



## Corporate Parenting Committee

**Monday 16 October 2023 at 5.00 pm**

Members' Suite - 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](mailto:hannah.o'brien@brent.gov.uk)

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## **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
<b>1 Exclusion of the Press and Public</b>	
<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>	
<b>2 Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members</b>	
<b>3 Declarations of interests</b>	
<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>	
<b>4 Deputations (if any)</b>	
<p>To hear any deputations received from members of the public in accordance with Standing Order 67.</p>	
<b>5 Minutes of the previous meeting</b>	1 - 8
<p>To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record.</p>	
<b>6 Matters arising (if any)</b>	
<p>To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.</p>	
<b>7 Update from Care In Action and Care Leavers in Action Representatives</b>	
<p>This is an opportunity for members of Care In Action (CIA) and Care Leavers In Action (CLIA) to feedback on recent activity.</p>	
<b>8 Annual Report: Participation and Engagement with Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2022-23</b>	9 - 24

To provide an overview of participation activity for care experienced children and young people in 2022-23 and demonstrate how feedback from care experienced young people informs practice and service development.

**9 Progress Report on Pan London Care Leavers Compact 25 - 40**

To provide information about the Pan London Care Leavers Compact and to update members on the Council's progress against the Compact and areas of development during 2023-24.

**10 Brent Fostering Service Six-Monthly Monitoring Report: 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023 41 - 56**

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

**11 Brent Adoption Report Six-Monthly Update: 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023 57 - 96**

To provide information on adoption performance, progress and activity of Adopt London West.

**12 Any other urgent business**

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

**Date of the next meeting: Monday 5 February 2024**



## **MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE** **Monday 17 July 2023 at 5.00 pm**

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

### **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 Collymore, who was substituted by Councillor Kennelly.

### **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 24 April 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 the group had seen Wicked at the Theatre and it had been nice to see a live show. The group hoped to do more theatre trips including to see Hamilton, and other different types of activities to cover a range of interests. The group had started planning the Summer Fun Day and would be having dinner the following week to discuss the role Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) would play in the planning of that. CLIA wanted to bring back mentoring between CLIA and CIA, which J had been part of when he was part of CIA many years ago. He felt it was a good opportunity to get to know each other, for CIA to learn from the experience of CLIA members and for CIA to feel confident in taking over when members of CLIA left. CLIA would be involved in some upcoming interview panels for job roles and J hoped to get CIA involved in interview panels in the future. J had also been involved in cooking lessons with

Brent Care Journeys where they had learned to make desserts, including apple crumble and Eaton mess. J had been invited to Buckingham Palace with another care leaver which had been a good experience to see the gardens and meet the King. He concluded his update by informing the Committee that CLIA enjoyed the Hub where once a month they went to get food and meet each other with a member of staff present.

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 asked what other activities the group was looking to do. J replied that he would personally enjoy doing more outdoor activities such as camping or glamping. The Chair added that she had been in touch with OVO Arena about getting tickets for events for children in care and care leavers and she would follow that up in September in the hopes some tickets would be secured for future activities. J expressed he would be interested in travel projects that engaged in various activities such as training abroad or in other areas of the UK.

The Committee asked how J had found the mentoring scheme when he took part in it. He explained that his mentor had took part in Corporate Parenting Committee and J had accompanied him to that. As a result J had been able to get to know his mentor and become comfortable with other care leavers in the group, and was more comfortable in formal meetings such as Corporate Parenting Committee where he could talk without being nervous.

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. **Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2022-2023**

Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report, which presented the 2022-23 annual report on outcomes for looked after children and care leavers and a summary of the activity taking place. In introducing the report, she highlighted the following key points:

- There was a total of 319 children in care in the reporting year compared to 341 the previous year which was a 7% decrease. She explained that this was a result of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) turning 18 during that period.
- The Council had received positive feedback following its Ofsted ILACS Inspection in February 2023 regarding placement stability for children. There had been a reduction in movement of placement of approximately 3% in the reporting year.
- Comments by the inspector stated that the Council had embedded permanency planning for children and achieved permanency for children without delay, and the Council was making strides with early permanency with Adopt London West (ALW).
- There had been a lot of participation activity over the past 12 months, and the service intended to merge Brent Care Journeys and its Children in Care Council (Care in Action and Care Leavers in Action) into one single offer. Children valued the offer of those activities, particularly the hub, and there had been good success with the participation in the Grand Mentors scheme.
- Priorities for the coming year were around stabilising and retaining workforce so that children could benefit from stable, long-term relationships. There was a continued focus on working with partners to improve health outcomes, particularly emotional wellbeing. The service envisaged future development work with Brent Care Journeys in anticipation of the end of the 5-year partnership with Barnardo's

and continued to engage young people in that work. Another priority was around improving accommodation pathways and independent development for care leavers. The Council was also reinvigorating life story work for children in care to help them understand their narratives for why they were in care.

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

The Committee asked for further information regarding the priority for staff retention. They asked whether staff were leaving due to feeling overworked. Kelli Eboji highlighted that the Council was working hard to ensure there was a competitive offer for staff. The Council had also broadened its options for recruitment, including looking internationally, and would now be welcoming a cohort of international staff over the next few months. In relation to the reasons staff left, she highlighted this was for a myriad of reasons but nothing specific. Following Covid, many staff relocated or moved to remote working which had impacted the workforce, particularly in London. Staff were not necessarily leaving due to money but because the type of work was very stressful and complex, and the workload was such that people did not want to do it anymore, particularly if there were other pressures in their home that made the pressure of the work incompatible. The Council was offering a flexible working policy and training to combat some of this. Palvinder Kudhail (Director for Integration and Improved Outcomes, Brent Council) added that the Council had some very good agency staff who loved working with the Council and the Council was approaching agency staff at every opportunity to convert to permanent staff. The incentives offer had been revised recently which was improving the story around what the Council paid, and there was also the benefits of the Civic Centre building and supportive managers.

In response to how many staff were permanent compared to agency, Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) explained that, for the whole of the children and young people department, there was probably about 20% agency staff. In some areas of the department that figure was much higher, such as in locality services where some teams were around 50%. He highlighted that the Council employed a lot of long-term agency staff, so the number of agency workers had not been flagged as an issue during the recent Ofsted ILACS inspection. The Council preferred staff to convert to permanent rather than stay as agency and so there needed to be benefits to going permanent. However, he highlighted there was a pattern of staff generally not staying in social work posts long term anymore, with the average being about 5 years since qualifying. He explained this was not just being experienced in Brent, but in response the Council was doing as much as it could to support the workforce.

The Committee highlighted the fact that cases going over 26 weeks in court created a burden on the child because a decision was needed ASAP, and asked if there was a percentage breakdown of the reasons for delays. Kelli Eboji explained there was no percentage breakdown because there were often many reasons for delays, mainly due to the complexity of cases that Brent had.

The Committee asked how the 3-month trial to support permanency detailed in section 5.10.3 of the report was going. Kelli Eboji replied that the trial was one month into starting with someone in post doing a lot of liaising with social workers. However, the service was unsure whether the trial could be sustained due to the need for social work capacity to deal with the day-to-day work.

The Committee was pleased to see an increase in post-16 young people accessing education, employment and training. They asked for examples of how the Council had worked to increase those numbers and what type of employment, education or training young people were going into. Sharon Bucky (Head of Inclusion and Brent Virtual School) explained that the post-16 team was very focused and undertook a lot of work with the LAC

and permanency team on this work. The majority of work focused on bringing the team together with Brent Works. There was a Supported Targeted Interventions Team with Prospects who had additional investment through the GLA to support young people who were more challenging, such as those who had a difficult year 10 / 11 and did not have a sense of agency in their own education, employment and training. That team had a particular programme looking at cognitive behavioural job coaching and helping people into work through a supportive internship approach, building their skills to go into further training. This had been successful but there was still more work to do on that front with additional funding now available to do that alongside relevant partners. The Council also had apprenticeships available and were placing care leavers into apprenticeships in most Council departments. Kelli Eboji added that, from September, a new programme for work experience placements for young people in the Council would be launched for where young people were not yet ready for an apprenticeship in order to prepare them for one in the future. It was highlighted that young people were very interested in their own enterprises now so it was important to support young people into that.

The Committee had concerns that, although the numbers had decreased, there were still a number of children going missing from care. They asked for further information about the action taken when a young person went missing, what the main barriers were to finding them, and whether there was enough support from police to fully investigate and prioritise these instances. They were particularly concerned following the Casey Review which found failings of the police in 75% of child protection cases. Kelli Eboji explained that when a child went missing from care there were a number of protocols that the Council needed to follow. If a child was missing then there should be a named police officer responsible for the case. A Strategy meeting was required within 72 hours of the young person going missing which pulled together the entire professional network that might be involved in the case, including the police who were required at those meetings. The meeting would then explore the missing young person's connected friends, networks and school connections. She highlighted that the school had been a key contributor at a recent missing persons case as the child had been missing from placement but in contact with their school. She highlighted that the response differed depending on the contact partners received from the young person, as some children missing from placement still kept in contact. This complicated matters for the police as they would no longer consider them as missing, and, as a result, sometimes the Council would need to escalate these cases. Sonya Kalyniak (Head of Quality Assurance and Safeguarding, Brent Council) added that when the service had difficulties getting a police response they went to her for support and she could get someone to look into it quickly. Social workers were also good at escalating concerns.

On the whole, it was felt that the Council had a good relationship with the police and in meetings partners were clear on who should do what. Police would lead on intelligence, including known addresses, phone work and visiting locations the child was connected to, while social workers phoned networks and stayed in touch with the young person if they could. In some extreme cases, the Council had agreed the release of a photo of a looked after child or alerted the British Transport Police if it was thought the child was moving via public transport which then involved police forces in different parts of the country, meaning that the case could move from the local professional network to a much wider network in some cases. In all cases, safeguarding and protection was a priority including seeing the child as a victim rather than perpetrator if they were involved in county lines due to vulnerability and exploitation. When a child was returned to home or care a dedicated staff member conducted 'return home interviews' to obtain information about why the person went missing and where they went. This happened independently from the practitioner involved in the case to have a more open conversation with the young person. In response to what learning had been obtained from those who repeatedly went missing, Kelli Eboji highlighted that relationships made the difference. When a looked after child had many changes of people in their lives having one or two people who related to them was important. The child would often be challenging to engage with as they had been hurt and



did not trust very easily, so it was important to find the best person they could relate to in order to have those conversations. Going missing from placement was often a typical reason for placement breakdowns as those vulnerabilities and uncertainties made it difficult for foster carers to manage and created instability.

Continuing to discuss the process when a child went missing from care, Nigel Chapman added that there was a senior police officer responsible for bringing together a weekly meeting to discuss children missing from home and care which picked up any trends and contextual safeguarding issues. Nigel Chapman received weekly reports on those who were missing, and for those who were missing for longer periods of time he received information on where the police were in finding them. The Safer Brent Partnership had recently had a discussion about the police response to the Casey Review at a local level and sought an update from the Chief Superintendent. The response to the Casey Review was being dealt with as a Met-wide issue but the NW BCU had a willingness locally to do things better.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

## 9. **Annual Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Report 2022-2023**

Sonya Kalyniak (Head of Quality Assurance and Safeguarding, Brent Council) introduced the report which informed the Corporate Parenting Committee of the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to the quality assurance and improvement of services for looked after children (LAC). She informed the Committee that the IRO role was statutory to ensure LAC needs were fully met and that their care planning was progressing as it should. The report identified areas of practice strengths and weaknesses. In introducing the report, she highlighted the following key points:

- Brent had 2 in-house IROs who were permanent members of staff and commissioned the remainder of IROs to Aidhour. Aidhour had been contracted with Brent for over 20 years, meaning the IROs had been in place for a very long time and knew the children very well. Some IROs from Aidhour had started to retire from their role so there had been some staff turnover and it was important to ensure there was sustained stability there. The service was looking at options to gradually bring more IROs in-house as it was seeing a lot of stability with in-house IROs presently.
- There was a strong focus on the advocacy service for IROs, who routinely checked that children and young people knew about advocacy and how it could support them. Brent's Advocacy Services were provided by Coram Voice for LAC and care leavers, and they had exceeded their target specifications of providing 500 advocacy hours per year to 60 children. In the reporting year, they had provided 697 hours of advocacy support to 67 children and young people. This included advocacy for children with a child protection plan.
- The Ofsted ILACS Inspection had reviewed the IRO service in February 2023. The inspectors had found that most IROs were monitoring the progress of children's plans, that actions were progressed and letters from IROs to children following review were child focused and easy to understand. However, the inspection had found that the consistency of those letters required improvement and there was a need to ensure children were active participants in their review.
- There was a lot of work being undertaken on participation and ensuring IROs found creative ways to ensure children engaged in their reviews. That work would continue into the next reporting year.

- Following the Ofsted ILACS Inspection, the service had done some in-depth audit work into some of the themes the inspection had found and put some improvement work in place which the service was now seeing.

The Chair thanked Sonya Kalyniak for her update and invited comments and questions from Committee members with the following raised:

The Committee asked why table 7 of the report indicated that over half of LAC did not participate in their review meeting. Sonya Kalyniak explained that the IRO would aim to speak to the child in advance of the review and make every effort to speak to the child, see them in person, offer advocacy support or speak to someone else who knew the child very well. The service could undertake some benchmarking compared to other similar local authorities as to the number of LAC participating in review meetings and provide that information to the Committee in the next report. Sonya Kalyniak was of the view that it would be relatively comparative to other local authorities. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) added that Brent had similar participation figures at its last Ofsted Inspection but it had not been flagged as an issue previously. There was no national data captured so benchmarking data was not readily available, but the Council was generating some of its own performance indicators on this to monitor how many children were participating in their reviews. In addition to this, a Team Manager would be involved in the IRO review for any child that had not been directly involved to see what could be done differently next time. In response to whether hosting IRO reviews online could increase participation, the Committee heard that the Council tried to ensure as many reviews as possible were done in person to ensure the relationship work was done. However, the service had found that participation during lockdown was quite high because children found their reviews to be less intimidating online so now officers checked with young people to find out how they wanted to participate. Some children would only do their review online, but it was still important that the IRO met the child in advance to build their relationship. This would then count towards attending reviews directly.

The Committee asked whether having a case load between 60-65 children was in accordance with national guidance, as detailed in paragraph 7.1, as this seemed quite high. The Committee was advised that a caseload of 60-65 cases was the number nationally recommended in the IRO handbook. Although IROs did work directly with children in advance and during their reviews, they would not have day-to-day contact and so 60-65 cases was seen as a reasonable caseload.

The Committee asked for further information about paragraph 9.1 which detailed looking at social pedagogy approaches. Sonya Kalyniak explained that this was one of the approaches in the Brent practice framework which foster carers had received training on. The approach was a way that young people could learn or build relationships through activities done together. For example, during a LAC review it could be cooking a meal together and conducting the review while having the meal around the table. This approach took a lot more time and consideration, but it was Brent's ambition to do more of that type of review, depending on what the individual child wanted.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

## 10. **Annual Brent Virtual School (BVS) Report 2021-2022**

Sharon Buckby (Head of Inclusion and Brent Virtual School) introduced the report, which outlined the achievements for all children in care that had an assessment during the reporting year. She highlighted the following key points:

- There were 423 children and young people enrolled in BVS during the 2021-22 academic year.
- Priorities during 2021-2022 had been to train social workers on personal education plans (PEPs), measured through how well schools were using resources to improve the opportunities young people had. PEP work was high, with a 95% completion rate. The 5% of incomplete PEPs would likely be due to a placement move or change in education provision.
- The service wanted to focus more on how teachers could utilise young people's own interests for the PEPs rather than have a collective approach, and it was doing this through exploring enrichment provision.
- The attendance rate was high and almost equivalent to the cohort who were not looked after, and significantly higher than other local authorities. This was attributed to the joint work of foster carers, social workers and schools.
- BVS had ensured no child in care received a permanent exclusion. Where possible, education officers manage disruption occurring in school and Sharon Buckby had occasionally stepped in with the Head of the school to ensure any issues were resolved.
- There had been good feedback from Ofsted following the Ofsted ILACS inspection regarding how well BVS knew the children who were looked after and its focus on achievements.
- In relation to progress and attainment, Key Stage 2 had done very well and results were not dissimilar to mainstream cohorts. Generally, the longer a child was in care the better their educational achievements because they had stability and it was easier in Key Stages 1 and 2 to support young people into enrichment activities. It was found that attainment was lower for those who entered the care system late because their education had been disrupted and they lacked stability, so for Key Stage 3 and 4, those young people coming into care late had lower attainment in their GCSE results.
- There was an opportunity for BVS to support young people not going into education, employment and training by encouraging them to stay on into year 12 and 13, which were critical months in a young person's long-term pathway and outcomes.
- A challenge for children who went into care late was issues around trauma and attachment and so a lot of work around mental health had been done. For example, a recent forum with designated teachers had looked at triggers and trauma and how to move forward, and the commissioned contract with WEST at the Anna Freud Centre delivered targeted intervention for young people and the family as a whole.
- BVS conducted direct interventions with the top 50 children of most concern who were likely to be excluded or had poor attendance and there was crossover there with the most vulnerable groups who were missing or known in relation to contextual safeguarding.

In considering the reports, the following points were raised:

The Committee asked what the take-up of WEST's Reflective Fostering Group was, as detailed in section 9.3 of the report. Sharon Buckby explained that take up of that group was very good, where there was a lot of work done around trauma, attachment and support. WEST also ran surgeries and consultations for social workers and foster carers around emotional wellbeing.

The Committee asked whether there were any known reasons for the difficulty in improving grades in maths, which were lower in comparison to reading and writing. They were advised that maths was an issue across all children in the reporting year, including children

who were not looked after. It was a problem in the national education system. BVS did offer booster classes and there were teachers in the school enabled to provide catch up classes online and face to face through PALAC. BVS looked to aim higher for all children, irrespective of where they were in their journey and Sharon Buckby highlighted the importance of 1-1 support and group support within schools. She felt that was something that BVS could do more of, including looking at how education endowment programmes could be used to offer advice on how to improve maths literacy at primary school.

The Committee asked whether past exam papers were used at booster classes and preparatory classes. Sharon Buckby confirmed that was done for SATS and GCSE homework classes in the Civic Centre and online. The challenge for the reporting academic year had been that it was the first time many pupils had done exams since pre-pandemic. She highlighted that Brent had been lucky that all schools had remained open during the pandemic and BVS had pushed to ensure that teachers remained face to face with Brent's looked after children. Following the challenges, she highlighted BVS had been pleased with the results.

The Committee felt that the enrichment programme detailed in section 11.1 was an excellent programme. Sharon Buckby agreed it was a good programme but there were low participation numbers overall at 70 children in total. As a result, BVS was working with the John Lyons Foundation and Harrow, Ealing and Barnet to think about that offer and what difference it was making. The Equine Therapy Programme only tutored around 1 young person per year, but it was very much based around what young people wanted to do.

