



## Corporate Parenting Committee

**Monday 5 February 2024 at 5.00 pm**

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

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

**The press and public will be excluded from this meeting.**

### Membership:

#### Members

Councillors:

Grahl (Chair)  
Collymore  
Dixon  
Gbajumo  
Hirani

#### Substitute Members

Councillors:

Chappell, Conneely, Kennelly  
and Rubin

Councillors: Maurice and Mistry

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

For electronic copies of minutes, reports and agendas, and to be alerted when the minutes of this meeting have been published visit: **[www.brent.gov.uk/democracy](http://www.brent.gov.uk/democracy)**

## Notes for Members - Declarations of Interest:

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

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

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

### \*Disclosable Pecuniary Interests:

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

### \*\*Personal Interests:

The business relates to or affects:

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

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

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

or

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

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

# Agenda

Introductions, if appropriate.

Item	Page
<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 / 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 Progress Report - The London Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers</b>	9 - 20

To provide an update to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the London Protocol on reducing criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers, published in March 2021. Previous reports have been presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in April 2019 and January 2022.

**9 Progress Report - Revised Fostering Offer** 21 - 28

To provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the updated Fostering Offer to be launched in April 2024.

**10 Progress Report - Brent Residential Children's Home** 29 - 34

To provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the progress of work being undertaken to commence a local authority residential children's home.

**11 Health Annual Report for Looked After Children 2022-2023** Presentation

To provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee in relation to health services and outcomes for Looked After Children in Brent.

**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 22 April 2024**



## MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE Monday 16 October 2023 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Grahl (Chair) and Councillors Dixon, Gbajumo and Hirani

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

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

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

None.

### 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 17 July 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 a Fun Day at the end of the summer holidays with young people and their carers. There had been activities for younger children to participate in and it had been good to see everyone interacting with each other. J had been involved in recent interviews for a new Participation and Engagement Manager. The new Bright Spots Survey would be launched soon.

S (Care Leavers in Action) explained that she had been working with the London Children in Care Council on the Pan-London Care Leavers Compact where they had considered the benefits of recognising being care experienced as a protected characteristic. She thought that some children in care and care leavers may benefit from this, such as being guaranteed an interview when they applied for jobs, but older care leavers were conflicted as to whether this would have an impact or whether it would be a 'tick box' exercise

because it would not be protected by law. She thought the potential benefits outweighed the negatives.

S asked whether the Council had considered any sessions with care leavers around voting and voter ID, particularly in relation to local democracy and politics. She highlighted that many care leavers may not know much about the political landscape including how to register to vote or that voter ID was now required. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) highlighted that Brent Youth Parliament had been looking at voting as an issue to promote, particularly for 17-year-olds becoming 18 soon. This would include awareness of how to register to vote in the first place and information on voter ID. He suggested a session with Care Leavers in Action could take place to get higher numbers of young people registering to vote.

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 whether the new half price bus and travel card from TfL for 18–24-year-olds would make a difference to care leavers. K highlighted that she currently spent around £15 per day on travel to get to work, which sometimes came out of her savings to pay for, so this would make a big difference to her daily travel expenses. J agreed, explaining that he travelled by bus mainly which could add up and sometimes he would need to take money from another bill to pay for travel. CLIA asked whether the travel subsidy that was offered through Brent's Care Leaver Charter would continue with the new TfL initiative, but officers were unsure how it would work as they had not yet seen the detail from the GLA.

The Committee asked how CLIA felt about the rent deposit and housing deposit scheme proposed in the Pan-London Care Compact. For some care leavers, they were still in semi-independent provision, but this commitment would affect them in the near future. One care leaver explained that they did not know much about housing and they were nervous about it, but their personal adviser helped them to feel safe about the future.

The Committee asked what other trips and activities CIA and CLIA would be interested in. Some were interested in doing more theatre trips but recognised that not everyone was interested in that, and residentials were a good activity for team bonding and encouraging people to join the CIA and CLIA groups.

The Committee thanked the representatives for the updates and **RESOLVED:**

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

## 8. **Annual Report: Participation and Engagement with Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2022-23**

Sonya Kalyniak (Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Brent Council) introduced the report, which provided an overview of participation activity for care experienced children and young people in 2022-23. In introducing the report, she highlighted the following key points:

- One of the key achievements of the reporting year was that young people had been trained as interviewers and participated in the interviews of key members of staff, including the Chief Executive and Director of Children and Young People.
- The Council had hosted a Pride of Brent Youth Awards ceremony with members of Care in Action (CIA) and Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) being both part of the judging panel and receiving awards.

- A staff conference which had included Brent Care Journeys had involved different multi-media presentations from young people for them to express their experience of being in care, and 400 people saw those visual presentations which included a moving dance production.
- The service had been considering how Brent Care Journeys ways of working could be incorporated into future service design when the partnership came to an end in early 2025.
- The Council would be starting a new round of Bright Spots surveys in collaboration with the University of Oxford and Coram Voice, which would be the third time using the tool meaning it would yield some comparable data and results. Those results were then used for CIA and CLIA to advocate on behalf of other young people. The previous round had found that it was not always easy to build relationships with foster carers when a child first entered care, and so the groups had created a leaflet of 'dos and don'ts' for foster carers, which they had now developed into training that they would deliver.
- It was highlighted that there had been several changes in Participation Workers over the past 6-12 months, which had been challenging for CIA and CLIA because that work was very relationship focused. The service was working hard to get more permanent recruitment into those teams and had now recruited a Participation Manager who had already been involved in participation work in Brent and had been endorsed by CLIA representatives.

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

The Committee asked whether Brent Care Journeys would be continued past the end of its partnership in 2025. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) explained that Brent Care Journeys was a partnership with Barnardo's but not a contract so was a slightly different way of working. The Council had a strong relationship with Barnardo's and worked with them in a number of other areas such as the Family Wellbeing Centres. As such, the Council was hoping this was not the end of Brent Care Journeys and was in conversations as to what that provision would look like beyond 2025 in its evolved state.

The Committee noted that the report detailed the disruptive nature of changes in children's social workers, and asked whether the service was doing anything to make that transition between social workers easier, particularly because social worker changes would become more likely with the current national workforce issues. Members of CLIA shared their own experience of managing changes in social worker, highlighting that sometimes it was hard when one social worker left to feel motivated to build a relationship with someone new. Some of the work CLIA was doing to combat that was work around trusted relationships where the young person had a trusted person they could talk to about these issues to help with that transition. The young person could get to know their new social worker with that trusted person to allow the new social worker to get a sense of the young person for themselves rather than through their case files. CLIA acknowledged that this could be a time-consuming process but worked to establish that relationship at the first instance.

In response to CLIA, Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) highlighted that she agreed this should happen, but currently it was difficult to create that sense of handover due to the amount of vacancies within the service. In the LAC service, there was around 30% vacancies, which meant people were coming in and out at different times and when one person left there was not automatically someone there to take over straight away, creating a gap for young people. She highlighted that there was a need to be creative to ensure that sense of consistency for young people and the service was always open to suggestions on how that could be made easier for young people. Sonya Kalyniak

added that the social work induction programme used a trauma informed approach to inform incoming staff where young people had already had changes of social workers and what they had told the service made things easier for them. Leaving social workers were also asked to do later life letters and end relationships with children and young people properly, including recording the work they had done with the young person. Palvinder Kudhail (Director Integration and Improved Outcomes, Brent Council) added that the Council was now collecting data on the number of transitions a child had, and if they had more than 3 social worker changes then the Council would look to see if there was anyone else within that person's network who had been more stable and could provide that consistency. It was often found that the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) was consistent and so the Council might look to them and ask them to reassure the young person and do an extra visit with them.

