



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

Monday 3 February 2025 at 5.30 pm

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

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 October 2024, be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

6. Matters arising (if any)

None.

7. Update from Brent Care Journeys 2.0 (BCJ 2.0) Representatives

The Chair welcomed representatives from Brent Care Journeys 2.0 to the meeting and invited them to provide updates from the group.

J informed the Committee that he had been involved in some interviews for roles within the participation team, which included both young people and staff which he felt worked more effectively than having two separate panels. He had started in a Care Ambassador role in January 2025, visiting placements, and had so far visited 2 placements and was enjoying that role as it allowed him to be the voice for young people to ensure they got the service they deserved.

K was retaking her GCSEs to support her future aspirations to do dentistry and had been supported to do that through Brent Virtual School and Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and

Permanency, Brent Council). She had recently taken part in the 'Create Arts' Ceramics project which had been a project spanning 6 weeks for young people to learn ceramic skills and create their own pieces, with a trip to the Tate Modern completing the project. N had also taken part in the ceramics project which she had enjoyed.

The Chair thanked those present for their updates, and invited comments and questions from the Committee, with the following points raised:

The Committee asked for further information about what the Care Ambassador role responsibilities were. Brent Care Journeys colleagues explained that Care Ambassadors were entering children's care homes and semi-independent placements where Brent children were placed to ensure the home was of good quality, met standards and that the children placed there were getting the service they needed, being provided for, were happy there, and were thriving in terms of education and health and being prepared for independence. In terms of how they became Care Ambassadors, Brent Care Journeys colleagues explained that there were several roles in the Council favoured towards care leavers, who sometimes needed extra support in getting a role. The Participation Team helped to find the roles, the young people then applied with support from the team and then interviewed for it. Kelli Eboji added that the chances of care leavers getting involved in these roles had greatly improved, but it was a challenge for the service to broaden that out to attract more interest.

Further information was given on the events that took place during Leaving Care Week in November 2024, where there was a coffee morning, a staff versus young people football match, Masterchef cooking event, and an end of week celebration.

In response to a query on what percentage of care leavers the service managed to maintain a relationship with, Kelli Eboji explained that the service would maintain a relationship with the majority of care leavers between the ages of 18-25. There was a small proportion who left the service before the age of 25 who chose to leave but who always had the option to re-engage. All care leavers had a personal advisor, and once a month there was a care leavers meal where everyone engaged with each other and informed each other of upcoming events. A hub, led by young people, also enabled that engagement and there was a care leaver WhatsApp channel with 150 young people signed up.

Brent Care Journeys then presented the next set of results from the Bright Spots: Your Life Beyond Care Survey, which analysed the views of care leavers aged 18-25. They highlighted the following key points:

- 140 young people had taken part in the survey, equating to 29% of the total eligible population.
- 87% of respondents had received a good explanation as to why they were in care, compared to 77% in other local authorities.
- 77% of respondents reported always feeling safe at home, compared to 64% in other local authorities.
- 69% of respondents reported always feeling safe in their neighbourhood, compared to 60% in other local authorities.
- Respondents were less likely to report low levels of life satisfaction than care leavers in other local authorities.
- Respondents were less likely to report low levels of happiness with their appearance than care leavers in other local authorities.
- 38% of respondents felt very positive about their future, compared to 27% in other local authorities.

- 28% of respondents reported very high levels of happiness the day before completion of the survey compared to 21% in other local authorities.
- An area to focus on was friendships, as just over one in ten respondents (11%) did not have a good friend, compared with one in fifty in the general population (2%).
- Another area of focus was anxiety, where 39% of care leavers reported high levels of anxiety compared to 22% in the general population.
- 16% of care leavers reported not having someone they trusted who stuck by them, compared to 4% of the general population.
- 18% of care leavers had a pet, which had increased from the previous survey, but was less than the general population.
- Brent Care Journeys 2.0 would now work through the findings in a workshop to consider potential solutions and future projects. Services would then develop an action plan in consultation with young people which included the principles of co-design and feedback so that young people were leading projects and receiving progress reports.

In considering the findings, the Committee asked the following questions:

Noting the lower-than-average response to having a good friend for Brent Care Leavers compared to the general population, the Committee asked whether there was anything in particular that might make it more difficult for young people to find meaningful friendships in Brent. From a Care Leaver point of view, K felt that a lot of their experiences did not relate to others and Care Leavers tended to keep things to themselves as a result. Being a part of Brent Care Journeys had allowed her to meet lots of friends who she was now close with and could talk about things she might not with others. The Committee felt this showed the importance of having events and activities led by and for care leavers specifically.

