



Corporate Parenting Committee

Wednesday 23 April 2025 at 5.30 pm

Members Suite - 4th Floor, 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)

Dixon

Gbajumo

L. Smith

Hirani

Substitute Members

Councillors:

Chappell, Conneely, Kennelly
and Rubin

Councillor: Kansagra and Mistry

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

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

Notes for Members - Declarations of Interest:

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

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

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

*Disclosable Pecuniary Interests:

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

**Personal Interests:

The business relates to or affects:

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

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

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

or

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

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

• Agenda

Introductions, if appropriate.

Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members.

Item	Page
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1 Exclusion of the Press and Public

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

Members are also asked to note that the following items are not for publication as they relate to the category of exempt information set out below, as specified under Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972:

Agenda Item 8:	Brent Virtual School Annual Report 2023-24: This appendix has been classified as exempt under Paragraph 2 of Part 1 Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, namely: "Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual"
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Agenda item 10:	Brent fostering service 6-monthly update and end of year monitoring October 2024 – March 2025: This appendix has been classified as exempt under Paragraph 2 of Part 1 Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, namely: "Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual".
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2 Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

3 Declarations of interests

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

4 Minutes of the previous meeting	1 - 8
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To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record.

5 Matters arising (if any)

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

6 Update from Brent Care Journeys 2.0 Representatives

This is an opportunity for members of Brent Care Journeys 2.0 to feedback on recent activity.

7 Report on Learning from Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) and Brent's Participation Offer (BCJ 2.0) 9 - 22

To provide information to the Corporate Parenting Committee on the progress made with Brent's participation offer and transition from Care in Action / Care Leavers in Action / Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) to Brent Care Journeys 2.0 (BCJ 2.0).

8 Brent Virtual School Annual Report 2023-24 23 - 42

To inform the Corporate Parenting Committee of the work undertaken by Brent Virtual School (BVS) and the school results for Looked After Children in the 2023-24 academic year. The delay in presenting the report is due to the need for exam results to be ratified.

9 Brent Adoption Report - Annual Report 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 43 - 58

To provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee in relation to adoption performance, progress and activity of Adopt London West, and good outcomes being achieved for children.

10 Brent Fostering Service - 6 Monthly Update Report and End of Year Monitoring Report: 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025 59 - 80

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

11 Any other urgent business

Notice of items to be raised under this heading must be given in writing to the Deputy Director – Democratic and Corporate Governance or their representative before the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 60.

Date of the next meeting: To be confirmed following the Annual Council Meeting



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

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	<p align="center">Corporate Parenting Committee 23 April 2025</p>
	<p align="center">Report from the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development</p>
	<p align="center">Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools - Cllr Gwen Grahl</p>
<p>Learning from Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) and Brent's Participation Offer</p>	

Wards Affected:	ALL
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	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.
List of Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Participation and Engagement Strategy 2024-2027 (to follow)
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Alice Weavers Participation and Engagement Manager alice.weavers@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Nicole Levy Service Manager Quality Assurance and Learning and Development nicole.levy@brent.gov.uk</p>

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an update regarding the participation offer, the transition from Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) to Brent Care Journeys 2.0 (BCJ 2.0), the response to the Bright Spots survey and progress in the Brent Children and Young People Participation and Engagement Strategy 2024-2027, which underpins all participation activities.
- 1.2. This report provides examples of participation activities undertaken since

April 2024.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1. That the CPC review and comment on the contents of this report. This ensures the CPC is fulfilling its responsibility to monitor and scrutinise the activity of Brent's Children and Young People (CYP) service including opportunities for children and young people to participate in decisions which affect them.

3. Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities and Strategic Context

This report sets out updates on participation programmes and activities for children in care and care leavers. The work of the participation team contributes to the following borough priorities:

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

4. Participation team

- 4.1. Participation programmes and opportunities are led by a participation team based within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance service. The team applies the core principles of youth work as set out by the [National Youth Agency](#).
- 4.2. The team comprises a Participation and Engagement Manager (0.6 FTE), a Participation and Engagement Officer (0.6 FTE), two Participation Support Officers (0.3 FTE) and Sessional Participation Workers (bank staff). As detailed later in the report, these sessional roles are currently in process of job evaluation and will then be advertised.
- 4.3. The Participation and Engagement Officer is new to the team and started on 31 March 2025. The position was vacant before this point and the team has not been at full capacity during this reporting period.
- 4.4. The Sessional Participation Worker role is aimed at care experienced individuals to offer opportunities for care leavers to become formally employed in the Council. This follows a successful model with Brent Care Journeys (see section 5) and the role of Care Quality Ambassadors in which several Brent care leavers are now working in the Council to quality assure different accommodation settings.

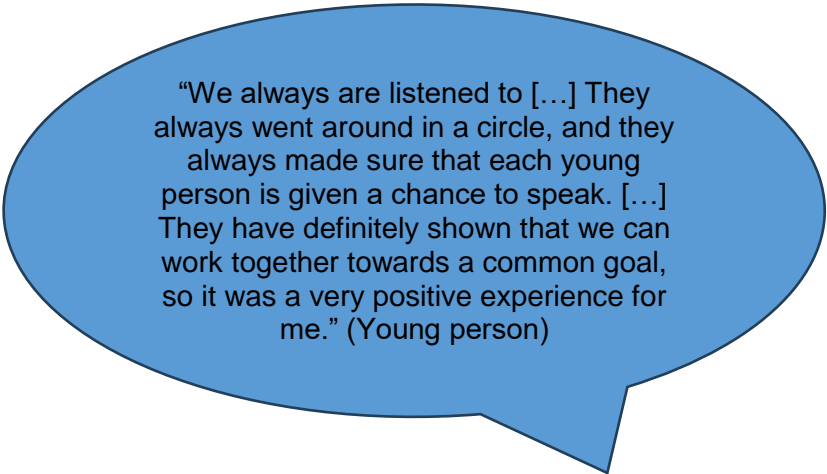
- 4.5. The Sessional Participation Workers will help to support participation staff run sessions and activities for children in care. They will be supported in the role to develop youth work skills by running activities for younger children under the supervision of participation team members who hold JNC youth work qualifications. If staff wish to go further with a youth work career, they will be supported to study and qualify as youth support workers under a government backed youth work training scheme with level 2 and 3 qualifications available locally.
- 4.6. The Sessional Participation Worker role is a new post, and work is underway to establish the position and open recruitment. A job description has been written and is being evaluated by HR. The participation team hopes to open recruitment later in the spring with workers in post in the summer.
- 4.7. The new Participation and Engagement Officer previously worked within Brent Care Journeys. They helped to develop the sessional worker role there, in which several care leavers were employed to run activities. They bring this experience and knowledge to BCJ 2.0, and they will be leading the recruitment and supervision of the new Sessional Participation Workers.
- 4.8. The participation team have ensured that they have aligned the work they do with the priorities set out in the Brent Youth Strategy, approved by Cabinet in March 2025 and launched in April 2025. The participation team helped facilitate co-design opportunities with children and young people.

