



Corporate Parenting Committee

Wednesday 20 July 2022 at 5.00 pm

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

The 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:

Grahl (Chair)
Collymore
Dixon
Gbajumo
Hirani

Substitute Members

Councillors: Chappell, Conneely,
Kennelly and Rubin

Councillor: Mistry and Maurice

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**

1 Exclusion of the Press and Public

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

2 Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

3 Declarations of interests

Members are invited to declare at this stage of the meeting, any relevant disclosable pecuniary, personal or prejudicial interests in the items on this agenda.

4 Deputations (if any)

To hear any deputations received from members of the public in accordance with Standing Order 67.

5 Minutes of the previous meeting

1 - 8

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

6 Matters arising (if any)

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

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

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

8 Annual Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Report 2021-22 9 - 20

To inform the Corporate Parenting Committee and Senior Leaders regarding the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to the quality assuring and improvement of services for Looked After Children (LAC).

9 Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2021-22 21 - 54

This report fulfils the Council's statutory obligation to present an annual report to the Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC) on outcomes for Looked After Children and care leavers, in line with The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010). The report provides a summary of the activity alongside with strengths and areas for growth in supporting looked after children and care leavers in Brent.

10 Foster Carers' Charter 2022 55 - 70

To provide information to the Corporate Parenting Committee regarding engagement and involvement of foster carers in the revision / updating of Brent's Foster Carers Charter.

11 Fostering Service Quarterly Report, Quarter 1 (Apr 2022 - June 2022) 71 - 78

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

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.

Date of the next meeting: Wednesday 19 October 2022



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE
Tuesday 19 April 2022 at 5.00 pm
Held as a hybrid meeting

PRESENT: Councillors McLennan (Chair) Conneely, Gbajumo, Maurice and Thakkar

1. Exclusion of the Press and Public

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

2. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

None.

3. Declarations of interests

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

4. Deputations (if any)

None received.

5. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the last meeting held on 19 January 2022 be approved as an accurate record, and to ratify previous decisions.

6. Matters arising (if any)

None.

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

A member of Care in Action (CIA) highlighted what the group had done at the most recent CIA sessions. They had discussed ideas to help young people when they first came into care, and considered a leaflet that could be given to young people when they came into care. They had also been looking at training for social workers and relationships with carers.

Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) members had met in person and spoke about refreshing the Terms of Reference which set out how the group worked, in partnership with the Voice and

Influence Group. They considered that more staff would be beneficial to improving the group, and hoped to create opportunities within the new proposals to enable paid sessional experience working with young people, which would be especially beneficial to care leavers who were of working age.

C (Care Leavers in Action) had been involved in delivering interview panel training to care experienced young people. He had co-facilitated the meeting which 10 young people had attended, including 3 care leavers and 7 CIA members, 3 of whom were new members. The session covered presenting yourself for interviewing, how to write interview questions for the best person for the job, and understanding council recruitment processes such as equality policies and unconscious bias. This was delivered to young people who had not done interview panels before, and all who attended the sessions participated well. In response to whether there were more opportunities to give young people the skills to co-facilitate the sessions, C felt that more could be done to support young people to facilitate meetings.

The Committee thanked the representatives for the updates and RESOLVED:

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

8. **Annual Progress of the Local Offer for Care Leavers (2021/22) and the Proposed Revised Local Offer 2022 -2024**

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the annual progress report of the local care leaver offer. He highlighted that Brent was one of the first local authorities to publish their offer for care leavers once the requirement became statutory in 2018. Brent had committed to reviewing the offer on an annual basis, bringing a revised version for the Committee to approve every two years, as per DfE guidance. There were commitments in the local offer defined by law, and also a set of commitments defined as additional or discretionary which Brent Council offered. The report included progress against those commitments. The report also detailed the demand on local services due to an increase in numbers of care leavers currently being supported. Children and young people had been consulted on the revised offer and had proposed some changes, highlighted in appendix 1 of the report.

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

Responding to how the offer would change as time went by against the projections, Onder Beter advised that the increase in care leaver numbers had been brought to the attention of the Committee over the past few years to keep them updated. The projections were kept under constant review both within the Children and Young People department and corporately. Every year, the Council had allocated growth funding to ensure it was meeting the funding requirements, but as the department moved into the future there would be challenges.

In response to a query regarding financial commitment for care leavers going into higher education, Onder Beter advised that there was a legislative requirement for local authorities to offer £2k bursaries per care leaver for higher education up to the age of 21. Brent had been providing care leavers with discretionary financial support up to the age of 25, based on a needs assessment, but was not resourced to provide financial support post 25 years old for higher education.

The Committee asked what impact the new additions to the local offer would have. Onder Beter advised that they had made good progress with the Nominated Housing Officer who worked with Personal Advisors to identify suitable independent accommodation for care

leavers. A strength in Brent was the support the Council offered care leavers who might be at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping. The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communications was impressed with Brent at a recent Moderation Panel when they were reviewing funding allocations to tackle rough sleeping. Onder Beter highlighted that, because the Council did well in this area, the funding allocation was not as much as would be preferred. In relation to the updates to the financial guide and how that would have an impact, the Committee were advised that it was too early to know what the impact of that was, however it was being done alongside a number of initiatives, such as workshops provided by 'My Bank', work with ASDAN, Independent Life skills work, and the new initiative with the Gordon Brown Centre.

In relation to care leavers having Band B priority for offers of accommodation, with three months to bid for and accept a property, the Committee asked what the reality of a care leaver getting a Band B property in 3 months was. Onder Beter advised that this had so far been a realistic target and there had not been any issues for young people ready to move on. He foresaw this being more challenging in the future due to market supply and demand in housing. The banding was agreed by Brent's Housing Allocation Scheme which was approved by Council members. The Children and Young People's department had input into that Scheme, with a comprehensive response to ensure care leavers were at the highest priority.

The Committee noted that care leavers were given a Personal Advisor (PA) at the age of 18. Considering the increase in mental health issues for young people, the Committee queried how skilled PAs were to provide support if there was an increase in mental health issues for the young people they supported. Onder Beter confirmed that all looked after children were allocated to a social worker until the age of 18. He advised that young people aged 16 and 17 were co-allocated to PAs who would be their sole worker post 18. Onder Beter stated that PAs were not mental health practitioners and their role was not to provide mental health support. He highlighted that mental health for care leavers was a national issue and steps were being taken to address this, for example with the NHS transformation plan which included service improvement to CAMHS for young people up to the age of 25. There was also a programme in Brent for care leavers called 'Safe Base Brent' focusing on care leavers' mental health, as well as the Brent Centre for Young People and online mental health support for those care leavers who did not meet the threshold for adult mental health services. Responding to a query on the level of need for care leavers, the Committee heard that care leavers were known to be a vulnerable group due to adverse childhood experiences which would put them in the category of young people needing mental health support. The degree of that support would depend on their individual level of need. It was highlighted that there was much more support available for children under 18 than for those 18-25 years old, who had much fewer services available. The Committee highlighted the importance of supporting that transition from childhood to adulthood and the importance of transitional services.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

9. Looked After Children and Care Leaver Placements

The Committee received a report which provided an update on placement commissioning activity for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. It was highlighted that there had been recent media attention on the topic, particularly the cost of specialist placements.

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) advised the Committee that the paper aimed to be informative, for members to see and understand the

pressures on the placements budget. This was not a Brent specific issue but a London and national issue, and the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) had recently published a report regarding the pressures. All local authorities had been contacted about their costs for placements and the Association for Directors of Children's Services had put in a response on behalf of local authorities. The average financial cost of a placement for a child in residential care was detailed in paragraph 3.13 of the report. Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) added that the issue was particularly significant for local authorities with a LAC population made up of mainly teenagers. Brent Council had seen an increase of 18.6% in the number of children and young people needing placements in the past year, and a 78% increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs). The increase in numbers had, in turn, increased demand on the Brent Family Front Door (BFFD). Table 5 included further details on the number of looked after children Brent Council were supporting in various residential settings.

The report detailed the difficulties and challenges around placement sufficiency and the importance of finding a suitable placement. Officers highlighted that, despite the challenges highlighted in the report, colleagues had put in a lot of hard work to identify suitable placements, including staying late in the evenings.

Brent had seen a decrease in the number of foster carers over the past few years due to the cohort being of a more mature age. This recruitment issue was experienced despite a number of recruitment strategies trialled by the Council. The previous year there had been a net loss of 7 foster carers, despite 5 new fostering households being recruited. Neighbouring authorities were experiencing similar issues with similar numbers. This would mean the Council would be relying more on independent foster carers and there was an increased risk of more children going into residential placements, which would increase financial pressures.

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

The Committee acknowledged the importance of the report in highlighting the cost implications to the placement budget alongside the complexity of cases. Committee members drew out some positives they felt the report demonstrated, such as that standards for living arrangements for young people in care were being looked into through future Ofsted regulations, although they felt quality provision would require funding.

In relation to plans for recruiting foster carers, the Committee were advised that this was being worked on with the West London Fostering Collaboration Project. The Committee were informed there were financial incentives and allowances for foster caring, but Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) were choosing to pay more money for foster carers which Brent Council was not able to compete with. It was hoped that Brent could level up allowances to bring them into a competitive range with IFAs. To further increase recruitment efforts, a redesign of the fostering service was considered with more impetus on digital marketing strategies. Brent was looking at the existing cohort of foster carers to see how they could be upskilled, and using creative ideas to increase the number of beds in placements. Onder Beter highlighted that more lobbying was needed to position foster care as the best care arrangement for looked after children, and the CMA report had issued recommendations around how fostering should be supported and boosted, including standards requirements for IFAs.

Those present acknowledged that foster carers were older in age and there were grandparents caring for children which could be challenging in terms of their complex behaviours. They were advised that grandparents willing to care for a grandchild were well supported in Brent by the kinship care arrangements, which received the same level of support provided as mainstream Brent foster carers. In relation to the age of foster carers,

the Committee also acknowledged that the current cost of living was an inhibiting factor for younger people.

The Committee asked what the impact of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care would be in terms of taking up recommendations. Gail Tolley advised that it had been made clear early on to members of the independent review that the review would provide ideas, solutions, and a strong steer to government on the issues. The report was due to be published in June 2022, and it was agreed that it should be presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee for a discussion, looking closely at any government response to the review at the end of this year. There was concern that the review may not go far enough in its steer to central government.

In relation to the pilot for young people needing CAMHS, the Committee asked how that would benefit young people, and where the funding came from to support that pilot. Nigel Chapman (Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes, Brent Council) highlighted that, regionally and across London, there was work being done to jointly commission and secure welfare homes in Barking and Dagenham. Working with the NWL CCG and the West London Alliance (WLA), the pilot would provide a home crisis service for children and young people who, following admission to A&E due to mental health concerns, were not able to safely return home and needed a short period of intensive support in a tier 4 bed. As this was being done in partnership across 8 local authorities the WLA and CCG had agreed to put funding towards it. Brent would act as the lead authority for this work in West London.

To close the discussion, Gail Tolley reminded that Children's Services in Brent was the 6th lowest funded Children's Services in London. The Committee agreed that this report was a starting point to drive the issue forward politically, and hoped that the new administration would pick up these issues.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

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

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 efforts being undertaken on fostering recruitment, and the number of foster carers in each stage of their applications. The Committee's attention was drawn to paragraph 9.1, which detailed a new Clinical Evaluation Tool for evaluating the impact and difference in outcomes for children with complex needs who were placed with foster carers. 50 children had been chosen for the assessment tool pilot by social workers and supervisors, and it was hoped this tool would help with placement sustainment. In relation to the West London Fostering Collaborative Project, that work had been put on hold during year end budget setting and local authority elections at the request of the other local authorities involved.

The Chair thanked officers for the presentation, and invited comments and questions from those present, with the following issues raised:

The Committee asked whether there was capacity in the system to take the number of children coming into care. Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) advised that officers anticipated that the numbers would plateau and slowly decrease in this financial year. The rise had mainly been linked to the increased number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs) entering the system, and there would be some increase in numbers of looked after children going forward but not at the level that had been seen over the past 12 months.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the contents of the report.

11. **Brent Adoption Report Six Monthly Report: 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022**

The purpose of this report was to provide a briefing to the Corporate Parenting Committee in relation to adoption performance data for 1 October 2021 – 31 March 2022, the progress and activity of Adopt London West (ALW), and how good outcomes were being achieved for children. Debbie Gabriel (Adopt London West) drew the Committee's attention to some key points of the report, detailed as follows:

- 21 adopters were approved in 2021-2022. 47% of those were from Black or Mixed Ethnicity households.
- There was a general support offer to families and also targeted support and specialist support. Adopters also received newsletters and invites to the whole family for training opportunities.
 - Specialist support included helping adults access their adoption records, specific counselling, reunification, or for families struggling with very young children's behaviour management.
 - Social workers made applications for support for families to receive specialist therapeutic support through the Adoption Support Fund, with 58 applications made for Brent families.
 - Special guardianship support was available, and one of Brent's special guardians acted as an advocate for special guardians. This special guardian co-facilitated a special guardianship support group and a small grant had been made available to the group to co-ordinate 'chill and chat' sessions which were more informal, regular catch-ups that were easy to access. The first special guardianship forum would take place the following week and senior managers had been invited to attend this to hear directly from special guardians in Brent.
- Partnership work continued across ALW.
 - The Partnership Board had now agreed a partnership with 'Kinship', a national organisation leading on advocacy support and training for special guardians.
 - The Black Adoption Project had started, and was planned in various stages. The first phase involved data collection to enable ALW to better understand the experience of Black children in care and adopters. For this, a survey had been conducted to seek the views and experiences of Black families, which would then be analysed by the Steering Group which had been established as part of the project's governance process.
 - 'We are Family' was a peer support adoption agency that ALW worked closely with. They delivered a Webinar programme online for adopters fortnightly and hosted a podcast series in partnership with ALW which had proved popular.

The Chair thanked Debbie for her update and invited comments and questions from those present, with the following issues raised:

The Committee queried what the most challenging factor for adopters was going forward. They heard that age was not a challenging factor, but the issue of adopters understanding that the needs of adoptive children were different continued to be a challenge for ALW and all adoption agencies. ALW were producing materials to help people understand in more detail the needs of adoptive children, for example through the ALW animation video on their website.

The Committee asked whether there was any possibility of crossover work between the Black Adopters Project and Brent's Black Community Action Plan (BCAP). The Chair highlighted that one of the 9 priorities the Youth Advisory Group of the BCAP had established over the 10 year implementation programme was family relationships, so believed there was some connection between the projects that could be explored. The Youth Advisory Group could link with ALW about this. The BCAP Programme Co-ordinator could also link in to the work and officers would provide the Co-ordinator with information about the ALW project.

Regarding the national issues with delays and speed of adoptions, the Committee queried whether there should be concern locally, highlighting the slow speed of some of the adoptions listed in the report. Debbie Gabriel advised that, regionally and nationally, more cases were being delayed due to birth parents appealing. The court process for appeals was very complex which contributed to the delay. Statistical analysis with neighbours was difficult due to the complexity of the adoptive cohort, and as the number of adoptive children in ALW was relatively small, this skewed the average and made it appear there were more delays than there necessarily was. It was acknowledged that it was right that parents were offered additional assessments and had strong advocacy to explore all options before adoption was decided as the final care plan. Nigel Chapman (Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes, Brent Council) added that, as the Agency Decision Maker, he saw speed once the court decision was received. Onder Beter added that Brent had never been limited to in-house adopters as an option, and the Council continued to look beyond Brent and nationally to search for adopters. He also added that the national data published in relation to speed of adoptions was outdated.

