



Corporate Parenting Committee

Monday 17 July 2023 at 5.00 pm

Boardrooms 1&2 - Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way,
Wembley HA9 0FJ

This meeting will be held as an in person physical meeting with all members of the Committee required to attend in person.

The press and public will be excluded from this meeting.

Membership:

Members

Councillors:

Grahl (Chair)
Collymore
Dixon
Gbajumo
Hirani

Substitute Members

Councillors:

Chappell, Conneely, Kennelly
and Rubin

Councillor: Maurice and Mistry

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.

Item	Page
1 Exclusion of the Press and Public	
<p>The committee is advised that the public may be excluded from meetings whenever it is likely in view of the nature of the proceedings that exempt information would be disclosed. Meetings of the Corporate Parenting Committee are attended by representatives of Care In Action (CIA), the council's Children in Care Council. The committee is therefore recommended to exclude the press and public for the duration of the meeting, as the attendance of CIA representatives necessitates the disclosure of the following category of exempt information, set out in the Local Government Act 1972: - information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.</p>	
2 Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members	
3 Declarations of interests	
<p>Members are invited to declare at this stage of the meeting, any relevant disclosable pecuniary, personal or prejudicial interests in the items on this agenda.</p>	
4 Deputations (if any)	
<p>To hear any deputations received from members of the public in accordance with Standing Order 67.</p>	
5 Minutes of the previous meeting	1 - 8
<p>To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record.</p>	
6 Matters arising (if any)	
<p>To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.</p>	
7 Update from Care In Action and Care Leavers in Action Representatives	
<p>This is an opportunity for members of Care In Action (CIA) and Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) to feedback on recent activity.</p>	
8 Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2022-2023	9 - 46
<p>This report fulfils the Council's statutory obligation to present an annual</p>	

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 strengths and areas for growth in supporting Looked After Children and Care Leavers in Brent.

9 Annual Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Report 2022-2023 47 - 58

To inform the Corporate Parenting Committee of the contributions of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) towards quality assurance and improvement of services for Looked After Children (LAC).

10 Annual Brent Virtual School (BVS) Report 2021-2022 59 - 75

To inform the Corporate Parenting Committee of the work undertaken by the Brent Virtual School (BVS) and school results for Looked After Children in the 2021-2022 academic year. This report was delayed in being presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee due to the need for exam results to be ratified.

11 Any other urgent business

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

Date of the next meeting: Tuesday 17 October 2023



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE Monday 24 April 2023 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Grahl (Chair), Collymore, Dixon, Gbajumo and Mistry (substituting for Councillor Hirani)

1. **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

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

2. **Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members**

Apologies were received from:

- Councillor Hirani, who was substituted by Councillor Mistry.

3. **Declarations of interests**

None.

4. **Deputations (if any)**

None received.

5. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the last meeting, held on 1 February 2023, be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

6. **Matters arising (if any)**

None.

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

J (Care Leavers in Action) informed the Committee that he had been involved in speaking to Ofsted during their recent inspection of local authority children's services in Brent. J had been asked about what services were available to care leavers and what could be improved, and care leavers had given some ideas of services they would like to see. One idea was subsidised driving lessons. The inspectors had been very friendly and spoke to each care leaver representative individually to understand the viewpoint of different types of care leavers. Another project that J had been involved in was around housing, looking at where care leavers could go to find information for accommodation when they became independent. They had made the suggestion that all services should be available in one

place as a 'one-stop shop', and that it was important to ensure there were staff available who could communicate with people who had language barriers.

C (Care Leavers in Action) told the Committee about the trip that Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) had been preparing for, to see *Wicked* in the West End. CLIA had been on trips in the past, but it had been a while since the last one. CLIA would get the opportunity to meet the cast after the show and talk about inclusivity in the group, to look at ways to increase the membership of CLIA. The Committee heard that the work around building trusted relationships had been completed at the last CLIA session. That piece of work would be tracked to see its impact. One way this was being done was through a QR code on posters about building trusted relationships, where the reader could scan the code to be brought to a survey and feed back about the information on the poster. The group had also spoke about the national consultation and found it very interesting because the group had already been looking at ideas on a national scale, looking to other boroughs to see what they did.

The Chair thanked those present for their contributions and invited members of the Committee to ask questions to the CIA / CLIA representatives. The following questions were raised:

The Committee noted that the previous (2018) looked after children sub-judgement within the Ofsted inspection of children's services had been rated 'outstanding' in comparison to the new rating of 'good'. They asked what the members of CLIA felt had declined over the last few years to have reduced the Ofsted rating. C explained that Covid had a big impact on services everywhere. He felt there was a much more severe impact on care leavers, because many had reached the point where they lived alone, so when lockdown had been in effect care leavers' mental health had took a decline as a result of loneliness and social isolation. C highlighted that healthy social interaction had a positive impact on mental health, and so it was difficult for care leavers without that. In addition, there had been a change in the office where, previously, care leavers had been able to drop in to say hello to staff from the LAC and care leaver team, and now they were no longer able to do so. As a result, he felt that there was not anything in particular within the service that had declined, but that the service was going through an adjustment period where things had changed so quickly and drastically following Covid.

The Committee asked whether there was enough support from community organisations to support the ambitions of looked after children and care leavers. C felt it would be a good idea to further tap into different communities using community organisations as there were looked after children and care leavers from different ethnic backgrounds, religions and cultures and it was important that there was integration and recognition for those young people.

In noting the update from C about trying to get more members involved in CLIA, the Committee asked what had been done so far. C told the Committee that he had spoken to friends who were also care leavers in Brent to get them to come to CLIA, but it was difficult to get new people because it was a difficult concept to explain and because the group had involved the same people for the past 5-6 years. The Committee expressed that they were grateful to young people for their efforts in engaging peers to come along.

Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) advised the Committee that they had been looking at the membership for CLIA, and were considering bringing together the 2 groups of CLIA and Brent Care Journeys, which Barnardo's were currently running. The Council were also working with the Young Brent Foundation looking at a space to use as a long-term base for young people in care and care leavers. At the moment, Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) highlighted that she had secured the space in The Curve for children and young people to use.

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. **Overview of support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)**

Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report, which informed members of the Council's legal responsibilities towards Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) under the Children's Act 1989. She explained that UASC was defined as 'at the time of making an application that the person is or appears to be under 18 and is applying in their own right because they have no guardian or relative in this country'. The number of UASCs in care had grown by approximately 34% in the UK over the past 12 months. This had been especially true for London, which continued to have the highest proportion of UASCs in the UK by a considerable margin. In introducing the report, she highlighted the following key points:

- UASCs became known to the Council through different routes. They could present directly to the local police station or council offices, or may be a previously dispersed asylum seeker. There was also the pan London rota to fairly distribute presenting UASCs and the national transfer scheme managed by the Home Office.
- Since August 2021, 59 people who were placed in hotel accommodation in Brent presented to the service as a UASC. This meant the service needed to assess those 59 people's age via age assessment. A significant number of those 59 were found to be adults. It was not an exact science and there was a need to be sensitive due to the risk of judicial review. The Council normally worked to a margin of 5 years.
- A dedicated UASC team had been created in Brent following the large influx of asylum seekers residing in hotel accommodation in order to respond to that specific pressure. There were social workers in that team who had specialist UASC knowledge and experience in completing age assessments.
- As of March 2023, Brent had 43 young people in care who were UASCs, a significant drop from the previous year which was 74. Brent had 153 care leavers who were former UASC, making up 35% of the care leaver population.
- In relation to support for UASCs, there was close working with the Brent Virtual School to ensure that, whether being assessed for their age or having had their age assessed and accepted, there was access to education. There was also close working with health partners to ensure quick health assessments and screenings. Regarding mental health and wellbeing support, there were several support services available. There was the WEST service delivered through the Anna Freud Centre, and specific group and 1-1 support for UASCs. Other community resources included WDP and Elevate, and there were other organisations that the Council linked with such as Young Roots and the Refugee Council. The Care Leavers Hub was also available to UASCs which they were encouraged to use, including the weekly football sessions run by the Leaving Care service which were particularly popular with UASCs and former UASCs and therapeutic Art sessions through Brent Care Journeys.

The Chair thanked Kelli for her introduction and invited contributions from the Committee, with the following points raised:

The Committee asked how many UASCs had a learning disability. Kelli Eboji explained that this would likely be determined through the Brent Virtual School. If there were concerns for a child's learning ability, they would be referred to an educational psychologist for an assessment through the Inclusion Service. More frequently, there were concerns about a child's mental health and the presentation of their emotional wellbeing could create some

uncertainty about their learning needs. She felt this was an area that needed more focus as it could take a long time to establish if a learning disability was present.

In relation to age assessments, the Committee asked what would happen where it was not clear how old a presenting asylum seeker was. Kelli Eboji highlighted that the Council worked to a margin of error, usually of around 5 years in order to then initiate an age assessment. If the Council determined that someone was between the ages of 18-25 then they would accommodate them and provide services under Section 20 of the Children's Act, and if they were assessed to be over 25 they would not be accommodated and would be referred back through the Home Office route. The assessment initially looked at the welfare of the person, then a social work judgement was made as to whether the person looked to be under 18. The person's claimed age was often in direct conflict with the Home Office assessed age and a judgement would be made depending on what the social worker was seeing and what the person was saying. Sometimes, if a person was assessed to be over 25 and therefore not accommodated, then this could lead to legal challenge. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) confirmed that if there were any doubts about someone's age they would not be placed in a foster home with younger children and more likely would be placed in semi-independent accommodation or in a foster home with older young people. He highlighted that the Council took the position of listening to the people coming forward and giving them the benefit of the doubt, veering away from a culture of disbelief.

Continuing to discuss age assessments, the Committee queried whether they were particularly distressing for the people coming forward. Kelli Eboji advised that they could be distressing because very often the people coming forward were already distressed and relaying distressing stories. Sometimes age assessors would hear very similar stories where people may have been told what to say, which they then needed to unpick to understand the truth. Age assessments would look at the person's health and family history but could not use medical determination such as dental records. There were interpreters, 2 assessing social workers, and independent support at the time of an assessment. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) advised that the Home Office were now setting up their own age assessment unit, with social workers employed to do assessments that would include bone density and dentistry tests, which the Home Office considered to be a more objective view on age. There was a difference of opinion of how certain that could be as it was not an exact science, but this would be done centrally by the Home Office and that responsibility for age assessments would be taken away from local authorities at some point.

The Committee highlighted that many older UASCs were more independent than their looked after peers and often went out by themselves a lot, becoming difficult for their foster carer to keep track of. They queried how the foster carers remained curious enough to be assured the young person was safe. Kelli Eboji explained that the Council tried hard to place a young person under 18 in a foster care placement, but this depended on the information they were able to learn about the person and others already in the foster care placement. Most UASCs were in semi-independent placements, but the one's who were in foster care were often more independent and there was a need to explore that with the person, explain the rules and find out why they were not abiding with them. This was work that the social workers should be doing and supporting the foster carers with.

In considering whether the right foster carers were available for UASCs, the Committee heard that there was a diverse group of foster carers and a set of carers who took only UASCs. However, the service felt that there was always room for more. There was good language and culture crossovers for most UASCs, but there was a low number of Afghan foster carers.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

9. Outcome of Ofsted ILACs Inspection

The Chair introduced the item, which was the February 2023 Ofsted inspection report of children's services in Brent Council, and congratulated all staff who had been involved in the inspection. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) advised that more detail would be provided at the next meeting regarding the actions the Council were taking in response to the inspection report.

The Chair invited the comments and questions from the Committee, with the following issues raised:

The Committee highlighted comments in the report about the attendance figures for children in care reviews and the quality of those reviews and queried whether that was the norm. They were advised that the attendance numbers were similar to the last inspection, so they had not declined but it was possible that expectations had increased. Most children did take part in their review in some way, usually through speaking with an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) or putting their feedback in writing. In having reviewed those interactions with IROs, Nigel Chapman advised that there were 1-2 employed through the IRO contract that were felt to be not offering as high a quality as would be preferred, where their language used had been officious and not child friendly for example, and which may have been missed in quality assurance work.

The Committee asked about care leavers' understanding of and access to their health histories, which was a recommendation for improvement. Nigel Chapman highlighted that this was common with care leavers, who sometimes had a fractured history prior to care. The inspectors had found that care leavers, when spoken to, were not able to confirm they knew where their health history was and who to speak to if they needed it, and some personal advisers could not point to where they would get that information. He expressed the need to focus health colleagues and Council staff to be confident in knowing how to access that information. Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) added that care leavers could access their health history via their GPs and the information for doing that was provided to them at their final LAC review, but they may have lost that information or need reminding, so they were now looking to communicate and remind care leavers how to do this at multiple points.

In relation to private fostering, the Committee highlighted the Ofsted finding that a small number of private fostering arrangements did not meet regulation and asked how that would be improved. Nigel Chapman advised that there was a very small number of children who were subject to private fostering arrangements, at less than 10 in Brent. An issue across all local authorities was awareness raising of what private fostering was and ensuring everyone knew how to make referrals. As such, the low number of private fostering arrangements in Brent was likely to be higher in reality and there were likely more children out there being looked after by a relative that would not be considered a close relative, or a friend. As part of member's safeguarding training, members were informed about what private fostering was, how to recognise it and how to report it. As a result of the Ofsted finding, Nigel Chapman had asked for an action plan to address those areas where they had not been complaint with regulations, and he was confident in that plan and the monitoring arrangements in place for that.

The Committee queried what item 38 of the report meant, which stated that 'the systems in place have not identified effectively the shortfalls in practice for children who are privately fostered or in areas of practice for children in care and care leavers that have declined'. The Committee were advised that this was the first time Ofsted had separated children in

care and care leavers as 2 separate judgements. The judgement was likely a result of the effect of turnover of social workers in LAC teams on some children's cases and the disruption in that relationship. For example, in some cases there were examples of inconsistent recording of supervision and higher caseload in some teams. An issue for the department was that there was confidence that having a consistent social work manager and independent reviewing officer was a mitigation for social work turnover, but it had not been possible to clearly evidence that in the time that the department had with the inspectors. Overall, the inspectors had seen good quality but there were some cases that were not consistently good, and the service was striving for an even distribution of consistently good work.

In relation to comment 36 of the Ofsted report regarding young offenders, where some personal advisers had taken a more 'befriending' role instead of advocacy following a serious incident, the Committee queried whether personal advisers were given training to provide that advocacy to young people. Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) confirmed that personal advisers had not had training on advocacy but there were plans to implement that as a result of the finding as part of an action plan to upskill personal advisers. There were also mentors and advocates through various different options available for young people in the criminal justice system, such as through Coram Voice. In relation to mentoring and advocacy for children and young people more generally, along with the commissioned advocacy services used the Council also had a "Grandmentors" scheme, where older people were matched with a care experienced young person as a grandparent type figure. There were approximately 20 matches within Brent.

The Committee asked whether care leavers had any entitlement to free public transport. Nigel Chapman advised that currently there was no London wide agreement from TfL about transport costs but there was a campaign to lobby TfL to do free transport for care leavers. Any support the Committee could put to that campaign would be appreciated. The Council were providing travel costs for care leavers to attend training and University.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

10. **Brent Adoption 6-Monthly Report: 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023**

Debbie Gabriel (Adopt London West) introduced the report, which updated the Committee on adoption performance data for the reporting period and the progress and activity of Adopt London West. The report included a summary of the psychological services that Adopt London West could provide as there was now an increased, more consolidated offer. Something new and different that Adopt London West had done during the reporting period was the drama group that had ran throughout October which had been well attended with 10 young people attending every day of the programme. As a result of that success another drama group would run in May. Adopt London had also been working on the Black Adopters Project and had hosted a theory of change workshop, which Councillors Collymore and Gbajumo had attended. Debbie Gabriel thanked the councillors for attending as it was unusual to have councillor engagement to that extent at events and this had been appreciated by the whole project group. Adopt London West's partnership board had agreed to extend the contract with Kinship, providing kinship carers with tailored support. In concluding the introduction, she highlighted that Adopt London West had been very pleased with Ofsted's positive comments that the relationship between Brent and Adopt London West worked well and that the arrangements and bespoke offer for special guardians in particular were good.

Councillor Gbajumo spoke on the Black Adopters Project event she had attended, confirming that there had been a very good turnout where they had heard from some professors. During the workshop, she had raised the theory that there was a tendency to believe two adults were needed to adopt, but a single person was able to adopt if they fulfilled the criteria. Debbie Gabriel agreed, confirming that there were a number of singles who were in the process of an assessment, particularly post-covid with many singles reaching middle ages and re-evaluating their life and goals. The previous month, Adopt London West had approved 3 single women.

The Committee were advised that the financial aspect was a challenge to many looking to adopt, including housing. This was not something Adopt London West could change but they were looking at targeting directly and encouraging people to be open and honest about their financial situation early on in the process so that financial offers could be made, for example through an adoption allowance. Having said that, the bigger issues around housing would remain. These factors would be looked at in detail and included in the next report.

The Committee asked whether there were any communities where there was a shortage of adopters, and heard that there was a shortage of Black adopters. There were many Asian adopters but few Asian children to adopt.

The Committee felt that early permanence placements was a good initiative, and asked whether the young people ended up staying on in those early placements. Debbie Gabriel confirmed that regionally, for Adopt London West, all children and young people had remained in their early permanence placement, but that had not been the case nationally. She highlighted that one of the most difficult balances was that the court may chose to place the child with their family, which was heart-breaking for adopters but great news for the family. This made adoption very complex and uncertain, and so nationally that message was important. Early permanence was a good way to have that conversation. A good example in Brent was where particular circumstances of a case meant that the child could be placed in February 2022 but the final adoption order was not made until November 2022, but that child had been with the family for months already where previously they would not have been.