The action to develop a mentoring partnership with the Football Association and Wembley Stadium, detailed in section 10.1 would be followed up. Officers would report back what had been agreed. In considering other opportunities for enrichment, the Committee heard that BVS was looking to do some closer work with Scouts and Sea Cadets through their relationship with Welsh Harp, and Committee members highlighted links they had with other organisations that could offer enrichment including Brownies, RAF in Wembley, and Northwick Park Gardens.

The Committee noted that the report did not detail work by BVS on career advice and guidance. Sharon Buckby explained that individual schools were responsible for careers advice and guidance and there were hubs available in all schools in every area of Brent. BVS ensured that, through the PEP process, careers advice and guidance was given in years 8, 9, 10 and 11 and followed that through post-16 with supported targeted work with prospects.

RESOLVED:


- i) To note the contents of the report.

## **11. Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 6:30 pm

COUNCILLOR GWEN GRAHL  
Chair

	<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b> 16 October 2023
	<b>Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People</b>
	<b>Lead Cabinet Member: Cllr Gwen Grahl</b>
<b>Annual Report: Participation and Engagement with Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2022/23</b>	
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	N/A
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>List of Appendices:</b>	Appendix 1 - Summary of Activity for Care in Action Groups
<b>Background Papers:</b>	N/A
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Sonya Kalyniak Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance <a href="mailto:Sonya.Kalyniak@brent.gov.uk">Sonya.Kalyniak@brent.gov.uk</a>  Nicole Levy Service Manager Quality Assurance and Learning Development <a href="mailto:Nicole.Levy@brent.gov.uk">Nicole.Levy@brent.gov.uk</a>  Palvinder Kudhail Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes <a href="mailto:Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk">Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk</a>

## 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an overview of participation activity for care experienced children and young people in 2022/23. Participation activity includes Care in Action (CIA) groups which comprises Brent's Children in Care Council. The work of CIA groups is complimented by participation work undertaken by Barnardo's led Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) and through the Hub for Care Leavers. Through these activities, care experienced children and young people's voices contribute to the development of services. This report provides an overview of participation activity and demonstrates how feedback from care experienced young people informs practice and service development.

## **2.0 Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review and comment on the contents of this report. It is recommended that Corporate Parenting Committee endorse the development areas for 2023/24 outlined in section 4.11 of this report.

## **3.0 Detail**

### **3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities and Strategic Context**

- 3.1.1 Participation and engagement with looked after children and care leavers contributes to the following Borough Plan 2023-27 strategic priorities:

- **Prosperity and Stability in Brent**
- **Thriving Communities**
- **The Best Start in Life**

Participation and engagement work with children and young people provides opportunities for them to gain confidence and skills for their future careers. This work also allows the Council to understand the live experience of those with care experience and support them to thrive in the future. One outcome of the strategic priority of children having the best start in life is that there are more opportunities for young people to participate in decisions. This includes more engagement with young people from a range of different communities. This report outlines how care experienced children and young people have been able to shape services that impact on their lives through participation and engagement activities.

## **4.0 Background**

- 4.1.1 In Brent there are three Children in Care Council groups: Junior Care in Action (JCIA) (7 to 11-year-olds) meeting in school holidays, Care in Action (12 to 17-year-olds) and Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) (18 to 25-year-olds) which both meet monthly. Sessions are organised by participation workers with the support of group members who identify areas of work that are important to them. The sessions provide a mixture of activities that allow members to:

- voice their views and experiences of care
- participate in focused opportunities that involve them in the development of the services that they receive
- have opportunities to gain skills that will support their ability to participate, feedback and make suggestions
- have time and space to meet with peers for support, social interaction, and the sharing of experiences
- find out about local, London and national projects/events.

- 4.1.2 A summary of activity for Care in Action groups is available in Appendix 1.

### **4.2 Care in Action summary of achievements**

#### 4.2.1 Key achievements in 2022/23 include:

#### 4.2.2 Young people becoming increasingly confident in taking part in interviewing and staff appointments:

- 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 who has taken part in several interview panels
- Young person interview panels were a feature for all senior appointments including for the Chief Executive, Corporate Director, 2x CYP Directors as well as the Head of Service for LAC and Permanency
- Young people also took part in several other interview panels including for Personal Advisors, Participation Officers and the Participation Manager.

#### 4.2.3 Celebrating care experienced young people's achievements:

- 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 person panel. In addition, the achievements of both CIA members and wider care experienced young people were recognised and celebrated. A CLIA member was the recipient of the Leader's Award and another member of CIA was the recipient of the Positive Role Model Award.
- The 2022 staff conference showcased the multimedia production from care experienced young people working that had been developed in conjunction with the KILN theatre and BCJ. This meant that over 400 staff had the opportunity to view the amazing work and messages from Brent care experienced young people.

#### 4.2.4 Care experienced young people continued to influence service delivery and shape the local offer through commissioning:

- The Voice and Influence Subgroup of the Local Partnership Meeting for LAC and Care Leavers has continued and further developed with an agreed terms of reference and BCJ being an active member. The subgroup helps to connect participation activities across CYP with membership also including the Virtual School, Fostering, LAC and Permanency teams alongside the participation workers. It has consistent attendance by members of CIA and CLIA members to develop new initiatives.
- CIA worked with BCJ to develop a codesigned prototype to enable system change. Young people said that they wanted to spend more time developing relationships with their social workers. As a result, an activity budget was piloted where every 6 months Social Workers are able to access funding to do an activity with the young person.
- A campaign focus in 2022/23 was improving relationships with carers, this was in direct response to findings from our last Bright Spots survey

results in early 2021. A “Do’s and Don’ts” poster for foster carers was developed has been incorporated into foster carer training.

- 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 panel for Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing tender; subsequently extra funding was secured enabling the project to widen its initial scope and CLIA members again took an active role by evaluating the tenders returned for the Targeted Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing provision. Their feedback influenced the final decision for the award of the 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.

4.2.5 The 2022/23 year provided several opportunities for Junior CIA, CIA and CLIA to come together and gain new experiences whilst also having the opportunity to share their views and influence services.

- Both CLIA and CIA were offered the opportunity to attend a residential experience. 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.
- There were also varied and regular half term, Easter and summer activities for JCIA, for example a trip to indoor bouncy castle venue called Inflatation.

Other events for the wider care experienced group included:

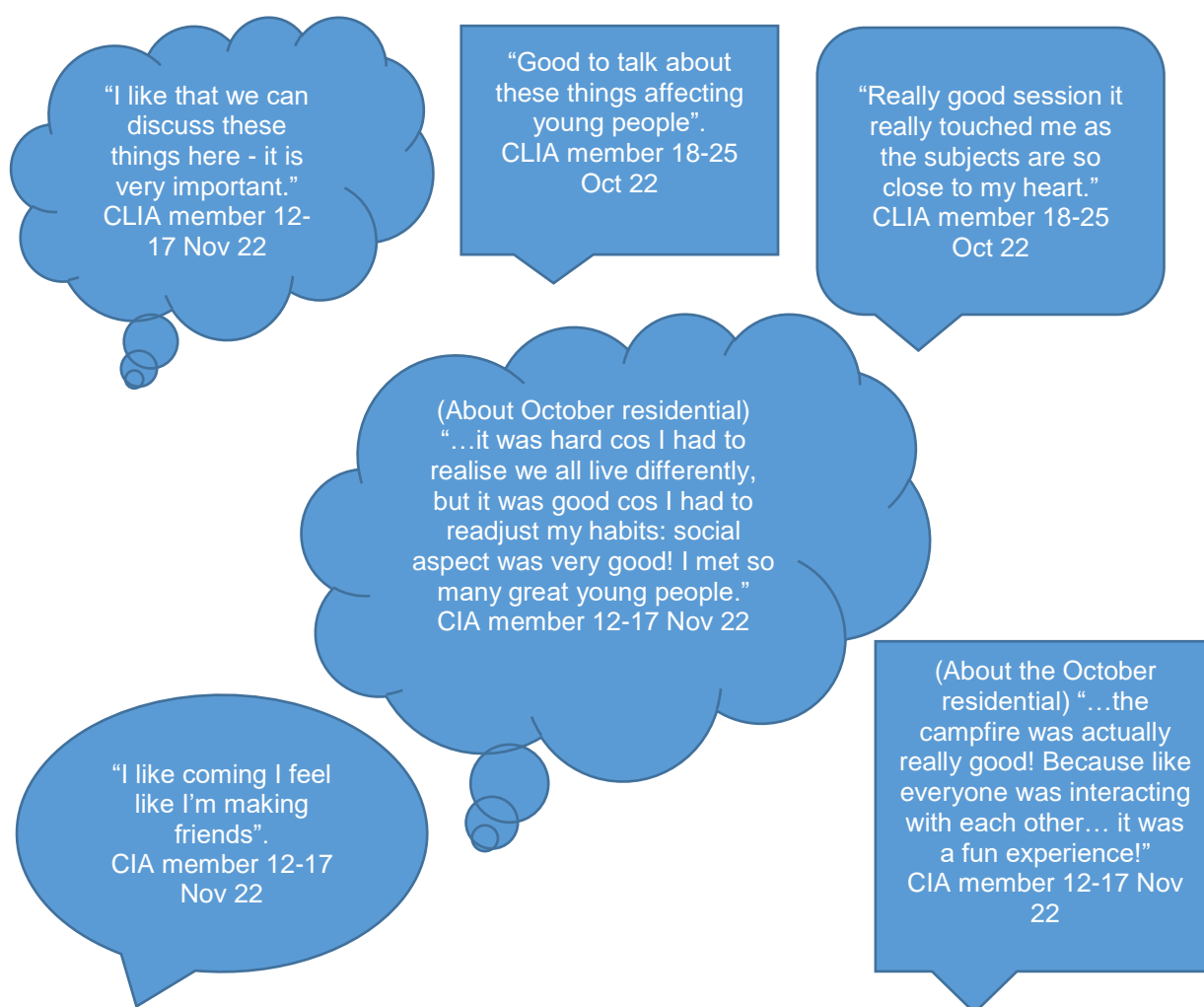
- C(L)IA hosted a summer fun day that was attended by over 50 children, foster carers and care leavers.



- 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.

### 4.3 What children and young people in Care in Action groups have told us has gone well?

4.3.1 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.



4.3.2 There continues to be a core group of children and young people in each of the Care in Action groups. They are actively involved in thinking of 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.

#### 4.3.4 Brent Care Journeys and joint working

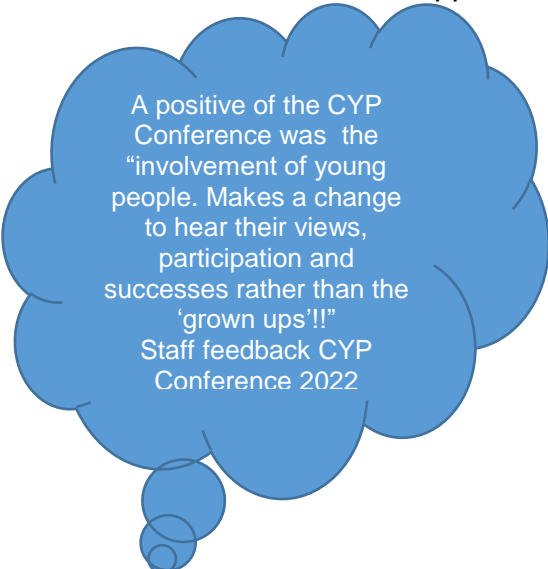
4.3.5 Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) a five-year partnership between Brent Council and Barnardo's. It is one of Barnardo's Core Priority Programmes as part of their 10-year strategy focusing on outcomes for care experienced young people and will continue until 2025. BCJ has continued to deliver a wide range of activities, from one-off events, to training, and ongoing workshops.

4.3.6 In preparation for the end of Barnardo's 5-year partnership in March 2025 CIA and CLIA have this year begun to work more closely with BCJ completing joint initiatives and sharing expertise. The Children's Services Manager for Brent Care Journeys now attends the monthly Voice and Influence sub-group of the Local Partnership Meeting providing the opportunity for BCJ and CIA to pull together to develop a unified Brent participation offer and develop shared priorities and opportunities for joint working.

4.3.7 In one instance a CIA member worked with BCJ to develop a codesigned prototype to develop memory boxes for care experienced young people. They then presented the concept to CIA encouraging other members to become more involved in the next stages of the codesign process.

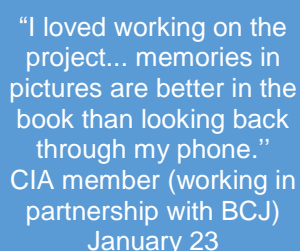
4.3.8 Young people that were members of both BCJ and CLIA took part in a theatre production at the Kiln Theatre which involved 3 films, movement, soundscape, monologue, poetry and set design. The participation team then worked with BCJ and the wider production to ensure that the production was showcased at the 2022 staff conference, with a live performance, videos and multimedia presentation all available to all CYP staff. Staff feedback was overwhelmingly positive and reported how they valued the opportunity to see the production which highlighted young people's experience of being in care.

4.3.9 The Ofsted ILACS report (Feb 2023) states children and young people "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".



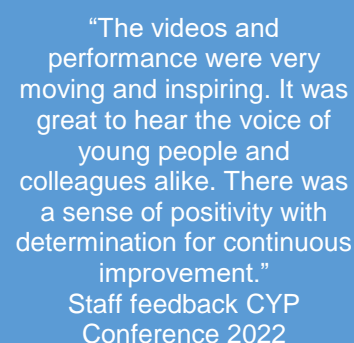
A positive of the CYP Conference was the "involvement of young people. Makes a change to hear their views, participation and successes rather than the 'grown ups'!!"

Staff feedback CYP Conference 2022



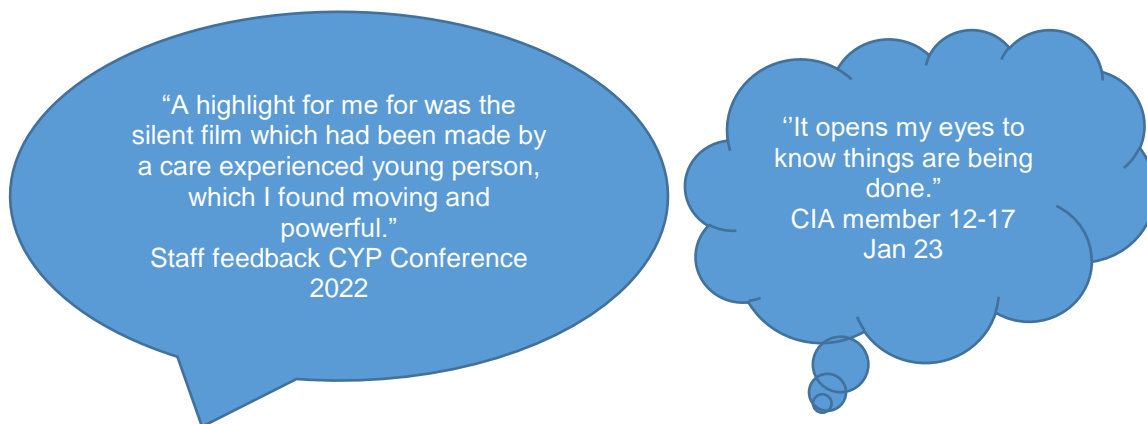
"I loved working on the project... memories in pictures are better in the book than looking back through my phone."

CIA member (working in partnership with BCJ)  
January 23



"The videos and performance were very moving and inspiring. It was great to hear the voice of young people and colleagues alike. There was a sense of positivity with determination for continuous improvement."

Staff feedback CYP Conference 2022



"A highlight for me for was the silent film which had been made by a care experienced young person, which I found moving and powerful."

Staff feedback CYP Conference 2022

"It opens my eyes to know things are being done."

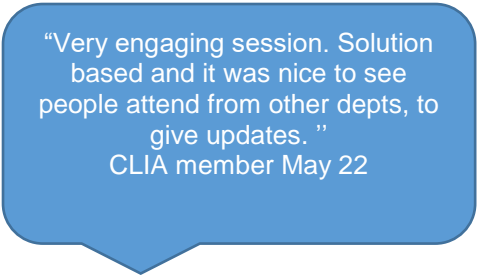
CIA member 12-17 Jan 23

#### **4.4 What children and young people said needs to improve**

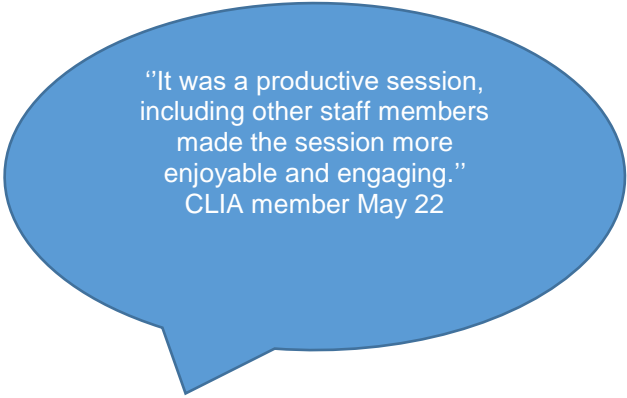
- 4.4.1 Young people have continued to express frustration with the number of staff changes across the professional network that supports them, particularly in relation to social work changes, which was evidenced by Ofsted commenting in the ILACS report (February 2023) that "...not all children in care benefit from stability in their relationships with workers, due to staff changes." Ofsted also acknowledged that "...services for children in care and care leavers have declined from outstanding to good, due to reduced oversight in some areas of social work practice and challenges in recruitment and retention of staff."
- 4.4.2 Young people want to be told in a timely way when social workers are leaving and to be provided the contact details of their new social worker at the earliest opportunity so that they can have organised introductions, handovers and goodbyes. Unfortunately, this was identified last year and remains an issue.
- 4.4.3 Young people continue to worry about the cost-of-living crisis and how it disproportionately impacts upon care experienced young people. Some young people have requested that "care as a protected characteristic" become a focus of work in 2022-23 and further consultation is planned in 2023-24.

#### **4.5 Engagement with Senior Leaders and Members**

- 4.5.1 Having met with young people from CIA, CLIA and BCJ, the Ofsted ILACS (Feb 2023) report states 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."
- 4.5.2 Sessions and events have continued to be attended by senior leaders including the Corporate Director, Directors, Head of Service for both LAC and Permanency and SQA and the Principal Social Worker.

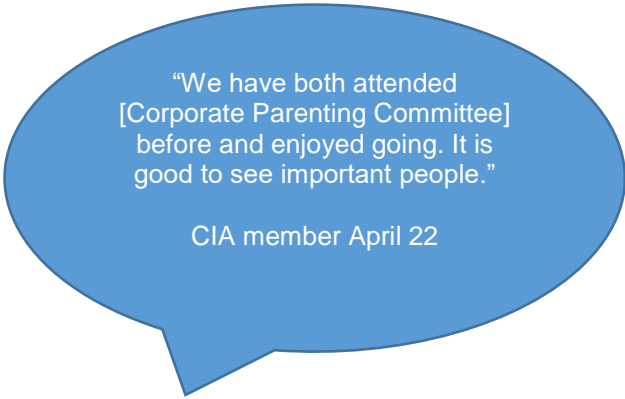


"Very engaging session. Solution based and it was nice to see people attend from other depts, to give updates."  
CLIA member May 22



"It was a productive session, including other staff members made the session more enjoyable and engaging."  
CLIA member May 22

- 4.5.3 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 is good to see important people."

