



Corporate Parenting Committee

Wednesday 19 January 2022 at 5.00 pm

Please note this will now be undertaken as a fully online virtual (rather than in person) meeting.

Further details on how to access the meeting will be sent to members of the Committee in advance.

Any formal decisions required to be taken during the meeting will be subject to formal ratification at the next quorate, in-person meeting.

Membership:

Members

Councillors:
Conneely
Vacancy
Gbajumo
Thakkar
Maurice

Substitute Members

Councillors: Agha, Lloyd, W Mitchell Murray, Sangani
Councillor: Colwill, Kansagra

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

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The press and public are 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 to charitable purposes;
 - whose principal purposes include the influence of public opinion or policy (including a political party or trade union).
- (b) The interests of a person from whom you have received gifts or hospitality of at least £50 as a member in the municipal year;

or

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

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

Agenda

Introductions, if appropriate.

Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members.

| Item | Page |
|---|-------------|
| 1 Election of Chair | |
| To appoint a Chair for the duration of the meeting. | |
| 2 Exclusion of the Press and Public | |
| The committee is advised that the public may be excluded from meetings whenever it is likely in view of the nature of the proceedings that exempt information would be disclosed. Meetings of the Corporate Parenting Committee are attended by representatives of Care In Action (CIA), the council's Children in Care Council. The committee is therefore recommended to exclude the press and public for the duration of the meeting, as the attendance of CIA representatives necessitates the disclosure of the following category of exempt information, set out in the Local Government Act 1972: - information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual. | |
| 3 Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members | |
| 4 Declarations of interests | |
| Members are invited to declare at this stage of the meeting, any relevant disclosable pecuniary, personal or prejudicial interests in the items on this agenda. | |
| 5 Deputations (if any) | |
| To hear any deputations received from members of the public in accordance with Standing Order 67. | |
| 6 Minutes of the previous meeting | 1 - 10 |
| To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record. | |
| 7 Matters arising (if any) | |
| To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting. | |
| 8 Update from Care in Action and Care Leavers in Action Representatives | |

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

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| 9 | Bright Spots Survey: Your Life Beyond Care 2021 | 11 - 16 |
| To receive a report updating the Committee on the Bright Spots Survey 2021. | | |
| 10 | Responding to Health Needs of Looked After Children | presentation |
| To receive a presentation from CCG representatives on the ways health services respond to the health needs of Looked After Children. | | |
| 11 | London Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers | 17 - 24 |
| To receive a report detailing the London Protocol on reducing criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers. | | |
| 12 | Fostering Service Quarterly Report, Quarter 3 (Oct - Dec 2021) | 25 - 36 |
| 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. | | |
| 13 | Any other urgent business | |

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

Date of the next meeting: **Tuesday 1 March 2022**

Agenda Item 6



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE Wednesday 13 October 2021 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT (in remote capacity): Councillor M Patel (Chair) and Councillors Conneely, Gbajumo and Maurice

Also Present (in remote capacity): Councillor McLennan

The Chair led opening remarks, explaining that the meeting was being held virtually and therefore any formal decisions made during the meeting would require ratification at a future in-person meeting.

1. Exclusion of the Press and Public

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

2. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Thakkar.

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 20 July 2021 be approved as an accurate record, subject to ratification at the next quorate meeting.

6. Matters arising (if any)

None.

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

A (Care Leavers in Action) told the Committee about the fun day that had been organised in August, where the Care Leavers in Action Group (CLIA) and the Care in Action Group (CIA) got together in Kenton for food and music. The groups had

input in to the planning of the event. Another event had been to Brighton beach on 3 September. Going forward, CLIA were lobbying for a celebration event to acknowledge the hard work they had done on the Young Inspectors project.

T (Care in Action) expressed to the Committee that CIA had been the highlight of the year so far, especially during Covid-19. CIA were working to attract other Looked After Children, and held an event at the Gordon Brown Centre with looked after children who were not part of CIA as a taster for them to see what type of activities the group did. T advised that CIA had wished the budget for the fun day had been wider as they wanted to do more, and hoped that could be taken on board for the following year. The CIA group had also looked at the results of the 'Bright Spots' survey, analysed the graphs and tables and gave feedback on what Brent could do better. T advised that the CIA group felt like a safe zone where she felt listened to, valued and important.

T (Care in Action) expressed that CIA had benefited her as a person to speak about her experiences confidently, with other people with similar backgrounds. The group allowed T to get to know other people and learn new things, and helped younger children speak the truth about their lives.

A (Care in Action) agreed that CIA had a good impact on her, and helped her become more social with other people and confident.

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) advised that, within the Covid guidelines, the service would look in to the possibility of an in person celebration event for looked after children and care leavers.

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. **Feedback from Looked After Children: Outcome of the Bright Spots "Your life, your care" survey 2020**

Sonya Kalyniak (Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Brent Council) introduced the report, which provided information about the 'your life, your care' survey and how the Council was responding to the results. She advised the Committee that the survey was conducted through the University of Oxford. It had been developed with children and young people to ensure it was easy to access and quick to complete, meaning the Council could get a really good representation of children's voices. The Committee heard that the Council put a lot of effort into promoting the survey through schools, foster carers and Independent Reviewing Officers, and elected members could be confident that this was a fair representation of young peoples' experience in care. There were responses from 36% of eligible children, meaning the survey was statistically relevant.

The key areas the results of the survey showed had gone well were; children and young people felt safe at home; a high proportion of respondents said they trusted

their carers; children and young people knew who their social worker was and trusted them, which was an improvement from the 2018 survey results; and there had been an increase in young people with less variation in social workers, with 40% of respondents aged 11-18 having had one social worker in the last 12 months, compared to 16% in 2018. The areas children and young people said needed to be improved were; feeling settled, with 76% reporting feeling settled compared to 90% in other local authorities benchmarked against; knowing their personal history and why they were in care; and contact and spending time with birth families. When Care in Action had discussed the results of the survey, they had discussed the topic of bullying, which had come up in the survey, and how the local authority could support people experiencing bullying. They also spoke about having a pet and contact with families.

The results of the survey were considered at a local partnership meeting to address key themes, which had good attendance from looked after children, care leavers, social workers and senior managers across the different service areas. Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) would lead on the improvement plan following the results.

The Chair thanked Sonya Kalyniak for her introduction and invited comments from the Committee, with the following points raised:

In relation to the timescales of the survey, the Committee were advised that the service was committed to doing a survey every 2 years, as it took a while from completion to get the results and then implement the improvement work. It was felt that 2 years would be sufficient time to see the impact of the improvement plan.

Sonya Kalyniak confirmed that the service would go back to the young people who had taken part in the survey as a ‘you said, we did’ exercise to show the respondents that their voice had made a difference, which would encourage them to complete the survey again in the future.