5. Learning from Brent Care Journeys and the transition to BCJ 2.0

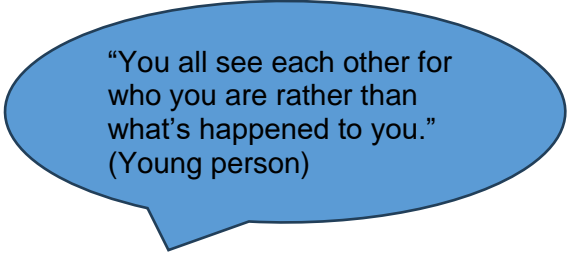
- 5.1. The London Borough of Brent entered into a 5-year strategic partnership with Barnardo's in 2019 called Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) which aimed to bring about transformational change in the children's social care system, leading to better outcomes for young people, and to provide learning for the wider social care system. Brent Care Journeys aimed to achieve these goals through collaboration with care-experienced young people and professionals based on a robust partnership.
- 5.2. The three key outcome areas were:
 - Outcome 1: Strategic Partnership with Care-Experienced Young People
 - Outcome 2: Viable Partnership Working Towards Outcomes
 - Outcome 3: Improvements in Children's Social Care Systems.
- 5.3. The ambition, and ultimate aim, of this partnership was to improve the children's social care system to support young people to achieve "positive destinations", a broader concept of positive outcomes for care experienced young people which went beyond the traditional focus on education, employment and training.

- 5.4. Brent Care Journeys was an innovative programme for care leavers. This established a programme of activities to support young people who have grown up in the care system to lead service design. Through a relationship-based approach and the active collaboration of people and communities, the programme supported young people to design, review and implement changes in services.
- 5.5. Brent Care Journeys was due to end by March 2025, but in June 2024 Barnardo's ended the programme early, due to an internal restructure. The Council worked with the team at Barnardo's in 2024 to enable a smooth transition to a new programme renamed as Brent Care Journeys 2.0 (BCJ 2.0).
- 5.6. BCJ 2.0 amalgamates Brent's Children in Care Council (previously called 'Care in Action') and projects for care leavers (previously called 'Care Leavers in Action'), providing space and opportunities for different groups to meet in a safe environment to take part in participation activities throughout the year and engage in trips and events in school holidays.
- 5.7. Learning examples from Brent Care Journeys
- 5.7.1. During the course of the BCJ partnership the following activities and initiatives were delivered:
- Social, educational and leisure activities
 - Co-designed and facilitated training for staff, carers and Ofsted
 - Power Groups: workshops or group activities that were designed and delivered directly by young people for young people, e.g. Vibes in the Kitchen, Brothers, Therapart.
 - Events: Kiln Theatre-BCJ Showcase "Dear Social Services", Listen Up, BCJ Fun Affair
 - 'Test and Learn' projects, using a co-design methodology, resulting in tangible resources and tools that have been inspired, developed and championed by care experienced young people. This has included:
 - Welcome Packs for young people moving into semi-independent placements now part of commissioning agreements.
 - Activity budgets for relationship building between key worker and young people.
 - Pre-birth Assessment tool designed by Care Leavers who were parents which are now used within Brent's pre-birth assessment work.
- 5.7.2. Many of the young people who were interviewed talked about the strong, meaningful relationships that they had developed with other Care Journeys peers throughout the course of the projects, and how important these had become to them. For several young people, this was the first time that they had been able to develop social connections with peers who shared their

experience of the care system and for this reason they felt more understood and accepted within these new friendship groups.

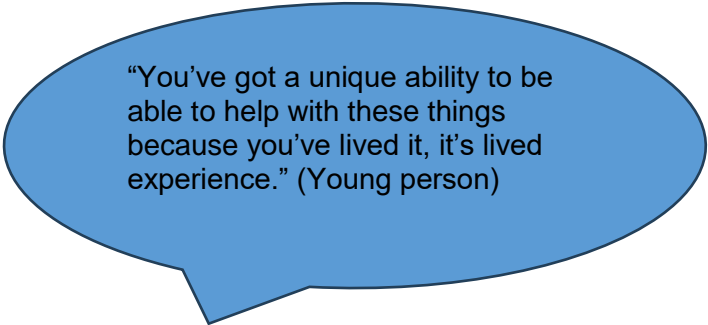


"We always are listened to [...] They always went around in a circle, and they always made sure that each young person is given a chance to speak. [...] They have definitely shown that we can work together towards a common goal, so it was a very positive experience for me." (Young person)



"You all see each other for who you are rather than what's happened to you." (Young person)

5.7.3. Young people who had been involved in projects like Alpha Labs said that they had developed a broader knowledge of issues that are present throughout the care system at a national level. Furthermore, they were not only aware of what problems exist but had also developed an understanding of how their skills and experiences put them in a good position to help tackle these problems, which fed into a greater motivation to do so.



"You've got a unique ability to be able to help with these things because you've lived it, it's lived experience." (Young person)

5.7.4. The participation team has learnt from the successes of the Brent Care Journeys programme to help develop BCJ 2.0 and to ensure that there was continuity for young people with projects for them to take part in.

5.7.5. The former Care in Action programme involved regular participation sessions for young people within three age groups: Junior Care in Action (ages 7-11), Care in Action (ages 12-17) and Care Leavers in Action (ages 18-25). The model of regular sessions focused on participation activities had varied results and in recent years attendance has been low. Young people in the Care Action group fed back that it not always possible to meet on weekday evenings due to school activities and Saturdays can also be difficult for young people who have contact time then. Young people like having a space to meet which is not

entirely focused on participation activities and instead has a more informal atmosphere with different youth-led activities like a youth club.