The Committee were advised that 51 families were currently receiving social worker support, where some of those families may have an Adoption Support Fund service, but not necessarily all of them. There had been a small improvement in the number of applications made, and as the ALW offer of services increased slightly it may be that not all families required an Adoption Support Fund service, but where they did applications were made very swiftly.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

12. **Any other urgent business**

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) informed the Committee that this was the last meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee under the current administration. She highlighted the importance of the Committee and the lives of the children it considered. She thanked members on behalf of the Children and Young People department for the time they had put in to the Committee, highlighting its very visible role in the Council in terms of external interest, such as Ofsted.

She also added that Councillor McLennan who had stepped in as Lead Member for Children's Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care, and who chaired the meeting, would be retiring as a Councillor and thanked her for her championing of the needs of children in care and care leavers. The Committee thanked Councillor McLennan on behalf of children and young people.

The meeting closed at 18:40 pm

COUNCILLOR MARGARET MCLENNAN
Chair

	<p align="center">Corporate Parenting Committee</p> <p align="center">20 July 2022</p>
	<p align="center">Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</p>
<p>Brent Council Children and Young People Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report</p> <p>Period of review: 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022</p>	

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

1.0 Introduction

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

2.0 The IRO Function

2.1 The IRO function sits within the Safeguarding and Reviewing Team. This team consists of:

- A permanent Service Manager

- Two full time IROs and five Child Protection Advisors
- One LADO
- One Contextual Safeguarding Lead
- The remainder of the 13 IRO staff are commissioned through Aidhour, an independent agency

2.2 Overall, the high level of retention of IROs has led to continuity of IRO input for many of our Looked After Children. Aidhour have been commissioned to provide IROs for Brent for many years. They are currently commissioned until October 2023 where the contractual arrangements will be reviewed. Many of the Aidhour IROs have been undertaking IRO duties for a number of years and know their children well. In some instances, the IROs have been the most consistent and trusted person in the child's life. All Aidhour IROs are experienced qualified social workers who are Disclosure and Barring Service checked and Social Work England Registered.

2.3 There are a total of 15 IROs in Brent, with representation of male and female IROs (6 males and 9 females). However, the ethnicity of the IROs does not reflect the diverse population of Brent Looked After Children.

Table 1: IRO Ethnicity

IRO Ethnicity	Number
White	8
Mixed	5
Asian or Asian British	0
Black or Black British	2

(see footnote 1)

3.0 Legal context and Purpose of the Service

3.1 The Independent Reviewing Service has been a statutory requirement since 2004. In 2010 the government published the 'Independent Reviewing Officer's Handbook', which is statutory guidance for IROs and local authorities. This was implemented in April 2011 and was linked to the revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance (2010). The responsibilities of the IRO were broadened to include not only the management of the review process but a wider overview of the case, including regular monitoring and follow up between reviews. The statutory duties of the IRO [section 25B (1), 1989 Act] are to:

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

3.2 The core tasks of the IRO include:

- Ensuring the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child. As corporate parents, each local authority should act for the children they look after as a responsible and conscientious parent would act.

- Monitoring the performance of the local authority's function as a corporate parent and to identify any areas of poor practice. This should include identifying patterns of concern. Where IROs identify more general concerns around the quality of the authority's services to its Looked After Children, the IRO should alert senior managers. Equally important, the IRO should recognise and report on good practice

4.0. Update on priorities for 2021/22

4.1 The following provides an update on priority areas for development in 2021/22:

1. Formalising a hybrid model of working for the future in consultation with children and young people.

Following the end of Covid-19 restrictions, the expectation was that LAC Reviews take place in-person, including IROs visiting the home in advance to gather the views of children. However, there are circumstances when a virtual/hybrid LAC Review is helpful. For example, a virtual/hybrid review may be required when there are Covid cases in the household/professional network or there are other circumstances that prevent everyone attending in person. There are also times where a young person has requested a virtual meeting as they find face-to-face reviews intimidating or triggering.

This is now an option for all LAC Reviews where circumstances suggest it would be helpful. IROs have confidence using technology to facilitate a review and virtual/hybrid meetings have been a valuable tool to engage with young people. Children feedback they like the way the reviews are working and there has been an increase in children's participation in LAC Reviews.

2. Reviewing consistency of IRO practice across LA employed and commissioned IROs.

The Service Manager, Safeguarding and Reviewing, is responsible for the IRO Service and has actively focussed on building consistency across LA employed and commissioned IROs. This has been done through quality assurance activity including reviewing of performance indicators and identifying themes from audits and feeding back to IROs on audit findings. Bi-monthly meetings with all IROs focus on developing IRO practice and building consistency in recording and report writing.

3. Auditing how escalations are tracked to ensure these make a difference to children.

The Service Manager, Safeguarding and Reviewing, regularly checks escalations and tracks these to ensure they are resolved. The Service Manager also reviews escalations through the LAC Tracker Panel to promote timely resolution to escalations. Processes have been put in place to ensure that, if there are thematic issues arising, these are escalated to the Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance.

4. Driving Pathway Planning from the age of 16 and escalating when this is not in place.

Pathway Plans are routinely checked at LAC Reviews. When young people reach the age of 16, and a Pathway Plan is not in place, has not been reviewed or is of poor quality in terms of planning for the young person's transition to adulthood, it is addressed with the social worker and escalated if required. IROs have reported an

improvement in Pathway Plans being completed within timescales. In 2022/23, IROs will be focussed on the quality of Pathway Plans.

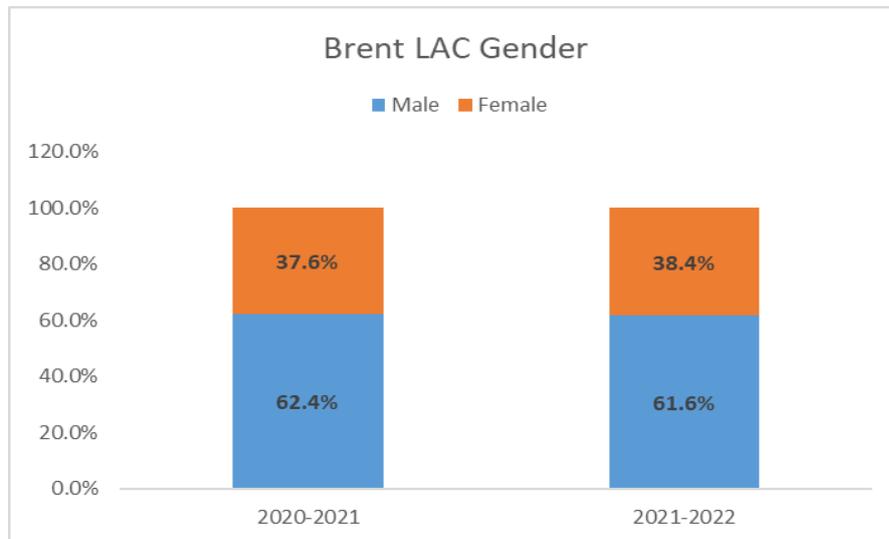
5. Driving high quality LAC reports that are shared with families and partners in a timely way.

Quality assurance activity has demonstrated that LAC reports are of a good standard and written in such a way that they are easy for young people to read and understand. The Service Manager, LAC and Permanency, shared positive feedback about the quality of reports at a recent IRO meeting. Targeted activity has focused on improving the timeliness of the distribution of LAC Reports with families and partners.

5.0 Profile of Looked after Children

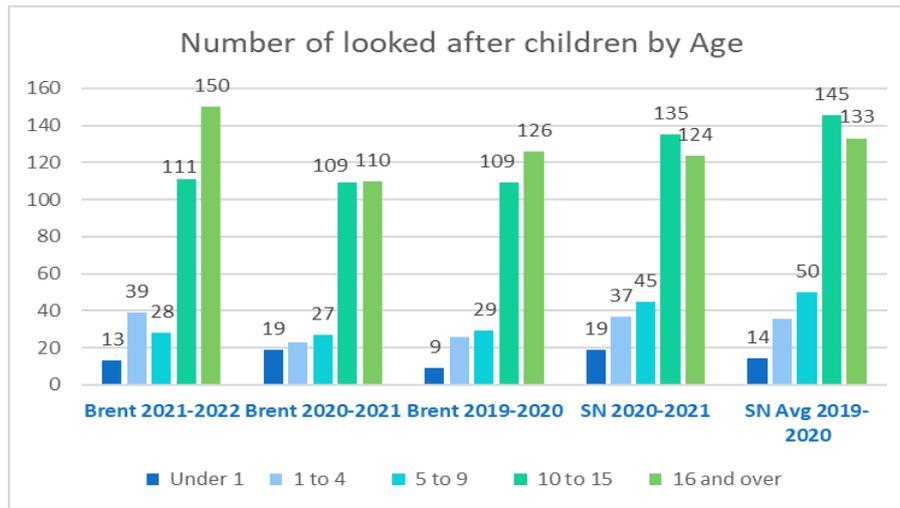
5.1 As of 31 March 2022 Brent had 341 children in care compared to 288 children on 31 March 2021, an increase of 18.4%. This represents 44 LAC per 10,000 head of child population against the rate for England of 62 per 10,000 head of child population, an increase in rate by 7 from previous year (37). On 31 March 2022, the Local Authority looked after 74 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) compared to 40 UASC in March 2021. This represents 21.7% of the total Brent LAC population. 61.6% male and 38.4% female, which is comparable to previous year 2020-2021. In 2021/2022, 49 children became children looked after for a second or subsequent time, compared to 44 in 2020/2021.

Table 2: Brent LAC by gender



5.2 A total of 44% of the Brent Looked After Children at the end of March 2022 are aged over 16 years old, compared to 38% at the end of March 2021. 76.5% of Looked After Children are aged 10 and over. This age profile is partially linked to external factors, such as the number of young people entering the United Kingdom as UASC. Having a predominantly adolescent LAC population requires IROs to have a sharp focus on outcomes such as placement stability, post-16 pathway planning for education, employment and training.

Table 3: Brent LAC by age



5.3 The ethnicity of Looked After Children has broadly been similar over the past two years. However, there has been a decrease in the number of Looked After Children from Mixed and Black or Black British backgrounds and an increase of children from Other Ethnic groups and Asian backgrounds.

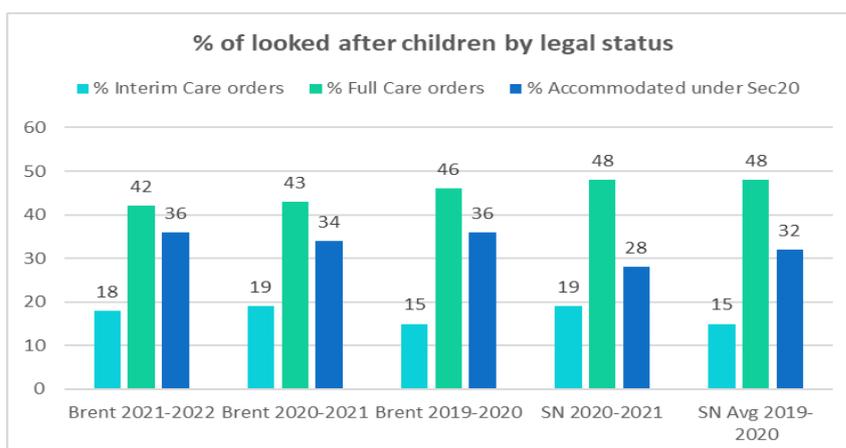
Table 4: Brent LAC by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Brent			Statistical Neighbours		England	
	Mar-20	Mar-21	Mar-22	Mar-20	Mar-21	Mar-20	Mar-21
% White	19	20	21	37	38	74	75
% Mixed	18	21	19	17	18	10	10
% Asian or Asian British	15	C	13	15	14	4	4
% Black or Black British	29	33	29	27	25	7	7
% Other ethnic groups	19	14	18	10	6	4	3

(See footnote 1)

5.4 As of 31 March 2022, the majority of Looked After Children were subject to Care Orders (Interim and Full Care orders) under the Children Act 1989, representing 60% of all LAC in this reporting year. A further 124 children (36% of all LAC) were in care through a voluntary agreement with the parents/carers as pursuant to Section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

Table 5: LAC by legal status



6.0 Brent LAC placement arrangements

6.1 The proportion of children placed more than 20 miles away from their home address as at 31 March 2022 was 16.4%, compared to 19.8% in 2020/21 (the national average is 14%). Brent aims to place children close to their families and local support networks. However, in some cases when young people enter care in adolescence, they need to be placed out of borough for their own safety. Placement sufficiency is a national and London-wide concern and it can be difficult to identify local placements for adolescents with highly complex needs. *Brent's Placement Sufficiency Strategy for Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2020-24* includes measures to broaden placement options for Looked After Children. The local authority is working with other London authorities on commissioning strategies aimed at increasing access to high quality local placements.

6.2 Most LAC were living with foster carers on 31 March 2022 (60%) which is lower than in 2021 (63%). Identifying foster placements for older LAC continues to be a challenge due to a lack of sufficiency in particular for foster placements suitable for adolescents. Increases in late entrants to care, including UASCs, coupled by a lack of foster placements for adolescents means that many young people are placed in semi-independent accommodation.

7.0 Quality assurance and monitoring

7.1 Caseloads for full-time IROs are between 60 and 65 children in accordance with national guidance and Ofsted recommendations. Social work staff value the expertise and knowledge of IROs, who provide guidance on care planning. IROs complete midway reviews and liaise with the child's Guardian where appropriate in court proceedings, as well as with other professionals as and when required.

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

- The Strategic Director of Children and Young People
- The Head of LAC and Permanency

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

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

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

7.4 Quality assurance activity continues to be an area of focus for the Safeguarding and Reviewing service. This has demonstrated that the IRO "footprint" on children's files is evident through mid-way reviews and other activities such as escalations. IROs continue to foster good working relationships with social work teams and work closely with Child Protection Advisors. This has assisted both IROs and Child Protection Advisors to respond to the needs of children and young people who become looked after following a period of being subject to a Child Protection Plan in a timely manner. Child Protection Advisors are invited to the initial LAC review of any child who becomes LAC after a period of being subject to CP plan with a view of contributing to robust care planning across the professional networks.

7.5 To ensure that the local authority learns from the experience of other IRO services, the Service Manager, Safeguarding and Reviewing, attends London IRO Managers and West London Children's Guardians Meeting. These meetings look at local and national issues affecting Looked After Children as well as highlighting any learning that can be taken forward. IROs continue to have a good working relationship with Children's Guardians within West London Children and the Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS).

7.6 The annual meeting between the Strategic Director, Children and Young People and IROs took place on 12 April 2022. IROs were updated on the continued drive to increase the number of permanent social work staff and the Department's strategic priorities. The Strategic Director confirmed that no issues had been escalated to her in the past year and IROs were encouraged to escalate any unresolved issues as necessary.