The Committee noted that young people had chosen not to prioritise the theme around young people feeling that they could talk to an adult they lived with, and queried what could be done to help in that area to open up conversations. Sonya Kalyniak advised that, although the CIA and CLIA groups had chosen specific areas to look at, the service would look at all areas that needed to be worked on. Training for foster carers about how to open up conversations and encourage vulnerable young people to share with adults they lived with was part of addressing that priority.

The Committee commended section 4.3.1 of the report, which stated that 40% of Brent young people reported they had one social worker in 12 months. They asked what further work would be done to improve that even more. Nigel Chapman (Operational Director for Integration and Improved Outcomes, Brent Council) agreed that the results indicated the impact of having a stable and permanent management group. He advised that the caseload in LAC and Permanency was manageable, to enable social workers to feel that they could do direct focused work with their children, and there had been a lot of work within the management group to develop and support that approach. The recruitment and retention challenge for the CYP department was frontline child protection teams, which was an issue nationally. The Council had agreed to increase resource for some frontline child protection teams to reduce caseloads, which would be proposed to the General

Purposes Committee. It was hoped that package would strengthen the progress made in this area even more.

Councillor McLennan was invited to contribute to the Committee, and asked about the feasibility of children and young people having more contact with their families in the context of child protection processes and regulations. Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) advised that the level of contact families had was ordered by the court and not a decision made by the Council in care proceedings cases. In some circumstances, it would be related to the experience they had with their birth families, and having a more stable social worker workforce would not necessarily increase the contact time children and young people had with their birth families. Onder Beter reminded those present that the survey had been undertaken after the first national lockdown where in-person contact had been restricted, and may have been completed in a context where children were missing seeing their birth families face to face.

The Committee noted that the report highlighted children and young people would like more opportunity to do different activities, recalling the earlier conversation with CIA representatives about expanding events. In relation to how the programmes were designed, Sonya Kalyniak advised that the activities were driven as much as possible by what young people wanted to see. The CLIA and CIA groups were the Children in Care Council so did a lot of work outside of activities, co-ordinating and ensuring young people had a wide variety of opportunities on offer. The responsibility for organising and arranging activities sat with the LAC and Permanency Team. Gail Tolley advised the Committee that through the Virtual School at half term some looked after children were going to an event at Oti Mbusi's Dance School which everyone was looking forward to. There had been restrictions which had meant the service were not able to do as many face to face activities, but they were now being put back in place led by the interests of children and young people. Onder Beter concluded by highlighting that an expansion of activities was also heavily reliant on resources.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

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

Sonya Kalyniak (Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Brent Council) introduced the report. She advised that Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) ensured cases were reviewed on a regular basis and that the wishes of children for their care plan were given good consideration. An average of 73 reviews were chaired every month, and there was a mixed model within Brent, with 2 in-house IROs and a commissioned service for the remainder of IROs. The arrangements had been in place for a long time. IROs had worked with young people since they had come in to care and it was a very stable service area.

A key theme in the report was to ensure a hybrid model was developed and put in place, following young people participating and being more confident with online case reviews during the pandemic. The Committee were advised that this model needed to be an innovative, long term and sustainable model, created in

consultation with children and young people. The service were also looking at escalations and how these made a difference to children.

In relation to the increase in escalations, the Committee queried whether there were any areas of concern there. Sonya Kalyniak advised that escalations were viewed as healthy, and IROs were encouraged to escalate where necessary. The service had emphasised what routes should be followed if an IRO had concerns.

The Committee highlighted that the majority of advocacy requests were around choice, type and location of placement. They were advised that this was in relation to children and young people requesting to change placements from semi-independent providers. The Committee were reminded that the report covered 2020-2021, so there was a hope that, following the implementation of the semi-independent quality assurance framework, those issues might be improved. Sonya Kalyniak added that there were new arrangements in place for children to access advocacy very swiftly. Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) added that the requests also related to where children were placed outside of their local area due to safeguarding, and they were unhappy to be placed away from their local connections.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

10. Support for Brent's Looked After Children and Care Leavers from Afghanistan

The purpose of this report was to provide information to the Corporate Parenting Committee with a summary of activities the Council were doing to support Afghan children and young people becoming looked after children and care leavers in Brent. Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) highlighted paragraphs 4.2 and 4.3 of the report, which detailed the emotional wellbeing and mental health support provided through commissioned services. Young people were being signposted to specialists in providing support to the Afghan community. Some young people had expressed they would like direct financial support to bring families to the UK, which Councillor Mili Patel as the Lead Member for Children's Safeguarding had been briefed on. As corporate parents, the Council had provided some support to help children who had needed to be brought back to the UK from Afghanistan.

The Committee highlighted the motion submitted by Councillor Hassan to Full Council regarding support for Afghan refugees, and members of the Committee had shared some of the initiatives detailed in the report with her such as the mental health offer, which members felt was very proactive. Councillor Hassan had been impressed at Brent's response and hoped national government funding could be secured to ensure these interventions continued to be offered.

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) advised the Committee that the government had focused on those Afghan families and individuals through the ARAP scheme who were evacuated. Brent did not have any bridging hotels for the ARAP scheme but there were families in hotels in Kensington

and Chelsea and Westminster, so Brent had looked at ways to help there in regard to school places.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the contents of the report.

11. **Brent Virtual School Annual Report**

Sharon Buckby (Head of Inclusion and Brent Virtual School) presented the report which outlined the activity of the Brent Virtual School and the educational outcomes for Brent looked after children for the academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21. She advised the Committee that looked after children had been learning in the pandemic and hoped councillors would see how well they had achieved despite that learning environment over the past 2 years. The core aim of the virtual school was to ensure children and young people were provided with every opportunity to succeed, to support schools to be aspirational, and to create intervention programmes to support looked after children's learning and understand how they learned. She highlighted the key positives within the report, including: the success of achieving PEPs with 99% completion rate, which was attributed to the multi-disciplinary approach taken; very high attendance levels which were far above the national average; and a zero permanent exclusion rate.

There was a slight decrease in the number of children achieving 5 GCSEs including English and Maths from 28% to 24% in 2021, which was attributed to the significant challenges faced during students' final years. The Committee were advised that lower attainment rates demonstrated the late entry to care for those in year 11, and very often those looked after children had unidentified or unmet Special Education Needs, coupled with a fractured educational career, and so the focus of the virtual school was to enable those LAC to have a positive future post-16. Those not engaged in employment, education and training post-16 had found it particularly hard to get back in to work, which had been isolating for those young people. As a result, work had been undertaken with the commissioned careers advice service, Brent Works, and the post-16 life coach.

