well for children and young people can also be understood and replicated.

The IRO Handbook, legislation and guidance around the planning for Cared for Children requires Local Authorities to ensure they have a good Formal Dispute Resolution in place. Whilst this may look different in each local authority all systems must have a 20-day maximum time limit to resolve any disagreement from the beginning of the process to its conclusion. In Brent this commences with an Informal

Practice Alert being raised by the IRO with resolution at this level within 5 working days with the Team Manager. If this is not achieved, then the IRO will escalate to a Formal alert allowing a further 10 days to reach resolution with a Senior Manager. If there were still no agreement after 15 days, then the IRO may escalate concern to CAFCASS.

Escalation have risen this year compare to last year. In 2020/21 there were 49 escalations initiated by IROs compared to 32 escalations in 2019/20.

The overall issues raised in escalations include the following areas:

- Delay in progressing care plan
- Delay in the completion of Personal Education Plans
- Delay in Placement Planning Meetings
- Delay in Health assessments
- Contact with siblings and wider family members.

The escalation process provides an avenue to resolving issues in the vast majority of cases. In some instances differences of opinion are acknowledged. Senior management oversight ensures clear Local Authority decision making in the best interests of the child. There have been no escalations to the Strategic Director.

11. Priorities for 2021/2022


Priorities to improve the IRO service for 2021/22 are as follows:

1. Formalising a hybrid model of working for the future in consultation with children and young people.
2. Reviewing consistency of IRO practice across LA employed and commissioned IROs.
3. Auditing how escalations are tracked to ensure these make a difference to children.
4. Driving Pathway Planning from the age of 16 and escalating when this is not in place.
5. Driving high quality LAC reports that are shared with families and partners in a timely way.

Report sign off:

Gail Tolley

Strategic Director Children and Young People

 Brent	<p align="center">Corporate Parenting Committee</p> <p align="center">13th October 2021</p> <p align="center">Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</p>
<p>Support for Brent's Looked After Children and Care Leavers from Afghanistan</p>	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Onder Beter Head of Service, Looked After Children and Permanency Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Brent Onder.beter@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Brent 020 8937 4091 Nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk</p>

1 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of activity undertaken to support Brent's looked after children and care leavers who originate from Afghanistan.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Committee review and provide comments on the contents of this report.

3 Context

- 3.1 Recent developments in Afghanistan has changed the political regime and societal context in the country. Brent has a large population of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and also those who are former UASC, currently supported as care leavers. Out of both UASC and former UASC population, Brent currently supports 21 Afghani looked after children and 53 care leavers.
- 3.2 Following the developments in Afghanistan, all social workers (SWs) and personal advisers (PAs) contacted Afghani children and young people on their caseloads to check in and assess their welfare. Additionally, a targeted meeting with all PAs and managers was held to discuss the issue. It became apparent that many were worried and anxious about their families and loved ones who remained in Afghanistan.

4 Support available for Looked After Children and Care Leavers in Brent

- 4.1 The main source of support for the children and young people has been their networks including immediate or distant relatives and friends. SWs and PAs have been in touch with young people, explored peer support as well as specific support for each individual depending on level of need. Details of available services for Afghani young people have been shared on the Care Leavers' WhatsApp group.
- 4.2 Social Work and Leaving Care Teams have explored mental health and emotional wellbeing services such as Safe Base Brent (therapeutic consultation for Brent care leavers), WEST (Anna Freud Centre, commissioned by Brent) and 'Kooth', online counselling. Some young people have taken up a counselling offer and PAs made relevant referrals. Additionally, voluntary organisations or relevant charities have also been contacted such as Young Roots who offer some emotional support to young people.
- 4.3 A multi-agency meeting, held on 26th August 2021, between Brent officers, health care partners, community and voluntary groups explored options to


support Afghani children and families. As a result of this meeting a list of community groups and organisations able to provide support to Afghani communities in Brent was shared with Afghani looked after children and young people known to Brent LAC and Leaving Care Teams. The list included a number of agencies such as the Afghan Islamic and Cultural Centre and Afghanistan and Central Asian Association.

- 4.4 Additionally, an Afghani mental health and wellbeing resource pack created by the Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS) was shared with relevant children and young people and their key workers. This was also available in the Pashto and Dari languages.
- 4.5 A separate meeting between the Community Mental Health Borough Director and Brent senior leaders has resulted in therapeutic group work being planned for Afghani children and young people. Two groups are planned to be held; one with under 18 UASC (to be delivered by specialist CAMHS, CNWL NHS Trust) and one with care leavers (to be delivered by Community Mental Health, CNWL NHS Trust). Preparations are currently ongoing with the view to have the first group meeting in October 2021.
- 4.6 Emotional wellbeing sessions are currently promoted and discussed between SWs/PAs and young people. Dari and Pashto interpreters will be available if the young people need them. Currently six UASC and three care leavers expressed an interest in attending the initial session.
- 4.7 Foster carers provide a pivotal role when it comes to emotional and social support for Afghani children. Therefore, supervising social workers have liaised with all foster carers who look after Afghani children to ensure that both they and children in their care receive an appropriate level of support. Foster carers shared that they have been available and supportive of Afghani young people by linking them with relevant community groups or mosques.
- 4.8 Some care leavers requested advice from Brent to help bring their families to the UK. Young people were advised that Brent did not have the power or authority to provide such support but young people were put in touch with the relevant central government agencies for specialist advice. However, two care leavers made decisions to travel independently to Afghanistan, without the prior knowledge of the Leaving Care team, in order to provide help and assistance to their families. Once in Afghanistan both made contact with their PAs, seeking assistance once it became clear that they were unable to relocate their family members to a neighbouring country. The PAs and managers were in regular close contact with the young people via social media. To facilitate one young person's return, financial support was provided to enable him to fly back from Pakistan. At the time of writing the other young person remains in Afghanistan. Close contact continues to be made with him and the Foreign Office are also aware of the current situation.

Report sign off:

Gail Tolley

Strategic Director Children and Young People

	Brent Corporate Parenting Committee 13 th October 2021
	Report from the Head of Inclusion and Virtual School Headteacher
Brent Virtual School Annual Report Academic Years 2019/20 and 2020/21	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
No. of Appendices:	Appendix 1 - Brent Virtual School Annual Report 2019/20 and 2020/21
Background Papers:	None
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Sharon Buckby Head of Inclusion and Headteacher, Brent Virtual School for Looked After Children Sharon.buckby@brent.gov.uk Michaela Richards Deputy Head Brent Virtual School Michaela.richards@brent.gov.uk

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the activity of the Brent Virtual School (BVS) and the educational outcomes of Brent Council's Looked after children (LAC) for the academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21. This combined report covers the two academic years that have spanned the Covid-19 pandemic. It reflects on the achievements of looked after children during this period and identifies areas in need of development that

have arisen for this group of young people as a consequence of their experiences of education during the pandemic.

- 1.2 The report also provides a summary of activity that has had positive impact on the outcomes for looked after children and identifies a set of priorities for the 2021/22 academic year. Data contained in this report is for looked after children who were in the care of Brent Council for the academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21, and includes outcomes for all children who have been in care for a year or more as at 31st March 2021, (“eligible cohort”).

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Corporate Parenting Committee notes the contents of this report and approves the strategic priorities for 2021/22 outlined in paragraph 3.4.

3. Summary

- 3.1 The Brent Virtual School (BVS) is the key statutory service for ensuring the best possible outcomes for the education of looked after children. The BVS leads on education to ensure that all professionals within a team around the child work together in the best interests of the pupil or student. The service provides intervention from the Early Years Foundation Stage to the end of KS5, supporting social workers, foster carers and placement providers to ensure an effective transition into leaving care services.
- 3.2 At the core of the work of the BVS is the aspiration to ensure that children and young people are provided with every opportunity to learn effectively and develop their skills, knowledge and understanding so they are able to make informed choices about their futures from a range of options. This range will be at its widest when children succeed in their schools and are provided with the ambition, resilience and opportunity to optimise their learning within and beyond the school.
- 3.3 **The key themes that have emerged when reviewing BVS activity during these two academic years include:**
 - a) The value of delivering Personal Education Plans online, maximising multidisciplinary participation and the focus on quality and impact. To enhance these arrangements there is a need to strengthen the lead role of the social worker and school in the delivery of PEPs.
 - b) The success in delivering a wide range of online booster classes and enrichment provision, combined with targeted onsite residential or therapeutic interventions to support the raising of aspirations and participation. With this it is clear that successful outcomes are more likely to be achieved by focusing on young people’s interests to maintain positive engagement and learning outcomes.
 - c) The multidisciplinary focus on persistent absenteeism and the holistic systemic planning for children.