In considering that transition period and the work the service were doing to minimise that disruption, the Committee asked how long that gap might be between a child's previous social worker leaving and being allocated a new social worker. Kelli Eboji answered that the 'worst case' scenario would be a week or fortnight gap where the service was waiting for someone to start. Where a social worker left and there were no other social workers with capacity, the Team Manager would hold that young person's case until someone new started to ensure the young person was always allocated.

The Committee asked about the uptake of participation projects and whether children and young people were making use of them, such as the grand mentoring scheme and apprenticeship scheme. They heard that there was a cohort of around 20 young people making good use of the grand mentoring scheme and the Council was in the process of renewing that contract so that it could continue. Officers and the Committee felt that more needed to be done around the apprenticeship scheme, particularly around the promotion of those opportunities. Some members of CLIA had not heard about these opportunities. Officers explained that, normally, a care leavers' personal advisor or social worker would let them know about the opportunities available to them and share the local offer with them, and if they joined their local hub that information would be available there too. The Committee felt there was still work to do around communicating effectively with care leavers to ensure they could access these schemes and the Committee asked for a follow-up on communication of the local offer in a future report.

RESOLVED:

- i) To endorse the development areas for 2023-24 outlined in section 4.11 of the accompanying report.
- ii) For a future report to detail the communication and engagement of the local offer with care leavers.

## 9. **Progress Report on Pan London Care Leavers Compact**

Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report which informed the Corporate Parenting Committee of the Pan London Care Leavers Compact and the Council's progress against the Compact. In introducing the report, she highlighted the following points:

- London local authorities were all being asked to make 6 commitments to London's care leavers by the end of December 2023. These were 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 aimed to



maximise consistency and quality in the local offers of support from local authorities.

- The report set out each commitment, including the current position in Brent for each of those. The Council was meeting most key elements of the Covenant, for example, Brent had implemented a Council Tax Scheme in 2018 waiving the requirement of Brent care leavers to pay council tax.
- Brent Council ensured care leavers were offered supported accommodation until they felt ready for their own tenancy which ensured no care leaver was found intentionally homeless. Brent was the only Council still offering social housing tenancies to care experienced young people.
- The Council did not currently offer a rent deposit scheme and would look at that as part of the work on the Pan-London Compact. Any proposals would be presented to senior managers.
- In relation to adopting the principle that care leavers up to the age of 25 should be placed in 'priority need' under homelessness legislation, Brent Council had not officially adopted that principle, but in practice there was close working between the Council's Housing Need Service and Looked After Children and Permanency Service through the joint protocol. That protocol would be revised during the current financial year.
- The Committee may ask the Council to do more work to present a position on the possibility of recognising being care experienced as a protected characteristic. In law, it did not appear in the Equalities Act, so it was not likely to be legally enforceable and would be more of an intent towards care leavers.

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

S (Care Leavers in Action) had been involved at a London level in developing the proposed Compact, which had been a long process involving a lot of research. She had found it an interesting experience to be involved in, particularly in hearing what other local authorities offered as part of their local offer. Personally, S was conflicted around recognising care experience as a protected characteristic as she was concerned it may turn into a 'tick box' exercise, but she did see benefits to this and it if a care leaver did not want to then they did not have to disclose their status.

The Committee asked whether there had been any further work around lobbying at a national level for the rights of care leavers. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) advised that being part of the London Covenant was in itself a commitment from the local authority to support the rights of care leavers. Part of the reason for the establishment of the Compact was the recognition that, across London, there was difference in service depending on where a care leaver was. In relation to the specific proposal to recognise being care experienced as a protected characteristic, Councils did not have a common view on that point and it was still an emerging issue. Committee members felt that sometimes words were important and although it may not be legally binding it could be a big statement and gesture to care experienced young people to have that enshrined in writing. As councillors, Committee members highlighted the possibility of bringing forward a motion to Full Council to have wider publicity around the commitment.

The Committee heard that the Council had not yet looked at supporting care leavers with private rented accommodation because the Council provided social housing tenancies, but there may be a need to look at that in the future as housing became more pressured.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report and support the improvement in the consistency of Brent's local offer to include updating some elements of the housing offer, set out in section 3.3 of the report.
- ii) To endorse the Council's adoption of the national Care Leavers Covenant and support its implementation across the Council.

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

Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report, which provided information on the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it was achieving good outcomes for children. In introducing the report, she highlighted the following key points:

- Fostering fortnight had taken place, focused on recruitment of foster carers, and there had been some follow up events throughout the summer. These had proved productive in terms of raising awareness and increasing enquiries.
- A fostering walk had taken place in Gladstone Park which ended with a cream tea for foster carers and had been a nice celebration event.
- There were several assessments in progress, with 5 at Stage 1 and 4 at Stage 2 which was promising and reinforced the belief that going out to the community through events was beneficial.
- The report had new sections focused on kinship to give kinship carers a more prominent profile. Some recent kinship activity involved a funday during kinship care week.
- The Council had bid for funding from the DfE for recruitment and retention of foster carers jointly with West London and had been successful. The Council was now in the process of starting a Fostering Recruitment Hub with West London which was being led by Hammersmith and Fulham. As part of that project, a model of support known as 'mockingbird' was being piloted, where foster carers supported each other through self-sufficient support clusters.

In considering the reports, the following points were raised:

The Committee asked what the difference between kinship carers and foster carers was. Kelli Eboji explained that if a child was placed in an emergency placement with their kin and that kin then became a carer then they would only receive a basic allowance because they would not yet have been to Foster Panel for approval. The connected person did not need to be a blood relative but connected to the child in some way. Once that carer had been approved at Foster Panel then they would get a slight increase in the fostering allowance they were paid. The fostering allowance was calculated on an age basis and had 4 tiers with 3 levels, including an enhanced rate for children with additional needs. In terms of support, kinship carers were entitled to the same level of support as traditional foster carers, including an allocated social worker.

The Committee asked whether the service had plans to bring more activity face to face instead of virtual, such as training, foster carer support groups and Foster Panel. Kelli Eboji highlighted the need for balance in this regard, as it was important that foster carers completed their training and foster carers could not always attend in-person training. The evidence showed that, generally, foster carers did attend online training as a preference to face to face, but the service did not want to stop face to face training completely. The

service was clear with foster carers on the expectations for them to undertake training, but having that flexibility was important, in particular for kinship carers who the service may struggle to engage in training as they had come to fostering through a different route. The service used every opportunity to train foster carers in multiple creative ways, such as asking the foster carer to read an article and then discuss it with their social worker.

The Committee was interested in the Brazilian Community Day that the LAC and Permanency Service had attended and asked whether the service had seen any interest in fostering from attendees that day. Elena Muller (Service Manager – LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) replied that the day had gone very well and the service would be looking to attend more of these community events in future. The service had recently been to a Somali activity day. The focus was on being present in the community in order to ensure Brent's multiple diverse communities knew about fostering. The service would also be attending multi-faith forums. Kelli Eboji thanked social workers who had attended those events who had taken time out on their weekends to talk about fostering with the community. The Committee asked for councillors to be sent information on these events and for the Committee to receive the foster carer newsletter.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the contents of the report.

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

Debbie Gabriel (Adopt London West) introduced the report, which provided both a six-monthly update and the Adopt London West annual report of adoption activity. In introducing the report, she highlighted the following key points:

- Performance regarding children's timescales and timeliness of the adoption pathway was strong against national data. Brent's individual performance was detailed in the report.
- Placement of children with Adopt London West adopters in Brent had not performed as strongly in the annual report year. It was highlighted that Adopt London West recruited adopters that they believed were suitable to adopt, but this did not always mean they were the right match for a particular child. That sometimes meant that where Adopt London West adopters were not happy to wait for a match, they might get approached by other regional adoption agencies looking to place their children with them. As such, there had only been 4 children placed with Adopt London West adopters in Brent the previous year. There had been measures put in place to focus that issue, and of the 3 children in Brent placed in the current year, 2 were placed with Adopt London West adopters, showing a stronger position than the previous year.
- Performance around recruitment was strong across Adopt London. Within a national context, Stage 1 was very lengthy and it was difficult to meet that timescale but all Adopt London agencies were doing well against that target.
- Adopt London West continued to have strong relationships with its partners.
- There had only been a small number of complaints received which all related to access to records which was a well-known challenge.