The Committee commended the report and highlighted the high attendance record, which was attributed to the fact schools remained open for all looked after children during the lockdown. There was a wholehearted focus in Brent on ensuring vulnerable children attended schools. Although there were challenges for young people in secondary schools placed outside of the borough, Brent Virtual School had worked very hard with foster carers to ensure children could engage wherever possible in a meaningful way.

The Committee queried how those not in education or employment would be supported. Sharon Buckby advised the members that Prospects gave targeted support, and Brent Works also supported young people into work. She highlighted that the combined work being done with by the virtual school with Brent Works had opened up opportunities and provided one of the most successful routes for young people to take. The focus was on looking at the interests of young people as a way to re-engage them and re-invigorate their motivation. This was done in conjunction with social workers or supported by semi-independent providers.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

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

The Committee received a report from Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) highlighting the work of the fostering service in Brent between July 2021 and September 2021. In summing up activity, he advised the Committee of the additional resources required to administrate 72 referrals for age assessments from unaccompanied asylum seekers coming forward as children from the 3 contingency hotels in Brent. This included recruitment of additional lawyers to support potential judicial review hearings and additional age assessors. He advised that the Council believed some of those who had come forward to be children over the age of 18, which raised concerns over the age assessment process on arrival to the UK by the Home Office.

In terms of recruitment and assessment of foster carers, there had been a decline in the number of new enquiries and the conversion rate from referrals into initial visits and assessments. This decline had been associated with the holiday period and that the marketing and recruitment officer had not yet been appointed. An interim service manager for LAC and Permanency had been appointed following the departure to another London LA of the postholder.

As requested by the Committee, the report included information on relevant elements of kinship care pertaining to fostering. Paragraph 9.1 of the report detailed new developments and the service were continuing to work on the collaborative fostering project where they hoped to have a product towards the end of Spring 2022. Paragraph 9.2 of the report detailed the decision made by the DfE to ban local authorities from placing any child under 18 in an unregulated semi-independent provider, and the Committee were reassured that there were no children under 16 placed in semi-independent accommodation in Brent.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

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

The Committee received a report from Debbie Gabriel (Head of Service, Adopt London West) updating them on the performance of Adopt London West over the review period. Debbie Gabriel highlighted the following key points in relation to the report:

- Sections 5 and 6 of the report detailed the improved performance for placing children after court authorisation, which had improved by 31 days. She felt this demonstrated the strong partnership between Brent social workers and Adopt London West.

- 11 children in Brent had plans for adoption. 6 had been placed in their adoptive families, and 1 child had been matched and would be with their adoptive family by the end of the month. There were 4 children going through court proceedings.
- The government had made early permanence for children a priority and allocated additional funding to improve that area of practice. There was one child in Brent placed in early permanence which meant they could join their adoptive family much earlier.
- There had been capacity issues for adopter recruitment, therefore the Board for Adopt London West had approved a fixed term temporary post to add additional management capacity and improve that position.
- In regards to adoption and special guardianship support, the education support group had been promoted as an area of good practice. This group met termly and was facilitated by an educational psychologist. A podcast had been recorded to help adopters think about the challenges of applying for a secondary school and the transition to high school.

The Committee thanked Debbie Gabriel for her introduction to the report, and noted that a Special Guardian had joined the meeting this evening to talk about her experience. The Chair welcomed the carer to the meeting and invited her to comment.

The carer informed the Committee that since becoming a Special Guardian carer she had linked with Adopt London West for support, and had a really positive experience. She engaged with different groups and carers who had been able to support each other along their journeys. She hoped to develop the service further through a peer support network with more community based activities for Special Guardians, which would be carer led within their own communities. One example of a community based event was a recent Fun Day, which was the first time the children had been able to interact with each other. She felt this enabled children to see other representation of themselves in the different family units. There was also a newly developed special guardian reference group, which the carer fed in to in order to influence government response to adoption nationally.

The Chair thanked the special guardian for her comments and invited comments and questions from the Committee, with the following points raised:

The Committee agreed that the special guardian was trailblazing in this area and helping to ensure all the support that could be given was in place. In terms of the role of the Committee, the members queried what carers would want them to do through monitoring and holding the service to account. The carer advised the Committee that it was important to understand that the journey for special guardians was different to adoptive carers, but was the same level of permanency for the child. Access to entitlement was not the same, and she was lobbying nationally for universal support no matter the legal order of the carer, highlighting it should be based on a child's needs. Support offered to special guardians was not currently regulated and she felt that this should be looked into, as it made it difficult for special guardians to approach services. In terms of improvement, she felt this could be done through utilising communities, forums and panels for special guardians to feed back their experience, which could make a difference at a local

level. The carer invited councillors to meet special guardian carers through support groups.

The Committee expressed gratitude to all special guardian carers, highlighting that the more equitable support that could be offered the more people might come forward as special guardians. They wanted to recognise and value special guardians, and noted that the previous week had been Kinship Carer Week.

The Committee moved to speak about recruitment, including the national recruitment campaign launched by central government '#youcanadopt'. Debbie Gabriel advised that the campaign was really welcome, but from experience it was highlighted that adopters needed certain skills, characteristics, understanding and insight. The children being placed needed to be able to maintain a level of relationship with their birth families. Ideally the service would look to be able to support children to be with their birth families and if that was not possible to place them within a kinship arrangement as that was better for children's resilience, emotional wellbeing and mental health. If that was not possible then adoption was the right pathway, but the right adopters were needed in order to be able to understand the children's loss and identity.

Adopt London West had launched a Black Adopters Project, recognising that the experience of Black adopters was not what it should be and that Black children often waited longer for adoption. Debbie Gabriel agreed to bring back to the Committee an update on the Black Adopters Project, particularly in relation to Brent, for the next report.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

14. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 18:51 pm

COUNCILLOR MILI PATEL
Chair

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|  Brent | <p>Corporate Parenting Committee</p> <p>19 January 2022</p> <p>Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services</p> |
| <p>Feedback from Care Leavers: Outcome of the Bright Spots 'Your life beyond care' survey 2021</p> | |

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| 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 purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the Bright Spots "Your life beyond care" survey 2021 and how the Council plans to respond.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

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

I am very happy here with my foster family and my pet [name]. I want to continue to live with them and after finishing my college to go to university to study art.

I love it [where I live]! I've painted the entire flat on my own and have assembled all of the furniture, so I've really left my mark on it.