- d) The number of young people entering care in adolescence with unmet or unidentified SEND needs has identified the extent to which there continues to be a significant minority of pupils whose full learning needs are not identified at an early enough point.
- 3.4 The BVS has reflected on the activity, progress and areas for continued development during the 19/20 and 20/21 academic years and, subject to Corporate Parenting Committee approval, intends to focus on the following priorities in 2021/22:
- a) To ensure there is mandatory PEP training for social workers. This is especially important with the introduction of a new PEP electronic system. To deliver online surgeries for designated teachers on improving the quality of PEPs and the use of the Pupil Premium to raise aspirations, targeting schools and settings where additional support has been identified.
 - b) Continued provision of an enrichment curriculum both on line and onsite, drawing in expertise as required and rooting this in the interests of individual children.
 - c) Review multidisciplinary support to ensure effective earlier identification of SEND needs in tandem with the new guidance for Virtual Schools in supporting the educational outcomes for all children with a social worker. This also links to the introduction of a graduated approach within Brent schools to help identify and meet pupils' additional needs at the earliest possible point.
 - d) Increased direct work by the advisory teachers and life coaches in school and colleges where young people are experiencing particular challenges to remain positively engaged.

Related documents:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/virtual-school-head-role-extension-to-children-with-a-social-worker>

Report sign-off:

Sharon Buckby

Head of Inclusion and Headteacher, Brent Virtual School for Looked After Children

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Appendix A: Brent Virtual School Annual Report Academic Years 2019-20 and 2020-2021

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the activity of the Brent Virtual School (BVS) and the educational outcomes of Brent Council's Looked after children (LAC) for the academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21. The report covers the two academic years that have spanned the Covid-19 pandemic. It reflects on the achievements of looked after children during this period and identifies areas in need of development that have arisen for this group of young people as a consequence of their experiences of education during the pandemic.
- 1.2 Data contained in this report is for looked after children who were in the care of Brent Council for the academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21, and includes outcomes for all children who have been in care for a year or more as at 31st March 2021, ("eligible cohort").
- 1.3 At the core of the work of the BVS is the aspiration to ensure that children and young people are provided with every opportunity to learn effectively and develop their skills, knowledge and understanding so they are able to make informed choices about their futures from a range of options. This range will be at its widest when children succeed in their schools and are provided with the ambition, resilience and opportunity to optimise their learning within and beyond the school.
- 1.4 ¹The Virtual School is the key statutory service for ensuring the best possible outcomes for the education of looked after children. The BVS leads on education to ensure that all professionals working collectively as a team around a child are working together in the best interests of the pupil or student. BVS provides support from the Early Years Foundation Stage to the end of KS5 and supports social workers, foster carers and placement providers to ensure an effective transition into leaving care services. BVS focuses on metacognition approaches, ensuring young people are ready to learn and employs a multi-disciplinary team, including teachers, educational psychologists, specialist mentors and family therapists. The team use trauma-informed practice to address the individual barriers to learning and develop individual learning plans for each student. The BVS strives to achieve the best possible educational outcomes by:
- monitoring the attainment, progression and attendance of children and young people who are looked-after and putting in place support where it is needed to help each individual achieve their potential
 - providing an enrichment curriculum to raise aspirations and increase participation

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children>

- working with young people, schools, colleges, social workers and foster carers and other placement providers to improve behaviour and attendance, promote improved outcomes and school stability and identify and address any barriers to learning
- supporting young people through school and into further or higher education, employment or training
- offering training on raising educational achievement and key aspects of legislative responsibilities, to professionals in schools, social care and placement support services
- promoting the educational achievement of children and young people who were previously looked-after through the provision of advice and information
- celebrating educational success of Brent's looked after children

2.0 Cohort characteristics

- 2.1 During this period LAC numbers remained consistent in terms of when looked after children came into care. As with previous years, LAC numbers remained higher in secondary aged children and the post-16 cohort. The age that children come into care has a significant impact on their outcomes as they may have already faced a number of issues with poorer educational outcomes such as persistent absenteeism and exclusion.
- 2.2 In July 2020, 178 (Nursery - Year 11) children were looked after, 62 were attending Brent schools and 96 attended schools outside the borough. Of the total cohort 122 were in schools in greater London, with the remainder placed outside London, some at a significant distance including the North East.
- 2.3 In July 2021 – 185 (Nursery – Year 11) children were looked after, 74 were attending Brent schools and 96 attended schools outside the borough. Of the total cohort 126 were in schools in greater London, with the remainder placed outside London, some at a significant distance.
- 2.4 The majority of Brent looked after children are in mainstream education; in 2019/20 this was just under 60% and in 2020/21 had increased to 66%. 18 attended Alternative Provision in 2019/20 and 12 in 2020/21. The number of children attending Residential schools or Special schools, where all pupils have an Education, Health and Care plan was 21 in 2019-20 and 23 in 2020-21
- 2.5 The number of Brent LAC with special educational needs is 47% of the cohort. Whilst this is high in comparison with the wider school population (15%), it is lower than the LAC national figure of 56% (based on SFR Cohort² Jan 2021). 24% of Brent LAC have an EHCP compared with 3% of the general Brent pupil population, although this is lower than the national figure of 28% (based on SFR Cohort Jan 2021).
- 2.6 The largest primary need for Brent LAC with an EHCP is consistent with the national LAC picture and is for Social, Emotional and Mental Health difficulties (SEMH) 43%.

² Please note this is provisional as the data is not usually published until January

- 2.7 A disproportionate number of Brent LAC are Black British, in comparison with LAC national figures. For BVS, this cohort makes up 30% of statutory school-age LAC. Nationally, considering the totality of virtual schools, the comparative figure is 8%, which is in line with the wider population. For the borough of Brent, which is one of the most diverse authorities in England, 18% of the general population are Black British. To address disproportionate educational outcomes for male pupils of Black Caribbean heritage in the general population the Council, with the support of local schools, ran a 2-year programme to raise achievement levels and to contribute to improving the life chances of this cohort of children and young people. The programme concluded in June 2020. Due to the national cancellation of tests and examinations and published performance tables, attainment data was not available to review whether further progress had been made from the significant closing of the gaps in 2018/19 in Brent schools between the attainment of British boys of Black Caribbean heritage and all pupils at the end of EYFS, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. The BVS also levers additional support through targeted activity such as mentoring and careers camps.
- 2.8 A consequence of young people entering care during their teenage years is that they very often have experienced a fractured education. In 2019/20 20 young people aged 12-16 entered care, in 2020/21 it was 32. The challenge to increase participation of this cohort is often aligned to broader contextual safeguarding issues. Additionally there is clear evidence that many, until they enter care, have unmet or unidentified SEND or mental health needs that impact directly on their educational outcomes and also in securing a post 16 destination. A focus for the BVS has been to utilise the multidisciplinary team of mental health therapists and educational psychologists to address these needs. However more needs to be done to ensure that the package of support is effectively delivered whether through an EHCP or SEN support or CAMHS plan.
- 2.9 30 unaccompanied minors (UASC) became LAC during 2019/20 and 2020/21. Just over a third (12) of these young people were aged 16-18 and became LAC during Key stage 5 and were enrolled onto ESOL programmes at either College of North West London (CNWL) or Harrow College. Both colleges offer rolling admission onto their ESOL courses so students can be admitted throughout the year. There were a number of other UASC who received tuition packages via BVS, whilst awaiting age assessments, but were then age assessed as adults, ending their LAC episodes. The remaining 18 UASCs were of statutory school aged, the majority of these (15) were in key stage 4 but 3 were key stage 3. Whilst the key stage 4 students were enrolled at one of three local schools who have an extended ESOL provision, the key stage 3 students went through the general admissions process based on the location of their placements. Given the extended time in the UK education system it is expected that they will go on to complete GCSEs at the expected age.
- 2.10 In 2019/21 94% of statutory aged LAC attending school were in Ofsted rated Good or Outstanding schools. Whilst every effort is made to ensure that all children attend a good or outstanding school 6% of LAC attended schools that were Ofsted rated RI (Requires Improvement). The primary reason for this was to ensure continuity and stability for the children when they moved into care. Additionally two young people were directed to attend secure training centres by the Court.