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

The Committee was pleased to see the high percentage of LGBTQ+ adopters outlined in section 7.1 of the report. The report had not mentioned the number of Black adopters that had been approved and the Committee asked whether there had been any. Debbie Gabriel explained that Adopt London West had not yet approved any entirely Black households within the current year but had approved some mixed ethnicity households. Debbie Gabriel provided further information on the Black Adopters Project that was currently underway. She highlighted that Black Adopters Project had been informed by a focus group of young people who gave clear messages about what they wanted and needed from the project, as well as a Steering Committee which had been informed by a working group of Black adopters established by We Are Family. Some of the pilot programmes focused on setting up regular opportunities for young people to come together socially. There was also a focus on influencing schools and a community engagement focus. It was agreed that the Committee could be provided with an update on the project in the next report.

In relation to the plans for DfE and Ofsted to pilot direct inspections of Regional Adoption Agencies with 6 agencies, the Committee was advised that it was not yet known which agencies would be inspected until the call was received. The pilot would not look into Special Guardianship.

The Committee highlighted the positive of the stable workforce in Adopt London West and asked if there was any insight as to how that had been achieved. Debbie Gabriel highlighted that, very often, Adopt London recruited social workers who were burnt out from being on frontline teams, because they had the ability to do therapeutic social work in a less demanding area. As such, it was positive for Adopt London West that it was attracting young social workers from a children in need background, but this then impacted on frontline teams who may be losing out on those staff.

RESOLVED:


- i) To note the contents of the report.

## 12. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 18:30 pm

COUNCILLOR GWEN GRAHL  
Chair

 <p><b>Brent</b></p>	<p><b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b> 5 February 2024</p>
	<p><b>Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People</b></p>
	<p><b>Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools - Councillor Gwen Grahl</b></p>
<p><b>Progress report: The London Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers</b></p>	
<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>	<p>Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers - A protocol for London: The national protocol on reducing unnecessary criminalisation of looked-after children and care leavers.</p> <p><a href="https://publishing.service.gov.uk">The national protocol on reducing unnecessary criminalisation of looked-after children and care leavers (publishing.service.gov.uk)</a></p>
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	<p>Afzal Ahmed Service Manager, Looked After Children and Permanency <a href="mailto:Afzal.ahmed@brent.gov.uk">Afzal.ahmed@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, Early Help and Social Care <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 and updates to the Corporate Parenting Committee about the London Protocol (The Protocol hereafter) on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care

Leavers, published in March 2021<sup>1</sup>. Previous reports on reducing the criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers were presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in April 2019 and January 2022.

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

## **2.0 Recommendation(s)**

That the Committee:

- 2.1 Note the contents of the report and the progress made since the introduction of the London Protocol on reducing the criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers.
- 2.2 Advocate in support of the key principles set out within the London Protocol on behalf of looked after children and care leavers when exercising their duties as corporate parents.

## **3.0 Detail**

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

- 3.1.1 This area of work contributes to the following borough priorities:

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

## **4.0 Background**

- 4.1 In November 2018, a national protocol on reducing unnecessary criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers was published by the Department for Education (DfE), Home Office and Ministry of Justice (MoJ). The protocol was the first national guidance aiming to tackle this issue. It provided a framework for local authority children's services, local care providers, youth offending services, the crown prosecution service, police, HM Courts and Tribunal Services and local health services. A Pan-London Protocol was published by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) in March 2021 and sets out a framework for practice relevant to London.
- 4.2 The national protocol's key objectives and principles focused on a practice model that aimed to introduce preventative measures, reduce re-offending

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

behaviour and rehabilitate young people who had offended through effective joint working between relevant agencies. The protocol highlighted the impact of previous trauma, attachment issues and specific vulnerabilities of looked after children and care leavers. All agencies were encouraged to use a trauma-informed approach to their practice. The Protocol recommends that restorative approaches should be used in a child-centred way to enable integrated, coordinated, and proactive responses to prevent and address challenging offending behaviour.

- 4.3 Care experienced children are up to six times more likely to be criminalised than other children. Just over half of care experienced children will have a criminal conviction by the age of 24 compared to just over a tenth of their non-care experienced peers of the same age. This over representation of children in care within the criminal justice system has been well documented in various national reviews such as '*In Care Out of Trouble*', an independent review by Lord Laming, published by the Prison Reform Trust in 2016 and '*The education background of looked after children who interact with the criminal justice system*', published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in 2022.
- 4.4 The criminalisation of any young person can be a barrier to the transition into adulthood and future life prospects. The life experiences of many looked after children and care leavers make them particularly vulnerable to involvement in the criminal justice system as does the context in which they live, residential children's, semi-independent providers or in foster care.
- 4.5 The London Protocol on reducing criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers sets out the overarching key principles to ensure that looked after children and care leavers are not unnecessarily criminalised, and encourages professionals to ask, 'would this be good enough for my child?'
- 4.6 Every effort should be made to avoid unnecessary criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers, including prevention activity. This is in recognition of the fact that looked-after children's experiences can contribute to behaviour that make them particularly vulnerable to involvement in the youth justice system, potentially effecting their future life prospects.

## **5.0 Brent's Approach**

- 5.1 As of 31 December 2023 there were 314 looked after children and 470 care experienced young adults aged 18-25 open to the leaving care service. 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. All children in Brent are allocated to social workers up to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Young people leaving care post 18 are allocated to personal advisors who are professionals with experience of working with children and young people.
- 5.2 Young people who come into contact with the youth justice system are supported by the Brent Early Help managed, Youth Justice Service (YJS).

Although LAC are overrepresented in the UK youth justice system, the number of LAC children supervised by Brent YJS has halved in the three-year period between 2021 and 2023. It is difficult to identify a single contributing factor to this decrease, however it is notable that Brent Early Help established the Brent COVID-19 Pathfinder for Overrepresented Children in October 2020. This was a three-year preventative programme that provided emotional wellbeing, mentoring and other support to more than 450 children and young people from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic heritage groups that were ‘at-risk’ of entering the youth justice system. Furthermore, Brent Early Help invested heavily in trauma recovery, and anti-racist training between 2020 and 2023. This enhanced the ability of the YJS to deliver services to children and young people in accordance with *Child First* principles that recognise the needs, capacities, rights, and potential of children. It has also enabled the YJS to increasingly raise awareness among partners that structural barriers prevent many children and young people from participating fully.

	2021	2022	2023
<b>No. of Brent LAC supported by Brent YJS</b>	52	34	25

5.3 There are currently 9 Brent care leavers supported by Probation and 24 care leavers in prison which equates to 5.4% of Brent leaving care population.

5.4 There is a failure to achieve equal treatment for all children in the youth justice system in London and more broadly throughout the United Kingdom. In Brent, this is most pronounced for children and young people from Black Heritage Groups.

- In December 2023 forty-three percent of children in the Brent youth justice system are from Black Heritage Groups. This compares unfavourably when considering these children make up 24% of the total population – according to the 2021 Census.
- Asian children were proportionately the least represented: 14% known to the Brent Youth Justice Service (YJS) compared to 31% of the total population.
- White heritage children accounted for 29% of the YJS, compared to 24% of the total population.
- Seventy-one percent of the YJS cohort were from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds compared to an overall child population of 76%.
- Young women made up 5% of the YJS cohort.