3.0 Background to “Your life beyond care” survey 2021

- 3.1 “Your life beyond care” is a well-being survey for care leavers. It builds on a similar survey for children in care. The survey was developed with care leavers by Coram Voice and The University of Oxford in 2019. Brent first took part in the survey in 2019 and this is our second survey.
- 3.2 The aim of the survey is to hear from care leavers about their well-being, improve their care leaving experience and highlight the Bright Spots of practice that contribute to care leavers doing well. Brent has been working in partnership with Coram Voice to ensure care leavers are involved and benefit from this survey.
- 3.3 The areas of focus in the survey were:
 - The people in your life
 - Being a care leaver
 - Housing
 - Living independently
 - Taking part in society
 - Feelings
 - Well-being

4.0 Summary of key messages from the “Your life beyond care” survey 2021

- 4.1 The survey completed via an online app with the support of the Quality Assurance and L&D Team. The survey took place between April and May 2021 and results were made available to Brent Council in August 2021. The eligible participation cohort of care leavers aged 16 to 25 years old was 411. Of that number, 132 care leavers responded to the survey which is a response rate of 32%.
- 4.2 51% of the respondents were aged between 21 and 25 years, most others (45%) were aged between 18 and 20 years. Four (3%) of respondents were aged 16-17 and one (1%) was age 26. 63% of respondents were male and 37% were female. The ethnicity of care leavers who completed the survey was 34% Black, 19% Asian, 16% White, 13% mixed and 18% other.
- 4.3 Before becoming a care leaver, nearly two thirds (65%) of the care leavers who responded had been in care for more than four years and just 3% had been in care for less than a year. Direct feedback from Care Leavers is included in quotations in this report

I am happy with my experience in social services so far.

The people in my life tend to be temporary and I cannot always trust them... I tend to rely on myself and my faith.

- 4.4 A sizeable minority of care leavers in Brent appeared to be thriving. Across the four well-being measures 30% reported very high levels of happiness, 26% reported very high life satisfaction, 35% reported feeling that things done in life were very worthwhile and 20% reported very low levels of anxiety.
- 4.5 24% of care leavers had overall low well-being which is a reduction from 31% in 2019. Care leavers with low well-being were more likely to report that they did not have someone they could trust; who believed in them; who listened to them and who praised their achievements. As well as the absence of key supportive relationships, other factors most strongly associated with low overall well-being were little or no involvement in pathway planning, unhappiness with appearance and feeling lonely ‘always or often’.
- 4.6 Pathway planning involves a local authority and young person setting goals and outlining the support needed to reach those goals. Care leavers were asked, do you feel involved in your pathway planning? Three-fifths (61%) of care leavers felt wholly or mostly involved with their pathway planning and this is an increased from 56% in 2019. 15% felt ‘hardly ever/ never’ involved with their pathway planning, or didn’t have a plan, or didn’t know what one was.
- 4.7 What care leavers said has gone well:
- Care leavers in Brent were statistically more likely than care leavers in other LAs to report very high levels of life satisfaction (26% vs. 16%). Those who said they were highly satisfied or very highly satisfied with life as a whole increased from 38% in 2019 to 50% in 2021.
 - Care leavers in Brent were statistically more likely than care leavers in other LAs to score very highly on feeling the extent to which things they did were worthwhile (35% vs. 22%). Those that responded that things they did were moderately to very highly worthwhile increase from 75% in 2019 to 87% in 2021.
 - Care leavers in Brent were statistically more likely than care leavers in other LAs to report ‘very high’ levels of happiness the previous day (30% vs. 21%). Those who reported ‘high’ and ‘very high’ levels of happiness yesterday increased slightly from 50% to 51%.
 - Care leavers in Brent were statistically more likely than care leavers in other LAs to report very high levels of positivity about the future (46% vs. 27%). This is an increase from 35% in 2019.
 - Care leavers in Brent were statistically more likely than care leavers in other LAs to report very high levels of satisfaction with the way they looked (44% vs. 25%). This is an increase from 35% in 2019.

- 95% of care leavers in Brent knew the identity of their leaving care worker. In the 2019 survey this figure was 89%.
- 17% of care leavers reported difficulties in coping financially. This is down 9 percentage points from the 2019 survey. 20% could not afford their mobile phone bills compared to 38 in 2019%.
- Although care leavers in Brent were statistically less likely than care leavers in other LAs to report owning a pet (14% vs. 28%), the proportion of Brent's care leavers who owned a pet rose from 4% to 14% between the 2019 and the 2021 survey.
- As in 2019, in Brent, care leavers continued to experience greater stability of worker than did young people (11-18yrs) in care.

*I have a lot of childhood trauma
... I internalise a lot of what I'm
feeling and it makes me
emotionally volatile.*

*Feeling great. Today
is a great day
everything is
positive.*

4.8 What care leavers said needs to improve:

- Nearly one in five (19%) of the care leavers reported not having someone they trusted and who stuck by them. The same is true for just 2% of young people in the general population.
- Nine out of ten (90%) care leavers reported having at least one good friend (an increase from 87% in 2019), but 13 (10%) did not – a much greater proportion than is recorded by peers in the general population, where 3% report not having at least one good friend.
- Compared to care leavers in other LAs, care leavers in Brent were statistically less likely to report trusting their leaving care worker 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes' (89% vs. 96%). This is a decrease from 95% in 2019.
- 40% of the care leavers in Brent reported high levels of anxiety. The same was true for 18% of young people in the general population.
- 44% of the care leavers did not 'always' feel settled where they lived (a slight reduction from 46% in 2019).

- 41% did not ‘always’ feel safe in their neighbourhood (an increase from 30% in 2019).
- More than a third (36%) did not think that their current accommodation was right for them (an increase from 29% in 2019).
- Although a slight decrease from 19% in 2019, 17% of care leavers reported either not having been told or wanting to know more about the reasons for being in care.
- 17% of the care leavers were struggling financially (compared to 26% in 2019). However, the same is true for 7% of 16-24 year olds in the general population.

I feel like I need more support and information for YP moving out from foster carer to semi independent. The booklet is not enough to prepare.

Stop letting young people get attached to people that's going to leave them. It's not fair and it hurts.

5. Brent’s response the ‘Your life beyond care’ survey 2021

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

- **Care Leavers in Action (CLIA):** The initial results were shared with CLIA. They want to continue to make changes to services based on the results of these. For example, following the 2019 survey, young people delivered a financial guide for care leavers that was well received by their peers. They are now developing ideas based on the 2021 survey.
- **Local Partnership Meeting with Looked After Children and Care Leavers:** The results led to a well-attended “Time to Act” sessions with key partners including Care Leavers in Action members, Council partners and health colleagues. All are contributing to the development of an action plan based on the learning from the “Your life beyond care” survey and the youth-led inspection.
- **Corporate Parenting Committee:** A further report will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in April 2022 outlining the full “Time to Act” plan.
- **Feedback to care leavers:** Brent care leavers will be written to and thanked for their engagement and feedback. This will include their feedback that there has been an increase in care leavers who do not trust their leaving care worker. This is despite an increase of care

leavers reporting they know who their leaving care worker is. It is acknowledged that there have been staffing changes in the Leaving Care Teams and it takes time to build trust. In addition, this relationship-based work may have been impacted by Covid-19 and the restrictions on face to face working.