In relation to having pets, the Committee asked whether Care Leavers wanted pets and were not able to have them or did not have the desire for a pet. Brent Care Journeys colleagues responded that many care leavers did want pets, but a lot of places did not allow them and it was only possible in pet friendly places. Whilst recognising that a pet was a big responsibility, Brent Care Journeys colleagues felt it was important to be able to have a pet if they wanted, as a pet could act as a stress reliever and provide company as well as give young people something to care for and look after. From a service perspective, Kelli Eboji explained that there were young people who would be responsible enough to provide and care for a pet, but there were situations where there may be a need to step in because the young person could not care for their pet appropriately, although these were not common. The Committee understood that they should not encourage young people to get pets when they were not equipped to care for it, but where a young person was responsible enough and would benefit from a pet, they felt the service should look to facilitate that. K agreed, highlighting that having a pet had made her more responsible and gave her more of a routine.

The Committee asked what more the Council could do to alleviate anxiety, noting that 39% of respondents felt anxious compared to the general population. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director of Children and Young People, Brent Council) highlighted there was a gap in mental health services being provided for 18+ year-olds compared to young people under 18. Care Leavers were over 18 so the Council was required to work with its adult mental health provider – CNWL – to provide support to Care Leavers. Brent Health Matters (BHM) for Children had also recently launched, with a Care Leaver working within that. The service was hoping to use BHM to look into what else could be done for Care Leavers who needed mental health support and could not access it, where it was not an acute issue but a general wellbeing issue. A public health funded programme was also launching

specifically for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASCs) over 18 who had emotional and wellbeing issues.

The Committee advocated working with foster carers and social work teams to ensure foster carers were aware of the impact of transitioning from being in care to being a Care Leaver, and how involvement in activities and having friendships helped alleviate anxiety or isolation, to help further prepare the young person for leaving care. Kelli Eboji assured the Committee that social workers worked closely with foster families to ensure any required support was provided, such as through Brent WEST, direct intervention through the Inclusion Service, and LIA. Palvinder Kudhail (Director Early Help and Social Care, Brent Council) added that the service was moving to a focus on lifelong links, where, as soon as a child became looked after, the social work team and foster family built the child's networks to keep them connected and ensure they did not lose their history when moving from one place to another.

In concluding the discussion, Nigel Chapman commended the large survey of young people done through Coram Voice, where the large sample size of respondents allowed the service to understand where young people were in their lives and benchmark against previous years and other local authorities. An action plan update would be brought to a future meeting.

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

That the updates by the representatives of Brent Care Journeys be noted.

8. Progress Report - Brent Residential Children's Home

Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report, which provided an update on the Brent Residential Children's Care Home project. She provided background information that the Council had received DfE funding to open a residential home as outlined in section 3 of the report, and, in terms of the capital workstream, the Council was currently at a place where refurbishment works were being undertaken on the property. The works had started in October 2024 following a procurement exercise and included interior and exterior works, including a roof replacement. It was hoped these would complete by the end of March 2025. The Council had successfully appointed a Registered Manager for the care home and was in the process of advertising for the remaining staff with adverts for a deputy manager, senior residential support staff and residential support staff now live. Documents to register the care home with Ofsted had been submitted and the Council was waiting for Ofsted to complete the process. Palvinder Kudhail (Head of Early Help and Social Care, Brent Council) would be supervising the Registered Manager, visiting the home and ensuring standards were met. The number of staff on site would depend on how many children were in residence, with staff onsite at all times. It was added that the home would be a four-bedroom property with 3 young people residing full-time and one emergency bedroom.

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

The Committee noted that the refurbishment works were stated to complete in March 2025, and asked when the home would be operational. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) explained that Ofsted had not yet completed the registration process, which could take between 3-6 months. The Council had provided all information required and followed up as there was a hope to open the home as soon as possible following completion in March. There were some savings allocated against the home opening, as it was more cost effective to have children placed locally, so officers were pushing hard to get the home open as soon as possible.

Nigel Chapman also provided some information regarding relationship building which the service had been doing in the local area, following the call-in received in relation to the decision to use the site as a residential children's home from residents who had not been happy with the home being built in their street. Officers had put in a lot of effort with the residents to keep them updated about the project and communicate an appropriate way that was not defensive, which had broken down some of the stigma residents had been holding.

Noting the reference in the report to a working group for the project, the Committee asked who was on that group and whether young people played any role on that. They were advised that the involvement of young people had been more specific, with a range of different engagement activity for young people including competitions and consultations which would continue to take place with young people. This had included a competition to design the bedrooms that the young people would be living in. The working group was made up of staff as it would be looking at day to day operations of the site. Young people had been involved in the creative opportunities of the project, and would also be involved in the recruitment of staff for the site.

It was confirmed that there would be someone on site at all times, including sleeping and waking staff with facilities in place for that. Part of the registration process had required information about ratios, including during the night, to ensure the site was safe and secure.

The Committee asked how easy it was to retain staff to ensure stability for children in this particular sector. Kelli Eboji acknowledged that would be the main challenge. It was hoped that with the recruitment being undertaken currently, this would give the service a chance to get the staffing group up to speed and ready to go prior to the care home opening with learning and development plans in place. The Registered Manager was from Brent so had links in the borough, and was very committed and excited about the project. Palvinder Kudhail added that the Residential Home Network was helping with learning from others, and had highlighted the difficulty in recruiting a Registered Manager, so Brent was very lucky to have a committed and enthusiastic individual recruited to the post.