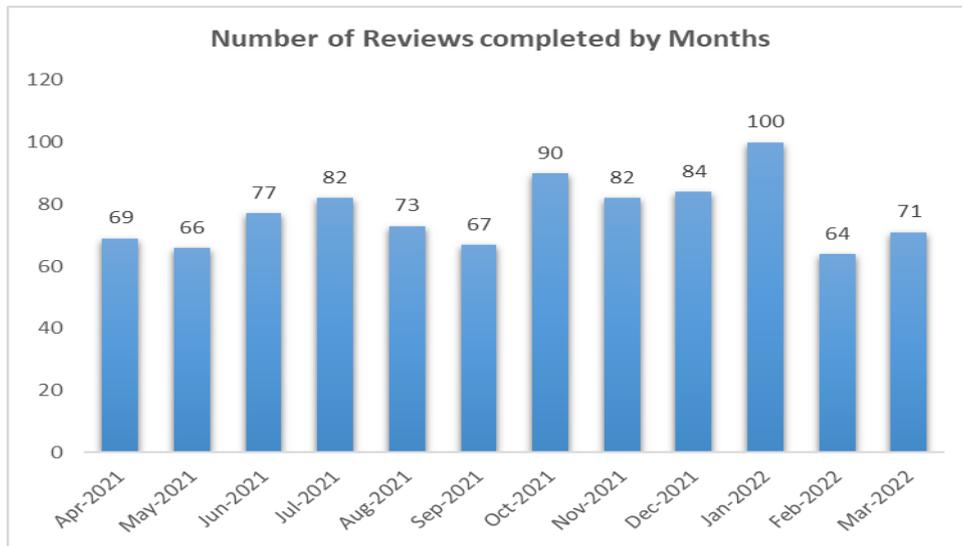
8.0 Performance of the IRO service

8.1 The following information provides a summary of performance in 2021/22:

- 925 Reviews took place for 509 children, 59 reviews more than 2020-2021 (866 reviews).

- A total of 88% of reviews happened within statutory timescale. This is lower than in 2020/21 and in part due to high numbers of reviews in some months, which put pressure on resources. This is an area of improvement focus for 2022/23.
- On average there were 77 reviews chaired each month with peaks of 100 in January 2022 and 90 in October 2021. Less busy months were May 2021 (66 reviews), Sept-2021(67 reviews) and February 2022 (64 reviews).

Table 6: Number of reviews per month



9.0 Attendance and participation of children

- 9.1 It is always preferable that children attend their review meetings and give their views. Children’s participation continues to be a strong focus of IROs and social workers to ensure that the child’s voice is heard and that reviews are held at a time and place to facilitate the greatest opportunity for attendance. Children and young people are allowed to say how and who should attend their review. The service has actively sought out best practice examples to improve the participation of children and young people. There are, however, some children with additional needs or who have suffered trauma which impacts on their participation and who therefore may not be able to participate fully at their review meeting.
- 9.2 Reviews offer an important opportunity for children to have their say about their care plans and for professionals and carers to listen and take children’s views into account. IROs encourage children to attend their reviews. If a child does not want to attend their review he/she can participate in a number of other ways. Participation types are recorded in Table 7. The majority of children and young people aged over four years (575 or 62%) attended their review and spoke for themselves. This is an increase from 59% the previous year.

Table 7: Participation types

Type of participation	Number of Reviews in 2020-21	% of Reviews in 2020-21	Number of Reviews in 2021-22	% of Reviews in 2021-22
Child physically attends and conveys verbally	508	58.66%	575	62%
Child does not attend but is represented	75	8.66%	80	9%
Child aged under four	125	14.43%	128	14%
Child does not attend but conveys through medium such as an advocate	134	15.47%	118	13%
Child does not attend and is not represented	18	2.08%	10	1%
Child attends but does not convey and is not represented	2	0.23%	5	1%
Child attends and is represented	4	0.46%	7	1%
Child attends and conveys symbolically	0	0.00%	2	0%
Total	866	100.00%	925	100%

10.0 Advocacy

10.1 IROs routinely check that children and young people know about advocacy and how it can support them in having a say in decisions affecting their lives. As part of the initial LAC review children and young people are given information on Brent's advocacy and complaint service by their IRO. The local authority commissioned a new Advocacy Service from April 2021 for Looked After Children and Care Leavers which is provided by Coram Voice. The majority of advocacy requests related to children and young people's concerns in the following areas:

- Support at meetings
- Finance, benefits and debt
- Concerns about the social worker or personal advisor
- Housing

10.2 The hours of advocacy support will vary based on the need and nature of the issues identified by a young person. The Advocacy Service contract specification is based on 500 advocacy hours per year (of professional time) with a target of 60 children and young people accessing advocacy per year. In the first year of the contract, Coram Voice provided a total of 620 hours of advocacy support to 60 children and young people.

11.0 Quality of Care Planning and progress between reviews

- 11.1 The IROs' main responsibility is to monitor the quality of care plans. IROs report that most children have a child friendly care plan, written in a clear and coherent manner. Children and young people are supported to contribute to their care plan and receive their own copy of their care plans.
- 11.2 The role of the IROs is to monitor progress on permanency and care plans through a mid-way review conducted by meeting with the social worker. This is either by a Teams call or in-person meeting. All Looked After Children receive a child friendly leaflet entitled 'My Independent Reviewing Officer' at their initial review. The leaflet contains their IRO's name, contact number and email address. Children often contact their IROs directly to discuss issues worrying them.
- 11.3 IROs also ensure young people have a Pathway Plan. They will ensure it is provided in a timely way and will escalate concerns if this is not in place. This includes promotion of Housing Vulnerability reports and encouraging an exploration of Staying Put arrangements. When children subject of a Child Protection Plan become looked after, IROs work closely with Child Protection Advisors to bring forward the Child Protection Conference and avoid dual plans.

12.0 Children's views about their IRO and their review process

- 12.1 The Service Manager, Safeguarding and Reviewing, regularly receives feedback from the Looked After Children's Participation Officer about children's experience of their IROs. Overall the experience reported by children of their IROs continues to be positive. Children have also said that their IRO listens to their concerns and takes up issues with the relevant services where this is needed and that the issues are often resolved quickly. IROs have reported young people contact them between reviews by email or phone to share information or request support.
- 12.2 In 2021/22 98% of Looked After Children over the age of four communicated their views, wishes and feelings at their reviews. This has been attained through their attendance at review meetings, through correspondence or by completing a consultation form and briefing an advocate, or through discussion with the IRO. IROs support children to chair or co-chair their review meetings if they wish to do so.

13.0 Escalations and Practice Alerts

- 13.1 One of the key functions of the statutory role of the IRO is to seek resolution to any problem or disagreement arising out the care planning process. It is a core part of their role to scrutinise practice and challenge the Local Authority and hold them to account in relation to achieving good and timely outcomes for children. To do this, IROs must establish good working relationships with social workers and their managers in order to be able to effect a good dispute resolution process and with good support of this process by senior managers. Alongside this responsibility, IROs in Brent also have a role in identifying good practice so learning from what works well for children and young people can also be understood and replicated.
- 13.2 The IRO Handbook, legislation and guidance around the planning for Cared for Children requires Local Authorities to ensure they have a good Formal Dispute Resolution in place. Whilst this may look different in each local authority all systems must have a 20-day maximum time limit to resolve any disagreement from the beginning of the process to its conclusion. In Brent this commences with an Informal

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

13.3 Escalations have increased in 2021/22 compared the previous year. In 2021/22 there were 55 escalations initiated by IROs compared to 49 escalations in 2020/21. The overall issues raised in escalations include the following areas:

- Delay in progressing care plan
- Delay in the completion of Personal Education Plans
- Delay in Placement Planning Meetings
- Delay in Health assessments
- Social worker non-attendance at a LAC Review

13.4 The escalation process provides an avenue to resolving issues in the vast majority of cases. In some instances differences of opinion are acknowledged. Senior management oversight ensures clear Local Authority decision making in the best interests of the child. There have been no escalations to the Strategic Director. In order to ensure that escalations are monitored and responded to in a timely way, the Service Manager, Safeguarding and Reviewing has introduced an additional layer of scrutiny to monitoring escalations.

14 Priorities for 2022/2023

14.1 Priorities to improve the IRO service for 2022/23 are as follows:

1. Improved performance of the timeliness of LAC Reviews with a target of 95% held within timescale.
2. Enhancing consistency of IRO practice across LA employed and commissioned IROs through direct observations of LAC Reviews and sharing good practice.
3. IROs driving improvement in the quality of Pathway Plans, including reports demonstrating progress from one Pathway Plan to the next.
4. Increased focus on permanency planning for children over the age of 12 and ensuring that IROs are monitoring and escalating any cases where permanency is delayed.

Footnote 1: Ethnicity Codes

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

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

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

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

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

Report sign off:

Gail Tolley

Strategic Director Children and Young People

Page 19

 Brent	<p align="center">Corporate Parenting Committee</p> <p align="center">20 July 2022</p> <p align="center">Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People</p>
<p align="center">Annual Corporate Parenting Report April 2021 - March 2022</p>	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	1. Local Offer for Care Leavers 2022-24, https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=446&MId=6614&Ver=4
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Onder Beter Head of Service, Looked After Children and Permanency Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Brent 020 8937 4382 Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Brent 020 8937 4091

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report fulfils the Council's statutory obligation to present an annual report to the Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC) on outcomes for Looked After Children and care leavers, in line with The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010). The report provides a

summary of the activity alongside with strengths and areas for growth in supporting looked after children and care leavers in Brent.

1.2 Progress against the previous year's priorities identified in the previous Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2020/21 have been updated throughout the body of this report. The priorities were:

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

1.3 The report also sets out the priorities of the Looked After Children and Permanency service for 2022/23.

2.0 Recommendations

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

3.0 Corporate Parenting

3.1 The concept of Corporate Parenting was introduced by The Children Act 2004, which placed collective responsibility on local authorities and their partners to achieve good outcomes for all children in and those leaving public care. The term 'Corporate Parent' defines the collective

responsibility of elected members, employees and partner agencies to provide the best possible care for LAC and care leavers.

3.2 The notion of being a corporate parent was strengthened further by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which highlighted the following seven principles of being a corporate parent. These are:

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being of those children and young people;
- to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
- to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

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

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

3.4 Members of Care in Action and Care Leavers in Action continued attending the Committee every quarter to provide updates on their recent activity. These updates were noted and supported by the Committee. The CPC in 2021/22 scrutinised a number of reports on various issues affecting LAC and care leavers including the following:

- a. In April 2021, the CPC scrutinised activities undertaken to assist Looked After Children and Care Leavers with their applications to obtain European Union Settled Status (EUSS). Additionally, The Committee heard about an update on the quality assurance of semi-independent provision commissioned by the Council to accommodate Looked After Children (LAC) aged 16-18 and Care Leavers. As a regular activity, the CPC has been provided with a quarterly update from the Fostering Service, including on Brent's Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, the joint fostering project, and the recruitment of foster carers. The last item covered in April 2022 was the six-monthly update on the performance of adoption activity managed by Adopt London West. These reports were co-written by Adopt London West and Brent, including information on activity on marketing/recruitment, assessment and approval of adopters; adoption scorecard information; family finding and matching; post adoption and post Special Guardianship Order (SGO) support including how Adoption Support Fund has been utilised.
- b. In July 2021, the Committee was presented with a report on the summary of activities undertaken by the Brent Care Journeys Programme. The report also drew attention to key achievements, challenges within the Covid-19 context as well as areas of priority for 2021/22. The Annual Corporate Parenting report for 2020/21 was presented to the Committee at the July 2021 meeting. At the same CPC, a quarterly report was presented with a summary of activities on Brent's in-house fostering service alongside with data in relation to UASC and placements for children.
- c. In October 2021, the Committee received a report summarising the outcomes of the Bright Spots Survey¹: 'Your life, your care' which was carried out with looked after children and young people in November/December 2020, and how the Council was responding to the results. Another report presented to the CPC was the Annual IRO report prepared by the Safeguarding and Review Service, in accordance with statutory requirements. The CPC also heard about a summary of activity undertaken to support Brent's Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers who originated from Afghanistan. This was the time when internal conflict in Afghanistan was affecting emotional wellbeing of Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers who originated from the country. At the same CPC, the Annual Report of the Brent Virtual School for Looked After Children was presented with an outline of the activity to support the educational outcomes for Brent Council's Looked After Children.

¹ Bright Spots Surveys are undertaken independently by Coram-Voice and University of Oxford in relation to care experiences of looked after children and care leavers.

As a routine activity, the CPC heard about the quarterly fostering and six monthly adoption reports.

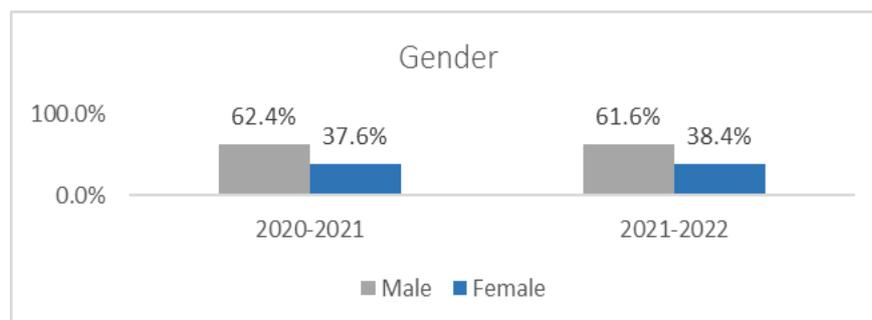
- d. In the January 2022 meeting, the Committee was presented with a report on another Bright Spots Survey 'Your Life beyond Care' undertaken with Brent care leavers and the Council's response to the results. The London Protocol on reducing criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers was another paper presented to the CPC, informing the Committee on Brent's position in relation to this and the relevant activities. North West London CCG presented a report to the CPC on the ways health services respond to the health needs of Looked After Children. The CPC also heard about the quarterly activity on Brent's in-house fostering service as the last item.

4.0 Profile of Looked after Children

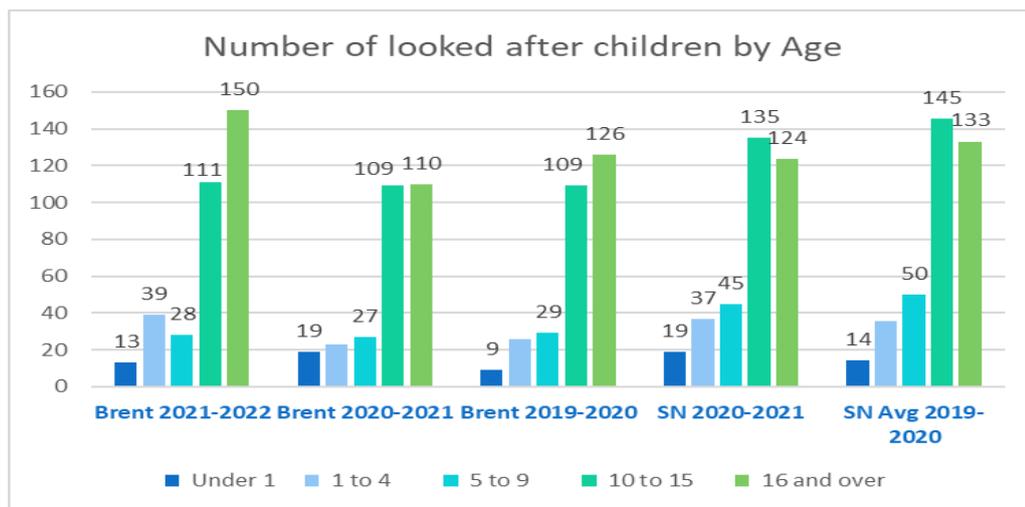
4.1 As of 31st March 2022 Brent had 341 children in care compared to 288 children on 31st March 2021, an increase of 18.4%. At 355 in February 2022, it was the highest at any time in the past five years. This represented 44 LAC per 10,000 among child population against the rate for England of 62 per 10,000 head of child population, an increase in rate by 7 from previous year (37). In 2021/22, 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. On 31st March 2022, the Local Authority looked after 74 UASC compared to 40 UASC in March 2021. This represented 21.7% of the total Brent LAC population. The majority of UASC are young males who were accommodated in hotels in Brent by the Home Office and subsequently age assessed to be under 18.