- 5.7.6. The developing model of BCJ 2.0, co-designed with young people, learns from Brent Care Journeys and the feedback from young people to create a youth-led model of different projects and opportunities which caters to young people's different interests and availability. This has shown the importance of creating time and space for young people to develop peer relationships and take part in a range of youth-led and informal education activities. This then leads into more formalised participation opportunities, such as attending Council meetings or taking part in interview panels.
- 5.7.7. Relational practice was central to Brent Care Journeys and BCJ 2.0 has taken a similar approach. Participation staff taking time to develop positive relationships with young people by getting to know them individually and taking their lead in how they want to work and what their interests are. The voluntary principle of youth work is at the heart of this by supporting young people's agency to decide themselves whether they want to engage and take part.
- 5.7.8. Some young people are keen to get involved in participation activities straight away but most need encouragement and extra support. The team is always looking to engage young people who are new to BCJ 2.0. This involves running youth activities and conducting outreach work in semi-independent provision and activities run by the Leaving Care team to build relationships and trust first before young people take part in participation activities, such as attending Corporate Parenting Committee.
- 5.7.9. Brent Care Journeys ran creative projects for care leavers to boost their mental health and provide a safe space to form relationships with peers. BCJ 2.0 has learnt from this to establish new creative projects for young people. This follows the principle above of building relationships with young people first to then encourage and support them to get involved in participation. We have formed a new partnership with the charity Create Arts to deliver an arts programme for young people in BCJ 2.0.
 - The programme includes four projects: two with care leavers (ceramics and music) and two with young people aged 11-17 (visual arts and drama).
 - The first project with care leavers ran in November and December 2024 for six weeks on Thursday evenings. There was a good turn out with seven core members and five new members.
 - Young people enjoyed being creative and having a social and creative space to chat to each other every week.
 - There was also feedback received that they enjoyed the 'routine' of the sessions as they ran consecutively for 6 weeks. Young people found these sessions "therapeutic" and it "makes you happy to do stuff".
 - The second project took place in February half term over three days for young people aged 11-17 with a focus on visual arts. The young people

made notebooks, tie-dye fabric items, lino print stencils and more. Each day was attended by at least 8 young people.

- Young people mentioned that they felt heard by the Council and felt a sense of belonging:


“When we want something, you can just put it out there saying, we want this, this makes us feel happy, and they’ll try their best to bring it for us.”

“It actually affected my wellbeing, you know, because it’s like, you know, you go out there, you can tell people, yeah, I’ve done clay. I go to like a thing every Thursday.”



5.8. Development of BCJ 2.0

- 5.8.1. BCJ 2.0 was soft launched in the summer of 2024 at the annual summer fun day event at the Unity Centre in Harlesden. Over 60 people attended including young people, carers and staff. There were lots of indoor and outdoor activities for all ages such as a DJ, bouncy castle, arts and crafts and a quiz. Guests shared positive feedback of the event:



“Lovely day. Thanks for having us xx”



“It was really fun.”

5.8.2. BCJ 2.0 is still evolving, with young people providing feedback about the types of projects and activities they would like to do. Young people are able to hold the participation team to account through the Voice and Influence subgroup meetings.

5.8.3. The focus in BCJ 2.0 has been on establishing a permanent staff team, running sessions and maintaining an active participation offer with opportunities for young people to participate in decision-making, such as taking part in Corporate Parenting Committee.

5.8.4. **Evidence of impact:** Since April 2024, we have worked directly with over 40 young people across all age groups in projects, events and participation opportunities. Our work with care leavers has grown and we have gone from three young people at the start of 2023 to engaging 15 young people. We have also had new young people aged between 7-17 join activities and trips and reconnected with past members of Care in Action who have come back to participation through BCJ 2.0.

5.8.5. Highlights of BCJ 2.0 since April 2024 include:

- engaging more care leavers with a bigger group now accessing participation opportunities,
- increasing opportunities for care experienced young people to join projects with young people from other participation groups and youth projects, such as Brent Youth Parliament and the Brent Youth Strategy,
- supporting young people to develop their public speaking skills through speaking at Brent and pan-London conferences,
- care leavers working with Councillors and officers to re-design Corporate Parenting Committee to make it a more accessible space for young people and something they now look forward to attending,
- supporting young people’s campaign to make care experience a protected characteristic, this was passed as an unopposed motion at full council in December 2024,
- young people working with the NHS to co-design an animation video about health services for children in care,
- care leavers attending a summer residential to build teamworking skills and plan participation activities,
- supporting young people to advocate for themselves with their personal goals, such as resitting exams, applying for jobs and being open to new participation opportunities within and outside of Brent,
- seeing young people form new friendships and look out for each

other, particularly in the care leavers group where they always help each other out,

- seeing children and young people have fun in projects and on trips where the focus is on providing a safe space for them to relax and enjoy activities.

5.8.6. There have been some challenges with the logistics of sessions. There has been a lack of suitable spaces to run sessions in the Civic Centre which is the most easily accessible location for children and carers to come to. Sessions often take place in training rooms or boardrooms which are not welcoming spaces for young people.

5.8.7. The priorities for BCJ 2.0 in 2025 will concentrate on building on our existing work to formalise the BCJ 2.0 offer. The newly appointed Participation and Engagement Officer previously worked at Barnardo's Brent Care journeys. Her recruitment provides continuity for young people and helps to ensure that the legacy from Brent Care journeys is maintained. She will be leading work to promote BCJ 2.0 to young people and staff. This will involve working with young people to co-create branding, a promotion strategy to recruit their peers and a programme of projects and activities. This will then be shared with relevant services to ensure all teams are aware of the full BCJ 2.0 offer to encourage more young people to take part. We will also explore new options for securing accessible spaces to deliver sessions and activities.

5.8.8. The Participation and Engagement Officer will also prioritise establishing contact with young people who were previously involved in Brent Care Journeys. Some young people did continue to take part under BCJ 2.0, but others moved on, sometimes due to family and work commitments or aging out of services, however others found the end of Brent Care Journeys upsetting and needed some time before re-engaging. The Participation and Engagement Officer will be in a unique position to leverage existing relationships with young people under Brent Care Journeys, to try to involve as many young people as possible with BCJ 2.0.

5.8.9. The full BCJ 2.0 offer will include learning from Brent Care Journeys and activities run over the past year to establish a programme of sessions, projects, trips and participation opportunities. The focus of BCJ 2.0 will be supporting young people to get involved with service design and improvement through their feedback and ideas. We want young people to be able to hold the Council to account on services for care experienced young people and initiatives such as the care leavers' charter and the London wide care leaver covenant. The BCJ 2.0 programme will be accessible to all young people by recognising that not all young people want to attend a regular in-person group or a formal Council meeting. Therefore, the programme will incorporate different types of opportunities with a balance of in-person and virtual; one-off, short-term projects and long-term programmes; activities and formal opportunities; local, regional and national opportunities; voluntary and paid opportunities. Participation will be built into everything with opportunities for young people to share their views, co-design initiatives and lead projects.