5.5 Ethnicity of Brent LAC and care leaver as at 31 March 2023:

Open and allocated LAC and Care leavers by ethnicity



Ethnicity	Number of LAC	Number of Care Leavers
ABAN -Bangladeshi	1	5
AIND -Indian	4	2
AOTH - Any other Asian background	34	48
APKN -Pakistani	6	8
BAFR -African	23	47
BCRB -Caribbean	27	42
BOTH -Any other Black background	44	58
MOTH -Any other Mixed background	38	31
MWAS -White and Asian	4	4
MWBA -White and Black African	1	3
MWBC -White and Black Caribbean	20	14
NOBT -Information not yet obtained	1	2
OOTH -Any other ethnic group	46	128
WBRI -White British	28	14
WIRI - White Irish	7	3
WIRT -Traveller of Irish Heritage	2	1
WOTH -Any other White background	32	28
WROM -Gypsy/Roma	1	0
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>438</b>

5.6 Sixty percent of LAC who received youth justice disposals in 2023 were from Black Heritage groups:

<b>2023</b>	
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>No. of LAC</b>
Asian or Asian British	1
Black or Black British	15
Chinese or other ethnic group	1
Mixed	5
White	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>

5.7 As stated above there is disproportionate treatment for children in the youth justice system in London and more broadly throughout the United Kingdom, when in reference to racial background. In Brent, this is most pronounced for children and young people from Black heritage groups. The Brent YJS Disproportionality Action Plan 2024/25 has been created to understand the extent to which youth justice disposals are disproportionately served, and to monitor the progress and effectiveness of initiatives undertaken by YJS to support children from Black African and Black Caribbean heritage groups.

5.8 The YJS Management Board monitors Disproportionality Action Plan progress on a quarterly basis. It also identifies opportunities to build a coordinated multiagency response to youth justice inequalities. The Board's strategic

guidance and support enabled Brent to obtain funding from MOPAC to establish a 12-month *YJS Disproportionality Project*, aimed at tackling disproportionality within the youth justice system. There were essentially two components to the programme. The first of these was delivered by the Young Brent Foundation and sought to achieve systems change through the offer of cultural competency training to professionals. The other element, led by Early Help, consisted of supporting YJS young people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Heritage groups to coproduce activities within Family Wellbeing Centres and make short films about their life experiences. The project ended in October 2023 (see also 5.15 below: *Other work undertaken to improve youth justice service outcomes for LAC*).

- 5.9 Ensuring looked-after children and care leavers have the right placements that meet their identified needs will significantly contribute to the prevention of criminalisation. It is recognised that caring for and managing children and young people with behaviour that can be perceived as difficult or challenging can be an integral feature of work within care placements.
- 5.10 Looked after children and care leavers interact with a whole range of agencies and professionals and it is important that all of them understand the reasons why looked after children and care leavers may behave in particular ways which are different to the universal population; key to this is their understanding of the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma on children, young people and adults.
- 5.11 A key part of our approach is to raise awareness of why looked after children and care leavers need to be specifically considered when making decisions about involvement of the criminal justice system. Locally this has been and will continue to be done through a range of training options; face to face and virtual and building into current training packages the agreed approach for looked after children and care leavers as set out in this protocol and the reasons for that.
- 5.12 Challenging power imbalances occurs frequently in Brent. Examples include:
- Working with the Chair of the Willesden magistrates Youth Bench to identify if service improvements are needed to ensure children understand court processes and that their voice is heard.
  - Professional opinion, especially around issues such as undiagnosed mental health problems, is used to challenge disposal recommendations from the police where appropriate through the identification of mitigating factors. This often leads to children receiving a lower tariff disposal than initially recommended.
  - Enabling courts to see young offenders as children first and foremost. All Brent YJS court reports have been restructured so telling the story of the child appears prominently at the beginning of report. This enables the judiciary to see the story of the child prior to considering offence details.
  - A sustained period of ongoing volunteer recruitment has allowed YJS to draw from a younger and more diverse pool of Referral Order Panel volunteers.

- 5.13 In 2023 Brent CYP refreshed its Practice Framework in consultation with staff working across the department. The framework continues to support trauma informed approaches in recognition of the need to better understand and therefore respond to the needs of young people. The framework supports focused activity to improve practise with vulnerable adolescents and is evidenced through the following activity:
- a. The Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Group, chaired by the Director, Early Help and Social Care, reviews data and current trends with a view to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The group is held bi-monthly and operates as a platform for learning from practice, sharing information and strengthening collaboration and cooperation of partner agencies to better respond to the needs of adolescents with multiple vulnerabilities. Through the group Brent leads on a clear multi-agency approach to discuss services available for young people at risk of exploitation in Brent. This includes resources commissioned by Brent services as well as pan-London Projects applied locally.
  - b. The Brent Youth Justice Service Management Board includes senior representation from Social Care (Localities, Looked After Children and Permanency services), the Police, Brent Probation Delivery Unit (PDU), Youth Justice Service (YJS), Early Help, Willesden Magistrates Court, NHS, and Public Health. In October 2021, the Board identified three actions (which are group supervision, Out of Court Disposal Decision Making Panel, and the LAC Children and Young People Transitioning to the Brent Probation Delivery Unit: see also 5.14) to ensure the responsibilities and good practice outlined in the *London Reducing Criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers protocol* were embedded within the Brent Youth justice System.
  - c. The Contextual Safeguarding Lead together with a YJS manager, runs joint Contextual Safeguarding training for social care practitioners to broaden their understanding of 'harm outside of the home' and to reinforce the need to disrupt perpetrators, in addition to increasing safety for young people. To ensure that victims are treated as such, and not as criminals, continued training and development is taking place on a multi-agency basis to ensure partners are aware of the Home Office disruption toolkit, and that young people are being referred consistently through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), and are able to use the s.45 defence (Modern Slavery Act) when they have clearly been a victim of criminal exploitation.
  - d. The Contextual Safeguarding Lead chairs a Contextual Safeguarding Champions Group with partner agencies including Looked After Children team managers, Community Safety and YJS to look at trends within practice and explore opportunities for intervention across the borough. This includes a recent Location Assessment, designed to increase safety for young people within the Civic Centre as a prevention approach to reduce the possibility of criminal activity.

- e. In relation to high-risk young people, an escalation process is in place. Heads of Service provide a briefing to the Director of Early Help and Social Care in their statutory role. The DCS and Lead Member are provided with regular updates and briefings about these cases by the Director. These procedures for the recording and reporting of critical incidents internally also demonstrate adherence to Youth Justice Board serious incident requirements.
- f. The Exploitation, Violence and Vulnerability Panel (EVVP) which is jointly chaired by Brent Council services and the police, leads on operational planning and co-ordination work between partners, driving strong interventions in response to individual young people at risk of exploitation. Most of the young people who are referred have contact with the youth justice system and therefore the EVVP plays a key role in triggering interventions and resources to assist safety planning for young people. A transitional safeguarding plan is also being piloted and used across this forum to further increase safety for young people who are on the verge of adulthood and effectively plan for their support network post adulthood.
- g. A weekly operational meeting between CYP staff and the Police investigates individual cases of children who are missing from home or care – some of whom are at risk of or are engaged in criminal behaviours. Key themes from these discussions feed into the EVVP which brings about consistency of practice.