4.2 In 2021/2022, 49 children became children looked after for a second or subsequent time, compared to 44 in 2020/2021.

4.3 The gender of the LAC population consists of 61.6% male and 38.4% female, which is comparable to the previous year 2020-2021



4.4 44% of the care population in Brent is aged over 16 years old, compared to 38.2% at the end of March 2021. Over 76.5% of the care population in Brent are aged 10 and over. Having a predominantly adolescent LAC population and associated risks presents challenges around outcomes such as placement stability, education, employment and training. Many young people present with emotional and behavioural difficulties and complex needs that foster carers do not feel equipped to manage. Additionally, there is a national lack of sufficiency around foster carers for teenagers.



4.5 Ethnicity of LAC

4.5.1 The ethnicity² of looked after children broadly remained the same compared to the previous year. However, there has been a decrease in the number of looked after children from Mixed population and Black or Black British backgrounds and an increase of children from Other Ethnic groups and Asian Background. This is

² **White includes** (White –British, White-Cornish, White-English, White Scottish, White Welsh, White-Irish, Traveller of Iris heritage, Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, Greek, Italian, Kosovan, Portuguese, White Eastern European, White Western European, Gypsy/Roma, Turkish, Serbian, any other white background)

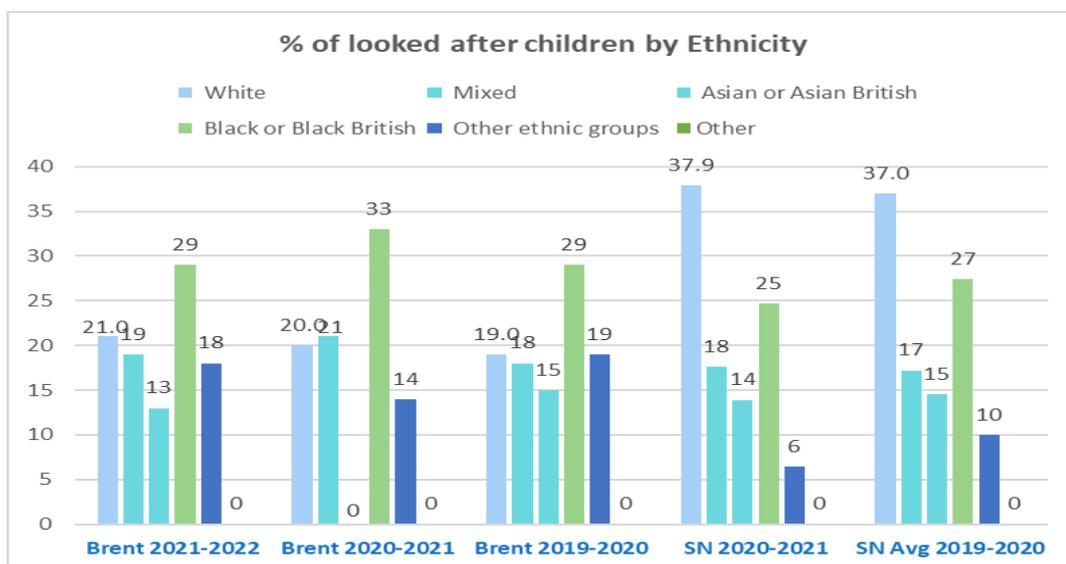
Mixed includes (White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Pakistani, White and Indian, Asian and any Black, Asian and Chinese, Black and Chinese, Chinese and any other ethnic group, White and Chinese, Any other mixed background)

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

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

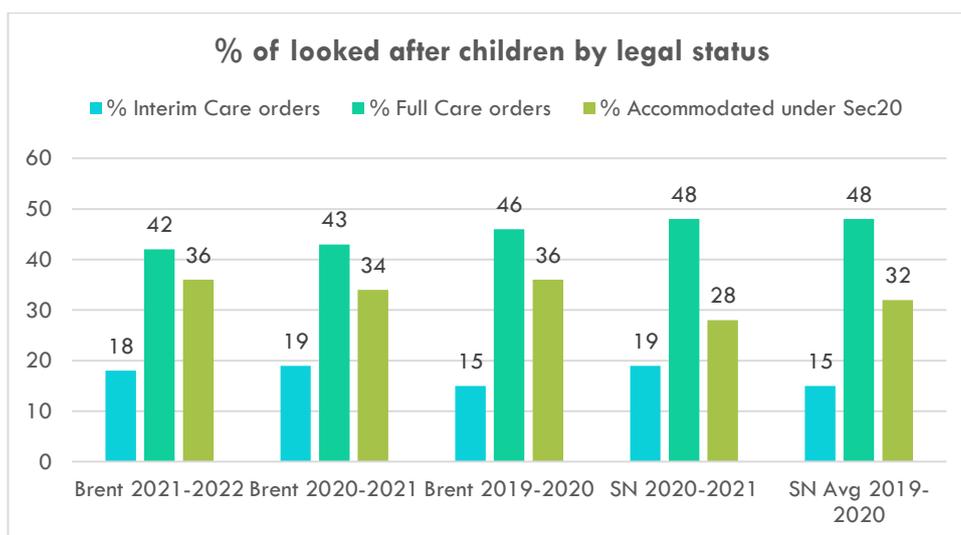
Any other ethnic group includes (Afghan, Arab, Egyptian, Filipino, Iranian, Iraqi, Japanese, Korean, Kurdish, Latin American, Libyan, Lebanese, Malay, Moroccan, Polynesian, Thai, Vietnamese, Yemeni, Refused, Information not yet obtained)

mostly related to the increased number of UASC taken into care in 2021/22. The large majority of UASC taken into care in this reporting year were of Asian background.



4.6 Legal Status and placement's locality of LAC

4.6.1 The majority of looked after children were subject to Care Orders (Interim and Full Care orders) under the Children Act 1989, representing 60% of all LAC in this reporting year. A further 124 children (36% of all LAC) were in care through a voluntary agreement with the parents/carers as pursuant to Sec 20 of the Children Act 1989. 77 of these children are UASC who are looked after on Sec 20 agreement.



4.6.2 The proportion of children placed more than 20 miles away from their home address as at 31st March 2022 was 16.4%, a reduction on the previous year's figure of 19.8% (the national average is 14%).

Brent was able to place more children locally within this reporting year. Brent Children’s Services aims to place children closer to their families and local support networks. However, in many cases where children enter care in adolescence, young people may need to be placed out of borough for their own safety. Placement sufficiency issues in London are also evident as it is challenging to identify local placements for adolescents with highly complex needs. Brent’s Sufficiency Strategy 2022-24 identifies this issue as a local and regional issue, including measures to work in partnership with internal and external partners to broaden placement options for looked after children.

4.7 Placements of LAC in Brent

4.7.1 Most children resided within fostering placements (205) – 60% of all LAC, a reduction from 2021 (63%). This area of work remains a challenge for most London local authorities and nationally. Identifying foster placements for adolescents has continued to be a challenge due to lack of sufficiency in foster placements and the majority of LAC being teenagers (60% are over the age of 13 and 44% over the age of 16).

4.7.2 The LA has an in-house fostering service that at the end of March 2022 supported 51 children.

5.0 Placement Stability

5.1 Recruitment and retention of foster carers remained a priority for 2021/22. The plan, following a successful fostering feasibility study in 2020-21, to create a joint fostering service primarily aimed at increasing placement options for teenagers, continued in 2021-22. Brent, Ealing and Harrow agreed to work together, initially in combining marketing, recruitment and training offers. Brent is leading this piece of work and four work streams (sufficiency, placement stability, co-production and engagement and performance and finance) attended by the relevant managers in Social Care, commissioning and marketing are meeting regularly to plan for this.

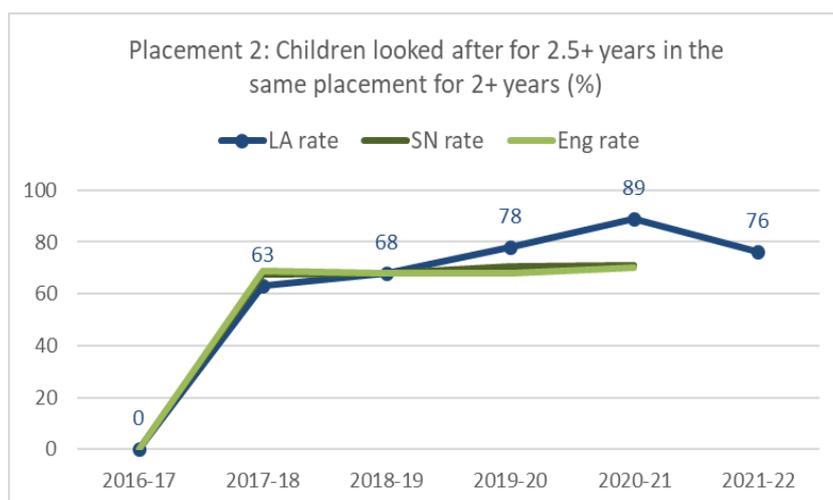
5.2 Number of Brent fostering households and approved fostering places at 31 March 2022 (and trend)

Collection year	Number of Households	Number of places
2020	99	155
2021	100	153
2022	98	142

5.3 Placement stability for children who have had 3 or more placements in a year has deteriorated. Brent's performance around 3 or more placement moves increased from 13% in March 2021 to 17.9% in 2022. This is particularly related to Brent's profile of looked after children as described above.

5.4 Scrutiny of all placement change requests at the weekly Children's Placement Panel has ensured a robust process for decision-making around placement changes and ensuring that change is only supported when it is in the child or young person's best interest. A monthly placement stability meeting was established to track multiple placement changes and share learning with practitioners and foster carers with the view to support placement stability. A social work practice consultant with the focus on placement stability has provided support to practitioners and chaired placement stability meetings. There continued to be a number of children and young people with complex needs who found it difficult to settle and where placement moves have been necessary. The focus of work is identifying and commissioning the right intervention for each young person to support stability. Where a placement is at risk, placement stability meetings are held with key professionals. Individual placements are monitored by social workers and by IROs as part of LAC Reviews and by the LAC Tracking Panel, chaired by the Head of Looked After Children and Permanency.

5.5 The robust activity and focus on placement stability has resulted in more looked after children remaining in their long-term placements for more than 2 years. This is well above national and statistical neighbour's performance.



5.6 The Head of LAC and Permanency scrutinised all placement change requests. The Operational Director continued to approve any out of area

placements and provided scrutiny at this level of operational service decisions to ensure placements meet the needs of children.

5.7 Permanency Planning

5.7.1 Between 01/04/2021 and 31/03/2022, there were 3 children adopted and 12 children who left care through the making of Special Guardianship Orders. In addition, in this reporting period, 8 children were made subject of a Placement Order, 4 children were formally matched and 3 were placed with their adopters.

5.7.2 The non-published data at the end of March 2022, in comparison to the published national and statistical neighbour averages, demonstrates that adoption timeliness remains strong when placing children for adoption once court authority to place has been granted. However, the average time taken for a child entering care to being placed for adoption is 488.5 days and compares less well against the Brent 2016-19 national average of 376 days and the statistical neighbour average of 370. The average time taken from the local authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved is 184.7 days which compares favourably to the national average of 178 days and the statistical neighbour average of 203.

5.7.3 Adopt London West (ALW)

5.7.3.1 Adopt London West (ALW) established in October 2019, continues to provide adoption and post-order support work on behalf of Brent. Adopt London West is hosted by Ealing and works closely with the other three regional adoption agencies within the Adopt London group. Unlike the other London RAAs, ALW also offers support to Special Guardians, a significant group requiring longer-term support.

5.7.3.2 ALW works closely with staff in Brent Children's Services once permanence for a child is first discussed. ALW ensures that adoption plans and associated family finding are progressed quickly and a robust approval and matching process is in place for children. Family finding for Brent children has continued to be a priority with ALW involved in permanency tracking activity on a monthly basis and leading on permanency planning meetings for children who have a care plan of adoption.

5.7.3.3 Over this past year we have worked proactively with ALW to utilise early permanency options for children with a likely

plan for adoption. This is an ongoing area of development; however, we have had three relinquished babies placed in Fostering for Adoption placements in this reporting year, one of whom was also adopted in this same period.

Case Study – Early Permanency with adopters

CZ is the first child of her mother and second child of her unnamed father.

CZ was born in the autumn of 2020. Her mother left the hospital on the same day she gave birth, leaving the baby. Brent Family Front Door received a referral from the hospital advising that the mother, aged 21 years old, had attended the delivery suite without a booking, reporting that she did not know about her pregnancy. The midwife advised that mother did not want to keep the baby and wanted the baby to be placed for adoption.

Mother was reported by the hospital to have depression and was prescribed anti-depressant medication. The full circumstances surrounding CZ's conception and her parent's relationship remains unclear and it is believed that CZ's father is not aware of the baby. CZ's mother did not want to provide any identifying information about the father but did state that the father has mental health needs and he and his family 'would not be good for the baby' as she had experienced ongoing domestic, sexual and financial abuse within the relationship. CZ was placed with a Brent foster carer under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

Formal permanency planning and family finding began immediately.

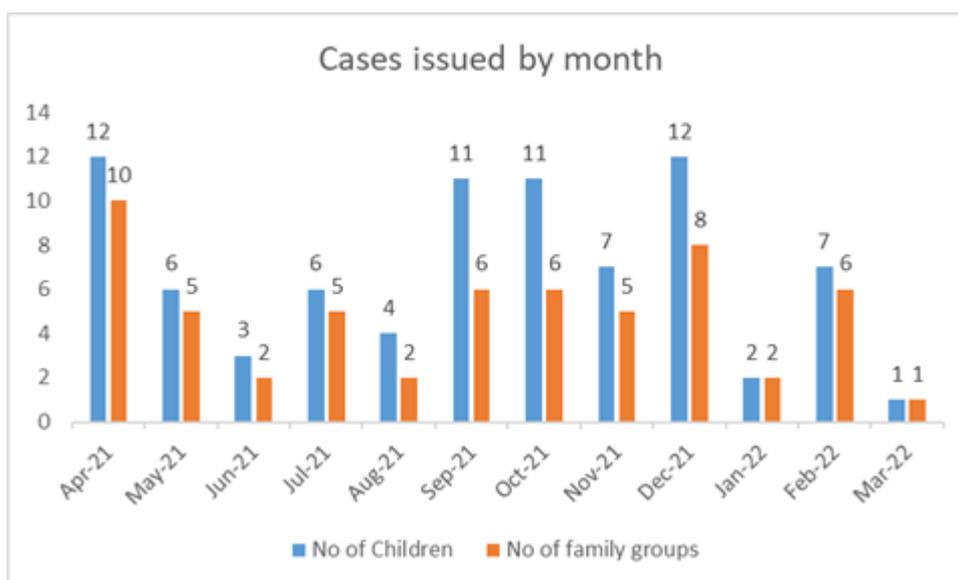
CAFCASS subsequently appointed a reporting officer who met mother to sign the adoption consent forms. Mother made it clear that she wanted the baby to be placed for adoption and that there was no one in her family able to look after CZ.

The Local Authority made a Part 19 Application in respect of CZ for the court to determine whether the child's putative father should be informed or consulted in respect of the child's adoption proceedings, or whether the adoption could proceed based on the child's mother's consent alone. The High Court ruled in favour of mother's position to keep the adoption confidential from the birth father having taken into consideration mother's depression and alleged history of domestic abuse.