Debbie Gabriel confirmed that foster parents could become adopters.

In response to why panel meetings were done on MS Teams, Debbie Gabriel explained that all assessment visits were done in person but there had been a decision for panels to remain on Teams. This was following research that this was preferred and was more comfortable for adopters.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the contents of the report.

11. **Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report Quarter 3: 1 January 2023 to 31 March 2023**

Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report, which detailed the activity of Brent's fostering service from 1 January 2023 to 31 March 2023. She advised the Committee that the priorities for the service moving forward were the recruitment and assessment of foster carers. The service was currently reviewing the marketing and recruitment strategy and setting targets for the new year, and lots of work had taken place around foster carer retention, including looking at the package of support

and allowances. The service was also developing it's kinship carer work and community space.

Elena Muller (Service Manager – LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) advised that the service was trying to engage with the kinship community and bring them on board. Brent was very fortunate to have a very vocal and passionate representative from the kinship carer community who was advocating for kinship carers and helped to organise some forums for kinship carers. The forums had helped the service hear what kinship carers found helpful and what else was needed in the way services were provided. As a result of those sessions a meeting with the web design team was arranged to look at how the community perceived the service and how the service responded to their needs at the first port of call. Councillor Grahl hoped that the service could look to other areas for best practice in relation to kinship carers, such as Liverpool who had recently developed a Kinship Charter.

In relation to training, the Committee heard that all training had moved online during Covid. The choice of online was still the preferred option but the service still made sure to offer a mix and wanted a balance so that as many people as possible could benefit from training. The figures in the report on uptake were positive and that continued to improve. In addition, the service was listening to feedback about what carers wanted to learn and alongside their core offer had additional options, such as adolescent mental health and contextual safeguarding which were in high demand. The service had started to engage with what children and young people thought would be helpful to include in training, and there was an ongoing project where young people were now part of educating foster carers and delivering some of that training.

The Committee felt that it would be good to have training for councillors on the issues around fostering and adoption. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) highlighted that it was 'Fostering Fortnight' in May and some communications could be disseminated to councillors to invite them to some of those events.

As no further issues were raised, the Committee RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

12. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 18:35 pm

COUNCILLOR GWEN GRAHL
Chair

	<p align="center">Corporate Parenting Committee</p> <p align="center">17 July 2023</p>
	<p align="center">Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People</p>
<p align="center">Annual Corporate Parenting Report April 2022 – March 2023</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:	Local Offer for Care Leavers 2022-24, https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=446&MIId=6614&Ver=4
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Kelli Eboji Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Kelli.Eboji@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Palvinder Kudhail Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk</p>

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 strengths and areas for development in supporting looked after children and care leavers in Brent.

1.2 Progress against the priorities identified in the previous Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2021/22 have been updated throughout the body of this report. The priorities were:

- 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 workplace 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 borough.
- 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.

1.3 The report also sets out the priorities of the Looked After Children and Permanency service (LACP) for 2023/24.

1.4 The Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Service (ILACS) took place in February 2023 and judged services to be good in all areas, including the experiences and progress of children in care and the experience and progress of care leavers. There were many strengths highlighted by Ofsted about the support and services provided to Brent's care experienced children and young people which we will continue to build upon. The areas of improvement noted in the Ofsted report specific to looked after children and care leavers were:

- Attendance of children in care at their reviews and the quality of information provided to children following their reviews.
- Care leavers' understanding of and access to their health histories.

1.5 An action plan has been developed to address the areas for improvement.

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 its responsibility to monitor and scrutinise the activity of Brent's Children and Young People (CYP) service over the past year, thus ensuring that adequate care and support are being provided to Brent's looked after children and care leavers.

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. By ensuring Brent's 'Promise' to LAC, 'Care Leavers' Charter' and Local Offer for care leavers is abided by.

- e. 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 2022/23 scrutinised several reports on various issues affecting Brent care experienced children and young people including the following:

- a. In April 2022, the CPC were presented with a report on the progress of the Local Offer for Care Leavers and the proposed revisions to that offer for 2022-2024. The committee received an update on placement commissioning activity for care experienced children and young people. The CPC was provided with a quarterly update from the Fostering Service, including an update on numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, the West London Fostering Collaborative project which was placed on hold during year end budget setting and local authority elections by the other local authorities involved, 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 2022, the Committee was presented with a report on the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to the quality assuring and improvement of services for Looked After Children. The Annual Corporate Parenting report for 2021/22 was presented to the Committee at the July 2022 meeting. The Fostering quarterly report was presented alongside information to the Corporate Parenting Committee regarding engagement and involvement of foster carers in the revision / updating of Brent's Foster Carers Charter.
- c. In October 2022, the Committee received a report summarising the current position for placement stability. The report explained the reasons for the increase in multiple placement moves and articulated the work undertaken to minimise unplanned moves for Looked After Children. The CPC received quarterly fostering and six-monthly adoption reports.
- d. In the February 2023 meeting, the Committee was presented with a report on the Brent Care Journey partnership and how it is contributing to our participation work and achieving good outcomes for children and young people. The CPC heard from the service

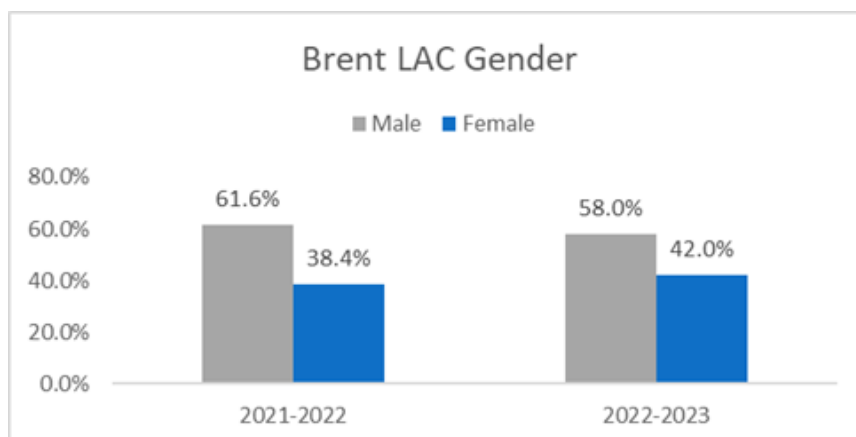
about the local authority's response to the National Safeguarding Review of Children with Additional Needs placed in Residential Education Provision which highlighted the positive findings of this review for these specific Brent children. The North West London CCG gave a presentation on the ways health services are responding to the health needs of Looked After Children. The CPC also received quarterly activity on Brent's in-house fostering service. The committee was informed at this meeting that the service would be providing 6-monthly reports for fostering moving forward in line with the bi-annual adoption report.

4.0 Profile of Looked after Children

4.1 As at 31 March 2023 Brent had 319 children in care compared to 341 children on 31 March 2022, a decrease of 7%. This represented 43.7 LAC per 10,000 child population against the rate for England of 62 per 10,000 head of child population, a decrease in rate by 3.3 from previous year (47). In 2022/23, 160 children became looked after, compared to an average of 180 per year over the previous four years. The decrease in LAC has primarily been driven by a decrease in UASC. On 31 March 2023, the Local Authority looked after 45 UASC compared to 74 UASC in March 2022. This represented 14.1% of the total Brent LAC population. The increase and subsequent decline in UASC numbers were related to the number of people accommodated in hotels in Brent by the Home Office, which has fluctuated over the period.

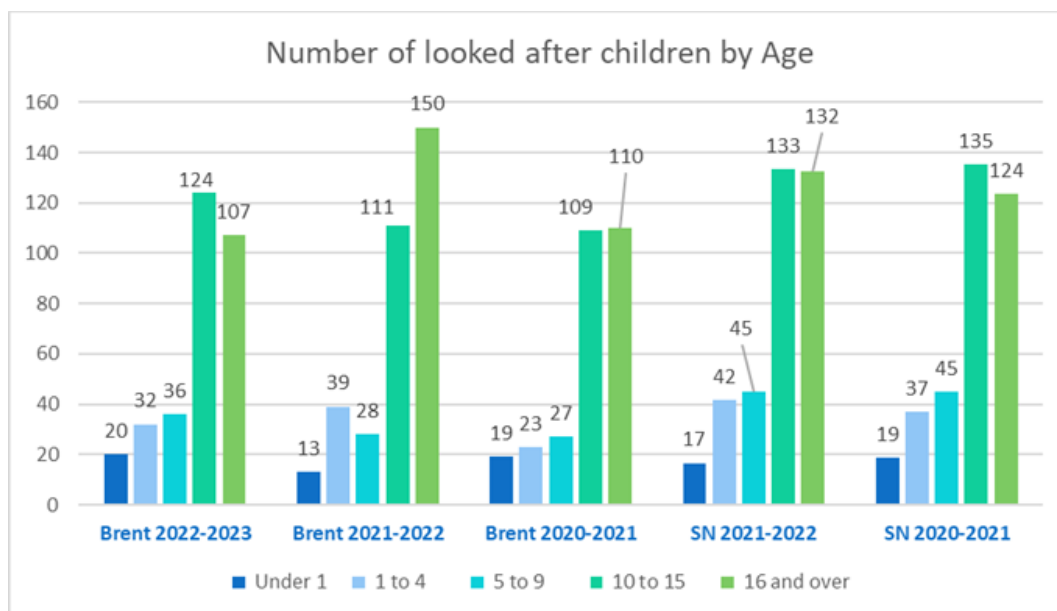
4.2 In 2022/23, 46 children became children looked after for a second or subsequent time, compared to 49 in 2021/22.

4.3 The gender of the LAC population consists of 58% male and 42% female; with the gender split narrowing slightly compared to the previous years.



4.4 33.5% of the care population in Brent is aged over 16 years old, compared to 44% at the end of March 2022. Over 72.4% 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 ethnicity¹ of looked after children broadly remained the same compared to the previous year. However, there has been a 4% decrease in the number of looked after children from Other Ethnic groups and Asian background. This is mostly related to the decreased number of UASC taken into care in 2022/23.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-looked-after-return-2022-to-2023-guide>

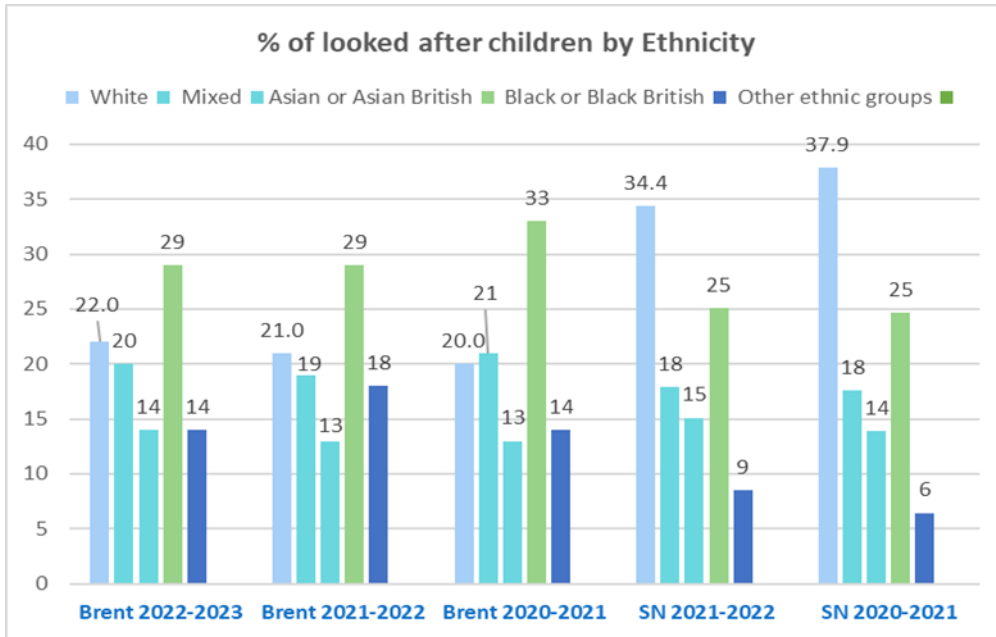
White includes (White –British, White-Cornish, White-English, White Scottish, White Welsh, White-Irish, Traveller of Iris heritage, Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, Greek, Italian, Kosovan, Portuguese, White Eastern European, White Western European, Gypsy/Roma, Turkish, Serbian, any other white background)

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)

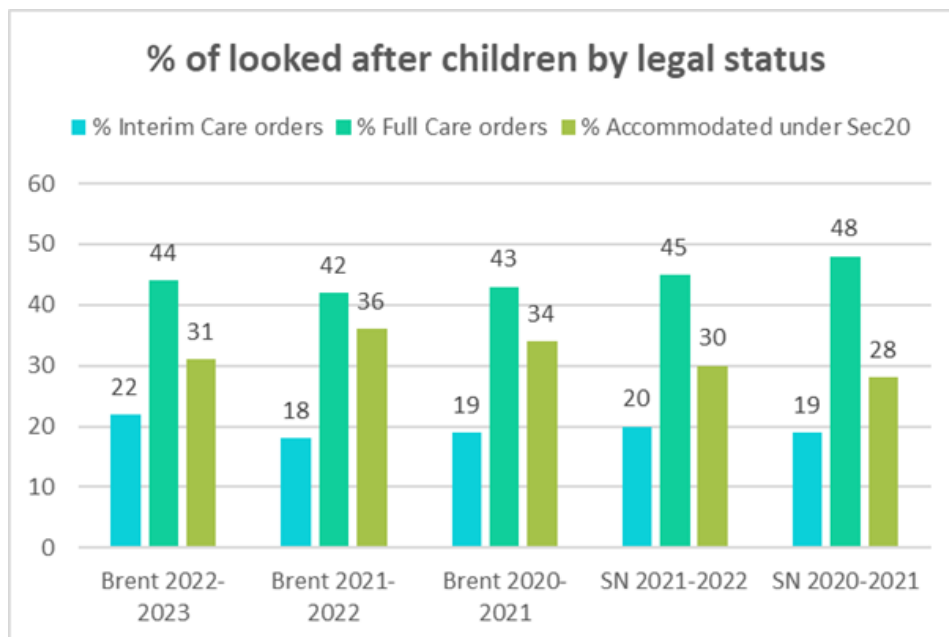
Black or Black British includes (Black Caribbean, Black African, Black Angolan, Black, Congolese, Black Ghanaian, Black Nigerian, Black Sierra Leonean, Black Somali, Black Sudanese, Black European, Black North American and Any other Black background.)

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)



4.6 Legal status and placement location

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 66% of all LAC in this reporting year. A further 99 children (31% of all LAC) were in care through a voluntary agreement with the parents/carers as pursuant to Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. 45 of these children are UASC who are looked after via Section 20 agreement.



- 4.6.2 The proportion of children placed more than 20 miles away from their home address as of 31 March 2023 was 17.2%, an increase of 0.8% on the previous year's figure of 16.4% (the national average is 14%).
- 4.6.3 Brent CYP 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.
- 4.6.4 Most children resided within fostering placements (206) – 64.6% of all LAC, an increase on 2022 (60%). 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 (57.4% are over the age of 13 and 33.5% over the age of 16).
- 4.6.5 The LA has an in-house fostering service that at the end of March 2023 supported 58 children, 7 more children than in March 2022.

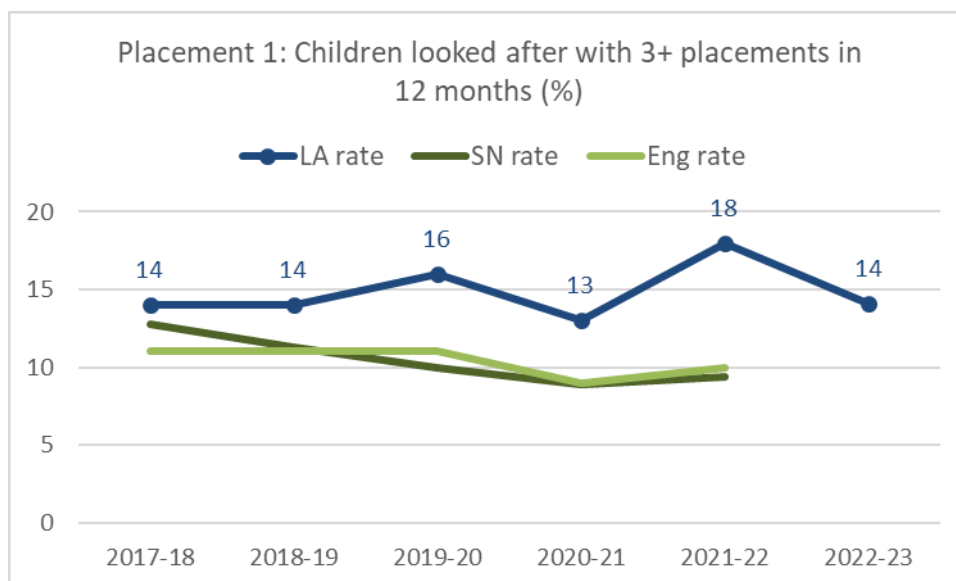
5.0 Placement Stability

- 5.1 Recruitment and retention of foster carers remained a priority for 2022/23. As reported to CPC in April 2022 the West London Fostering project was placed on hold, however we continue to explore ways of improving the recruitment and retention of foster carers by updating the fostering offer.
- 5.2 Number of Brent fostering households and approved fostering places at 31 March 2023 (and trend):

Collection year	Number of Households	Number of places
2020	99	155
2021	100	153
2022	98	142
2023	101	145

- 5.3 Placement stability for children who have had 3 or more placements in a year has improved. Brent's data around 3 or more placement moves

decreased from 17.9% in 2021/22 to 14.1% in 2022/23. This is particularly related to Brent's profile of looked after children as described above.