Feedback to Care Leavers will include other key messages about service improvement based on the findings of the survey, the “Time to Act” plan and how the survey results will be used to develop the revised Local Offer.

Report sign off:

Gail Tolley

Strategic Director Children and Young People

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|  Brent | <p>Corporate Parenting Committee 19 January 2022</p> <p>Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</p> |
| <p>The London Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers</p> | |

| | |
|--|--|
| Wards Affected: | All |
| Key or Non-Key Decision: | N/A |
| Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act) | Open |
| No. of Appendices: | 0 |
| Background Papers: | Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers - A Protocol for London (https://www.london.gov.uk/mopac-publications-0/reducing-criminalisation-looked-after-children-and-care-leavers) |
| Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details) | Onder Beter, Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Onder.beter@brent.gov.uk Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk |

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the London Protocol (The Protocol hereafter) on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers, published

in March 2021¹. A previous report on reducing the criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers was presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in April 2019 following the publication of a national protocol on this issue.

- 1.2 This report provides a summary of the London Protocol and sets out Brent's position around current practice and actions taken to reduce the criminalisation of children in care and care leavers. It contains evidence of services and approaches provided to looked after children and care leavers at a strategic and operational level.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is asked to review and comment on the content of this report.
- 2.2 The Corporate Parenting Committee advocates in support of the key principles set out within the London Protocol on behalf of looked after children and care leavers when exercising their duties as corporate parents.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 In November 2018, a national protocol on reducing unnecessary criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers was published by the Department for Education (DfE), Home Office and Ministry of Justice (MoJ). The protocol was the first national guidance aiming to tackle this issue. It provided a framework for local authority children's services, local care providers, youth offending services, the crown prosecution service, police, HM Courts and Tribunal Services and local health services.
- 3.2 The national protocol's key objectives and principles focused on a practice model that aimed to introduce preventative measures, reduce re-offending behaviour and rehabilitate young people who had offended through effective joint working between relevant agencies. The protocol highlighted the impact of previous trauma, attachment issues and specific vulnerabilities of looked after children and care leavers. All agencies were encouraged to use a trauma-informed approach to their practice. The Protocol recommends that restorative approaches should be used in a child-centred way to enable integrated, coordinated and proactive responses to prevent and address challenging offending behaviour.

¹ <https://www.london.gov.uk/mopac-publications-0/reducing-criminalisation-looked-after-children-and-care-leavers>

- 3.3 A Pan-London Protocol on reducing criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers was published by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) in March 2021. The London Protocol contains the core principles stipulated in the National Protocol and sets out a framework for practice relevant to London. The London Protocol is aimed at local authority children's services, local care providers (fostering services, children's homes and other arrangements), the Metropolitan Police Service, educational settings, Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and HM Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS), magistrates sitting in local youth courts and health services in London, including mental health. It provides the principles and tools to facilitate the co-ordinated, consistent multi-agency practice that is needed to prevent unnecessary criminalisation.
- 3.4 The London Protocol has a central question at its heart: "**will this be good enough for my child**". It encourages all agencies to ask this question when working with looked after children and care leavers who are exhibiting offending behaviours. Furthermore it has suggested a key set of principles for professionals when working with looked after children who come into contact with the criminal justice system, e.g. seeing children as children and embedding collaboration with children.
- 3.5 The London Protocol provides a practice model for all professionals in their responses to reducing criminalisation of looked after children. Safeguarding children who are subject of or at risk of harm outside the home (referred to as 'contextual safeguarding') is emphasised in the Protocol and roles and responsibilities of each agency have been amplified.
- 3.6 Areas within the Protocol that require further development include work being undertaken across agencies to more effectively support adult care leavers to reduce criminalisation. The next review of the Protocol will be published in March 2024.

4. Brent's practice to reduce criminalisation of LAC and care leavers

- 4.1 Looked after children and care leavers are known to be a vulnerable group with adverse childhood experiences such as suffering neglect, abuse and harm. Brent has 334 looked after children (aged 0-18) and 430 care leavers aged (18-25) as of 30th Nov 2021. All children in care in Brent are allocated to social workers up to their 18th birthday. Young people leaving care post 18th birthday are allocated to personal advisors who are professionals with experience of working with children and young people.
- 4.2 Children in and leaving care are supported within the Looked After Children and Permanency (LACP) Service. LACP has 6 social work teams and 3 leaving care teams supporting children and young people. Young people coming into contact

with the youth justice system are supported by the Youth Offending Service (YOS) in the Early Help Service of CYP.

- 4.3 While LAC continue to be overrepresented in the youth justice system, the overall number of LAC supported by the YOS in Brent has declined since April 2021 - there were 18 LAC supervised by the YOS in September 2021 compared to 25 in April 2020. There are currently 9 Brent care leavers supported by Probation. There are 24 care leavers in prison which makes 8% of leaving care population supported by Brent.
- 4.4 In 2021 Brent CYP refreshed its Practice Framework for all staff working across the department. The refreshed framework contains a specific emphasis on trauma informed approaches in recognition of the need to better understand and therefore respond to the needs of young people. The framework supports focused activity to improve practice with vulnerable adolescents and is evidenced through the following activity:
 - a) A six-monthly report on the progress of contextual safeguarding is considered by the Corporate Management Team to ensure a council-wide response for vulnerable adolescents. The last 6-monthly report was produced in November 2021 covering the period April 2021 to September 2021.
 - b) The Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Group, chaired by the Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes, reviews data and current trends with a view to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The group is held bi-monthly and operates as a platform for learning from practice, sharing information and strengthening collaboration and cooperation of partner agencies to better respond to the needs of adolescents with multiple vulnerabilities. Through the group Brent leads on a clear multi-agency approach to discuss services available for young people at risk of exploitation in Brent. This includes resources commissioned by Brent services as well as pan-London Projects applied locally.
 - c) The YOS Management Board, chaired by the Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes, consists of representatives from different agencies including the police, probation, operational social work services, the Youth Justice Board and the courts. The Board aims to provide strategic direction for youth justice services, and monitor objectives linked to key performance indicators, within the national framework established by the Youth Justice Board and other locally agreed priorities. The Board reviews multi-agency activities aiming to reduce re-offending, reduce first time entrants into the youth justice system and to reduce the use of custody.
 - d) In relation to high risk young people, an escalation process is in place. Heads of Service provide a briefing to the Operational Director and the Strategic Director Children and Young People in their statutory role. The

DCS and Lead Member are provided with regular updates and briefings about these cases by the Operational Director IIO. These procedures for the recording and reporting of critical incidents internally also demonstrate adherence to Youth Justice Board serious incident requirements.