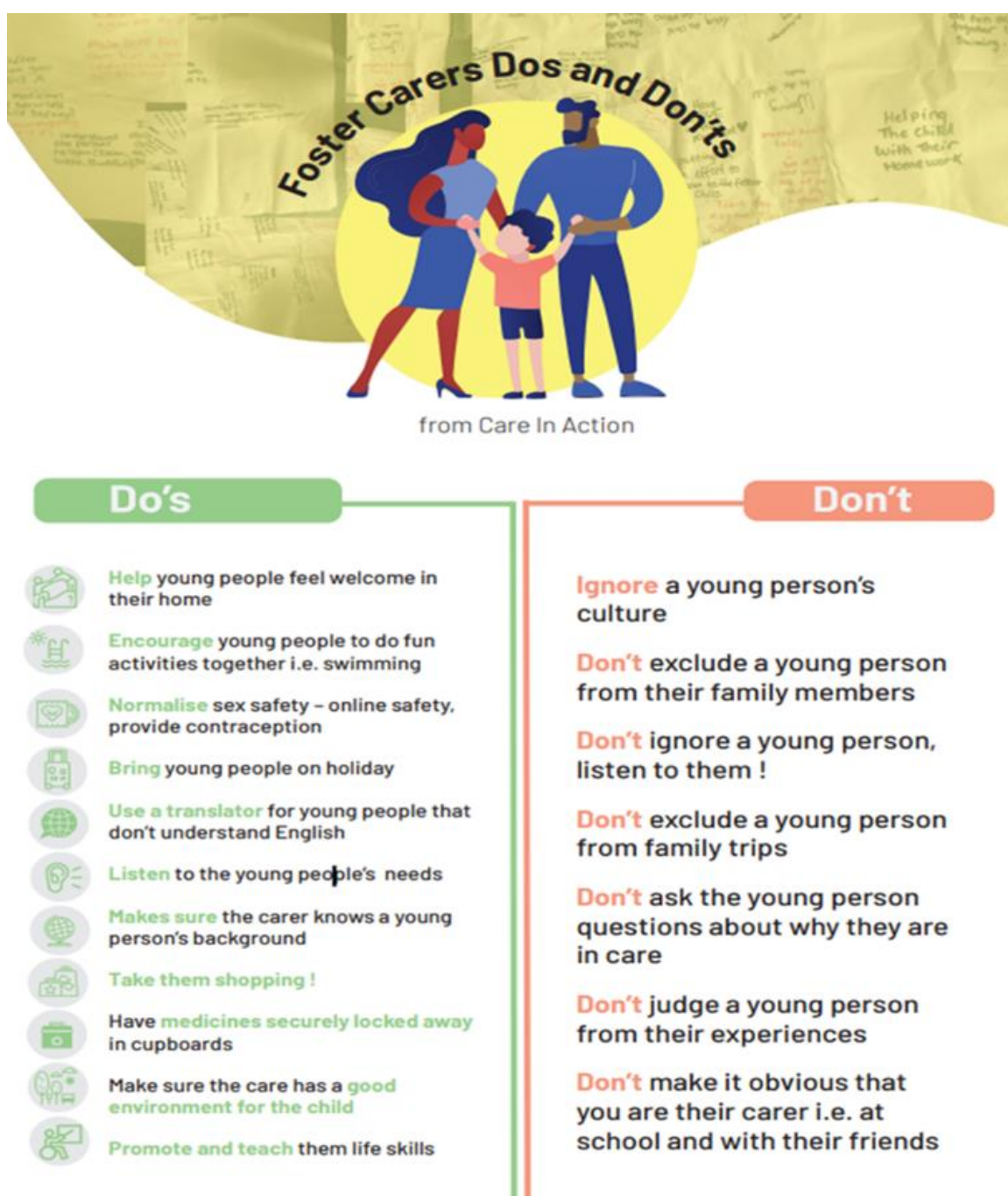
CIA member April 22

- 4.5.4 Representatives of CIA/CLIA have also attended the Local Partnership Meeting for LAC and Care Leavers and are members of the Voice and Influence subgroup 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.

#### **4.6 Focus area: Bright Spots Survey Findings**

- 4.6.1 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. The survey was carried out in for children in care in 2021 and care leavers in 2022 with findings reported in the 2021/22 annual report.
- 4.6.2 In 2022/23 CIA groups continued to focus on developing campaigns based on the findings from this survey. For example, one finding was the need to improve relationships with carers when children first enter care. Consequently, our

children and young people developed a “Do’s and Don’ts” poster for foster carers which is being incorporated into foster carer training.



4.6.7 A campaign focus for Care Leavers in action was responding to 19% of care leavers who answered the Bright Spots Survey in 2021/22 did not feel that they have a trusted person who stuck by them.

4.6.8 Care Leavers in Action have developed the below piece of work is intended for use by all Trusted Adults including social workers, foster carers, IROs, independent visitors and PAs. The aim is to improve understanding of what it



takes to build a trusting relationship between an adult involved in the care of a young person. The leaflet also has QR code embedded to capture feedback.

## THINK ABOUT OUR JOURNEY

Let's talk about trust from a care experienced perspective!

If you are trying to build a relationship with a young person, you need to think about how hard it may be for us to trust you

Having someone you trust is really important but some young people don't have anyone that they trust. In the last Bright Spots survey, nearly one in five (19%) of the young people reported not having someone they trusted and who stuck by them

## BUILDING SAFE AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Safe, stable relationships help young people build attachment, develop self-confidence and esteem, resilience, in addition to helping them build trust in adults again. They can learn positive relational experiences as opposed to previous negative experiences and trauma. By building a strong connection with someone you could also create a much-needed sense of belonging and identity.

## CARE LEAVERS IN ACTION'S TOP TIPS ON HOW TO BUILD A TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP:

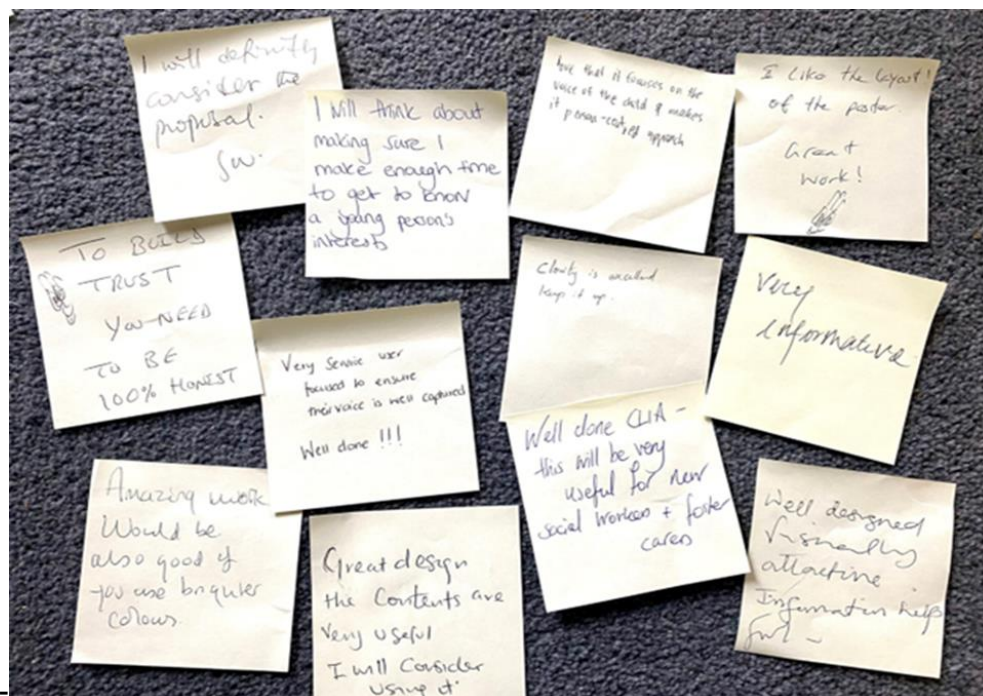
- "Show up to big things like graduations, performances, award ceremonies".
- "Consistency, continuity- keep things the same or give reasonable notice for changes"
- "My last PA kept it real with me"
- Telling them different channels they can go to... and groups they can join to have their voices heard such as care leavers in action...with it not over lapping with external organisations such as Barnardos and children's care in council should be statutory for all local authorities
- Knows how to listen Not misbehaving Honesty SMART Targets Advocate
- "Motivating the younger generation to go and succeed in life and make a name for themselves". "Being there for someone who is going through something and not judging them"
- "Participation staff caring about how we get home and if we arrived safely"
- "Getting to know the young person outside of care, like attending care leavers stuff, keen interests and willing to try new things"
- "Motivating a young person to achieve to the best of their ability. They believe on being a long life champion and aim to be happy in life."
- Honesty Empathetic Consistency Authenticity "Say it how it is!"

"TO BE TRUSTED IS A GREATER COMPLIMENT THAN BEING LOVED"

"TRUST IS THE HIGHEST FORM OF HUMAN MOTIVATION"

"LEARNING TO TRUST IS ONE OF LIFE'S MOST DIFFICULT TASKS"

Please use this QR code to feed back to Care Leavers in Action on this leaflet



## **4.7 The Care Leavers' Hub**

- 4.7.1 The Care Leavers' Hub activity scheme was developed in November 2018 and provides care leavers space to social with other care leavers and combat isolation.
- 4.7.2 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.
- 4.7.3 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.
- 4.7.4 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.
- 4.7.5 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.

## **4.8 Local events, opportunities and initiatives that are promoted with care experienced young people**

- 4.8.1 Through a Participation and Enrichment group on Microsoft Teams, participation and enrichment activities are regularly shared with social workers and personal advisors so that they can bring them to the attention of children, young people and carers. Some areas that have been promoted in the last year include:
  - a) Brent Youth Parliament – a youth led group that supports young people in Brent to express their views, have a say in decisions that affect them and learn new skills.
  - b) Pride of Brent Youth Awards – recognising and celebrating the outstanding achievements of Brent's brilliant young people.
  - c) Local offer consultation - Consultation workshop delivered by LCT in conjunction with BCJ in 2022 with regards local offer.

- d) Apprenticeships - 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.
- e) 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.
- f) ASDAN Independent Skills Programme or the Gordon Brown Practical Skills weekend - 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.
- g) Grandmentors scheme - 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.

#### **4.9 London and national events**

- 4.9.1 Children in Care Council Partnership – a representative from each London borough attends this network to discuss issues that care experienced children and young people face. The group also carries out research, campaigning and projects.

#### **4.10 Keeping up to date with best practice: London Participation Network meeting**

- 4.10.1 The Acting Participation and Engagement Lead has continued to attend London wide meetings for participation officers. The meetings are a support network, where officers share what is happening in their borough. These meetings have proven to be invaluable as a forum for learning about best practice. The meetings are very solution focused.

#### **4.11 Development Areas for 2023/24**

- 4.11.1 Participation Team Staffing: The Participation team underwent a restructure in 2022-23. The aim of which has been to provide increased capacity and resilience within the service through a team-based approach. The agreed realignment builds additional capacity having created a part time team manager role allowing greater day to day focus on developing participation in Brent. The aim is to establish a pool of workers that can be utilised to cover especially busy periods including the summer holidays and residential activities. Critically, the



creation of a bank of participation support workers, paid on an hourly basis will facilitate the opportunity to casually employ care experienced young people to support C(L)IA events.

4.11.2 Recruitment has been challenging, an interim manager was appointed in February with significant participatory experience, and she was keen to apply to the role full- time. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen personal circumstances she has had to move abroad so is no longer available. However, in the 5 months that she was in post it was apparent that the model worked and provided then necessary oversight and expertise to continue to drive innovative participation. Currently, the team is staffed by 2 participation workers with permanent roles being advertised with the aim for a full team of permanent staff in 2023-24.

4.11.3 In 2023-24 there needs to increased focus on the following areas:

- Further development work to achieve a unified approach with Brent Care Journeys to ensure that the work Barnardo's started continues at the end of our 5-year partnership in March 2025.
- Continue to explore ways to increase attendance and participation at all CIA groups.
- A new Bright Spots survey will be relaunched in October/November 2023 to gain feedback from care experience children and young people. The results will be used to improve services.
- Work with CIA and CLIA to further explore their views of care experience as a protected characteristic. If so, to develop consultation with wider audience of care experienced children and young people.
- Work with wider service to increase children and young people's attendance and involvement in LAC reviews and care planning.
- Widen the participation offer beyond care experience young people to ensure that voice of all children we work with is sought and their views and opinions are used to influence service design.

## **5.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement**

5.1 This report demonstrates that the voices of care experiences young people are critical to the development of services that impact upon them.

## **6.0 Financial Considerations**

6.2 There are no financial considerations arising from this report.

## **7.0 Legal Considerations**

7.1 Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them and to have their views considered and taken seriously. Section 19 of the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014 protects participation of young people by law.

## **8.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations**

8.1 There are no Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) considerations arising from this report.

## **9.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations**

9.1 There are no climate change and environmental considerations arising from this report.

## **10.0 Communication Considerations**

10.1 There are no communication considerations arising from this report.

**Report sign off:**

***Nigel Chapman***


Corporate Director of Children and Young People

## Appendix 1: Summary of Activity for Care in Action Groups

The below table summarises key areas of activity for Care in Action Groups in 2022/23 in addition to monthly meetings.

Consultations / Project	Month	Lead / Team	CLIA participants	CIA participants	JCIA participants	Total
Junior care in action Flip out trip	April 2022	SQA Participation Team			6	6
Interview Panel Training	April 2022	SQA Participation Team	3	7	0	10
Care in Action recruitment day	April 2022	SQA Participation Team	3	7	-	10
CLIA Residential to Gordon Brown	July 2022 (CLIA)	SQA Participation Team	5		-	5
Voice of the Child Practice Conference	July 2022	SQA Participation Team		2		2
Summer Fun Day  Purpose of the event: - To bring care experienced children and young people together. - To promote CIA groups to children young people and carers	August 2022	SQA Participation Team				58
JCIA Inflationation  Three new members Consultation regarding foster carer dos and don'ts	August 2022	SQA Participation Team		5	7	12
CIA Residential to Gordon Brown	October 2022	SQA Participation Team		10		10
London Zoo Christmas celebration open to all care experienced young people carers and foster siblings	December 2022	SQA Participation Team		-	-	58 (30+ children and young people)

CIA and JCIA – Cinema trip	Feb 2023	SQA Participation Team		4	9	13
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	<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b> <b>16th October 2023</b>
	<b>Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People</b>
	<b>Lead Cabinet Member: Cllr Gwen Grahl</b>
<b>Pan London Care Leavers Compact Report</b>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	ALL
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	N/A
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>List of Appendices:</b>	Appendix - Brent Care Leaver Offer
<b>Background Papers:</b>	Care Leaver Covenant- <a href="#">Local Authorities Engagement - Care Leaver Covenant (mycovenant.org.uk)</a>
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Afzal Ahmed Service Manager, Looked After Children and Permanency <a href="mailto:Afzal.Ahmed@brent.gov.uk">Afzal.Ahmed@brent.gov.uk</a>  Kelli Eboji Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency <a href="mailto:Kelli.Eboji@brent.gov.uk">Kelli.Eboji@brent.gov.uk</a>  Palvinder Kudhail Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes <a href="mailto:Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk">Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk</a>

## 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 To inform Members about the Pan London Care Leavers Compact.
- 1.2 To inform Members of our current progress against the Compact and areas for development in 2023–24. Our ambition is to achieve an excellent outcome for every young person.

## 2.0 Recommendation(s)

That the Committee:

- 2.1 Note the contents of the report and support improvement in the consistency of Brent's local offer to include updating some elements of our housing offer as set out in paragraphs at 3.3.
- 2.2 Endorse the Council's adoption of the national Care Leavers Covenant and support its implementation across the Council.

### **3.0 Detail**

#### **3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context**

- 3.1.1 The Pan London Care Leavers Compact contributes to the following borough priorities:

##### **Prosperity and Stability in Brent**

The Compact aims to tackle inequality and disproportionality for care experienced young people in London by creating a consistent response to housing need across local authority areas. It also aims to ensure care experienced young people can access safe, secure and affordable housing.

##### **The Best Start in Life**

Aligned to the borough plan priority for babies, children and young people to get the best start in life, the Compact aims to ensure that care leavers receive the support they need, when they need it, particularly at the important point of transition to adulthood.

##### **A Healthier Brent**

In order for care experienced young people to have good health outcomes social determinants of health such as inequalities in housing, employment and income must be addressed. The key elements of the Compact aims to address these inequalities.

#### **3.2 Background**

- 3.2.1 As of 31 March 2023 there were 438 care experienced young adults aged 18-25 open to the leaving care service.
- 3.2.2 Multiple sources reference the poor outcomes of children who leave the care of local authorities compared to those who live with their families. These young adults tend to be living independently earlier than their peers, often at a distance from 'home' with less support and intersecting disadvantage.
- 3.2.3 The Government's Independent Review of Children's Social Care (March/April 2022), a key policy driver in children's social care, makes recommendations regarding housing and care leavers as follows:

*"Recommendation 2: Introduce a stronger safety net against care leaver homelessness by removing the local area connection test, ending intentionally homeless practice, providing a rent guarantor scheme and increasing the leaving care grant to £2,438 for experienced people".*

- 3.2.4 The Pan London Care Leavers Compact provides a framework for developing consistency, breadth and quality in the support offered to London's care leavers. The compact was initiated in early 2022 to support a more consistent and high-quality offer for care leavers across the capital.
- 3.2.5 It is a duty under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 that England's local authorities must publish information about the services offered for care leavers. Each London borough therefore has a care leaver offer, but these are individual to each area and, as a result, there is a lack of consistency. Care leavers do not always live in the borough responsible for them, which poses further challenges with the variation in offers. It is also important that the offer to care leavers reaches beyond services provided in the local area. Partners such as health, education and transport have important roles to play, as do the private and voluntary sectors.
- 3.2.6 Ofsted introduced a new, separate judgement about the experiences and progress of care leavers to the inspection framework for local authorities in January 2023. Brent was inspected against this in February 2023 with an outcome of a 'good' judgement. Our current care leaver local offer is published on the Brent website (see appendix) and is in the process of revision following feedback from the recent Ofsted inspection. It will be published early in the new year following a period of co-design and consultation with young people.