5.5.10 BCJ 2.0 provides opportunities for young people to develop their skills and experiences which builds their future employability. For example, young people have paid opportunities to join staff interview panels where they experience interviews from the other side. Participation staff work with young people to articulate their experiences on their CVs and in interviews.

5.5.11 BCJ 2.0 will also connect to regional and national opportunities for young people to further develop their experiences of participation. Participation staff are connected to regional and national participation networks and regularly share opportunities with young people. However, many young people need encouragement and support to apply for these opportunities which the participation team provide. The team recently supported two care leavers to apply and interview for the Family Justice Young People's Board, led by the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), the young people were successful and are now representing Brent at a national level to share their views on family courts.

5.5.12 A focus of BCJ 2.0 for 2025 will be projects linked to the findings of the Bright Spots survey with young people sharing their ideas for service improvement and co-designing new initiatives.

6. Response to Bright Spots

6.1. Background

6.1.1. Brent has, over several years, been a Local Authority who have partnered with Coram Voice to complete the Bright Spots Survey with children in care and care leavers. Coram Voice states that "*The Bright Spots Programme is a research and service improvement project. The Programme was set up to understand what is important to children in care and care leavers and share learning about what makes life good for them*".


6.1.2. Between 1 March and 30 April 2023 and again between 11 October 2023 and 29 March 2024, all Brent children in care aged 4-18 years were asked to take part in an online survey to find out how they felt about their lives.

6.1.3. Findings are split into two separate reports *Your Life, Your Care* (for those aged 4-17) and *Your Life Beyond Care* (for Care Leavers). The *Your Life, Your Care* report was presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee by young people in October 2024 and the *Your Life Beyond Care* report was presented by young people in February 2025. In these meetings, young people discussed the findings with the Committee.

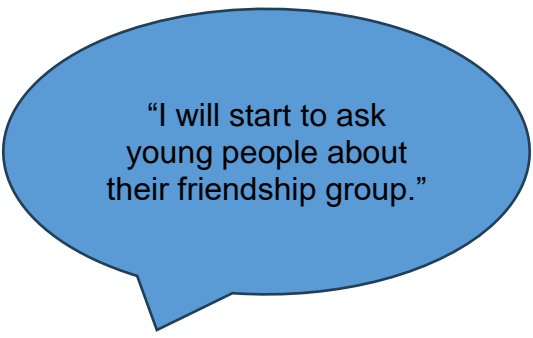
6.2. Action plan

6.2.1. Since the reports have been published, young people and staff have been reviewing the findings to understand the different views across all age groups.

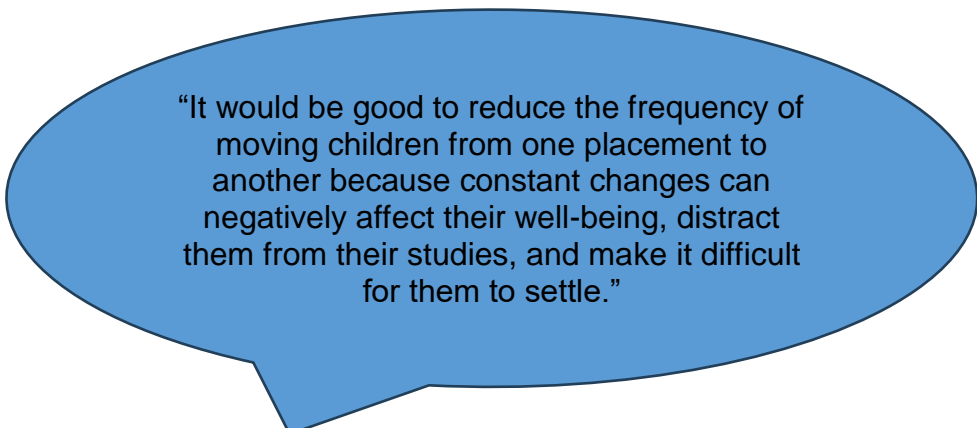
6.2.2. The reports have been shared with staff across CYP and two workshops were run by Coram Voice to celebrate success, go through the findings and share learning. These workshops were attended by staff from different services and involved interactive activities for staff to reflect on what they would continue doing, start doing and stop doing in response to the findings.



“I will continue to work together in partnership with other services to avoid delays in placement and decision making.”



“I will start to ask young people about their friendship group.”



“It would be good to reduce the frequency of moving children from one placement to another because constant changes can negatively affect their well-being, distract them from their studies, and make it difficult for them to settle.”

6.2.3. The reports have been shared with young people involved in BCJ 2.0 and care leavers have been involved in creating the presentations for Corporate Parenting Committee. Over the Easter holidays, the participation team will be running an activity in all sessions to share the findings more widely and listen to young people’s ideas for how services could be improved.

6.2.4. Young people will then use this feedback to co-design initiatives, campaigns or longer-term projects to help improve services based on the findings of the surveys. This will learn from previous Bright Spots project to build on the work of their peers. For example, in the previous round of Bright Spots surveys, young people developed a guide for practitioners about how to build trusted relationships with young people. This guide is still very relevant for today and young people will look at whether they want to update this in line with the most recent findings.

6.2.5. Opportunities to get involved in Bright Spots participation initiatives and projects will be shared across services to encourage young people not

involved in BCJ 2.0 to take part. Participation staff will then get to know new young people and encourage them to get involved in other participation projects within BCJ 2.0.

6.2.6. Young people will be leading the way with Bright Spots activities, they will also be working closely with staff from different services to understand what could work and hear their ideas too. There will be opportunities for staff and young people to work together on Bright Spots, including through the Voice and Influence meetings and at the annual summer fun day.

6.2.7. Young people will be empowered to also involve elected members and learn about opportunities outside of Corporate Parenting Committee to raise awareness of their campaigns, learning from their success with the campaign to make care experience a protected characteristic which was debated at full council, with care leavers attending the meeting in November 2024.