- e) In 2020 Brent received funding from the Youth Justice Board to establish a BAME Covid-19 Pathfinder programme. The programme supports BAME young people to reengage or engage with education, empowering young people to offer feedback on the services they have used and providing young people with access to a range of positive activities. The aim of the programme is to reduce the numbers of young people from Black and Asian backgrounds from coming into contact with the youth justice system. Whilst the programme does not directly work with LAC, through preventative measures it helps young people to remain within their families and communities, reducing the likelihood of them being at risk of entering the care system.
- 4.5 Brent has well-established operational practice when it comes to working with LAC and care leavers who come into contact with the youth justice system. Some of the key examples are as follows:
- a) Brent social work teams within the Localities and the LACP services have established links with YOS, reinforced by a revised joint protocol (October 2021). This protocol provides clarity on the respective roles and responsibilities of all practitioners where children or young people come into contact with the youth justice system. It aims to provide a basis for effective joint-working, providing a framework for delivery underpinning partnership working. The joint YOS and Social Care protocol references the March 2021 London-wide Protocol and it covers three specific areas of work with looked after children:
- Joint working where young people are remanded to Local Authority accommodation;
 - Providing joint support to young people who are transitioning from custody to the community upon release;
 - Improved partnership working when children and young people are in the community and are receiving services from both teams.

On 30th November 2021 eight cases of looked after children who were on YOS Orders were jointly audited by CYP staff across service areas (LACP, Early Help and Inclusion). The audits highlighted a number of strengths in the system such as good management oversight, strong working relationships between YOS and SW Teams; evidence of voice of young people captured, evidence of positive relationship with young people and its impact. They also drew attention to some challenges around young people coming to care late with very complex needs and professionals having some difficulty to support them appropriately before their 18th birthdays.

- b) A monthly Resettlement and After Care Meeting involving managers from various CYP services discuss and develop plans to help young people who are to be released from custody. This activity assists risk management and facilitates a smooth transition back into the community.
- c) Resettlement meetings take place with Probation prior to the release day of care leavers from custody. This helps in relation to rehabilitation back into the community as well as risk management. A draft joint protocol between Brent CYP and Probation was completed in December 2021 and will be finalised in February 2022. This approach is expected to provide further clarity on roles and responsibilities of professionals working with care leavers who come into contact with the justice system.
- d) Since October 2021 the YOS and social work teams have undertaken joint group supervision, using our practice approach called 'Signs of Safety'. This is to assist both YOS case managers and social workers to develop their understanding of high-risk / complex cases as well as have the opportunity to reflect together and develop joint safety planning.
- e) A forum has been established with providers of semi-independent accommodation in the borough to support them in their quality assurance activity as well as to offer training in a number of areas, including how to manage challenging behaviours and de-escalation of concerns to avoid involving the police unless it is necessary to do so.
- e) The Exploitation, Violence and Vulnerability Panel (EVVP) which is jointly chaired by Brent Council services and the police, leads on operational planning and co-ordination work between partners, driving strong interventions in response to individual young people at risk of exploitation. Most of the young people who are referred have contact with the youth justice system and therefore the EVVP plays a key role in triggering interventions and resources to assist safety planning for young people.
- f) A weekly operational meeting between CYP staff and the Police looks into individual cases of children who are missing from home or care – some of whom are at risk of or are engaged in criminal behaviours. Key themes from these discussions feed into the EVVP which brings about consistency of practice.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The London Protocol is a positive step forward, enabling professionals to embed a trauma-informed approach in their practice with looked after children and care leavers coming into contact with the youth justice system. Inspired by the National Protocol, the London Protocol solidifies a practice model for agencies and offers helpful practical tools when it comes to understanding the reasons for the behaviours of looked after children as well as planning an effective joint response.

- 5.2 Brent has a strong working relationship with agencies such as care providers, police, probation, health and schools and colleges. There are well-established systems and structures in place to support young people with both preventative and rehabilitative interventions, endorsed by joint protocols.
- 5.3 The issue of transitional safeguarding for care leavers, which is linked to reducing criminalisation of adult care leavers, remains a developing area of national practice. Brent has made progress, overseen by the Children's Trust, to develop a local response. However, a London-wide approach to this challenging area has not yet been established. It is anticipated that the London Protocol will be strengthened further to include a practice model and tools for all agencies working with care leavers on the subject of transitional safeguarding when it is reviewed by March 2024.

Report sign off

Gail Tolley

Strategic Director Children and Young People

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|  Brent | Corporate Parenting Committee 19 January 2022 Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People |
| Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 3: 1st October 2021 to 31st December 2021 | |

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| 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 October – 31st December 2021.

2 Recommendation(s)

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

3 Background

3.1 Service Priorities

The in-house fostering function is positioned within the LAC and Permanency Service (LACPS) of the Children and Young People's Department. Learning from our Covid-safe practice developed since the beginning of the first National lockdown in March 2020 and feedback from children, families and our foster carers, the following priority areas have been set out:

- To maintain use of recruitment drives that include an element of direct interface between the fostering teams and prospective foster carers as restrictions around social distancing continue, 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. Currently there are eight social work posts filled with permanent members of staff. The remaining 4 posts are currently vacant. There are plans in place to recruit to two of the vacant positions in early 2022. The two other positions have been kept vacant to meet growing demand in other parts of the service, particularly leaving care as a result of higher numbers of care leavers requiring support.

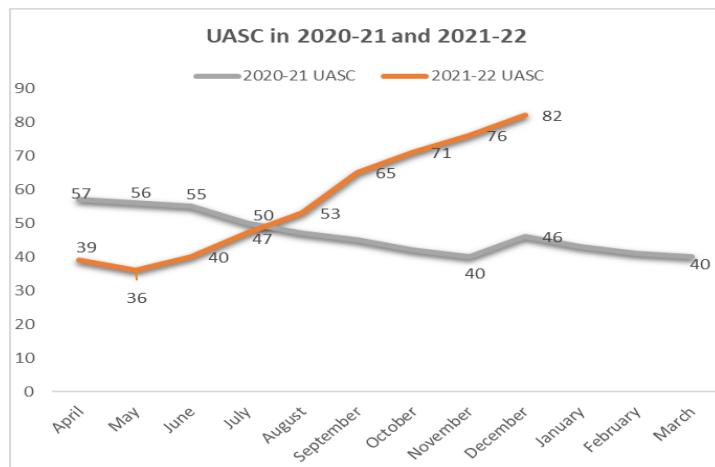
4.0 Placement Activity

4.1 The total number of looked after children as at 31st December 2021 was 351, which is an increase by 39 children from Q2 of 2021-2022 (312 children) and an increase by 55 children from the same period in 2020 (296 children). This is an expected trend in line with the increase with the number of children on child protection plans. Additionally, we have more unaccompanied asylum seeking children within the cohort compared to last financial year.