### **3.3 Pan-London Care Leavers Compact**

- 3.3.1 London's Local Authorities are all being asked, by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023, to make six commitments to London's Care Leavers as part of a Pan London Care Leavers Compact. There are five housing related positions and an additional commitment relating to whole council support of Care Leavers through membership of the Care Leavers Covenant. The Compact aims to maximise consistency and quality in the 'local offers' of support to Care Leavers by Local Authorities and their partners.
- 3.3.2 The commitments within the Compact are set out below, including the current Brent position underneath each sub-heading. Overall, as a local authority we are meeting most of the key elements of the covenant.
- 3.3.3 **London Local Authorities offer a full council tax exemption for their Care Leavers (18-25) that live within the borough.**
- a. We have a council tax scheme for care experienced young people which came into effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2018.
  - b. We waive council tax payment obligations for all our care experienced young people regardless of where they live. For those living outside of the borough we ensure they have applied for any exemptions from their local council.
- 3.3.4 **Adopting the policy that no care leaver (18-25) should be found intentionally homeless.**

- a. Our housing policy ensures that care leavers are offered supported accommodation until they feel they are ready for their own tenancy, hence why they have never been in a position to be found intentionally homeless. Brent is the only London Authority that is still offering social housing tenancies to our care experienced young people.

**3.3.5 Offering a rent deposit scheme for care leavers (18-25) for whom private rented accommodation is assessed as a suitable option.**

Brent does not currently offer a rent deposit scheme for care experienced young people, where it is suitable for them to go into the private rented sector. However, it will be one of the recommendations from a current project looking at the cost of looked after children/care leavers placements. This will be presented to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) in October 2023.

**3.3.6 Ensuring there is a joint protocol between Housing and Children's Services for Care Leavers in line with good practice advice.**

Brent has a joint protocol in place between Housing and Children's Services that ensures care leavers are prioritised when considering their longer-term housing options and support needs.

**3.3.7 Adopting the principle that Care Leavers up to the age of 25 are to be found as being in 'priority need' under homelessness legislation.**

Brent has not officially adopted this principle, but in practice the close working relationship between the Council's Housing Needs and Looked After Children and Permanency services through the joint protocol has meant this has not been an issue.

**Action:** The joint protocol will be revised by the end of December 2023 to ensure this principle is formally adopted.

**3.3.8 London Borough of Brent becomes a signatory to the Care Leaver Covenant.**

- a. The Covenant is both separate and connected to the Compact. The Covenant is a national improvement programme, following governmental commitment to care leavers. The Covenant encourages a 'whole council approach' - the strategic idea that responsibility for being a corporate parent sits across the whole council and not only with those people and departments that have 'care leaver' in their job descriptions. As well as council tax exemption and housing commitments, the Covenant commits local authorities to promote training and employment opportunities, revising social value policies to ensure that care leavers are considered as a standard part of procurement practice and connecting local economic development activity for the benefit of care leavers. Brent has demonstrated whole-council support for care experienced young people without officially adopting the covenant. For example, there are ring-fenced care leaver apprenticeships in place and a specific programme to support employment opportunities.

- b. The Compact asks local authorities to sign up to the care leaver covenant. The service will take the covenant to relevant Council departments and to



CMT before the end of this year to ensure effective visibility and promotion of the aims of the covenant.

The Corporate Parenting committee is asked to endorse Brent becoming a signatory to the Care Leaver Covenant.

### 3.3.9 The issue of **recognising being care experienced as a ‘protected characteristic’**.

Care Leavers and those who support them have advocated for some time that care experience should be recognised as a ‘protected characteristic’. This gained further traction through the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care (2022). The Review discussed the stigma and discrimination that people experience because of being in care or care experienced and argues that it is similar in nature to other groups that have a legally protected characteristic under the Equality Act (2021). It recommended that care experience should be made a protected characteristic to give employers and public services greater authority to put in place programmes to promote better outcomes for care experienced people.

Despite the Review’s position, the DfE response (Stable Homes Built on Love, 2023) did not follow through with any related proposals. A small number of London local authorities have decided to pass resolutions this year adopting this position. The implications of such a position are still to be fully understood; whilst the position is not binding in law, it will likely make a difference to the development of new council policy (through EDI assessments) and of whole council approaches to support Care Leavers.

As this is such a recent area of development, around which learning is still being gathered, there is no recommendation for it to be included within the London Compact. The implications of taking such an approach within Brent are being considered and any proposals will come forward if it can be seen to clearly improve outcomes.

## 4.0 **Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement**

4.1 *“The Compact truly focuses on involving care leavers in decision making and policy changing can help to promote greater transparency and accountability in the care system. Care leavers can act as advocates for their peers and help to ensure that the care system is held accountable for its actions and decisions.”* Pan London Children in Care Council

4.2 Brent care leavers have been consulted and involved in the development of our current Care Leaver offer and they will be involved in the review of the offer.

4.3 Brent care leavers in partnership with our Participation Team have also begun discussions on care leavers as a “protected characteristic” and these discussions will inform future work.

## 5.0 **Financial Considerations**

- 5.1 There are currently no financial considerations arising from this report. However, the cost implication of offering a rent deposit scheme for care experienced young people will be considered at a later stage following the outcome of a project reviewing the cost of looked after children/care leaver placements.

## **6.0 Legal Considerations**

- 6.1 Section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires local authorities to publish information about services offered to care leavers and other services that may assist care leavers to transition to adulthood and independent living. This will include financial support, housing, health, education, and training. The local offer should ensure that all care leavers have a clear idea of what services are available to them, as well as helping to highlight any gaps in provision or support that the young person may need.
- 6.2 There is no specific legal or statutory duty on the local authority in respect of the Pan London Care Leavers Compact. The progress of Compact has come about through a vision and desire to work together across London authorities to bring partners together to deliver high quality and well-coordinated support for care experienced young people.
- 6.3 Recommendation 2.2 is for the Committee to endorse Brent adopting the national Care Leavers Covenant and support its implementation across the Council. It is clear that adoption will require the Council to review a range of policies and practices, to include the revision of social value policies to ensure that care leavers are considered as a standard part of procurement practice and connecting local economic development activity for the benefit of care leavers.
- 6.4 The implications of the council recognising care experience as a protected characteristic are still to be fully understood; and whilst the position is not binding in law, it will likely have influence on the development of new council policy and of whole council approaches to support Care Leavers.

## **7.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations**

- 7.1 Please refer to section 6.4.
- 7.2 By adopting the principles outlined in the Compact and the Covenant, services provided to care leavers will ensure greater fairness and more equal treatment.

## **8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations**

- 8.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

## **9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)**

9.1 There are no human resource or property considerations.

## **10.0 Communication Considerations**

10.1 At this stage there are not any communication considerations.

**Report sign off:**

***Nigel Chapman***

Corporate Director of Children and Young People

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## Local Offer to Care Leavers 2022 – 2024

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### 1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

### 2. Support we must provide by law

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

- **Personal Advisor**

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

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

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

- Be involved in understanding your needs and preparing your Pathway Plan so that you can get a good idea of what you want to do with your life;

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

### **3. Support we offer**

#### **• Education, Employment and Training**

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

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

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

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

Our other education and training support offer to you includes:

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

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

- **Accommodation**

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

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

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

Our other accommodation support offer to you includes:

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

- A 'Setting up Home Allowance' of £2,000 (based on assessed need) for items you need to set up home like appliances, bedding and furniture.
- If you don't want to live in Brent because you have friends, family or connections elsewhere you will need to talk to your PA. Your PA can make contact with the Local Authority where you wish to live to see if they are able to assist you.
- A decorating allowance if the property has not been decorated (if housed in a Brent Housing Property), such as to buy paint or wallpaper;
- To give you advice to prevent you from becoming intentionally homeless in Brent and giving you a second chance to sustain your tenancy.
- You will be provided with an independent life skills programme including the involvement of activities to gain practical skills such as cooking, budgeting and staying in a foster environment.
- If you are in a position to purchase the accommodation you live in, your PA will signpost you to the relevant information

### • **Your Health and Wellbeing**

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

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

### • **Finances**

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

The law and the guidance says:



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

Our additional support offer to you includes:

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

- **Relationships**

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

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

- **Participation in Society**

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

- Workshops to inform you more about participation in society and having your voice heard, led by the Chief Executive of the council.

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

#### 4. Who can help?

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

##### Brent Leaving Care Team

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

When are we open:

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

How to contact us:

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

Disabled Children's Team you can contact by Brent's Family Front Door on 020 89374300.

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

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

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

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

CIA aims to:

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


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

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

Other places you can go for help:

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

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	<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b> 16 October 2023
	<b>Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People</b>
	<b>Lead Cabinet Member: Cllr Gwen Grahl</b>
<b>Brent Fostering Service 6-monthly Monitoring Report:          1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023</b>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	N/A
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>List of Appendices:</b>	N/A
<b>Background Papers:</b>	N/A
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	<p>Elena Muller            Service Manager, Looked After Children and Permanency  <a href="mailto:elena.muller@brent.gov.uk">elena.muller@brent.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Kelli Eboji            Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency  <a href="mailto:Kelli.eboji@brent.gov.uk">Kelli.eboji@brent.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Palvinder Kudhail            Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes  <a href="mailto:Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk">Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk</a></p>

## 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children. It includes relevant data on the service's performance and activities, as well as updates on the functioning and progress of the Fostering Panel. Additionally, the report outlines the developments that have taken place in the Service throughout the year, as well as any planned initiatives for the upcoming period. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).

- 1.2 Brent Fostering Service operates in accordance with the Fostering National Minimum Standards, the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. These regulations are the foundation of the regulatory framework for fostering services under the Care Standards Act 2000. This report details the activity of Brent's fostering service from the 1 of April 2023 to the 30 of September 2023.

## **2.0 Recommendation(s)**

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

## **3.0 Detail**

### **3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context**

- 3.1.1 This report sets out the management of the local authority's inhouse fostering service and the developments that have taken place in the reporting period. The work of the fostering service contributes to the following borough priorities:

- **The Best Start in Life**
- **Prosperity and Stability**
- **A Healthier Brent**
- **Thriving Communities**

In order for care experienced young people to have the best start in life, prosperity and stability, safety, and good health they need safe, stable homes with primary carers who love them and who are able to meet their holistic needs. The fostering service contributes to these priorities by recruiting, assessing, and supporting foster carers and connected person carers for Brent children and young people. Providing safe, stable, loving placements for children and young people when they are unable to remain with their parent/s, means that they will have the best life chances.

## **4.0 Background**

### **4.1 Service Priorities**

- 4.1.1 The in-house fostering function is located within the LAC and Permanency Service (LACPS) of the Children and Young People's Department. The service is focusing on the following priority areas in 2023/24:

- To have a strong focus on recruitment, assessment and approval of new carers with the view to achieve a net gain of 10 new carers by the end of the financial year
- To enhance the support offer to Brent's foster carers and kinship

carers, by providing therapeutic services and other additional benefits to increase placement stability

- To enhance the training and development programme for carers to include a permanent, ongoing mix of virtual and direct delivery of courses and seminars
- To continue improving the stability of children by providing more local and in-house placement options, minimising change of social workers and placements
- To develop partnerships with neighbouring authorities to recruit and retain more foster carers
- To recruit, train and retain foster carers that offer emergency placements to children and young people who come into care in unplanned circumstances
- To continue to develop and transform the service in consultation and collaboration with care experienced young people and foster carers through workstreams and co-designed training
- To ensure that the foster carers feel supported and valued by providing regular service updates, building and strengthening Brent foster carers community and celebrating their achievements.

## **4.2 Staffing Arrangements**

4.2.1 The structure of the Fostering Service has remained the same since the last report. The Fostering Service consists of two teams: one Support and Assessment Team, and one Kinship Care Team. The service is overseen by the Service Manager.

4.2.2 The Fostering Support and Assessment Team consists of 8 supervising social workers, one Team Manager, and one Recruitment Officer (RO) post.

4.2.3 The Kinship Care Team consists of 8 social workers, one Team Manager and one Practice Consultant Social Worker. The student who completed the Step Up programme during the previous reporting period has started as a newly qualified ASYE (Assessed and Supported Year of Employment) social worker in the team.

4.2.4 The workload in the teams continues to be at manageable levels, with a temporary increase in the number of cases in the Kinship Care team over the summer period, as new kinship and foster carers are assessed, approved and allocated to supervising social workers to ensure ongoing support.

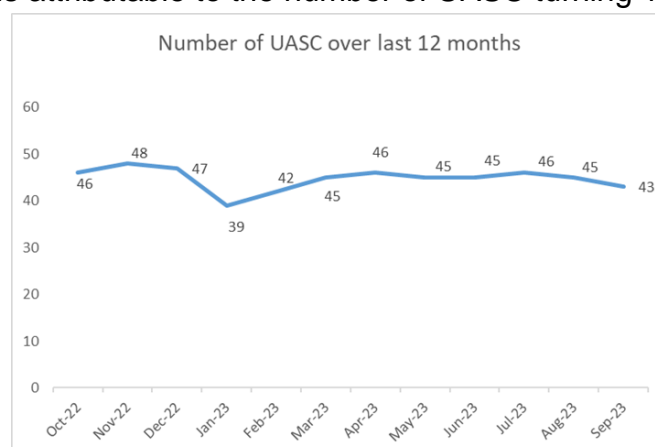
## **4.3 Placement Activity**

4.3.1 The total number of looked after children as at 30 Sep-2023 was 311, which is a decrease of 8 children from 319 on the 31 March 2023, and a decrease of 23 children from the same period in 2022 (334 children).

#### 4.3.2 The corporate performance targets for 2023/2024 are as follows:

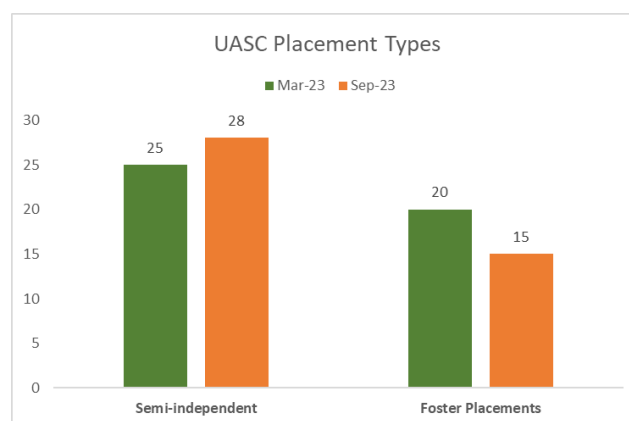
- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers as of 30 September 2023 was 17.4% (54 children), a decrease by 0.6% from 31 March-2023, (18%, 57 children) – annual target 25%
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend as at 30 September 2023 was 14.8% (46 children), an increase by 2.8% from 31 March-2023 (12%, 38 children) – annual target 20%
- Percentage of looked after children placed with independent fostering agencies as at 30 September 2023 was 32.8% (102 children), a decrease by 0.4% from 31 March -2023 (33.2%, 106 children) – annual target 25%
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements as at 30 September 2023 was 65% (202 children), an increase of 2% from 31 March 2023 which was 63% (201 children) – annual target 70%. This is primarily related to the age of new looked after children and the increase in the number of 16 - 17-year-old UASC who were placed in semi-independent accommodation.
- There were 52 looked after children in semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations) as at 30 September 2023, which represents 16.7% of all looked after children. This is a decrease by 1.2% from 31 March 2023 (17.9%, 57 children).

#### 4.3.3 There were 43 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) as at 30 September 2023, a decrease of 2 UASC (45 UASC as at March 2023). The decrease is attributable to the number of UASC turning 18.



#### 4.3.4 The number of UASC placed in semi-independent accommodation as at 30 September 2023 was 28 compared to 25 UASC as at March 2023, none in residential children's home and 15 UASC placed in foster placements, compared to 20 UASC in March 2023.





#### 4.4 Recruitment and Assessment of new foster carers

- 4.4.1 During this reporting period, the marketing and recruitment activities took place online, monthly information evenings were held online on Zoom, and face-to-face, in person events across the borough.
- 4.4.2 The Fostering Team attended eight local events during this period. The summer months were particularly busy, with school fetes, local summer fairs and festivals happening in all of Brent's wards. The main objectives of raising awareness about fostering and building a reputation among residents were achieved by distributing leaflets, personalised merchandise and networking with other local charities and council services.
- 4.4.3 The Fostering team engaged with various minority groups at two of the above-mentioned events: Eastern European Day and Brent Brazilian Community Day. The Fostering team will continue to attend more community events in the upcoming months, raising awareness in different communities and multi faith groups, about the need for local foster carers for local children.
- 4.4.4 Foster Care Fortnight took place from the 15 - 28 May 2023, and events included a Brent Fostering Walk in Gladstone Park, a Cream Tea event for foster carers and some online activities. The objective during Foster Care Fortnight was to encourage local people to discover what makes them unique and to invite them to bring their distinctive skills to fostering. The online campaign focused on disseminating the unique fostering stories of four local foster carers who have been using their skills and experience to help vulnerable children for years. This is the dedicated campaign landing page: <https://www.brent.gov.uk/fcf23>
- 4.4.5 The Foster Carers' Cream Tea event was attended by over 30 fostering households. The carers had the opportunity to meet the new management team, to see each other in person and catch up and to find out about upcoming initiatives within the service. They also attended a wellbeing training session and took part in a fostering-focused quiz created by one of the supervising social workers.

- 4.4.6 The Brent Foster Walk was a great opportunity to meet local residents, raise awareness about the need for local foster carers and receive feedback from the community. Fliers and branded merchandise were distributed to the people encountered in Gladstone Park. The walk was well attended, with over 20 people taking part. Amongst them were foster carers and their families, social workers and managers, looked after children and the Lead Member, Cllr Grahl.
- 4.4.7 The Recruitment Officer has continued to send flyers and merchandise to local stakeholders who have offered to promote fostering in the community and established good working relationships with the Brent community engagement team, the local Co-op community liaison officer, and the Queen's Park Folk online community leaders. They continue to support fostering by spreading the word about the need for local carers.
- 4.4.8 The Fostering Newsletter continues to be delivered monthly to the 4000+ subscribers.
- 4.4.9 In the reporting period, the fostering team received 31 enquiries. Phone calls and web requests for call-backs were two of the most popular ways for people to contact the fostering team. 8 applicants had an initial visit and 4 progressed to stage 1 of the assessment process. The remaining 4 applications required 'no further action' for reasons including: unwillingness to share personal information, lack of availability due to current lifestyle, opting to join an independent fostering agency, and lack of understanding of the issues and concerns discussed with the visiting social worker.
- 4.4.10 Of the 2 assessments reported in stage 2 in the previous reporting period, 1 applicant has pulled out due to change of circumstance and 1 remains in stage 2.
- 4.4.11 In this reporting period there are 9 assessments in progress in this reporting period. Of these:
- 5 are in stage 1
  - 4 are in stage 2, including one carer who is on hold until October 2023 and a connected person whose kinship placement ended but has expressed interest in becoming a mainstream carer. The assessment has been fast tracked to stage 2.