In spring of 2021, Adopt London West Adoption Panel recommended CZ was placed for adoption. Within a month, CZ was placed for adoption and in the same year, the Adoption Order was granted.

5.8 Care Proceedings

5.8.1 The number of care proceedings initiated by Brent has remained consistent with a total of 58 cases (82 children) being issued in 2021/22 compared to 57 cases in 2020/21. Nationally there was a 1.1% increase in care proceedings applications.



5.8.2 Timeliness of care proceedings concluded in 2021/22 is 43 weeks, again, better performance than the national average at 45 weeks. This continues to reflect strong joint working between social work and legal teams as well as effective care proceedings tracking arrangements.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Brent (Internal data 2020/2021)	35 weeks	38 weeks	35 weeks	39.5 weeks	43 weeks
London average (Baker Bulletin Q1 and 2)	31 weeks	33 weeks	37 weeks	Not available	Not available
National average (CAFCASS data)	29 weeks	31 weeks	32 weeks	41 weeks	45 weeks

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

- Complexity within cases - new children born within proceedings, larger sibling groups often with different care plans, Fact Finding hearings and delays due to outstanding criminal charges/court processes.
- International elements- requiring travel, liaising with foreign authorities and legal bodies, and often prolonged, complex family assessments.

- Delays caused by difficulties in securing independent experts and completing expert assessments.

5.8.4 Brent has continued to track care proceedings cases via an established monthly 'Care Proceedings Tracking meeting', chaired by senior CYP managers and senior lawyers of the Local Authority. The meeting aims to quickly identify any issues that might cause or create delay within proceedings and rectify them as well as provide advice and guidance to practitioners on complex court cases.

5.8.5 A Social Work Practice Consultant (SWPC, specialist in permanency planning and court work) has continued supporting and developing social work practice in these areas by co-working court cases. The support provided by this role has been invaluable, particularly for the newly qualified and less experienced social work staff in the service who benefit from the additional support, expertise and modelling that the SWPC provides for court work cases. The SWPC also works with looked after children teams to ensure that permanency planning is taking place for children, including those with a plan of adoption, in a timely manner.

5.8.6 There has continued to be a high number of court hearings this year, as virtual hearings have remained in place for the majority of cases. Virtual court hearings have presented several benefits, like decreased time taken to travel to and from court, less sitting and waiting around at court. However, the change to virtual hearings has also presented some challenges: additional hearings, limited ability to discuss, negotiate and liaise with parties in person and a lack of physical support for parents during hearings.

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

6.1 Looked after children continued to have their voice heard and influence exerted during 2021/22. Their views have consistently been reflected in assessments and applications to court, gathered through direct work using Signs of Safety tools and through IROs who meet with children as part of the LAC review process. IROs continued to provide good independent oversight of decision-making. The child/young person attended and spoke for themselves in 62% of LAC reviews in 2021/22, an increase from 59% in the year previous.

6.2 In Brent children and young people who are the members of Brent's Children in Care Council call their groups 'Care in Action'. There are three groups who meet once a month as:

- Junior Care in Action (JCIA) (7-11 year olds)
- Care in Action (CIA) (12-17 year olds)
- Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) (18 – 25 year olds)

6.3 Key achievements in 2021/22 include:

- The first Youth Inspection was completed, with findings presented to the Director of Children Services and the Lead Member in September 2021. CLIA members have held the LAC and Permanency Service to account regarding the changes that they have committed to implementing.
- The first residential for CIA was held at the Gordon Brown Centre in summer 2021 with 12 participants attending.
- Care in Action Groups produced videos of what was important to them at their Christmas parties and these were shared at the CYP Staff Conference in January 2022.
- Care in Action groups were involved in a range of consultations to help develop services. This includes contributing to the development of Brent Practice Promises with their direct quotes being included.

6.4 There continues to be a core group of children and young people in each of the Care in Action groups with a focus on understanding the views of their care experienced peers through Bright Spots surveys. They are actively involved in ways to recruit more children and young people into the groups. The groups are directly promoted to children and young people through foster carers, social workers, personal advisors, the Virtual School and Independent Reviewing Officers.

"I think we are seeing changes and differences, I am getting good support"

CIA member, (12-17 years, Feb 2022)

"CIA is a close knit group and have built great relationships with senior leaders"

CIA member, (12-17 years old), February 2022

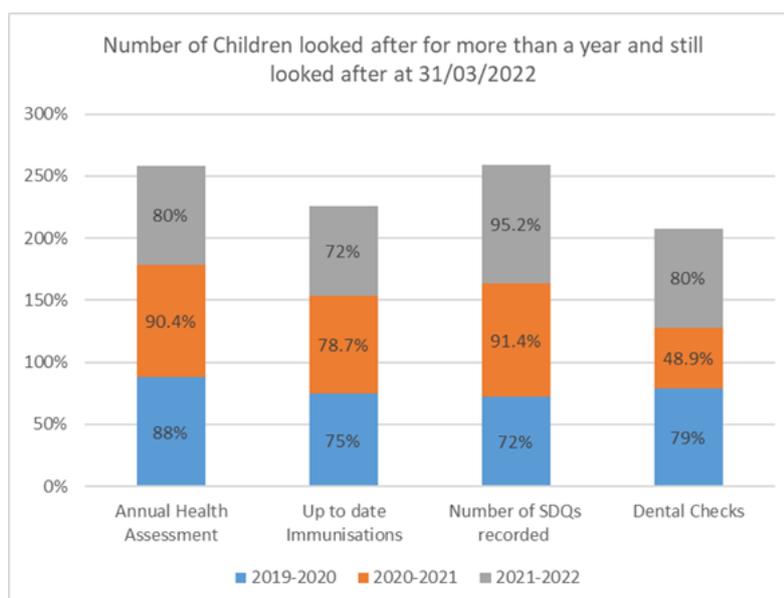
6.5 In the past year, the Strategic Director and Lead Member for Children's Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care and other senior leaders attended each of the groups. For example, at an event in October 2021, JCIA/CIA members prepared questions to ask the Strategic Director and gave feedback on their experiences.

6.6 Members of CIA/CLIA have attended every Corporate Parenting Committee meeting in 2021/22. They represent their peers and explain what each group has accomplished. The members take their responsibility to represent their peers seriously and support each other to prepare and represent themselves and their peers well. In addition, representatives of CIA/CLIA attended the Local Partnership Meeting with LAC and Care Leavers and are members of the Voice and Influence sub-group of this meeting. The Local Partnership Meeting is a multi-agency meeting of partners working together to improve outcomes for LAC and care leavers. Participants include representatives from CCG, CAMHS, Central North West London NHS trust, Anna Freud Centre; Probation, various providers as well as Brent staff from Housing, YOS, Brent Virtual School for LAC, Localities, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance and Looked after Children and Permanency service.

7.0 Health of Looked After Children

7.1 Local Authorities, as the Corporate Parents, are responsible for ensuring that LAC receive regular health checks (six monthly for children under the age of 5 and annually for those over the age of 5), dental checks and appropriate immunisations. Statutory health data for LAC is reported for those children who have been in care for more than 12 months.

7.2 LAC Health data for 2021/22 has not yet been submitted to the DfE as part of the statutory data reporting requirement and will not be submitted until August 2022. Unpublished data shows that there has been significant progress in ensuring dental checks (following difficulties last reporting period due to the Covid-19 pandemic) and SDQs are completed for LAC. It also indicates that health assessment and immunisation performance has declined, primarily due to a large cohort of unaccompanied asylum children who do not have a record of immunisations and also a large cohort of adolescents for whom it has been more challenging to encourage them to undertake a health assessment.



7.3 In line with our priorities for 2021/22, there has been increased activity to support emotional wellbeing of looked after children and care leavers in this reporting period.

7.4 The Wellbeing and Emotional Support Team (WEST) now provides a wider targeted service for identified vulnerable groups, including Looked After Children and children with a disability, and is delivered by the Anna Freud Centre. The service provides support, clinical advice and training for professionals working with children and young people and a range of evidence based interventions working directly with children, young people and families in the identified priority vulnerable groups. Additional capacity was built into this service when our Brent Emotional Wellbeing Service (BEWS) was decommissioned in this reporting period. When the need arises for a Tier 3 CAMHS referral, clinicians are available to support social workers in completing those referrals.

7.5 Other low to moderate mental health and wellbeing services that are providing support to our looked after young people are WDP Elev8 and the Brent Centre for Young People.

7.6 A CAMHS Looked After Child and Transition Mental Health Care Coordinator is co-located with LAC teams to work alongside social workers. The Coordinator ensures that the emotional wellbeing and mental health needs of children and young people who are accommodated outside of Brent are met. This role began as a pilot and has now been confirmed as a permanent post, with contracted hours being extended to 0.8 F/T. The aim of this post is to improve emotional and mental wellbeing of children placed out of borough and to ensure that they have access to

the necessary support locally. Feedback from social workers has continued to be positive about the impact of having access to a clinical practitioner with the flexibility to undertake direct work and advocacy for some of our most vulnerable and challenging to care for children and young people.

7.7 During this reporting period we have provided specific support to our UASC LAC population through individual and group therapeutic work provided by WEST. This support is ongoing and the plan is to expand this further in 2022/23. In partnership with CNWL, we provided a Bespoke Wellbeing Workshop for UASCs and former UASCs affected by the political changes in Afghanistan in August 2021. An emotional wellbeing programme for UASC and former UASC is planned to take place in 2022/23. The proposed programme of support will involve low-level therapeutic work in the form of case work and group work, and some social activities focused on achieving overall wellbeing, over 24 months from 1st August 2022.

7.8 During this reporting period, in partnership with Tender (<https://tender.org.uk/>), we delivered a four-day Healthy Relationship programme to a group of our 12-15 year old LAC girls. Using a mixture of yoga and creative arts, the girls were able to explore what healthy relationships were and how to create healthy relationships for themselves in a relaxed and fun environment. They celebrated successfully completing this week with a fun Graffiti Art session. We continue to partner with Tender and plan to run several more Healthy Relationship groups in 2022/23.

Feedback from participants of Healthy Relationship group:

What are the key elements of a healthy and unhealthy relationship?

Healthy – kindness, mature, funny, fairness, loving, good listener

Unhealthy – control, pressure, physical fighting

I learnt that healthy and unhealthy relationships are good to talk about because you never know what might happen in an unhealthy relationship. I also learnt that yoga is calming.

I enjoyed meeting new friends and having a good time. I also enjoyed the yoga and different activities.

I have enjoyed that you can talk about anything, and people will listen to you.

8.0 Multi-agency Partnership for LAC and Care Leavers

8.1 Brent Children's Services have well established and mature relationships with partners resulting in strong and effective multi-agency arrangements. The Brent Children's Trust, chaired by the statutory Director of Children's Services, and plays a key role within Brent's Corporate Parenting Strategy via setting priorities for all partners working with children and families including children in care and care leavers. A range of activities undertaken by partners, including service providers, is routinely reported to the Joint Commissioning Group, a sub-group of the Children's Trust.

8.2 The Local Partnership Meeting (LPM) for Care Experienced Children and Young People is one of the five transformation groups reporting to the Joint Commissioning Group. The LPM consists of relevant officers from Brent Council (including CYP Department (Looked after Children and Permanency, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Youth Offending Service within Early Help, Housing Needs, Public Health), Community Wellbeing, Regeneration and Environment) and partners such as NHS North West London CCG, Probation, Westminster Drug Project (WDP) and Central London Community Healthcare (CLCH) NHS Trust. The group is also attended by Care Leavers in Action Group (Brent's Children in Care Council) representatives who act as conduits between the LPM and representatives of the CLIA group.

8.3 The LPM has been responsible for achieving the priorities of 2021/22. Six working groups were set up by the LPM with relevant representation, each group working on one particular priority area. Chairs of these priority area working groups regularly attended the LPM to report on their progress. These priority areas were as below:

- Health and Wellbeing of the looked after children and care leavers
- Education, Employment and Training
- Voice and Influence (participation and engagement)
- Independent living
- Transitional Safeguarding
- Stability for LAC and Care Leavers

9.0 Children Missing or Absent from Care

9.1 In the year ending 31st March 2022, 94 children in care were reported to be missing from their placements at least once compared to 74 in the previous year. This represented 18% of all LAC looked after at any point during the year (n=503) compared to 15% in the previous year. 64 of the

94 had more than one missing incident in the year. In this reporting year 87 children were reported as being absent from their care placement compared with 34 in 2020/21. An absence may be a situation where a child has not returned home at an agreed time but their whereabouts is known. These higher figures are likely to be in relation to pandemic lockdown measures easing and the missing figures, although higher than last year, have remained lower than they were pre-Covid.

9.2 Children who are missing from care are offered return home interviews (RHIs) by the Children's Rights Officers (CRO), from the Early Help service and the Looked After and Permanency Service. The goal of this work is for young people to receive a consistent response from an independent person outside of the 'social services system'. In addition, these consistent workers have a much clearer overview of all the missing young people in the borough and are able to help identify trends and patterns within the regular missing forums.

A Social Work Practice Consultant (SWPC,) a specialist in missing and vulnerable young people in the service, monitors RHIs and supports team managers in chairing missing complex strategy meetings. The SWPC also makes sure that safety plans and Vulnerability Adolescent Risk Assessments (VARA) are completed.

9.3 The Vulnerability Risk Assessment is a tool used to assess risk holistically and plan with multi-agency partners to reduce risk. This VARA is being integrated into Mosaic to further aid information sharing and reporting between agencies.

9.4 The SWPC liaises daily with the CRO to gather information and themes from the RHIs. Some of the learning from the RHIs from 2021/2022 are: A small number of young people commented that placement staff lack interest in their experience/journey. Young people have spoken of their need to have more of a holistic approach towards their care within their placement as well as warmth from staff in relation to their interaction with young people. This learning was fed into meetings with the commissioning team. There is also further learning about the desire for changes to contact with family which are passed back to the appropriate social worker. In addition, we have been able to identify that unaccompanied asylum seeking young people are more likely to go missing if they feel they are placed further from any support network that exists in the UK. There is an ongoing theme that most young people do not view themselves as missing and say they were just out with friends. Many do not want to take part in an RHI for this reason but often do have more informal conversations with the CRO which provide the local authority with useful information. Further work is progressing to explore other ways to capture information, including

looking at whether there are other trusted people in the young person's support network who could carry out the RHI with them. The SWPC shares information with the Contextual Safeguarding Lead (CSL) and partners in different forums with the aim to improve practice and upskill practitioners in different direct work approaches with the aim to engage our young people.

- 9.5 The contextual safeguarding lead chairs a weekly missing meeting with the police to ensure cases are progressing and information is being shared between agencies or escalated if needed, in addition to a monthly operations meeting to further interrogate the missing data and ensure learning is being applied to practice.
- 9.6 Brent has collaborative approaches to provide a coherent overview of the most vulnerable adolescents. Practitioners have the opportunity to have a 1:1 consultation with the CSL who provides advice and tools to practitioners to identify young people who are at risk of exploitation or other vulnerabilities. Other tools and resources available for practitioners are the NRM (National Referral Mechanism), Global Thinking and Rescue and Response (GTRR), exploitation services. These services, including the Exploitation, Violence and Vulnerability Panel (EVVP) are available for young people up to the age of 25, thus including both Looked after Children and Care Leavers. Further work is ongoing to explore Transitional Safeguarding processes within the Council, to support those over the age of 18 who remain at risk of extra familial harm.
- 9.7 A strategic overview of operational activity is provided by the Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Group - a strong multi-agency forum, supported by a Vulnerable Adolescents Data Analyst who triangulates data to identify children and young people at risk. During CSSG themes and trends that have been identified from the EVVP panel are discussed to ensure a multi-agency strategic response.
- 9.8 The CSL has relaunched the Contextual Safeguarding Champions group including a local Pupil Referral Unit and the Young Brent Foundation. These partners share best practice, identify trends and address barriers to safeguarding young people within the community. In the longer term, these findings and the implementation of the safety measures will help to further reduce the number of young people going missing.