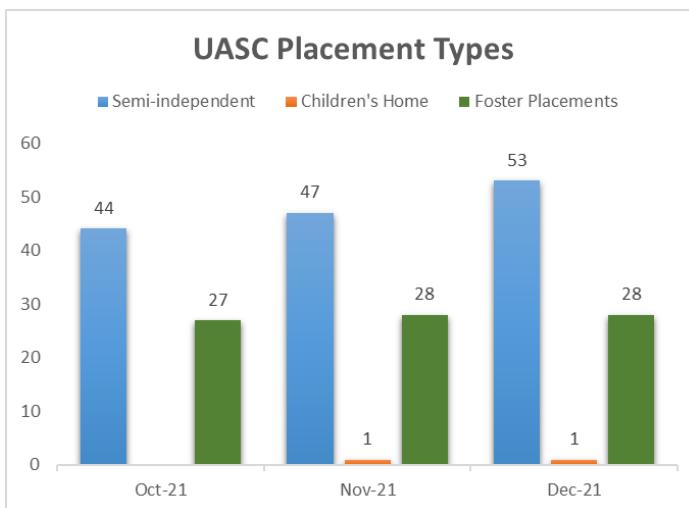
4.2 The corporate performance targets for 2021/2022 are as below:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 30% - the actual percentage as of 31st December-2021 was 16.2% (57 children), a drop by 1.4% from the previous quarter Q2 of 2021/2022, 17.6% (55 children)
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15% - the actual percentage as of 31st December-2021 was 12.8% (45 children), an increase by 1.6% from Q2 of 2021/2022 11.2% (35 children). Brent's commitment to place children within their family and friends' network has continued.
- Percentage of looked after children placed in independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 31st December-2021 was 31.3% (110 children); a decrease by 1% from Q2 of 2021/2022 (32.3%, 101 children).
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 70% - the actual percentage as of 31st December-2021 was 60.4% (212 children), a decrease by 0.9% from Q2 of 2021/2022(192 children, 61.3%).
- There were 91 looked after children, aged 16/17 in registered semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations) as at 31st December 2021, which represents 25.9% of all looked after children. This is an increase by 3% from the end of Q2, 2021/2022 (23%, 72 children)

4.3 As of 31st December 2021, there were 82 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), an increase of 17 (65 UASCs) from the end of Q2 of 2021/2022.



- 4.4** The number of UASC who are placed in semi-independent accommodation is 53, 12 more than at the end of Q2, 2020-22, one is in a residential children's home and 4 more UASCs placed in foster placements than Q1 (24 UASC).



- 4.5** The increase in number of UASC mostly related to referrals received from three hotels where the Home Office placed adult asylum seekers in Brent. Referrals come from individuals who claim to be under the age of 18 requesting interim support from the local authority whilst age assessments are undertaken by children's services. Local authorities are under statutory obligation to provide accommodation and interim support without prejudice whilst undertaking age assessments. Individuals who are assessed to be adults are referred back to the Home Office and those assessed to be under 18 are provided with on-going care and support by children's services. In order to meet its statutory duties Brent recruited four specialist social workers to respond to this demand and provided accommodation to individuals whilst undertaking age assessments. This has put a significant pressure on placement and staffing budgets.

5 Recruitment and Assessment

- 5.1** Marketing and recruitment activities continue to be delivered online. An increase from 13 enquiries in Q2 to 19 enquiries during Q3 was observed. Monthly fostering information evenings continue to take place online via Zoom, which attendees continue to find more convenient than having to travel to a venue.
- 5.2** During this reporting period marketing activity has been carried out through Brent Council's website and social media, managed by the Marketing and Recruitment Officer (MRO) and fostering social work teams. Interested parties made enquiries via phone or online. The teams carried out initial visits and assessments face-to-face and virtually via video calls, ensuring the experience of prospective carers remain 'business as usual'. The interim MRO has remained in place until the substantive MRO returns to work from maternity leave in April 2022.
- 5.3** Online recruitment activities have assisted Brent to have strong social media presence, with constant daily posts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, aimed at attracting new foster carers. We have seen a steady increase of interaction on these digital platforms.
- 5.4** The number of subscribers to the fostering newsletter has reached 4637 sign-ups. Our Facebook Page reach was 2,896 (up 1,100% on previous quarter) and Instagram reach was 937, up 1,600% on previous quarter). Our Twitter account averaged 3000 per month; this is the biggest area of growth in terms of social media marketing. This growth is expected to rise and make a positive impact on fostering enquiries in spring of 2022.
- 5.5** In addition to Brent's increased focus on social media campaigns, a three-month Google Advertising campaign is planned to launch in January 2022, to pilot "pay per click" advertising. This is expected to increase enquiries and attract more prospective foster carers developing an interest in fostering.
- 5.6** Of the 19 enquiries over the period, 7 resulted in initial home visits and 3 have successfully progressed to Stage 1 of the fostering assessment process. The other 16 applicants were deemed unsuitable to foster at present due to a number of reasons, including insufficient bedroom space, prospective applicants needing more time to consider whether they wish to apply and some fixed views from enquirers about the ethnic and cultural background of children they were prepared to consider fostering.
- 5.7** Of the 8 assessments reported in the last period as being in stage 1, 3 still remain in Stage 1 due to delays in completing relevant checks. Of the remaining 5, 2 have progressed to stage 2, and 3 have withdrawn from the assessment process for personal reasons.

- 5.8** Of the 5 assessments reported as being in stage 2 in the last quarter, 3 are being presented to the fostering panel on 21st January 2022. 1 assessment has had to come to an end as the applicants pulled out due to personal reasons. The other 1 remains in stage 2
- 5.9** In this reporting period there are 12 assessments underway. Of these:
- 6 are in Stage 1
 - 3 are in Stage 2
 - 3 are being presented to the fostering panel on 21st January 2022.

6 Fostering Panel

- 6.1** The LACPS has a Fostering Panel constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The service maintains a diverse and highly experienced central list of panel members that includes an elected member. The panel chair and vice chair are independent people with professional and personal experience of fostering and panel members include those with personal experience of the fostering system. Current demand requires three panels to be held every two months.
- 6.2** Face-to-Face panels were reinstated from 1st October 2021. However in light of recent developments linked rising Covid case numbers a decision was made to return to virtual fostering panels from January 2022. The situation will be monitored closely and reviewed on a monthly basis to explore when face to face panels can be re-established.
- 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)
 - the first annual review of each approved carer and any other review as requested by the service, including those where there is 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 October – 31st December 2021, 3 panels were held with 17 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:
- 4 new ‘family and friends’ fostering households were recommended for approval;
 - 4 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;

- 1 ‘family and friends’ fostering households were found suitable to continue to foster following review;
- The approval of 1 ‘family and friends’ households was terminated due to the child reaching 18 and therefore ceasing to be looked after;
- 7 fostering households resigned or had their fostering role terminated for a number of reasons including ill-health, moving to another part of the UK or overseas and in one case transferring to an independent fostering agency.