2.11 During 2019/20 a total of 10 pupils were not on roll at any one time, in 2020/21 this was 7. At any time, there are a few children or young people who are awaiting a mainstream school place, a special school place or an appropriate alternative provision. This will be for a number of reasons:

- newly arrived from abroad, as an unaccompanied minor (UASC) with no age assessment
- emergency entry to care, or change of care placement at short notice
- school placement has broken down and pupil is assigned a new provision, but not on roll yet

Between school placements, BVS arranges 1:1 tuition for English and maths, funded by the Pupil Premium Grant. This usually takes place in the home setting, although older pupils may be taught in other suitable settings. For some LAC, particularly those who have missed periods of schooling prior to care, mentoring is commissioned in order to prepare and support them back into education. BVS monitors LAC not on roll at fortnightly meetings, ensuring these pupils are receiving suitable education in the interim period. By far the majority of Brent LAC are placed within statutory time-scale (20 days).

3.0 Brent's Looked after Children's Attainment 2019/20 and 2020/21

3.1 The reports for this cohort are based on LAC who have been continuously looked after for at least a year on 31st March 2020 and 31st March 2021 – “the eligible cohort”.

3.2 **Key Stage 2 Statutory Attainment.** Whilst external assessments were not undertaken for Key Stage 2 pupils due to Covid 19, PEPs were maintained and progress checked accordingly. The schools progress measures identified that for the SRF group (6 qualifying out of 9 children in total with 3 not tested) in 2019/20 67% achieved the expected level of progress in Reading, Writing and Maths; 83% achieved expected progress for Reading; 67% for writing; and 85% for Maths. In 2020/21 50% achieved the expected level of progress in Reading, Writing and Maths; 67% achieved expected progress for Reading; 67% for writing; and 50% for Maths. Whilst there does appear to be a marked decrease in those children who achieved the expected level of progress, across all measures this equates to one fewer child than in the previous year. The number of children in the cohort is relatively small which can increase greater year on year volatility in the overall percentage reported.

3.3 The BVS also held booster classes throughout the pandemic prioritising Maths and Writing, using the Letterbox Club, Promoting the Achievement of Looked after Children (PALAC) tutoring to support literacy and numeracy and MathsWhizz (software subscription) and weekly group booster sessions.

3.4 All children who do not reach the expected standard at KS2 are eligible for Year 7 Catch-Up funding in their first year at secondary school. BVS has ensured that additional support was provided for Year 7 LAC who did not reach the expected

standards; support/interventions are documented in their autumn term personal education plans (PEPs). However, in order to ensure that children are achieving well, the BVS advisory team has identified the need to target more effectively children with additional needs and support schools, carers and social workers to retain a focus on children's education.

- 3.5 Key Stage 4 Statutory Attainment 2019/20 and 2020/21.** In 2019/20 pupils scheduled to sit GCSE exams were awarded either a centre assessed grade (based on what the school or college believed the student would most likely have achieved had exams gone ahead) or their calculated grade using a model developed by Ofqual - whichever was the higher of the two. In 2020/21 all pupils were awarded a teacher assessed grade.
- 3.6 The DfE states that the pupil level attainment statistics increased - more than would be expected in a typical year - between the 2018/19 and 2019/20 academic years. This reflects the change to the way GCSE grades were awarded rather than improvements in pupil performance. As a result the 2019/20 and 2020/21 attainment data should not be directly compared to data from previous years for the purpose of measuring changes in student performance.
- 3.7 2020 and 2021 (reference table 1) saw a significant increase in the headline results for the looked after children SFR cohort. Whilst this is in part due to the method of assessment, centre assessed grades (CAG) which are more favourable to vulnerable children; there was also clear evidence of positive tracking for the students who achieved this measure. During 2019/20 all the students who achieved 5 passes at level 4-9 (incl Eng and Maths) attended both school based interventions and VS interventions including 1-1 tuition and group booster sessions. There was a similar picture with regards to intervention for 2020/21 with one student also receiving PALAC tuition. Although there was a slight decrease on this measure in July 2021 this equates to one student who received a grade 3 in one of their foundation subjects. The 5 passes at level 1-9 also saw a 12% and 7% increase respectively in 2020 and 2021, whilst this is not a high attainment measure it is equally important for all students as it allows for some Post 16 pathways, and has been relevant for the students who had high levels of persistent absenteeism due to their wider needs. One of the key foci for BVS will be to maintain this level of achievement even if Centre Assessed Grades are no longer used. Again as with children at Key stage 2 the BVS advisory team have identified the need to target more effectively children with additional needs and support schools, carers and social workers to retain a focus on children's education.

Table 1: Key Stage 4 Statutory Attainment

Key Stage 4					
New grade levels	Previously known as:	2020/21** *		2019/20**	
		LAC	%	LAC	%
5 passes at level 4-9 incl Eng and Maths	5 A*-C (including English and Maths)	6/34	18%	8/29	28%
4 passes at level 4-9 incl Eng and Maths	4 A*-C (including English and Maths)	8/34	24%	8/29	28%
5 passes at level 1-9	5 A-G	17/34	50%	18/29	62%
4 passes at Level 1-9	4 A-G	19/34	56%	18/29	62%
1 pass Level 1-9	1 A-G	25/34	74%	21/29	72%
Achieving 4-9 pass in English and Maths	Eng & Mat A*-C pass	9/34	26%	9/29	31%

Key Stage 4- SFR COHORT					
New grade levels	Previously known as:	2020/21***		2019/20**	
		LAC	%	LAC	%
5 passes at level 4-9 incl Eng and Maths	5 A*-C (including English and Maths)	5/21	24%	6/21	29%
4 passes at level 4-9 incl Eng and Maths	4 A*-C (including English and Maths)	6/21	29%	6/21	29%
5 passes at level 1-9	5 A-G	12/21	57%	13/21	62%
4 passes at Level 1-9	4 A-G	13/21	62%	13/21	62%
1 pass Level 1-9	1 A-G	16/21	76%	15/21	71%
Achieving 4-9 pass in English and Maths	Eng & Mat A*-C pass	6/21	29%	6/21	29%

3.8 Destinations at Key stage 5

By July 2020, 97% (34 out of a total of 35) of the year 11 LAC cohort had a September Guarantee of which 32 took up their place. In 2020/21 96% (42 out of a total of 44) of the year 11 cohort had a September Guarantee for 21/22 of which 39 took up their place. In each year there are a small number of students who do not take up their post-16 destination place, in some cases this is due to them not receiving the results needed, whilst for others it is due to summer placement moves or more serious barriers to learning such as persistent absenteeism, risk of exploitation or serious

youth violence. In these cases BVS life coach and Post 16 advisor continue to work closely with these pupils to ensure that suitable provision is identified and enrolment takes place within the first few weeks of the academic year.

3.9 Post 16 EET/NEET:

In July 2020 six Year 13s successfully achieved A level grades and three progressed to university. In July 2021, four year 13s were undertaking level 3 courses, three students who successfully achieved A level grades have all progressed to university, and one with a BTEC National Diploma in Sports has moved into employment.

- 3.10 In 2020/21 the NEET figures for the whole cohort increased by 5% based on the previous academic year. The overall figures for EET were 76%. The Covid 19 pandemic undoubtedly contributed to the increase in NEETs as those young people who are in the workforce tend to work in the hospitality and retail sectors. In 2020/21 the NEET cohort represented 28% of young people.
- 3.11 Targeted engagement is coordinated by the Post 16 Life Coach for young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET. This includes the use of careers camps, engaging young people with Brent Works for employability programmes and pathways into work, as well as the use of commissioned young people's careers interventions.

4.0 Personal education plans

- 4.1 The Virtual School maintains contact with LAC wherever they are placed, for example PEPs were completed during 2019-2020 at Secure Units and Young Offender Institutions within, and beyond Greater London.
- 4.2 PEP completion rates remained at 99% throughout the academic year 2019-2020 and also for 2020-21 for the statutory cohort. In the main PEPs were delivered online throughout this period.
- 4.3 The BVS has undertaken 6 quality assurance audits over the two academic years, covering KS1-KS5 and additional PEPs covering the UASC cohort. 36 PEPs have been reviewed in total of which 28 PEPs have been graded as good, 6 PEPs as Requires Improvement and 2 Inadequate. A key factor emerging from the quality assurance process was the increased multidisciplinary attendance at the PEP and the sharp focus on quality and impact in the discussions particular at KS5, and in relation to what adjustments had been made in schools to respond to the pandemic.
- 4.4 The undertaking and completion of PEPs falls under the remit of the BVS. However, the role of the BVS is to champion, advocate, support and challenge and quality assure the PEPs as being aspirational and stretching for LAC. During the Covid-19 period the engagement of social workers and schools in PEPs and improving the quality of PEPs has not been as high as would be expected and improving this issue will be a focus for the BVS in 2021/22.

