



Corporate Parenting Committee

Tuesday 19 April 2022 at 5.00 pm

Conference Hall – Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way,
Wembley, HA9 0FJ

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

The press and public will be excluded from this meeting.

Membership:

Members

Councillors:

McLennan
Conneely
Gbajumo
Thakkar
Maurice

Substitute Members

Councillors: Agha, Lloyd and Sangani

Councillor: Kansagra, Colwill

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/democracy**

Notes for Members - Declarations of Interest:

If a Member is aware they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest* in an item of business, they must declare its existence and nature at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent and must leave the room without participating in discussion of the item.

If a Member is aware they have a Personal Interest** in an item of business, they must declare its existence and nature at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent.

If the Personal Interest is also a Prejudicial Interest (i.e. it affects a financial position or relates to determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission, or registration) then (unless an exception at 14(2) of the Members Code applies), after disclosing the interest to the meeting the Member must leave the room without participating in discussion of the item, except that they may first make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to the matter, provided that the public are allowed to attend the meeting for those purposes.

***Disclosable Pecuniary Interests:**

- (a) **Employment, etc.** - Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit gain.
- (b) **Sponsorship** - Any payment or other financial benefit in respect expenses in carrying out duties as a member, or of election; including from a trade union.
- (c) **Contracts** - Any current contract for goods, services or works, between the Councillors or their partner (or a body in which one has a beneficial interest) and the council.
- (d) **Land** - Any beneficial interest in land which is within the council's area.
- (e) **Licences** - Any licence to occupy land in the council's area for a month or longer.
- (f) **Corporate tenancies** - Any tenancy between the council and a body in which the Councillor or their partner have a beneficial interest.
- (g) **Securities** - Any beneficial interest in securities of a body which has a place of business or land in the council's area, if the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body or of any one class of its issued share capital.

****Personal Interests:**

The business relates to or affects:

- (a) Anybody of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management, and:

- To which you are appointed by the council;
- which exercises functions of a public nature;
- which is directed is to charitable purposes;
- whose principal purposes include the influence of public opinion or policy (including a political party of trade union).

- (b) The interests a of a person from whom you have received gifts or hospitality of at least £50 as a member in the municipal year;

or

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

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

• Agenda

Introductions, if appropriate.

Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members.

Item	Page
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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 Annual Progress of the Local Offer for Care Leavers (2021/22) and the Proposed Revised Local Offer 2022 -2024 9 - 30

To provide a review of the progress of the Brent's Local Offer for Care Leavers during the period 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022, and a reviewed local offer for 2022-24 following consultation with young people and internal and external partners.

9 Looked After Children and Care Leaver Placements 31 - 40

To provide an update on placement commissioning activity for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

10 Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report - Quarter 4: 1 January 2022 to 31 March 202 41 - 48

To provide information about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children, in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011). The report covers activity from 1 January 2022 to 31 March 2022.

11 Brent Adoption Report Six Monthly Report: 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022 49 - 64

To provide a briefing in relation to the adoption performance data for 1 October 2021 to 21 March 2022, including the progress and activity of Adopt London West and how good outcomes are being achieved for children.

12 Any other urgent business

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



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE
Wednesday 19 January 2022 at 5.00 pm
Held as an online virtual meeting

PRESENT (in a remote capacity): Councillors Conneely, Gbajumo, Maurice and Thakkar

Also Present (in a remote capacity): Councillor McLennan

1. Election of Chair

Councillor Conneely was appointed as Chair for the duration of the meeting.

2. 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.

3. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

None.

4. Declarations of interests

Councillor Conneely declared a personal interest that she worked for Brent Centre for Young People who worked in partnership with Brent Council.

5. Deputations (if any)

None received.

6. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the last meeting held on 13 October 2021 be approved as an accurate record, subject to formal ratification at the next quorate, in-person meeting.

7. Matters arising (if any)

None.

8. Update from Care in Action and Care Leavers in Action Representatives

A (Care Leavers in Action) advised that she had been involved in the youth inspection project where Care Leavers In Action (CLIA) were able to work alongside other services

and meet senior members within Brent to ask tough questions. A had also been involved in the semi-independent accommodation project and had conducted a visit to a placement in semi-independent accommodation. She had been able to speak with the young person placed there and gather their views and feedback. The aim of the project was to improve the lives of people living in semi-independent accommodation. For the future of CLIA, A hoped to reach out to other Boroughs to see how they worked with their young people in care and wanted to focus on mental health, employment, training, and pathway planning.

C (Care Leavers in Action) had also been involved in the youth inspection. C felt that the work care leavers were doing was being seen and taken on board by senior leaders in Brent. The outcome of the project had been presented by young people to the Strategic Director for Children and Young People and Lead Member for Children's Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care in Autumn. Subsequent to receiving the report, Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) had chaired an implementation group which included young people, and the next Committee meeting would receive a summary report of the response and actions taken as a result of the inspection. A new project C was working on with CLIA included looking at mental health services in leaving care services, and also using hypothetical scenarios to test PAs.

L (Care Leavers in Action) highlighted that, at the last Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) session, they had a Christmas party, which had been good but not many people attended. CLIA was trying to engage more people to join and encourage people to see how CLIA could support them.

Tanya Williams (Participation and Engagement Lead, Brent Council) spoke on behalf of a member of Care in Action (CIA) who could not attend the meeting. The young person had been attending CIA for 3 years and had enjoyed the Christmas party. The CIA group were working on recruiting more people to join the group through video messages. The CIA member fed back that holding sessions in the Civic Centre was not suitable for all members and the group were looking into other venues to hold sessions. Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) highlighted that she would be interested to hear more about the reasons CIA were looking at venues outside of Brent Civic Centre and was happy to work with children and young people on that. Tanya Williams advised that views were currently quite mixed, but a trial session had been held at a Family Wellbeing Centre the previous day and a further session would be held there in February. Those sessions would then be reviewed to see if it was the right venue.

The Committee asked the young people present about the focus on mental health, which appeared to be top of the agenda for young people. C responded that mental health was an extremely prevalent issue, not just for care leavers but also those in care, foster care, and all the adjoining sectors linked with care. C highlighted that the current mental health facilities that care leavers had access to were sometimes not trusted or there was a lack staff. C highlighted that over the past 20 years mental health had become a much more vast area and while there were moves in the right direction, he felt mental health services were not completely where they needed to be yet, which was why CLIA wanted to focus attention on that.

In relation to the semi-independent accommodation project, the Committee asked whether care leaver involvement was making a difference to commissioning or placement arrangements. Care leavers advised that from their time in placement to now they had seen a huge improvement. There were things that could be worked on and care leavers were taking the areas young people felt needed more attention and working with the providers and key workers on those areas. Care leavers looked forward to reporting back on the project in the future.

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) advised that on 12 January 2022 the London Children in Care (CiC) Council held a meeting with a Brent CIA member there as a representative on the London Council. In addition a panel held at the end of the meeting had been successfully facilitated by a Brent Care Leaver. The motto from the meeting from young people across London had been 'less corporate, more parenting'.

The Committee thanked the representatives for the updates and RESOLVED:

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

9. **Bright Spots Survey: Your Life Beyond Care 2021**

Sonya Kalyniak (Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Brent Council) introduced the report, which provided information on the Bright Spots "Your life beyond care" survey 2021 and how the Council planned to respond. She highlighted that there had been a good response rate, with 132 care leavers responding out of a possible 400 at the time. This amounted to a 32% response rate with a good range of experiences, age groups and ethnic backgrounds. In introducing the report, she highlighted the following key points:

- There were high levels of happiness, life satisfaction and feeling worthwhile, and a reduction in the reporting of low wellbeing. There had been 24% of respondents reporting low wellbeing so there was still work to do there but it had improved. Levels of positivity about the future had increased at 46% compared to 35% in 2019 and there was a higher percentage of care leavers knowing who their leaving care worker was.
- Areas for improvement were around young people feeling that they had someone they trusted and people who stuck by them in life. There was a correlation between those who reported lower wellbeing and not having someone to trust. 41% of young people said they did not feel safe where they lived, and 36% felt their accommodation was not right for them. Some respondents wanted to know more about the reasons they had been taken in to care.
- These areas had been focused on in a session, and care leavers had looked at the results in detail and were considering what project they would like to do following the results to support their peers. For example, following the previous survey they had developed a financial guide for care leavers which had been well received.

The Chair thanked Sonya for her introduction and invited comments and questions from those present, with the following raised:

Responding to whether the completion of the survey was incentivised, Sonya Kalyniak advised that there had been a prize draw of 3 prizes, so those who let the service know they had completed it were entered into the draw. She highlighted that the survey was 10 minutes long and designed to be quick and snappy, developed with young people. Details of the prize winners would be circulated to care leavers.

The Committee queried the statistic in section 4.4 of the report which detailed that 30% of care leavers reported high levels of satisfaction, and whether that meant 70% of care leavers did not. Sonya Kalyniak explained that there were also people who reported high levels of satisfaction, but the 30% referred specifically to those reporting 'very' high levels of satisfaction.

In relation to some respondents feeling they had nobody they could trust, the Committee queried how the Council might address that in future, and whether the pandemic had impacted those feelings where it might have been difficult to meet and establish a trusting relationship. Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) felt it was an important point to raise. In light of the growing care leaver numbers, the service had been expanded with the addition of another leaving care team which had meant new PAs were required, and he felt it inevitable there would be trust issues at the beginning of those new relationships which took time to build. He felt there was a need to focus on how to provide those opportunities for relationships to grow and be nurtured between new members of staff, PAs and care leavers. He hoped with the easing of restrictions more face to face meetings with larger groups was possible in order to boost relationship building.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

10. **Responding to Health Needs of Looked After Children**

The Committee received a presentation from Dr Arlene Boroda (Designated Doctor for Safeguarding Children, and Children Looked After – Brent, NWL CCG) and Esther Powers (Designated Nurse for Looked After Children – Brent and Hounslow, NWL CCG) which provided an update on the response to the health needs of looked after children during 2021. The following points were highlighted during the presentation:

- Statutory duties had continued during Covid-19, including Initial Health Assessments, which were conducted face to face, and Review Health Assessments, which had been conducted either face to face or virtually depending on the clinical need and preferences of the person. Infection control measures had been in place.
- All Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) needing screening for infectious disease had been seen or referred.
- Partnership work had continued, and health was very well represented at relevant panels, such as the Entry to Care Panel.
- The Health Provider Team was well resourced in terms of staffing. The transfer of community services had been seamless, and Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust (CLCH) had invested in an additional LAC Nurse to cover out of borough cases. A new specialist mental health LAC nurse had also been appointed by Central and North West London Healthcare NHS Trust (CNWL) to support out of borough placements.
- In relation to care leavers specifically, a health resource booklet had been co-produced with young people and incorporated into Pathway Plans.
- A care leavers' health audit had been completed in 2021 with a sample of 15 care leavers. 33% of the sample had been UASC with no vaccination records. Of the overall audit sample, registration with a dentist and optician, and regular dental and vision checks, were not at 100%, but when compared to other populations they were at similar percentages, and the numbers were not a cause for concern.

- In relation to what had gone well during the reporting period, the following areas were listed: there had been positive progress in the management of timeliness for BAAFs; The Looked After Children (LAC) health admin continued to offer quarterly bitesize training sessions for social workers; a wider professional network was participating in strategy meetings and risk management discussions and; the out of borough CAMHS co-ordinator was providing flexible resource for LAC and care leavers requiring referrals for therapeutic intervention.
- The health service continued to work on areas for improvement, such as waiting times for CAMHS which remained a priority, out of borough care leavers receiving their care leaver's health summary consistently, and timeliness of referrals for initial and review health assessments.
- A new pathway had been designed by NHSE for dental access for LAC due to the difficulty in accessing dental care for young people across Brent.
- In relation to the overall health arrangements in Brent, from 1 April 2021 Brent CCG had been subsumed into the NWL CCG covering all 8 NWL boroughs. The CCG was a part of the quality directorate, and across NWL CCG there was a want to standardise the offer across the 8 boroughs to ensure best practice.
- Dr Boroda provided a case study of how the health service was supporting UASCs. She advised that the CCG were committed to meeting the health needs of UASCs placed in Brent and asked how they were feeling, what their journey had been like, and invited them to use the services on offer. The health service ensured the use of translators where necessary, and offered culturally competent practice.