10.0 Education of Looked After Children

- 10.1 There is a multidisciplinary team operating within Brent Virtual School (BVS) to support young people in care to achieve their best educational outcomes. This comprises lead advisory teachers, educational psychologists, clinical psychologists, emotional wellbeing practitioners, mentors, education officers, a UASC and year 11 education officer, post 16 advisors and a performance officer. The team draws on the expertise of colleagues in the Inclusion Support team and works closely with social workers and foster carers, as well as school and setting staff.
- 10.2 As of the end of summer term 1 2021/22 Looked After Children's school attendance at KS1 and KS2 (Primary) is 94.1% and KS3 and KS4 (Secondary) is 82.8%. There has been a steady increase in attendance rates each month since the start of the spring term. There has been an increase in fixed term exclusions this year (20) in comparison to the last two years, but this is still lower than pre-pandemic numbers. As with previous years there has not been any permanent exclusions for looked after children. This is due to the close partnership working with schools, designated teachers, foster carers and social workers, addressing problems before they arise.
- 10.3 Since the start of the academic year 12 new statutory aged UASC have entered the care system, all but one of these young people are in Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 5, 25 UASC have entered the care system during this academic year. A dedicated BVS welcome pack has been developed for the UASC cohort and translated into relevant languages. Additionally a dedicated BVS staff member works with statutory aged UASC to ensure that appropriate education provisions are in place as soon as possible and where there is a dispute with a young person's age tuition is provided until the outcome of the relevant assessments. In addition to school/college admissions the UASC advisor also ensures that the young person and their carer are signposted to local community groups and activities including Springforward, Young Roots and Paiwand as well as online resources. There is also a comprehensive enrichment programme including residential trips that are both UASC specific and with others which seek to promote transition and integration into the local area and wider community.
- 10.4 The number of statutory aged young people in care under the BVS with an EHCP is 48, just over 25% of the cohort. A new system was introduced this academic year whereby the annual review is combined with a PEP review. A dedicated SEND officer for LAC has been identified and is supporting the BVS, social workers and schools to ensure a coherent approach. Where BVS have difficulty in placing students with an EHCP the SEND team support the commissioning and negotiation within the placement area. Where there are challenges the

Virtual School Headteacher (VSH) and Deputy step in to negotiate with local VSH and Inclusion Assistant Directors.

- 10.5 The number of Post-16 young people that are EET has significantly increased since the same reporting period last year (81%). This is in part due to the removal of restrictions due to the pandemic but also largely due to the partnership working between the commissioned service Prospects and BVS. The Post-16 advisor, data manager and Prospects advisors meet on a monthly basis and go through all students cross referencing databases to ensure the most accurate information and then ensure that those young people who are NEET are receiving direct support from one of the three workers. This process has helped to close the gap between EET and NEET and also allowed for early intervention for those most at risk of becoming NEET. Prospects have also provided access to a new programme funded by the GLA ESF, Spark Change. This is a supported internship programme for young people including LAC and care leavers. The support programme includes CBT job coaches and will commence in the summer term 2021/22 to support young people back into EET.
- 10.6 There are currently 53 Year 11 students of which 20 are UASC. The SFR cohort number is 34 of which 8 are UASC who will not be sitting external examinations. Of the remaining 26, 9 students have an EHCP and a further 9 are SEN support. 20 students are expected to sit GCSEs and another two are being entered for functional skills. The PPG has been utilised to support these students in a number of ways including: art therapy, 1:1 tuition in specific subject areas, enrichment activities that explore their Post 16 ambitions. The BVS enrichment programme is a key tool to keep children and young people motivated. A regular programme of activity includes the BVS Homework Club, which is a weekly session that takes place at Brent Civic Centre each Wednesday, where BVS teaching staff are on hand to support students with revision and the development of their learning styles; the PALAC tuition programme offered to students in English and Maths; online resources - Savemyexams and GCSEPod and a range of revision resources.
- 10.7 94% of PEPs for the autumn term 2021/22 were completed and signed off by the Virtual School. There has been some drift since then in the timeliness of completion due to two main reasons, the first being a move to a new PEP and Attendance digital platform (eGov) that has taken time to embed with schools and the second being a renewed focus on PEP quality. In order to improve the quality of the PEPs the BVS has organised a Designated Teachers' (DTs) Forum on the theme of standardisation and PEP quality; is undertaking ongoing training for social workers on the new system and the PEP process; has provided

guidance and training videos to all schools; is undertaking group and 1:1 training with DTs and is holding improvement meetings with identified schools to discuss the quality of their PEPs

- 10.8 The mental health and wellbeing of Looked After Children is supported by the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) and the Wellbeing and Emotional Support Team (WEST). The Education Psychology Service has undertaken consultations with 34 young people new to care since the start of the academic year. The key themes emerging for the adolescent cohort are communication skills, self-confidence in their ability to succeed and learning delays due to their fractured educational experience. As a consequence the PPG is being refocused in the summer term to expand the enrichment activities via the use of the Gordon Brown Centre with CBT supported weekend activity programmes, a broadened offer based on individual interests and the engagement of a speech language therapist, to delivery group work and individual work in developing their communication skills.
- 10.9 WEST provide clinical psychology support for looked after children and young people not meeting the CAMHS threshold. WEST also provide consultations and indirect intervention programmes supporting social workers, foster carers, Brent Virtual School and other members of the professional network to best support LAC. WEST has worked with 41 LAC in the spring 2022 term with 79 direct sessions delivered to 19 CYP and 132 indirect sessions relating to 30 children. The team leads a Reflective Fostering Group, which is an 11-session group programme for foster carers and kinship carers. During the summer term WEST is providing direct work tailored to supporting UASC. WEST have also been preparing to deliver tailored support for life-story work with social workers alongside training on 'Understanding Trauma' and clinical supervision for social workers managing highly complex cases.
- 10.10 Brent Virtual School retains 50% of the Pupil Premium Plus which is used for a number of resources and activities including mentoring, residential trips, enrichment activities; training – online and face to face and 1:1 tuition for students out of school. The enrichment programme offers LAC a wide range of opportunities both local and further afield and the Virtual School is constantly looking at ways to improve the offer with one of the focus points this year being how to engage a wider range of LAC. Key groups that have been identified as being the ones that are least represented are, children with profound SEN, Key Stage 4 boys and those who live beyond 50 miles of Brent. BVS is working with local borough partners, Harrow, Barnet and Ealing, in order to create an even more robust offer that targets these groups whilst also maintaining those that are already engaged. Whilst the enrichment programme has a

major impact on those involved it is sometimes hard to measure as some of the impact could be described as 'soft' skills. After each activity feedback is collected in order to measure the impact and decide on whether the activity is one that we will run again in the future.

11.0 Care Leavers

- 11.1 The Local Authority has a dedicated Leaving Care Service that provides services and support to all young people who leave care from the age of 18 years (including those leaving care at age of 16 and 17) until they reach the age of 25.
- 11.2 All care leavers have an allocated personal advisor who is introduced to them at the age of 17 to start building relationships and advocate for young people as they approach 18. This ensures that all those in care approaching 18 years of age, already know their personal advisor and have developed a positive relationship in working alongside their allocated social worker, this then helps smooth the transition into adulthood. Due to the impact of the Social Work Act 2017, there has been an expected increase in the overall number of care leavers. In line with this growth in demand Brent has allocated additional resources to increase the capacity of Leaving Care Teams in 2021/22. With an increased capacity in leaving care, personal advisors will start to be co-allocated cases at 16 and a half.
- 11.3 A personal advisor is not a qualified social worker but often has a background in working with young people in a variety of settings such as in youth justice, housing organisations or youth groups. In 2021/22, the staffing establishment of the Leaving Care Service consisted of three teams with 6 personal advisors supervised by three team managers. The teams also had co-allocated external partners such as Prospects, 2 part-time DWP workers, personal advisor with a lead in housing as well as Barnardo's Care Journey's Team members.
- 11.4 As of 31st March 2022, Brent was responsible for the support to 333 Former Relevant Young People [aged 18 - 21] (an increase of 8.5% from 307 last year) and 133 young people aged 22-25 (an increase of 23% from 108 last year). In line with the Social Work Act 2017, Brent offers a 21+ service providing support, advice and guidance to any care leaver who may wish to have this support up to the age of 25.

12.0 Brent's Local Offer for Care Leavers

- 12.1 The comprehensive local offer for care leavers, revised in April 2022, shows that the local authority is an ambitious corporate parent for care

leavers. As part of reviewing the local offer, a series of workshops were delivered in conjunction with Barnardo's (Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) which included workshops with Children in Care, current care leavers and consultation took place with young people who attend the care leaver's hub and Care leavers in Action (CLIA).

- 12.2 The main findings from consultation were captured in several themes, some of these themes have been converted to actions and have been part of the revised local offer for care leavers for example under 'User Experience' care leavers wanted to know about the local offer in person. Under 'Inclusion and Accessibility' care leavers were concerned that the local offer maybe inaccessible to those who have no or low level of English, or those with special needs such as learning disability. As part of the local offer we agreed to assess financial viability of making the offer available in different languages as well as a visual version. The local authority provides for appropriate tailored individual support, including 10 ring-fenced apprenticeships for care leavers, a traineeship programme, various workshops around vocational training and development opportunities.
- 12.3 Care Leavers have access to a range of services including careers advice and guidance through daily drop-in sessions across Brent, a dedicated Care Leavers Careers Advice worker and two life coaches as well as consultations with a DWP worker regarding financial support. Care Leavers who are parents are encouraged to be actively engaged in activities/programmes on offer in Brent's newly established Family Wellbeing Centres (former Children's Centres), including access to The Maternal Early Childhood Sustained Home-visiting (MESCH) through the Health Visitors Service. Care Leavers are supported by Brent Virtual School to achieve education outcomes. For example, the counselling phone line Safe Base has been made available to Care Leavers in Higher Education, to support with mental health issues and build resilience to stay the course. As part of Brent's Local Offer, 67 different commitments were made to care leavers. 8 of those commitments were statutory duties Brent needed to provide by law and 59 were additional, discretionary commitments made to care leavers.
- 12.4 DfE guidance suggests that local authorities should review their local offers every 2-3 years. Senior leaders in Brent made a decision for the progress of the local offer to be reviewed on an annual basis with the view to revise it in a two yearly cycle. In this way, care leavers' needs continue to be kept on the agenda annually.
- 12.5 Brent has continued to meet its statutory responsibilities as well as discretionary commitments to care leavers during the COVID-19

pandemic, in line with our priorities for 2021/22. During national lockdowns, the majority of care leavers were visited online and at times face to face when required. During the restrictions of in-person meetings, there was significant impact on face-to-face activities such as the weekly football and monthly enrichment activities for care leavers. All activities returned to face to face after the national public health guidance allowed this.

13.0 Care Leavers' Enrichment Programme throughout the Pandemic

13.1 Throughout the pandemic, the enrichment programme for care leavers has continued through a hybrid mixture of online and offline events. The Enrichment Programme continues to be a peer support programme and our young people are now meeting face to face once a month and communicate and share knowledge and events via their WhatsApp Group. It was positive to see young people meeting to share their experiences of how they coped during lockdown, a number of social events have taken place including a Christmas party. With the support from personal advisor(s) and the manager from Wembley Stadium Learning Zone we were granted permission from Wembley Stadium to allow the party to take place. Young people took part in various things such as a dance performance, we had a photo booth available, and another young person prepared a DJ music mix throughout the evening.

13.2 The Care Leavers' Hub has been meeting since its inception in November 2018 and the participants continue to grow the work after lockdowns ended. Some of the comments made are:

"...I find the hub group a great place for socialising with other people, the atmosphere is enjoyable to catch up with friends and food is sometimes involved so that's a plus as well" (*NM, Care Leaver*)..."

"...Yeah I do, it's a good time to chill and just be with people. I really enjoy them" (*CM, Care Leaver*)..."

Thereafter activities have included going to the cinema, bowling and having a meal. We continue to recognise how our interactions on the Enrichment Programme helps the young people to combat isolation. During our sessions, we also discuss current issues such as mental wellbeing, the rise in the cost of living and other topics raised by young people.

13.3 We have continued to support young people into employment. This includes starting a 'Seeking employment' WhatsApp group. Jobs are being posted every day and Brent's commissioned provider for EET, Prospects, are part of the group, supporting young people with their CV

and interview skills. One young person successfully gained a place on the civil service year-long internship based on information in this group and many others have asked for support and more information on various roles.

- 13.4 Element's autumn project with Brent care leavers ran from October to December 21. There were 12 sessions, covering photography, mixed media, painting, lino printing, drama, marbling and poetry. We also ran a project showcase at the Kiln cinema space, to celebrate the group's hard work and creativity. The sessions were co-facilitated by two Brent Youth Champions: these were paid roles and both received training in facilitation, and then worked co-facilitating sessions alongside Element staff members. Both facilitators supported Element staff to run the project showcase and one of the co-facilitators also planned and ran her own mixed media session. The final project showcase was held at the Kiln cinema space in December 21. Element staff, with Kiln guests, celebrated the efforts of the group over the past two months.

"I've been doing this project for a couple of months now. It was nice meeting new people and doing more art.", care leaver

'Thank you, this has been something that I've always wanted to do. I've always wanted to express myself through art, I've always been into drawing but I've never had the chance to showcase it. This opportunity was nice so I said to myself, "let's go for it". I've met some very nice, cool people, with lots of jokes. Thank you for coming through- shout out to everyone.' care leaver

- 13.5 The Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) is one of Barnardo's Core Priority Programmes as part of their 10-year strategy focusing on outcomes for care experienced young people and will continue until 2025. BCJ has continued to deliver a wide range of activities, from one-off events, to training, and ongoing workshops. As reported in the first interim report, up to June 2021 BCJ ran a variety of Here and Now activities that were a combination of 'voice and influence events' (e.g., Black History Month vent) and recreational activities (e.g., horse riding). After June 2021, BCJ continued to deliver 'Here and Now' activities, including:

- Recreational activities such as meals and movie nights
- Influence and voice events: Barnardo's Excellence Awards, motivational workshops, participation in recruitment of Brent and Barnardo's staff
- Training and support sessions for movement members
- Power groups were introduced around themes such as fitness, reading and being a parent. These groups are led by movement

members and represent spaces for care experienced young people to connect with others under those themes.

Last year Brent worked with BCJ to find opportunities and experiences for young people within the local authority. Since July 2021 this process has evolved to include the recruitment of care-experienced young people to junior staff roles within the BCJ team.

14.0 Grandmentors Programme

14.1 The Grandmentors programme transforms the lives of young people through the emotional and practical support of older volunteers. The trained volunteers, aged 50 and over, forge trusting and positive relationships that support, challenge and empower mentees to unlock their own skills and to shape their own future. Grandmentors provide a vital link for young people as they navigate life after care. Despite the challenges of Covid-19, Brent Grandmentors have been instrumental in guiding and supporting young people transitioning into Independent Living. The support Grandmentors provided varied depending on the individual's needs, i.e. from managing a budget, to finding a job or progressing in education and/or building confidence and healthy relationships. Each relationship helped to provide the essential building blocks to support young people in their transition from care to independence. The following case study demonstrates the impact grand mentors have on young people's lived experience:

Case Study – M receives support from his grand mentor

M is a young 19-year-old man that needed support with independence, having someone to speak to when feeling low and support when looking for employment and attending interviews. M was also currently bidding for his own place and wanted support through the transition of him living independently.