5.0 Attendance

- 5.1 Attendance monitoring is a key priority for the Virtual School. During 2019/20 and 2020/21 a regular report was presented to the Children and Young People Department Strategic Leadership Team meeting so that a clear line of sight could be maintained on the education of looked after children. This increased focus will continue through into 2021/22 academic year.
- 5.2 Although attendance remains a challenge, particularly at KS4, it is of note that the decrease in attendance for the reporting period (84% as compared to 88% in 2018/19 and 86% in 2017/18) was primarily due to the impact of Covid 19 and the initial lockdown that took place in March 2020. Until this point there had been a further 2% increase in attendance and the year to date figure just before lockdown 1 was 90%. This followed the trend of the previous year, which also saw an overall 2% increase in attendance. Attendance at Key stage 1 and 2 is usually consistent at around 97-98%. Key stage 3 attendance tends to remain between 94-96%, with key stage 4 attendance in the 80-90% range. As with previous years, the overall attendance figure is affected by the lower level of key stage 4 attendance. This lower percentage and the fact that the key stage 4 cohort is larger than the other three statutory age cohorts has meant that attendance has not been at the target level. In 2020/21 the overall attendance for the academic year was 90%.
- 5.3 Persistent absence data is discussed in a monthly meeting with the Head of LAC and Permanency. Where attendance is an issue, BVS works with social care colleagues to address underlying issues and if required, uses Pupil Premium funding for targeted educational mentoring.

6.0 Exclusions

- 6.1 There were no permanent exclusions for Brent LAC in 2019/20 and 2020/21, this continued the trend of previous years. The total number of days lost to fixed term exclusions decreased significantly compared to 2018/19. The number of days lost due to FTEs was less than a third of the figure for the previous year. Even taking into account the disruption in schools during 2019/20 and 2020/21 there has been clear reduction in days lost due to fixed term exclusions. In 2019/20 this was 26 days, while in 2020/21 this was 41 days.
- 6.2 Increased targeted support from BVS and also training within schools has meant that there is a renewed focus from schools on LAC and the management of complex needs.

7.0 Training and Development

- 7.1 BVS is committed to ensuring that professionals working with children in care have the right knowledge, information and skills to enable them to fulfil their role in contributing to improving the educational outcomes for our children. The Virtual School continues to deliver its multi-agency central training programme to Headteachers, Designated Teachers, school governors, Social Workers, Independent Reviewing Officers, Foster

Carers and Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs). Regular training throughout the year included focus on the use of Pupil Premium, links between research and improving educational attainment, the importance of high quality PEPs; transition, Dyslexia and Dyscalculia; and training in partnership with key sector leaders including trauma informed practice with one commissioned provider and domestic abuse awareness and its impact on children and young people - offered in partnership with the charity Tender. Evaluations from the training are routinely used to plan and target future training. The number of professionals accessing training for the two year period was over 100 each year.

- 7.2 The Designated Teachers Forum for Looked after Children Forum meets termly, with representation from local primary, secondary and special schools. It has been running for a number of years, with the aim of sharing good practice, improving quality and impact of education on children's outcomes and highlighting new legislation or policy developments. In July 2021, 70 schools were represented at the forum.

8.0 Celebration Event

Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, the annual celebration event for looked after children was postponed. Plans are currently underway for a celebration event celebrating the achievements of the past two academic years to be held in January 2022. The event will be co-produced with young people.

9.0 Covid 19 and the work of the BVS during the pandemic

- 9.1 As the spring term 2019/ 2020 ended the UK was hit by Covid 19 and through the first lockdown it was clear that the pandemic raised concerns about increased exposure to 'hidden harms' as well as lost learning and the impact of social distancing on children and young people's development and on their mental and emotional health and wellbeing. As a result the BVS rethought how services would be delivered to looked after children as well as how communication with carers, schools and social workers would maintain a focus on their attendance and achievement. Whilst children of statutory age were enabled to stay in school, those post 16 young people had a much greater challenge as further education provision closed. Even those who continued to attend school in person have had a far from normal experience that also would affect their achievement and development.
- 9.2 During the summer term 2020 the BVS held two live webinars with carers to support with remote learning. A total of 20 carers attended including kinship carers, carers from independent fostering agencies and Brent carers. An 'Educational Resources Pack' was emailed to carers during the first week to provide additional learning to that implemented by the schools. This included extensive resources that children and foster carers could access. A printable resource pack was created so that Social Workers could print and take hard copies of worksheets to any foster carers requesting

them when they visited. A further 'Educational Resources Pack' and "Covid Support Pack" was sent out in the week prior to the Easter break 2020.

- 9.3 All carers and young people were contacted to ascertain their access to IT. As a result of the information collated, within the first three weeks of general school closures in spring 2020 over 50 items of IT were ordered and directly delivered to young people as part of the wider DfE support programme for vulnerable pupils. BVS offered online training sessions to schools, carers, social care colleagues and other Brent staff as well as training for carers and foster carers and designated teachers (DTs) on Trauma Informed practice. BVS also engaged with another provider to deliver three workshops on trauma informed practice and recovery. These sessions were attended by schools, Brent Council employees from a number of service areas including the wider CYP workforce with the focus on supporting LAC in education during the pandemic. The focus on attachment was critical due to the pandemic and the additional trauma that was felt by LAC, some of who lost family members to the pandemic.
- 9.4 Looked after Children were eligible to attend school as part of the 'vulnerable children' cohort and the BVS worked with the professional team around the child to promote attendance where this was achievable, based on individual home circumstances.
- 9.5 The BVS enrichment programme became a key tool to keep children and young people motivated across 2019-20 and 2020-21. During 2019/2020 online clubs such as Philosophy Group and Book Club were set up for young people with many of the established enrichment activities moved to online platforms and, where possible, residential or face to face activities were undertaken to maintain motivation, achievement and resilience. These included:
- Strength with horses
 - Jamie's farm local visit
 - Philosophy group
 - Book club
 - Debate mate
 - We Belong - visits to theatre, museum and Houses of Parliament
 - Outdoor pursuits

Over the two academic years 73 pupils engaged in the enrichment programme, with a further 29 attending booster classes, which are to support students in key assessment years to help raise their attainment. Two young people were successful in being published in a national poetry book; one young person won the sub-regional debate mate competition and one young person has been selected to represent Jamie's Farm on the national stage.

10.0 Strategic Priorities for 2021/22


- 10.1 The key themes that have emerged when reviewing BVS activity during these two academic years include:

- a) The value of delivering Personal Education Plans online, maximising multidisciplinary participation and the focus on quality and impact. To enhance these arrangements there is a need to strengthen the lead role of the social worker and school in the delivery of PEPs.
- b) The success in delivering a wide range of online booster classes and enrichment provision, combined with targeted onsite residential or therapeutic interventions to support the raising of aspirations and participation. With this it is clear that successful outcomes are more likely to be achieved by focusing on young people's interests to maintain positive engagement and learning outcomes.
- c) The multidisciplinary focus on persistent absenteeism and the holistic systemic planning for children.
- d) The number of young people entering care in adolescence with unmet or unidentified SEND needs has identified the extent to which there continues to be a significant minority of pupils whose full learning needs are not identified at an early enough point.

10.2 The BVS has reflected on the activity, progress and areas for continued development during the 19/20 and 20/21 academic years and will focus on the following priorities in 2021/22:

- a) To ensure there is mandatory PEP training for social workers. This is especially important with the introduction of a new PEP electronic system. To deliver online surgeries for designated teachers on improving the quality of PEPs and the use of the PPP to raise aspirations, targeting schools and settings where additional support has been identified.
- b) Continued provision of an enrichment curriculum both on line and onsite, drawing in expertise as required and rooting this in the interests of individual children.
- c) Review multidisciplinary support to ensure effective earlier identification of SEND needs in tandem with the new guidance for Virtual Schools in supporting the educational outcomes for all children with a social worker. This also links to the introduction of a graduated approach within Brent schools to help identify and meet pupils' additional needs at the earliest possible point.
- d) Additional direct work by the advisory teachers and life coaches in school and colleges where young people are experiencing particular challenges to remain positively engaged.