In considering the presentation, the Committee raised the following points:

The Committee queried the reasons for the difficulties in accessing dental care for looked after children. Esther Powers advised that during the pandemic dental care was difficult to access for everybody, and, even though looked after children were considered priority in Brent to be seen, it had been difficult to get them to be seen face to face for routine care. Dr Arlene Boroda added that NHSE had issued directives around infection control because dental procedures involved access to the oral cavity, which was high risk in relation to the transmission of Covid-19. Many aerosol generated procedures could carry the virus and pose risk to the patient and professional. She highlighted that NWL Designated Safeguarding professionals had raised the alarm that the dental figures would be poor and asked what the government was doing about it, and services were commissioned on the back of that. The safeguarding community continued to argue the cause for services for the population so there were no closed doors for Brent's young people. She added that medical emergencies did continue and community dentists and A&E remained open for those in pain that needed to be addressed.

The Committee asked whether there were any opportunities for funding to be streamed through to LAC health services. Dr Arlene Boroda believed that, if statutory functions were needed, commissioners would have those conversations and do their best to meet the need. She was not aware of any funding restrictions impacting services. One workstream that should be monitored was the increased number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and she was sure that conversation would be held at the appropriate level.

In relation to how CAMHS waiting lists could be addressed for looked after children, Dr Arlene Boroda advised there was no one size fits all approach. There was an opportunity to work together as a partnership and there were conversations with children and young

people and foster carers which she felt was key. She highlighted that emotional wellbeing and mental health was very complex, and over the past 2 years emotional wellbeing and mental health for young people had been impacted by multiple variables not limited to Covid-19. She felt working together to find and trial solutions to see what worked was important. Dr Boroda felt optimistic that the strategic leaders in Brent would work together in the means they had to focus on this issue.

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) expressed thanks to Dr Boroda for the presentation and the work she and her team did, which was cited as best practice in London and nationally. Dr Boroda added that the team worked very well as a partnership and had good foster carers and social care professionals.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

11. London Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report, which provided a brief outline of the London protocol for reducing the unnecessary criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers, which had been announced in March 2021. This followed from the national protocol published three years ago. The summary was set out in section 3 of the report, and the report also detailed Brent's position on current practice to reduce the criminalisation of children in care and care leavers. Onder Beter requested the Committee embraced the principles set out in the protocol in relation to the trauma informed approach taken and the advocacy on behalf of looked after children and care leavers who came into contact with the justice system.

In relation to the Path Finder Programme, Nigel Chapman (Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes, Brent Council) advised that this was a 3-year funded Youth Justice Project aimed at preventing the entry of young people into the criminal justice system through a very early intervention approach. There was one more year of the programme. The Youth Panel had been running for a year, doing a regular podcast with the voices of young people across Brent. There was also counselling and activities provided through the Young Brent Foundation. In total, the project would work with up to 350 young people across the programme, and had worked with 160 so far.

Regarding representation on the programme, Nigel Chapman advised that the criteria was exclusively for young people from Black, Asian or other minority ethnic backgrounds. Through a recent survey of young people using the Youth Offending Service (YOS), which had a high response rate of between 80-90%, the findings showed there was an overrepresentation of young Black people in the Criminal Justice System, and an update would be presented to the Safer Brent Partnership on participation of young people at their next meeting.

The Committee asked how transitional safeguarding work was being included in the work. Onder Beter advised that the report included information on the ongoing work of exploring and mapping the services currently within the Council and how other departments could work together to address the issue. The Transitional Safeguarding Scrutiny Task Group would also look at this area.

The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

12. Fostering Service Quarterly Report, Quarter 3 (Oct - Dec 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).

The report detailed the increase in numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs) currently being supported in Brent, which had doubled compared to the same time the previous year. This was a result of the dispersal of Asylum Seekers by the Home Office into 3 Brent hotels, and some of those subsequently coming forward to claim to be under 18 and therefore children. It had been found that some of those who came forward were children and a lot of activity had been undertaken to ascertain that through age assessments. This had put pressure on the Council's budget through the need to recruit 4 specialist social workers to conduct age assessments and 2 locum lawyers to assist in confronting challenges around judicial reviews.

Nigel Chapman (Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes, Brent Council) added that there had been difficulties with the placement of Asylum Seekers in hotels in Brent for at least 6 months, where the Home Office had not been making the right decisions at port of entry in terms of age assessments, and were then placing young children in adult accommodation who were then going to the Council for support. The Council were also lobbying the Home Office for a more dispersed approach to dealing with new arrivals. Through a meeting with the Home Office, he had been advised that they were planning to increase resources at ports to do age assessments, and would be utilising the national transfer scheme which was now mandatory for local authorities. It was possible that the process for age assessments at ports would change as a result of discussions and could include medical checks. The Council were anticipating a rise in the numbers of people arriving in Spring, once winter was over. A meeting on Friday 21 January was being held with London Councils to see how they could support and challenge the Home Office in relation to the issues outlined.

The Chair advised the Committee that the resources in relation to supporting UASCs had been raised at the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee the previous evening during budget scrutiny. She highlighted there had been very strong feelings from all councillors across parties that the commitment from Brent had been excellent but the Council were bearing the burden of resource constraints which needed to be addressed by Central Government through more funding.

The report also detailed the recruitment efforts for foster carers. Onder Beter highlighted that there were challenges in recruitment, and this was a shared challenge across neighbouring local authorities. There had been some good marketing activity on social media and the data showed a significant increase in the number of people showing an interest in fostering and subscribing to social media. A specific Google campaign was underway, the results of which would be seen in Spring. The report detailed the additional efforts the service was doing to identify any barriers for existing foster carers currently on hold, in order to make them available to foster again. Existing foster carers were also receiving a financial incentive to join the campaign call for action.

Recruitment ideas were discussed, such as placing advertisements in Indian newspapers, posting on 'next door' and through Whatsapp. Councillors raised several online opportunities for them to share information about foster caring to help with the recruitment ask and posters would be shared with the Committee in order for them to disseminate through their channels.

RESOLVED:


- i) To note the contents of the report.

13. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 18:50 PM

COUNCILLOR R CONNEELY
Chair

	Corporate Parenting Committee 19 April 2022
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People
Annual Progress of the Local Offer for Care Leavers (2021/22) and the Proposed Revised Local Offer 2022 -2024	
Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Draft Local Offer to care leavers for 2022 - 2024 Appendix 2 - Care Leavers' Charter
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 This report provides a review of the progress of the Brent's Local Offer for Care Leavers during the period 1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022. The report also presents a reviewed local offer for 2022-24 following consultation with young people and both internal and external partners. (See appendix 1)

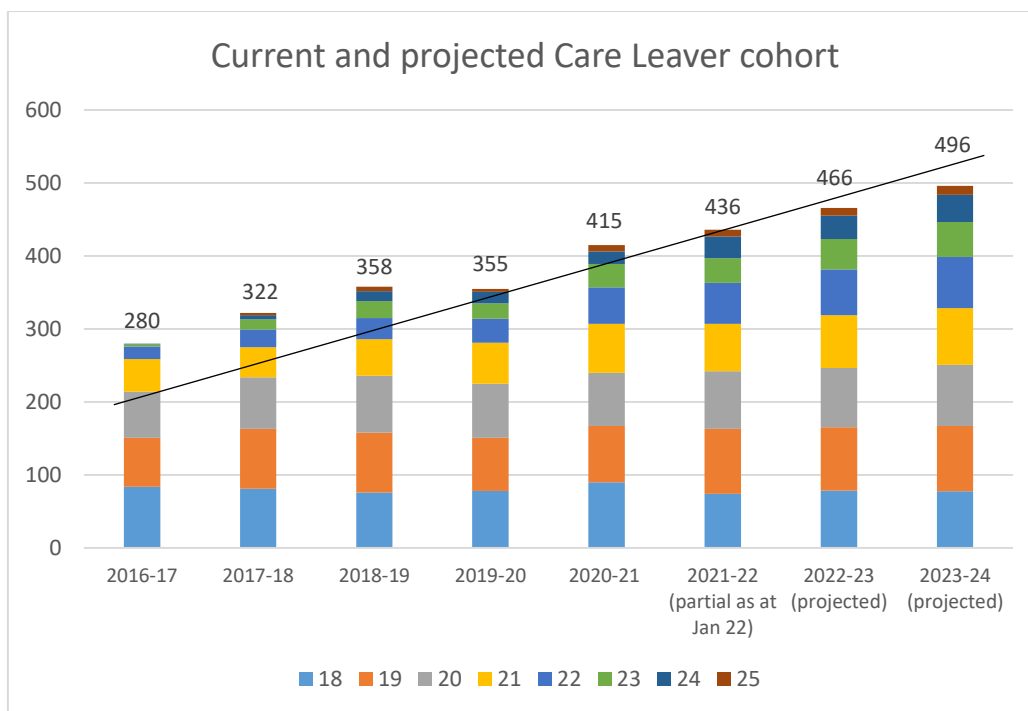
- 1.2 The Lead Member for Children's Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care, on behalf of the Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC), approved the last local offer in April 2020.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. The CPC is requested to review and note the content of the report and provide support and challenge to the service area in their pursuit to achieve the best outcomes for Brent's care leavers.
- 2.2. The Corporate Parenting Committee, is requested to approve Brent's reviewed local offer 2022-24, presented in appendix 1.

3. Background

- 3.1 Brent's first Local Offer for Care Leavers was presented to the CPC on 7th February 2018, following the Children and Social Work Act 2017 (SWA 2017). The SWA 2017 introduced a new obligation for local authorities to publish a local offer for care leavers following consultation with young people. The local offer is expected to provide information about the available statutory and discretionary support and services from the local authority.
- 3.2 Following approval from the Committee, the Local Offer was presented to Cabinet for approval as the offer included council tax exemption for Brent's care leavers. The Cabinet approved the offer and it was then activated from 1st April 2018. Brent's Local Offer for Care Leavers was one of the first published in the country. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 that came into force on 1st April 2018 allowed local authorities until March 2019 to publish their local offers. Brent however consulted early with senior leaders in the Council, members of staff, partners and most importantly young people, in the development of the local offer. Brent's Local Offer was co-produced with 119 care leavers who participated in a consultation process, including face-to-face dialogue, workshops and a questionnaire. According to the guidance, published by the DfE, councils are expected to review the local offer once every two to three years. This was not prescriptive and was for each local authority to determine.
- 3.3 Senior leaders in Brent made a decision for the progress of the local offer to be reviewed on an annual basis with a revised version being produced on a two yearly cycle. This was to ensure care leavers' needs were considered formally on an annual basis. Brent has kept the local offer under annual review since it was introduced in 2018 and revised it in 2020. This version (see Appendix 1) is the revised iteration for 2022 to 2024.
- 3.4 In supporting the ambition to provide a comprehensive care leaver offer there are also competing budgetary pressures. The growing number of the care leaver cohort, partly as a result of the support offer being raised to 25, has contributed to this pressure and is referenced within a report on placement sufficiency being presented at the CPC on the same date. The graph below illustrates the trend of rising care leaver numbers:



4. Impact of Brent's Offer for Care Leavers: Annual Review 2021-2022

- 4.1 Brent's Local Offer for care leavers included statutory support and guidance the Local Authority must provide and additional support offered with partner agencies.
- 4.2 Brent has continued to meet its statutory responsibilities towards care leavers during the COVID-19 pandemic. For the majority of care leavers, during the national lockdowns, visits took place virtually, in some cases in person, by following social distancing guidance. The pandemic has had a significant impact on delivery of some enrichment activities such as weekly football, annual celebration of achievements and monthly care leavers' hub, albeit the latter continued online. Once the Covid-19 restrictions were relaxed in November 2020, face to face activities with young people re-started.
- 4.3 Brent has fulfilled all of its statutory duties to care leavers as set out in the Local Offer:
- i. Allocation of personal advisors to care leavers: every care leaver has an allocated personal advisor. As at 28 February 2022 there were 409 care leavers (aged between 18 and 25) receiving support from the service.
 - ii. Pathway plans for young people: all care leavers were provided with a pathway plan and the vast majority of them were reviewed on a six-monthly basis. Some care leavers who did not have a pathway plan review were young people who had exhausted their appeal rights to remain in the UK; they were reluctant to come to meet with PAs.