5.14 Well-established practice is in place when it comes to working between LAC and Care Leavers who come into contact with the Youth Justice Service. Some of the key examples are as follows:

**Group supervision**

Social Care and the Brent YJS work collaboratively whenever Looked After Children (LAC) enter, or are at risk of entering, the youth justice system. This was enhanced in January 2022 by the adoption of joint case supervision. These arrangements formalised existing good practice by regularising ongoing joint risk management and decision making. Practitioners from partner agencies including CAMHS and the PDU participate in group supervision whenever this is in the best interests of the child. Joint decision making and planning has increased our ability to ensure young people get the right interventions at the right time. Other benefits include children receiving consistent information from practitioners, multi-agency safety planning, and greater clarity surrounding the remit and responsibilities of services.

**Out of Court Disposal Decision Making Panel**

This weekly Panel is chaired by Brent YJS and attended by Police, Health, YJS, Social Care, Early Help staff and Restorative Justice workers to jointly consider and determine Out of Court Disposal (OCD) decisions. LAC Social Workers have attended the Panel since November 2021. This has strengthened our ability to take mitigating factors into consideration and identify appropriate interventions and disposal conditions. The effectiveness of our OCD decision

making is monitored by a Metropolitan Police led Multi-Agency Scrutiny Panel, comprised of senior representatives from the police, CPS, Judiciary, MOPAC and the YJB. The Scrutiny Panel audited six Brent OOC cases in November 2022, six cases in June 2023 and a further six cases in December 2023. Decision making in 17 out of 18 cases was adjudged to be correct. A further impact is that Social Workers are equipped with the information they need to explain OOC conditions to children in their care and support them to successfully comply with legal conditions.

### **LAC Children and Young People Transitioning to the Brent Probation Delivery Unit**

Since December 2021, LAC Social Workers and Personal Advisors have contributed to all transition meetings between the YJS and PDU. This ensures that planning is as supportive as possible for LAC moving from the youth justice system to the adult criminal justice system. The adoption of this approach has improved support to LAC as the transitioning process is less technical and more child centred. The individual needs of young adults are central to transitioning and professionals work together to ensure LAC understand the differences between adolescent and criminal justice services, are less fearful about change, and are as prepared as possible to successfully complete their order.

5.15 Other work undertaken to improve youth justice service outcomes for LAC include:

- **Practice development sessions**

These are held regularly and includes themes of relevance to the overrepresentation of LAC children in the youth justice system including good youth participation techniques and understanding the impact of power imbalances and cultural differences when supporting children and young people.

- **Bail template letter**

Background information has been expanded to provide the courts with details of any discrimination or trauma LAC young people have experienced.

- **YJS case studies.**

These are shared at YJS Board meetings to explore how the needs of children have been considered and take forward learning for case work.

- **Magistrates training.**

As part of its contribution to the Willesden Magistrates Court Users Forum, Brent has delivered good practice sessions including understanding the impact of trauma on a child's behaviour in court and anti-racism training.

- **Child first approaches.**

Relationship building, coproduced intervention plans, listening to children, participation work and annual surveys are used to inform practice and achieve good outcomes for children and young people.

- **Collaborative culture in CYP**

Social Care and YJS work together every day in a range of ways including joined up planning undertaken at complex strategy meetings, at risk of custody meetings, and preparing bail packages. As well as joining together in joint case supervision sessions for high-risk young people.

- **Your Choice**

The Your Choice programme provides training in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques to practitioners working with young people (aged 11-17 years) at medium to high risk of harm. The CBT technique is used during the delivery of interventions and professional interactions with Your Choice participants. To date this programme has been offered within the Accelerated Support team (AST), the YJS and has recently begun in the Looked After Children and Permanency Service (LAC). Twenty-two practitioners from LAC and YJS have been trained to deliver CBT techniques. The YJS Your Choice Project Lead meets regularly with LAC and YJS staff to facilitate the allocation of cases. In partnership with voluntary sector colleagues from PLIAS, St Giles and EACH, three Your Choice sessions are delivered each week. Two of the current seven Your Choice participants are children in care, with this number expected to grow. Six of these children are from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic Heritage Groups, and one was from an Asian Heritage Group.

- Actions identified as part of the **Brent YJS Management Board review of *London Reducing Criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers protocol***, (see 5.14 above) are included in the **Brent YJS Improvement Plan 2023/24**. Progress is monitored quarterly by the Brent YJS Management Board.
- *The revised approach to supporting children transitioning to adult services has been formalised in **The Joint working protocol between Brent Youth Offending Team and The Probation Service** (Brent Probation Delivery Unit PDU)*. Created in May 2022, the Protocol outlines the operational procedures and standards required when transferring supervision from the YJS to Brent PS.

5.16 Work undertaken to embed the *London Reducing Criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers protocol* in Brent was reviewed at the YJS Management Board on 20 July 2023. Members noted that the impact of all three of the initial workstreams (group supervision, OOCs, and transitioning to PDU) had been positive. The Board identified a new set of actions that builds upon the progress already made.

- a. Explore new opportunities to achieve good outcomes for LAC children through ever closer working between the Looked After Children and Permanency Service and YJS.
- b. Promote the Brent YJS restorative justice offer to care homes and foster carers. This is currently offered to all victims of crime and will be extended to carers and key workers as a non-criminal remedy. The initiative seeks to avoid criminal prosecutions by raising awareness that restorative justice is an effective alternative to informing the police about low level incidents in many instances.

- c. Ensure that the work we are doing to tackle the over representation of children and young people from Black Heritage Groups includes a specific focus on Looked After Children.
- d. Further develop our work with placement providers and foster carers. This will include supporting them to identify and share information about children who are at risk of going missing in line with the Philomena Protocols.
- e. Strive to find solutions to the challenges associated with placing young people in suitable accommodation where they are free from contextual safeguarding harm and near enough to avoid disrupting their education and relationships with families and positive friends.
- f. Continue to educate partners and stakeholders about their responsibilities under the London Reducing Criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers protocol.
- g. Ensure youth participation work captures the voice of LAC children supported by YJS. This will include creating opportunities to use film and other media to raise awareness across the youth justice system.
- h. Support MOPAC to evaluate the impact of the *London Reducing Criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers protocol*. This will include adopting new and emerging developments from the Reducing Criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers working group that facilitate practitioner surveys and dip sampling care setting incident reports.
- i. Expand the range of diversionary activities and preventative services available to LAC children and young people working closely with community and voluntary sector partners to increase LAC access to existing early intervention initiatives that seek to prevent children and young people from entering the youth justice system.

**5.17 Priorities over the next 6-12 months include:**

- a. Accommodation Provider forums to explore how we can together aim to reduce criminalisation of LAC and care leavers by ensuring staff/carer responses to behavioural difficulties which may be viewed as criminal, are proportionate and appropriate and the need for police involvement and /or court action is minimised.
- b. Training to be provided to foster carers that focus on de-escalation when working with young people presenting behavioural difficulties.
- c. Training for Personal Advisors on providing advocacy when supporting young people in prison.
- d. A joint LACP and YJS staff forum to:

- Continue to develop awareness of the London Protocol.
- Explore ways of supporting young people which will result in less re-offending when they have been convicted of an offence or if they have received an out of court disposal.

The impact of this work would be the continued reduction of looked after children known to YJS and a reduction of care leavers known to Probation or in prison. Other benefits will include greater confidence and awareness in foster carers and placement provider staff in managing at risk young people, greater placement stability for this harder to place cohort, greater confidence in staff advocating for young people at risk of criminalisation.

## **6.0 Financial Considerations**

6.1 There are currently no financial considerations arising from this report.

## **7.0 Legal Considerations**

7.1 Schedule 2 of the Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to take reasonable steps to reduce the need to bring criminal proceedings against children in their area and to encourage children within their area not to commit criminal offences.

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

8.1 By adopting the principles outlined in The Protocol, we are recognising and addressing the vulnerabilities and disadvantage experienced by care experienced young people, ensuring better overall outcomes.