#### **4.5 Support from Supervising Social Workers (SSW)**

- 4.5.1 One of the main priorities continues to be the retention of foster carers. Feedback received during the annual reviews and Fostering Panel has highlighted that carers value the support they receive from the highly skilled and experienced supervising social workers, and this continues to remain the main reason why foster carers are committed to fostering for Brent. The foster carers are able to contact their supervising social workers and the Team Manager outside of office hours as and when required.

- 4.5.2 To keep foster carers engaged and informed, the fostering service provides a monthly newsletter and facilitates foster carers' support groups. The monthly foster carers' support group continues to be facilitated virtually as it is the foster carers' preferred option.
- 4.5.3 On 29 July 2023, the Fostering Team organised a seaside trip to Brighton for foster carers, their families and Looked After Children. Feedback from the foster carers indicate that it was a successful trip and they enjoyed it.
- 4.5.4 To celebrate our foster carers and the great work they do with Brent children, an end of year celebration is being planned to take place on the 24 November 2023.

#### **4.6 The Kinship Care Team**

- 4.6.1 The Kinship Care team undertakes both planned and emergency assessments of prospective family members and friends who come forward as alternative carers when it is not possible for a child to remain in the care of their parents. The team provides placement support to the connected persons carers and training during the assessment period.
- 4.6.2 In the period from April 2023 to September 2023, the Kinship Care team received 85 referrals for viability assessments of a relative, friend and people connected to the child. A viability assessment is a preliminary assessment of a relative, friend or a person connected to the child, who may be unable to live with his or her parents, to determine whether that person is a realistic option to care for the child long-term and should undergo a full Connected Persons assessment. This assessment is usually undertaken within 10 working days and the outcome of the assessment is shared with the person being assessed and other parties involved in decisions around the child.
- 4.6.3 A Connected Persons assessment is a comprehensive and evidence-based assessment of relative, friend or a person connected to the child who may want to foster or be a special guardian to the child. This assessment usually takes 12 weeks to complete and includes comprehensive checks and triangulation of information from various sources. Based on the information gathered in the assessment, a recommendation is made to the Court whether the person being assessed is suitable to foster a child or become a Special Guardian to the child. A support plan is developed at the end of the assessment that outlines the support available to the kinship carer including information on post order support.
- 4.6.4 In this reporting period, following a positive viability assessment, 43 Connected Persons assessments were/are being undertaken. Of these 3 did not progress as further assessment was not required. 5 carers withdrew and did not wish to be assessed further.
- 4.6.5 17 children were placed in 13 emergency kinship placements between April 2023 and September 2023. An emergency placement is made under Regulation 24 of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England)

Regulations 2010. Temporary approval is provided to the carer to foster a child for 16 weeks with a possibility of seeking an extension for a further 8 weeks to allow completion of the assessment.

- 4.6.6 Children who remain in kinship placements beyond 24 weeks where the carer has not been approved as a Connected Persons carer (following presentation and recommended for approval at the Fostering Panel) are in an unregulated placement. A risk assessment is undertaken for these placements and social workers are required to visit the placement weekly until the foster carer is presented at the Fostering Panel for approval or the termination of the placement. During this reporting period, there were a total of 20 children in 16 unregulated placements (these include placements that started prior to April 2023 and those placements that have subsequently been formalised during the period) due to delays in receiving the outcome of the medical checks, DBS checks, connected person's availability to engage with the assessment process, delay in starting the assessment, and/or ADM ratification.
- 4.6.7 As at 30 September 2023, there were 10 children in unregulated placements with 8 carers. 5 carers will attend Panel in the next 2 months. 2 carers have already attended Panel and ADM decision is awaited. 1 carer has applied for a Child Arrangements Order. There is a clear process in place to ensure management oversight of these unregulated arrangements which includes completing risk assessments, obtaining the views of the child's IRO and sign off from the Fostering ADM.
- 4.6.8 4 Connected Persons foster carers were presented to the Fostering Panel between April and September 2023 of which 2 have been approved as short-term Connected Persons carers whilst the decision on 2 cases are pending ADM approval.
- 4.6.9 7 children were made subject of Special Guardianship Orders in this reporting period.

#### **4.7 Fostering Panel**

- 4.7.1 The LAC and Permanency service has a Fostering Panel constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The service maintains a diverse and highly experienced central list of panel members that includes an elected member. The panel chair and vice chair are independent people with professional and personal experience of fostering. Most of the independent panel members also have personal experience of the fostering system, including one independent panel member who was brought up in a kinship arrangement. The work of the Fostering Panel is supported by the Panel Adviser.
- 4.7.2 Three new Panel members have been recruited in the last 6 months. One Panel member with professional background in education has already started and the other 2 new panel members, with professional expertise in mental health and social work will be gradually introduced over the next few months.

4.7.3 Fostering Panels are generally held three times every two months and extra panels are arranged if there is an increase in demand. Most panels take place virtually; although, some meetings have taken place face to face in the recent months.

4.7.4 The functions of the fostering panel are to consider:

- Each application and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a foster carer or Connected Person(s) foster carer and the terms of their approval.
- The first annual review of each approved carer and any other review as requested by the service, including those of a Standards of Care issue and those exploring any allegations made.
- The termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a foster carer.
- The long-term fostering matches of all children below the age of 12.

4.7.5 During this period, 7 panels were held with 33 cases presented of which:

- 4 carers were recommended for approval as short-term connected persons
- 6 carers were re-approved as part of their 3 yearly annual review
- 5 carers were re-approved as part of their 1st annual review
- 14 carers whose fostering approval/status were terminated/resigned (5 mainstream foster carers and 9 connected person carers)
- 2 carers were re-approved as a long-term carers
- 2 prospective foster carers whose Stage 2 was terminated.

4.7.6 All the recommendations made by the panel were ratified by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), apart from one connected persons approval which was deferred by Panel and approved by the ADM.

4.7.7 The Head of Service for Looked after Children and Permanency acts as the ADM for the Fostering Service. The ADM, upon reviewing the recommendation of the Fostering Panel, decides whether applicants should be approved as foster carers or not. The ADM also has the responsibility of determining the continued suitability of foster carers following completion of annual reviews of foster carers and recommendation from the Fostering Panel.

## **4.8 Training and Support for Foster Carers**

4.8.1 The CYP Learning and Development Team within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service continues to offer learning opportunities for new and experienced foster carers and connected persons using different delivery methods comprising of face-to-face, online/virtual and E-Learning.

4.8.2 In the period April to September 2023, 22 learning sessions were offered to carers which included 7 workshops via Brent Safeguarding Partnership. Except for First Aid Training, all the sessions took place online.

- 4.8.3 Low take up of learning opportunities by carers is a national issue affecting many local authorities, and Brent is no exception to this. Nonetheless, the Learning and Development Team continue to make efforts to promote and encourage participation of carers in mandatory training and other learning offers, through regular reminders. The Fostering Panel also monitor and scrutinise the foster carers' training attendance and hold carers to account if the carers are not compliant with this requirement.
- 4.8.4 Carers continue to have access to training via the Brent Safeguarding Partnership, multi-agency learning and development offer. The training offer was diversified following a period of consultation with the key stakeholders: care experienced young people, foster carers, social workers, supervising social worker and managers. In addition to the mandatory training, new facilitated training/ learning opportunities for foster carers were introduced, such as:
- Race, Culture and Spirituality: Improving practice with children and families from Black and minority ethnic communities.
  - Working with Children and Young People Who Self-Harm: Responding to Risk and Managing Anxiety.
  - Parental Mental ill Health: Working better together to Safeguard the Child and the Adult.
  - Neurodiversity and ADHD in Children and Young people.
  - Safeguarding Missing children in care, incorporating the Philomena Protocol.
  - Gaming and Gambling Awareness Workshops for foster carers by YGAM (Young people's gaming and gambling harm prevention).
- 4.8.5 The training offer is regularly reviewed to ensure that the foster carers continue to develop their professional skills, deepen their understanding of the looking after children's needs, and have the opportunity to keep abreast with new findings, research and learnings from serious case reviews. For the coming period new learning opportunities include: Supporting LGBT+ young people; Consent and Managing Disclosures of Sexual Assault; Principles of Trauma Informed Practice: Beyond Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs); and Suicide Prevention Training.
- 4.8.6 As part of strengthening relationships, improving the quality of care for children and young people in care, and promoting multi-agency learning, Brent foster carers have been invited to attend internal CYP staff trainings, for instance Principles of Trauma Informed Practice: Beyond ACEs, and Suicide Prevention Training.
- 4.8.7 Following each learning opportunity, carers are encouraged to provide feedback. In response to feedback question relating to 'what carers learned, what they plan to apply to their role as a carer', some quotes can be found below:

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*"To be more empathic and to be mindful of what the children have been through."*

**(Parental Mental ill Health: Working better together to Safeguard the Child and the Adult)**

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*"Knowing what to say to a child before it happened to them and how they should deal with a search...Explain to my child the importance of answering question when getting searched, NAME AND NUMBER"*

**(Learning from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews – Child Q)**

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*"Be less judge mental [health] of others as we all can mask and hide from the world, and have time, patience, understanding and the ability to seek to understand others [to] help theirs and my needs to improve and make sure they can see there is hope and light and a way forward to success in this world and be happy to love oneself for how unique we are"*

*"To talk calmly, allow the child to just be and recognize that their ADHD impacts everything about them."*

**(Neurodiversity and ADHD in Children & Young people)**

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4.8.8 In addition to facilitated learning opportunities, the Learning and Development Team continues to provide all carers access to learning opportunities at any time of the day, evenings, and weekends, through access to an online E-Learning courses package.

#### **4.9 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints**

4.9.1 During the reporting period, there were 2 allegations made against Brent foster carers. One temporary approved (Reg 24) connected person carer made a complaint about the social work team. The allegations made against foster carers were thoroughly investigated by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and no further action was taken. The foster carers reapproval will be considered at the Fostering panel and the outcome of the investigation will be taken into account before a recommendation is made. The connected person carer's complaint was investigated by the Head of Service for LAC and Permanency.

4.9.2 During this period, a number of compliments regarding the fostering service were received. The Fostering and Kinship Team received numerous positive comments from foster carers during assessments, annual reviews and from other colleagues and professionals. The practitioners' achievements and good practice have been acknowledged and celebrated at the bi-monthly LAC and Permanency service forums. Additionally, the Fostering Panel complimented several practitioners for the quality of the reports presented.

4.9.3 There have been 48 annual reviews completed in this reporting period. 5 annual reviews were cancelled due to the carers' resignation and 1 annual review had to be rebooked.

4.9.4 Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) for fostering conduct all the annual reviews of foster carers, ensuring impartiality and providing a safeguarding mechanism for both the child and the carer. The Fostering Independent

Reviewing Officer also completes Standards of Care Review meetings, where concerns have been identified regarding carers. This allows a level of independence from the Fostering Service, and the officer will then take these to Fostering Panel where appropriate for fuller discussion and recommendations on continued approval.

#### **4.10 Service Development**

##### Working with carers and community partners to engage and promote the voices of Brent Kinship Carers

- 4.10.1 The Kinship Care Team continues to work with a Brent Kinship Carer Peer Volunteer and other external organisations (Family Rights Group, Families in Harmony, CoramBAAF) to promote the voice and interests of kinship carers in Brent and West London. The Kinship Care team organised a professional network meeting in June 2023 and invited the agencies that provide community services to kinship carers. The aim of the meeting was to put together a guide for professionals and carers of all these organisations that offer services and support to the Brent kinship community. A small number of organisations took up the invitation, so a similar event will be organised before the end of the year.
- 4.10.2 The Kinship Care team is working with the Brent Kinship Carer Peer Volunteer to update the information on Kinship Care on the Brent website. This piece of work will be finalised in October 2023.
- 4.10.3 The current Kinship Care and Support policy is being reviewed and updated. This is in consultation with our Kinship Care team, Brent Kinship Carer Peer Volunteer and Adopt London West. It is due to be fully updated by the end of October 2023.
- 4.10.4 The Kinship Care Team is looking forward to working with Brent Health Matters to spread awareness of the various kinship care arrangements that happen in the community and share information on the support that is available to the carers in the community through statutory and voluntary agencies.
- 4.10.5 Kinship Care Week: 02.10.2023 to 08.10.2023.  
The Kinship Care team in collaboration with the Brent Kinship Carer Peer Volunteer, Brent Health Matters, Brent Community Engagement Team, Virtual school and Adopt London West is hosting and taking part in a series of events to mark Kinship Care week and celebrate and appreciate the contribution and commitment of kinship carers. The events include:
- A display in Wembley Library between the 2 to 6 October about Kinship Care through time as reflected in literature.
  - A “Meet and Greet” on the 5 October 2023 between 9:00 am to 11:30am at the Brent Civic Centre for Special Guardians and Kinship carers to meet the Brent Kinship Care Team.
  - A “Fun Day” on the 7 October 2023 from 11:00 am to 3:00pm at Jason Roberts Foundation, Stonebridge NW10. Kinship carers and their



families have been invited to attend the fun day where there will be activities and refreshments.

#### Enhanced Support and Resources for Brent Carers

- 4.10.6 One of the Fostering Service main priorities has remained the enhancement of the support offer to Brent's foster carers and kinship carers by including a therapeutic element to support placement stability.
- 4.10.7 The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families via Brent WEST service has continued to provide targeted mental health and emotional wellbeing service for vulnerable children and young people in Brent as well as support Foster Carers and Kinship carers through consultations and Reflective Carers' Groups.
- 4.10.8 During the reporting period Brent WEST ran the Reflective Fostering Programme on-line for six weeks between May 2023 and June 2023. It was facilitated by a WEST Child and Family Specialist. Due to small numbers, the group was a mix of foster carers and kinship carers. The programme was regularly attended by five carers caring for seven Brent children. Content included: mentalising for self and others and techniques to support this; an exploration of carers' experience of being parented/cared for and how this influences their approach to caring; and an overview of trauma and how this impacts emotions and behaviour.

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*Feedback from carers: "I found the mentalizing, thermometer and 2-handed approach very useful, as well as [the practitioner] who was excellent at delivering this course". "[The practitioner] was very understanding to my needs and continued to help me to be a different parent. She provided a safe place to air my concerns and was very empathetic and curious to my situation".*

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- 4.10.9 A Child and Family Specialist attended the Foster Carers' Cream Tea event in May 2023. The event focused on self-care and increasing resilience for foster carers. WEST provided a presentation on the Reflective Carers' Programme and offered some strategies to recognise, reflect and improve emotional wellbeing, including support networks, emotional thermometer and breathing exercises. Laughter as a therapy tool was introduced to the carers present. The foster carers engaged well and reported to finding the session interesting and fun.

#### 4.11 Recruitment and retention

- 4.11.1 Brent has continued to be ambitious for its children and is committed to increasing the number of in house foster carers to ensure that Brent children are looked after locally by high quality, supported foster carers, delivering improved long-term outcomes for children.

- 4.11.2 To increase the sufficiency of in- house foster carers, and to reduce our reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies, Brent is currently developing a proposal for a comprehensive and flexible recruitment and retention package that is competitive across the sector and provides the right level of support and reward for new and existing foster carers.
- 4.11.3 Brent has been revising the current fostering offer, conducted a review of the current fostering rates and is looking at widening the support package for foster carers to include health and mental wellbeing services to bring them in line with other West London local authorities. This proposal was discussed with a small reference group of foster carers and their input and suggestions will shape and improve the final offer.
- 4.11.4 Brent, together with 7 other neighbouring boroughs (Ealing, Harrow, Hounslow, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster and Hillingdon), submitted a funding application to Department for Education to improve recruitment and retention of foster carers in September 2023. The proposal is firstly for Brent and the other local authorities to establish a West London fostering recruitment hub, and secondly to establish and implement the Mockingbird model across the local authorities to boost retention and support for foster carers. The bid was successful, and the new Fostering Recruitment Hub will be operational by April/May 2024, hosted by Hammersmith and Fulham. The local authorities will be working with The Fostering Network over the coming months to develop the Mockingbird model. The funding from DfE will last for 2 years, after which the partner local authorities will be expected to continue to fund these depending on their success.
- 4.11.5 The Fostering team has been working closely with the Brent Communication Team to develop an attractive, sustainable fostering brand that will be finalised when the new fostering offer is agreed. The new brand identity for Brent Fostering will be used across all advertising materials to give a consistent and recognisable look and aid recruitment.
- 4.11.6 Brent has during this period joined a growing partnership of councils and children's trusts and CAN Digital to promote Local Authority fostering. The project is called 'Any Of Us' is the largest public sector fostering film collaboration yet, with over 80 participants across England. CAN Digital have produced a short film telling three different stories from diverse foster carers who are sharing their own experience of looking after children. The film will appeal to a wide audience, and it is envisaged that it will encourage people to foster for Brent. The film was launched nationally in Birmingham on the 26 September 2023 and can be accessed on the Brent website and social media.

## **5.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement**

- 5.1 Stakeholder consultation and engagement takes many varied methods within the service, and we are committed to evaluating and developing new and creative ways of hearing from stakeholders.

5.2 Carers views are sought through one-to-one discussions with their SSW, Annual Foster Carer Reviews, and Support Groups. Carers are encouraged to provide written feedback on their experiences of assessment and panel process.

5.3 Children and young people provide feedback through discussions with their social worker, IRO, or their carers SSW, Looked After Children Reviews, written feedback for Annual Foster Carer Reviews, Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings, Care in Action/Participation activities, Brent Care Journeys.

## **6.0 Financial Considerations**

6.1 There are currently no financial considerations arising from this report. However, the cost implication of a revised fostering offer will be considered at a later stage following the outcome of a project reviewing the inhouse fostering offer.

## **7.0 Legal Considerations**

7.1 There are currently no legal considerations arising from this report.

## **8.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations**

8.1 There are currently no Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) considerations arising from this report.

## **9.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations**

9.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

## **10.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)**

10.1 There are no human resource or property considerations.

## **11.0 Communication Considerations**


11.1 At this stage there are not any communication considerations.

### **Report sign off:**

**Nigel Chapman**

Corporate Director of Children and Young People

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	<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b> 16 October 2023
	<b>Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People</b>
	<b>Lead Cabinet Member: Cllr Gwen Grahl</b>
<b>Brent Adoption Report</b> <b>6-monthly report: 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023</b>	
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	ALL
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	N/A
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>List of Appendices:</b>	Appendix 1 - ALW Annual Report 2022-2023
<b>Background Papers:</b>	N/A
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Debbie Gabriel, Head of Service, Adopt London West Brent's Regional Adoption Agency <a href="mailto:GabrielD@ealing.gov.uk">GabrielD@ealing.gov.uk</a>  Elena Muller Service Manager, Looked After Children and Permanency <a href="mailto:elena.muller@brent.gov.uk">elena.muller@brent.gov.uk</a>  Kelli Eboji Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency <a href="mailto:Kelli.eboji@brent.gov.uk">Kelli.eboji@brent.gov.uk</a>  Palvinder Kudhail Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes <a href="mailto:Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk">Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk</a>

## 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a briefing to the Corporate Parenting Committee in relation to:
- adoption performance data for the period 1 April – 30 September 2023
  - the progress and activity of Adopt London West
  - how good outcomes are being achieved for children.