- iii. Higher education bursary: all care leavers at university continue to be offered a bursary of £2,000. Discretionary payments (based on financial assessments) are made for educational related expenses such as a laptop or living/rent expenses during the Christmas, Easter or summer vacation.
- iv. Providing accommodation to care leavers in higher education during holidays: all care leavers in higher education or in residential further education were provided with accommodation or reasonable funding when they made their own arrangements during the summer vacation.
- v. Providing accommodation: all young people were offered suitable accommodation as per their needs. Young people who were in foster care were provided with the choice of 'staying put' with their foster carers or moving to supported accommodation where they were offered weekly sessions to improve their independent life skills. No care leaver had a breakdown of tenancy or became intentionally homeless.
- vi. Financial support: Every care leaver was offered an assessment of need when required and they received financial assistance towards expenses related to education, employment or training. They were also supported to access other sources of funding such as college or university funds or applying for Universal Credit from the Department for Work and Pensions.

5. Additional Support Offered under the Local Offer

- i. Education, Employment and Training: The Local Offer had twelve discretionary commitments in this area; ten commitments were fully met and two not met, mainly due to Covid-19 restrictions. An outline of some of the offers achieved are set out below:
 - staff members from the Department for Work and Pensions continued to offer remote 'virtual' support during COVID-19 to young people and personal advisors.
 - in line with the increase in universal credit payments during Covid-19 restrictions, subsistence allowance paid to care leavers was also increased.
 - care leavers at university and colleges were offered additional financial support due to Covid-19 including laptops and internet dongles to support remote learning when necessary.
 - the apprenticeship scheme for care leavers: ten ring-fenced apprenticeships were offered within Brent's local offer, either directly by the Council or arranged by the Council.
 - one young person has successfully secured an apprenticeship within the council,
 - one young person has now secured full time employment with Brent Council;

- two young people were assisted by the DWP on apprenticeship schemes.
 - Barnardo's as part of the Brent Care Journeys Programme has offered work opportunities to two care experienced young people as well as part-time opportunities to 10 young people.
 - Brent has been working with Drive Forward Foundation and Catch 22, to support young people with additional needs into apprenticeships or work employment with a focus on working with young people who have been released from prison.
 - four young people were offered civil service government care leaver internships,
 - Brent has also supported young people in other aspiring positions including a paralegal and a level 3 HR apprenticeship and barbering.
 - six young people were supported to apply for the government Kick Start Employment Scheme
- over 100 ASDAN Independent Living workbooks have been distributed to looked after children and care leavers. ASDAN is a curriculum development and awarding organisation, providing programmes and qualifications to help young people develop skills for learning, work and life. A virtual training event was jointly delivered with ASDAN to all personal advisors to better understand the independent living work book and how to best deliver it to young people. Later this year, a celebration event will be held for those who have completed the Independent Living Workbook in 20/21.
 - despite the Covid 19 restrictions, a Christmas event for care leavers took place in person in December 2021.
 - although volunteering opportunities were limited due to Covid-19 some young people were provided with opportunities to work with Barnardo's in a paid or in a volunteering capacity.

There were 2 offers that were not met due to the impact of Covid-19:

- annual evening celebration event for care leavers' achievement scheduled to take place in 2020 and 2021 could not be held due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The event was postponed and will be re-scheduled for September 2022.
- due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the traineeship programme due to take place in September 2020 and February 2021 did not take place. Instead, more efforts were made to support young people individually to be involved in EET.

- ii. Accommodation: there were twelve additional support commitments, all of these were met. Some of the examples were:

- virtual workshops were put in place during 2020-22 including support in maintaining a tenancy and 'My Bank' workshops. Feedback from young people below demonstrates the positive impact of the sessions:

"I thought it would be a bit of a waste of time because I know how to save money and budget money, but it opened my eyes to a lot of different things like all the bills you have to pay and things like that. When you get your own house it's not as easy as you think it is"

"Everything is becoming more and more digitalised to do anything like take a mortgage out or go on holiday you need your card you need a bank account you need money to do everything nowadays so you should know how to handle it"

- no care leaver was made intentionally homeless. Care leavers who had rent arrears were supported with managing their tenancy through a payment plan where Brent made a part payment to secure their tenancy (through an additional rough sleeping grant provided by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government), or supported to apply for Discretionary Housing Fund to pay the whole or part of the arrears.
- Care leavers were provided with a 'setting up home allowance' of £2,000, or £2,500 if they were parents.
- a nominated tenancy officer was available at the point of housing allocations. Additionally, Brent employed a Personal Advisor with a housing background who specialised in assisting young people in maintaining their tenancies and offering housing advice to personal advisors.

iii. Health and Wellbeing: under this section, there were eleven commitments. Ten commitments were fully delivered with one not delivered due to Covid-19 restrictions. Some of the headlines of the delivered commitments are as follows:

- PAs provided support to young people to register with a GP.
- care leavers were provided with a summary of their health records at their last Health Review prior to their 18th Birthday.
- care leavers received emotional support through the Care Leavers in Action group and via Hub events, which have taken place virtually throughout the pandemic.

- The Safe Base, therapeutic support including telephone line for care leavers, has been well-used by care leavers including those attending university in particular during Covid-19 lockdown.

One offer was not delivered:

- Kiln Theatre was closed due to Covid-19 pandemic for most of the year.

iv. Financial support: there were 8 additional commitments under this section and all of these were offered. Some of the successes were:

- Thirty one (for 21-22) young people, the total eligible cohort, were supported to be exempt from paying council tax, including those residing in other boroughs.
- provision of workshop on 'money management and budgeting' was provided through 'My Bank'. The sessions took place for 4 days and it also included a module on tenancy support.
- support to open a bank account was provided to all care leavers
- financial guide produced by CLIA was shared with all looked after children and care leavers by their personal advisor or their social worker
- a new 'Brent Financial Guide', was produced which included advice on budgeting, finance and other practical support.

One offer was not delivered:

- there has been delay in reviewing the leaving care guide. Young people will work with an in-house designer to develop a young people friendly publication of the Local Offer and leaving care guide.

v. Relationships: eight commitments were made under this section: five were fully met and three were partly met due to the impact of Covid-19. Some of the delivered commitments are below:

- as an extension of the life skills programme a group of young people completed a weekend at the Gordon Brown Activity Centre where they showed their readiness for independent living.

"I really needed this time for my mental health."

Some of the partly delivered commitments were as below:

- in person workshops for care leavers with special educational needs and disabilities are due to be delivered in 2022/23. Delay was due to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic.

vi. Participation in Society: nine commitments were made under this section; eight were achieved with one not achieved:

- monthly Hub Events. Feedback below demonstrates how important the Hub event is for young people. There has been an ongoing virtual programme during the pandemic including Zoom social time, Bingo events and motivational speakers. The event which was one of our most popular Hub events to date with over 20 young people logging in to hear a guest speaker provide tips on mental wellbeing and confidence. Some of the quotes received from young people where:

'He was really informative and motivating. I wish the session was longer'

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

- a digital pathway plan App was developed in consultation with young people and launched in Dec 2021. The App allows young people to undertake their pathway plans digitally as well as access important information such as the local offer on their phones. The app is being embedded into practice and is seen to be a pioneering piece of work that can be purchased by other LAs.
- one commitment that will be delivered in 2022/23 is the ongoing work to encourage care leavers to participate in Brent Youth Parliament, we currently have one young person but are committed to encourage more to join.
- A group of care leavers reviewed the leaving care service and presented their findings to the Strategic Director and the Lead Member.

6. **Proposed Changes to the Local Offer for 2022-24**

6.1 As part of reviewing the local offer. A series of workshops were delivered in conjunction with Barnardo's (Brent Care Journey (BCJ) which included, workshops with:

1. Children in care
2. Current care leavers (current interaction with the local offer)
3. Care leavers whose cases were closed
4. Care leavers who are young parents
5. Care leavers who are or were UASC
6. Consultation took place with young people who attend the care leavers hub and Care Leavers in Action

7. Internal (i.e. Housing, Adults Social Care, etc.) and external partners (NW CCG; CLCH, registered housing providers, semi-independent providers)

BCJ facilitated workshops with care leavers with the above groups 2, 3, 4 and 5. Leaving Care Teams facilitated consultation with the groups 1, 6 and 7.

6.2 The main findings from the consultation were captured in several themes:

6.2.1 User experience and communication

- *care leavers want to know about the local offer in person from their personal advisor and via an app for care leavers.* Accepted and will continue to be discussed by PAs and will be made available on the pathway plan app.
- *young people wanted the local offer to be clearly visible on the Brent website and signposted to and from social media. Some groups suggested it should be shared in a link via email, via text message or availability of paper copy or as part of BCJ welcome pack.* Accepted and will be implemented.

6.2.2 Inclusion and accessibility

- *care leavers were concerned that local offer may be inaccessible to those who have no or low levels of English, or those with special needs such as learning disability.* Accepted. Exploration has started to assess financial viability of making the offer available in different languages as well as a visual version.

6.2.3 Format and Presentation

- *care leavers said their local offer needs to be brief, bold, clear and direct. The local offer should include pictures and images and be attractively designed with vibrant colours.* Accepted. BCJ would consider supporting young people to propose suggestions of design with support from an internal designer.

6.2.4 Improvements

- *care leavers who were former UASC wanted the local offer translated into their language.* Exploration has started to assess financial viability of making the offer available in different languages
- *care leavers wanted the local offer by a range of media, specifically plain English written, audio and video.* Accepted. A video is planned to be made by care leavers introducing and promoting Brent's Local Offer for Care Leavers.
- *care leavers said there should be procedures which guarantee accountability that each young person has been made aware of the local offer.* Accepted. This has already been covered by Brent's Practice Promises, launched in Feb 2022.

6.2.5 Contents

- *care leavers wanted discounted gym membership – This was offered in the past but not taken up by young people.* Accepted to explore. Brent will re-engage with Community and Wellbeing Department to explore this option as the Sports Centres began to operate normally post Covid-19 pandemic.
- access to emergency funds – this is already available based on a financial assessment.

7. Feedback from Stakeholders.

- 7.1 A workshop was held with internal and external stakeholders in March 2022. Brent Works offered to provide a dedicated employment worker to be based at the Brent Civic to provide advice and assistance to care leavers. This is in addition to Brent Virtual School offering career advice to all care leavers' post 18. Brent Works also offered to have a 'Care Leavers' tab on their Brent Works portal for specific employment opportunities for care leavers.
- 7.2 Prospects, the commissioned provider for post-16 education, employment and training, who offer careers advice to care leavers have also offered a careers' coach to work with care leavers. This is in addition to Catch 22 providing bespoke service to young people being released from prison.
- 7.3 As part of the 'Accredited Life Skills Programme' (ASDAN) care leavers will be offered an opportunity to attend a residential weekend at the Gordon Brown Activity Centre to further develop their independent life skills.
- 7.4 Care leavers with learning needs or SEND, who are in their own tenancies, will receive priority support from Brent's Housing Management Team.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 The Looked After Children and Permanency service had a budget of £6.573m in 2021-22. The final year-end figures will be available early in the new financial year. Pressures related to Covid-19 and support to young people were key issues during the year and significantly outweighed any reductions in costs where activities had to be changed or could not go ahead. A significant part of these pressures were in relation to the non-salary overspend, attributable to the statutory and discretionary spend directly supporting looked after children and care leavers.
- 8.2 The review of the offer and suggested changes would have potential financial implications. However given the nature of these and that some would be 'one-off', it is considered that these can be being managed within the existing core budgets and other resources for such purposes and without loss of other service support, as it is hoped the Covid-19 additional pressures of the last two years will further recede next year.

- 8.3 The pressures from increasing LAC and Care Leaver numbers continue to present challenges. Inflationary pressures in the economy are also of concern. All pressures will be managed appropriately via the LB of Brent and CYP Department detailed monitoring and review systems to track these effects and any resulting budgetary pressures will be managed appropriately internally. The level of support continues to be based on the Care Offer and the needs of the young people.

Report Sign-off:

Gail Tolley

Strategic Director Children and Young People

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Draft Local Offer to Care Leavers 2022 – 2024 **(Changes being proposed are highlighted in the text)**

1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

2. Support we must provide by law

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

• Personal Advisor

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

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

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

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

3. Support we offer

• Education, Employment and Training

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

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

The law says we must provide you with assistance with expenses linked with employment, education and training. In particular:

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

Our other education and training support offer to you includes:

- **A guaranteed offer of a careers appointment with Brent Virtual School or Prospects (Connexions) to discuss your careers options post 18. Prospects will provide assist you in CV writing, improve your job interviews skills and help you apply for employment, education or training opportunities.**
- All apprenticeship vacancies within the school and local business advertised on a web recruitment system and details circulated to you and your personal advisor through various channels such as WhatsApp group and care leavers' hub.
- A drop in service offered by Brent Works available at Brent Civic each week to offer you advice and assistance on employment and training opportunities.