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	Corporate Parenting Committee 13 October 2021
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People
Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 2: 1st July to 30th September 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, Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Onder.beter@brent.gov.uk Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).

- 1.2** This report details the activity of Brent's fostering service from 1st July – 30th September 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 direct course 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.

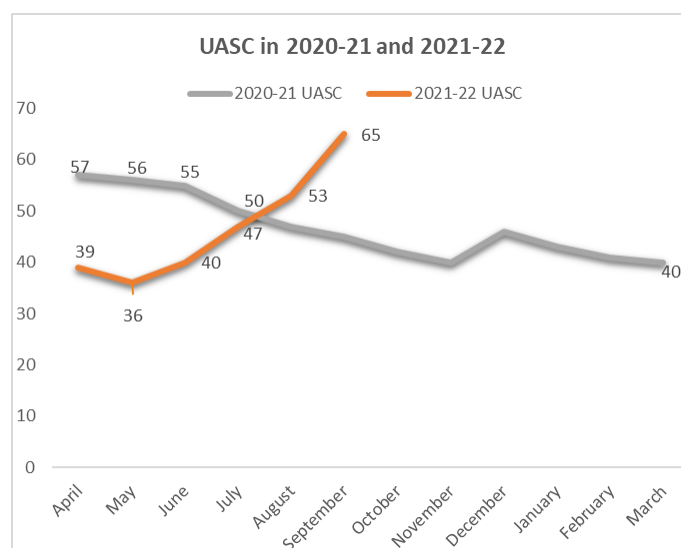
4.0 Placement Activity

4.1 The total number of looked after children as at 30th Sept 2021 was 313, which is an increase by 16 children from Q1 of 2021/2022 (297 children) and an increase by 15 children from the same period in 2020 (298 children).

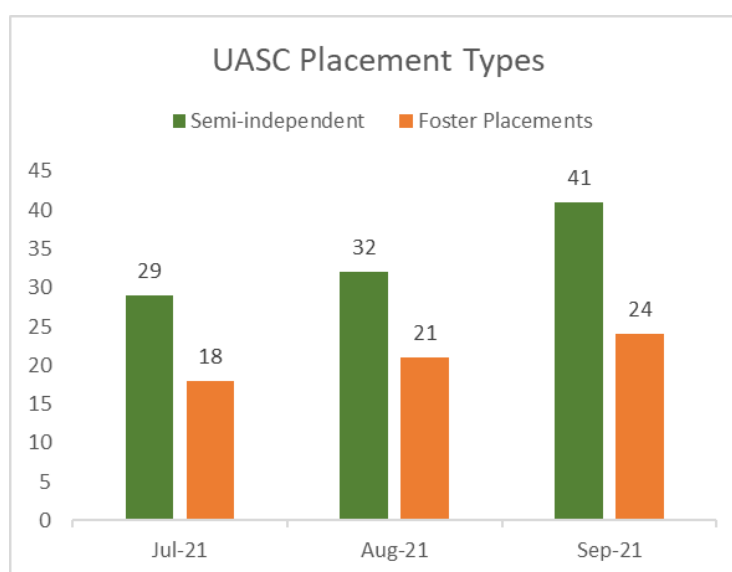
4.2 The corporate performance targets for 2021/2022 are as below:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 30% - the actual percentage as of 30th September 2021 was 17.6% (55 children), a drop by 2.3% from the previous quarter Q1 of 2021/2022, 19.9% (59 children). In this reporting period, more adolescents including unaccompanied asylum seeking children entered care and had to be placed in semi-independent accommodation.
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15% - the actual percentage as of 30th Sept- 2021 was 11.2% (35 children), a decrease by 2.3% from Q1 of 2021/2022 (13.5%, 40 children).
- Percentage of looked after children placed in independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 30th Sept-2021 was 32.3% (101 children); an increase by 0.7% from Q1 of 2021/2022 (31.6%, 94 children).
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 70% - the actual percentage as of 30th September 2021 was 61.3% (192 children), a decrease by 3.7% from Q1 of 2021/2022(193 children, 65%). This is primarily related to the age of new looked after children and the increase in the number of 16 - 17 year-old UASC who were placed in semi-independent accommodation.
- There were 72 looked after children in registered semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations) as at 30th September 2021, which represents 23% of all looked after children. This is an increase by 6.2% from the end of Q1, 2021/2022 (16.8%, 50 children). This is again related to an increase in the number of UASC placed in semi-independent provision.

4.3 As of 30th September 2021, there were 65 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), an increase of 25 Unaccompanied Minors from Q1.



- 4.4** The number of UASC placed in semi-independent accommodation is 41, 19 more than at the end of Q1, 2020-22, none in residential children's home and 6 more UASC placed in foster placements than Q1 (18 UASC).



5.0 Recruitment and Assessment

- 5.1** Marketing and recruitment activities continue to take place successfully online. Despite a huge success during the previous periods, since the easing of the lockdown rules, we have seen fewer people make enquiries or attend the information evenings. Whilst the sign up rate for the information evening has remained high, fewer people then attended the sessions – a maximum of 3 people attended each one. This is usual for the holiday period but needs more focus now that schools are back as there is usually a pattern of rising in September/October. The monthly fostering information evenings took place

online via Zoom, which attendees reportedly enjoyed, and continue to find more convenient than having to travel to a venue to hear more about fostering.

- 5.2** During this reporting period, all marketing activity has been carried out online through the Brent Council website and managed by the social work team. Interested parties made enquiries by phone or online and the team carried out initial visits and assessments face-to-face and virtually via video calls, ensuring that the experience by prospective carers was for 'business as usual'.
- 5.3** Temporary cover for the position of Marketing and Recruitment Officer (MRO) has been put in place until the substantive MRO returns in January 2022.
- 5.4** Of the 13 enquiries over the period, 3 resulted in initial home visits and have successfully progressed to Stage 1 of the fostering assessment process. 1 applicant has been fast tracked to stage 2, as she had been previously assessed but asked to be on hold for personal reasons. The other 9 applicants were deemed unsuitable to foster at present due to various reasons, including: insufficient space; a lack of flexibility and only wanting to make early enquiries about fostering for the future.
- 5.5** The applicant from an Independent Fostering Agency who was reported in the last quarter as being in stage 2 and on hold, resumed her assessment and was presented to Brent's fostering panel in September 2021. However, the approval was deferred due to a number of questions being raised in the meeting. The case is scheduled to return to panel in November 2021.
- 5.6** Of the 6 assessments reported in the last period as being in stage 1, 4 remain in Stage 1 as there has been a delay in progressing medicals due to Covid19. Of the remaining 2, 1 has progressed to stage 2, and 1 has withdrawn from the assessment process for personal reasons.
- 5.7** Of the 5 assessments reported as being in stage 2 in the last quarter, 1 applicant was approved by the Agency Decision Maker in July, 1 was deferred at panel and 1 assessment has had to come to an end due to a diagnosis of long-term Covid19. The other 2 remain on hold for now; the applicants remain interested in fostering but cannot at the moment commit due to personal reasons.
- 5.8** During this reporting period 13 assessments were in progress, including the 2 previously identified as being on hold. Of these:
- 8 are in Stage 1; and
 - 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. However, there are plans to reinstate face-to-face panels as of 1st October 2021 in line with other council meetings given the roll out of the vaccine programme.
- 6.3** The functions of the fostering panel are to consider:
- each application and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a foster carer or Connected Person(s) (Family and Friends foster carer) and the terms of their approval;
 - the first annual review of each approved carer and any other review as requested by the service, including those of a Standards of Care issue and those exploring any allegations made;
 - the termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a foster carer; and
 - the long-term fostering matches of all children below the age of 12.
- 6.4** During the period 1st July – 30th September 2021, 4 panels were held with 21 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:
- 2 new ‘family and friends’ fostering households were recommended for approval;
 - The approval of one potential new foster carer was deferred due to questions being raised as described above;
 - 1 new fostering household was recommended for approval;
 - 8 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
 - 3 ‘family and friends’ fostering households were found suitable to continue to foster following review;
 - 1 young person was matched on a long-term basis with his foster carer;
 - The approval of 3 ‘family and friends’ households were terminated – 1 due to the young person returning home, 1 due to the young person reaching the age of 18, and 1 due to an Special Guardianship Order being granted; and
 - 2 fostering households resigned from their fostering role for Brent – 1 due to health reasons and 1 as they realised they would prefer to adopt than foster.