Information and child level data presented in Section 5 of this report is provided by Brent CYP; the remainder of this report includes the progress and activity of Adopt London West. An Adopt London West annual report (2022-2023) is also available as an appendix to this report.

- 1.2 This is the eighth report presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in this format as Cabinet gave approval in April 2019 for Brent council to:
  - a) join the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Adopt London West (ALW) consisting of the London boroughs of Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith and Fulham for the provision of Adoption services and Special Guardianship Support; and
  - b) delegate authority to the Strategic Director, Children and Young People, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care to agree and enter into a Partnership Agreement with participating boroughs.
- 1.3 The Key Decision was made on 2 September 2019 and, following the TUPE of those Brent staff members who chose to move to Ealing, Adopt London West has been a 'live' RAA since October 2019.

## **2.0 Recommendation(s)**

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

## **3.0 Detail**

### **3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context**

- 3.1.1 This report sets out the provision and management of the local authority's adoption service and the developments that have taken place in the reporting period. The work of ALW contributes to the following borough priorities:

- **The Best Start in Life**
- **Prosperity and Stability**
- **A Healthier Brent**
- **Thriving Communities**

In order for care experienced young people to have the best start in life, prosperity and stability, safety, and good health they need safe, stable, permanent homes with primary carers who love them and who are able to meet their holistic needs throughout their minority. The work of ALW and the LAC and Permanency service contribute to these priorities by ensuring permanency is achieved for children and young people either via a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or Adoption. Providing safe, stable, permanent, loving placements for children and young people when they are unable to remain with their parent/s, means that they will have the best life chances.

## **3.2 Background - Adopt London West**

- 3.2.1 Adopt London West Regional Adoption Agency became operational on 1 September 2019 with a formal launch in October 2019.
- 3.2.2 A comprehensive partnership agreement forms the basis of the ongoing service arrangements. The Partnership Board on which the Strategic Director, Brent CYP is a member of continues to provide the necessary oversight to ensure that the shared service is appropriately scrutinised and supported to deliver improved outcomes for children and adopters.
- 3.2.3 As part of the national RAA implementation and development programme a network of RAA leaders has been established and a national strategic lead appointed. Government published a National Adoption Strategy in July 2021, that sets out ambitions to further improve the consistency of support offered to adopters and achieve innovation and change in various aspects of the adoption system. Monthly meetings take place attended by the Department for Education (DfE) who remain interested and engaged in the RAA delivery model.
- 3.2.4 National priorities have been agreed by the network of RAA leaders and several workstreams established to progress specific elements of the National Adoption Strategy. ALW's Partnership Board and Heads of Service meetings will continue to be informed of practice changes and developments and will closely monitor performance and practice to ensure standards of service to children and their families remain consistently high.

## **4.0 Responsibilities**

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

abroad; there is a legal requirement for these adoptions to be made lawful in the UK.

- 4.3 Inter-country adoption referrals continue to be referred to the Inter-Country Adoption Centre, a specialist Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA), with whom a service level agreement is in place.
- 4.4 Statutory social work in relation to children needing adoptive placements remains the responsibility of Brent CYP. The care plans for children are formulated by the social work teams and agreed by Head of Service for LAC and Permanency. The Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes then considers and ratifies any adoption plans.

## **5.0 Performance Data**

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

### **Adoption Scorecards (published [here](#))**

- 5.2 The non-published data for the period under review shows performance against the two most significant indicators:
- **A1** (The average time taken for a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 447 days (388 in the last 12 months). This is a 10% decrease on the previous reporting period (467.5 days).
  - **A2** (The average time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 128 days. This is a 10% decrease on the previous reporting period (140 days).

## **6.0 Child related data**

- 6.1 There have been 2 Adoption Orders granted during this reporting period.
- 6.2 There are currently 15 children with an adoption plan who have not yet been adopted. The details of these children's cases are as follows:
- 2 children are placed with their new families
  - 3 children are subject to Placement Orders
  - 2 children have been matched with prospective adopters
  - 1 child was placed in a fostering for adoption placement
  - The remaining 7 children have recently had a plan of adoption agreed by Brent, but no court order has yet been granted.
- 6.3 For some children it is appropriate to consider placing them with foster carers who are also approved adopters, this is referred to as an Early Permanence placement. This enables the child to be placed earlier than is usually possible and before care proceedings have concluded. During this reporting period one



child has been placed in an Early Permanence placement, allowing the child to spend less time in foster care and begin building attachments to their new family.

## **7.0 Adopter Recruitment**

- 7.1 7 adopter households have been approved since 1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023. 84% of the adopters approved in this period are of White ethnicity, whilst 14% are White & Asian. 42% identify as LGBTQ+.
- 7.2 As of 30 September 2023 there were 34 approved adopters. 9 have already had a child placed, 3 are early permanence placements, 12 are matched/linked to child/ren, and 10 are on hold.
- 7.3 The adoption assessment process comprises 2 stages. Stage 1 assessments should take place within 2 months - this stage is described as “adopter led”, where adopters work through exercises and complete various tasks that contribute to a full and thorough assessment of their suitability.
- 7.4 Stage 2 should take a maximum of 4 months and is a detailed assessment that is both reflective and analytical. In total, the comprehensive assessment process should be completed within 6 months.
- 7.5 There are 20 families in the formal stages of assessment. 9 are in Stage 1, 11 are in Stage 2.

## **8.0 Casework**

- 8.1 ALW is currently offering a service to 216 Brent children, families or individuals who are accessing their adoption records. 28 children are allocated to a social worker for family finding, 23 are receiving a Social Work service, 31 are currently receiving an Adoption Support Fund (ASF) therapeutic service that is under review, and 25 individuals are accessing adoption records. The overall total represents an 18% increase on the previous reporting period.
- 8.2 There are 103 contact cases open relating to Brent families, 26 are direct contact arrangements and 87 are active letterbox exchanges.
- 8.3 There are 25 access to records requests currently open in relation to Brent records. 50 have been made in this reporting period so far.

## **9.0 Adoption Support Fund**

- 9.1 Families who require specialist therapeutic support, are assessed by a social worker and an application submitted to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) for funding to cover the costs of the therapeutic services. 65 applications have been made to the ASF on behalf of Brent families in this reporting year and a total of £158,175 of funding for therapeutic services received for these families.

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

## **10.0 ALW Adoption Panel**

- 10.1 The role of ALW's panel is as follows:
- to consider the presentation of approvals, reviews, and terminations of adopters' suitability to adopt, following which a recommendation is made by panel members and sent to ALW's Agency Decision Maker (Head of Service) for a formal decision.
  - to consider whether a relinquished baby from Brent should be placed for adoption, following which a recommendation is made by panel members but sent to Brent's Agency Decision Maker (Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes, Children and Young People's Services) for ratification/challenge; and
  - to consider adoption matches between Brent's children and their prospective adopters, following which a recommendation is made by panel members and sent to Brent's Agency Decision Maker (Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes, Children and Young People's Services) for ratification/challenge.
- 10.2 Feedback between ALW and Brent is considered by the Heads of Service quality assurance group and the Partnership Board and shared with Service Managers in Brent after each panel presentation to aid service development and quality assure the work of the RAA.
- 10.3 ALW Panel continues to take place virtually via Microsoft Teams. Prior to each panel meeting, the Adviser liaises with the applicants and external professionals to support them to access Microsoft Teams to reduce the risk of delay on the day and explain how the panel day will run and confirm that they are able to access the meeting confidentially. Panel members and observers also complete and return a confidentiality self-declaration, attesting to this for the duration of the panel meeting.
- 10.4 During the period under review, 7 new adopter households have been approved and 2 Brent children have been formerly matched with their new families by the Agency following positive recommendations from the Adoption panel.
- 10.5 Annual training for panel members is a regulatory requirement, a series of practice development discussions have taken place throughout the year with panel members, the most recent session exploring unconscious bias was facilitated by Dr Nedah Basit and took place on the 17 July 2023.

## **11.0 Value for Money**

- 11.1 The overall benefits of a shared service are also realised through the practice improvement and opportunities that are possible now that small individual services have become part of the wider Adopt London collaboration and the

national RAA network. It was previously not possible for LA Adoption services to offer the range of support and services that can now be delivered as a Regional Adoption Agency.

## **12.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement**

- 12.1 There are currently no stakeholder and ward member consultation considerations arising from this report.

## **13.0 Financial Considerations**

- 13.1 There are currently no financial considerations arising from this report.

## **14.0 Legal Considerations**

- 14.1 There are currently no legal considerations arising from this report.

## **15.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations**

- 15.1 There are currently no Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) considerations arising from this report.

## **16.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations**

- 16.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

## **17.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)**

- 17.1 There are no human resource or property considerations.

## **18.0 Communication Considerations**

- 18.1 At this stage there are not any communication considerations.

### **Report sign off:**

**Nigel Chapman**

Corporate Director of Children and Young People

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## Adopt London West

### Annual Report

1st April 2022 – 31st March 2023



<b>1. About Adopt London West.....</b>	
Error! Bookmark not defined.	
<b>2. ALW Team Structure.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Financial Arrangements.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4. Performance.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>5. National Adoption Landscape and RAA Leaders Network.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>6. Adopt London Collaboration.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>7. Clinical Psychology Provision.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>8. Adoption Panel .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>9. Priorities for 2023/24 .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>10. Feedback from families regarding ALW.....</b>	<b>29</b>

## 1. About Adopt London West

### Introduction

#### Context and responsibilities

Legislation requiring local authorities to deliver adoption services through Regional Adoption Agencies was passed in 2016 in the Education & Adoption Act. London RAA's were launched in 2019, around the middle of the national RAA change programme.

Adopt London West (ALW) is a partnership between the four London boroughs of Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith & Fulham and Hounslow.

The adoption and special guardianship support functions of the four boroughs were delegated to Adopt London West on 1st October 2019, hosted by the London borough of Ealing as the lead partner. The ALW Partnership Agreement covers the legal and financial terms of the arrangement. There is shared oversight of the RAA through a Partnership Board and Heads of Service Quality Assurance Group.

Adopt London West has responsibility for all adoption and special guardianship support services, delivering these on behalf of the local authorities. These include:

- *The recruitment of prospective adopters*
- *The assessment of prospective adopter's suitability to adopt a child*
- *An adoption panel to consider recommendations on applicants' suitability to adopt and the suitability of adopters to meet the needs of children with a plan of adoption, 'matches' of children.*
- *The provision of adoption and special guardianship support services to children, families and adopted adults living in the region, including.*
- *Independent support to birth parents*
- *Access to adoption records*

Responsibility for the child remains with the local authority, the following summarises the key responsibilities that are retained.

- *Corporate Parenting*
- *Agency Decision making responsibilities and all legal responsibilities for children looked after.*
- *Early permanence, care and adoption planning*
- *The provision of and review of financial allowances to adopters and special guardians*

In partnership with the RAA, each partner contributes to:

- Quality assurance and performance tracking
- Ensuring that accurate and timely data is held, collated, and reported to the DfE, ASGLB and any other body as necessary.

### **Governance arrangements**

The ALW Partnership Board meets quarterly and has Director level representation from each of the four partner boroughs. This Board has responsibility for all partnership decisions that need to be made above Head of Service level, for monitoring the performance and budget of ALW.

The Heads of Service group meets monthly and has membership at Head of Service and / or Service Manager level from each partner borough. The purpose of this group is to monitor and improve partnership working across the boroughs and ALW, including making decisions and proposals about practice and procedures that relate to adoption work across the agencies. A focus of this group in 2022/23 has been to improve the preparation and support to Special Guardians and to recommend to the ALW Partnership Board that a shared contract with the national organisation 'Kinship' should be commissioned for 2023/24.

### **Ofsted Inspections**

ALW support and participate in the adoption elements of any partner local authority inspection including 'inspecting local authority children's services' (ILACS) and focused inspections looking at permanency or children in care. In 2022/23 we were involved in the ILACS inspection that took place in Brent.



As adoption inspection regulations have not been updated to reflect the creation of RAAs and local authority inspections only look at some areas of adoption work, the Department of Education and Ofsted have announced plans to pilot direct inspections of Regional Adoption Agencies towards the end of 2023. Ofsted have not yet published an inspection framework, but we understand they intend to inspect six RAAs nationally as part of the pilot, and to publish one composite report which focuses on emerging themes rather than naming findings in relation to individual RAAs. When the pilot is complete Ofsted and the DfE will consider possible regulatory change to include RAA inspections within the national framework.



## 2. ALW Team Structure

### Staffing

ALW operates as a shared service, there are currently 32 team members, who work across 4 specialist teams focussed on the different practice areas,

- a small recruitment and assessment team who are responsible for the recruitment, assessment preparation and training of adopters.
- a family finding team who are responsible for early identification of children, family finding and early permanence arrangements
- an adoption and special guardianship support team offer a comprehensive range of services to families, children and adopted adults and manage a large volume of applications to the Adoption Support Fund on behalf of families who require a therapeutic service.
- a business support team provides a range of services including, management of initial enquiries, data collection, reporting and analysis, financial systems and budget monitoring, co-ordination and administration of Adoption Panel, core administrative services, the business management of the adoption support fund process including a statutory annual assurance statement

All are employed by Ealing as the host Local Authority with the exception of the 2 Clinical Psychologists(1FTE) who are employed by West London NHS Trust. ALW is managed by a Head of Service, Team Managers and a Business and Performance Manager. In addition to the core team, sessional social workers undertake some assessments of adopters to provide additional capacity.

A part time marketing and communications lead is part of the Adopt London shared marketing & communications team.

The staff group is stable, all permanent social work posts are occupied, there are a couple of fixed term posts covering for a secondment and maternity cover.

## 3. Financial Arrangements

### Partner LA Financial Contributions

The Partnership agreement set out the agreed financial contributions for the first 2/3 years of operation. The resources that transferred, both staff costs and non-staff budgets, were based on the existing resources that each borough had allocated to deliver its adoption functions prior to regionalisation.

The financial contribution formula was reviewed and agreed for a period of two years by all partners and implemented in April 2022, the revised formula reflects a demand based budget. A further review of the financial model will take place in late 2023.

LA	2022/23 Financial Contribution	Percentage Contribution
Brent	£400,844	20%
Ealing	£695,451	35%
Hammersmith & Fulham	£329,170	17%
Hounslow	£542,495	28%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£1,967,961</b>	<b>100%</b>

The following paragraphs describe the key areas of financial activity.

### Adoption Support Fund

Adopt London West manages all applications from families living in each partner LA to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) a Department for Education fund for the direct provision of therapeutic support to families. Applications to the fund are made following a Social Work assessment and identification of a therapeutic provider.

2022/23	Number of applications	Funding (Adoption)	Funding (SG)	Total
<b>Brent</b>	65 (+ 5%)	£131,975	£16,200	£148,175
<b>Ealing</b>	165 (+ 85%)	£256,882	£85,495	£342,377
<b>H&amp;F</b>	93 (+ 60%)	£132,895	£84,812	£217,707
<b>Hounslow</b>	85 (+ 13%)	£182,822	£27,745	£210,567
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>408</b>	<b>£704,574</b>	<b>£214,252</b>	<b>£918,826</b>

## Interagency placements

Inter-agency placements are purchased when no adopters approved by Adopt London West are available or are not considered to be the most suitable match for a child. 18% of the children placed in 2022/23 were placed with ALW approved adopters, increasing this percentage is a target for improvement in 2023/24. The cost of Inter Agency placements was **£566,810**. Inter-agency income from ALW families matched with children from other regions was **£272,250**. Currently each partner local authority is responsible for the payment of inter-agency fees, a finance workshop is planned to explore funding models with the aim of reaching agreement on an approach that is mutually beneficial and equitable to all partners.

There is a shared commitment across the Adopt London partnership to place London children with London families, maximising the use of all potential families within the partnership provides the best outcome for children and adopters, placing children locally means that, when necessary, high quality, timely support can be arranged. Therefore, increasing the number of children placed with Adopt London adopters across each of the 4 regions is another priority.

Children placed - Interagency & ALW Placements 01 April 2022– 31 March 2023			
LA	ALW	Interagency	Total
Brent	0	4	4
Ealing	1	4	5
H&F	2	4	6
Hounslow	1	6	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>22</b>

## 4. Performance

### Children

Whilst the number of children being placed for Adoption nationally continues to be low, in London there has been a slight increase in the number of children placed in 2022/23 to 190 from 180 in 2021/22.

22 children were placed by ALW in their new families in 2022/23, 10 fewer than in 2021/22, the reduction reflects less children placed by Hounslow following an unusually high number placed last year.

The adoption performance targets set two main performance indicators; one directly relates to ALW performance.

- **A2** length of time between a Placement Order and match with an adoptive family, the expected timescale is 121 days.

- The average for ALW was 133 days, slightly outside the expected timescale but a significantly stronger performance than the national average of 197 days and the London average of 238 days.

## Adoption Orders

Adoption Orders granted 2022-23	Brent	Ealing	H&F	Hounslow	Total
Total	7	3	7	6	23

Black children and children with additional needs wait considerably longer than other children to be placed, on average 7 months longer, children with a disability wait an additional 359 days compared to other children.

Of the 22 children placed, 32% are of Black Caribbean, African or Indian ethnicity and 18% are of mixed ethnicity and include 3 sibling groups of 2 aged between 3 – 7 years.

Of the 22 children placed, 7 were placed under Early Permanence arrangements, this means children were placed with adopters who are also approved as foster carers and often before Court proceedings have concluded, enabling the child to move in with their new family, sometimes months earlier than is usually possible.



## Adopters

20 new adoptive families were approved in 2022/23 one household less than last year, as is reflected across London since the Covid-19 pandemic, assessments of families are now often more complex. This appears to be due to increased difficulty and challenge in family life – for example more applicants have experience of mental health difficulties, financial pressures, fertility treatment which has ended for financial reasons, recent bereavement, and redundancy/employment uncertainty. These complexities impact the assessment process in different ways but can mean that the assessment needs to be slower, that families might need to take a break or leave the process, or that professional counselling support may be needed before an assessment can progress. The target of approving 30 new households continues to be an improvement target for 2023/24.

25% of adopters approved in 22/23 are Black, Asian, or mixed ethnicity and 15% are from the LGBT+ community.

Performance indicators for the approval of adopters set the expected length of the assessment process,

- **Stage 1** – should be completed in 60 days, the average time in **ALW was 108 days**, notably lower than the London average of 130 days
- **Stage 2** – should be completed in 121 days, the average time in **ALW was 134 days**, significantly lower than the London average of 196 days.

Assessments take longer than expected for a variety of reasons, in Stage 1 delays are usually due to the completion of statutory checks, medicals and DBS (criminal records) are most likely to be subject to delay. The detailed assessment at Stage 2 can be affected due to the applicant's personal circumstances. National data confirms that all regions struggle to meet the expected timescales for either stage.