- 5.4 A stability meeting is convened every time a placement is at risk of breaking down and is attended by key professionals. These meetings are chaired by a Social Work Practice Consultant who leads on placement stability. The focus of these meetings is understanding the holistic needs of the child or young person, the carers' strengths as well as identifying the right support package that would ensure placement stability. During 2022/23 the Social Work Practice Consultant chaired 42 placement stability meetings, and as a result of robust planning and individualised support packages, 22 children and young people remained in their current placement. A follow up meeting is offered in some cases to help sustain the placements, a new initiative that has been well received by social workers, foster carers and placement providers. If a placement cannot be sustained, robust planning and a transition plan is formulated.
- 5.5 The children and young people who are most in need of support and intervention are the children with additional needs and mental health difficulties, followed by those who have been affected by contextual safeguarding issues, or are at risk of gang involvement and have a history of going missing from placements.
- 5.6 Stability meetings are not required when the placement change reflects a positive and appropriate move for the child or young person, such as adoption, children matched with long term foster carers or young people moving from fostering placements to semi-independent units as part of their preparation for independence.
- 5.7 Some feedback received from social workers, carers and professionals who have attended these meetings:

Feedback from child social worker: *“Placement stability meetings are very relevant and beneficial to ensure/prevent placement breakdown for LAC. Such meetings provide a platform for key professionals to discuss and understand the needs of child, needs/expectations of carers, risks and safety concerns for child and together come up with ideas, suggestions, action plans to address the needs of child, support carers in order to better manage risks and have a safety or support plan in place to ensure placement stability for children. I have had a few of these stability meetings and we were able to prevent placement breakdown.”*

Feedback from Fostering SSW: *“All meetings requested have been organised swiftly. Placement Stability meetings have mirrored the SOS model and what is working well is emphasised. The meeting provides a good reflective space for all to think about the mechanism of the placement. The chair always presents as polite, calm, friendly, non-judgemental and knowledgeable during meetings. Chair has varied Social Worker experience and is able to give/make good independent advice/suggestions. Foster Carers have reported feeling listened to and respected. We have been able to develop good plans of support for placements in attempt to minimise any disruption for the child.”*

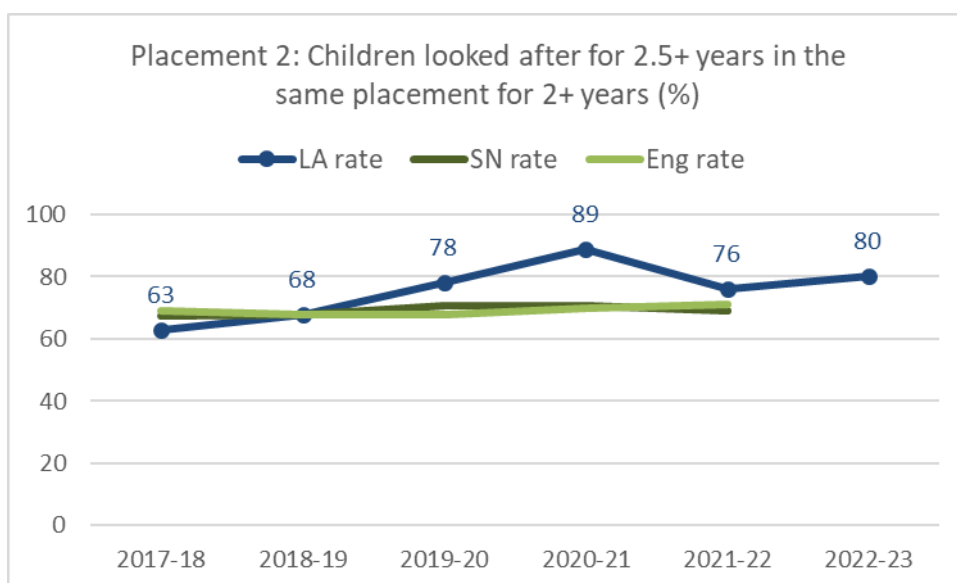
Feedback from carers:

“The chair really listened to me, I felt able to share all of my concerns and challenges and I felt valued and respected.”

“I was touched when the chair remembered me from 2011, I felt supported by him then and felt his input in the stability meeting was also supportive.”

Feedback from an external provider- Semi- Independent Unit Manager
“This is why I love working with Brent; the team around the child are committed to the needs of the children and willing to go the extra mile to offer support.”

- 5.8 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. Monthly stability performance meetings continue to scrutinise all the planned and unplanned 2+ moves. The findings and learning from the meetings are shared with the social work team and inform future placement planning to prevent further moves.
- 5.9 The robust placement planning and individualised packages of support have enabled more looked after children to remain in their long-term placements for more than 2 years. This is well above national and statistical neighbour performance.



5.10 Permanency Planning

5.10.1 Permanency planning for children who have become looked after is a priority for the local authority, and one of our key pillars of care planning. The object of planning for permanence is to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond, and that this placement is found for them as quickly as possible.

5.10.2 Our approach when working towards permanency for a child is to ensure that we are progressing a parallel plan which ensures a secure and stable permanent option for the child is available to them in the quickest available time. Permanence options can be to return to the care of a parent/s, a permanent placement with someone from the child's family or friend network, long-term fostering or adoption outside the child's family or friend network.

5.10.3 In February 2023 Ofsted inspectors commented that permanency planning for Brent LAC was embedded and permanency was achieved for children without delay. We continue to build upon the progress we have made in this area by increasing our capacity to secure permanency for our young people aged 12+, by trialling a specialist social work resource within the looked after children and permanency teams. This social worker will work alongside LAC social workers to guide and assist them to progress the permanency plans for children and young people. They will support with family finding, matching, permanency reports (CPR and APR), and reinvigorating our placement profiles to ensure that we represent

our children in the best possible light. This is a 3-month trial and will be reviewed in terms of impact and effectiveness.

5.10.4 Between 01/04/2022 and 31/03/2023, there were 7 children adopted and 10 children who left care through the making of Special Guardianship Orders. In addition, in this reporting period, 9 children were made subject of a Placement Order and 5 were placed with their adopters.

5.10.5 On 31/3/2023 there were 4 children subject to a Placement Order waiting to be matched and placed.

5.10.6 The non-published data at the end of March 2023 compared 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. The average time taken for a child entering care to being placed for adoption is 443 days and is comparable against 2022's 3 year average of 436 days. The average time taken from the local authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved is 128 days which compares favourably to last year's position (142 days).

5.10.7 Adopt London West (ALW)

5.10.7.1 Adopt London West (ALW) established in October 2019, continues to provide adoption and special guardianship support services 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, together this partnership offers services to 24 London boroughs, there are a number of shared projects across the Adopt London partnership, including nationally funded projects to improve practice in family finding and matching and also in Early Permanence.

5.10.7.2 ALW works closely with staff in Brent CYP 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.

5.10.7.3 Over this past year we have worked proactively with ALW to ensure that children can be placed with their siblings. Of the four children placed in 2022/23, all were placed together with their siblings or have joined their sibling in the same adoption placement at a later date, this demonstrates the tenacity and determination that children's relationship with their siblings is a high priority for Brent, with a fifth child being placed with their sibling at the time of writing this report.

Case Study – Adoption Family Finding and Early Permanency with adopters

Child A born March 2020 and **Child B** born March 2022 (full sibling to Child A)

Child A is a mixed heritage child, whose birth mother is White British and birth father is of Black British/Caribbean heritage. Placement and Care Orders in respect of Child A were granted in May 2022.

Several potential families were considered for a then single child, two-year-old Child A, there were concerns about his in-utero experiences, as well as instability and loss, caused by numerous placements moves and changes of care givers. However, in March 2022, Child A's birth mother presented at hospital just prior to giving birth to Child B. Following DNA testing it was confirmed that the children were full siblings. Therefore, the family finding criteria for Child A was changed and the search was widened to seek families who could consider two children who would likely be placed at different times, as it was important to avoid delay for Child A, who was now two years old and whose legal status was more definitive.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to place the children together in foster care, however once Child B was settled, sibling contact was established and continued until the children could be placed together.

In June 2022 a potential family were identified via Link Maker (national database of adopters in the UK), the family were a dual heritage couple (one of whom is White British and Black African and the other is of White British heritage), with several Black Caribbean friends in their network. Initial discussions were held with the potential family to include the children's history and likely transition plans.

A fuller Family Finding Visit took place in July 2022, in respect of Child A in the first instance, and the family was formally selected later that month. The couple were then matched with Child A only at the Adopt London West panel in November 2022 and Child A was placed in December

2022. There were regular updates shared by the children’s social worker and the family finder attended an in-person LAC Review in February 2023, which allowed opportunity for further exploration about their readiness to proceed with Child B.

The family were then formally selected in March 2023, in respect of Child B and the couples second Matching panel took place in May 2023. Child B has also now moved to the family and is living alongside his sibling for the first time. Both children are settling well, and the adopters have commended the thoughtful planning of placing the children separately, with an extended time period between moves. They have stated that this has benefited Child A’s development and security, whilst continued sibling contact has meant the children and the couple had a growing knowledge and appreciation of each other.

5.11 Care Proceedings

5.11.1 The number of care proceedings initiated by Brent has remained consistent with 54 cases (82 children) being issued in 2022/23 compared to 58 cases in 2021/23. Nationally there was a 9.8% decrease in care proceedings applications.

5.11.2 52 cases (74 children) concluded in this reporting period with the following outcomes:

- 25 Full Care Orders (34%)
- 4 Full Care Order and Placement Order (5%)
- 18 No Order (24%)
- 14 SGOs (19%)
- 12 Supervision Orders (16%)
- 1 designation out (1%)

5.11.3 The timeliness of care proceedings which concluded in 2022/23 is 55 weeks, compared to 43 weeks in 2021/22.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Brent (Internal data)	35 weeks	38 weeks	35 weeks	39.5 weeks	43 weeks	55 weeks
National average (CAFCASS data)	29 weeks	31 weeks	32 weeks	41 weeks	45 weeks	45 weeks

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

- Complexity within cases with larger sibling groups with varying ages and different care plans, an increase in Fact Finding hearings and continued delays due to outstanding criminal charges/court processes.
- International elements requiring travel, identifying suitable assessors/professionals outside the UK, 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.
- Courts hearings are re-timetabled alongside court hearings being spread out over a longer period as a result of the courts trying to catch up with the back log of hearings caused by Covid.

5.11.5 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 continues to identify issues that might cause or create delay within proceedings with the aim of rectifying them as well as provide advice and guidance to practitioners on complex court cases. Social work managers have stated that they find this forum useful as it provides a space to speak directly with senior managers and senior lawyers and tease out any complex issues.

5.11.6 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, as well as taking the lead social work role when there are complex court or designation cases. The support provided by this role has continued to be 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 on court work cases.

5.11.7 A high number of court hearings have continued over the last reporting year, however in 2022/23 there have been less virtual hearings and an increase in face-to-face hearings. Parents have reported that they find face to face hearings more interactive with several benefits, like seeing the Judge face to face, hearing first-hand evidence in person, clarity can be sought straight away with less time spent using emails following the hearing, as well as less

time spent navigating the courts electronic system, which did not always work effectively.

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 2022/23. 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 majority of children and young people aged over four years (60%) attended their review and spoke for themselves. This is a slight reduction from 62% the previous year. The Ofsted ILAC inspection (February 2023) noted that we need to improve the direct participation of children and young people in their reviews. The IRO is key to achieving this and increasing direct participation of children in LAC reviews is an area of practice improvement focus.

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:

- Junior Care in Action (JCIA) (7-11 year olds) who meet in the school holidays
- Care in Action (CIA) (12-17 year olds) who meet monthly
- Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) (18 – 25 year olds) who meet monthly.

6.3 Key achievements in 2022/23 include:

6.4 In April 2022 a cohort of 10 young people attended 'youth interview' panel training. This was co-facilitated by a trained participation worker and a senior representative of CLIA.

6.5 Young people interview panels were a feature for all senior appointments including the Chief Executive, Corporate Director, 2x CYP Directors as well as the Head of Service for LAC and permanency.

6.6 Young people also took part in several other interview panels including for Personal Advisors and Participation Officers and the participation manager.

6.7 CLIA members were trained to take part in the tendering process. These commissioning projects were:

Mental health and wellbeing project

In September 2022 young people from CLIA were initially involved in the original tender for Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing tender and took

part in a panel – however this process was suspended when extra funding was secured enabling the project to widen its initial scope.

Subsequently CLIA members took an active role by evaluating the tenders returned for Targeted Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing provision. Their feedback influenced the final decision for the award of contract to the preferred provider.

Hospital Discharge Project

Young people from CIA and CLIA were involved in the evaluation of tender applications relating to a test and learn project originally funded from the Integrated Care System (ICS) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Provider Collaborative, Central North West London (CNWL) and West London (WL) health trusts.

The aim of the project is to identify the most appropriate means of supporting discharges of children and young people from emergency departments and acute hospital settings, within the most appropriate and expedient timescale.

The target group for the service are young people who have presented with a mental health crisis including suicidal ideation, but who are assessed to have not met the criteria for a Tier 4 setting and therefore are deemed medically fit for discharge.

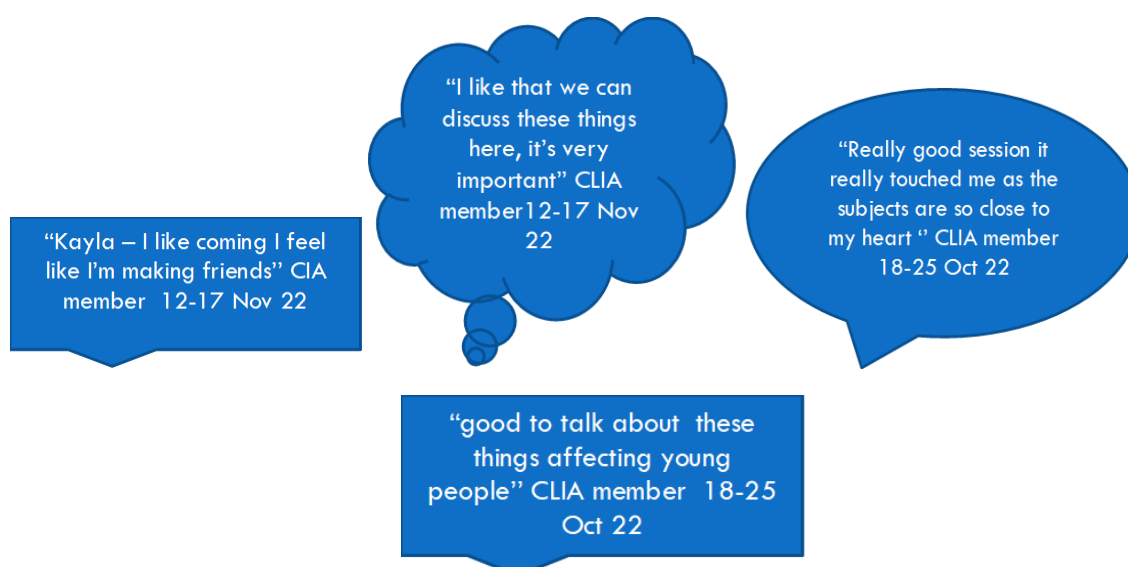
- 6.8 A campaign focus in 2022/23 was improving relationships with carers, this was in direct response to findings from our last Bright Spots survey. The Bright Spots survey is a service improvement tool, designed by CoramVoice, the University of Oxford, and care experienced young people, that supports local authorities to systematically listen to their children in care and care leavers, about the things that are important to them. One of the specific pieces of work developed by our children and young people was a “Do’s and Don’ts” poster for foster carers which is being incorporated into foster carer training.
- 6.9 CIA worked with BCJ to develop a codesigned prototype to enable system change. A result of which was a pilot project of enabling funding for workers to spend quality time with the children they work with.
- 6.10 Representatives of CIA and CLIA took a lead role in planning and organising the Pride of Brent Youth Awards. Members of CIA were on the young people panel. In addition, the achievement of both CIA members and wider care experienced young people was recognised and celebrated.
- 6.11 The Gordon Brown Centre is an outdoor centre, run by Brent Council, that offers a range of outdoor learning opportunities for children and young people. In 2022/23 the participation team ran two residential trips to Gordon Brown Centre, one in the summer holiday and one in the October

half term. Both attracted new members that the team have worked with to continue engaging.

6.12 There were also varied and regular half term, Easter and summer activities for JCIA, for example a trip to indoor bouncy castle venue, Inflatation.


6.13 Other events for the wider care experienced group included:

- C(L)IA hosted a summer fun day that was attended by over 50 children, foster carers and care leavers
- In December 2022 the Participation Team applied to London Zoo community engagement initiative and were able to secure discounted tickets. A day trip was organised for Care Experienced children and young people and foster carers and their families; over 60 people attended.



6.14 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.

6.15 Young people have continued to regularly attend and contribute to Corporate Parenting Committee, new young people were supported to attend for the first time in 2022, before each committee young people are prepared with a briefing session in which they develop messaging to senior leaders.