7. Progress in the Brent Children and Young People Participation and Engagement Strategy 2024-2027

7.1. Background to the Participation Strategy

7.1.1. The Brent Borough Plan 2023-2027 makes an explicit commitment to increasing the active participation of Brent children and young people by stating: *“We want all our young people from all backgrounds to be seen and heard in our services. We will create more opportunities and spaces to empower our young people to have their say.”*

7.1.2. In Autumn 2023, a draft Participation and Engagement strategy was developed, and consultation took place with children and young people and the CYP workforce. Following the consultation process, the strategy was re-drafted and launched at the CYP staff conference in June 2024.

7.1.3. The Participation Strategy covers both a universal and targeted participation offer but this report focuses only on the participation offer for children in care and care leavers. The strategy underpins all participation work.

7.2. Involvement of young people in the Participation Strategy

7.2.1. Throughout the development of the participation strategy, we have gathered feedback from young people and implemented changes. Young people were consulted about their views on participation and what they felt were the benefits and barriers with their feedback included in the final version (Appendix 1).

- 7.2.2. A Voice and Influence subgroup for staff and young people meets once a month to discuss participation priorities which feeds into Local Partnership meetings. Through this group, several care leavers gave feedback on earlier versions of the Participation Strategy and one of their suggestions was for a video version which they felt would be more accessible for young people.
- 7.2.3. The participation team worked closely with young people to co-design a video version of the participation strategy. Young people have been involved in developing the video behind and in front of the camera. Young people have helped to write the script, record voiceovers, interview each other and share feedback on editing.
- 7.2.4. An initial version of the video was shown at the December CYP staff conference and different versions of the video have been shared with young people to gather their feedback at different stages and shape the final design. The final video is expected to be finished in spring 2025 and will be used to promote the participation strategy and activities to young people and staff.

8. Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 8.1. Stakeholder consultation and engagement is essential to participation, and we are committed to continuing to evaluate and develop new and creative ways of hearing from young people, carers, staff and partner organisations.

9. Financial Considerations

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

10. Legal Considerations

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

11 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

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

12. Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 12.1. There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

13. Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

- 13.1. There are no human resource or property considerations.

14. Communication Considerations

14.11 At this stage there are not any communication considerations.

Report sign off:


Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children, Young People
and Community Development

By virtue of paragraph(s) 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

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 <p>Brent</p>	<p>Corporate Parenting Committee 23 April 2025</p>
	<p>Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People and Community Development</p>
	<p>Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools - Cllr Gwen Grahl</p>

**Brent Adoption Report
6-monthly report: 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025**

Wards Affected:	ALL
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	OPEN
List of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	<p>Debbie Gabriel, Head of Service, Adopt London West Brent's Regional Adoption Agency GabrielD@ealing.gov.uk</p> <p>Kelli Eboji, Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Kelli.eboji@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Palvinder Kudhail, Director, Early Help and Social Care Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk</p>

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a briefing to the Corporate Parenting Committee in relation to:
- adoption performance data for the period 1 October 2024 – 31 March 2025
 - the progress and activity of Adopt London West
 - how good outcomes are being achieved for children.

Information and child level data presented in Section 5 of this report is provided by Brent CYP; the remainder of this report includes the progress and activity of Adopt London West.

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

2.0 Recommendation(s)

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

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

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

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

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

3.2 Background - Adopt London West

- 3.2.1 Previous reports have set out the background and circumstances leading to the formation of Adopt London West Regional Adoption Agency in October 2019.
- 3.2.2 The partnership continues to mature and evolve, relationships between all partners remain positive with consistent attendance of Directors and senior leaders at the quarterly partnership board meetings.

4.0 Responsibilities

- 4.1 As delegated in the partnership agreement between Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham and Hounslow, Ealing (as the host Local Authority for ALW) is responsible for ensuring that children whose permanence plan is adoption in all four partner Local Authorities are matched in a timely way with adopters who best meet the needs of those children. This involves featuring children in various profiling events, via national linking websites, supporting them in adoption activity days and networking events with other Regional Adoption Agencies in London and nationally. ALW is also responsible for the preparation and assessment of prospective adopters, supporting adopters with family finding following approval, and the on-going post placement support to adopters and special guardians. ALW is also responsible for the provision of services to adopted adults and all those affected by adoption who request a specific service or an assessment of need.
- 4.2 ALW provides a service to Brent residents who wish to make a private application to adopt their partner's child. These are non-agency adoptions and often referred to as "step-parent" adoption, or special guardians who may wish to adopt the child in their care. The team is also involved in completing adoption reports on children who may have travelled from and been adopted abroad; there is a legal requirement for these adoptions to be made lawful in the UK.
- 4.3 Inter-country adoption referrals continue to be referred to the Inter-Country Adoption Centre, a specialist Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA), with whom a service level agreement is in place.
- 4.4 Statutory social work in relation to children needing adoptive placements remains the responsibility of Brent CYP. The care plans for children are formulated by the social work teams and agreed by Head of Service for LAC and Permanency. The Director, Early Help and Social Care then considers and ratifies any adoption plans.

5.0 Performance Data

- 5.1 Brent's 3-year performance for 2021-24 is:

- **A1** (The average time taken for a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 556 days (3-year average) (716 in the last 12 months) compared with 444 days in 2022-23.
- **A2** (The average time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 180 days (3-year average) (289 in the last 12 months) compared with 119 days in 2022-23.
- **A20** (The average time between a child entering care and the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child): 380 days (3-year average) (447 days in the last 12 months).

5.2 Performance variance in this small cohort of children is caused by a range of factors, and can be the result of significant delays for just one child, due to extended complex care proceedings, the individual needs of the child impacting on the availability of suitable adopters and therefore 'family finding' taking longer than hoped, these factors affect the average timescale for all children placed, some of whom may have been placed very quickly

6.0 Child related data

6.1 There have been 7 Adoption Orders granted in this reporting year (2024-25).

6.2 There have been 10 children placed for adoption since April 2024, compared to 4 children last year, this is the highest number of children placed since ALW became the Regional Adoption Agency delivering services on behalf of Brent.

6.3 There are currently sixteen children with an adoption plan who have not yet been adopted. The details of these children's cases are as follows:

- Eight children have been placed with their new families in this reporting year, six of those are placed with adopters approved by ALW.
- Six children are subject to a Placement Order but are not yet placed, two have been matched with their new family and introductions and transitions are due to start imminently. Two of the children are likely to have a change of care plan and they are expected to stay with their current foster carers.
- ALW and Brent are exploring potential families for the remaining child who is subject to a Placement Order.
- One child has a plan of Adoption agreed by Brent, but no Court order has yet been granted.