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 for foster carers and special guardians under review given the removal of lockdown restrictions and look forward to offering some face-to-face sessions, however there are no immediate plans to do so. First Aid Training is the only course that has been offered in person to carers since April 2020. This will be reviewed in quarter 3.

7.1.1 8 courses were offered (all virtual) during the period under review, using Zoom, including:

- 5th July – sudden unexpected death of infants – for carers working with babies (SUDI)
- 7th July – the role of the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer)
- 28th September – oral health

Carers' comments about the sessions were mainly positive but they continue to express that they are missing face-to-face interaction with their peers:

"It was good knowing how to lay the infant to sleep and to be careful not to leave the cot unsupervised."

Sudden unexpected death of infants – SUDI.

"Trainer was very confident in her knowledge as she is currently practising in this area of work so was able to give examples etc."

Brent LADO Training

7.1.2 All carers additionally have access to an online training package provided by an external provider, AC Education. The training courses offer a range of topics from *Fostering Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children* to specialist educational needs courses such as *Understanding Dyslexia and Dyspraxia*. 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 AC Education, with a view to having more signed up as the year progresses.

7.2 Support from Supervising Social Workers (SSW)

7.2.1 Alongside recruitment, retention of foster carers is a priority for the team, and the support offered to foster carers forms a large part of why carers remain committed to Brent, according to their feedback in Fostering Panel presentations and in their annual reviews. The Covid-19 Pandemic affected the lives of all Brent foster carers; however, they have expressed their appreciation for the support they received.

7.2.2 To keep foster carers engaged and informed in writing, the fostering service use emails and mobile text messaging. Additionally, SSWs have maintained this flow of information via their supervisory visits and in their email and telephone communications. The next Newsletter is due to be sent out mid-October by the interim MRO.

7.2.3 The monthly foster carers' support group continues to be facilitated virtually as foster carers have expressed that it is their preferred option. Foster carers' feedback that they find these online sessions useful and this view is supported by the increasing number of attendees each month; a shared view is that it is easier to commit to such a group without having to leave home to attend. To enable more carers to attend, the groups alternate between daytime (10am – 12noon) and evening (5:15 – 7:15pm) slots.

The support groups that took place during the reporting period focused on a wealth of topics ranging from finance to the reviewing process.

7.2.4 The topic of the virtual support groups held in July and September focused on equipment, staffing, consideration for the foster carers' ball, training, and visits. No foster carers' support group meeting takes place in August as it is a holiday period. The July Support group meeting was attended by the Fostering Service Manager, and the feedback received from foster carers indicated that they appreciated the Service Manager's attendance and contribution at the meeting.

7.3 Support for kinship carers

7.3.1 Support for people who foster as a result of being a family member or family friend of a looked after child are entitled to the same support as Brent's unrelated foster carers and receive the same financial, social work and developmental support from an allocated SSW and Brent's training programme.

7.3.2 Support for carers who offer kinship care for children and young people subject to a Special Guardianship Order receive support from both the local authority and Brent's Regional Adoption Agency, *Adopt London West*. Support requiring an element of finance is requested via Brent's Commissioning and Resource

Team via a financial assessment of need. Special Guardians are also entitled to access the training programme available to foster carers. All other support is offered to special guardians via *Adopt London West*. This includes: advice, guidance, mediation and advocacy.

7.3.3 There is a support group available to special guardians via *Adopt London West*, which is co-facilitated by one of Brent's special guardians on a voluntary basis and a social worker from within the service.

7.3.4 The Head of Service for Adopt London West, Brent's Agency Advisor for Fostering and Adoption and the special guardian who facilitates the support group met on 30.09.21 to develop the support offer for special guardians. Discussions included improving information available on Brent's website in relation to the support available, providing annual input into the review of the Statement of Purpose and the creation of a feedback loop, ensuring that learning from the support group is fed back to each of the partner authorities in *Adopt London West* for service development. The longer term plan is to recruit a special guardian from the other 3 local authorities to volunteer alongside Brent's one.

8.0 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints

8.1 July 2021

Booked reviews – 4 (1 is a couple)

Took place – 4

August 2021

Booked reviews – 4 (1 is a couple)

Took place – 4

September 2021

Booked reviews – 16

Took place - 14

1 did not take place as the young person turned 18 before the review could be held

1 did not take place due to staff sickness at short notice.

Totals for July 2021 to September 2021:

Booked reviews – 24 (5 were couples)

Took place – 19

Cancelled/rescheduled - 5

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. The two work streams that were meeting weekly (virtually) have now been combined and are held bi-weekly as it was felt by the staff involved to be more productive that way. The focus continues to be on sufficiency and placement stability. These meetings provide an opportunity for workers from each of the local authorities to develop their working relationship, learn from one another and share ideas. Further updates will be provided to the Committee in early 2022 as this progresses.

9.2 Following national consultation by the Department for Education on the use of unregulated (independent or semi-independent) provision, the prohibition of placing children under the age of 16 in such accommodation became law on 9th September 2021. This new piece of legislation was contained within amendments to The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. There are no children under the age of 16 placed in such accommodation and Brent is compliant with the requirements of the new regulations.

<u>Report sign off:</u>

<i>Gail Tolley</i>

Strategic Director Children and Young People
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 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 13 th October 2021
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People
Brent Adoption Report 6-monthly report: 1st April 2021 to 30th September 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)	Debbie Gabriel, Head of Service, Adopt London West Brent's Regional Adoption Agency gabrield@ealing.gov.uk Onder Beter, Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency onder.beter@brent.gov.uk Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk

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1.0 Summary

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

- adoption performance data for the period 1st April 2021 – 30th September 2021.
- the progress and activity of Adopt London West;
- how good outcomes are being achieved for children.

Information and child level data presented in Section 5 and 6 of this report were provided by Brent; the rest of this report includes the progress and activity of Adopt London West.

1.2 This is the third report presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in this format as Cabinet gave approval in April 2019 for Brent council to:

- a) join the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) *Adopt London West* consisting of the London boroughs of Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith and Fulham for the provision of Adoption services and Special Guardianship Support; and
- b) delegate authority to the Strategic Director, Children and Young People, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care to agree and enter into a Partnership Agreement with participating boroughs.

1.3 The Key Decision was made on 2nd September 2019 and, following the TUPE of those Brent staff members who chose to move to Ealing, Adopt London West has been a 'live' RAA since October 2019.

2.0 Recommendations

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

3.0 Background – Adopt London West

- 3.1** Adopt London West (ALW) Regional Adoption Agency became operational on 1st September 2019 with a formal launch in October 2019.
- 3.2** A comprehensive partnership agreement forms the basis of the ongoing partnership arrangements. The partnership board on which the Strategic Director, Brent CYP, sits will continue to provide the necessary oversight to ensure that the shared service is appropriately scrutinised and supported to deliver improved outcomes for children and adopters.
- 3.3** As part of the national RAA implementation and development programme a network of RAA leaders has been established and monthly meetings are facilitated by the DfE delivery partner Deloitte. Meetings are attended by senior DfE officials and provide an opportunity to learn from the early RAAs and also to consider wider sector collaboration and influence.
- 3.4** It is acknowledged from evidence gained from the first cohort of national RAAs to become operational, that the first 2 years after going live for an RAA is a period of transition and transformation to a new delivery model. Performance has been noted to dip in the early stages of operation, therefore the Partnership Board and Heads of Service meetings are closely monitoring practice and performance as a new and developing service.

4.0 Responsibilities

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

is also involved in completing adoption reports on children who may have travelled from and been adopted abroad; there is a legal requirement for these adoptions to be made lawful in the UK.

4.3 Inter-country adoption referrals continue to be referred to the Inter-Country Adoption Centre, a specialist Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA), with whom a service level agreement is in place.

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

5.0 Performance Data

5.1 The most recent set of national adoption scorecards was published in July 2021, covering the 3-year period April 2017 to March 2020.