*"We have both attended
[Corporate Parenting Committee]
before and enjoyed going. It's
good to see important people."*

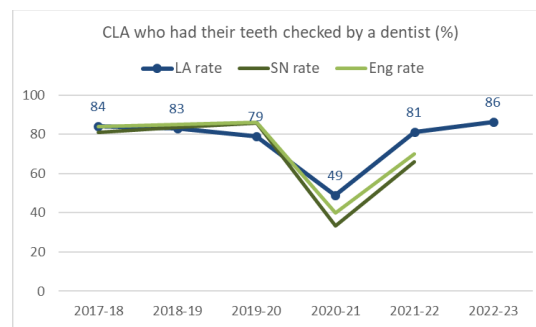
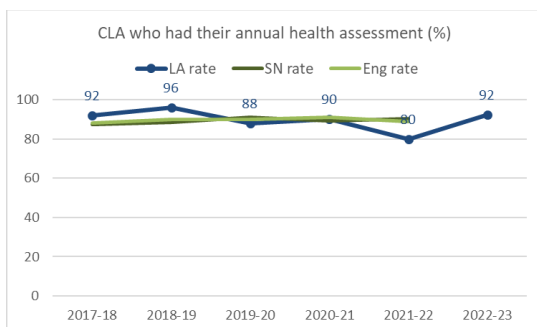
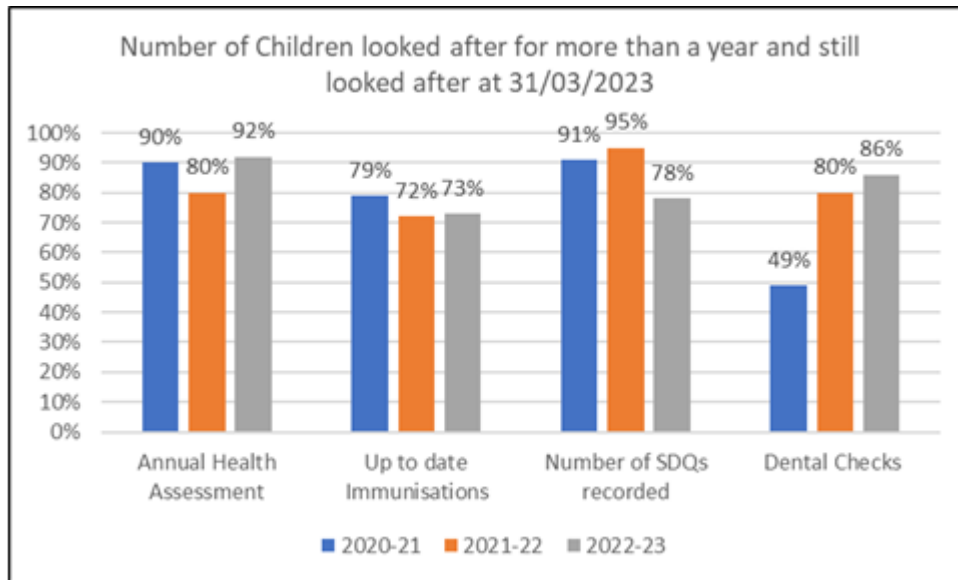
CIA member (12-17) April 2022

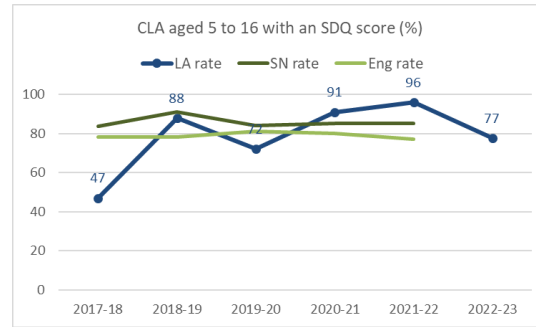
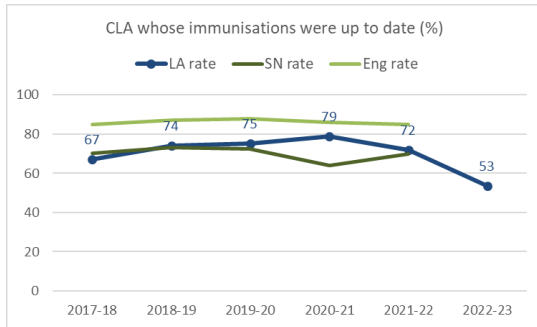
- 6.16 Representatives of CIA/CLIA have also attended the Local Partnership Meeting for LAC and Care Leavers and are members of the Voice and Influence sub-group of this meeting. The Local Partnership Meeting is a multi-agency meeting of partners working together to improve outcomes for care experienced children and young people. 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, Localities, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance and Looked after Children and Permanency service.
- 6.17 Children and young people who regularly attend CIA, CLIA or BCJ report that they enjoy and value the groups for a wide variety of reasons. These include having an opportunity to meet other care experienced young people and make new friends in a safe space; being provided the opportunity to influence the way services are delivered for the wider care experienced population; and being afforded the opportunity to see how decisions are made. This year the impact of participation activities has been evidenced by the increased use of co-production and co design evidence by initiatives such as tools for life story work and developing of resources for foster carers. This will continue to be a focus and the impact of these codesigned resources will be reviewed going forward, including by seeking more in depth feedback from care experienced young people and from groups utilising the materials developed.
- 6.18 Having met with young people from CIA, CLIA and BCJ, Ofsted determined that *"Members of the council and senior leaders are listening, committed and caring corporate parents. Members of the vibrant child in care and care leavers' councils, called 'Care in Action' and 'Care Leavers in Action', attend the corporate parenting board and are actively involved in initiatives and innovative projects that help to improve and strengthen services and support. Co-design with children and care leavers is at the heart of the approach to children's services improvement. Managers are working on plans to increase participation activity and the numbers of children and care leavers who attend these groups."*
- 6.19 Over the coming year we will be working with Barnados to integrate our Brent Care Journey and CLIA work as we enter the final phase of our partnership with Barnados.

7.0 Health of Looked After Children

7.1 Local Authorities, as 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 2022/23 has been submitted to the DfE as part of the statutory data reporting requirement. Unpublished data shows that there has been positive progress made with health and dental assessments compared to the last reporting year. Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs) and immunisations are an area that require improvement, and this will be a focus for the service in 2023/24.





- 7.3 In line with our priorities for 2022/23, 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.
- 7.5 Over the reporting period WEST worked with 44 LAC (Apr-Aug 2022), 36 LAC (Sept-Dec 2022) and 45 LAC (Jan-Mar 2023) They have offered a range of direct, face to face and indirect sessions.
- 7.6 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. Safe Base also continues to provide therapeutic counselling support to Care Leavers.
- 7.7 Our CAMHS Looked After Child and Transition Mental Health Care Coordinator, is co-located within the LAC and Permanency service and continues to work alongside social workers and Personal Advisors to provide direct intervention, support, advice and guidance to looked after children and young people, living out of the borough, who are experiencing poor emotional wellbeing and mental health. Although this role is to work with children and young people living outside of Brent, support has been provided to some in-borough children when the appropriate support cannot be accessed straight away. This role contributes to the monthly Health and Wellbeing subgroup (to the Local Partnership Meeting) which brings together professionals who focus on and work to drive forward improvements for the health and wellbeing of our care experienced young people.
- 7.8 In this reporting year CAMHS Looked After Child and Transition Mental Health Care Coordinator has provided direct therapeutic work for 28 children and young people. Thirteen girls aged 13 years and up and fifteen

boys aged 3-18 years. A number of these young people have turned 18 and she has provided support to them during this transitional period. Weekly or fortnightly therapy sessions have been provided for those young people, along with support to their carers or placement providers.

- 7.9 In 2022/23 we have provided ongoing support to our UASC LAC population through individual and group therapeutic work provided by WEST. We are currently working with WEST to consider ways of developing this work further, using a Reflective Care model and the use Virtual Mental Health leads for staff working with our UASC population. There has also been several successful BCJ power groups started in this reporting year which provide community and friendship to our UASC and former UASC young people, specifically “Therapart” and “Brothers” which are groups that have been co-designed and developed by care experienced young people and are well attended by, but not exclusive to, UASC and former UASC. Our regular weekly football group that has been consistent since 2018 is also considered part of our health and wellbeing offer for UASC.
- 7.10 During the summer of 2022 staff ran a successful 8-week Health Relationship parenting course for our care experienced young people who are already parents. The course includes exploring what a healthy relationship is, first aid for children, baby massage and aims to give insight to the young parents on how to keep themselves healthy in order to parent healthy children.

8.0 Multi-agency Partnership for LAC and Care Leavers

- 8.1 Brent CYP have well established and mature relationships with partners resulting in strong and effective multi-agency arrangements. The Brent Children’s Trust, chaired by the Corporate Director of Children and Young People 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 Departments (Looked after Children and Permanency, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Youth Justice Service within Early Help, Housing Needs, Public Health), Community Wellbeing, Regeneration and Environment) and partners such as NHS North West London ICB, Probation, Westminster Drug Project (WDP) and Central London Community Healthcare (CLCH) NHS Trust. Care Leavers in Action attend and contribute to the LPM via the Voice and Influence subgroup and act as conduits between the LPM and representatives of the CLIA group.

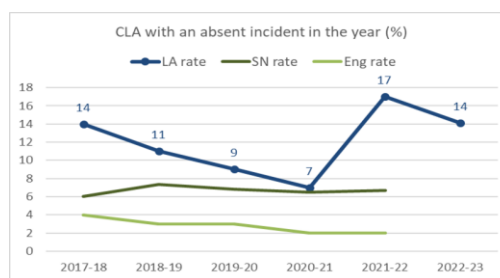
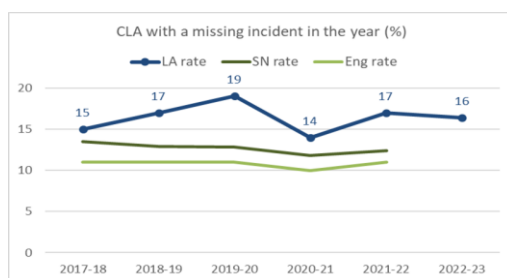
8.3 The LPM has been responsible for achieving the priorities of 2022/23. Six working groups were set up by the LPM with relevant representation, each group working on one particular priority area. Chairs of these priority area working groups regularly attended the LPM to report on their progress. During this reporting period, due to a number of staff changes, we have refreshed our TOR and membership and have reinvigorated the working groups. The priority areas are:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Education, Employment and Training
- Voice and Influence (participation and engagement)
- Path to Independence
- Transitional/Contextual Safeguarding
- Stability for LAC and Care Leavers.

9.0 Children Missing or Absent from Care

9.1 In the year ending 31st March 2023, 78 children in care were reported to be missing from their placements at least once, compared to 94 in the previous year. This represented 15.8% of all LAC looked after at any point during the year (n=495) compared to 18% in the previous year. 57 of the 78 had more than one missing incident in the year.

9.2 An absence may be a situation where a child has not returned home at an agreed time but their whereabouts is known. In this reporting year 68 children were reported as being absent from their care placement compared with 87 in 2021/22.



9.3 The Social Work Practice Consultant (SWPC) in the LACP services is responsible for overseeing young people who go missing. The SWPC specialises in supporting vulnerable young individuals within the service and delivering an effective service that safeguards young people and promotes their overall well-being.

9.4 Children who are missing from care are offered return home interviews (RHIs) by Children's Rights Officers (CRO) embedded in the LACP and Early Help services. The goal of this work is for young people to receive a consistent response from an independent person. 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 operational missing forums.

- 9.5 Following the RHI, the Social Work Practice Consultant (SWPC) liaises daily with the CRO to gain a better understanding of themes. Through data collection, we have been able to identify the potential involvement of young people in cross-county criminal activities, Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE), and being subjected to sexual exploitation (CSE).
- 9.6 In the RHI feedback form, our young people express the need for a more holistic approach to their care within their placement and emphasise the importance of warmth from staff in their interactions. A recurring theme emerges where most young people do not perceive themselves as missing, stating that they were simply out with friends. Others mention that they do not have any activities to engage with. Additionally, some individuals are over 17 years old and consider themselves old enough to make decisions about their whereabouts.
- 9.7 The below quotes from our young people after RHI being completed:



- 9.8 Close collaboration with partner agencies has allowed us to gather essential intelligence to locate young people. We consistently apply a proactive approach for young people who have missing episodes. Strategy meetings provide a platform for key professionals to discuss and understand the needs of a child, plan to disrupt behaviour, evaluate risks and devise a safety plan to ensure young people are kept safe.
- 9.9 One of the ways we do this is with joint supervision between social work teams and the Youth Justice Service for the young people known to both services. These joint sessions provide a space where the practitioners and managers can share risk, agree priorities for case work and safety planning. Another example is with the police when they have been able to attend strategy meetings promptly and provide updated information in cases involving contextual safeguarding concerns. This collaborative approach, alongside a strengthened emphasis on peer mapping across services, aims to provide a cohesive response to children and young people who are at risk and improve outcomes for them.
- 9.10 During the weekly missing meeting with the police there is an opportunity to review progress of young people that are still missing and facilitate

information sharing between agencies. If necessary, cases can be escalated to senior managers where cases have become stuck or little progress has been made which can in some cases instigate a police review of a case where a young person has been missing for a long period of time. Furthermore, a monthly Missing Operations meeting is conducted to analyse missing data in-depth, identify barriers to working collaboratively and to ensure that lessons learned are being applied in practice.

- 9.11 A quantitative contextual safeguarding audit was carried out in the past six months in relation to our most vulnerable young people and identified that social workers demonstrate a clear understanding of the importance of engaging young people in conversations to understand their perspectives on risk and safety. This approach also extends to involving caregivers and other partners in the decision-making process.
- 9.12 The SWPC continues to collaborate with the LAC and Leaving Care teams to enhance their confidence and proficiency in using the Vulnerability Adolescent Risk Assessment (VARA) and consistently understanding and evaluating risks. We are also working with the Contextual Safeguarding operational group to develop a Missing Response Plan, which is a plan specifically focused on disruptive activities and actions required to locate the young person.
- 9.13 There is recognition across Brent's partnerships that risk and harm continue into adulthood, particularly for young people during the 18-25 transitional period. Practitioners are encouraged to attend one-on-one consultations with the CSL, who provides advice and tools to identify young people at risk of exploitation or other vulnerabilities. Other organisations and resources for practitioners include the NRM (National Referral Mechanism), St Giles, Global Thinking and Rescue and Response (GTRR).

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 The annual report 2021/22 provides a detailed outline of the achievements of young people looked after in Brent and provides the Virtual School priorities for 2022/23.
- 10.3 Key highlights for 2021/22 includes the continued high attendance of children in care that is on par with children not looked after. Whilst

attendance in 2021/22 was lower than pre-pandemic years the impact of the pandemic is a feature that is reflected across all pupil groups. Attention therefore for the Virtual School has been on mechanisms to support attendance particularly working with social workers, foster carers and wider professionals such as clinical psychologists to address barriers to education.

- 10.4 Looked after children continue to achieve well and make significant progress in education once in care. With the re-introduction of examinations in the summer of 2022, the BVS focused on supporting those in key stage 2 and key stage 4 through homework clubs, online and face to face booster classes. In 2021/22 LAC achieving the 5 passes at 4-9 including English and maths was higher than the previous academic year by 2%. However, the most accurate data set to compare to is 2018/19, the last time examinations were held.
- 10.5 **Post-16:** The number of post-16 young people that were in education, employment, or training (EET) at the end of the academic year 2021/22 increased compared to the same reporting period last year - 80% compared to 73% in 2020/21. This was achieved through close working with social workers, corporate colleagues, careers advisory hubs, and through targeted youth employment workers.
- 10.6 **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC):** 17 new UASC entered the care system in the academic year 2021/22. All but one of these young people were in Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 5, 33 UASC entered the care system during 2021/22. 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 UASCs 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 age assessment is known.

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 allocated additional resources to increase the capacity of Leaving Care Teams.

- 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 2022/23, 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 (BCJ) Team members. We have encouraged personal advisors to develop specialisms in different areas and currently we have three PAs who are BCJ champions, two PAs who organise the Gordon Brown Residential weekends for young people, and a PA who coordinates the weekly football sessions as part of the enrichment offer.
- 11.4 As of 31 March 2023, Brent was responsible for the support to 332 Former Relevant Young People [aged 18 - 21] (no change from 333 last year) and 125 young people aged 22-24 (a decrease of 6% from 133 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 (2022-2024) shows that the local authority is an ambitious corporate parent for care leavers. As part of reviewing the local offer in 2022, a series of workshops were delivered in conjunction with Brent Care Journeys for the purpose of consultation with young people who attend the care leavers' hub and Care leavers in Action (CLIA). The next formal review of the local offer for care leavers will be in April 2024.
- 12.2 The main findings from the consultation were captured in several themes, some of these have been converted to actions and have been part of the revised local offer, 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 may be inaccessible to those who have no or a low level of English, or those with special needs such as a learning disability. As part of the local offer, we agreed to assess the financial viability of making the offer available in different languages as well as a more visualised 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 Family Wellbeing 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.

- 12.4 DfE guidance suggests that local authorities should review their local offers every 2-3 years. The Brent Local Offer will be formally reviewed in a 2-yearly cycle, with the next formal review due in April 2024. The offer has been informally reviewed and updated in early 2023 to include a new gym membership offer for young people and the co-produced "Welcome Pack" for young people moving into semi-independent placements. The service, in partnership with BCJ, is arranging workshops over the summer period (August 2023) to begin the formal review process, which will also include a review of our Financial Policy.

13.0 Care Leavers' Enrichment Programme

- 13.1 The Enrichment Programme 'Hub' remains an integral part of the Care Leavers Service and continues to address and combat isolation faced by some care leavers. Over the last twelve months, care leavers continued to meet at their chosen venue and engaged with activities such as bowling and mini golf. Those that attend the Hub are aged between 18-25 years and during the sessions the older young people support the younger ones often talking about independent living skills and managing a tenancy. A member of the group has given birth to a baby in this reporting period and continued to attend the Hub events right up until her due date. She said, *'I am just at home on my own and coming to meet the group gives me something to look forward to'. The Hub has also celebrated the achievement of a member of the group who graduated after achieving his master's degree in law and others celebrated their birthdays. The graduate said when he was asked how it feels to receive his certificate, 'it was hard work but I needed to go a step further than degree level to be able to work in a law firm of my choice'.*

- 13.2 The Hub group continue to discuss the challenges of life and world events such as the King's coronation to which some of our care leavers were for and others against the celebration. Other topics discussed include the feelings about how Covid was handled and the behaviour of some government politicians in regard to supporting the public were highlighted, those who took the vaccine and others who did not and life after Covid and lockdown overall with the impact on mental health and wellbeing. The young people discussed their holiday experiences including one that was missed because the young person did not have the correct documents to

travel. The care leavers most definitely used this time and opportunity to share their experiences with each other.