## **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



	<p align="center"><b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b> 5 February 2024</p>
	<p align="center"><b>Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People</b></p>
	<p align="center"><b>Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools - Councillor Gwen Grahl</b></p>
<p><b>Progress report- Revised Fostering Offer</b></p>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	Non-Key Decision
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
<b>List of Appendices:</b>	N/A
<b>Background Papers:</b>	N/A
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<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 Early Help and Social Care <a href="mailto:Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk">Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk</a></p>

## 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 In March 2023, the Corporate Management Team (CMT) approved a 6-month programme of work to explore innovative approaches to the commissioning of children’s placements by CYP given the continued, sustained budget pressures faced by the department. The programme’s aims were to achieve efficiencies and financial savings whilst ensuring good outcomes for Brent Looked After Children (LAC) and care leavers.

1.2 This report focuses on the findings from the work of the Fostering workstream and presents the plan for a revised and updated **Fostering Offer** which will be implemented from April 2024.

## **2.0 Recommendation(s)**

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

2.2 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to note and advocate for the need for Brent to improve its offer to foster carers in order to increase the number of in house foster carers and improve retention rates.

2.3 The Corporate Parenting Committee is asked to note the benefits of ongoing work to establish a regional West London fostering hub.

## **3.0 Detail**

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

3.1.1 The revised fostering offer 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 purpose of this updated offer is to recruit and retain more inhouse foster carers, thereby providing more local placements for Brent's looked after children, meaning that these children can stay connected to their families, schools and community. 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 Growing In-House Fostering – Rationale for change**

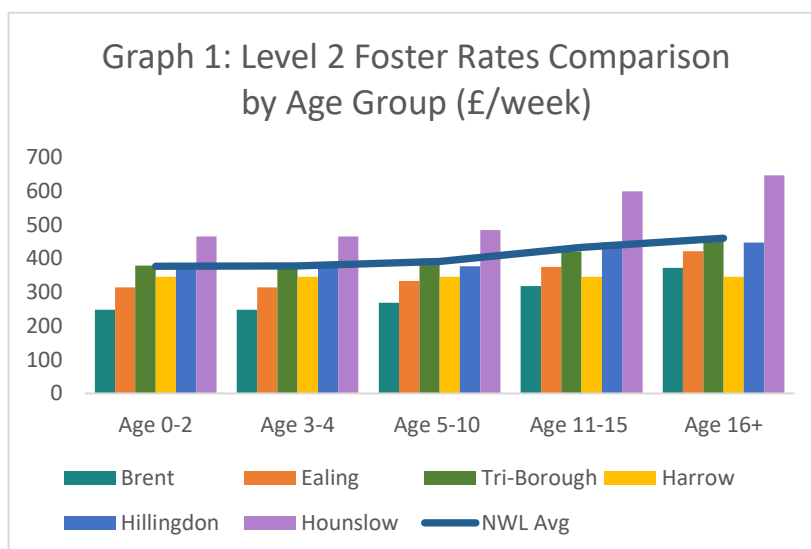
4.1.1 There was a 39% reduction in Brent's in-house fostering households between 2017/18 and 2022/23 and a reduction in available beds/placements from 106 to 74. Brent is not alone in experiencing falling numbers of foster carers. Nationally, 1 in 8 fostering households in England left their role during the period 2021-22 according to [Ofsted research](#), which compares to 1 in 6 Brent Foster Carers leaving over the same period. Furthermore, Brent currently has 23 fostering households aged 65 and over, creating a risk that a sizeable proportion of carers will leave fostering in the coming years.

4.1.2 As a result of the number of in-house foster carers reducing, Brent is increasingly reliant on commissioning fostering placements from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) which are more expensive than inhouse placements. At the end of March 2023, 53% of foster placements in Brent were made with IFAs, rather than Brent foster and kinship carers.

4.1.3 Exit interviews conducted with Brent Foster Carers over the period 2020-23 suggest that for those transferring to IFAs or other local authorities, the more attractive financial

and support packages offered was a key reason for leaving Brent Foster Care Service. Recent anecdotal evidence also demonstrates that carers are moving to neighbouring local authorities more frequently, with recent moves to both Harrow and Camden. In addition, Brent loses a number of foster carers each year due to retirement.

- 4.1.4 Benchmarking foster carer rates confirms the weekly rates paid to Brent Foster Carers are the lowest among neighbouring local authorities (Graph 1). The line shows the average North West London weekly rates for Level 2 fostering placements across different age groups. Brent is the furthest from the average across all age ranges except for 16+. Benchmarking against other packages of support on offer for foster carers identified the need for Brent to consider a new fostering offer, which included increasing payment levels.



- 4.1.5 The modelling work completed over the past 9 months has demonstrated that if the current offer was not updated and increased it is projected that by 2028/29, 56% of all fostering placements will be made with IFAs, compared to the 2018-2023 average figure of 47%. This would increase spend on IFA placements further increasing existing pressures on the budget and providing rationale to a cost avoidance approach.

## 4.2 New Foster Carer Offer

### 4.2.1 Increased weekly fostering allowance

- 4.2.2 To reach *parity* with the North West London average, a weekly rate uplift across all Brent allowance rates was required. This will ensure an aligned approach across the Department for Education (DfE) funded West London Fostering Recruitment Hub (as outlined in 4.9.3). Due to council budget pressures, this increase will be introduced in two phases over the next two financial years.

### 4.3.1 Digital Offer

- 4.3.2 Benchmarking against other authorities demonstrated that a key additional benefit offered by neighbouring authorities is the offer of a free laptop to their foster carers to complete the various administrative tasks related to their placements. Cross-council discussions have identified existing funding that will be used to support Brent foster carers to access a digital device, laptop or iPad, through the Council's digital inclusion scheme.

#### **4.4.1 Free gym membership**

4.4.2 In response to a survey sent to foster carers regarding their interest in free gym membership, which demonstrated overwhelming interest in this benefit, all Brent foster carers will have access to free gym membership at Brent's leisure centres.

#### **4.5.1 Blue Light Card - Discounted shopping and leisure activities**

4.5.2 Blue Light Card provides those in the NHS, emergency services, social care sector and armed forces with discounts online and in-store. Blue Light Card offers a range of official discounts from large national retailers to local businesses. Sign up to this card is being tested currently with a small group of carers in preparation for a full roll out in April 2024.

#### **4.6.1 A word-of-mouth referral fee**

4.6.2 Although Brent has historically offered a word-of-mouth referral fee, this has been inconsistently applied and "advertised". As part of our refreshed fostering offer, Brent foster carers who successfully refer a friend or family member who are subsequently approved to be a foster carer and have a child placed with them, will receive a £1000 referral fee.

#### **4.7.1 Council Tax Exemption**

4.7.2 Local authorities can leverage opportunities to increase foster carer capacity that are not available to IFAs, such as council tax exemption. Council Tax exemption for carers that live in-borough and additional payments to those living out-of-borough to subsidise council tax costs is offered by several nearby local authorities, including Camden, Hounslow and the Bi-Borough. Feedback from other local authorities suggests that this has a particularly positive impact on foster carer retention. This was also positively received in the Foster Carer Reference Group.

4.7.3 Due to Council budget pressures it is not possible to introduce this incentive immediately. The service will continue to work with Council colleagues to explore the possibility of introducing this for the 2025/26 financial year.

#### **4.8.1 Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention**

4.8.2 **Looked After Children's Resilience Service:** A new test and learn project was initiated in November 2023 called the Looked After Children's Resilience Service. This is a preventative approach, using CAMHS provider collaborative funding and will be tested until July 2024. It will replicate the system-wide approach of a current Hospital Discharge Service programme to support, train and further upskill Brent foster carers, identified IFA carers and further local residential children's homes through bespoke training and in-reach placement support so that children and young people with mental health needs can be more effectively supported. Work with foster carers will seek to reduce the number of fostering placement breakdowns that result in higher-cost residential placements.