The Chair thanked officers for the update and drew the discussion to close. She asked for officers to ensure that the young people who had been involved in designing the home were invited to see the home post-works.

9. Kinship Care Strategy

The Chair invited some of Brent's kinship carers to the meeting, who had been invited to speak about their experience of kinship care in Brent. They asked the carers to feed back to the Committee how they had found kinship caring in Brent, what support they received and whether there was anything they would like to see to further support them in their care journeys.

One couple explained the circumstances that led to them coming to care for their four grandchildren, the first of whom had come into their care at 10 months old and the second of which had come into their care from birth. When the younger grandchild had turned one, their daughter had become pregnant again, and so The Kinship Care Team had asked whether the couple would take on the third child. The couple had agreed, but highlighted they already had two children under 3 years old, so it had been a difficult decision, particularly as the process needed to be done quickly within 8 weeks. It had then been discovered that their daughter was pregnant with twins, so the couple had agreed to take them on provided they received support with whatever they needed to ensure the twins were not separated. The children were now 14, 12 and 10. From the beginning, the couple had received good support from the Council and had a good Social Care Team. They did

have a high turnover of Supervising Social Workers, so when they received their third Social Worker they had not wanted to engage unless they committed to staying with them long term. The third Social Worker had stayed long term and had always remained in communication with the family and checked how they were. As an area for improvement, the couple felt that communication between one Social Worker leaving and the new Social Worker starting needed to be stronger, as it would take a month or so to bring new Social Worker up to date with what was going on, leading to a lot of repeated stories.

Another kinship carer had taken on a child she had known from a baby due to the baby's mother experiencing mental health issues. The child had been a sibling, but she had been honest with the kinship service that she had some health issues and was of an age where she did not feel able to care for both children. Despite this, she had worked hard to enable the children to remain in contact with each other and she was pleased with how things were going. She felt she had received a lot of support in caring for the child. The carer was considering the SGO route, but had concerns about losing the support she was currently getting from the service. Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) reassured her that the service would work with her to address her concerns and help her decide whether it was the right route for her.

A third kinship carer looked after 2 children. She had been caring for her eldest granddaughter for seven years, and her second grandchild had come to her during covid. She explained that the first year of caring had been stressful, but taking on a second child had been easier thanks to her experience. She had received a lot of support and help from her social workers, but highlighted the intense process she had to go through to become a carer. She explained the process was quite intrusive and looked into all the details of her life, but acknowledged this was understandable and she did not take it personally. Other carers present agreed that it was an intrusive process but was about being honest and prepared and understanding that Social Workers were there to help and support the carers and protect the child. They added that the service had helped them to understand their network and put them at ease throughout the process.

The Committee asked if there was a network of other kinship carers that could provide support. The carers present explained there was a kinship meeting once a month, but they were not local, and highlighted the importance of speaking with other carers to ask about their experiences.

The Chair thanked the kinship carers for sharing their stories and invited officers to outline the report, which provided an overview of the national developments relating to the provision of services and support for kinship carers in England and Wales. In introducing the item, she highlighted the National Kinship Care Strategy from central government, which was the first strategy on kinship care from a UK government.

Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) then outlined the report, explaining that the government had asked local authorities to put a Kinship Local Offer in place. The offer presented to the Committee had built on the offer already in place in Brent, but had some new elements following reflection on the new guidance and how Brent's offer aligned with that. An action plan had been developed that focused on the areas needing further development or where there were gaps in service. A series of consultations was being launched with kinship carers in February 2025 through an informal coffee mornings to talk to each other about the offer, as the recent kinship coffee morning had proved very successful. The service was also reviewing the information pack provided to kinship carers going through assessment to ensure it was robust and kinship carers were aware of the services available to them, as well as updating the website to include those universal services. There would be work undertaken on special guardianship support plans, recognising the anxieties raised by kinship carers about becoming a special guardian. Officers were also looking at extending the Brent fostering training offer to all kinship carers

and was looking to further develop kinship social workers, for which there was a large turnover. She concluded by highlighting this was the first time there had been a single definition of kinship care, which had been helpful in designing the local offer.

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

The Committee were pleased that kinship carers were being recognised and tailored support put in place. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Schools, Brent Council) added that Brent Council had always ensured that when a child was in a kinship placement there was no difference in the support provided financially, and the Council was committed to continuing that. Brent had a higher number of children living with their families compared to other local authorities as it was recognised that children needed to be with family, and it was important to ensure carers had support to provide that care. As such, he felt that Brent Council had been leaders in kinship support when it created its own Specialist Kinship Team in 2007.

The kinship carers present proposed an ambassador's programme, using willing kinship carers, where other kinship carers could contact experienced ambassadors when they had questions or anxieties about kinship care. It was agreed this idea would be discussed with other carers at the upcoming coffee morning.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the content of the report.

10. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 19:05

COUNCILLOR GWEN GRAHL
Chair