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

7 Training and Support for Foster Carers

7.1 The Learning and Development Programme

Brent’s learning and development team continue to keep the training offer for foster carers and special guardians under review in light of Covid 19. To date, First Aid Training is the only course that has been offered in person, and due to the renewed guidance regarding homeworking and the sharp rise in Covid numbers, online training will continue. This will be kept under review and the aim is to establish more face to face courses when the guidance indicates it is appropriate to do so.

Foster Carers do report preferring face to face sessions as they appreciate the ability to interact with peers and enjoy the group exercises, however some carers have commented that they are pleased that sessions are online as presently they would not feel comfortable attending in person.

7.2 Eight courses were offered during the period under review, 7 went ahead and one had to be rescheduled. All except First Aid were virtual. The training included:

- 13th October - Digital safety, keeping children safe online
- 8th Nov 21 – Prevent training
- 10th Dec 21 – Managing challenging behaviour

Carers’ comments about the sessions were mainly positive:

“All the elements of this course will help to improve the care I provide for children placed in my care.” Managing challenging behaviour.

“This training will help me in the care I am giving to the child as I have gained knowledge and the ‘know how’ if I am placed in a situation the best way to deal with it and benefit the child as well” Managing challenging behaviour.

“All aspects of the course were useful and informative” Prevent training

- 7.3** In addition to arranged training sessions, all carers have access to an online training package provided by an external provider. 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. There are currently 60 Brent carers who have accounts with AC Education, with a view to having more signed up as the year progresses.

8 Support from Supervising Social Workers (SSW)

- 8.1** Alongside recruitment and retention of foster carers, 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 continues to affect the lives of Brent foster carers and looked after children, making the support offered to carers even more important.
- 8.2** In addition to visits and calls to foster carers by the SSWs, foster carers are engaged and informed via emails and mobile text messaging. The MRO (Marketing Recruitment Officer) also sends a monthly newsletter to carers.
- 8.3** 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 online sessions useful and this view is supported by the increasing number of attendees each month; a shared view is that it is easier to commit to such a group without having to leave home to attend. To enable more carers to attend, the groups alternate between daytime (10am – 12pm) and evening (5:15 – 7:15pm) slots.
- 8.4** The October Support Group was attended by the recently appointed Interim Service Manager. Topics covered and discussed during October to December included annual celebration of achievements for Brent's foster carers, SharePoint, Covid/vaccination, training and LAC reviews. In relation to annual celebration, foster carers voiced their appreciation of Brent rewarding carers with vouchers last year in the light of face to face celebrations not being permitted due to Covid-19 related restrictions. Therefore, a discussion took place between senior managers and the Lead Member for children and families resulting in a decision made to acknowledge the carers' achievements via a certificate and a voucher, as a token of appreciation. Brent foster carers were sent vouchers and feedback was that this was very much appreciated by the carers. Each foster

carer will also receive a certificate of achievement signed by the Strategic Director CYP in the New Year.

9 Support for Kinship Carers

- 9.1** Support for connected persons carers who foster on a ‘family and friends’ basis are entitled to the same support as Brent’s mainstream foster carers and receive the same financial, social work and developmental support from allocated SSWs and via Brent’s training programme.
- 9.2** 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 able to access Brent’s training programme available to mainstream foster carers. All other support is offered to special guardians via *Adopt London West*. This includes: advice, guidance, mediation and advocacy.
- 9.3** In terms of developments, the national kinship care charity ‘Kinship’ has been commissioned by Adopt London West to offer Special Guardians free emotional and practical support. Special guardians can approach ‘Kinship’ who can help with expert advice and support around benefits, financial issues, housing, education, legal issues, family relationships and contact; access to grants; regional and local peer support groups and telephone peer support with another kinship carer.

10 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints

10.1 October 2021

Booked reviews – 18
Took place – 11
6 – Didn’t take place due to SSW sickness
1 – Cancelled due to carer resigning

November 2021

Booked reviews – 10
Took place – 9
1 – postponed to December 2021

December 2021

Booked reviews – 1
Took place - 1

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

11 New Developments or updates

11.1 Update on Collaborative Fostering Project

This work continues between Ealing, Harrow and Brent, with Brent providing the lead role. The main focus has been on establishing agreed shared principles surrounding fostering allowances and fees which will enable the collaborative arrangement to successfully compete against Private and Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) when it comes to recruitment and retention of foster carers. More detailed planning and specific details outlining the work undertaken and proposed future work will be provided to the next Corporate Parenting Committee.

11.2 Brent, Ealing and Hounslow local authorities have jointly commissioned 'Kinship' to provide a membership package to provide additional support for Special Guardians which is being administered by Adopt London West. Kinship will provide one to one support to Special Guardians through their Project Workers. All referrals to Kinship services are made by Adopt London West in consultation with Brent. As at 9th December 2021 7 Brent carers were accessing Tier 2 support.

11.3 New Scheme. In December the "recommend a friend" recruitment scheme was launched. This was framed as a call to action targeting in-house carers through our monthly foster carer newsletter and asking supervising social workers to promote the scheme through their networks. The recommend a friend scheme provides carers with a £750 "finder's fee" for each applicant put forward who successfully complete the assessment stage and is formally approved via our fostering panel. Progress will be reviewed and reported at the end of Q4 (March 22).

11.4 Carers on Hold. A key focus of work involves improving the utilisation of carers, with an emphasis on reducing the number of carers on hold. Carers can be on hold for a number of reasons e.g. ill health, break from fostering, concerns surrounding standards of care, personal or family circumstances and home relocation. During the last 12 months some carers have had to deal with ill health due to Covid and carers or family members having to self-isolate and/or recover from illness.

11.5 Having carers on hold means the team are unable to utilise foster carers or match children requiring placements. The management team currently conduct fortnightly monitoring of carers on hold to enable current status to be tracked and to agree actions to ensure carers eventually are able to resume fostering. During Q3 progress has been made in reducing the number of carers on hold from 16 to 10. Where there are practice concerns linked to carers on hold the focus is on establishing whether carers fully recognise and understand the level of concerns; can continue to meet fostering standards and are willing to undergo further training.

Report sign off:

Gail Tolley

Strategic Director Children and Young People

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