6.4 Early Permanence for Children

For some children it is appropriate to consider placing them with foster carers who are also approved adopters, this is referred to as an Early Permanence placement. This enables the child to be placed earlier than is usually possible and before Court proceedings have concluded. Four of the children placed

this year have been placed in Early Permanence placements, allowing the children to move earlier and begin building attachments to their new families.

7.0 Adopter Recruitment

- 7.1 18 Adopter households have been approved in 2024/25, this is less than last year's 20 approvals, a decrease in approvals has been affected by a social worker leaving the service causing a reduction in assessment capacity. An additional fixed term post was agreed by the partnership board and that worker joined the service in February 2025. Of those approved, 2 were foster carers adopting a child in their care, 1 was a second time adopter, planning to adopt the sibling of her child and another household are also second time adopters.

72% are White British, 11% are Black, 17% Mixed White/Asian. 17% of these approved adopters identify as LGBTQ.

The profile of adopters recruited in this period does broadly match the needs of Brent children, with the exception of sufficiency of Black Adopters. The lack of Black adopters is well documented and the reason why the Black Adoption Project was established.

6 out of the 10 children placed this year have been with ALW Adopters, and there are a further 2 Brent children linked with ALW adopters who will hopefully be successfully matched and placed within the next 2/3 months. The six children that have been placed with ALW adopters have all been placed with families who reflect their racial, cultural, religious backgrounds and are considered to be strong matches.

- 7.2 There are currently 35 ALW approved adopters: 19 of whom already have a child/children placed with them, 11 are in the active family finding stage, 7 of these families are already matched or linked with children 3 families are on hold due to their personal circumstances, 2 are likely to resign as adopters.
- 7.3 The adoption assessment process comprises 2 stages. Stage 1 assessments should take place within 2 months (60 days), this stage is described as "adopter led", where adopters work through exercises and complete various tasks that contribute to a full and thorough assessment of their suitability. Department for Education (DfE) Adoption and Special Guardianship data for 2023/24 shows the England average for Stage 1 was 134 days, the London average was 193 days, ALW average for those adopters approved in 2024/25 = 131 days.
- 7.4 Stage 2 should take a maximum of 4 months (120 days), this is a detailed assessment that is both reflective and analytical. In total, the comprehensive assessment process should be completed within 6 months. DfE data for 2023/24 shows the England average for Stage 2 was 150 days, the London average was 160 days, for those adopters approved in 2024/25 the average for ALW is = 184 days, this is due to 2 households taking a break in their

assessment due to a significant health issue and personal matter for the other applicant, without these delays, the ALW average would have been 153 days.

- 7.5 There are 25 prospective adopters in the formal stages of assessment. 13 households are in Stage 1, 9 in or about to commence Stage 2 and 3 households are currently on hold.

8.0 Casework

- 8.1 In this reporting year ALW has offered a service to 373 Brent children, families or individuals who are accessing their adoption records – 33 children are open to a social worker and at various stages of family finding, 28 are receiving a social work support service, a further 42 are receiving an Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) therapeutic service that is under review. 99 requests have been made for access to adoption records held by Brent.
- 8.2 There are 171 keeping in touch arrangements (formerly referred to as contact) being facilitated for Brent families - 43 direct contact arrangements and 128 active letter exchanges.

9.0 Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund

- 9.1 Families who require specialist therapeutic support are assessed by a social worker and an application submitted to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) for funding to cover the costs of the therapeutic services. 67 ASGSF applications have been made on behalf of Brent families and this year, £139,870 funding has been received for these services.
- 9.2 Due to delays from Government making an announcement about the ASGSF from April 2025, funding applications cannot be submitted at this point but are being prepared in anticipation of this announcement.

10.0 ALW Adoption Panel

- 10.1 The role of ALW's panel is as follows:
- to consider the presentation of approvals, reviews, and terminations of adopters' suitability to adopt, following which a recommendation is made by panel members and sent to ALW's Agency Decision Maker (Head of Service) for a formal decision.
 - to consider whether a child whose parent/s are consenting to their adoption, (formerly referred to as a relinquished baby) from Brent should be placed for adoption, following which a recommendation is made by panel members but sent to Brent's Agency Decision Maker (Director, Early Help and Social Care, Children and Young People's Services) for ratification/challenge; and
 - to consider adoption matches between Brent's children and their prospective adopters, following which a recommendation is made by panel members and sent to Brent's Agency Decision Maker (Director,

Early Help and Social Care, Children and Young People's Services) for ratification/challenge.

- 10.2 Feedback between ALW and Brent is considered by the Heads of Service quality assurance group and the Partnership Board and shared with Service Managers in Brent after each panel presentation to aid service development and quality assure the work of the RAA.
- 10.3 ALW Panel continues to take place virtually via Microsoft Teams. Prior to each panel meeting, the Adviser liaises with the applicants and external professionals to support them to access Microsoft Teams to reduce the risk of delay on the day and explain how the panel day will run and confirm that they are able to access the meeting confidentially. Panel members and observers also complete and return a confidentiality self-declaration, attesting to this for the duration of the panel meeting.
- 10.4 During the period under review, 18 new Adopter households have been approved since April 2024 and 12 Brent children have been formerly matched with their new families by the Agency following positive recommendations from the Adoption panel. Of the 10 children placed in 2024/25, 6 children have been placed "in-house" with ALW adopters, and 4 children have been placed with adopters from another adoption agency. (Please note that children may be matched with their new family and placed in a different reporting year).
- 10.5 Annual training for panel members is a regulatory requirement, a series of practice development discussions have taken place throughout the year with panel members. Training for all Adopt London panel members took place on 11th November 2024 on a new practice model for considering transracial and trans cultural placements, AFDIT (Anti -racist framework for decision making and transitioning children from minoritised racial and ethnic groups into transracial adoptive families) developed by Dr Tam Cane, University of Sussex, and coproduced with adoptees with lived experiences.

11.0 Adoption practice updates

National

Adoption England Strategy 2024-27 published



ALW development plan aligns to the 5 national outcomes set out below. Adopt London HOS group and ALW staff are involved across some of the working groups progressing culture change and practice development initiatives.

Outcomes for 2024-2027

In the next 3 years, 2024 -27, Adoption England will prioritise supporting the delivery of the following outcomes:



Training to LA partners reflects national work and modernising of Adoption agenda, there is a particular emphasis on work for children to maintain relationships with their birth families.