- A care leavers link on the Brent Works Portal highlighting specific training and employment opportunities available in Brent.
- Support to meet your transport costs when travelling to training, school/college, apprenticeships or job interviews;
- Support to buy tools, equipment, essential clothing and books;
- Support and advice if you choose to go to university, such as helping you apply for tuition fees and maintenance loans;
- In partnership with Brent Works we will send your personal advisor employment, training and apprenticeship opportunities to help you get into employment, training or an apprenticeship scheme within the council or elsewhere.
- A Department of Work and Pensions worker seconded to the leaving care team who will assist you in claiming benefits and avoid you getting undue benefit sanctions;
- A celebration event to share the positive education and training experiences of care leavers;
- Up to 10 apprenticeships arranged by the council on an annual basis;
- A traineeship programme offered twice a year in partnership with Brent Employment Skills and Enterprise for all care leavers who do not have the required qualification and skills to apply for an apprenticeship scheme;
- Volunteering opportunities for care leavers.
- An annual review of your education health and care plan in line with SEND Code of Practice.

• **Accommodation**

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

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

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

Our other accommodation support offer to you includes:

- Supported accommodation if you are not ready or don't want to have your own tenancy yet;
- Supporting you to remain with your foster carers under what's called a 'Staying Put' arrangement. This will be reviewed every six months as **part of your pathway plan review** to make sure its meeting your needs;
- Supported lodgings if you have a disability and have been assessed to have eligible needs under the Care Act 2014.
- Return to your family if it is safe for you to do so and if you have a disability and have been assessed to have eligible needs under the Care Act 2014, a care package to support you and your parents.
- Residential Care if you have a profound disability and have been assessed to have eligible needs under the Care Act 2014.
- Once you have reached the stage where you can live independently and maintain your tenancy, you will have the option to apply to Brent Council for social housing (this is accommodation managed by us or a housing association). **As a care leaver you will be given priority Band B and you will have 3 months to bid for a property, if you have not secured a property by then you may be given a direct offer.** Your PA will speak to the nominated housing officer, who works with the leaving care team, when you are ready to live on your own;

- Workshops to receive advice about holding down a tenancy, including avoiding rent arrears, paying bills and budgeting effectively;
- A 'Setting up Home Allowance' of £2,000 (based on assessed need) for items you need to set up home like appliances, bedding and furniture.
- If you don't want to live in Brent because you have friends, family or connections elsewhere you will need to talk to your PA. Your PA can make contact with the Local Authority where you wish to live to see if they are able to assist you.
- A decorating allowance if the property has not been decorated (if housed in a Brent Housing Property), such as to buy paint or wallpaper;
- To give you advice to prevent you from becoming intentionally homeless in Brent and giving you a second chance to sustain your tenancy.
- If you are in a position to purchase the accommodation you live in, your PA will signpost you to the relevant information

• **Your Health and Wellbeing**

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

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

• **Finances**

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

The law and the guidance says:

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

Our additional support offer to you includes:

- Being exempt from paying Council Tax, only after you have maximised the council tax rebate because you are on low income, a student or receiving universal credit;
- Offering you the opportunity to attend relevant money management courses;
- Information on how to access your Junior ISA, if you have one (a fund of money set aside by the government and the council);
- Support to open a bank account;
- Support to apply for universal credit or other benefits;
- Support to gain important identification documents, such as a passport and/or provisional driving licence, before your 18th birthday;
- Signpost to relevant charities or organisations where you could obtain advice on immigration matters.
- Financial support in exceptional emergencies based on a financial assessment undertaken by your personal advisor.
- We will work with CLIA to update the current leaving care guide in accordance to the feedback received from young people.

- **Relationships**

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

- Signpost you to an advocate if you need one;
- If you already have an 'independent visitor' before the age of 18, continuing to support to maintain contact with your 'independent visitor';
- Help to maintain or regain contact with people special to you or who cared for you in the past, like former foster carers or social workers;
- Life skills workshops that will focus on practical skills and managing relationships;
- Group work for young parents regarding healthy relationships;
- Group work with former Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children regarding relationships to minimise risks of isolation;
- Workshops for care leavers with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities by Brent Outreach Autism Team regarding relationships;
- As part of our independence training, workshops on Healthy Relationships.

- **Participation in Society**

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

- Workshops to inform you more about participation in society and having your voice heard, led by the Chief Executive of the council.
- Encouraging and helping you to enrol on the Electoral Register, so you can vote in elections;

- Providing information on groups and clubs you may wish to join;
- Development of a website for care leavers and an app to support independent living arrangements;
- Pathway plan app so that you can complete your pathway plan through a digital app.
- Making sure that your personal advisor talks to you about the local offer in your pathway plan review meetings.
- Seats on Brent Youth Parliament;
- Informing you about voluntary work that you may be interested in;
- Giving you advice and helping you to challenge any discrimination you face as a care leaver;
- You will have access to our Children and Young People's participation service called Care Leavers in Action (CLIA), where you can get involved in decision making on matters that have impact on children in care and care leaver or join an interview panel when recruiting senior staff and commissioned services to the council.
- You will have access to the Brent Care Journey which is a joint partnership with Barnardo's and Brent, where you can get involved in sharing your care experience with like minded young people, get an opportunity to change things by exploring new ideas and testing those out with social workers and senior managers.

4. Who can help?

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

Brent Leaving Care Team

Where to find the Leaving Care Team: Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley.

When are we open:

Monday to Friday 9 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.

How to contact us:

Duty Number 0208 379 4612 or 4613 during office hours, 24 hour emergency number 0208 863 5250

Disabled Childrens team you can contact by Brent's Family Front Door on 020 8937 4300.

Independent Advocacy: You can request an advocate or call the helpline like Coram, Tel. 0808 800 5792 Web: <https://www.coram.gov.uk/how-we-do-it/coram-voice-getting-your-voices-heard> or Childline, Tel. 0800 111 Web. www.childline.org.uk/pages/home.aspx. Coram Voice and Childline support and advise children in care. They have some useful information on their website and you can call them if you want to speak to someone.

If you are not happy or you think something is not right you can make a complaint by emailing complaints. service@brent.gov.uk or by calling us on 0208 937 2444. Most care leavers are helped to make a complaint by an advocate. If you would like an advocate to help you make a complaint, talk to your carer or personal advisor.

Brent Care in Action: Brent Care in Action is Brent's Children in Care Council. It works to make sure young people who have experienced care have a chance to be involved in making decisions. It is a chance to share views about the services and support you receive.

Care Leavers in Action is accessible to young people aged 18+.

CIA aims to:

- Give young people a chance to share their views and ensure thoughts and feelings are considered in decisions that are made
- Meet other young people and take part in fun activities/outings
- Talk to Brent Council about policies and rules that effect you
- Discuss ways to improve services for children in care

Your personal advisor can tell you more about how you can get involved.

Brent Care Leavers Charter: You will find the link to Brent Care Leavers' Charter below;
<https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s112463/9b.%20Appendix%202%20-%20Brent%20Care%20Leavers%20Charter.pdf>

Other places you can go for help:

- Rees: The Care Leavers Foundation <https://www.reesfoundation.org> Provides small grants for care leavers aged 18-25;
- The care leavers association <http://www.careleavers.com> A charity aimed at improving the lives of care leavers;
- Become <http://www.becomecharity.org.uk> Online advice and information for care leavers;
- Propel <http://propel.org.uk/UK> Information on what support is available for care leavers at university;
- Shelter <https://england.shelter.org.uk> Provides housing advice;
- National government benefits calculator <https://www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators> Information on benefits;
- Citizens Advice Bureau <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk> Information about money, benefits, your rights, employment, housing and the law.
- Care Leavers Covenant is a national inclusion programme that supports care leavers aged 16-25 to live independently [Home - Care Leaver Covenant \(mycovenant.org.uk\)](https://www.home-care-leaver-covenant.org.uk)
- Young Brent Foundation works with young people in Brent: <https://youngbrentfoundation.org.uk/>
- Brent Care Journeys is joint partnership with the Leaving Care Service to create the change needed to ensure that young people aged 19-21 with care experience, will be as or more likely to be in 'positive destinations' compared to their peers who have not been in care <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/services/brent-care-journeys>

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BRENT CARE LEAVERS' CHARTER

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

WE PROMISE

TO RESPECT AND HONOUR YOUR IDENTITY

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

TO BELIEVE IN YOU

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

TO LISTEN TO YOU

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

TO INFORM YOU

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



Brent

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

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

TO SUPPORT YOU

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



TO BE A LIFELONG CHAMPION

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




TO FIND YOU A HOME

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



Mili

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

	Corporate Parenting Committee 19 April 2022
	Report from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People
Looked After Children and Care Leaver Placements	
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:	Looked After Children's and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2020-24
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Shirley Parks Head of Forward Planning, Performance and Partnerships shirley.parks@brent.gov.uk Brian Grady Operational Director, Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy brian.grady@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report provides Corporate Parenting Committee with an update on placement commissioning activity for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

2.0 Recommendations

That Corporate Parenting Committee:

- 2.1 notes the contents of the report and the demand and market supply issues that the local authority faces.
- 2.2 notes the development activities underway to improve access to suitable placements for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

3.0 Detail

3.1 The Looked After Children's and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2020-24 sets out how Brent meets its statutory Sufficiency Duty as laid down in Section 22G of the Children Act 1989. Brent's placement activity reflects a collaborative and partnership approach to the sourcing of suitable placements for children and young people. Brent seeks to:

- provide LAC and care leavers with access to a range of placement options that meet their specific and diverse needs as identified in their care plan
- enable looked after children to be placed in a family setting where possible, whether with their own extended family members or foster carers, and provide staying put options for care leavers
- secure placements within or close to the local authority area, unless for safeguarding reasons this is not appropriate
- enable sibling groups to stay together or support sibling contact as outlined in their care plan
- minimise disruption to children and young people's education or training, with this considered at all stages of placement finding
- provide LAC and care leavers with access to support and services of high quality that are appropriate to their needs as identified in their care plan or pathway plan
- ensure placements are subject to robust quality assurance by commissioners and social work teams to support placement stability, with further support and challenge provided by Independent Reviewing Officers.

National and Regional Context

3.2 There is national and regional (Pan London) pressure on placements for looked after children and care leavers and concerns about rising placement costs over the past few years. In response to this, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has recently undertaken a market study into children's social care placements in England, Scotland and Wales. The CMA's final report (March 2022) highlights that there is a national shortage of appropriate placements and that the costs of placements are high. The report refers to two concerns that are contributing to poor outcomes for children and local authorities:

- The market is not providing sufficient placements that fully meet children's needs when and where they require them resulting in negative outcomes.
- Some prices and profits in the sector are above levels expected in a well-functioning market, where new providers would help to meet demand, driving down prices and profits.