- 13.3 The Hub hosted another well attended Christmas dinner that was organised by staff with the help of the manager of the Learning Zone. They were offered the opportunity to do a stadium tour before dinner and said they enjoyed the experience. One of the young people who is studying music at university volunteered to be the DJ for the night. The young people said they enjoyed their dinner and that for some of them would be their only Christmas dinner as a family.
- 13.4 Our Care Leavers Hub activities are usually held in the last week of each month to encourage good attendance. The activity is to offer care leavers who are identified by their personal advisors as being affected by isolation. Some of these young people do not have families, support or trusted friends. The young people who attend the activities are supported by some older care leavers to combat that feeling of isolation and sometimes shyness. The sessions are usually vibrant with a variety of conversations taking place. It also enhances maturity and confidence in our young people.

From a young person who comes to Hub activities, *“It is a great opportunity for everyone to feel included and appreciated when being a social gathering on a monthly session to catch up on life and with the people who are almost like family and it is without saying that Emily does a phenomenal job at organizing events. Emily includes us all in what we would like the socials to be about and what activities we should do. This level of commitment is terrific for us young people to engage with the wider community to enrich our culture integrity and intelligence. This is paramount to ethos and values of Personal Advisors in supporting young people”.*

- 13.5 Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) a five year partnership between Brent Council and Barnados, 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. The codesigned projects from 2022 phase of co-design have been implemented as pilots. For example:
- Memory Boxes – Young people wanted creative resources to record memories and experiences.
 - Activity Budget – Young people said that they wanted to spend more time developing relationships with their social workers. So every 6

months the social worker is able to get some funding to do an activity with their young person.

- 13.6 One of the highlights of last year was the development of a theatre production at the Kiln Theatre which involved 3 films, movement, soundscape, monologue, poetry and set design. A part of that production was introduced at the 2022 staff conference which highlighted young people's experience of being in care.
- 13.7 BCJ have continued to deliver a range of opportunities for engagement, codesign, social support, activities, and system change. Ofsted commented re: BCJ *'[CYP] are actively involved in initiatives and innovative projects that help to improve and strengthen services and support. Co-design with children and care leavers is at the heart of the approach to children's services improvements'*.
- 13.8 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. Currently there are 3 care experienced project workers working alongside Barnardo's and engaging with young people.
- 13.9 The Grandmentors programme aims to transform 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. 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. 19 care leavers have benefited from this support to date and the service is working with Grandmentors to recruit more mentors in 2023/24.
- 13.10 Grandmentors have made the most significant impact addressing the health and wellbeing of young people. Most young people who are referred to the project score low in this area. Grandmentors have reported high levels of stress and anxiety with their mentees which at times has required professional intervention. A lack of motivation has also been fed back. Grandmentors are able to make an impact by incorporating practical achievable goal setting and being a constant source of encouragement. As goals are met, this has a direct impact on their sense of wellbeing and self-esteem.
- 13.11 The following case study demonstrates the impact grand mentors have on young people's lived experience:

Case Study – C receives support from her grand mentor

Ranii and C were matched in October 2021, making them one of our earliest matched. Ranii is a well-known radio presenter on Sunrise radio which broadcasts out of Hounslow. C was referred due to being NEET and having issues with her housing. C was also on medication due to her depression and anxiety. Over the last few years Ranii has helped C find part time work and resolve issues with her landlord. However, for C, the real impact came is her improved sense of self-esteem and mental health following Ranii's introduction to holistic health practises.

*The match has now ended successfully. C in her feedback said that **"Ranii has helped me in so many ways, I'm now a much happier and confident person and so much of this is down to Ranii"**.*

- 13.12 Other examples which demonstrate the positive relationship that develops between the young person and mentor:

"When M was matched with Barbara in December 2021, he was NEET. Barbara helped M create a CV and supported him through a series of applications and interviews until he secured employment. Barbara has helped him maintain this employment and has supported him with a few work-related issues."

"A was matched with Godwin in December 2001 and was also NEET. A lacked motivation and was also in danger of becoming involved in offending behaviour. Godwin helped him find a part time course in Health and Social Care and a few months later he also supported A with getting a part time job at a local supermarket."

14.0 Care Leavers in Education, Employment & Training

- 14.1 There were 42 young people in higher education in 2022/23. These included 19 young people aged 19-21 at university (a decrease from 22 last year), studying a variety of subjects from Sociology, Health and Social Care, Early Childhood Studies and Politics and Economics. Additionally, 23 care leavers aged between 22 and 25 were in higher education at the end of the reporting year (an increase from 22 last year). Brent had an equal percentage of care leavers in higher education than statistical neighbours and higher than 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 %
2020-21	24	10%	20	8%	2040	6%
2021-22	22	7%	25	8%	2,230	7%
2022-23	19	8%				

14.2 At the end of the reporting year, the percentage of young people aged 19-21 in education, employment and training was 53%, down from 56% last year. The difference is mainly due to the impact of the 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 was 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 below:

Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in Education, Employment or Training	Brent	Brent %	Statistical Neighbour average	Statistical Neighbour average %	National figure	figure %
2020-21	128	54%	131	52%	16900	52%
2021-22	140	56%	142	57%	18610	55%
2022-23	131	53%				

A care leaver in Higher Education

JFM is currently 23 years old. JFM is currently attending Warwick university and is studying History and Politics. JFM is in his 3rd year and hopes to do a Masters degree one day. JFM is currently working towards independent living now that university is almost complete and looking forward to getting his result in August. JFM hopes to get a job as a political historian or a researcher and throughout his studies he worked part-time as a Project researcher where the core focus was about Care Leavers.

A care leaver applying for Higher Education

MF is a young man who entered the UK as an unaccompanied minor – he has with all exceptions demonstrated his understanding in preparing for independence. His education path is exemplary despite having and acute skin condition that is triggered by anxiety. MF's education schedule was interrupted by having to spend time in hospital because of the severity of his skin condition. He managed to achieve some of the highest awards for his college work and was awarded certificates and trophies. He shared with me that 'I want to be a doctor practicing in brain

injuries and return to my country of origin to help my people'. MF is in the process of applying to university to do a degree in medicine and brain injuries surgery.

14.3 Brent has a number of current employment schemes, some of which some are targeted exclusively at care experienced young people. For example:

- **Barnardo's**

Barnardo's have been working in partnership with Brent for the past 3 years fulfilling a 5 year project entitled Brent Care Journeys. The project is set to work with Brent care experienced young people to use their experience to improve the care journey for children looked after and care experienced young people. Throughout this partnership, care experienced young people can volunteer, and complete paid work with Barnardo's working with looked after children and care experienced young people.

- **Prospects**

Prospects is a service within the Connexions organization supporting NEET young people in finding suitable opportunities. We work closely with Prospects, meeting every month with a focus on our 19 to 21-year-old care leavers. Referrals can be made independently or via the monthly meeting and the Prospects team support our care leavers into education, training, and employment.

LACP also work with other agencies that provide service to the wider community in Brent for example Brent Start, Brent Works and Catch 22, a charity specialising in supporting ex-offenders or those at risk of offending. Their workers are trained in working with this 'hard to reach' cohort and supporting them into work or education for a 12-month period. They work across London which increases the reach of services as many care leavers live outside the borough.

15.0 Care Leavers' Accommodation

15.1 Care Leavers in Brent continue to be awarded priority housing banding due to their leaving care status. Young people are supported to complete either the ASDAN Independent Skills Programme or the Gordon Brown Practical Skills Weekend along with the My Bank Money Programme before being referred for their own accommodation. Personal advisors continue to complete a vulnerability assessment as well as provide evidence of the young person's readiness for their own accommodation.

15.2 Our service and the housing team meet monthly for our Housing Allocations Panel where referrals are discussed and accepted for housing, thereafter our care leavers can bid for three months before being eligible for a Direct Offer. Once a care leaver has secured their own accommodation they are supported to furnish and buy essential items for their property with a 'setting up home allowance' of £2000. In this reporting

year we have supported approximately 20 young people into their own tenancies.

- 15.3 Following the success of the Gordon Brown pilot, this skill-based weekend remains a pathway for our care leavers in building their independent living skills. 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. At present, there are monthly sessions at Gordon Brown with males and females attending alternative months. Each young person is given a starter pack for when they move into their tenancy which includes a tool kit, set of knives, pots and pans and other essentials for living independently.
- 15.4 Below are some comments young people have made about the Gordon Brown Centre:

Gordon Brown Centre – Feedback from participants

“I still have all the pots and pans they gave me at Gordon brown it was so good!”

“The rooms are nice, bed was comfortable.”

“They need to make this more often, it’s good for Care Leavers.”

“Never knew how to chop veg properly, now I know this technique.”

We learned a lot of new stuff”

“This is like a holiday and to be honest I haven’t had one”

“It’s nice being out here with nature”

“Brent need to do this for more young people”

“What, we get our own drill kit? To KEEP FAM?” Nar when’s the next trip, this is sick, big man ting.”

- 15.5 Our Leaving Care Service has a Team Manager with a YJS background and pre-existing working relationships with Probation therefore our joint protocol with the Probation Service remains a positive aspect of our service with more dialogue and support offered jointly by personal advisors and probation officers and more joined up working prior to release from prison to ensure 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. Our Team Manager attends the monthly Risk Forum hosted by the Youth Justice Service along with the Transitions to Probation Meetings held quarterly as well as the Resettlement and Aftercare Meetings held in relation to custody release.
- 15.6 We have a Team Manager dedicated to addressing the housing issues faced by our care leavers to include care leavers at highest risk of homelessness/rough sleeping. Within this provision, bi-monthly Rent Arrears Meetings are held with the Income Revenue Teams to discuss care leavers who have fallen into arrears and plan a way to address this matter

to include setting up payment plans, applying for discretionary housing benefit payment or other financial support, i.e. residency support fund they are eligible for and further budgeting and other support provided by their PA.

- 15.7 The service is planning to host an event to celebrate our young people that have completed their training, i.e. ASDAN or Gordon Brown and My Bank within this reporting period, 2022/23.
- 15.8 The collaboration between BCJ and Brent commissioning team has resulted in our care leavers receiving a welcome pack when moving into a new semi-independent accommodation. This includes essentials and a local supermarket voucher. At the end of the reporting year, 84.4% of care leavers aged 19-21 were in suitable accommodation. Apart from the cohort of care leavers on remand or incarcerated, this is due to former UASCs being refused leave to remain in the UK and choosing not to continue 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 %
2020-21	208	88%	210	83%	28270	88%
2021-22	213	86%	212	85%	29270	88%
2022-23	206	84.4%				

- 15.9 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 independence. The number of care leavers in semi-independent provision has risen to 96 in March 2023 from 91 in March 2022. This increase 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 on their applications (mainly from countries like Albania, Iran and Iraq) due to a backlog. However, a new fast track process has been introduced by the Home Office in March 2023 which will consider applications by people from Afghanistan, Sudan, Syria Eritrea and Vietnam, which could see the timeframe for decisions reduce to several weeks.
- 15.10 The following case study demonstrates evidence of good joint work between LACP and the housing department. There was evidence of strong professional network and communication between various professionals:

Case Study – Accommodation

TC is a 19-year-old mother to a three-month-old son. TC is of Black British Caribbean heritage who grew up across several different countries with various family members. TC reports having 23 siblings which whom she has a relationship with the majority.

TC had several missing episodes while living in semi-independent placements and there were CSE concerns, TC experienced disruption to her education TC experienced breakdown in relationships with at least three different family members which resulted in TC becoming known to Children Services in the latter part of her teenage years.

TC has settled well in her last placement however due to safeguarding concerns (not related to TC) she had to move which was very disruptive for TC as the news came whilst she was in hospital giving birth to her son. TC was supported to move to a new placement, TC had little family support and her relationship with her son's father was not what she expected it to be therefore her personal advisor supported her with managing the move.

Prior to this, TC had been referred to our Housing Allocation Panel and was successful therefore she was bidding for her own accommodation and was eligible for a direct offer therefore TC's PA approached housing to see if there was any eligible accommodation for TC when we received notification that she was required to move placement, this caused TC considerable emotional distress and uncertainty however, within weeks, TC was put forward for a two-bedroom newly built flat to which she was successful. There was a lot of communication, flexibility, and collaborative working in a short space of time allowing for TC and her son to move into permanent accommodation. TC was further supported with the Set-Up Home Allowance of £2,000 to enable her to purchase household items needed to furnish her home. TC has reported that she is happy in her new home and her baby is thriving.

TC has since, settled into motherhood and her accommodation and maintains a good rapport with her PA and continues to manage her emotional health well.

16.0 Priorities for Corporate Parenting Partners 2023/24

- The highest priority for the LACP service, and wider CYP, is to stabilise and retain our workforce, so that children and young people will benefit from long-term, stable, caring relationships.
- Continuous focus from all partners to improve health services and outcomes for LAC and care leavers including emotional wellbeing and CAMHS i.e. ensuring all young people leaving care understand how to access their health histories, system improvements for collaborative

reporting with health partners, targeted wellbeing support for UASC and former UASC.


- Visioning and future development work for Brent Care Journeys to be prioritised in anticipation of the end of our 5-year partnership with Barnados in March 2025, which will continue to enable young people to be involved in design and improvement of services across CYP, the council and wider.
- Continued work on accommodation pathways and developing independence skills for care leavers, particularly those placed within semi-independent provision and their readiness to move on.
- Continue to promote the voice and engagement of children and young people in day to day practice, i.e. improve the uptake and usage of our Pathway Plan App, complete a new cycle of Bright Spots Survey, and ensuring children and young people participate fully in their LAC Reviews.
- To continue to develop and improve practice in relation to life story work for children in care.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director Children and Young People

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	<p align="center">Corporate Parenting Committee</p> <p align="center">17 July 2023</p>
	<p align="center">Report from the Corporate Director, Children and Young People</p>
<p>Brent Council Children and Young People Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report April 2022 - March 2023</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>Sonya Kalyniak Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Sonya.Kalyniak@brent.gov.uk 020 8937 5809</p> <p>Palvinder Kudhail Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk 020 8937 4091</p>

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Annual IRO Report is prepared by the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance 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 Service Manager
- Two full time IROs and 13 IRO's commissioned via Aidhour, an independent agency
- Five Child Protection Advisors
- One LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer)

- One Contextual Safeguarding Lead

- 2.2 Historically, 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 and are now experiencing recruitment and retention issues. Aidhour are currently commissioned until October 2023 when the contractual arrangements will be reviewed. 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 registered with Social Work England.
- 2.3 There are a total of 15 IROs in Brent, with representation of male and female IROs (6 males and 9 females). The ethnicity of the IROs is more reflective of the diverse population of Brent Looked After Children than it has been in previous years.

Table 1: IRO Ethnicity

IRO Ethnicity	Number
White British	7
White Other	2
Black or Black British	4
Mixed	1
Asian or Asian British	1

(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 includes 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 2022/23

4.1 The following provides an update on priority areas for development in 2022/23:

1. Improved performance of the timeliness of LAC Reviews with a target of 95% held within timescale.

A total of 82% of reviews happened within statutory timescale. This is lower than in 2021/22 (88%) due to a combination of staff turnover in Care Planning teams and high numbers of reviews in some months. This is an area of improvement focus for 2023/24.

2. Enhancing consistency of IRO practice across LA employed and commissioned IROs through direct observations of LAC Reviews and sharing good practice.

Observation and auditing of IRO practice across in-house employed and the commissioned service has taken place over the last year. 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. There is evidence of some good practice-records of reviews that were written in child friendly language; however, the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Service (ILACS, February 2023) highlighted that the letters sent by IROs to children and young people were not consistently appropriate for children. Developing consistency in the letter sent to children following a review is an improvement area for 2023/24.

3. IROs driving improvement in the quality of Pathway Plans, including reports demonstrating progress from one Pathway Plan to the next.

IROs have assisted in ensuring that young people's wishes, goals and aspirations are considered within their Pathway Plans for when they transition from being looked after to care leavers. The Ofsted ILACS (February 2023) found that "care leavers contribute to their pathway plans, which contain their wishes, goals and aspirations. This places them firmly at the heart of decision-making and planning for their future".

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.

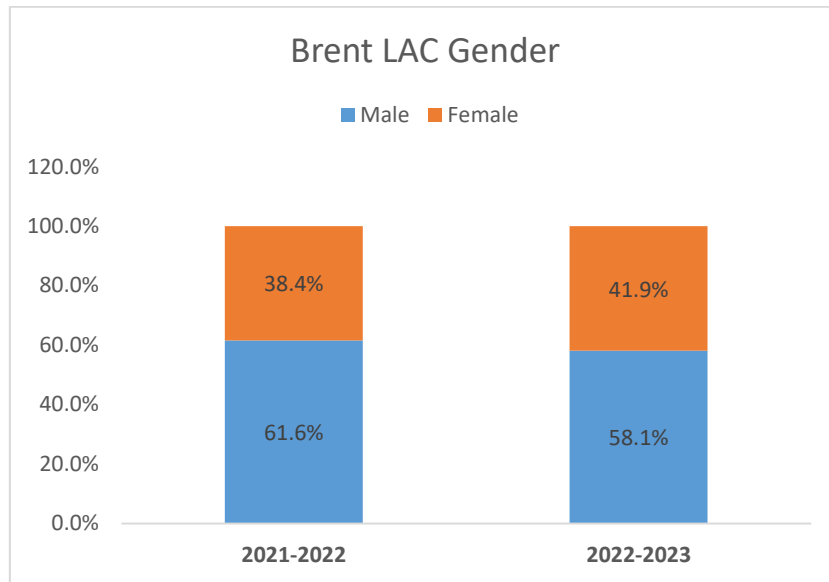
The efforts that IROs have made in this area alongside care planning and permanency colleagues have been acknowledged by Ofsted. The ILACS inspection report (February 2023) noted that "permanence planning is well considered for most children in care and gives them a sense of belonging and security in their home and care arrangements".