Work has progressed throughout the year on all priority areas identified in the National Strategy, Adoption England have indicated, subject to DfE grant funding continuing that previous grant funding allocated for specific practice developments is likely to be consolidated to enable regions to prioritise innovations within agreed parameters.

If grant funding is consolidated as expected, the Adopt London Heads of Service group will work together to identify priorities and make an application for funding accordingly. There is a plan to discuss this proposal at the National RAA Board Chairs meeting on May 16th 2025.

12.0 Adopt London Updates

Adopt London Black Adoption Project

Black Adoption Project Principles

The Black Adoption Project is committed to taking a different approach to create better futures for Black adopted children in London.


To work consistently and reach our goals, we:

- Are accountable and empowering: We think about how we use our power and ensure we are held to account. We work closely with Black children, adoptive families, and communities to make positive changes, enabling self-empowerment and leadership. 
- Use data to guide us: We gather information and insights to understand what's working, what isn't, and what questions we need to answer.
- Learn and adapt as we go: We know things can be complicated, so we try things out, learn from them, and stay open to new ideas and approaches. 
- Practice anti-racism: We actively work to get rid of racism wherever we find it, and in all its forms, including within the Black Adoption Project. We recognise that this requires continuous effort and action.
- Are honest and authentic: We're real about our imperfections and mistakes, and we use them as opportunities to learn and improve.
- Continuously learn: We're committed to learning and getting better every day, so we can do better for Black children.
- Embrace complexity and uncertainty: We know things can be tough, but we face challenges head-on, knowing they're part of the journey toward positive change. 



HOW WE WORK

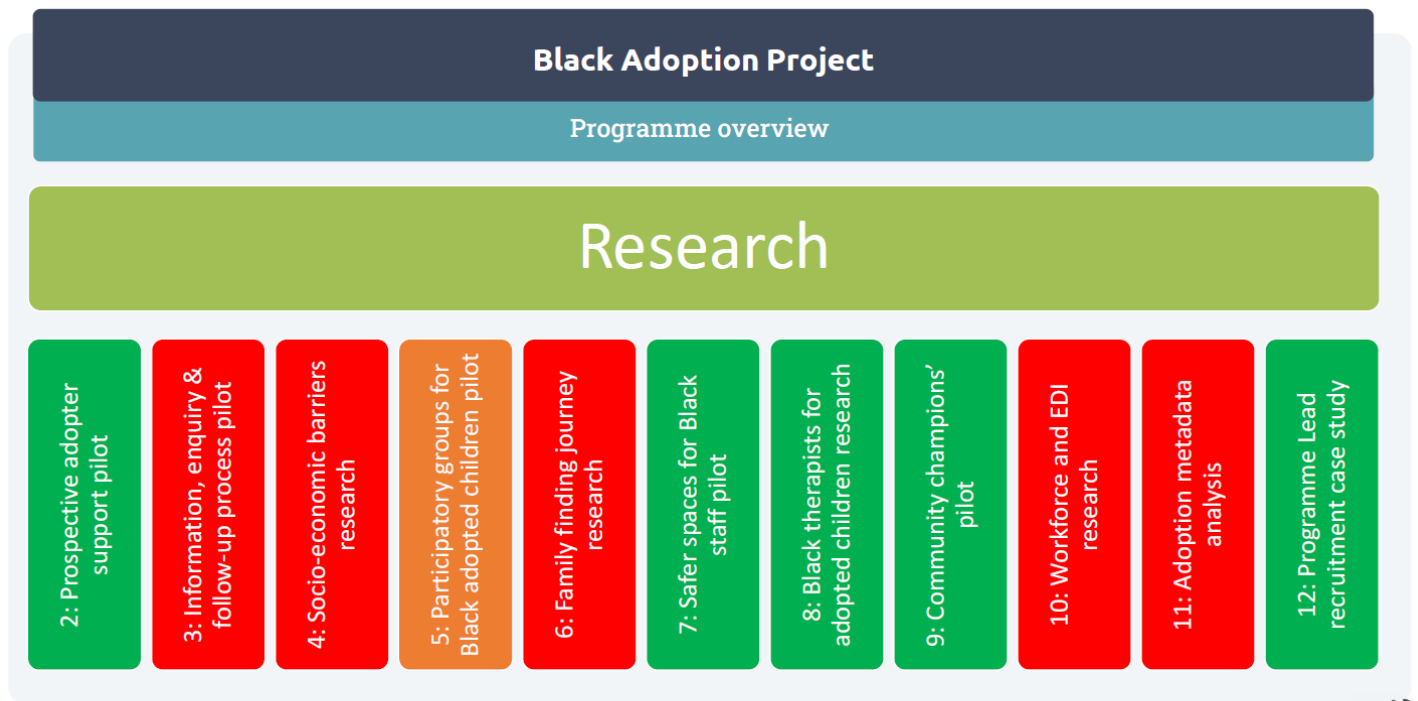
EVIDENCE
SELF-EMPOWERMENT
AUTHENTIC anti-racist
EMBRACE COMPLEXITY
Head and learn





Updates

The Black Adoption Project pilots are shown below with green representing pilots that are currently in progress or completed, orange representing pilots that have started or in the planning stages and red representing pilots that have not begun or require additional funding to launch.



Pilot 2 which is the prospective adopter support pilot is currently in progress via the **Adoptive Parent Stakeholder Group (APSG)** which had two meetings, one in January 2025 and the other in March 2025. New members have been welcomed making the group much larger (12 parents in January & 11 parents in March).

January was primarily focused on introducing new members and in March, the group had useful suggestions about the pilot updates provided. In-depth discussions took place whilst sharing important insights. Overall, the group was highly motivated and committed. The group have identified that there is a need for some work to encourage more Black men to engage with the project, 2 fathers are offering to take this work forward.

Annual Adopt London Staff Conference

The Annual Staff conference took place in February, attended by 150 staff from across the Adopt London partnership, the themes for the day focussed on practice issues primarily related to Black children. A presentation by Dr Tam Cane, University of Sussex on the AfDIT Framework, used to guide decision making when considering a transracial placement, the rest of the day was spent on progress of the Black Adoption Project hosted by the Steering Committee members.

In attendance were Adoption England representatives and the Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby who also met with the BAP steering committee members privately.

Black Adoption Project
 Communications updates

Staff conference

Presentations to staff conference from Chloe & Farrah, Esther & Nikki, Malaika & Charmaine, Laurelle; followed by Q&A panel discussion with audience.

[Blog post by Linda](#)



Communication Updates
 Business Card size

Black Adoption Project
 Communications updates



The Black Adoption Project was born out of a commitment to address the stark disparities that exist within adoption for Black children and families.