Adoption Scorecards (published [here](#))

- **A1** (The average time taken for a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 457 days. This is a 2% increase on the previous reporting period (450 days) and compares unfavourably against the 2017-20 national average of 367 days and the statistical neighbour average of 350. This is due to delay in completion of care proceedings for a small number of children. As the number of children with an adoption plan is low, delays to care proceedings adversely affects this performance indicator.
- **A2** (The average time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 138 days. This is an 18% decrease on the previous reporting period (169 days) which is lower than the 2017-20 national average of 175 days and compares favourably to the statistical neighbour average of 205. This demonstrates effective action taken to ensure children are placed in their adoptive homes without delay as soon as court authority to do so is provided.

6.0 Child related data

6.1 There have been no Adoption Orders granted yet during this reporting year.

6.2 There are currently 4 adoption applications in progress; applications are likely to be made for the remaining children placed for adoption within the next quarter.

6.3 There are currently 11 children with an adoption plan who have not yet been adopted.

The details of these children's cases are as follows:

- Six children are placed for adoption.
- One child has been matched with their new family and will be placed by the end of October 2021.
- Four children remain subject to ongoing care proceedings, which are expected to conclude towards the end of 2021.

6.4 Early Permanence for Children

For some children it is appropriate to consider placing them with foster carers who are also approved adopters, this is referred to as an Early Permanence placement. This enables the child to be placed earlier than is usually possible and before Court proceedings have concluded. Brent have recently placed a child in an early permanence placement, ensuring that the child is able to benefit from the security and stability of their adoptive family and development of early attachments as early as possible.

ALW and our Adopt London partners are working to increase the numbers of Early Permanence placements made across London ensuring specialist training and support is offered to those adopters who are willing to consider early placements.

7.0 Adopter Recruitment

7.1 ALW approved 7 Adopter households in the period 1st April 2021 – 30th Sept 2021, a total of 20 households in the full reporting year 2020/21. This year's approval numbers have reduced when compared to last year's performance; this reflects assessment capacity pressures. The Partnership Board have agreed additional temporary posts to respond to these pressures; a Practice Manager has recently taken up one of the posts to provide additional management oversight to recruitment activity. Performance is expected to improve as a result of these measures.

29% of adopters approved during this reporting period are from BAME communities and 29% identify as LGBTQ.

7.2 There are currently 36 ALW approved adopters, 15 of whom already have a child placed with them, 14 are still in the active family finding stage, and 1 family are linked to child/ren. 6 families are on hold due to their personal circumstances.

7.3 During this reporting period, (Apr – Sept 21) the service received 273 general enquiries about adoption compared to 299 in the same period last year.

- 7.4** The adoption assessment process comprises 2 stages. Stage 1 assessments should take place within 2 months - this stage is described as “adopter led”, where adopters work through exercises and complete various tasks that contribute to a full and thorough assessment of their suitability.
- 7.5** Stage 2 should take a maximum of 4 months and is a detailed assessment that is both reflective and analytical. In total, the comprehensive assessment process should be completed within 6 months. Of the families approved so far this year, the majority have been slightly outside of these timescales due to the personal circumstances of the families.
- 7.6** There are currently 20 families in the formal stages of assessment, 9 in Stage 1 and 11 in Stage 2. A further 6 families are expected to be approved in Q3, once the benefits of the additional staffing capacity are realised, Q4 should see an increase in approvals.

8.0 Adoption and Special Guardianship Support

- 8.1** Throughout the assessment and post approval process of searching for the right child to join their family, prospective adopters are informed about support services available to them and are encouraged and supported to attend the *Foundations for Attachment* training course, a course that offers adopters insight and strategies to meet the needs of children who are likely to have experienced developmental trauma.
- 8.2** An internal mentoring scheme is in place to offer support to any new adopters, or those who may need some additional empathic support. ALW have a contract with **Adopter Hub**, an online support forum and adopter community run by voluntary adoption agency PACT that provides training and resources to adopters. In addition, a peer support organisation **We are Family** organise frequent training events and social groups. ALW have a contract for services delivered by **PAC-UK** that offer sensitive and independent therapeutic support.
- 8.3** ALW has an ‘education support group’, which meets six times a year. The group is co-facilitated by an Educational Psychologist and an ALW Social worker and provides a forum for families to receive support and guidance on how to engage with their child’s school and a range of education related issues. The subject of the recent education support groups has been, 25th May 2021, “Supporting Transitions” and 13th July, “Choosing a School”. Each group was attended by 4 families from Brent.
- 8.3.1** An online training event took place on 28th May 2021 as part of the Adopt London Trauma Informed Schools working group, the event

was attended by almost 200 people from across the Adopt London boroughs and Virtual School Heads network.

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

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

- **20/4/21:** OLLIE foundation, Youth Suicide.
- **29/4/21:** Parenting children who have experienced Trauma – Lauren Topper, Clinical Psychologist.
- **13/5/21:** Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Awareness – FASD Charity.
- **20/5/21:** Managing Contact – Julie Young, senior researcher, University of East Anglia.
- **10/6/21:** Contact from the perspective of a birth mother – Birth parent.
- **24/6/21:** Mindfulness session – mindfulness practitioner.
- **8/7/21:** Music therapy – Chrystal Luk.
- **20/7/21:** The teenage brain – Adele Bates.
- **9/9/21:** Choosing a secondary school – Dr Gabrielle Pelter (Educational Psychologist) & Jane Pickerden ALW.

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

8.6 Special Guardianship Support

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

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

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

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

ALW partner LAs have worked together to agree funding to continue to offer specialist support to Special Guardians from “Kinship”. Brent, along with 2 other partner local authorities, have commissioned the enhanced service from Kinship to ensure families most in need benefit from a bespoke service that responds to their individual circumstances.

Financial support for special guardians, including advice and assessment of need, remain the responsibility of the local authority.

9.0 Feedback on quality of service

9.1 Some examples of recent feedback on the quality of the service offered by ALW.

9.2 Information sessions

April:

- *We are really thankful for the wonderful session and the information provided, which is really valuable*

May:

- *The presentation was very informative and helpful in terms to understand the adoption process, possible source of further information (the list of the recommended books). The presenters were very efficient in the way they delivered the information. All topics that a potential adoptive parent needs to know were covered in great details. The approach of the presenters was, warm, friendly, and very informative. The lady, who shared her and her partner's experience as adoptive couple, was very touching and encouraging. Thank you!*
- *The information meeting clarified all the adoption process and hearing the adopter experience was really great and emotional for us.*

- *Very helpful and that's why I choose to adopt through ALW. It was clear and I loved the openness. We are aware that adoption isn't an easy process, but the way you described the journey sounded easier and supportive.*

June:

- *The information meeting was very informative. Lucy (adopter) was extremely eloquent whilst explaining her and her husband's journey through early permanence, together with the highs and lows of this process. She explained very well the emotional roller coaster for her and her husband, this is something that I believe is inevitable as part of this process, and I was grateful for her candour. I was also impressed by how well she explained the honesty and support she thought they had been offered by their social workers, which is a very important aspect of the process, as far as I am concerned. It was inspiring and lovely to see her obvious joy of being a mother.*

July:

- *Thanks a lot for sending this email with the materials and useful resources. We found the information session to be very insightful and productive. It was very well organized, and a lot of our questions were answered. It was really useful to hear it directly from a parent who has gone through the journey.*
- *I would like to pass on my thanks for the session. I found it really informative and having an adopter in the session to talk through her experience was really helpful and brought the experience to life.*

9.3 Adopters who have attended ALW Panel for a match with a child.

- *We felt that each panel member had both our and our future daughter's interests at heart. Panel gave us ample opportunities to contribute, they were interested in our journey and encouraging of our views.*
- *The Panel meeting was well organised, everything was clear in terms of structure, panel were professional and encouraging which made the whole experience excellent, we were treated with respect and kindness as well as professionalism.*
- *It was really clear from everyone giving their recommendations that everyone knew our case so well and spoke about the reasons why they were supporting the match, it really made us feel that time had been spent on this which was amazing.*
- *Despite being well prepared we still felt nervous at the start, the panel chair made us feel comfortable and at ease, all panel members were friendly and respectful, a very good experience, we were treated with respect and genuine interest.*

- *Thank you for making an intimidating meeting feel welcoming, from a group which felt representative of different lived and professional experiences.*

9.4 People using the helpline and Adoption Support services

- *Since ALW has formed, I feel the service has really improved and is very responsive, it feels that emails and information shared has a really nice supportive tone.*
- *I expected to be passed around and that it would be difficult to get help, but actually I was overwhelmed by how welcoming and supportive V was in my initial call.*
- *I am so impressed with the service and incredibly grateful with the speed, professionalism, and kindness with which you helped me today, thank you for going the extra mile for me today.*

10.0 Casework

10.1 Currently ALW is supporting 51 Brent families - 15 are receiving a Social Work service and 36 are currently receiving an ASF therapeutic service.