4.8.3 **A Fostering Friendly Organisation:** The service is working with colleagues in Human Resources (HR) to review and amend key Brent Policies so that Brent Council can achieve Fostering Friendly status recognition. This would encourage Brent staff to

become foster carers with the Council. The same approach will be encouraged with other large local employers such as the Football Association.

- 4.8.4 **Regional Fostering Hub:** Brent, together with 7 other neighbouring West London local authorities (Ealing, Harrow, Hounslow, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster and Hillingdon), successfully submitted a funding application to Department for Education to improve recruitment and retention of foster carers in September 2023 by creating a joint fostering recruitment hub (dedicated “front door” for fostering enquiries) that will be operational from April/May 2024. This is being overseen by the Commissioning Alliance, with Hammersmith and Fulham acting as the lead local authority. The increase to Brent’s fostering allowances will ensure Brent’s offer is comparable to our neighbours, allowing the West London coalition to compete with IFAs in a unified way.

Funding provided by DfE will also be made available to Brent to establish its first ‘Mockingbird’ fostering constellation, something that will serve to boost recruitment and retention of Brent foster carers.

Mockingbird is a global award winning and pioneering programme led by The Fostering Network in the UK. It delivers sustainable foster care through an evidence-based model structured around the support and relationships an extended family provides. The model nurtures the relationships between children, young people and foster families supporting them to build a resilient and caring community. Planning has already begun with The Fostering Network and further updates will be provided to CPC in our next 6-monthly fostering report.

#### 4.9.1 **Marketing and Communication**

- 4.9.2 The Fostering team are working closely with the Brent Communication Team to develop an attractive, sustainable fostering brand that will be launched in April 2024 when our new fostering offer goes “live”. The new brand identity for Brent Fostering will be used across all advertising materials to give a consistent and recognisable look and aid recruitment.
- 4.9.3 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’ and it 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: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laCl9H6Qrkk>
- 4.9.4 Currently there is no dedicated marketing and recruitment budget for the Brent Fostering Service. Marketing activity costs are met using the fostering team budget and as a consequence is limited to those which are low cost, meaning the impact on increasing foster carer numbers is minimal. Marketing arrangements will be strengthened once arrangements with the West London Fostering Recruitment Hub are more fully known, and there may be a future financial ask of each local authority to support marketing and recruitment initiatives as part of the work within the hub. At the moment the activities undertaken by the fostering service on its own include the following.

- Fostering fortnight activities- *please note that 2024 Fostering Fortnight will be taking place from 15<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> May 2024*
- Community-based awareness raising.

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

5.1 The work undertaken in the fostering workstream was informed by foster carers and supervising social worker in several ways: direct feedback, reference group meeting, surveys, exit interviews.

## **6.0 Financial Considerations**

6.1 The financial considerations discussed in this report have been agreed and will be funded by future growth allocation budget within CYP.

## **7.0 Legal Considerations**

7.1 The operation of fostering services is governed by the Children Act 1989, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and associated National Minimum Standards. The regulations and standards do not prescribe the detail of how a fostering service should financially reward its foster carers, but the National Minimum Standards provides that there is a clear and transparent written policy on payments to foster carers that sets out the criteria for calculating payments and distinguishes between the allowance paid and any fee paid.

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

8.1 Pursuant to s149 Equality Act 2010 (the “Public Sector Equality Duty”), the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it,

8.2 The Public Sector Equality Duty covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

8.3 Having due regard involves the need to enquire into whether and how a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected characteristic and the need to consider taking steps to meet the needs of persons who share a protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it. This includes removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by persons who share a protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.

8.4 There is no prescribed manner in which the council must exercise its public sector equality duty but having an adequate evidence base for its decision is necessary.

8.5 The proposals in this report have been subject to screening and Officers believe that there are no adverse equality implications. The proposals covered in this report

support Looked After Children and Care Leavers and aim to improve their life chances.

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

9.1 The work and recommendations outlined in this paper will also have a positive impact regarding climate change. By increasing the sufficiency of local placements by building local foster carer capacity, far less travel (often using carbon-emitting modes of transport) will be required.

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

10.1 There are potential Human Resources implications relating to need for additional staffing to support Brent Foster Carers. It is understood that when numbers of Brent Foster Carers increase, there may be a need for to restructure and increase resource of the Supervising Social Worker team.

10.2 There are no property considerations associated with this work.

## **11.0 Communication Considerations**

11.1 Communications and Marketing have been considered throughout the process and are relevant to the new Brent Foster Carer offer.

11.2 Engagement with communications colleagues is ongoing to ensure that the launch of a new Marketing and Communications Strategy for Brent Foster Care recruitment coincides with the launch of any new Brent Foster Carer offer to ensure maximum impact.

11.3 It is important to note that the success of the new foster carer offer and associated campaign will require a council-wide approach at all levels to promote the new fostering offer and opportunities to become a foster carer.


**Report sign off:**

***Nigel Chapman***

Corporate Director of Children and Young People

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 <p><b>Brent</b></p>	<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>
	<b>Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People</b>
	<b>Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools - Councillor Gwen Grahl</b>
<b>An update on the Brent Residential Children’s Home project</b>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	Barnhill
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	Key
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
<b>List of Appendices:</b>	None
<b>Background Papers:</b>	<p><a href="#">Brent Childrens Care Home Business Case</a>, Cabinet Report, 22 May 2023</p> <p><a href="#">Acquisition of Property Brent Childrens Care Home Project</a>, Cabinet Report 15 January 2024.</p>
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Michelle Gwyther Head of Forward Planning, Performance and Partnerships <a href="mailto:Michelle.Gwyther@brent.gov.uk">Michelle.Gwyther@brent.gov.uk</a></p>

## 1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Corporate Parenting Committee on the Brent Residential Children’s Home project.

## 2.0 Recommendation

That the Committee:

2.1 Notes the progress of the Brent Residential Children’s Home project and are informed of the key milestones to be achieved in the next three (3) months.

## 3.0 Background

3.1 In June 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) opened applications for its Wave 2 Children's Home Capital Grant Programme. This provided an opportunity for local

authorities to apply for matched capital funding available until March 2025 to create provision for residential children's homes for children and young people in their own local area.

- 3.2 The Council's bid to the DfE's Children's Home Capital Programme was submitted on 9 September 2022. On 17 November 2022, the Council received a letter which confirmed the bid was successful. This notified Brent that it would be awarded in principle grant funding of £1.1m for the development of a residential children's care home in Brent subject to 50% match funding from the local authority. This match funding was agreed by the Council's Capital Programme Board in May 2023.
- 3.3 The Brent Residential Children's Home project will deliver a four-bed residential step-down home within Brent for looked after adolescents (aged 12 – 16) with social, emotional and behavioural needs. It will provide three bedrooms for a step-down provision to prepare young people who are in residential settings away from the borough for a move into a local fostering placement, supported accommodation (if 16+) or to return home. The remaining one bedroom will be allocated for emergency placements to enable a short-term response for young people in crisis.
- 3.4 The Council has sourced a six bedroom (6) residential property within the borough which will be re-modelled. Four of these bedrooms will be for young people and the remaining two bedrooms will provide a staff bedroom(s) and office facilities.
- 3.5. Following a consultation process with senior leaders across CYP, a decision has been taken by the Director of Children and Young People that the residential home provision will be run in-house and will not be commissioned out to an external provider to run on Brent's behalf. This is for the reasons of the LA having direct control of the home and the ability to shape and adapt the home to meet the changing needed of young people.