## 5. National Adoption Landscape and RAA Leaders Network

### National RAA Leaders Group



The 32 Regional Adoption Agencies in England currently work together under the title of 'The National RAA Leaders Group', plans are progressing to establish the group and its work under the brand 'Adoption England', this is expected to take place in Autumn 2023. The

Leaders Group has a Strategic Lead and several project leads focused on developing particular areas of practice nationally and coordinating the work of RAAs.

The Leaders Group has been tasked by the Department of Education with developing the priorities it identified within the first national adoption strategy 'Achieving Excellence Everywhere' (2021) and provided with funding to progress this work. These priorities focus on developing national standards in recruitment, matching, and support; looking at alternative models of matching practice; increasing the use of early permanence placements; developing multi-disciplinary support; and considering models for national and pan-regional commissioning in adoption support.

An important priority for all RAA's in progressing the national agenda is one of modernising adoption to incorporate new principles and priorities, notably in relation to maintaining relationships for children with their first family and ensuring that children have a real understanding of their life story and ongoing support to maintain a positive sense of identity as an adopted child, young person and adult.

In addition, the Leaders Group is focused on raising the voices of those with different lived experiences of adoption, and on increasing representation of all forms of diversity within adoption services. Whilst much of this work is being progressed nationally, Adopt London have also been successful at accessing grant funding from the National RAA Leaders Group to progress priorities that align with the DfE strategy.

## 6. Adopt London Collaboration

An important principle at the planning and implementation stages for Regional Adoption Agencies in London was a strong desire to work collaboratively, this wider partnership became 'Adopt London' 24 London boroughs are part of this arrangement organised across 4 Adopt London regions, North, South, East and West.

The shared vision of the benefits of an Adopt London collaboration includes the belief that:

- ***Stronger leadership focusing on Adoption is achievable***
- ***There is the potential to achieve an improved offer to families through joint delivery of some services and ultimately joint commissioning***
- ***Improved relationships with voluntary adopt agencies and other provider services will benefit the whole adoption sector***
- ***Services across the partnerships can become more responsive, flexible, and resilient by sharing resources, knowledge and expertise***
- ***A shared commitment to continually improving practice for adopted children, adopters and all those affected by adoption will drive forward change, encourage innovation and contribute to establishing a model for joint working in other areas of children's services.***



## Adopt London



The four Adopt London regions work closely together as 'Adopt London' covering the different geographic regions in London and providing services to 24 boroughs in total. Adopt London are

unique nationally in working in such a close partnership across a large number of local authorities.

Through this partnership, we aim to develop a London-wide profile for the recruitment of adoptive parents, improve services that benefit from economies of scale, and share and standardise best practice. The host boroughs for Adopt London are Islington, Southwark, Havering, and Ealing. Heads of Service, Service Managers, Team Managers, Panel Advisors, and Marketing & Communications leads all work closely with their peers across Adopt London to develop shared services and practice standards.

Heads of Service and the host borough Directors and Directors of Children's Services meet quarterly as the Adopt London Executive Advisory Board chaired by a non-host partner DCS. The Executive Advisory Board oversees the joint project work of Adopt London, supports with problem solving, and considers Adopt London issues that need the support of other senior leaders to resolve.

In 2021 the Executive Advisory Board wrote to all member boroughs to request agreement to work towards an Adopt London legal partnership agreement linked to local agreements. This agreement would formalise the responsibilities of the Executive Advisory Board and protect the ownership of the Adopt London shared brand and online resources. This work was paused in 2022/23 due to legal complexities and capacity, but it is hoped this will restart during 2023/24.

The Adopt London Heads of Service work towards a strategic work plan that is supported by the Executive Advisory Board. The plan covers; governance and commissioning arrangements, operational and practice development of priority areas including opportunities to access national funding, marketing and communications arrangements, and the voice of adopters, adopted children, adopted adults, and birth family members. A Pooled Budget is held to fund shared activity. These were some of our shared areas of work in 2022/23:

Matching Project: Adopt London have been awarded funds from the National RAA Leaders Group to test methods for improving shared practice for matching children in need of adoption with adoptive families. This has led to the creation of Adopt London Matching Manager and Matching Coordinator posts to lead the shared work.

Early Permanence: We have also been awarded funds to strengthen Early Permanence practice across London. In 2022/23 a research report was prepared looking at the barriers to Early Permanence placements in London, which included interviews with Family Court Judges, managers from CAFCASS, local authority Agency Decision Makers and legal advisors, and RAA practice leads.

**Black Adoption Project:** We completed the first phase of this large, long-term project to improve adoption for Black children and families and have started preparing to initiate and evaluate practice pilots.

**Adopted Adults support:** We are working with adopted adults to expand the availability of support groups in London. A new group specifically for transracially adopted adults was set up in this period in partnership with the Transracial Adult Adoptee Network (TAAN).

**Agency Decision Maker workshops:** Funded by the National RAA Leaders Group, Adopt London ran a development workshop for London Agency Decision Makers to reflect on case law, guidance, and best practice around Best Interests Decisions.

**Adopt London choir:** Founded during the 2020 pandemic, the choir is made up of London adoptive parents who meet weekly online to sing and network, and sometimes meet in person to perform at events. The choir has proven to be a strong source of support for many parents. You can watch some of their videos on the [Adopt London YouTube channel](#).

**Marketing & Communications:** Our marketing and communications leads pool their time and resources to provide a shared Adopt London public presence, including website and social media. A single public profile is particularly effective for the recruitment of prospective adoptive parents.

**Adopt London staff event:** We hosted our second annual in-person event for 150 Adopt London staff members to increase relationships and co-working across the Adopt London RAAs. The event focused on the importance of our use of language in our work.

**We Are Family:** We continue to have a strong partnership with adopter peer network charity We Are Family, which provides support groups across London, a specialist webinar programme, and podcast.

In addition to continuing work in these areas, our priorities for further shared work in 2023/34 are:

**Adopter voice:** We are developing a strong mechanism for gathering and responding to adoptive parent feedback, and for consulting with parents on service developments.

**Adopted children and young people's groups:** We are planning to expand social groups for adopted children and young people across the Adopt London area to provide social opportunities and invite participation.

**Shared commissioning arrangements in adoption support:** We have received funding from the National RAA Leaders Group to scope potential improvements to commissioning arrangements, particularly in relation to provision under the Adoption Support Fund. In the long term this work could increase the effectiveness of our arrangements whilst reducing administration.



## Adopt London brand

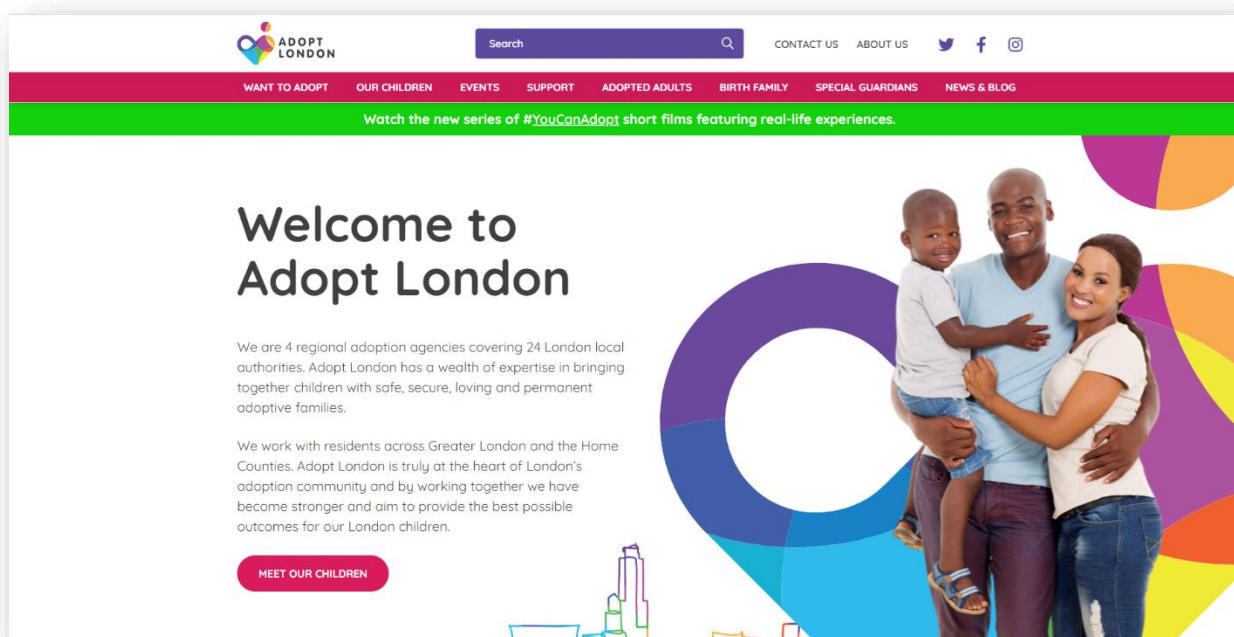
Our single Adopt London public face is successful at making Adopt London easy to find for anyone considering adoption in London and provides prospective adopters with a clear and transparent choice between agencies. Pooling communications resources means that Adopt London can spend less whilst still maintaining a professional, creative, and current online presence.

We have a shared recruitment and communications strategy. Through the Adopt London brand we aim to celebrate the diversity of London, to demonstrate that London children are central to our agencies, and to highlight a range of voices impacted by adoption.



[The website](#) is at the heart of Adopt London's communication and usually the first contact point for people considering adoption. Articles, blogs, news, and up-to-date information is accessible on the website with several new pages and content reviews being introduced during the year. In 2022/23 we undertook significant development work in the systems side of the website to ensure it is compliant with local government standards and began a programme of work to improve accessibility.

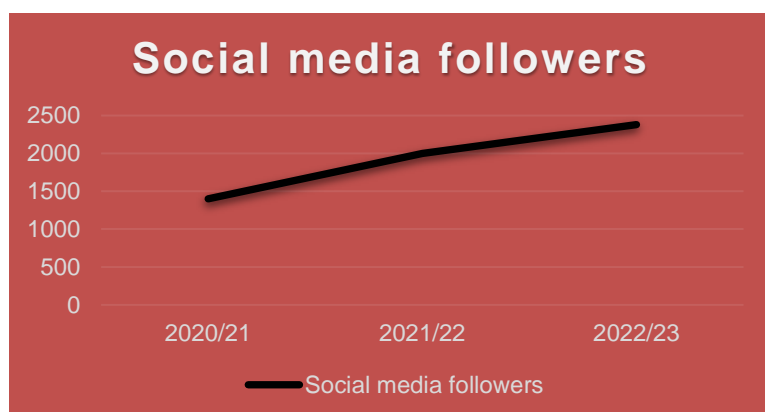
We are grateful to Hammersmith and Fulham's web manager and team who have provided advice, support and guidance on the move to a new website provider, accessibility requirements and compliance with expected standards required of Local Authorities, they will continue to act as critical friends to Adopt London.



The Adopt London social media channels post regularly to communicate and inform a range of audiences impacted by adoption. Our social media followers continue to organically increase and using these channels can be an effective way

to engage and support people in London who are considering adoption but not yet ready to begin an assessment.

Year	Social media followers
2020/21	1400
2021/22	2000
2022/23	2380



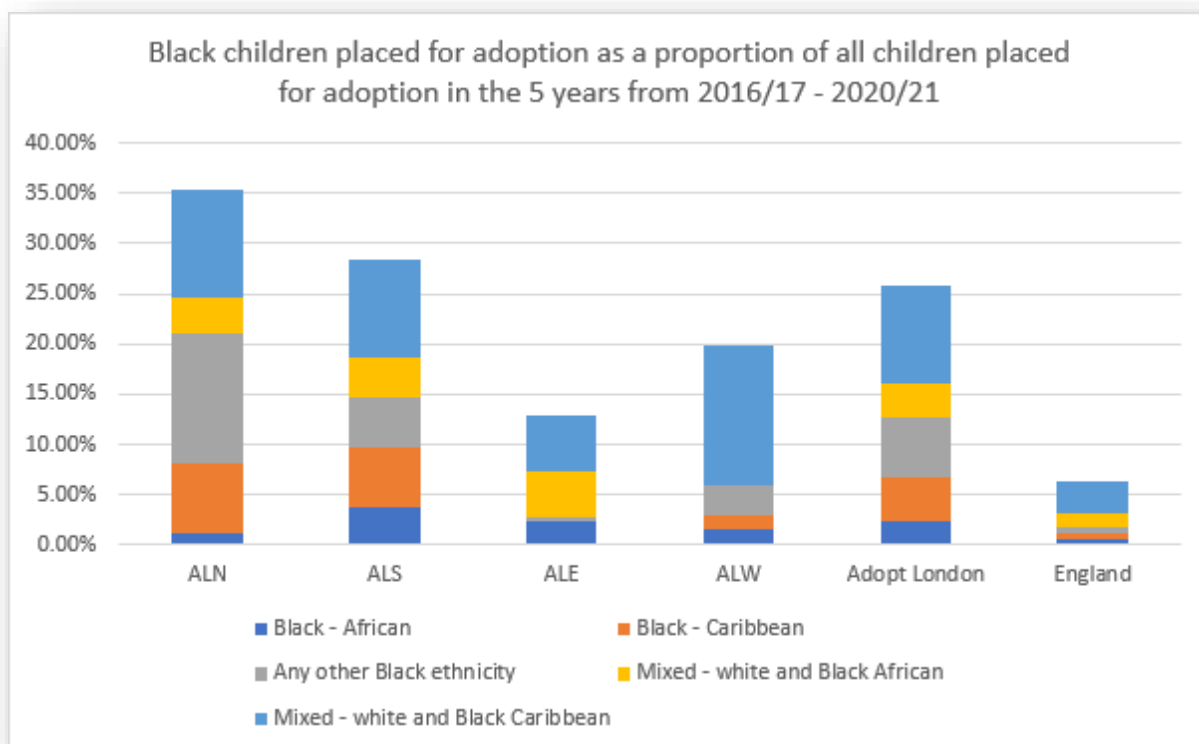
## Black Adoption Project



The Black Adoption Project aims to improve adoption for Black children and families and is a partnership project between Adopt London and Laurelle Brown Training & Consultancy. We have now completed phase 1 of the Project and have a strong governance structure established with a wide range of representatives covering professional, community, and lived experience of Black adoption – including adult adoptees, care experienced adults, and adoptive parents.

Our initial research is detailed in our Phase 1 Report, which evidences the disparities for Black children in the adoption system and pinpoints where these disparities are occurring. It also looks at the experiences of Black prospective adoptive parents, and Black community perceptions of adoption. Some of our key findings are:

- Black children who have a plan of adoption agreed by the court are much less likely than other children to go on to be adopted, and this often seems to be because suitable adoptive parents could not be found.
- Black children who are adopted wait much longer to move into their adoptive family.
- Black prospective adopters are more likely to drop out during the assessment process and not go on to adopt a child.
- Some of the most significant barriers to adoption are financial factors, negative experiences or perceptions of the assessment process, the need for more support after adoption (including culturally informed support), and the impact of racism.



Across Adopt London on average 25.8% of children placed for adoption were of Black or mixed Black ethnicity backgrounds. We found that Black children with a Placement Order were 20% less likely to have been successfully placed for adoption than children of other ethnicities. Black Caribbean children particularly were 12 times more likely than other children to have ‘prospective adopters could not be found’ given as the reason for a change of care plan away from adoption. When other factors were held constant, Black children spent on average 6.5 - 8 months longer in the adoption process before moving in with their adoptive family, and the most substantial delays occurred during the family finding process – again suggesting that significant delay is caused by difficulties identifying suitable prospective adopters.

Within the research we also looked at the journey for Black prospective adoptive parents and found that Black-only households were 5-6 more likely than white-only households to leave the adoption process without adopting a child – indicating that there are difficulties during the assessment phase that need to be considered further.



### Black adoption project goals

- *Levelled playing field for black **families**.*
- *Reimagined **system** for black children.*
- *Black **communities** understand and care about adoption.*
- *Black adopted **children** have the support they need.*
- *Confident, anti-racist and culturally competent **workforce**.*

During 2022/23 we organised workshops with a wide range of stakeholders including adopted young people, to develop a Theory of Change – a document which articulates the things that aren't working now, and the goals of the project. The research findings and Theory of Change process led directly to some options for creating change. The pilot proposals target different areas of practice including:

- Services to increase retention of Black prospective adopters both at the initial enquiry stage, and later during the assessment process.
- Exploring ways to reduce the economic barriers to adoption.
- Specialist learning and development programme for adoptive parents of Black children.
- Community-led approach to raise awareness of adoption and ultimately to recruit more Black adoptive parents.
- Research into the significance and availability of Black therapists providing support under the Adoption Support Fund.
- Social, participatory and educational groups for Black adopted young people.

In the next phase of work, we will be initiating a number of pilot projects across these different areas of practice, and evaluating the impact these changes have on Black children and families.

Alongside the research and practice change is activity focusing on the importance of workforce development and support for Black staff members. We have been running monthly 'Safe Space Sessions' for Black staff to reflect on their work within adoption and discuss experiences that impact and shape the workplace and practice. We have run whole-staff development training, and a series of workshops focused on learning from Black adoptees on their experiences of adoption. In the next phase of work, we will be developing programmes of support for staff to help create and embed change.

## We are Family



2022/23 has been our third year working in formal partnership with We Are Family, a London adoptive parent peer support charity that provide a wide range of peer support to adoptive parents free-of-charge. Their overall membership has now grown to 1157 members, an increase from just over 1000 at the end of 2021/22. Through We Are Family our adoptive parents are connected to social networks of other adoptive parents from the earliest stages of adoption, providing parents with a place to seek advice, normalise parenting challenges, and reduce the potential for isolation.

There are currently seven locally based We Are Family groups running across London including one in West London, as well as a group for single adoptive parents and for prospective adopters still being assessed. The groups hold meetings both virtually and in-person, organise family gatherings, and have an annual celebration picnic. We Are Family also run a playgroup for adoptive parents with pre-school children and have recently begun to initiate some common interests' groups – such as for parents of teenagers.

We Are Family groups are run by adoptive parent volunteers, supported by a small salaried staff team. In 2022/23 We Are Family have started providing professional peer support training to their volunteers which assists with the sustainability and development of their voluntary roles.

*"I was lucky that I found We Are Family early into our placement, my husband & I were struggling a great deal with the challenges with no family or support close by and being part of We Are Family changed that. I don't believe we would have the relationship with our children that we have now if it were not for the help, support and understanding that other WAF members gave to me."*

***We Are Family member and adoptive parent.***

*"I have gained so much from being a We Are Family volunteer. As well as making new contacts and meeting people from different walks of life, I get the chance to use my professional skills from my previous working life in education to run activities."*

***We Are Family volunteer and adoptive parent.***

## Adopters Training

Adopt London provide expert webinars to our adoptive parents twice per month through our partnership with We Are Family. Adoptive parents can choose whether to attend webinars live and have the opportunity to ask questions, or whether to watch on demand in the member hub for up to a year after the event. This way of offering learning, development, and support has been popular with adoptive parents who need flexibility to manage childcare demands. In 2022/23 we provided 23 expert webinars on a wide variety of topics. Over 400 adoptive parents attended webinars live this year, and since the programme started over 3100 webinars have been watched on demand.