It is a partnership between four Regional Adoption Agencies (covering 24 London boroughs) and Laurelle Brown Training & Consultancy.

The Project is in collaboration with Adopt London staff, those with lived experience and community groups.

@blackadoptionproject



Creating better futures for Black adopted children in London

Be part of the change.

Scan or search for the

Black Adoption Project Linktree account to:

- stay informed about the Project
- be the first to hear about webinars and events
- learn how you can support and get involved



13.0 Adopt London Projects funded by Adoption England, DfE grant funding

13.1 Early Permanence

- Project was due to conclude on 31/3/2025, however, there is sufficient funding to extend until 30/9/2025. The focus for the next six months will be specifically on ensuring each agency's Early Permanence practice is compliant with fostering regulations, an increasing area of interest in recent Ofsted inspections.
- Shared SW training programme will continue to be delivered in the next six months in various sites across London.

13.2 Matching

- Funding for this project ends on 31/3/2025, there will be a short extension until mid- June when the Clinical Psychologist commences maternity leave.
- The addition of a Clinical Psychologist to the project has enabled more capacity to support Child Appreciation Days, three have taken place since January, practice guidance has been developed to support their continuation.
- One of the themes emerging from the project is the needs of neurodivergent children in transitions. The psychologist has experience and expertise in this area and is working with Professor Beth Neil, University of East Anglia to develop practice guidance to support these children as they move to new families.
- A practitioner day in June will conclude the project, the focus will be on the needs of neurodivergent children in transitions and Child Appreciation Days,

13.3 London Commissioning

- Adoption England continues to promote the development of a regional commissioning framework nationally, London is significantly way behind other regions in this area. Funding was allocated to undertake regional needs assessment, this was completed at the end of June, a commissioning discussion paper has been produced for discussion at the next Adopt London Executive Advisory board to consider next steps.
- Grant funding of £190k was awarded to the Adopt London partnership to develop a clinically informed social work practice model across Adopt London. A Service Manager has been appointed on a secondment opportunity to lead this work. Also, the allocated funding will enable additional Clinical Psychology resource to further develop business case & funding model for in house psychology provision in all Adopt London regions. There have been some delays in progressing the appointment of additional clinical psychology capacity due to some contracting issues with West London NHS Trust, a solution has now been agreed, and posts will be advertised imminently.

14.0 Conversations for Change

An Adopt London, adopter consultation project was launched earlier in the summer with an adopter with experience of community engagement facilitating the consultation.

Over 100 responses were received, feedback from families aligned with messages heard in the focus groups that were held as part of the regional needs assessment. The plan is to continue the consultation project, including some at least one face to face focus group each year.



15.0 Adopt London West practice updates

15.1 Keeping in Touch (formerly referred to as Contact)

Practice development

A focus of work in this period has been to further develop the keeping in touch arrangements for children, previously referred to as Contact. In line with the adoption transformation agenda:

- Brent workers seem engaged with talking to the keeping in touch team, wanting to learn, share ideas around keeping in touch, attending training
- ALW's Consultant Practitioner who manages the Keeping in Touch team presented at Brent Staff Forum in December 2024 (all LAC, permanence staff) on life story, identity, keeping in touch, and stayed for the whole event, which, apart from ALW contribution was all about lifelong links, life story etc so it was clear and positive that ALW messages were aligned with the local authorities practice too.
- The ALW Consultant Practitioner based herself in the Brent office for the rest of that day and invited staff to come with ideas / consultations which several did
- The main result of this was the leaving care team talking to ALW about several cases where contact with adopted siblings has been lost / never established, and ALW are supporting with this. There are 6 siblings in one family, 9 in the other. In the family with 9 siblings, contact has been reestablished contact between 3 of these siblings.
- ALW are currently supporting 148 letter exchanges and 43 direct contacts for Brent children.
- ALW are part of Adoption England's culture change programme around Keeping in Touch and were already promoting a more open and proactive approach to telling children their stories and maintaining meaningful connections.
- Some key activities over the past couple of years include adapting ALW training and messages for prospective adopters, rolling out training for each partner local authorities, attending team meetings / staff forums, offering case consultations, re-designing the keeping in touch referral form, introducing

team members to families earlier, offering adopters an annual review and sharing information about different ways to stay in touch.

- As such, ALW is capturing information on the additionality; that is how many children are having increased opportunities to be in touch with their family members as a result of the focus on this area.

There are 35 Brent children currently experiencing some sort of additional contact with birth family members.

- Some Brent examples:
 - A 17 year old has been supported to make a pre-recorded video for her birth father and paternal aunt; ALW supported the father to make a video in response, and now the team is supporting a face to face contact
 - A sibling group of 6; placed in pairs. Adopters responded to the offer of review, ALW have offered support to enable all siblings to be in touch with each other.
 - 2 adopted children aged 9 and 6: the adopter has been supported to meet with birth mother, birth father, paternal grandparents, and face to face meetings between the children and these members of their birth families. The adopter now manages the relationship with the birth father and his parents independently and ALW provide very light touch support for birth mother's contact.

16.0 Feedback

"Thank you for sharing your knowledge and experience with us. And thank you for offering us an open and caring space to talk and reflect. I'm coming away from this course with some tools that I'm already implementing and others that I want to familiarise myself with to try and be a better parent. Thank you to all the members of the group for your kindness and sincerity: if parenthood is a journey, I've learnt a lot by doing this part of the journey with you."

- *"I feel like the staff are amazing."*
- *"I am very happy with my relationship with my contact person."*
- *"I feel you guys are doing a great job."*
- *"I have a lovey relationship with my son's adoptive mum and it was all thanks to you."*

"The service from my worker has been very good ... she has been very kind and considerate and always replies sensitively and in a timely manner."

17.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

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

18.0 Financial Considerations

18.1 Brent Council's contribution to the cost of running the functions of ALW in 2024/25 was £0.424m.

18.2 The overall benefits of a shared service are also realised through the practice improvement and opportunities that are possible now that small individual services have become part of the wider Adopt London collaboration and the national RAA network. It was previously not possible for LA Adoption services to offer the range of support and services that can now be delivered as a Regional Adoption Agency.

19.0 Legal Considerations

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

20.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

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

21.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

21.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

22.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

22.1 There are no human resource or property considerations.

23.0 Communication Considerations

23.1 At this stage there are not any communication considerations.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children and Young People

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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