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

- 4.1 The development of a Children's Residential home in Brent aligns with two Borough Plan outcomes, firstly Prosperity and Stability in Brent, and secondly The Best Start in Life. Enabling more children and young people to stay in the borough means they will have greater opportunities to participate in and contribute to the Brent community. They will receive local services to enable them to be fully equipped to succeed in adulthood.

#### **5.0 Detail**

- 5.1 A fortnightly cross Council working group has been established with the aim of delivering the children's residential home in Brent. The working group is held to account by reporting to the Children's Residential Care Home Board on a monthly basis and the CYP Senior Leadership Team meeting on a quarterly basis. The project will also start reporting monthly to the DfE from February 2024.
- 5.2 It is expected that construction works will be completed by December 2024 and the home operational by March 2025 at the latest. These are indicative dates and the project plan has some contingency to mitigate against slippage to ensure target dates are achieved.
- 5.3. The project plan has been separated into three (3) workstreams. A progress update and the key milestones to be achieved in the next three months can be found below for each workstream.

## **Capital Workstream**

- 5.4 The Council has identified and negotiated the acquisition of a property in the Barnhill area. The property sale price is identified to be at the appropriate market value for a property of its type and location. Officers have negotiated to achieve the best price possible, and in doing so have ensured the agreed purchase price represents value for money.
- 5.5. At the point of writing this report, the property purchase is scheduled to be completed by the end of January 2024 and then further surveys will be undertaken. These surveys are intrusive and could not be completed prior to purchase and will enable the final scope of works for the property to be established. The scope of works will include remedial work on the roof and may include the requirement for a full roof replacement.
- 5.6 A tender exercise for the building works contractors will go live mid-April 2024 and following this work will commence on the property. The construction works will include some configuration of the home to best suit the operation of a children's residential home, enable the installation of IT infrastructure required for a Council building and address any structural issues found in the surveys.

## **Recruitment Workstream**

- 5.7. The process for recruiting a Registered Manager has commenced who is responsible for the effective operation of the residential home. Whilst the home is being remodelled and not yet open, they will be part of the working group and an integral part of its development. This opportunity will be advertised internally first as it is a good career opportunity for a member of Brent CYP staff.

## **Registration Workstream**

- 5.8 The Director for Early Help and Social Care will be the Responsible Individual for the residential home. They will start the process of being registered with Ofsted in order to meet the requirements of this role under the Children's Home (England) Regulations 2015.

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

- 6.1 The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools has been kept informed of all developments in relation to the residential home.
- 6.2. The Barnhill ward members were informed about plans to purchase a property in the Barnhill area for the purposes of operating a children's residential home on 9 January 2024.
- 6.3. Officers will work with ward members to address any questions or concerns local residents have now or in the future about the residential home. This could include providing ward members with information about key developments and being part of discussions between ward members and local residents about the children's home.

## **7.0 Financial Considerations**

- 7.1 The purchase of the property will be funded by a combination of DfE grant funding and capital borrowing.

- 7.2 The project budget is £2.2m, £1.1m funding from the DfE and £1.1m from the Council, and the Council will fund its 50% contribution from borrowing. The borrowing costs for this have been included in the running costs for the children's home as detailed in the business case approved by Cabinet in May 2023.
- 7.3. The placements budget over the past few years has been under significant pressure, and the ability to set up an in-house residential home provision would enable the local authority to be able to manage these pressures. The residential home is expected to save approximately £291k per year on the placement budget.

## **8.0 Legal Considerations**

- 8.1 A children's residential care home run by Brent Council directly supports the local authority in delivering a range of statutory duties as laid down the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004, the Children Leaving Care Act 2000 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017.
- 8.2 Following submission of the bid to the DfE's Children's Home Capital Programme, the Council secured endorsement from individual Cabinet Members in relation to their portfolio area in consultation with the Leader in accordance with paragraph 13 of Part 3 of the Constitution, for the submission of bids for additional resources from government.
- 8.3 The Corporate Director of Children and Young People has delegated authority pursuant to paragraph 9.5 of Part 3 of the Constitution and Financial Regulation 8.2.2 of Part 2 of the Constitution to enter into a grant funding arrangement. In doing so, the Corporate Director must ensure that the objectives of the grant agreement are consistent with the Council objectives and priorities in accordance with Financial Regulation 9.1.2.
- 8.4 Section 120 of the Local Government Act 1972 provides that for the purposes of (a) any of the Council's functions under this or any other enactment or (b) the benefit, improvement or the development of the Council's area, the Council may acquire any land whether situated inside or outside its area.
- 8.5 Legal Services will be required to undertake the necessary legal due diligence including examining search results and the title for the property. Enquiries before contract will be raised and the purchase will be subject to satisfactory results of the searches, a good and marketable title and a satisfactory survey and valuation result.
- 8.6 The development of a children's residential care home in accordance with the project business case will require the procurement of a range of construction and consultancy services contracts, all to be procured in compliance with the Council's Constitution and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

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

- 9.1 The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
  - b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
  - c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it,

pursuant to s149 Equality Act 2010. This is known as the Public Sector Equality Duty.

- 9.2 Under the Public Sector Equality Duty, having due regard involves the need to enquire into whether and how a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected characteristic and the need to consider taking steps to meet the needs of persons who share a protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it. This includes removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by persons who share a protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.
- 9.3 The Public Sector Equality Duty covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 9.4 There is no prescribed way the Council must exercise its public sector equality duty but having an adequate evidence base for its decision is necessary. The proposals set out in this report aim to ensure that there are sufficient and suitable residential care home placements for all Brent children and that their diverse and special educational needs are met.

## **10.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations**

- 10.1 Any remedial works to the property will use carbon reducing technologies and materials. These could be enhancements to the property's insulation levels, energy efficient electrical fittings and low carbon heating systems.
- 10.2 Young people will also be encouraged to use green sources of travel, i.e., walk, cycle, scooter etc. Bicycle and electric scooter storage will be provided as part of the external landscape.

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

- 11.1 The property is purchased on the open market. The Council will be the freeholder of the property.
- 11.2 Brent Council will run the residential home directly under the Children's Homes (England) Regulations, as is the case for the Ade Adepitan Short Break Centre.
- 11.3. New posts will be created to manage and run the children's residential home directly. This includes a Registered Manager, Deputy Manager and Residential Child Care Officers. These are all new posts and will not impact any existing postholders within CYP and therefore the inclusion of these posts will not be subject to any restructure requirements.

## **12.0 Communication Considerations**

- 12.1 Officers are in the process of finalising a communications strategy in relation to the development of the residential home to ensure all relevant stakeholders are kept apprised about key developments.
- 12.2. There will be on-going consultation with young people throughout the development of the children's home, with different methods of engagement deployed to maximise the number of young people who are involved. The aim is to understand young people's preferences on different areas of a residential home including the design, personalisation of private spaces, how best to use communal spaces, what makes a home feel safe, and the operation of the home. The feedback will be interwoven

throughout the planning of the home, and they will be informed how their contribution has been used.

- 12.3. A survey has been circulated to Brent CYP currently in a residential home or who have had residential home care experience. It will be open until the end of February and includes questions on design preferences, personalisation of bedrooms, use of communal spaces, safety and how communal rules should be communicated.
- 12.4 Two focus groups will be held, one in person on 12 February 2024 and a second online on 15 February 2024 for young people aged 16-21 who have current or previous experience of residential homes. The sessions will cover a range of topics as described above and ask young people for their input through discussions and polls. This will be followed up with a trip to Ikea for young people to highlight items that would be preferential in a residential home.
- 12.5 A drawing competition is planned to target young people aged 11-16 who are currently in residential homes. This will go live over the February 2024 half term and ask young people to design a bedroom. This will allow them to be creative and the designs will help to see what common items young people would like in their bedrooms and how they would decorate the space.

**Report sign off:**

***Nigel Chapman***

Corporate Director of Children and Young People