5.0 Profile of Looked after Children

5.1 As of 31 March 2023 Brent had 321 children in care compared to 341 children on 31 March 2022, a decrease of 6.2%. This represents 44 children in care per 10,000

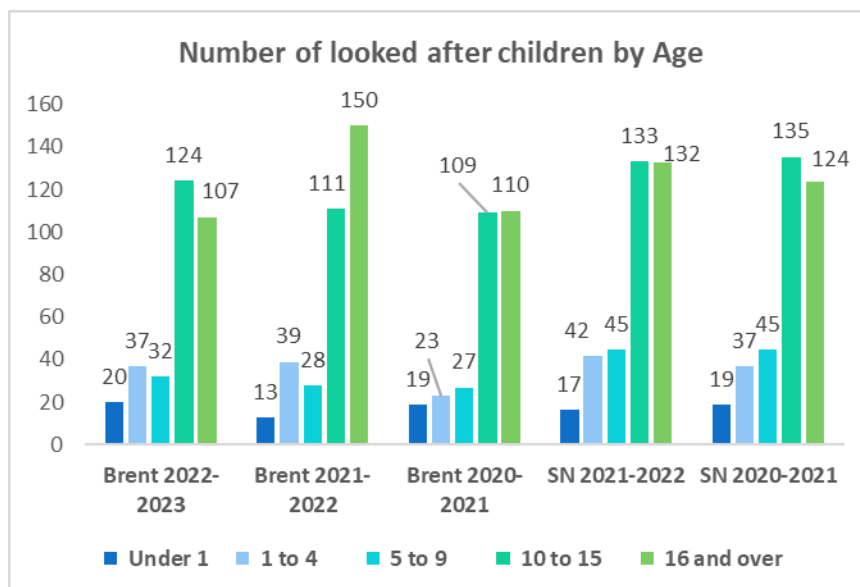
children compared to the England rate of 62 per 10,000 head of child population, a decrease in rate by 3 from previous year (47). On 31 March 2023, the Local Authority looked after 45 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) compared to 74 UASC in March 2022. This is a 33% decrease compared to the previous year and represents 14% of the total Brent LAC population.

Table 2: Brent LAC by gender



5.2 In terms of the overall LAC population there is a slightly higher (3.5%) proportion of female children in care compared to 2021-2022. However, there is still a higher proportion of male children in care.

Table 3: Brent LAC by age



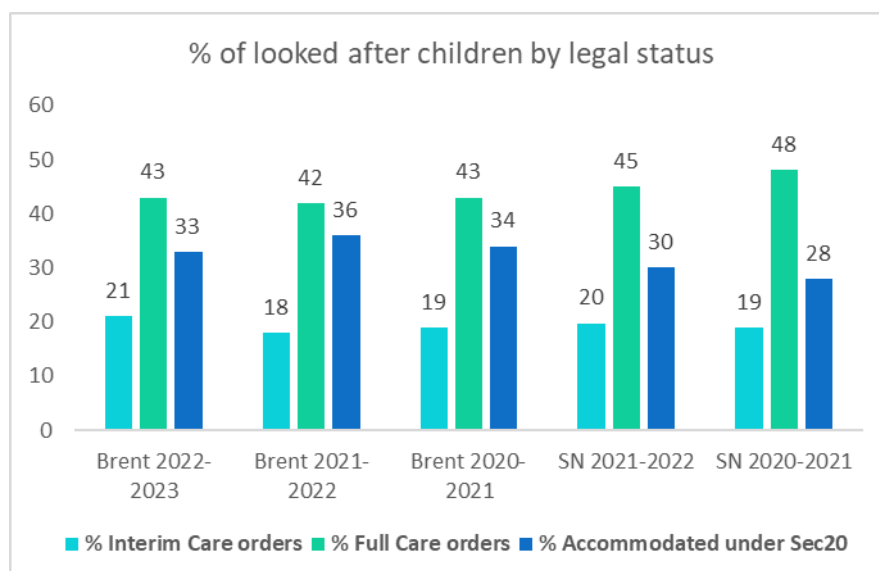
5.3 A total of 33% of the Looked After Children at the end of March 2023 were aged over 16 years old, compared to 44% at the end of March 2022. This reduction is partially due to a reduction of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children in the care system. 72.2% of Looked After Children are aged 10 and over. This age profile is partially linked to external factors, such as the number of young people entering the United Kingdom as UASC. Having a significant 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. The Localities Teams have continued to be proactive with progressing care plans resulting in a small increase in younger children entering care.

Table 4: Brent LAC by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Brent			Statistical Neighbours		England	
	Mar-23	Mar-22	Mar-21	Mar-22	Mar-21	Mar-22	Mar-21
% White	21	21	20	34	38	73	75
% Mixed	22	19	21	18	18	10	10
% Asian or Asian British	15	13	c	15	14	5	4
% Black or Black British	29	29	33	25	25	7	7
% Other ethnic groups	13	18	14	9	6	4	3

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

Table 5: LAC by legal status



5.5 As of 31 March 2023, the majority of Looked After Children were subject to Care Orders (Interim and Full Care orders) under the Children Act 1989, representing 64% of all LAC. A further 105 children (33% of LAC) were in care through a voluntary agreement with the parents/carers as pursuant to Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. In

2022/2023, 46 children became children looked after for a second or subsequent time, compared to 49 in 2021-2022.

6.0 Brent LAC placement arrangements

- 6.1 The proportion of children placed more than 20 miles away from their home address as of 31 March 2023 was 16.8%, compared to 16.4% in 2021/22 (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 2023 (66.3%) which is higher than in 2022 (60%). 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 Corporate 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 team. 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. A recent audit of reviews undertaken in March 2023 identified that these were still key areas of strengths but recognising that post review communication with children and young people would benefit from improved consistency as such the review templates have been revised and exemplars of best practice have been circulated to IROs.

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).

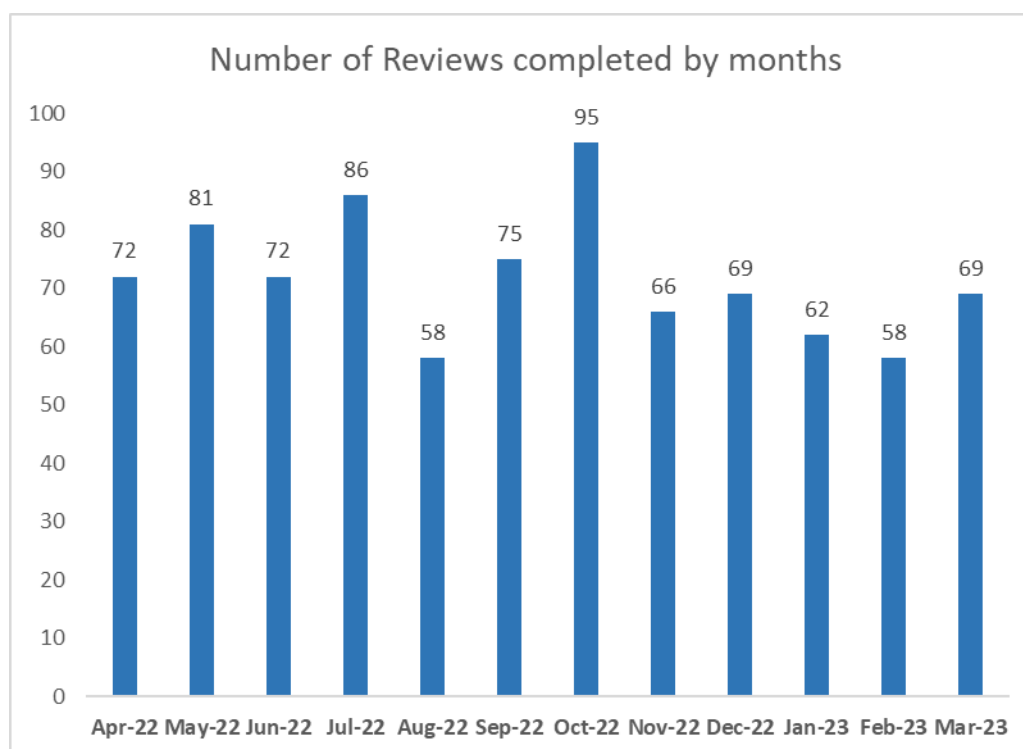
7.6 The annual meeting between the Corporate Director, Children and Young People and IROs took place on 24 January 2023. IROs were updated on the continued drive to increase the number of permanent social work staff and the Department’s strategic priorities. The Corporate Director acknowledged that there had been staffing challenges faced in the Care Planning Service and highlighted that the recruitment and retention package had been extended to Care Planning staff to help improve workforce recruitment and retention and improve stability for Looked After Children in Brent.

8.0 Performance of the IRO service

8.1 The following information provides a summary of performance in 2022/23:

- 863 Reviews took place for 486 children, 62 reviews fewer than 2021-2022 (925 reviews).
- A total of 82% of reviews happened within statutory timescale. This is lower than in 2021/22 (88%) and in part due to a combination of staff turnover in Care Planning and high numbers of reviews in some months, which put pressure on resources. This is an area of improvement focus for 2023/24.
- On average there were 72 reviews chaired each month with peaks of 86 in July 2022 and 95 in October 2022. Less busy months were August 2022 and February 2023 (58 reviews).

Table 6: Number of reviews per month



9.0 Attendance and participation of children

- 9.1 Full participation of children in their review meetings is strong focus of IROs following the Ofsted ILACS (Feb 2023). IROs are considering children's active participation in their reviews in more creative ways to takes participation beyond the child's voice, to less formal reviews that facilitate the greatest opportunity for participation. For example, a recent review took place that was a birthday party for an 18 year old, celebrating her successes and ambitions for her future. Improvement work includes looking a social pedagogy approaches and integrating these approaches into reviews.
- 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 (520 or 60%) attended their review and spoke for themselves. This is a slight reduction from 62% the previous year. The Ofsted ILAC inspection (February 2023) noted that we need to improve direct participation of children and young people in their reviews, The IRO is key to achieving this and increasing direct participation of children in LAC reviews is an area of practice improvement focus.

Table 7: Participation types

Participation Types	Description of codes	Number of children	% of children
PN0	Child aged under 4 at the time of the review	145	17%
PN1	Child physically attends and speaks for him or herself (Attendance).	521	60%
PN2	Child physically attends and an advocate speaks on his or her behalf.	3	0%
PN3	Child attends and conveys his or her view symbolically (non-verbally) (Attendance symbols)	1	0%
PN4	Child physically attends but does not speak for him or herself	5	1%
PN5	Child does not attend physically but briefs an advocate to speak for him or her (Views represented by advocate or independent reviewing officer (IRO) through texting	125	14%
PN6	Child does not attend but conveys his or her feelings to the review by a facilitative medium (Texting the chair	48	6%
PN7	Child does not attend nor are his or her views conveyed to the review	15	2%
Grand Total		863	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 has commissioned Advocacy Services provided by Coram Voice since April 2021 for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. The majority of advocacy requests related to children and young people's concerns in the following areas:

- Concerns about the social worker or personal advisor
- Housing/homelessness
- Complaints – non completion of assessment of kinship carers/pathway plans etc
- Finance, benefits and debt.

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 2022/23, Coram Voice provided a total of 687 hours of advocacy support to 67 children and young people. Coram Voice provide a quarterly report that is shared with IROs at the IRO meeting. IROs also recommend advocacy for those young people who they feel would benefit from the service.

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.
- 11.4 The Ofsted ILACS inspection (February 2023) noted that most IROs monitor the progress of children's plans well between looked after reviews to ensure that actions are progressed. Following on from the Ofsted ILACS an audit was undertaken of reviews and mid way reviews and as a result, revised templates for completing mid-way reviews have been developed and shared with IROs.

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. Feedback from advocacy services raises no concerns in respect of IROs and a focus group of care experienced young people were complimentary about their IROs when meeting with Ofsted in the recent inspection.
- 12.2 In 2022/23 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. The Ofsted ILACS inspection February 2023 noted that 'While many children are actively and purposefully helped to participate in their reviews, too many children do not directly attend'. As previously mentioned, this is an area of focus.

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 professional 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 CAF/CASS.
- 13.3 There has been a small decrease in the number of escalations in 2022/23 compared to the previous year. In 2022/23 there were 51 escalations initiated by IROs compared to 55 escalations in 2021/22. 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
 - No Review Papers completed by Social Worker.
- 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 Corporate Director and no escalations to CAF/CASS. 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 2023/2024

Ofsted ILACS inspection (February 2023) stated:

Most independent reviewing officers (IROs) monitor the progress of children's plans well between looked after reviews to ensure that actions are progressed. IROs write letters to children following their reviews. These letters are not consistently of good quality and a small number are not routinely shared with children, their carers or families. While many children are actively and purposefully helped to participate in their reviews, too many children do not directly attend. For these children, the decisions and plans made at the review are made for them and not with them.

This feedback has informed the improvement planning for the IRO service for 2023/24. The key areas of focus are as follows:

1. Improve the attendance of children and young people in care at their reviews from the current 60% to 70% in 2023/24. This will be achieved through more proactive monitoring of direct participation and exploration of creative ways to engage young people in their reviews. Review forms will be implemented in 2023/24 so that IROs specify how young people have participated in reviews. Line managers will oversee these figures to creatively consider how direct participation can be achieved in future LAC Reviews.
2. The quality of information provided to children and young people following their reviews will be improved to ensure these are consistently written in age appropriate and child friendly language. Exemplars of best practice minutes/letters to young people will be developed and circulated. Line managers will dip sampling the records of reviews to drive improvement.
3. The quality assurance and performance reporting around mid-way reviews and participation will be strengthened. The midway review format has been changed to improve qualitative information and performance team have devised a reporting structure for management to review and track progress.
4. There will be increased supervision of commissioned IROs provided by Aidhour to help maintain consistency and maintain a qualitative service to Looked After Children & Young People.

An action plan is in place to track improvements and impact. The Head of Service, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, is meeting regularly with Aidhour management to review progress.

Footnote 1: Ethnicity Codes

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

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

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


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

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

Report Sign-off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director Children and Young People

 <p>Brent</p>	<p>Corporate Parenting Committee</p> <p>17 July 2023</p>
<p>Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People</p>	
<p>Brent Virtual School for Looked After Children Annual Report (2021-22 academic year)</p>	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	
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:	None
Background Papers:	None
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Sharon Buckby Head of Inclusion/Headteacher – Brent Virtual School Sharon.buckby@brent.gov.uk 020 89373804</p> <p>Michaela Richards, Deputy Headteacher, Brent Virtual School Michaela.Richards@brent.gov.uk 020 8937 1075</p>

1. Purpose of the Annual Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the annual report is to outline the activity and impact of the Brent Virtual School (BVS) during the academic year 2021/2022 in monitoring and supporting looked after children to achieve the best possible educational outcomes. Data contained in this report is for looked after children who were in the care of Brent Council for the academic year 2021/2022, and the report includes outcomes for all children who have been in care for a year or more as of 31 March 2021 (“the eligible cohort” for the Statistical First Release (SFR)).
- 1.2 The data in this report is for the 2021/22 academic year and could not be presented to Corporate Parenting Committee earlier as the local authority was waiting for the DfE to publish the final data.

2.0 Context

- 2.1 423 children and young people were on roll with the BVS in 2021/22. 24 were under four years old, 234 pupils were aged 4-16 years old and 165 were aged 16–18.
- 2.2 The BVS operates as a multi-disciplinary team supporting young people in care to achieve the very best they can. The team comprises of lead advisory teachers, educational psychologists, clinical psychologists, emotional wellbeing practitioners, mentors, and education officers, a UASC and year 11 education officer and a post-16 advisors. The team draws on the expertise of colleagues across the Inclusion Service and the Management Information and Performance Team and works closely with social workers and foster carers, as well as school and setting staff.
- 2.3 The priorities for BVS in 2021/22 were to:
- a) Embed training for social workers on personal education plans (PEPs) as mandatory training.
 - b) Provide online surgeries for designated teachers on improving the quality of PEPs and in the use of the pupil premium to raise aspirations; targeting schools and settings where additional support for these activities has been identified.
 - c) Continue to provide an enrichment curriculum both online and onsite, drawing in expertise as required and rooting this into the interests of looked after children.
 - d) Increase the direct work by the advisory teachers and life coaches in schools and colleges where young people are experiencing challenges.
 - e) Review the multi-disciplinary support provided to ensure effective earlier identification of SEND needs in tandem with the new guidance for Virtual Schools in supporting the educational outcomes for all children with a social worker.
- 2.4 The BVS was successful in delivering against the five priorities during the academic year 2021/22, the details of which are contained in the relevant sections of the main body of this report.