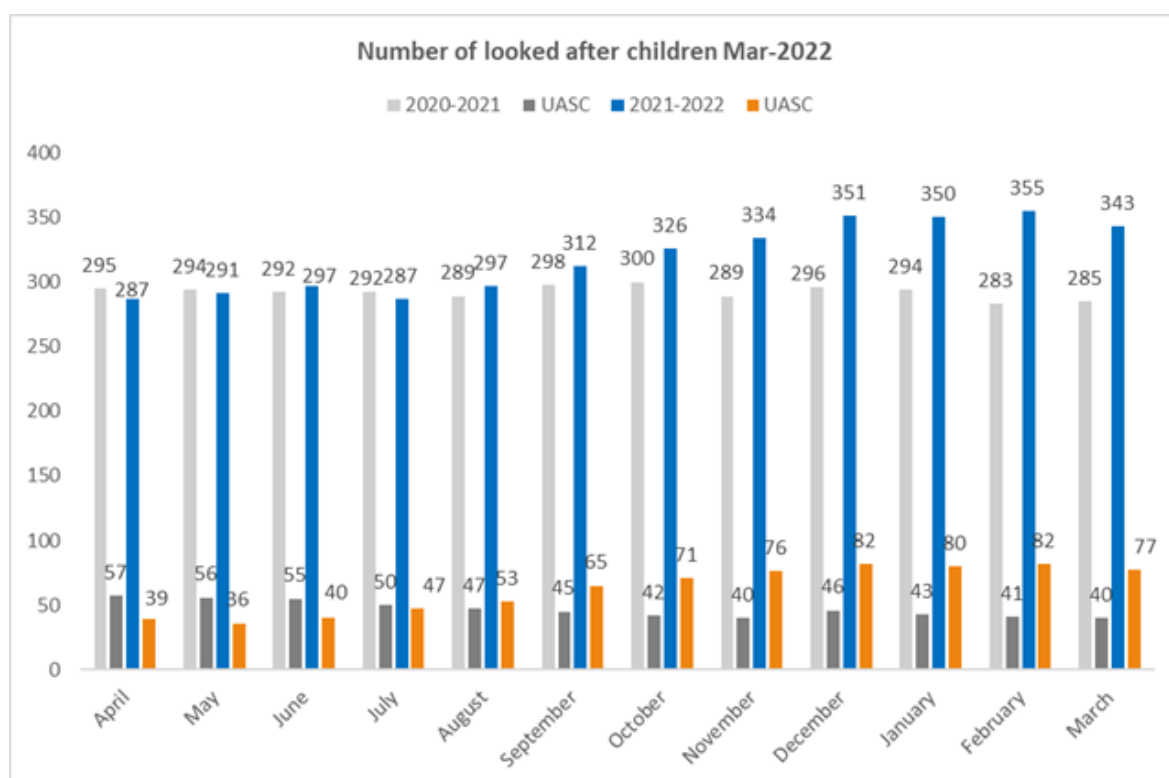
3.3 The CMA's recommendations include the government taking a collective approach to engagement with the placements market and some national support for local authorities in market shaping; targeted government funding to local authorities for initiatives to increase local foster carers; reviewing regulation and planning requirements and a number of steps to develop market resilience.

Demand for Placements

3.4 During the pandemic, Brent has seen a significant increase in demand across children's services, with caseloads increasing by 11% over the past year.

- an increase in child referrals from 3031 in Dec 20 to 3410 in Dec 21 (12.5%)
- an increase in children in need from 2467 in Dec 20 to 2746 in Dec 21 (11.3%)
- an increase in the number of children subject of Child Protection Plans from 281 in Dec 20 to 352 in Dec 21 (25.3%)
- an increase in the number of Looked After Children (LAC) from 296 in Dec 20 to 351 in Dec 21 (18.6%)
- an increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) from 46 in Dec 20 to 82 in Dec 21 (78%)
- an increase in the number of care leaver population aged 18-25 years from 388 in Dec 20 to 436 in Dec 21 (12.4%)

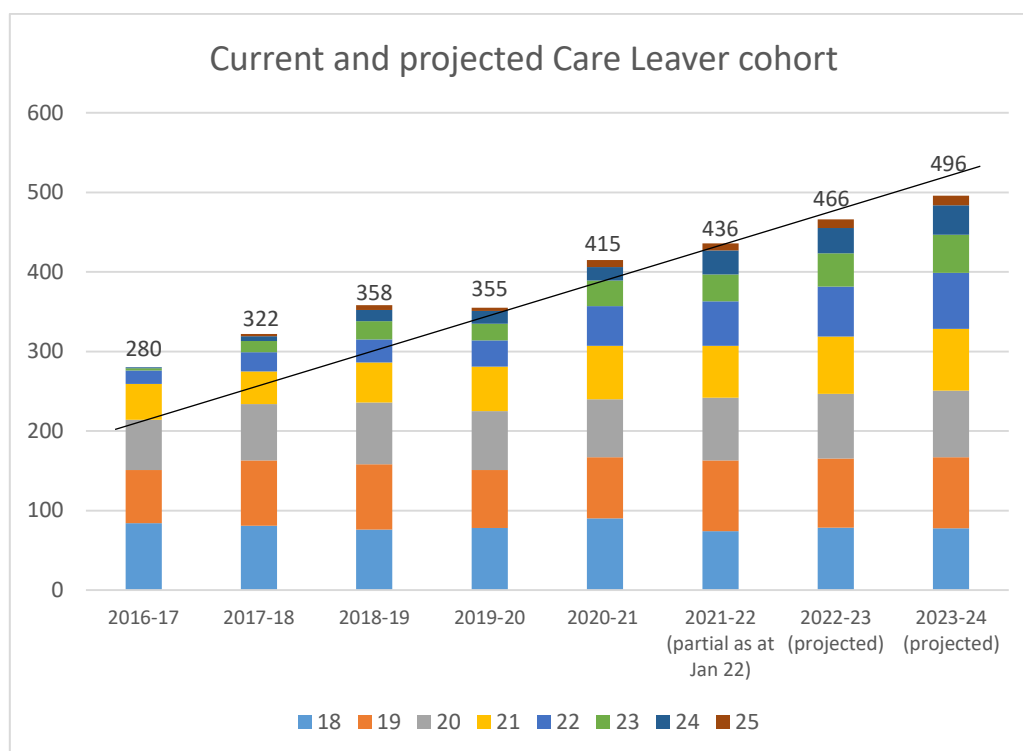
3.5 In Brent, the LAC (0-17) population was relatively steady between 2016 and 2021 at between 280 and 300 children each year. Over the past year, the number of LAC has increased. At 355 in February 2022, it was the highest at any time in the past five years. In 2021/22 to date 190 children have become looked after, compared to an average of 167 per year in the previous four years. The increase in LAC has primarily been driven by an increase in UASC. There have been over 60 new UASC in the year to date, the majority of whom are young males who were accommodated in hotels in Brent by the Home Office and subsequently claimed to be under 18. Chart 1 shows the increase in Looked After Children (LAC) over the past year compared to 2020/21, highlighting the increase in UASC.



3.6 60% of looked after children are currently placed in fostering placements either with in-house carers, Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) or with a relative or nominated family friend, 10% are placed in residential homes (including children's homes, mother and baby residential homes and young offenders institutions) and 26% are placed in semi-independent provision. The number of children placed with IFA carers increased from 86 in April 2021 to 110 in March 2022, while the number placed with in-house foster carers reduced over this period. This reflects a reduction in in-house carers (due to retirement, ill-health or moving to IFAs), as well as specific placement needs, such as sibling groups for whom foster placements together have only been identified with IFAs.

There is a high number of LAC over the age of 16 (46% of the LAC population), many of whom present with behaviours that foster carers do not feel equipped to manage. A national lack of sufficiency around foster carers for teenagers, including within Brent's in-house foster service, means that Brent continues to place young people in semi-independent provision. The number of LAC placed in semi-independent provision increased from 41 in April 2021 to 92 in January 2022 (75% of whom were UASC). At the end of March 2022, 86 LAC were in semi-independent provision.

- 3.7 The Care Leaver population has been steadily increasing since 2016/17 and is forecast to continue to grow based on the current LAC population. Care leavers are accommodated in staying put arrangements with their former foster carers or semi-independent accommodation (25 and 147 respectively). Care leavers are accommodated based on their vulnerabilities, which for many have increased during the pandemic, or because they are waiting for a Home Office decision on their asylum claim and do not have recourse to public funds. This is the case for fifty per cent of the oldest care leavers (there are 24 over the age of 21), some of whom are waiting for their ID following a positive decision. CYP works closely with colleagues in Housing to provide a tenancy for Care Leavers when they are ready, as set out in the corporate offer to Care Leavers, but the timeliness of some moving can be impacted by the availability of suitable properties.



Placement Sourcing Challenges

- 3.8 The need for a placement for the most vulnerable children can often occur urgently through either a family or placement breakdown. For some children, such as those subject to police protection or in the case of a UASC, there is an immediate same-day need to source a placement, which given the under-supply of appropriate placements regionally and nationally can limit the local authority's commissioning options.
- 3.9 The LA has an in-house fostering service that at the end of March 2022 supported 51 children. The LA provides short breaks for children with disabilities at the Ade Adepitan Short-break Centre, but does not operate any residential children's homes. LAs that run

their own residential children's homes tend not to be accessible to other LAs. Brent is therefore reliant on private and charitable sector markets to procure placements for many LAC and Care Leavers. The Placement Team uses the Commissioning Alliance (WLA) Dynamic Purchasing Vehicles (DPVs) and spot-purchasing to commission IFA placements, children's homes placements and semi-independent provision. While the preference is to use the DPVs, as there are quality thresholds for providers to access the DPV frameworks, it is not always possible to identify a suitable placement via this route. All searches explore the wider market. For every IFA search, for example, the Placements Team approach the 70 providers on the DPV, 100 IFA providers in London and the South East and 165 in the rest of the country.

- 3.10 While the local authority successfully sources suitable placements for the majority of looked after children, it faces a number of challenges in identifying suitable placements for adolescents with complex needs. There is a national and local shortage of regulated placements (fostering and children's home) and in particular placements that can meet the needs of this group. Despite high levels of occupancy, IFA providers receive approximately 250 referrals a week, with the larger agencies, such as the National Fostering Agency (NFA), receiving around 400. Residential children's home providers report similar referral numbers. Despite Ofsted opening up a fast-track approval process for the registration of new children's homes, providers report not being able to open homes or expand in line with demand. They are also struggling to recruit registered managers.
- 3.11 National and local referrals over the past two years reflect increasing complexity of need - children and young people with contextual safeguarding risks around gangs, drugs and county lines, child sexual exploitation (CSE), self-harm and mental health needs, as well as an increase in children and young people whose liberty is restricted through a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard (DoLS) that includes a series of measures agreed in Court to keep them safe, such as restricting access to phones and movement outside of the home. Amongst the top 50 young people in the borough of most concern because of their multiple vulnerabilities, 60% are LAC. Of this group, around 18% are involved in county lines, 17% are known to the YOS and there are CSE concerns for 7% and each year there are several incidences of Brent young people being hospitalised due to a self-harm incident. Many LAC and Care Leavers are purposely placed away from Brent due to gang-related safeguarding risks.
- 3.12 In a market of national shortage, it can be difficult to match children who have multiple vulnerabilities or risk factors to placements. In relation to fostering placements, there is a growing theme around IFAs insisting on additional resources to care for children with complex behaviours, partly in response to a lack of relevant experience in IFA carer pools. This includes high levels of supervision, such as additional support from the IFA Supervising Social Worker, and additional support packages, such as support workers to take children out at weekends or access to IFA therapeutic programmes. This translates into high placement costs – the average IFA weekly fee is £900 a week, but the top 10 highest cost IFA placements range from £1370 to £1950 a week for an individual child and up to £2800 a week for a mother and child fostering placement.
- 3.13 Identifying residential children's home placements can be very challenging despite comprehensive nationwide searches, in particular for children and young people who require specialist or therapeutic provision, such as adolescents with complex social, emotional mental health needs, possibly with autism or ADHD, presenting with complex behaviour. Many children's home providers maintain voids, which reflects both difficulties matching children and provider reluctance to support children and young people with high levels of need out of concern for the impact on their Ofsted rating if they are judged as unable to adequately keep these young people safe. Often only one provider comes forward when a placement is being sourced. As a result, the local

authority has limited influence over the market and limited negotiating power in relation to costs and the support packages providers believe children require. This is particularly acute when a placement becomes fragile or when new placements are needed for children in crisis, for example those who are known to the criminal justice system/Youth Offending Service or have mental health concerns. The number of children placed in residential children's homes has remained relatively steady in Brent over the past few years at around 27 children. Brent's 10 most expensive children's homes placements range in cost from £4,800 to £10,500 a week.

- 3.14 Nationally there is a shortage of welfare secure beds, that are for children and young people who are considered to be at significant risk due to absconding or self-harm. There is usually a long waiting list for access to welfare secure beds, that are managed on a national level through the Secure Welfare Co-ordination Unit run by Hampshire LA. Brent has had two young people placed in Welfare Secure units over the past year, at a cost of £7000 a week per placement.

Case Study 1

Child A is a 14 year old boy of Black British heritage. He was a child in need and subject of a child protection plan before becoming looked after in 2019. After being placed in several foster placements that broke down, a residential children's home was sourced for Child A outside of London for his own safety. He settled well at the home in a LA in North England, attending an alternative provision school in a neighbouring LA where he made good progress.