10.2 There are 80 contact cases open relating to Brent families - 13 direct contact arrangements and 67 active letterbox exchanges.

10.3 There have been 43 requests for access to records in relation to Brent records, out of a total number of 114 requests received by ALW during this period.

11.0 Adoption Support Fund

11.1 Families who require specialist therapeutic support are assessed by a social worker and an application submitted to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) for funding to cover the costs of the therapeutic services. 26 applications have been made to the ASF on behalf of Brent families in this review period.

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

12.0 Adopt London

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

- **Adopt London North:** a partnership between Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, and Islington, hosted by Islington.

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

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

12.3 Key priorities/activities for Adopt London in the next six months include:

12.3.1 Birth Parents Counselling

ALS host LA Southwark are leading on the commissioning of a new counselling service for birth families. The draft service specification has been informed by conversations with PAUSE (Joanne Alper from Adoption Plus and Professor Beth Neil from UEA). The shared ambition is to commission an innovative service that will operate using an assertive outreach model; co-production with birth parents will be integral to the service design.

12.3.2 Development of Readiness tool

An online Adoption readiness tool is in development, this will assist people who are interested in Adoption to decide if it is the right time or appropriate for them to proceed with their interest.

Providing detailed information, guidance, and a range of resources, empowers and enables people interested in Adoption to understand the needs of children requiring adoption and also the qualities and attributes that are needed for them to progress through the assessment process.

Feedback from applicants confirms that most people would prefer to undertake some guided research and reading before they embark on the intensive assessment process. Regional Adoption Agencies have a responsibility to provide information and advice to anyone who is interested in Adoption, the readiness tool will provide an efficient, flexible service that people can access at their own convenience, whilst still having the option to discuss their interest in person.

In addition, an animated film is in development which is due to be launched in October, the film will encourage potential applicants to think more about the characteristics and needs of children who have a plan of Adoption, and to challenge their assumptions about who the right child for them may be.

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

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

All webinars produced are available to view on demand, the Trauma & Loss webinar has been viewed by 106 members on demand, following the live event. In the autumn, WAF will extend their membership offer to prospective Adopters who are in the early stages of assessment, the webinar programme and other resources will enable adopters to be better prepared for the likely challenges they may face when a child joins their family. Crucially it will also provide peer support from more experienced adopters.

WAF have used the grant from Adopt London to develop their offer to families and since the start of the partnership have seen membership grow from 500 members in London to 850 members. A shared priority for Adopt London & WAF is to focus on increasing the diversity of membership.

Adopt London have made a small additional grant to WAF to fund an entertainer/activities coordinator for a series of coordinated picnics over a weekend in late September.

A partnership statement is being drafted to support further funding bids that WAF wish to submit, a finance workshop is booked for the autumn to develop a sustainable business and funding model for the ongoing partnership.

12.3.4 Adopt London Partnership Agreement

As the potential for further development of the Adopt London partnership and collaboration activity is understood by the four Heads of Service and Executive Board, a decision has been taken to enter into a formal partnership agreement to provide a robust framework for joint projects.

12.3.5 Marketing & Comms/Website development

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

- Transfer to a new website provider to enable greater flexibility to the now well-established Marketing & Comms group to manage content and develop new material.
- Increasing the frequency and quality of informative and supportive blogs for all affected by or interested in Adoption.
- Increasing the functionality to support self-guided information, help, resources, and learning.
- Increasing the use of analytics particularly in relation to social media platforms and the ability to target specific demographic groups.
- An Adoption podcast in partnership with Black Ballad, *a lifestyle platform which seeks to tell the human experience through the eyes of Black British Women*, is to be recorded between 21st- 23rd September.
- Improving the area of the website dedicated to support for special guardians.

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

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

12.3.6 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

An Equality, Diversity & Inclusion project is about to commence in partnership with a training & consultancy organisation, the focus is specifically on the experience of black adopters within Adopt London, the aim is to co-produce a programme of work to address the disparity in the system for adopters and for black children who typically wait longer for an adoptive family.

It is envisaged that this will be a medium to long term project and be fully inclusive across the Adopt London partnership.

13.0 Value for Money

13.1 Funding model

Each partner LA transferred the staffing budget for their individual adoption services when Adopt London West launched in 2019, the partnership agreement set out that the funding model should be reviewed, and a new model agreed in 2021. A series of finance modelling workshops have taken place with Directors and Finance lead from each partner LA. A proposed formula will be presented to the Partnership Board on 25th October for agreement, to be effective from April 2022; there will be no increase in costs to Brent.

13.2 ALW's shared contracts and services provide tangible evidence of value for money and economies of scale, the budget commitments for non-staffing costs for 2021/22 is **£231,597**. These include shared contracts for services that Adoption Agencies (RAAs) are required to provide, for example, independent counselling services for birth relatives, a specialist service for people who wish to adopt a child from overseas, training for adopters, costs associated with statutory checks required for prospective adopters.

In addition, there are several other standard services that incur costs that are not statutory requirements, rather accepted custom and practice in any adoption service, these include; marketing and comms, subscriptions for membership organisations, CoramBAAF, New Family Social, Adoption UK. A range of training and development opportunities and other services outlined elsewhere in this report are also included in the non-staffing spend commitments set out above. Under the terms of the current funding formula, Brent's contribution to ALW is 23% of the overall budget. Therefore, the proportionate contribution to the non-staffing budget would be in the region of £53,260, however, due to several efficiencies and other factors, this amount has not been required.

The overall benefits of a shared service are also realised through the practice improvement and opportunities that are possible now that small individual services have become part of the wider Adopt London collaboration and the national RAA network. It was simply not possible for LA Adoption services to offer the range of support and services that can now be delivered as a Regional Adoption Agency.

14.0 National Adoption Strategy

14.1 Government published the first National Adoption Strategy in July 2021, a summary of the key messages and vision is set out below

- £48 million investment ongoing: £46 million Adoption Support Fund, further investment of £1 million for a national recruitment campaign, £500k to improve practice and increase the numbers of Early Permanence placements and £500k for RAA Strategic Leadership) this equates to £1 million new money for Adoption.
- A new framework of National Standards, Recruitment, Matching and Support is to be agreed and implemented.
- Adopters should not be deterred because of their background; the sector need to attract a wider group of Adopters – barriers to be removed
- There is a need to dispel the myth that adoption is only for those who cannot have children.

- An important message is reiterated that we are seeking families for children not children for families.
- Voice of Children and Adopters needs to be heard
- Acknowledgement of Trauma Informed Practice and support for therapeutic parenting training to be offered as part of an early intervention and support model
- Emphasis on Early Permanence – increasing numbers and improving practice, quality mark, pilot for children 5-10, and siblings.
- Outcomes based standards with measurable aims for Adoption Support Services to be devised and implemented with access to early support.
- Transitions to adulthood to be carefully considered and services improved, acknowledgement that young adults who have been adopted are likely to remain vulnerable and their needs may be similar to Care Leavers.

A programme of work to address the priorities set out will be devised by the National RAA leaders' group under the direction of the newly appointed Strategic Lead.

15.0 ALW Adoption Panel

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

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

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

15.3 ALW Panel continues to take place virtually via Microsoft Teams.

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

- 15.4** During the period under review, 8 adoption panels were held in ALW resulting in the successful approval of 7 adoptive families. The Panel recommended adoption as the care plan for 1 Brent child, 2 other Brent children were matched with their new families during this time.
- 15.5** Annual training for panel members is a regulatory requirement. Joint training for panel members and ALW Social workers took place on 21st and 25th May 2021. The topic was Transracial Adoption, the training was delivered by the Inter Country Adoption Centre, a voluntary Adoption Agency and experts in this area. A further panel training practice discussion took place on 6th September 2021, regular practice discussions will continue to further develop practice standards.
- 15.6** As part of continued quality assurance and to ensure the work of the panel is scrutinised, the Strategic Director of Children and Young People and Operational Director (Children and Young People) both observed the work of the ALW adoption panel during this reporting period.