- ❖ Child to parent violence
- ❖ Executive functioning
- ❖ Self-care for parents
- ❖ Adoption support available through Adopt London
- ❖ Special Educational Needs
- ❖ Supporting contact with birth families
- ❖ Non-violent resistance parenting strategies
- ❖ Adoptee experiences
- ❖ Life story work
- ❖ Birth parent experiences
- ❖ Sensory processing
- ❖ Childhood anxiety
- ❖ Parenting teenagers

*"I found it tremendously valuable and interesting, thank you!"*

**Webinar on childhood anxiety**

*"Brilliant, insightful and helpful"*

**Webinar on life story work**

*"Fantastic. So knowledgeable. I know more from Eleanor's webinar than I've known for the entire year this has gone on for."*

**Webinar on Special Educational Needs**

*"Great presenter, very engaging, experienced with specific tangible techniques."*

**Webinar on non-violent resistance parenting strategies**

*"It all confirms my gut feeling about contact being so important going forward."*

**Webinar on supporting contact with birth families**

In addition, for the second year we have produced an original podcast series 'Adoption Shared' in partnership with We Are Family, our adopter peer support partners. In 2022/23 we published the third season, with episodes focused on Black adoption from different perspectives. The podcast has been successful at providing another way for us to engage, support, develop, and build loyalty with those considering adoption who are not yet ready to begin an assessment. Episodes are also used in preparing and training prospective adopters and in building community for adoptive parents.

The first three seasons of Adoption Shared have now been downloaded 8,284 times. A fourth season is being prepared for release in 2023/24 focused on adoption experiences for children with additional support needs.



## Partnerships with Voluntary adoption agencies and Adoption Support Agencies



**PAC-UK**



ALW commissions a service from PAC UK which includes:

- An advice line, supporting adopted adults and birth parents'
- Counselling services for anyone affected by Adoption or Special Guardianship arrangements living in any of the 4 partner boroughs.



ALW commissions international assessment work from the Inter Country Adoption Centre, (IAC) this is mainly used by people wishing to adopt a child from their own country of origin or another overseas country.

Partnerships between Adopt London and the Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA's) operating across London are positive and productive, a quarterly meeting takes place to share practice and service developments.



A feature of this collaboration is an ongoing programme of Lunch and Learn sessions facilitated by PACT a Voluntary Adoption agency operating in London, funding is shared by the 5 London RAA's. Up to 100 adoption social workers have attended each

event on a range of adoption related subjects, this provides an opportunity for all adoption social workers from across the sector to come together, build networks and enhance their learning and development.

### ALW Practice and support services

The social workers, managers, and all support workers in ALW strive to deliver a therapeutically informed, reflective, and respectful service to all children, families, prospective adopters, our partners and all who are affected by adoption and special guardianship arrangements. Social workers are trained in Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP) which supports our practice model.

During 2022/23 we have continued to focus our efforts on welcoming new prospective adopters, family finding for children and offering a range of support services, some of which are summarised below.



## **Early permanence**

All ALW adopters in assessment are encouraged to consider Early Permanence, additional training and support is offered to those who wish to proceed. Increasing the numbers of children placed in Early Permanence arrangements is a development priority regionally and nationally. An Early Permanence project for London as a region includes a research project looking at the barriers to Early Permanence in London, the report is expected in the summer.

## **Matching**

As part of the collaboration with the other Adopt London regions a new matching project has commenced, funded from the national RAA programme. A matching manager has been appointed to drive forward innovative practice initiatives, provide additional capacity and enhance the number of children placed across the Adopt London partnership if no suitable matches within ALW are available.

## **Special Guardianship Support**

Peer support services have developed further this year, a special guardian co-facilitates a monthly support group, in addition, a peer support initiative of informal meetings and “chill & chat” sessions are also coordinated and facilitated by the same special guardian. A special guardianship forum has met for the first time, this was attended by various guest speakers including a director of one of the partner LA’s. The forum will meet quarterly and is co-chaired by the special guardian and head of service, the purpose is to enable direct dialogue between special guardians and representatives of the service and to influence policy and practice.

## **Kinship**



ALW has commissioned a service from Kinship, a national charity (formerly known as Grandparents Plus) the service offers membership to all families living in any of the 4 ALW partner authorities who are caring for a child in a kinship arrangement regardless of the legal status of the arrangement. In addition, a more specialist level of service is also included in the contract that offers direct more intense support to 40 families a year.

Team Managers from each partner LA meet regularly with ALW managers to ensure that the service is supporting the most vulnerable families.

## **Drama Workshop**

### **October 2022 half term Drama workshop**

As part of ALW’s support offer to families, during the Oct half-term break, 10 young people took part in a 4 day drama workshop facilitated by ALW Social Workers and an independent drama therapist, funded by the Adoption Support Fund. The workshop was open to 11-13 years old young people in both Special Guardianship and adoptive families.

The 10 young people, aged 11-13 years of age, started the week looking at setting the scene, building characters and roles, and creating stories, progressing to directing. The children

worked together, supporting each other to bring one of their stories to life, which was wonderful to see. It was impressive that all 10 children came on the first day and continued to come for each of the 4 days.

After just 4 days we could see that they all felt more comfortable in themselves, with each other, and with the staff, and their friendships were becoming more solid. From some parental feedback, we know that some of the young people want to stay in touch, which is an indicator of enjoying each other's company.

A celebration evening was held in November, all of the young people attended as did their parents and special guardians, the children enjoyed pizza's and watching the edited film of the workshop they each received certificates recognising their individual contributions and celebrating their talent.

**Drama Therapist's feedback to the social workers who co-facilitated.**

*I think it was the most amazing week that the young people seemed to get so much from, and I really wanted to thank you for your incredible support.*

*From the conception of the idea a few months ago, to the ongoing organisation of the celebration follow up session, it has been an absolute pleasure to be involved in a project that has been run so smoothly, and with such enthusiasm. I am so grateful to you and your team for supporting the therapeutic work in such a solid and yet subtle and understated way. It makes such a huge difference.*

*All of the interactions I was witness to, were so astute, well timed and completely relevant to the situation. I am certain that the young people will hold these personal connections and newly formed relationships firmly and with real meaning feeling the benefit of them for many weeks/months to come.*

As a result of the success of the workshop, another workshop took place in May half-term.

*After first day of workshop S's Mum and she said she had a great day yesterday and was really keen to come back today. Mom said that S is amazing and is so proud of her.*

(Families' feedback on the drama workshop)

*Thank you all for your hard work for the drama workshop last week and for the regular feedback from ALW. R really enjoyed it and her confidence was definitely boosted. I know she has already exchanged messages with couple of the other attendees and will look forward to the 25th.*

(Families' feedback on the drama workshop)

## 7. Clinical Psychology in ALW

The clinical psychology offer embeds two NHS employed clinical psychologists (equivalent to 1.0 WTE) alongside Adopt London West's social care services providing support to adoptive and special guardianship families in Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith & Fulham and Hounslow.

This is a Tier 2 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS); the service offers a range of provision to both social work staff and adopted/special guardianship families.

Below includes an overview of the clinical psychology provision currently:

- *Psychology consultation with social workers*
- *Supporting transitions from foster-carer to adoptive families*
- *Reflective practice for the recruitment and family finding social work team*
- *Supporting the team manager/consultant practitioner to hold and maintain the structure for 'group supervision' for the support team*
- *Training and workshops for staff*
- *Preparations groups for prospective adopters*
- *The development of practice guides*
- *Direct work with children, young people, and families (funded via the Adoption Support Fund); this includes:*
  - I. Assessment and formulation model; a four-session clinical psychology assessment (with an additional review appointment after a written report has been provided to the family) for adopted and special guardian families.*
  - II. Foundations for attachment; a Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) informed programme, for those parenting children who have relationship difficulties, especially children who have experienced attachment difficulties, trauma, loss and/or early separation in their life. This is a nine-week programme and we approximately run four groups a year.*
  - iii. Other therapeutic interventions: the range of direct interventions include Dyadic Developmental Practice/ Parenting/ Psychotherapy (DDP); Narrative Therapy; Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT); mentalisation based approaches; Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) skills; Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR); Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT); and Compassion Focussed Therapy (CFT). These interventions are funded through the Adoption Support Fund from the child/young person's intervention grant.*

## Case Study example of Clinical Psychologists support to a family

D, aged three years, was referred to the Clinical Psychology service within Adopt London West following the adoptive parents sharing concerns with their social worker in relation to some of D's behaviours and requesting support in understanding and responding to them. Her parent's described their caring relationship to be 'intense'; D often struggled to play and explore independently and remained preoccupied with remaining close to them. D was also rejecting in her relationship with her adoptive father.

The clinical psychology assessment was four sessions and involved a comprehensive account of the family's strengths, presenting needs and parenting experiences. The parent's described strengths of family stability, commitment and D becoming more open to their attempts of physical comfort. They identified parenting challenges of intense connection seeking, control, and hypervigilance. Within the sessions together, there was an emphasis on co-developing a shared understanding of D's needs and the parenting challenges they were experiencing. We understood D's connection seeking as a communication of need, and in response to this the necessity to provide D with attachment experiences that address missed experiences and supports trust in her parent's availability, whilst also holding in mind the impact this has on them as parents.

Considering the needs identified and the shared understanding that was co-developed, therapeutic parenting values were discussed to further strengthen the parent-child relationship and D's experience of safety and security. Some of the recommendations included dedicated and planned attachment time with D, as well as offering preventative connection prior to key moments of separation. We also thought about embodying playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, and empathy within their way of being with D; and the value of naming and storying her emotions and experiences to support D in meaning-making her inner world. The recommendations also recognised the need for adults to be consciously aware of their non-verbal communication and provide storytelling of their emotional world to lessen any worries of rejection or the 'threat-lens in which D view's their interactions with her. Considerations were also given to her parent's noticing when there may be a wrestle for control within their relationship and how they may respond to this.

## 8. Adoption Panel

The ALW Adoption panel hears recommendations on.

- *Proposed matches of children with prospective adopters*
- *Adoption as a suitable care plan for children whose parent/s have consented to adoption (formerly referred to as relinquished babies)*
- *Suitability of prospective adopters to be approved*
- *Reviews of adopters and recommendations to rescind approval.*

There have been 16 ALW Panels from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, running every 3 weeks, with due consideration to the need for additional panels, based on the demand by ALW in ensuring that decisions are made in a timely and effective manner.

ALW placed 22 children during this period, however, the Panel made positive matching recommendation on behalf of 26 children, which was the same compared to the previous year. Out of those 26 matches, 7 were made with ALW approved families and 19 with families approved by other RAAs/VAAAs. Early Permanence Placements – out of the 26 children, 11 were already in early permanence placements when the match was presented at Panel, some children will have been placed in 2021/22.

Adoption Plans -- The Panel also made a recommendation on the adoption plan for 1 child.

The Panel considered the suitability of 20 families to adopt, 4 of whom were dually approved as adopters and foster carers enabling them to offer early permanence placements, Of the families approved in 2022/23 - 25% are of Black, Asian or mixed ethnicity & 15% identify as LGBT+.

In addition to the above 20 approvals, the Panel was asked to consider **7 resignations**:

- 2 families due to being offered jobs abroad and relocating.
- 2 couples due to a breakdown in their relationship.
- 1 couple due to falling pregnant.
- 2 due to change of plans and personal circumstances.

All Prospective Adopter Reports (PARs) taken to panel have had a unanimous positive recommendation from panel and are deemed good to excellent reports and this evidences the excellent work that our recruitment team complete to ensure thorough and evidence-based assessments. Due to staffing capacity, ALW uses Independent Social workers to complete many of its assessments and although it is recognised this is not an ideal situation, all social workers that ALW uses are trusted and aligned with the values and working practices of ALW. Prior to panel, PARs are audited by the Team Manager before being sent to the Panel Advisor for a second audit to provide robust quality assurance.



In addition to those applicants that were successfully approved in 2022-2023, two further applications were supported to withdraw from stage 2 prior to panel and an additional 6 applications were withdrawn or ended during the stage 1 process or post stage 1 break. Again, this evidences the thorough work that the team complete to ensure that applicants are prepared, ready, and safe prior to attending panel.



**Feedback to the Panel --** Following each panel meeting, the Adviser sends feedback forms to all those who attended the Panel meeting and the professionals involved. The overall feedback is very positive, with some comments about timings and processes taken into consideration to improve the Panel's practice:

*"That was an incredibly positive experience, what lovely people"*

*"The chair was excellent in both their welcoming and explaining the process to the adopter, who stated to me that she found the experience very pleasant and affirming".*

*"Panel was a great experience, thank you to everyone involved who did everything they could to keep us relaxed as they could so we could enjoy the experience!"*

*"Although this was a big day for us and naturally, we were somewhat nervous, panel was a great experience. Everyone did their utmost to make us feel comfortable and relaxed, the panel questions were very clear and fair. We had the chance to say what we wanted to say, we were listened to, and given the chance to ask questions."*

*"Wonderful Panel Chair, an extremely good balance of being personable and professional."*

*"In my opinion there was nothing that needed to be improved. Panel was a great experience; my adopter was very happy with the feedback and comments. Panel members were welcoming, and the questions were relevant."*

*"The Panel was super engaged, welcoming, and clear in all language/communication. The whole experience was made super pleasant thanks to the Chair leading the panel in such an excellent way. I liked how everybody introduced themselves and I was pleasantly surprised everybody gave 2 reasons for their decision. It was an incredibly heart-warming experience which I had not expected. My deepest thanks to everybody part of the panel yesterday."*

*"All the members of the panel made us feel relaxed. We felt as we could talk about everything openly and we are happy we could share what we feel about S. You made the day that could be more stressful into quite pleasant experience. Thank you for that!"*

*"Definitely felt treated with respect."*

*"The questions were very clear and to the point, I felt it was positive that some questions were given before panel".*

*"I felt very comfortable and at ease to share my views within the panel."*



The quality of reports presented to panel throughout the year has been deemed good to excellent, any issues or concerns that have arisen in the functioning of the Panel, or the adoption service have always been successfully resolved because of the effective working relationship that exists between the Panel and ALW.

Quarterly meetings take place between the Panel Chair, the Panel Vice Chair, the Panel Adviser, the Adoption Team Managers, and the ALW Head of Service are productive in progressing development, change and improvement in the work of an adoption agency.

Following each case, the Panel submits its feedback to the Head of Service and managers, any feedback to the panel is considered at the next Panel meeting to ensure that there is quality assurance both ways.

## 9. Priorities for 2023/24

- *increase the number of children placed with ALW adopters.*
- *further develop the Clinical Psychology offer to enable more clinical intervention services to be delivered in house.*
- *achieve DDP partner status to further support and embed our therapeutic practice model.*
- *increase the number of children living in special guardianship arrangements engaging in community activities through partnerships with Brentford and QPR football clubs.*
- *Implement a consistent and regular training offer to all 4 partner local authorities.*
- *launch shared Adopt London TriX procedures.*
- *implement an independent Adopter voice project across Adopt London.*
- *launch shared Adopt London TriX procedures.*



## 10. Feedback

<i>"Fantastic presentation - really helpful and loved Sharon sharing her story too. THANK YOU."</i>	Email received following Info Session
<i>"Firstly, I just wanted to say that I was so inspired by you and your colleagues for the work that you do to help children. Secondly, I thought the session was really well run and insightful and a good foundation for understanding the adoption process and the presentation looked great!"</i>	Email received following Info Session
<i>"Wanted to say thank you for organising and for sharing all your experiences. It's so encouraging to be in a room of lgbt adoptive parents and also see so many other lgbt+ prospective parents too. Thank you!"</i>	Feedback following Meet The Adopter LGBT event
<i>"Thank you very much Margaret and colleagues- this was my first session- Excellent Event! Well organised and good opportunities to network!"</i>	IAC
<i>"This was my first event and it was so helpful and informative, thank you!"</i>	PACT
<i>"Thank you so much. This is wonderful news to have come on my Birthday. I am so delighted by this decision. I appreciate all the hard work and support from your team. It has been such a positive experience, and I can't thank everyone enough for that. I am so looking forward to being matched with my child. Have a great day."</i>	Email following notification of Panel approval as an adopter
<i>"Many thanks for organising the funding for continued support. We're very grateful"</i>	Support
<i>"ALW has been incredibly supportive"</i>	Support
<i>"ALW have always provided superb support to us as a family even through the pandemic"</i>	Support
<i>"We are very grateful for the assistance we have received from ALW so far. It has been a great source of support to us, especially through the recent transition from primary to secondary school. I think we would have really struggled over the last 12 months without the help and support provided"</i>	Support
<i>"We just wanted to say a huge thank you for a very informative session. It was really useful and honest."</i>	email received following Info Session
<i>"We have really appreciated the ALW's support which has been invaluable in helping us provide therapy for our family"</i>	Support

<i>"Sarah has also been a pillar of support to the whole family. Without her intervention, things would not have progressed the way it has, so we are very much indebted to Sarah too."</i>	Support
<i>"We have found ALW to be available and quick to respond to any help. ALW have continued to be supportive and help us access funding to help support our adopted child and us as a family."</i>	Support
<i>"We have been very pleased with the support and care given to us. Without it, I doubt if we would have been able to continue family life in the way are doing."</i>	Support
<i>"We chose ALW as we attended 3 other Information Sessions with other agencies earlier this year and felt most comfortable with ALW, who were the most helpful, friendly, knowledgeable, and approachable. In the other information sessions the social workers didn't seem as enthusiastic or knowledgeable. ALW's was definitely the best session – it was well organised, the presenters came across well, and they even went to the effort of having a previous adopter join the call, which none of the other agencies did at their information sessions."</i>	Prospective Adopter
<i>"Sarah, thank you SO MUCH! You have been AMAZING!!!</i>  <i>We really appreciate the help and support that you have given to our family.</i>  <i>It is so incredible that, years after the adoptions, we have the continued to receive the same level of care that we had during both adoptions."</i>	Support
<i>"I expected to be passed around and that it would be difficult to get help, but actually i was overwhelmed by how welcoming and supportive Vanessa was on that initial call."</i>	Birth Parent
<i>S, an adopted adult phoned on Friday having received a call from someone stating she was relative of her birth mother and that her birth mother was dying and desperately wanted "forgiveness" for having had a child adopted. Munaza immediately advised S what she needed to do and the person at the GRO also pulled out the stops to get the paperwork sent and delivered to Ealing yesterday. S has been in contact yesterday with S and will be meeting virtually with her today as this is a legal requirement and help her to think through this unexpected situation</i>  <i>"Thank you so much Munaza</i> <i>I am so impressed with your service and more importantly I am incredibly grateful with the speed, professionalism, and kindness with which you helped me today.</i>	Adopted Adult

*Thank you for going the extra mile for me today."*

**Debbie Gabriel**  
**Head of Service**  
**September 2023**