After 18 months, he was involved in an incident, which resulted in the police insisting that he moved. The only suitable placement was identified for Child A in North London, despite a nationwide search.

The placement in London struggled to manage Child A's complex behaviours. He had multiple missing episodes and he only complied with the home's curfew rules when on a tag after breaching his referral order. After 5 months the placement gave notice and a new placement search commenced. During this time, the provider increased the placement cost from £6,200 to £10,000 a week on the grounds that Child A required 2:1 support and it was not possible to match other children with Child A given his vulnerabilities. In the meantime, Child A was confirmed as a victim of modern slavery.

In beginning of this year, Child A was arrested on a number of serious charges. He is currently in a Youth Offending Institution pending a court hearing, when the judge will decide if he is to be retained or remanded into the local authority's care. Search for an alternative children's home placement out of London continues.

- 3.15 Like children's home placements, residential parent and baby assessments are relatively low in number but high cost. Over the past two years, the number of requests for parent and baby residential assessments has increased, reflecting heightened parental vulnerabilities during the pandemic, in particular mental health concerns and domestic violence. Residential parenting assessments are commissioned on a spot purchase basis due to the relatively small number of placements required annually. Each placement costs an average of £3,500 a week for a minimum period of 12 weeks (£42,000). Over the past year there has been an increasing number of families placed in this provision.
- 3.16 Semi-independent placements are low cost but high incidence nationally. The council commissions a range of semi-independent placements, that are unregulated provision (not inspected by Ofsted), from up to 40 providers at any point in time. This includes supported placements that have 24-hour onsite support, shared placements with

different levels of day time support and independent accommodation with floating/visiting support. Brent commissions the majority of its semi-independent placements through a DPV, but is increasingly spot-purchasing in the wider market due to increased demand and because not all providers have chosen to register on the DPV. Brent continues to have a block contract with Centrepont, who are currently providing 20 placements, 5 of which are high support placements. Over the past five years the number of semi-independent placements commissioned has increased from 90 in April 2016 to 241 at the end of March 2022. At an average cost of £800 a week, semi-independent placements are putting significant pressure on the placements budget. A number of cost avoidance actions are planned, including reducing the length of time that care leavers are accommodated in semi-independent provision through an enhanced and focused life skills development programme and using the Gordon Brown Centre to help young people successfully move into adulthood and independent living; working with the Housing Department to ensure that care leavers can access their own tenancy as soon as possible and redesigning the Council's commissioning approach to semi-independent provision with Housing colleagues.

Case Study 2

Child B is a 17-year-old unaccompanied child from a Middle Eastern country, who had been placed by the Home Office at a hotel in Wembley. On presenting to the LA, he was in need of immediate accommodation the same day, pending an age assessment. Due to Child B being an unaccompanied minor, there was no chronology nor risk assessment that the social work team could provide to inform the placement search.

The request was for a semi-independent provision with 24/7 staffing, with a preference to place with other unaccompanied minors with the same nationality/cultural match. Child B was placed in a provision in a neighbouring authority the same day that the request was made at a cost of £875. He is receiving 5 hours a week of key worker support to help him settle and is utilising an interpreter paid for by the provider.

Sub-Regional Placement Initiatives

- 3.17 It has been increasingly difficult for local authorities to recruit and retain foster carers consistently despite a range of recruitment efforts. Over the past few years, the number of foster carers in Brent has reduced. In 2021 Brent had a net loss of 8 carers (5 newly approved carers and 13 de-registrations). The age profile of Brent's current foster carers (many are over the age of 60) means that more are likely to retire over the next few years. Whilst there is a range of reasons carers cease to foster, including retirement, ill health, housing issues, moving to IFAs for higher fees and changes in circumstances, the overall net position will increase reliance on IFA placements unless further targeted action is undertaken.
- 3.18 The LA's dependency on the IFA market comes at a cost – there is an average cost difference of £500 between an in-house and IFA foster placement. This dependency is likely to increase in the future, unless the in-house fostering service is redesigned so that it can compete with IFAs. Brent is leading collaborative work with Ealing and Harrow, with involvement from St Christopher's Fellowship, to design a new fostering service with the aim of increasing access to local in-house placements and improving placement stability and choice for adolescent children in the care system. The project is effectively an 'invest to save' initiative that would involve raising foster carer rates, including a fee structure of higher rates for complex placements and older looked after children, and establishing an expanded support service for carers.

3.19 Brent has been working with local CAMHS providers and the Commissioning Alliance (WLA) on a pilot children's home crisis service for children and young people who, following admission to A&E due to a mental health concerns, are not able to safely return home and who need a short period of intensive support. The North West London CAMHS Provider Collaborative has identified £700k to support the commissioning of these placements that would be accessible to LAs in the North West London ICS footprint. The proposed pathway is a residential children's home that would operate as a crisis service, offering short-term placements of up to 4-6 weeks to stabilise a young person following hospital discharge, with support from CAMHS, before they return home or are placed in a long-term fostering or children's home placement. Brent is acting as the lead authority for the project. The model would be innovative in that it would provide a step-down from hospital that is jointly supported by social care and health.

Pan-London Placement Initiatives

3.20 Under the governance of the DfE-funded ALDCS regional London Innovation and Improvement Alliance (LIIA), the Pan-London Placement Commissioning Programme led by the DCS for Barnet, is taking forward a range of projects to improve placement sufficiency, quality and value for money for London local authorities in order to improve outcomes for London children. As part of this work authorities are being asked to help identify suitable properties that could be developed for new provision. On behalf of West London (WLA) authorities, the Head of Forward Planning, Performance and Partnerships sits on the Pan-London Placements Commissioning Panel, which is overseeing the following projects:

- Developing a Pan-London Sufficiency Tool to improve understanding of demand across London and to inform market management
- Secure Provision development – capital allocated by DfE to develop 24 secure beds with 12 step-down from secure placements in London, as no such provision currently exists in the London region.
- London Accommodation Pathfinder – placements that are an alternative to custody (remand or sentence) with a bespoke support and risk management programme for this cohort
- Residential Parenting Assessments – reviewing the potential for Pan-London or sub-regional block commissioning arrangements to drive efficiencies and more effective local market management
- Children's Home Placements – research into under-utilisation of London placements by London LAs to identify actions to increase local availability, such as block contracting arrangements to achieve cost and volume efficiencies.
- High Cost Low Incidence placements - commissioning opportunities for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health concerns (SEMH).

3.21 The consultancy TPXImpact (formerly known as Futuregov) has been commissioned to explore the development of a new model for collaborative arrangements for commissioning placements for local authority children's services in London, both pan-London and sub-regionally. The need for a new model of collaboration was highlighted in a report commissioned by ALDCS through London Councils, 'Review of Commissioning Arrangements for Looked After Children in London' (Institute of Public Care July 2018), which recommended developing *'an agreed set of principles and approaches, from which a new collaborative and dynamic relationship with the market can be created, a strategic partnership approach'* with *'supporting commissioning consortia'*. Options and recommendations for future collaborative structures for pan-London and sub-regional commissioning are being explored building on the developing Pan-London Vehicle (PLV) and reflecting the commissioning interface with health partners.

Government Policy Shifts

- 3.22 The government's independent review of Children's Social Care, which commenced in March 2021, is looking at how the social care system can '*ensure that children grow up in loving, stable and safe families, and where that is not possible, care provides the same foundations*'. A case for change was published in summer 2021 and as the review progresses, there may be recommendations that impact on placement commissioning activity.
- 3.23 The quality assurance of unregulated semi-independent provision currently rests with local authorities. In Brent the Commissioning Team undertake a rolling programme of monitoring visits and, now that Covid-19 restrictions are lifting, will be implementing the new quality assurance framework for semi-independent provision that will directly involve young people who have care-lived experience. The government undertook consultation in 2020 on proposed reforms to unregulated provision and in summer 2021 on introducing national standards for independent and semi-independent provision for looked after children aged 16 and 17. The government announced in December 2021 that it plans to implement mandatory national standards for this provision and the requirement for this provision to be registered and inspected by Ofsted. Ofsted will be registering providers from April 2023, with the new standards becoming mandatory from Autumn 2023. This is likely to have significant impact on the market with some providers ceasing to operate and others reviewing how they operate and is likely to result in higher costs for local authorities.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The 2021/22 gross Placements budget is £22m with £5m income from grants such as the Home Office UASC grant, funding from the Dedicated Schools Grant towards the education costs of LAC, HM Prison and Probation Service and also income from Health contributions where applicable. Therefore, the net expenditure General Fund budget is £17m. The forecast as at Quarter 3 of 2021/22 is a pressure of £1.5m which is mainly due to pressure against the semi-independent placements as explained in this report.
- 4.2 In recognition of the growing pressures against the Placement budget, finance modelling was undertaken in collaboration with the service to estimate the likely pressure over the next 3 financial years and in 2021/22. This led to ongoing growth funds of £2.7m and one-off Covid-19 related pressures of £1.2m. The model has been refreshed to take into the account further increases in demand and for 2022/23, the budget will be allocated growth funds of £4.5m.
- 4.3 The Home Office UASC grant is provided to support local authorities with UASC who are LAC and Care Leavers. For Brent as an authority with high numbers of UASC, the rate is £143 per night (£114 for authorities with lower numbers) per UASC who are LAC, but this then reduces to a rate of £270 per week once they become Care Leavers (over 18s) of which Brent has a larger cohort. However, the challenge faced by Brent and other local authorities is that the funding provided is not sufficient to meet the costs which is one of the reasons for the pressure on the Placements budget.
- 4.4 At this stage, the growth funding provided to support the budget in 2022/23 and actions taking by the service to actively manage the budget, assume a balanced budget for 2022/23. However, the risk remains that further increases in demand could arise post the Covid-19 pandemic. Other factors such as the complexity of cases, rising inflation, poverty and cost of living increases, risk of changes in health contributions which are child specific and increases in UASC could have an impact on the budget. The planned

regulation of the semi-independent market and any recommendations from the Government's Social Care Review are also areas of risk.

5.0 Legal Implications


- 5.1 The local authority has a statutory Sufficiency Duty as laid down in Section 22G of the Children Act 1989. Other relevant statutory guidance includes Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children (DfE 2010), the Children Act 2004, the Children Leaving Care Act 2000 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

6.0 Equality Implications

- 6.1 The services covered in this report are for Brent's most vulnerable children and young people.

Report sign off:

Gail Tolley
Strategic Director, Children and Young People

 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 19 April 2022
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People
Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 4: 1st January 2022 to 31st March 2022	

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 January 2022 – 31st March 2022.

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. The service has focused on the following priority areas in 2021/22:

- To maintain use of recruitment drives that include an element of direct interface between the fostering teams and prospective foster carers, children and young people
- To enhance the support offer to Brent's foster carers and kinship carers with a mixture of face-to-face and virtual contact in social work and peer support
- To enhance the training and development programme for carers to include a permanent, ongoing mix of virtual and direct course and seminars
- To consider hybrid working as 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

3.2.1 The Fostering Support and Assessment Teams consist of two teams of social workers, two team managers 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 allocated to supervising social workers to ensure ongoing support.

3.2.2 Currently we have 7 permanent staff members in post. More recently, we appointed an eighth member of staff who will be joining on 4th April 2022. The current Marketing and Recruitment Officer (MRO) remains on maternity leave until mid-April 2022 and this role has been covered by interim support.