3.0 Attendance

- 3.1 At the end of 2021/22 academic year the school attendance for Looked After Children in KS1 and KS2 (Primary) was 93.68%, compared to 91.29% in 2020/21, 90.30% in 2019/20 and 95.89% in 2018/2019 pre-pandemic. School attendance at KS3 and KS4 (Secondary) was 82.42% in 2021/22, compared to 76.18% in 2020/21, 81.09% during 2019/20 and 83.66% in 2018/2019 pre-pandemic. Whilst attendance figures for the last academic year were lower than pre-pandemic figures, they are higher than the previous academic year.
- 3.2 The approach adopted to improving attendance includes:
- Monitoring attendance via an online attendance collection platform
 - PEP meetings and liaising with school staff
 - Regular meetings with LAC and Permanency Service managers to discuss attendance

- Working collaboratively with Education Welfare Service (EWS) to monitor attendance
- Working with careers and placement providers on strategies to ensure attendance.

3.3 At any one time, there will be small number of looked after children or young people who are awaiting a mainstream school place, a special school place or an appropriate alternative provision. This will be for several reasons; for example children may have newly arrived from abroad as an unaccompanied minor (UASC) for whom an age assessment is required; children may be placed into care as an emergency or may have had a change of care placement at short notice. In a small number of cases, school placements break down and the child or young person may not yet be on the roll of an identified new provision.

3.4 To ensure that children who are between school placements do not miss education, the BVS arranges 1:1 tuition for English and maths, which is funded by the Pupil Premium Grant. This usually takes place in the home setting, although older pupils may be taught in the local library. For some LAC, particularly those who have missed periods of schooling prior to care, mentoring is commissioned to prepare and support them back into education and to consider their wider personal, social, careers and health education.

3.5 The BVS Deputy Headteacher monitors the children not on a school roll at fortnightly meetings, ensuring these pupils are receiving suitable education in the interim period. The majority of Brent LAC are placed into an appropriate education setting within the statutory timescale (20 days). For children where there are challenging placement stability or vulnerability issues, the BVS leadership team meets with the Looked After Children and Permanency Service leadership team to ensure a holistic approach to enable the child to access education.

4.0 Exclusions

4.1 There was an increase in fixed term exclusions for Looked After Children during the academic year 2021/22 in comparison to the previous two academic years (21 compared to 16 in 2020/21 and 12 in 2019/20), but this is still lower than before the pandemic (26 in 2018/19). The BVS has actively engaged with schools where young people's behaviour has been identified as a barrier to achievement. Additionally, the BVS has arranged respite provision, extra support in the classroom or outside of school and, for those pupils on a pathway to a permanent exclusion, a managed move has been arranged. As with previous years there have not been any permanent exclusions for Looked After Children. This is due to close partnership working with schools, designated teachers, foster carers and social workers and addressing problems before they arise with the oversight of the BVS leadership team.

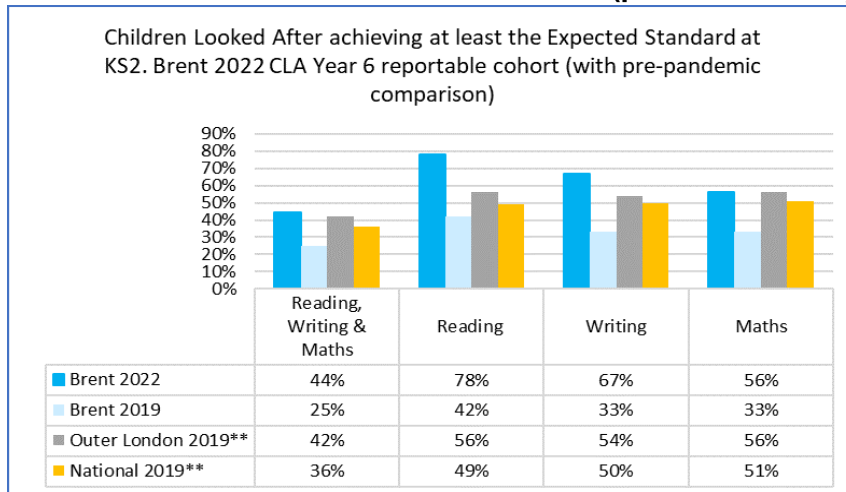
5.0 Progress and Attainment

5.1 **Key Stage 2.** The academic year 2021/22 saw the reintroduction of testing after two years. Nationally there was a drop in achievement rates at Key Stage 2. As primary progress measures in 2019/20 and 2020/21 were subject to centre assessments, they are not comparable to this academic year. When compared to 2018/19, the last year when testing was undertaken, the provisional results indicate a significant increase in

levels of attainment for LAC at KS2 (Tables 1 and 2). Within this context, it should be noted that the number of children in the cohort is relatively small.

5.2 At the time of the 2022 KS2 tests, Brent had 12 LAC in Year 6, of whom there are results for nine children. Two of the three children for whom there are no results did not sit KS2 tests due to their level of SEND (both have an Education, Health and Care Plan - EHCP). Therefore, Table 1 below captures the outcomes for nine children.

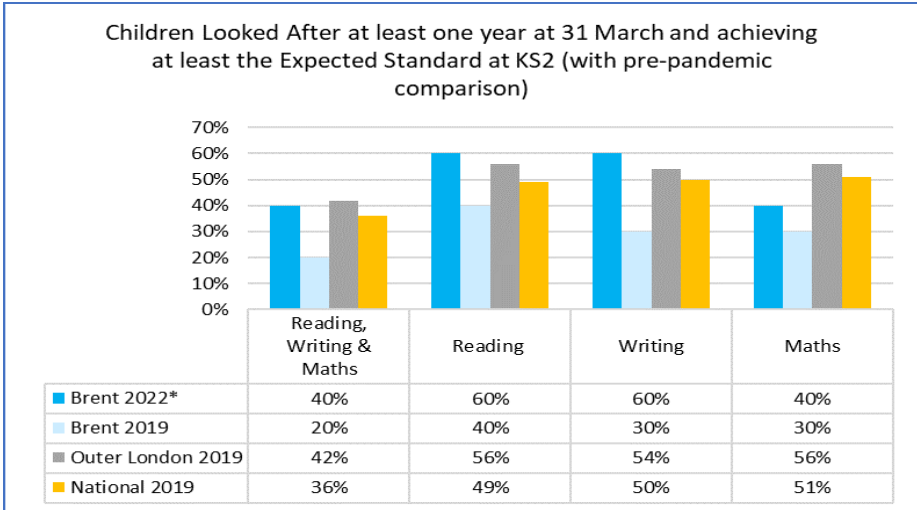
Table 1: 2022 KS2 All CLA in KS2 cohort (provisional data)



**2019 Outer London & National Data as published by DfE is only for CLA at least one year at 31 March

5.3 Of the whole cohort of 12 children, seven had been in care for at least a year on 31 March 2022. Taking into account the two children with an EHCP who were not tested, Table 2 presents the results for five children who had been in care for at least a year. Three of the five children who had been in care for at least a year and achieved expected at the end of KS2 in Reading and Writing, have been in care for over two years and one of these who achieved expected in Maths also, has been in care for over 4 years. Furthermore, all have been in stable placements with their same carer since coming into care. The length of care and stability of placement are two important factors in their outcomes and if these are maintained by the time they reach KS4, they are more likely to be on track to achieve their expected KS4 outcomes of level 4-9 passes including English and maths.

Table 2: 2022 KS2 CLA in care at least one year at 31/03/2022



- 5.4 BVS promotes access to additional tutoring support for all pupils but especially those sitting end of KS2 or KS4 assessments. This is accessed through either face to face or online external tutoring or through the preferred option of schools and education settings providing an in-house 1:1 individualised support programme using the PALAC (Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children) tutoring/mentoring evidenced based method developed by the Institute of Education. This focuses on using in-school staff as "tutors" to secure the best possible academic outcomes. Research conducted by the Institute of Education indicates a strong and sustained correlation between the tutoring and improved grades. All three children who achieved their expected KS2 outcomes were in receipt of PALAC tutoring prior to sitting their assessments.
- 5.5 To support achievement in numeracy and literacy during 2021/22, as with the two previous academic years, the BVS held booster classes using the Letterbox Club, PALAC, MathsWhizz (software subscription) and weekly group booster sessions. In total 29 Children engaged in either booster or PALAC sessions, whilst a further 45 had access to MathsWhizz and/or Letterbox subscriptions. Whilst it is difficult to quantify the impact that these have had directly on attainment, it is apparent that all are considered to be valuable resources as recognised through the PEP process and in feedback from carers.

KS2 Case Study MG

In 2017, before MG came into care, she was permanently excluded from her mainstream school. MG came into care in June 2018 and was subsequently placed with long term foster carers in Kent County Council. BVS took advice from Kent Virtual School with regards appropriate schools and was able to help secure a school place for September 2018. She has since been on roll at this school and attended consistently however on entry was working below expected standards. Given MG's previous trauma and disrupted education which had impacted on her academic levels, school disapplied her from the KS1 SATS assessments as she was working pre key stage. MG continued to face many academic and emotional challenges and was reported to be working two years behind her peers in 2019. BVS worked with the school to ensure she was supported with PALAC tuition. Support was also sought from the Brent Wellbeing and Emotional Support Team (WEST) who worked to support MG and her school to build her emotional resilience. By the end of the 18/19 academic year, MG was working towards expected levels across the board. However in 2020, faced with the pandemic challenges, MG's academic and emotional abilities began to decline. Counselling was put in place weekly for a year, which supported her to get back on track with her learning. In 2022 her school report showed an improvement in her academic levels and overall a more positive change in her behaviour and attitude both at home and school.

- 5.6 **Key Stage 4:** At the end of the academic year 2021/22 there were 60 Year 11 students of whom 23 were UASC. The SFR (eligible) cohort number was 44 of which 18 were UASC who did not sit external examinations. Of the remaining 26, eight students had an EHCP and a further six were SEN support. 20 students sat GCSEs and another two were entered for functional skills qualifications.
- 5.7 Pupil Premium Funding has been utilised to support these students in a number of ways including art therapy, 1:1 tuition in specific subject areas and 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 included The BVS Homework Club, which is a weekly session held at Brent Civic Centre, with BVS teaching staff on hand to support students with revision and the development of their learning styles; the PALAC tuition programme was offered to students in English and Maths; online resources - Savemyexams and GCSEPod and a range of revision resources.
- 5.8 There were no national examinations in 2020 and 2021, with centre assessed grades awarded in their place. As with all children and young people, this method of assessment tends to be more favourable to vulnerable children, who are not subject to the pressure of exam conditions. 2020 and 2021 saw a significant increase in the headline results for the looked after children in the SFR cohort.
- 5.9 The methods to support KS4 LAC during the pandemic were maintained in 2021/22 along with weekly homework clubs that provided a face-to-face opportunity for BVS to support pupils. However, like many young people facing public examinations against the backdrop of two previous years of centre assessed grades, levels of anxiety for some LAC increased in 2021/22. This was compounded by a cohort at KS4 that included several children new to care and many that had experienced significant challenges, including placement stability.

5.10 Despite this, LAC achieving the 5 passes at 4-9 including English and maths was higher than the previous academic year by 2%. However, the most accurate data set to compare to is the 2018/19, the last time examinations were held. Based on the previous data for public examinations (Table 3) there has been a marked increase in all the headline figures from 7% to 20%.

Table 3: Achievement rates for GCSEs 2018/19-2021/22

New grade levels	2021/22****		2020/21***		2019/20**		2018/19*	
	LAC	%	LAC	%	LAC	%	LAC	%
5 passes at level 4-9 incl Eng and Maths	7/35	20.0%	6/34	18%	8/29	28%	2/29	7%
4 passes at level 4-9 incl Eng and Maths	7/35	20.0%	8/34	24%	8/29	28%	2/29	7%
5 passes at level 1-9	19/35	54.3%	17/34	50%	18/29	62%	13/29	45%
4 passes at Level 1-9	23/35	65.7%	19/34	56%	18/29	62%	13/29	45%
1 pass Level 1-9	27/35	77.1%	24/34	71%	21/29	72%	19/29	66%
Achieving 4-9 pass in English and Maths	7/35	20.0%	9/34	26%	9/29	31%	4/29	14%

The above data is for the whole cohort (53) minus SEN/Disabilities and ESOL (18).

Key Stage 4- SFR COHORT								
New grade levels	2021/22****		2020/21***		2019/20**		2018/19*	
	LAC	%	LAC	%	LAC	%	LAC	%
5 passes at level 4-9 incl Eng and Maths	4/24	17%	5/21	24%	6/21	29%	2/26	8%
4 passes at level 4-9 incl Eng and Maths	4/24	17%	6/21	29%	6/21	29%	2/26	8%
5 passes at level 1-9	13/24	54%	12/21	57%	13/21	62%	13/26	50%
4 passes at Level 1-9	16/24	67%	13/21	62%	13/21	62%	13/26	50%
1 pass Level 1-9	19/24	79%	16/21	76%	15/21	71%	19/26	73%
Achieving 4-9 pass in English and Maths	4/24	17%	6/21	29%	6/21	29%	4/26	15%

*The above data is for the eligible LAC cohort minus SEN and ESOL (13 LAC)

**The above data is for the eligible LAC cohort minus SEN and ESOL (2 LAC)

***The above data is for the eligible LAC cohort minus SEN and ESOL (3 LAC)

****The above data is for the eligible LAC cohort minus SEN and ESOL (10 LAC)

5.11 Of the four pupils who had been in care for at least a year and made expected progress at KS4, achieving 5 passes at level 4-9 including English and Maths, three had been in long term care for 5-13 years. Three were in care at the end of KS2; two achieved expected standards in Reading, Writing and Maths and one pupil with English as an additional language (EAL) was working below threshold. Thus, between the KS2 and KS4 milestones, two had made expected levels of progress and one had made above expected progress. Notably all four pupils were in stable and supportive foster care placements which undoubtedly had a positive impact.

5.12 Additionally, of the four KS4 pupils who achieved their expected outcomes of level 4-9 passes including English and maths, three also had 1:1 tutoring in the core subjects either delivered in school or externally. BVS has also partnered with the Harrow School to offer young people access to their online Lumina Tutoring Programme

which matches young people to qualified subject teachers (who teach in Independent Settings) and deliver focused online sessions x45 mins weekly during term time. The programme has been running for two years with positive feedback from both carers and young people. One of the KS4 young people who was receiving regular and consistent English tutoring (which started in summer term of Yr 10), achieved a level 5 pass in English Language surpassing his school prediction of a level 4. For another pupil who was receiving support for Maths externally, the school commented “..he came into school this morning and was showing his maths teacher new ways to solve problems (which he said he learnt yesterday) and was so proud of himself”.

5.13 In 2021/22 there were five students who did not achieve any GCSE passes who were eligible for entry. These students had a series of contextual safeguarding issues that impacted on the consistency of their education and in some cases the impact was from Year 10 through to Year 11. Throughout the year additional support was put in place to ensure that these young people had clear Post-16 pathways, although this has been with varying degrees of success.

5.14 **Post-16:** The number of post-16 young people that were in education, employment, or training (EET) at the end of the academic year 2021/22 has significantly increased since the same reporting period last year at 80% compared to 73% in 2020/21. This is in part due to the removal of restrictions due to the pandemic, but also largely due to the partnership working between Prospects (the commissioned provider) and BVS. The BVS Post-16 Advisor, the Performance Data Officer and Prospects advisors meet monthly to review the position of all students and to ensure those young people who are NEET are receiving direct support. This process has helped to close the gap between EET and NEET and allowed for early intervention for those most at risk of becoming NEET. Prospects has also provided access to a new programme funded by the GLA Education Support Fund called Spark Change, which is a supported internship programme for young people including LAC and care leavers. The support programme, which includes cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) trained job coaches, commenced in the summer term 2021/22 to support young people back into EET. A particular focus has been on rooting participation into the interests of young people as a hook to re-engage them. This is particularly important for those young people whose education has been fractured due to placement moves and contextual safeguarding issues.

KS4 Case Study BK

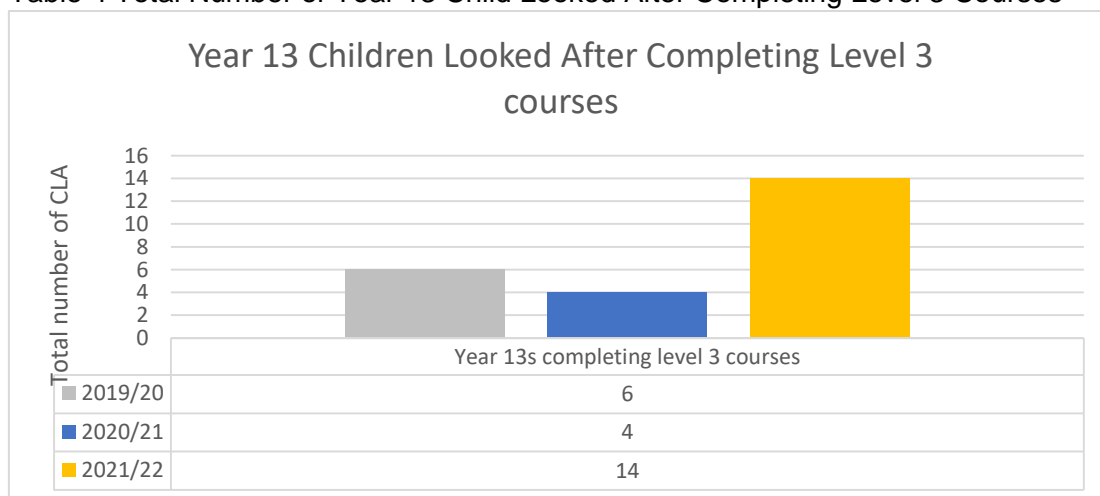
BK arrived in the UK from Afghanistan as an unaccompanied minor and was placed in care in 2016 along with his brother. The siblings moved to their current carer in Sept 2017. BK's primary school had put in considerable EAL support and he was disapplied from the KS2 SATS due to working below threshold. His transition to secondary school was positive and the EAL support continued in Years 7 and 8. By the end of KS3, BK had made age related expected progress.