M was matched with grandmentor shortly after referral, this grandmentor is teaching assistant in a secondary school. In a recent interview with the project M spoke in detail about his experiences with his mentor. He spoke about being initially very nervous meeting Barbara face to face but was pleasantly surprised with how at ease he felt with her during their first chat taking a walk through Wembley Central, he stated that "things seemed very informal and I didn't feel like I was talking to a professional, just someone that wanted to help". M also mentions how setting goals and objectives really helped him as he was feeling a sense of loss of purpose and motivation. Since meeting with his grandmentor, M now has job as a finance assistant and has successfully moved into his flat. He spoke about how much his

Grandmentor has advised motivated and supported him on his job seeking. "My Grandmentor helped me create my C.V. She helped me revise for exams and would provide me with links for work experience and helped me prepare for the job I now have". When asked how his life has changed since being matched, M said he has "A new flat, and a new Job" but highlighted that what he valued the most from the match was "Emotional support".

- 14.2 Feedback from another care leaver referred to have a grandmentor demonstrates the positive relationship that develops between the young person and his mentee:

"...I am so grateful for this opportunity, my mentor is amazing and I couldn't have picked anyone better. She is very nice and understanding, full of wisdom that I enjoy listening to. I am able to speak about things that matter and receive great insight that I'm sure I wouldn't have been able to get elsewhere. Honestly, R has been a huge influx of positivity and I look forward to speaking to her every week. We speak for over an hour sometimes two and I love that she doesn't mind and doesn't get rid of me but instead continues to listen and help me. I am grateful for every session so far and the sessions to come I can feel myself becoming a better person already. Thank you so much!" Grandmentors mentee

15.0 Care Leavers in Education, Employment & Training

- 15.1 There were 44 young people in higher education in 2021/22. These included 22 young people aged 19-21 at university (a decrease from 25 last year), studying a variety of subjects from Sociology, Health and Social Care, Early Childhood Studies and Politics and Economics. Additionally, 22 care leavers aged between 22 and 25 were in higher education at the end of the reporting year (an increase from 14 last year). Brent had a higher percentage of care leavers in higher education than statistical neighbours and nationally. The table below highlights some of the comparative data for young people at university:

Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in Higher Education	Brent	Brent %	Statistical Neighbour average	Statistical Neighbour average %	National figure	figure %
2019-20	24	10%	20	8%	1,920	6%
2020-21	24	10%	20	8%	2040	6%
2021-22	22	7%				

15.2 At the end of the reporting year, the percentage of young people aged 19-21 in education, employment and training was just over 56%, compared to 53% last year. The difference is mainly due to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic which has left some care leavers, particularly those working within the hospitality sector and on zero-hour contracts, unemployed. Brent's performance is in line with statistical neighbours and the national average. The national key performance measures as related to outcomes for care leavers in education, employment or training are as below:

Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in Education, Employment or Training	Brent	Brent %	Statistical Neighbour average	Statistical Neighbour average %	National figure	figure %
2019-20	137	57%	133	53%	16440	53%
2020-21	128	54%	131	52%	16900	52%
2021-22	140	56%				

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

15.4 The case studies below demonstrates Brent's commitment to support care leavers who aspire to attend higher education despite having additional needs:

Case Study 1 – A care leaver in higher education

DD is 21 years old. She has completed her final year at University where she was studying Sociology, during term time she was residing on campus and during the holiday period, she resided with her former Foster Carer whom she fondly calls Nan with whom she has a very strong relationship. Given that DD suffer from Lupus which affects her ability to carry out her daily life chores and makes her feel low occasionally, she has remained strong minded and positive which has resulted in her achieving her lifelong EET goals and having a powerful personal and professional network surrounding her has made a contribution towards this achievement.

Her plan now is to go on to do a Master's Degree for the next upcoming academic year and thereafter to find suitable and permanent employment where it hoped that there are many opportunities for her to have some kind of career progression.

Case Study 2 – A care leaver in higher education

GK is studying at a university, part of the Russell group of universities, and has dreams of being a politician. This young man has shown real promise in the future, despite the uncertainty of his immigration status. The university have provided additional financial assistance to GK in recognition of his academic abilities. We have only supported GK with subsistence and accommodation as we would for any another young person in similar circumstances but what GK has shown is his determination and commitment to succeed.

16.0 Care Leavers' Accommodation

- 16.1 All care leavers in Brent are given priority housing banding due to their leaving care status. Young people are only put forward for a council tenancy when they are ready to move on. The PAs complete a vulnerability assessment with the young person and recommend that they should be able to manage a council or housing association tenancy. Young people also need to complete a mandatory one-week MyBnk money programme and ASDAN independent life skills programme or a week at the Gordon Brown Centre before they move to their tenancies. A 'setting up home allowance' of £2000 is provided for care leavers to furnish their homes and buy essential items.
- 16.2 The Leaving Care service piloted two weekends at the Gordon Brown Centre for 17 young people in preparation for their independent living. The Gordon Brown Centre is an outdoor facility set on a 25-acre site in Hampshire operated by Brent staff. The centre is in a natural setting that enables young people to experience positive activities such as low ropes, high ropes archery, farm animals, and a fire-making woodland/campfire area. The first group were facilitated in February 2022. It allowed the young people to learn and demonstrate the skills needed to manage their property independently.
- 16.3 We have developed a joint protocol with the Probation Service to better meet the needs of care leavers transitioning from prison to the community, a joint approach that will ensure that young people's needs are being addressed before they leave custody so that they are provided with suitable accommodation with the right level of support when they are released from prison. A monthly housing panel reviews all requests for tenancy nominations for care leavers, which is chaired by the Housing Service Manager.

- 16.4 A personal advisor with specialism in housing provides intensive support to care leavers at highest risk of homelessness/rough sleeping. 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. Later this year, a celebration event will be held for those who have completed the Independent Living Workbook in 20/21. MyBank Charity that works with young people provided training to care leavers on money management and managing tenancies.
- 16.5 A collaboration between BCJ and Brent commissioning team has resulted in changes to the Quality Assurance framework Brent used to assess semi-independent accommodation and to the development and delivery of training Semi-Independent Accommodation providers. It also led to Brent offering care experienced young people paid roles as accommodation co-inspectors.
- 16.6 At the end of the reporting year, 81% of care leavers aged 19-21 were in suitable accommodation (down from 83% last year). This performance is equal to statistical neighbours and slightly below the national average. This is partly due to some care leavers who were former UASC, being refused leave to remain in the UK and choosing not to be in touch with the Local Authority.

Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in suitable accommodation	Brent	Brent %	Statistical Neighbour average	Statistical Neighbour average %	National Figure	National figure %
2019-20	197	82%	202	82%	26360	85%
2020-21	208	88%	210	83%	28270	88%
2021-22	209	81%				

- 16.7 Care Leavers continue to be placed in appropriate and safe accommodation. Those who are not ready to move to independence are encouraged to stay put with their foster carers or in semi-independent accommodation until they are ready, with the expectation that carers identify how they will support transition to adulthood. The number of care leavers in semi-independent provision has dropped to 91 in March 2022 from 136 in March 2021. This decrease was partly due to the pandemic delaying young people's move into their tenancies. Additionally, there are several former UASC who have been waiting for a Home Office decision which has been delayed due to the backlog caused by the pandemic.

- 16.8 The following case study demonstrates evidence of good joint work between Youth Offending, LAC and Permanency and the Metropolitan Police Protection Officer. There was evidence of strong professional network and communication between various professionals:

Case Study – Accommodation

TM is 18 years old of Black British Caribbean heritage who grew up with his mother and 3 siblings in Brent.

TM has been known to Children Services since 11 years old. He had a history of school exclusions including bringing a knife to primary school, and missing episodes from his home.

The family were known to Youth Offending Services and Probation within the borough as well. TM committed a serious offence in 2017 and was sentenced to 4 years in custody. As a result of this he became a Looked After Child and subsequently was cared for under a Full Care Order from 2019.

TM was recalled to custody twice after being released on licence as a result of breaching his licence. TM finished his sentence in 2021 and return home under a PWP and has shown good engagement following this.

TM has resided with his mother since this time and now 18, TM is engaging with Prospects and will be referred to a specialist organisation dealing with the issues associated with the offence TM had committed.

He continues to follow the guidelines of the professionals and no concerns have been raised since his final release from custody.

17.0 Priorities for Corporate Parenting Partners 2022/23

- Continuous focus from all partners to improve health services and outcomes for LAC and care leavers including but not limited to dental care, emotional wellbeing and CAMHS i.e. targeted support for UASC and former UASC.
- Partners to work together to increase the number of Brent's looked after children and care leavers in employment, education and training. In line with this, partners are encouraged to offer Brent care leavers work place experiences and apprenticeships
- Partners to have increased engagement with Brent Care Journeys Programme (in partnership with Barnardo's) enabling young people being involved in design and improvement of services across the locality

- Ongoing work around transitional safeguarding to enable a coordinated approach based on collaboration from partners, i.e. completion of a joint protocol with Probation on care leavers being released from custody
- Further work on accommodation pathways for care leavers, particularly those placed within semi-independent provision and their readiness to move on.

Report sign off:

Gail Tolley

Strategic Director Children and Young People

	<p align="center">Corporate Parenting Committee 20 July 2022</p>
	<p align="center">Report from Strategic Director, Children and Young People</p>
<p align="center">Brent's Updated Foster Carers' Charter 2022</p>	

Wards Affected:	All
No. of Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Draft Foster Carers' Charter 2022
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Nigel Chapman - Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes nigel.chapman@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Onder Beter - Head of Looked After Children and Permanency Onder.beter@brent.gov.uk</p>

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide information to Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC) regarding engagement and involvement of foster carers in the revision/updating of Brent's Foster Carers Charter.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 CPC is requested to review/comment on the contents of this report and approve the charter.

3.0 Background

3.1 In March 2011, the Government issued guidance to local authorities requiring them to set up a Foster Carers' Charter. The Fostering Network produced additional best practice guidance on how to make charters meaningful and effective in ensuring that foster carers are regarded as integral members of the team, working together to support children in our care.

3.2 The Brent revised Charter sets out clear expectations for how Brent foster carers should be treated, trained and supported. The charter helps to build a better understanding between foster carers and those involved in delivering care and support to children and young people, promoting a more collaborative approach based on "team around the child" principles.

3.3 The Charter also aims to emphasise the status of Brent foster carers as “professional partners”, thereby helping foster carers get the recognition they deserve and need in order to provide children and young people with the best possible outcomes.

3.4 The Charter was developed applying key principles set out within the Fostering Network Guidance. A consultation process took place in April 2022 in which supervising social workers met with foster carers to review the Charter, share their thoughts and provide feedback. Further engagement/consultation took place in June 2022 involving the Service Manager and 21 foster carers from Brent Foster Carers’ Support Group. Overall feedback has been positive, they like the fact that:

- there is a clear commitment to Brent carers as “professional partners”
- the charter is both aspirational and valuing of carers skills and abilities in achieving good outcomes for children
- Brent has placed high importance on carers’ learning and development needs

4.0 The Charter’s Impact on Brent Carers

4.1 Foster carers are valued and respected team members and form an integral part of our frontline team in delivering good outcomes for children.

4.2 The foster carer support group is held monthly and acts as a reference group to inform service development and improvement of Brent’s fostering service. The group is seen as a valuable resource for newly approved carers starting their career in fostering.

4.3 They play a vital role in marketing and recruitment of prospective carers

4.4 They provide expertise and advice in the appointment of supervising social workers

4.5 There are good examples of carers having worked in partnership with SSWs and CSWs in Staff Forums/events, presenting “good practice” case study examples of direct work with children and birth families.

4.6 A quarterly report on fostering is presented to the Council’s CPC which has corporate oversight on the fostering service and corporate parenting. Foster carers have attended and/or contributed to the council committee, sharing personal experiences and offering their professional perspective on practice and support of looked after children.

5.0 A Charter Informed By the Views of CYP: 2021 Your Life, Your Care Bright Spot Survey

Our children feel happy with their foster carers

• Our children said:



5.1 The charter was informed by the views of Brent children and young people involved in the Your Life, Your Care Bright Spots Survey. The survey captured the views of looked after children in terms of their well-being, their relationship with carers and what can be improved.

5.2 The survey concluded that Brent children and young people generally felt happy about their carers and experiences in foster care.

5.3 The feedback reflects the impact Brent Foster Carer Charter is having on both foster carers and the lived experiences of children and young people in foster care.

6.0 Further Consultation and Mechanism for Evaluating Progress

6.1 A key action arising from the engagement/consultation event held in June 2022 was to schedule a further meeting with foster carers in six months to review progress made in embedding core values expressed within the Charter and assess impact and outcomes

6.2 This would include identifying areas where the Council is achieving positive change for Foster Carers e.g. where more carers were expressing feeling valued and supported. Also, use the event to reflect on areas requiring further improvement and for both the Council and foster carers support group to be accountable for acting on the views of carers through joint action plan.

6.3 Next steps will be to organise and co-facilitate a feedback event in December 2022 to include representatives from the foster carers support group and managers/frontline staff to review progress against the Charter.

Report sign off:

Gail Tolley

Strategic Director Children and Young People



Brent

FOSTER CARERS and KINSHIP CARERS'

CHARTER

2022

Final Draft

**'Children are at the heart
of our work'**

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Carer' refers to both foster carers and kinship carers in this Charter. The term 'Kinship Carer' only refers to connected person's carers who are known as 'family and friends foster carers. It does not include special guardians or any other arrangement.

The Charter has been developed in consultation with Brent foster carers.

The purpose of the Charter is:

- to encourage open and honest partnership working between foster carers, kinship carers, social workers and the fostering service
- to ensure foster carers and kinship carers are supported by Brent Council to be the "best they can be"
- to help and support foster carers and kinship carers to work together with staff to build professional/respectful relationships with each other and with children and young people
- to show commitment and investment in the professional development of foster carers and kinship carers, to aspire and reach their full potential
- to ensure foster carers and kinship carers are given opportunities to meet, form support groups and have a strong voice in influencing the development of children's services and best practice

ROLES AND COMMITMENT

Brent's role

Brent's aim is to recruit and assess prospective carers who are willing and able to provide a home that enables children and young people to grow and reach their full potential. Brent will ensure that all carers receive training, guidance and financial support.

Carers' role

Carers are key members of the professional team around the child. Their role is to provide a safe and secure environment for vulnerable children and work with staff to help them to settle, develop and enjoy their time with their foster family.

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." Helen Keller

The charter provides clarity in relation to expectations from Brent and carers in respect of looked after children and young people.

What Carers can expect from Brent

1. Working in partnership
2. Information
3. Support
4. Learning and development
5. Fair treatment
6. Clarity about decisions
7. Communication and consultation

What Brent can expect from carers

1. Working in partnership
2. Value and respect for children and young people
3. Information
4. Commitment to learning and development
5. Communication and consultation

WHAT CARERS CAN EXPECT FROM BRENT

1. Working in partnership

Brent recognises that Carers are vital in ensuring positive outcomes for children and young people in care.