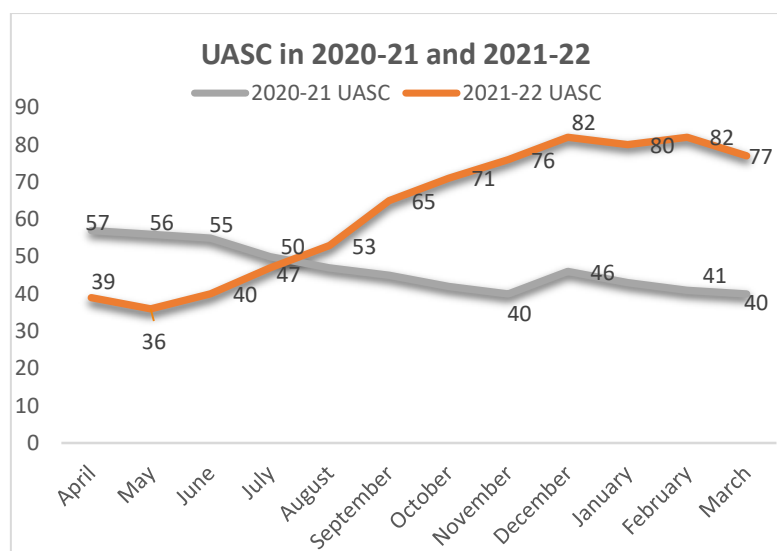
4. Placement Activity:

4.1 The total number of looked after children as at 30th March 2022 was 344, which is a decrease by 7 children from Q3 of 2021/2022 (351 children) and an increase by 56 children from the same period in 2021 (288 children)

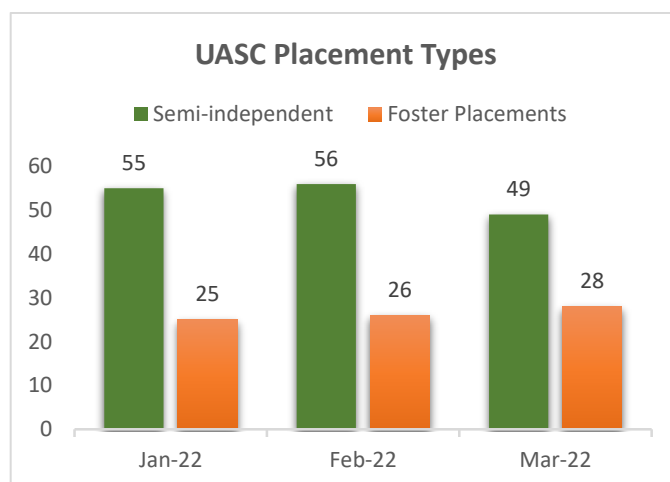
4.2 The corporate performance targets for 2021/2022 are as below:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 30% - the actual percentage as of 30th March 2022 was 14.8% (51 children), a drop by 1.4% from the previous quarter Q3 of 2021/2022, 16.2% (57 children). In this reporting period, more adolescents including unaccompanied asylum seeking children entered care and had to be placed in semi-independent accommodations based on their needs.
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend – annual target 15% - the actual percentage as of 30th March 2022 was 13.4% (46 children), an increase by 0.6% from Q4 of 2021/2022 of 12.8% (45 children),
- Percentage of looked after children placed with independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 30th March 2022 was 32% (110 children); a decrease by 0.7% from Q4 of 2021/2022 31.3% (110 children)
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 70% - the actual percentage as of 30th March 2022 was 60.2% (207 children), which is nearly the same as Q3 of 2021/2022 which was 60.4% (212 children). 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 86 looked after children in semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations) as at 30th March 2022, which represents 25% of all looked after children. This is a decrease by 1% from the end of Q3, 2021/2022 (25.9%, 91 children).

4.3 As of 30th March 2022, there were 77 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), a decrease of 5 UASC (82 UASC in Q4)



- 4.4** The number of UASC placed in semi-independent accommodation is 49, 5 less than at the end of Q3, 2020-22 (54 UASC), none in residential children's home and same number of UASC placed in foster placements in Q4 (28 UASC).



5. Recruitment and Assessment:

- 5.1** Marketing and recruitment activities continue to take place online. In the past quarter, there has been a steady increase in enquiries and attendance at information evenings. The monthly fostering information evenings have taken 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. However, with the end of lockdown and the beginning of spring, we plan to make face-to-face meetings available.

- 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 for prospective carers was 'business as usual'.
- 5.3** We carried out a short testing period for Google Ads, which indicated that Google Ads would attract more potential carers.
- 5.4** Of the 16 enquiries over the period, 4 were general enquiries, 8 were considered not suitable due to the lack of a spare room or the time commitment required of the prospective carers. 4 enquiries resulted in initial home visits with 2 progressing to Stage 1 of the fostering assessment process. Therefore, the total initial visits for this quarter is 4.
- 5.5** During this quarter, 5 prospective carers progressed to stage 2 (assessment phase). 3 new carers were approved during this quarter. 7 assessments are in stage 2 with the expectation that they will be presented to the fostering panel in May 2022 for approval as new carers.
- 5.6** In this reporting period there are 12 assessments underway, of these:
- 5 are in Stage 1;
 - 7 are in stage 2.

6. Fostering Panel

- 6.1** The LACPS has a Fostering Panel constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The service maintains a diverse and highly experienced central list of panel members that includes an elected member. The panel chair and vice chair are independent people with professional and personal experience of fostering and panel members include those with personal experience of the fostering system. Current demand requires three panels to be held every two months.
- 6.2** 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.

6.3 During the period 1st January 2022 – 31st March 2022, 5 panels were held with 16 specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:

- 4 ‘family and friends’ fostering households were recommended for approval;
- 3 new carers was recommended for approval as short term carers
- 2 fostering households were found suitable to continue as foster carers following review;
- 2 short term carers were recommended for approval
- 1 change of approval numbers linked to fostering household
- 1 family and friends’ fostering household’s status was terminated as the carer was granted a Special Guardianship Order in respect of the child
- 2 fostering households resigned from their fostering role for Brent – 1 due to health reasons
- 1 assessment was discontinued at Stage 2 due to the applicant’s personal reasons.

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 Brent’s Learning and Development Team within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service continues to keep the training offer for foster carers and special guardians under review given the removal of lockdown restrictions with the intention of face-to-face sessions being delivered in the spring. At present, First Aid Training is the only course that is offered in person to carers.

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

- 13th January – Preventing Placement Breakdowns
- 26th January – The Professional Role of The Foster Carer
- 7th February – Traffic Light Tool for sexually harmful behaviours
- 25th February – First Aid Training
- 9th March – Professional Boundaries and Record Keeping
- 28th March – Prevent Training

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

“The courses expectations were met, and course was excellent”

(Preventing Placement Breakdowns training)

"I found the section about (preventing) choking and (providing) CPR most useful in the First aid Training course"

First Aid Training

7.3 All carers additionally have access to an online training package provided by an external provider. The training courses offer a range of topics from *Caring for a child of a different ethnicity* to specialist educational needs courses such as *"Transitions in education"*. 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 66 carers have accounts with the external provider, an increase of 6 carers, with a view to having more signed up as the year progresses. The license is also up for renewal and a meeting will take place in April to discuss this further. The plan is to move towards more hybrid training sessions allowing both in person and remote attendance.

7.4 Support from Supervising Social Workers (SSW)

7.5 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.

7.6 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.

7.7 The monthly foster carers' support group continues to be facilitated virtually as foster carers have expressed that it is their preferred option. Foster carers feed back 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 topics ranging from finance to the reviewing process.

8 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints:

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

8.2 There have been 25 reviews of foster carers in this period.

9 Practice Development

9.1 BERRI Clinical Evaluation Tool

As part of evaluating the impact and difference our work is having on children placed with foster carers, we will be piloting use of the BERRI clinical evaluation tool. The evaluation tool can be used for identifying, tracking and improving the outcomes of children with complex needs. The BERRI assessment checklist gathers information around five themes - Behaviour, Emotional Wellbeing, Relationships, Risks and other indicators and applies a score to produce a profile on children in our care and strategies to inform our work in strengthening placement stability. This pilot will be led by our Fostering/Placement Stability Practice Consultant.


9.2 West London Fostering Collaboration Project

The CPC has regularly been updated about the progress of this piece of work. The work continued until March 2022 and, due to the end of year budget setting period affecting other LAs involved and local elections taking place, the work has now been put on hold until June 2022.

Report sign-off:

Gail Tolley

Strategic Director Children and Young People

 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 19 April 2022
	Report from Adopt London West, Regional Adoption Agency
Brent Adoption Report Six Monthly Report: 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2022	

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

1.0 Summary

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

- adoption performance data for the period 1st October 2021 – 31st March 2022
- 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 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 fifth 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 a National strategic lead appointed. Government published a National Adoption Strategy in July 2021, which sets out ambitions to further improve the consistency of support offered to adopters and achieve innovation and change in various aspects of the adoption system. Monthly meetings take place attended by DfE who remain interested and engaged in the RAA implementation programme.

3.4 National priorities have been agreed by the network of RAA leaders and several work streams established to progress specific elements of the National

strategy. ALW's Partnership Board and Heads of Service meetings will continue to be informed of practice change and developments and will closely monitor performance and practice to ensure standards of service to children and their families remain consistently high.

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 Adoption Data

- 5.1** The most recent set of national adoption scorecards was published in August 2020, covering the 3-year period 2017-2020.

Adoption Scorecards (published [here](#))

- 5.1.1** The non-published data for the period under review demonstrates that performance against the two most significant indicators has weakened against the A1 indicator, but continued to strengthen in comparison to the A2 indicator in published national and statistical neighbour averages:

- **A1** (The average time taken for a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 489 days. This is a 9% increase on the previous reporting period (420 days) and compares unfavourably against the 2017-20 national average of 367 days and the statistical neighbour average of 350.
- **A2** (The average time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 185 days. This is a 9% increase on the previous reporting period (169 days) which is higher than the 2017-20 national average of 175 days but compares favourably to the statistical neighbour average of 205.

5.1.2 It is important to note that the above indicators have been significantly impacted by two specific adoption cases where there were delays in placing for adoption due to challenges in identifying adopters because of the age and behaviour of one child and the complex disability of another child. The A1 indicator without these two cases would be 393.3, which is significantly lower than the previous reporting period.

6.0 Child related data

6.1 There have been 3 Adoption Orders granted during this reporting period.

6.2 There are currently 3 adoption applications in the Court process, the remaining children have been placed more recently; therefore, adoption applications are likely to be made for these children in 2022-23.

6.3 There are currently 12 children with an adoption plan who have not yet been adopted. The details of these children's cases are as follows:

- Seven children are placed for adoption.
- One child has been placed in an Early Permanence placement and will be matched with their new family within the next month.
- Five of the eight children above have been placed with ALW approved adopters.
- Four children are yet to be formally matched with a family but links are currently being explored for 3 of them and 1 will move to their sibling's adopters shortly.
- There are currently no other children who are likely to have a plan of adoption confirmed.

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. One child is currently in an Early Permanence placement, the Adoption Order on another child who was placed in an Early Permanence placement in August 2021 was granted in December, considerably sooner than is usual. This demonstrates the positive outcomes for children placed in this type of arrangement, ensuring that the

child can 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. A successful funding bid has been approved to develop Early Permanence practice in London, a project lead has been appointed to progress this work.

7.0 Adopter Recruitment

7.1 ALW approved 14 Adopter households in the period 1st Oct 2021 – 31st Mar 2022, and a total of 21 households in the full reporting year 2021/22. This is a slight increase on the numbers approved in 2020/21. Ambitious targets have been set to approve 30 Adopter households in 2022/23, it is hoped that funding for additional temporary posts will be made permanent to support achieving this target.

47% of adopters approved during this reporting period are from Black or Mixed ethnicity communities and 28% identify as LGBT.

7.2 There are currently 40 ALW approved adopters: 17 of whom already have a child placed with them, 16 are in the active family finding stage (7 of which were approved within the last month), and 2 families are matched/linked to child/ren. 4 families are on hold due to their personal circumstances.

7.3 During this reporting period, (Oct 21 – Mar 22) the service received 275 general enquiries about adoption compared to 249 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.

7.6 There are currently 16 families in the formal stages of assessment, 9 in Stage 1 and 7 in Stage 2. 21 families have been approved in 2021/22.

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 runs 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.

Support group topics in this period have been:

- 16/11/21 – Home/School partnerships – attended by 22 households, (6 Brent families)
- Friendships – attended by 11 households (3 Brent families)
- Trauma aware Schools – attended by 18 households (3 Brent families)

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 comprehensive webinar programme is delivered, "WAF Talks" there are at least two webinars a month, all of which are recorded and available "on demand" and form an online library of resources for families to access at their convenience.

8.6 In addition, a new podcast series "**Adoption Shared**" was released between October – December 2021, the concept for the series is a combination of authentic adopter voices and professional voice content, the content is adopter led, based on requests and suggestions from members so directly relevant and responsive to identified needs. The series is hosted by an adopter who is also an actor.