In KS4, concerns around behaviour and motivation arose. This was exacerbated during lockdown learning as BK struggled to get up to log into his school lessons. Efforts were made to encourage him to attend school as a vulnerable learner, but he resisted as most of his peers were learning from home. Following a joint meeting held with BK, his carer, the school, BVS and his social worker, a modified timetable was agreed which proved to be successful for a period of time. At a further review, in consultation with BK, incentives were offered in the form of vouchers if he continued meeting his targets around completing homework and logging in for at least 3 hours daily.

The network remained in regular email communication with BK's school doing regular check ins and the social worker completing regular home visits. In Year 11, to address concerns around altercations BK had in particular with some female staff members, training was offered around staff using trauma informed approaches. The school also used pupil premium plus funding to put in targeted 1:1 after school interventions in maths and science which were the two subjects he had fallen behind in. BVS Link Advisor also visited BK fortnightly in school for mentoring and post- 16 support. This enabled a rapport to be built and gave BK an opportunity to articulate his views which were communicated with the network. BVS also advocated for school to use pupil premium plus funding for BK to access cricket club membership as this was something he was passionate about. There was a marked improvement between Autumn and Spring mock assessments due to the tailored 1:1 intervention package.

5.15 Of the 14 LAC who completed level 3 courses, five are now at university. This is an improvement on the previous two academic years both of which saw three Year 13 students progress onto university study. The overall number of Year 13s completing level 3 courses increased from six in 2019/20 and four in 2020/21 to 14 in 2021/22.

Table 4 Total Number of Year 13 Child Looked After Completing Level 3 Courses



6.0 SEND

- 6.1 The number of statutory aged young people in care under the BVS with an EHCP is 49, just under 25% of the cohort, 7 of whom were in residential settings and 23 of whom were placed in SEN special schools (mostly educated outside of Brent) during 2021/22.
- 6.2 Table 5 outlines the categories of need of LAC pupils with an EHCP with Table 6 comparing Brent LAC categories of need with all Brent, London and national pupils with an EHCP. There are higher rates of social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and moderate learning difficulties (MLD) in the LAC cohort, compared to all children and young people with an EHCP in Brent, London and nationally. These rates will reflect the impact of the vulnerability of young people becoming LAC, and the complex trauma and challenging environments experienced by young people prior to becoming LAC. Evidence suggests there is often unidentified SEND need for those late into care that is subsequently identified as SEMH, as a consequence of a pattern of neurodiversity conditions (particularly attention deficit disorder) as well as trauma experience underpinning SEMH needs. In 2022/23 academic year health partners and Brent Council have identified both mental health and neurodiversity (including a better understanding of trauma and trauma related SEMH) as priority areas, for which LAC will be a focus cohort. Section 9.0 'Mental Health and Wellbeing' provides further details of the work underway to support the SEMH of LAC pupils.

Table 5: Categories of need of LAC pupils with an EHCP

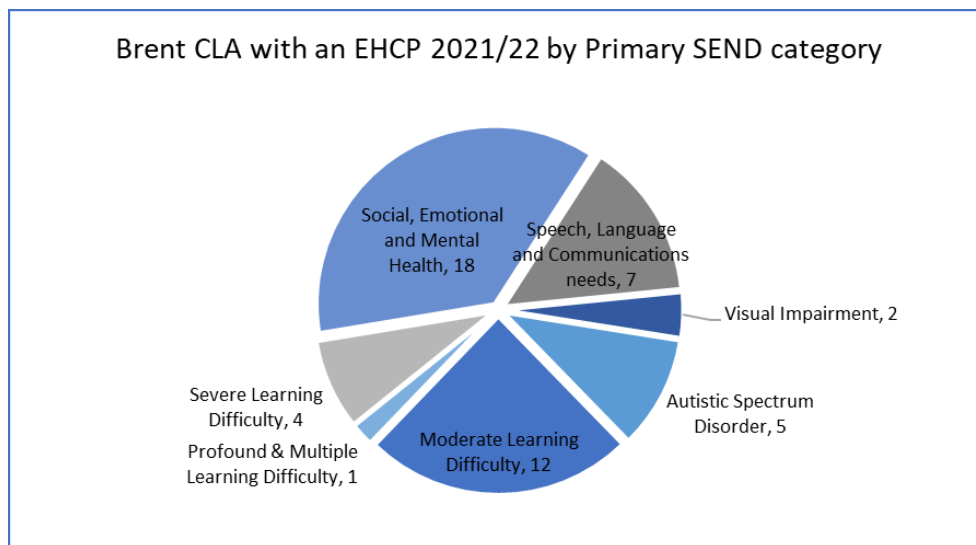
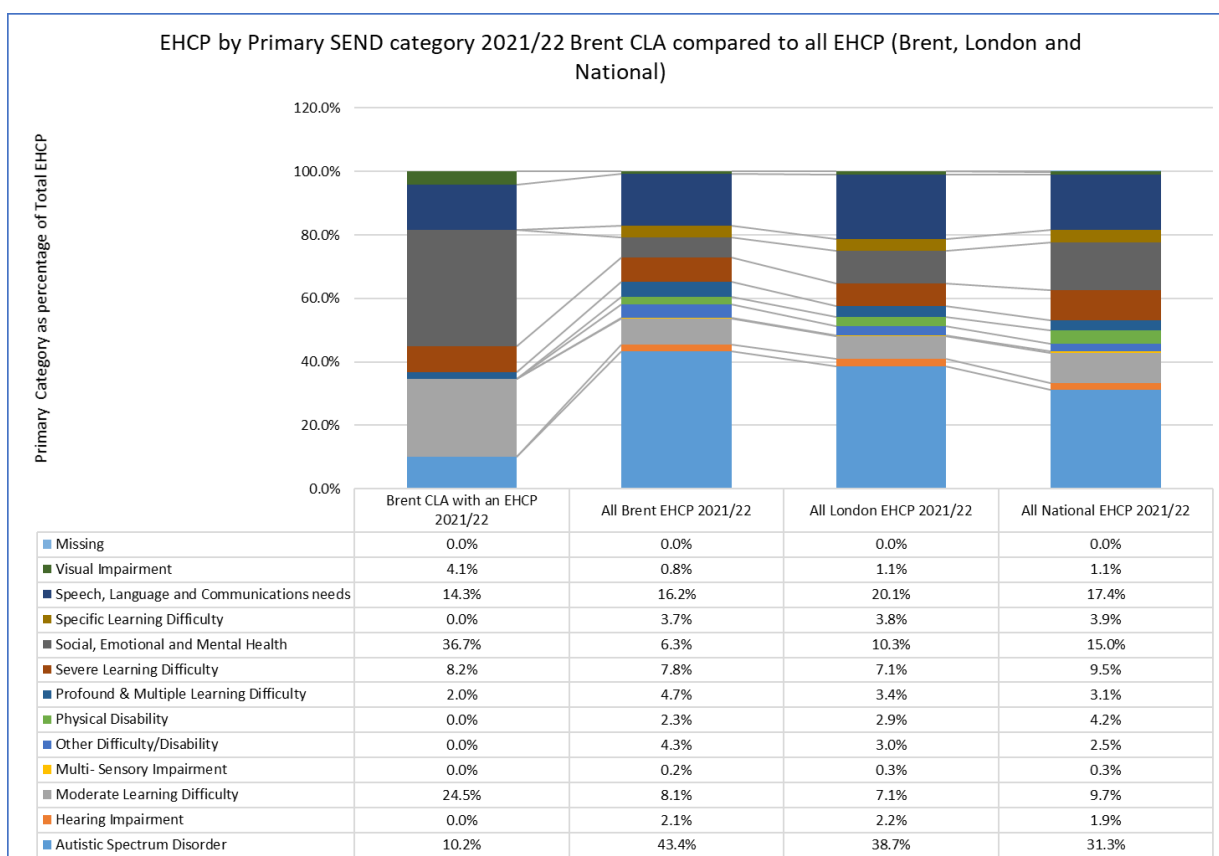


Table 6: LAC SEND needs 2021/22 compared to all Brent, London and national



6.3 A new system was introduced this academic year whereby the EHCP 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 has difficulty placing students with an EHCP in other local authority areas, the SEND team support the commissioning and negotiation within the placement area. Where there are challenges the Virtual School Headteacher (VSH) and Deputy Headteacher step in to negotiate with local Virtual School Heads and Inclusion Service Heads of Service.

7.0 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

7.1 17 new statutory aged UASC entered the care system in the academic year 2021/22. All but one of these young people were in Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 5, 33 UASC entered the care system during 2021/22. 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 UASCs 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 age 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 to promote transition and integration into the local area and wider community.

7.2 Most of the UASC pupils are disapplied from KS4 assessments as new arrivals into the country. The majority are placed into local English as an Additional Language provision from which they progress into further education and onto BTEC courses wherever possible.

8.0 ePEP

8.1 94% of PEPs for the autumn term 2021/22 were completed and signed off by the advisory staff and leadership of the BVS. There was some drift 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 taken a number of steps: a Designated Teachers' (DTs) Forum focused on the theme of standardisation and PEP quality and ongoing training is underway for social workers on the new system and the PEP process; guidance and training videos have been provided to all schools; group and 1:1 training with DTs and improvement meetings with identified schools to discuss the quality of their PEPs are taking place.

8.2 The quality of PEPs are reviewed termly and 65% were judged as good during the spring term. Wherever the quality of PEPs are considered to be inadequate or to require improvement to be good, the BVS team work with designated teachers to improve the quality. This has resulted in improvement group discussions with a few schools both in and outside of Brent. Critically there needs to be a clear demonstration of stretch in progress objectives with a clear link to use of the pupil premium.

9.0 Mental Health and Wellbeing

9.1 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), a commissioned service delivered by the Anna Freud Centre. 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 PPP is being refocused in the summer term 2022/23 to expand enrichment activities with CBT supported weekend activity programmes, a broadened offer based on individual interests and the engagement of a speech language therapist, to deliver group work and individual work to support communication skills.

9.2 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, BVS and other members of the professional network to best support children looked after. WEST 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. In the summer term, WEST worked with 44 LAC. During this term, 80 direct sessions were delivered relating to 18 CYP. 40 of these sessions were delivered face to face. 59 indirect sessions were delivered to 27 young people.

9.3 WEST also lead a Reflective Fostering Group, which is an 11-session group programme for foster carers and kinship carers. During the summer term WEST provided direct work tailored to supporting UASC. WEST have also been preparing to deliver a tailored support for life-story work with social workers alongside training

on 'Understanding Trauma' and clinical supervision for social workers managing highly complex cases.

10.0 Pupil Premium Spend

10.1 The BVS retains 50% of the Pupil Premium Plus (PPP) and it is used for a number of resources and activities including mentoring, residential trips, enrichment activities; online and face to face training and 1:1 tuition for students out of school. The remaining 50% is allocated to schools to support the progress of children and young people looked after by Brent, the use of which is monitored through the PEP process. 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. One of the foci this year has been how to engage a wider range of LAC. Key groups that have been identified as being the least represented are children with profound SEN, Key Stage 4 boys and those who live beyond 50 miles of Brent. BVS is working with the local borough Virtual School partners, Harrow, Barnet and Ealing, to create an even more robust offer that targets these groups whilst also maintaining those that are already engaged. Whilst the enrichment programme has positive impact on those involved, it is sometimes hard to measure the impact as much of the support is targeted at developing 'soft' skills. After each activity feedback is collected in order to measure the impact and the benefits of the activity to determine future use. The focus for 2022/23 will be to target those young people who are not yet engaged. This tends to be boys aged 14-16. A key ambition is to develop a mentoring programme in partnership with the Football Association and Wembley Stadium for this group.

10.2 Some of the retained PPP is used for BVS staff to provide a comprehensive training programme to a range of professionals working with vulnerable students. The content of these sessions includes:

- Governors' Training, promoting positive outcomes for disadvantaged groups and the effective use of pupil premium
- Gender Awareness and Sexuality Training by Brook (multi agency training for social workers and designated teachers)
- Education Online Training Programme for foster carers
- Targeting new DTs and staff working with post LAC children in schools

10.3 Towards the end of 2021/22 academic year, the BVS began the delivery of Social Worker EPEP training as a mandatory course. BVS provide a monthly rolling training programme for social workers with 38 social workers attending the training.

11.0 Enrichment Programme

11.1 The BVS enrichment programme is an integral part of the BVS offer to young people and care leavers. This included three weekend trips during the summer term to the Gordon Brown Centre, the LA's outdoor centre. In partnership with John Lyons Foundation and the Harrow, Ealing, Barnet and Brent Virtual School alliance, the BVS has been able to offer a variety of activities. Over 70 children attended the following events:

- Strength with horses
- Care to Dance
- Arvon Writing Residential

- Book club
- Debate mate
- Brunel STEM residential
- Family First Theatre Nights
- Outdoor pursuits – Horsenden Hill and Phoenix Outdoor Centre



Gordon Brown Residential Trip, June 2022): *“I liked the different activities, some were hard”* (AK, Yr 7)



Debate Mate, Feb 2022: *“it taught me to express myself and made me confident”* (JCB, Yr 9)



A Christmas Carol at The Old Vic, Dec 2021): *“It was such fun”* (RH, Yr9

12.0 Extended Duties for all Children with a Social Worker

12.1 In 2021 Brent Virtual School recruited an Extended Duties Team (ExDT) to meet new national criteria following the expansion of Virtual Schools’ remit.

12.2 A key requirement of the extended duties is to provide strategic oversight of children with a social worker. This duty has been met through:

- Supporting social workers to address attendance, challenge exclusions and provision of reduced timetables where necessary. Additionally social workers have a better understanding of their role in the EHCP process. The Extended Duties Team (ExDT) spend part of each week working at both the Civic Centre and Willesden Library to provide information, advice and guidance to social workers through individual discussions and weekly surgeries.
- The ExDT has attended a number of multi-agency forums to raise the importance of education for children with a social worker and has supported schools to revisit policies (behaviour and attendance) to ensure that children with a social worker are not disadvantaged. This includes the Brent Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Group and EVVP.
- Cross service training for school staff, carers and social workers has been developed and delivered. One-minute guides including part-time timetables, exclusions and attendance are in development so that professionals and parents have a good understanding of DfE guidance regarding this cohort and the position and offer available in Brent.
- Engagement has also taken place with the Borough’s School Designated Safeguarding Leads and SENCOs, through various forums, to highlight the issues arising for children on CIN and CP Plans and to consider sustainable solutions to some of the challenges identified.

12.3 Monitoring the attendance of children with a social worker is a key element of the extended duties remit. Currently there is no statutory requirement for schools to share

this data with local authorities. As a consequence, the BVS have been exploring how best to establish this both with Brent schools and for schools in other local authorities. The BVS have been awaiting guidance from the DfE as to whether the new national attendance monitoring system will become a statutory requirement from September 2023. Until then, the BVS are working closely with social workers to ensure that attendance is a key priority within plans and that schools supporting young people with a social worker are linked to the ExDT. Given the high rate of pupil mobility the monitoring of attendance will facilitate better coordination of cross borough working and also identify any trends emerging from the monitoring process.

- 12.4 Whilst not an objective in the extended duty requirements, the ExDT has delivered direct work with 118 children during 2021/22, with the team maintaining a maximum caseload of 50 children at any one time, predominantly educated out of borough, who have experienced the most fractured education, very low attendance and who are at risk of permanent exclusion. Impact measurements are currently in development for 2022/23.
- 12.5 Approximately 50% of all referrals are listed as attendance concerns due to mental health issues (social anxiety disorders), social and emotional issues, previously undiagnosed learning difficulties, gang affiliations and parental issues (parents with mental health problems, parents keeping children off school). A third of the referrals relate to children at high risk of permanent exclusion from out of borough schools and children's parents needing support to help their children to access education and educational support. Examples of the work undertaken include:
- Preventing the exclusion of a Year 10 pupil attending an academy school in a neighbouring borough. Due to a series of incidents, the case was referred to the Virtual School after the school had decided to permanently exclude. The VS managed to prevent the PEX, liaised with the school, Brent admissions and social care to facilitate an in-year transfer.
 - Working with Secondary Schools in Brent and another local authority to facilitate a managed move, avoiding a permanent exclusion.
 - Supporting the education of three siblings seeking a nurse, primary and secondary school place due to the family being moved out of the LA due to a serious incident. The VS school team worked with the children's mother and social care to identify schools and nurseries, liaised with them on the parent's behalf, engaged with other LA admissions team to secure school places and have those ready for when they moved to their new home.

13.0 Strategic priorities for BVS for 2022/23 and 2023/24

- 13.1 The strategic priority for the BVS remains the continued drive to improve the educational outcomes for looked after children and children with a social worker. To that end many of the priorities for 2022/23 are a continuation of those for 2021/22:
- a) To provide online surgeries for designated teachers on improving the quality of PEPs and the use of the pupil premium to raise aspirations, targeting schools and settings where the need for additional support has been identified to ensure PEPs support improved outcomes.
 - b) To continue to provide an enrichment curriculum both online and onsite, drawing in expertise as required and rooting this into the interests of looked after children to improve aspirations and outcomes.
 - c) To increase attendance through working collaboratively with schools and carers / placement providers and through the direct work by the advisory teachers and life coaches in school and colleges where young people are experiencing challenges to remain positively engaged.

- d) To evaluate the impact of the BVS Extended Duties Team (ExDT), and
- e) To review multi-disciplinary support to ensure effective earlier identification of SEND needs in tandem with the new guidance for Virtual Schools in supporting the educational outcomes for all children with a social worker.

Report sign-off:

Nigel Chapman

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