Brent will:

- Value the skills and contributions of carers
- Include carers in all necessary meetings that affect them and the child, recognising that their contribution is important to the well-being of the child in their care
- Ensure that the Placement Service, Fostering & Kinship Team meets the standards set out in Regulations, Standards and Guidance
- Ensure that all aspects of our practice is open and transparent
- Respect confidentiality (except where it may be necessary to share information to safeguard the child/young person, in which case we will inform carers of this action)
- Ensure that allowances and fees are paid regularly and within the required timescales
- Ensure that records are being kept about all significant events and communications

2. Information

Brent recognises that information sharing with carers is critical in ensuring that the overall needs of looked after children or young people are met.

Brent will:

- Provide carers with a carers' handbook upon initial approval which contains all relevant policies and procedures. The local authority will also ensure that these are updated when required and new guidelines are provided
- Ensure carers have information on all financial matters
- Give carers all relevant information available to enable them to safely care for the child or young person placed in their care
- Ensure that Support Plans are drawn up in consultation with carers and agreed prior to the placement commencing
- Ensure that Placement Planning Meetings take place within timescales

3. Support

Brent recognises that fostering can be challenging and that having robust and timely support makes a huge difference.

The Brent will:

- ensure that fostering allowances are reflective of the needs of individual children and paid within the outlined timescales
- provide monthly supervisory visits, or more if required, and regular telephone contact with carers
- ensure that newly approved foster carers and kinship carers are 'buddied up' with experienced foster carers
- provide additional support to children or young people, carers and their families through CAMHS and other agencies
- facilitate regular support groups during the day and evening to enable carers to attend
- ensure that the carers' support groups run regularly to meet with senior managers for consultation.
- ensure all foster carers are members of an independent organisation which provides support and advocacy (Fostering Network)

4. Learning and Development

Brent recognises that in order to enable children to experience stability in their life, and help them succeed, it is essential for carers to have access to training and development opportunities that will strengthen their skills and knowledge.

Brent will:

- Ensure that all carers have a Learning & Development Plan and we will review your progress annually
- Provide all necessary training and other development opportunities
- Continually consult with carers on additional specialist training they might require
- Ensure that 'one to one' and group training are available to support carers
- Ensure opportunities are available specifically for foster carers to gain support in completing their TSDS (Training Support & Development Standards) and further their career development, i.e. Qualification Credit Framework Level 3 (QCF)

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5. Fair treatment

Brent recognises that carers need to be treated fairly at all times.

Brent will:

- Provide an open transparent process for dealing with complaints from carers and allegations within the required time scales
- Ensure that carers and their families are treated with dignity and respect whilst subject to an allegation
- Ensure carers are provided with independent support as necessary
- Ensure outcomes of investigations are put in writing to carers

6. Clarity about decisions

Brent local authority recognises that to enable children and young people to view Fostering and Kinship arrangements as a positive experience, carers must be empowered to make everyday decisions regarding the children in their care.

Brent will:

- Ensure they are supported to make decisions and encouraged to participate as equal partners at placement planning meetings and reviews. Help provide clarity on decisions carers can and cannot make in relation to the child or young person in their care
- Ensure that carers are supported and feel confident to make basic decisions on the day to day matters relating to the child or young person in their care
- Regularly consult children and young people about their wishes and feelings and help them to contribute to the decisions made about their lives

7. Communication and Consultation

Brent is a firm believer in openness, transparency and building a positive working relationships.

Brent will:

- Encourage and ensure regular communication with carers and other professionals
- Strive to provide honest and constructive feedback to carers which will benefit both carers and children in placement
- Ensure that carers are consulted on all matters affecting them
- Ensure that carers are provided with feedback in a timely manner

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WHAT BRENT LOCAL AUTHORITY CAN EXPECT FROM CARERS

1. Working in partnership

Carers recognise that high quality care can only be provided if all professionals work together.

Carers will:

- Where applicable, meet the standards and guidance set out in the Fostering Regulations (2011) and National Minimum Standards and follow the local authority's policies and procedures (See Carers' Handbook)
- Provide looked after children with an experience of family life
- Use their expertise, skills and knowledge positively to improve the lives and experiences of children in their care
- Show willingness to work positively with birth families and significant people in the child's life to help them maintain their sense of identity
- Work positively within a network of professionals involved with the child or young person, i.e. school, health, religious establishments and others

2. Value and Respect for the child or young person in their care

Carers recognise that every child and young person should be respected and valued as an individual and be supported to meet their aspirations and full potential.

Carers will:

- Ensure their practice supports the individual needs of each child in their care
- Support the child or young person to be involved in making decisions regarding their lives appropriate to their age and understanding
- Respect and promote the child or young person's identity, culture, religion, language and other cultural observations and practices
- Afford the same level of consideration, care and protection as they would for their own child
- Advocate on behalf of the child or young person in their care by obtaining additional support and services as required

3. Information

Carers recognise that openness and sharing of information is key to positive working relationships in safeguarding children.

Carers will:

- Maintain information about the child and/or their family in a confidential manner
- Keep supervising social workers informed of any changes within their household
- Inform the Local Authority of any difficulties that they, the child or any other household members are experiencing that could have an impact on the placement
- Make use of their logbooks and evidence that they are recording significant events in relation to the child or young person in placement
- Respond to correspondence and requests for information in a timely manner

4. Learning, Development and Support

Carers recognise the importance of having access to learning and development opportunities. This will have a significant impact in ensuring that they will positively meet the needs of the individual children placed in their care.

Carers will:

- Take responsibility for the development of their knowledge and skills
- Attend all mandatory training courses and also specialist training that would benefit the placement
- Be proactive in informing the local authority of their training needs
- Attend monthly support group meetings where applicable
- Give sufficient notice to the local authority if they are unable to attend training or support group sessions

5. Communication and Consultation

Carers recognise the importance of effective communication in ensuring the needs of children are met.

Carers will:

- Conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times
- Make sure their views are communicated in a constructive manner which is beneficial to all
- Keep the local authority informed of all matters relating to the child or young person in writing
- Participate in consultation and discussions on an individual or group level (support groups/focus groups) which will contribute to the development of the service as a whole

In signing this Charter, Brent Council, Foster Carers and Kinship Carers agree to reflect the spirit and intentions of the Charter in their actions:

- **Brent Local authority**

(Contact details for the person responsible for implementing the aims of the Charter)

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 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 20 July 2022
	Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People
Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 1: 1st April 2022 to 30th June 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)	Darren Johnson, Interim Service Manager, LAC and Permanency Darren.johnson@brent.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 Purpose of the Report

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

1.2 This report details the activity of Brent's fostering service from 1st April 2022 – 30th June 2022.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

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

3.0 Background

3.1 Service Priorities

The in-house fostering function is positioned within the LAC and Permanency Service (LACPS) of the Children and Young People's Department. The service is focusing on the following priority areas in 2022/23:

- To have a greater focus on recruitment, assessment and approval of new carers with the view to achieve 5 net gain by the end of the financial year, considering termination of approvals and resignations
- To enhance the support offer to Brent's foster carers and kinship carers, considering therapeutic element to support placement stability
- To enhance the training and development programme for carers to include a permanent, ongoing mix of virtual and direct delivery of courses and seminars
- 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 five supervising social workers, two team managers and one marketing and recruitment officer (MRO) post.

3.2.2 The workload across the teams continues to grow as new kinship and foster carers are approved and allocated to supervising social workers to ensure ongoing support.

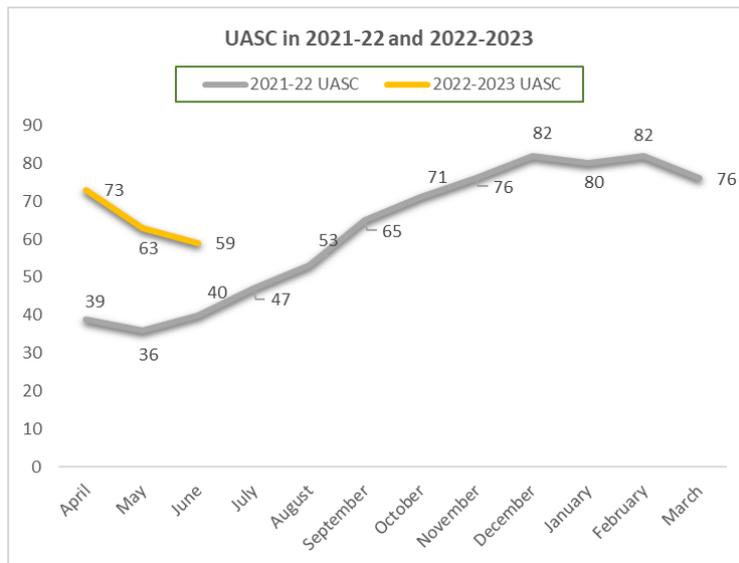
4.0 Placement Activity:

4.1 The total number of looked after children as at 30th June 2022 was 339, which is a decrease by 2 children from Q4 of 2021-2022 and an increase by 42 children from the same period in 2021 (297 children)

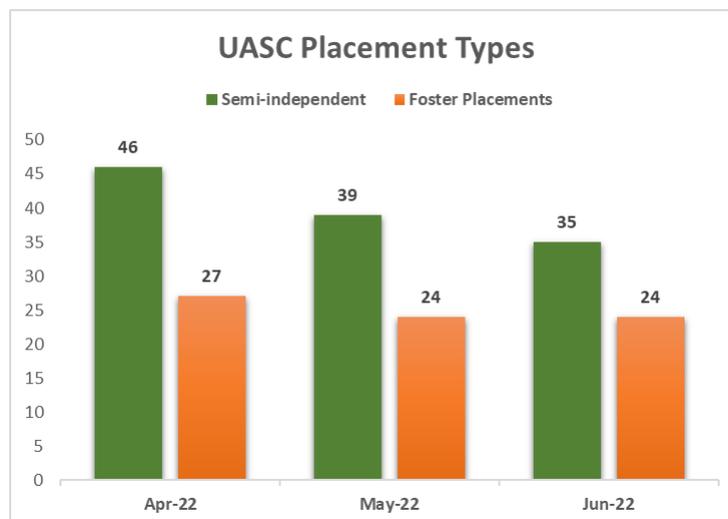
4.2 The corporate performance targets for 2022/2023 are as below:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 30th June 2022 was 15.3% (52 children), nearly same as the previous quarter Q4 of 2021/2022, 15.2% (52 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 20% - the actual percentage as of 30th June 2022 was 15.6% (53 children), an increase by 0.6% from Q4 of 2021/2022 of 15% (51 children),
- Percentage of looked after children placed with independent fostering agencies – annual target 25% - the actual percentage as of 30th June 2022 was 29.8% (101 children); same as Q4 of 2021/2022 30% (102 children)
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements – annual target 70% - the actual percentage as of 30th June 2022 was 60.8% (206 children), which is an increase by 0.7% from Q4 of 2021/2022 which was 60.1% (205 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 76 looked after children in registered semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children’s Home Regulations) as at 30th June 2022, which represents 22.4% of all looked after children. This is a decrease by 0.2% from the end of Q4, 2021/2022 (24.6%, 84 children).

4.3 As of 30th June 2022, there were 59 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), a decrease of 18 UASC (77 UASC in Q4 2021-22). The decrease is attributable to the number of UASC turning 18 and those dispersed into the National Transfer Scheme.



4.4 The number of UASC placed in semi-independent accommodation is 35, 14 less than at the end of Q4, 2021-22 (49 UASC), none in residential children's home and 24 UASC placed in foster placements, less by 4 UASC from Q4 (28 UASC).



5.0 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. Face-to-face recruitment activities and information evenings are planned to take place in the second quarter of this financial year.

5.2 During this reporting period, marketing activity has been carried out 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. Therefore, our recruitment activity will include the use of Google Ads in the future.

5.4 Of the 13 enquiries received during this reporting period, 6 were general enquiries, 1 was unsuitable due to personal commitments, 2 enquirers were invited to our information evenings, 3 expressed interest in progressing to initial visit, 1 enquirer was an approved IFA foster carer so progressed to Stage 2.

5.5 During this reporting period, 10 assessments were undertaken. Of these:

- 3 are in Stage 1; and
- 7 are in Stage 2.

5.6 In terms of assessments reported in previous quarter (Q4 2021/22); 4 applicants went on to be approved as new carers during Q1 2022/23.

6.0 Fostering Panel

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

6.2 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 this period, 6 panels were held with 22 cases discussed during these sessions. Within these cases:

- 3 were recommended for approval as short term connected persons
- 4 were recommended for approval as short term carers
- 8 carers were approved as part of their 3 yearly annual review
- 3 carers were approved as part of their 1st annual review
- 1 carer was approved re long term match
- 1 carer was approved re change of approval numbers
- 2 carers fostering approval/status were terminated

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 summer 2022. At present, First Aid Training is offered in person to carers. Training is hybrid combination of face to face and virtual courses.

7.2 Six courses were offered (all virtual) during the period under review, using Zoom, including: Professional Boundaries and Record Keeping, Oral Health and Sexuality and Gender. Carers' comments about the sessions were mainly positive but they continue to express that they would like to have more face-to-face interaction with their peers. This is being planned to move towards more face to face training in the near future. An example of the carers' comments is below:

"Sexuality and Gender course was rated "Excellent" (Sexuality and Gender 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 Positive Parenting Techniques for Parents and Carers to Specialist Educational Needs courses such as Understanding Dyslexia and Dyspraxia. The courses can be accessed at any time of the day, or at the weekend, in response to carers asking for more flexible training times. Feedback from foster carers has been positive for all training commissioned and sign up has stayed consistent with carers regularly requesting the online training. We have recently renewed the

agreement with the agreed provider, with a view to signing up more carers as the year progresses. The plan is to continue the move towards more hybrid training sessions allowing both in person and remote attendance.

7.4 Support from Supervising Social Workers (SSW)

7.4.1 Retention of foster carers remains a priority, based on feedback from annual reviews and fostering panel. The support offered to foster carers forms a large part of why carers remain committed to Brent.

7.4.2 To keep foster carers engaged and informed, the fostering service provides a monthly newsletter and facilitates foster carer support groups.

7.4.3 The monthly foster carers' support group continues to be facilitated virtually as foster carers have expressed that it is their preferred option. However, some foster carers have expressed that they would welcome in the future alternate face-to-face and virtual sessions. This is being explored with foster carers.

7.4.4 The support groups that took place during the reporting period focused on topics ranging from training, summer trip, foster carer charter, foster carer association, finances and working together. The group in June was attended by the Fostering Service Manager and there was positive feedback received about their attendance and engagement on issues raised.

8.0 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 26 annual reviews of foster carers in this reporting period.

9.0 Service Development

9.1 Website Development

Work is being progressed to fully optimise the council website by enhancing our fostering digital platform to support 2022-23 marketing and recruitment activities.

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 September 2022.

9.3 Enhanced Support and Resources for Brent Carers

A review of current resources allocated to Brent's in-house fostering function is underway with the view to look into structure of teams and existing budget for support and supervision of carers. The aim is to place an enhanced focus on marketing, recruitment and approval of new carers as well as strengthening placement support. It is anticipated with some realignment of resources, Brent would be in a better position to attract more people into fostering as well as upskilling and supporting existing carers so that they would be enabled to care for children with complex needs and trauma.

9.3.1 The review will identify creative, cost effective ways in which to enhance our service offer to carers with the hope to create a dedicated in-house specialist support service aimed at strengthening placement stability and building carers' confidence and resilience. Part of the review will also explore approaches/best practice in "growing our own" especially regarding development of specialist and therapeutic cares.

Report sign off:

Gail Tolley

Strategic Director Children and Young People