Series 1

- Episode 1 – Choosing a Secondary School for your Adopted Child.
- Episode 2 – Life as a Single Adopter of Two Children.
- Episode 3 – Choosing a Primary School for your Adopted Child.
- Episode 4 – Contact with your Adopted Child's Birth Family.
- Episode 5 – Strategies for Managing Big feelings at Christmas and beyond.
- Episode 6 – Five Questions

Episode 1 featured the 2 facilitators' of ALW's Education support group– Dr Gabrielle Pelter (Educational Psychologist) & Social Worker Jane Pickerden, this episode has been downloaded more than 250 times, evidencing the

extended potential and reach of content that can be accessed virtually, the overall number of downloads for the series is 1,150 to date.

Series 2 - is currently in development with some sessions already recorded and is likely to be launched in April/May, the topics are,

- Supporting your Adopted Child (recorded)
- Adopting as a parent in a same sex couple
- Executive Functioning (in development)
- Adopting an older child as a single adopter(recorded)
- Embracing Fear (recorded)
- Child to Parent Violence (NVR)

Series 3 - funding has just been agreed and will form part of the Adopt London Black Adoption Project and will coincide with Black History Month in October 2022, the series will focus on the experiences and voices of Black Adopters

8.7 Special Guardianship Support

ALW remains the only Adopt London region that has Special Guardianship support as part of the core offer.

Following the presentation to Corporate Parenting Committee in October 2021, the offer to Special Guardians in ALW has developed further. The Brent Special Guardian, who co-facilitates the ALW support group has extended her offer to include peer support, an informal network of “chill & chat” sessions that is likely to appeal to those families who favour a more informal approach. This peer support network is supported by ALW with a small financial grant; however, the groups are to be independent and autonomous.

In addition, the first meeting of a planned forum is scheduled for the end of April, which will be an opportunity for Special guardians to meet with senior staff of partner LAs to present issues of concern and to influence practice developments. Brent’s Special Guardian has a clear vision to inspire and engage other special guardians and work towards a champion from each of the 4 partner LAs, the ambition is that this group of champions will work in partnership with ALW staff to inform and influence practice development.

The National organisation “Kinship” (formerly Grandparents Plus), provides advocacy, peer support and expert advice and information to Special Guardians. ALW’s Partnership Board has given agreement to a contract with Kinship for 2022/23 to provide membership services and direct support to some families regardless of the legal status of the family’s kinship arrangement.

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.

9.0 Feedback on quality of service

- 9.1** Some examples of recent feedback on the quality of the service offered by ALW, the feedback relates to; information sessions, a Meet the Adopter LGBT event, family finding profiling event, approval as adopters, adoption support services, ASF applications for therapy funding.

November 2021

"We chose ALW as we attended Information Sessions earlier this year with (other agencies) and felt most comfortable with ALW, who were the most helpful, friendly, knowledgeable and approachable. ALW's Information Session was definitely the best session – it was well organised, the presenters came across well, and they even went to the effort of having a previous adopter join the call, which none of the other agencies did at their information sessions."

December 2021

"Firstly, I just wanted to say that I was so inspired by you and your colleagues for the work that you do to help children. Secondly, I thought the session was really well run and insightful and a good foundation for understanding the adoption process and the presentation looked great!"

January 2022

"We just wanted to say a huge thank you for a very informative session. It was really useful and honest"

February 2022

Feedback from Adopt London East colleagues, following a family finding event hosted by ALW

"J fed back how fantastic the event was ALE have three potential links as a result of the event. J has been involved in all the events across London and she said that she thought that the one ALW ran had been seamless".

"Thank you very much ALW colleagues- this was my first session- Excellent Event! Well organised and good opportunities to network!"

March 2022:

"Fantastic presentation - really helpful and loved S sharing her story too. THANK YOU".

Feedback following Meet the Adopters LGBT event

"Wanted to say thank you for organising and for sharing all your experiences. It's so encouraging to be in a room of LGBT adoptive parents and also see so many other LGBT+ prospective parents too. Thank you!"

Email following notification of approval as an adopter:

“Thank you so much. This is wonderful news to have come on my Birthday. I am so delighted by this decision. I appreciate all the hard work and support from your team. It has been such a positive experience, and I can't thank everyone enough for that. I am so looking forward to being matched with my child. Have a great day”.

9.2 People using the helpline and Adoption Support services

“Thank you very much for your email. And a big thank you to you for helping secure the funding for therapy. It is a godsend, and essential for their well-being, and we sincerely appreciate that they are able to have this therapeutic intervention. Thank you for everything you have done. Kind regards,”

“Thank you SO MUCH! You have been AMAZING!!! We really appreciate the help and support that you have given to our family. It is so incredible that, years after the adoptions, we have continued to receive the same level of care that we had during both adoptions. Yours gratefully (redacted)”

10.0 Casework

10.1 Currently ALW is supporting 51 Brent families - 14 are receiving a Social Work service and 37 are currently receiving an ASF therapeutic service that is under review.

10.2 There are 77 contact cases open relating to Brent families - 11 direct contact arrangements and 66 active letterbox exchanges.

10.3 There have been 47 requests for access to records in relation to Brent records, out of a total number of 76 requests received by ALW during this period.

11.0 Adoption Support Fund

11.1 Families who require specialist therapeutic support are assessed by a social worker and an application submitted to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) for funding to cover the costs of the therapeutic services.

11.2 58 applications have been made to the ASF on behalf of Brent families in this reporting year and a total of £143,349 of funding for therapeutic services received for these families.

11.3 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”, the 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 Adopter Recruitment

12.3.1.1 The recruitment of adopters is now a shared activity across the Adopt London partnership of the 4 RAAs, a marketing and communications strategy provides the framework for all public facing recruitment efforts. A strapline “the heart of adoption in London” encapsulates the partnership and communicates our vision of being the regional adoption agencies of choice for London residents, putting London children at the heart of everything we do.

12.3.1.2 We are committed to recruiting adopters who understand the needs of our children, our preparation and training of adopters encourages them to parent therapeutically. There is a particular focus on targeting prospective adopters who can meet the racial, religious, and cultural needs of our black children.

12.3.1.3 Our key messages represent our focus on children, the strength of the Adopt London partnership, the scope of our service provision and the inclusivity of our brand. These are incorporated in all our marketing activity, on our website, and printed materials, a comprehensive social media

strategy ensures that content is posted each week that reflects the messages below.

- Children are at the heart of what we do
- Experts in adoption
- Supporting you throughout your adoption journey
- Everybody is welcome
- Celebrating London's diverse adoption community.

12.3.1.4 The COVID pandemic changed the way we recruit new adopters and support our approved adopters. The pandemic also meant fewer opportunities for us to meet adopters in person, so we had to focus on how we could consistently reach adopters in new and innovative ways by pivoting to a digital approach.

12.3.1.5 We continue to fund the [Adopt London virtual Choir](#) as a means of families keeping in touch and having some fun, this was initially a Covid response initiative but has been so successful in becoming a peer support community it is now considered a core element of our support offer.

Season's Greetings

from everyone at Adopt London



Follow us

On [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#)
@adoptlondonuk for the latest news and updates

www.adoptlondon.org.uk

12.3.1.6 Our understanding of using a digital approach and the “soft advertising” potential of promoting the Adopt London brand has been considerable, increasing traffic to the website, a growth in social media followers, and extending the content reach to our target audience enables us to reach more prospective adopters.

12.3.1.7 Using appropriate hashtags that target specific groups and using diverse images in content we post and publish, reflecting key adoption dates, national holidays and religious and cultural festivals ensures that our content is relevant, varied, and interesting

12.3.1.8 We will continue to build on experience to deliver a marketing and communications approach that supports

London's diverse communities accessing the publicity and advertising via different marketing channels and to establish a strong reputation as a leading provider within the adoption services marketplace.

- 12.3.1.9** A comprehensive social media plan to promote blogs and engage with a more contemporary audience using popular platforms ensures the Adopt London brand remains current and influence prospective adopters to choose one of the Adopt London regions. A shared marketing and communications strategy sets out the objectives for this work.

13.0 Adopt London Priorities

- 13.1 Launch of adoption readiness tool** - potential adopters will be able to complete an online guided tool to help them decide if Adoption is right for them. Adoption is an extremely sensitive and private consideration, enabling families to decide if they are ready to proceed with an enquiry privately will support families to be better prepared once they start the formal process.

- 13.2 “Our Children” an animated film** has been launched to help potential adopters understand the needs of children who require an adoption placement, to think more about their characteristics and to challenge assumptions about who the right child for them may be.

(Click on link in picture below to view the film)



The style, content and messages of the Our Children animation, fits well with the National Adoption Recruitment Strategy and Marketing Campaign which for 2022 has a focus on moving from a public message of #YouCanAdopt to

#CanyouAdopt, the emphasis will be an appeal to consider the needs of children who need Adoption and the recruitment of families who can meet those needs and away from a more general message that anyone can adopt, an essential shift in emphasis.

14.0 Adopt London, Black Adoption Project



An innovative and ambitious project has been launched by the Adopt London partnership. A long standing and persistent gap exists between the number of black adopters and the number of black children for whom an adoption plan is agreed. Adopt London recognises and acknowledges this inequality and will make every effort to remove obstacles and provide support to both adopters and children.

The intention is that this will be a long- term project that evolves as new priorities and objectives emerge.

Phase 1

- **Data analysis**
- **Survey**
- **Establish Steering Group**

Data analysis – to establish a baseline position, Coram have been commissioned to provide specific details on black children and adopters from existing ASGLB data. Data from 2016/17 - 2020/21 has been used to confirm the position over the last 5 years, 19.2% of children placed by Adopt London LAs in this period were from black or dual black ethnic background compared to 5.3% nationally. Black children in Adopt London were 12 times more likely to have their care plan changed from Adoption because no adopters could be identified for them as opposed to a change in their needs, nationally it is 3 times more likely. This provides stark evidence of the need and case for change.

Survey - a survey was launched on 21st March seeking views and experiences of Black families, the purpose of the survey is to better understand the perceptions and life experiences of black families in and around London, so that we might attract more of them to consider adoption.



The survey is for anyone who may have adopted a child, may be going through an adoption assessment at this time, or may have made an adoption enquiry in the past with any adoption agency and either decided not to progress or was not offered an assessment. It is also for those who may have never considered adoption previously. The aim is to achieve 300 responses, focus groups with different groups will then be held to discuss further messages from the survey to inform the

next stage of the project.

Steering Group - A steering group will provide governance to the project and will be chaired by one of the Adopt London partner LAs DCS. Membership will include adopted adults, adopters, Adopt London staff and other interested parties with experience of adoption. A working group of WAF members will act as a consultation and reference group to the steering committee, a representative from WAF will be part of the steering group.

14.1 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 further series of Podcasts "Adoption Shared" will be launched in April/May following the success of Season 1, referred to earlier in this report.



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.

WAF have increased their membership offer to include 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.

In addition, Adopt London staff will have access to the WAF website and resources from April 2022, this will enable staff to offer more specific guidance on resources that may support an individual family.

A partnership statement from Adopt London supports further funding bids that WAF wish to submit, a sustainable business and funding model for the ongoing partnership is also now agreed.

14.2 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.

Please see the [link](#) for Adopt London's website.

15.0 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Adopt London Black Adoption Project as described above 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.

16.0 National Adoption Strategy

16.1 Government published the first National Adoption Strategy in July 2021, a recent announcement by the Secretary of State on 3rd March 2022 reinforced an ongoing commitment to improving Adoption services and a 3-year funding announcement was made.

- Confirmation that the Adoption Support Fund will continue for a further 3 years
- £19.5 million to strengthen the work of RAAs and wider Adoption system, some of which will be ring fenced for bids to develop local practice such as the successful London bid to develop Early Permanence practice.
- Original priorities on National Recruitment, and improvements in Early Permanence practice to continue
- New priorities added to support developments in national matching, regional commissioning pilots and the creation of centres of excellence have been added.
- All development priorities will be incorporated into the national workstreams mentioned earlier in this report.

17.0 ALW Adoption Panel

17.1 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 a formal decision.
- 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.

17.2 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.

17.3 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.

17.4 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, 3 other children were matched with their new families during this time.

17.5 Annual training for panel members is a regulatory requirement, practice development discussions on Transracial Adoption and on the implications arising from a recent Court judgement have taken place in this review period. Training on the use of a newly developed Early Support Guide is to take place in May facilitated by Dr Mel Jarvis, Clinical Psychologist, and author of the Guide. Formal training will take place later in the year, the subject of which will be jointly agreed between ALW and panel members.

18.0 Value for Money

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.

Report sign off:

Gail Tolley

Strategic Director Children and Young People