



Corporate Parenting Committee

Monday 13 October 2025 at 5.30 pm

**Members' Suite – Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way,
Wembley, HA9 0FJ**

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

The press and public will be excluded from this meeting.

Membership:

Members

Councillors:

Grahl (Chair)
Dixon
Gbajumo
Smith
Hirani

Substitute Members

Councillors:

Chappell, Conneely, Kennelly
and Rubin

Councillor: Kansagra, 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.

Item	Page
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1	Exclusion of the Press and Public	
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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.

2	Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members	
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3	Declarations of interests	
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Members are invited to declare at this stage of the meeting, any relevant disclosable pecuniary, personal or prejudicial interests in the items on this agenda.

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

6	Update from Brent Care Journeys 2.0 (BCJ 2.0) Representatives	
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This is an opportunity for members of BCJ 2.0 to feed back on activity over the last quarter and facilitate discussion on issues pertinent to Brent children and young people with Members. This will include a progress update on co-produced work relating to our Bright Spots Action Plan.

7	Progress report - the London Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers	9 - 40
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To provide an update to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the London Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers (The Protocol hereafter), published in March

2021. Previous reports have been presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in April 2019, January 2022, and February 2024.

8 Six-Monthly Adoption Report - Adopt London West 41 - 86

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.

9 Fostering Service 6-monthly Report 87 - 117

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).

10 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: Monday 2 February 2026



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE Monday 14 July 2025 at 5.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors 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**

Apologies were received from Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development, Brent Council).

3. **Declarations of interests**

None.

4. **Deputations (if any)**

None.

5. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the last meeting, held on 23 April 2025, 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 (BCJ 2.0) to the meeting and invited them to provide updates from the group.

J advised that he had been involved in interview panels for roles at the new residential children's care home in Brent, including for the Deputy Manager and Senior Residential Support Worker. He had enjoyed working with other professionals he had not yet met and coming together as a panel to make decisions.

N advised that a 'link-up' session was held during May half term where new people and new staff had attended. She advised this had allowed attendees to bond and also share information and advice with each other. These sessions were being held in a dedicated

space in the Civic Centre where young people had quick access to staff, including personal advisors and managers.

S provided feedback on the Create Arts music project she had been involved in, where young people were supported to create their own music and lyrics. She had created a music video with 7 other care leavers which used many different languages including Hindi, Arabic and English. The BCJ 2.0 group were also working on implementing actions following the findings of the Bright Spots Survey, which had shown that care experienced young people wanted friendship and trust. From that, a project called Trusted Buddies had been created, where young people aged 18-25 years old buddied with children aged 11-19 years old and supported them with the aim of maintaining a lifelong friendship. That project was in its research phase and further updates could be provided at the next Committee meeting.

The Chair thanked BCJ 2.0 representatives for their updates and invited comments and questions from the Committee, with the following points raised:

In response to whether BCJ 2.0 had received support in their Trusted Buddies project, S explained that she had presented the idea to The Participation Team and the project was being done in collaboration with Cafcass.

The Committee requested to see the music video that had been created which would be circulated.

In relation to the new residential children's care home, BCJ 2.0 had visited the home and had been pleased with the way it had been designed and decorated.

The Committee asked how BCJ 2.0 had been able to engage new young people in the 'link-up' session. N advised that this was through the group chat and advertisements in the hub, and current BCJ 2.0 members had spoken about the experience they had and the connections they had made. A further incentive was receiving food. Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) provided thanks to Appia Douglas (Participation and Engagement Officer, Brent Council) who had done a lot of work on this.

In response to what BCJ 2.0 had planned for the summer, J advised that a fun day was planned for August as well as a residential trip for care leavers and children in care which everyone was looking forward to.

8. Annual Corporate Parenting Report 2024-2025

Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the annual Corporate Parenting Report, covering the activity for the period 2024-25 and the priorities moving forward into 2025-26.

In presenting the report she highlighted the following key points:

- In relation to staffing and recruitment priorities, as of the end of 2024-25, staffing in the service was almost fully permanent with agency staff recruitment reserved solely for sick leave or maternity cover.
- The improved staffing, alongside the service redesign, was hoped to create a strong foundation to develop quality and consistent practice.
- The service continued to work with health colleagues to improve health services, children and young people's emotional wellbeing and implement interventions.
- The service continued to work with Brent Children's Trust with an action plan in place for that.

- Brent Care Journeys with Barnardo's had now transitioned to Brent Care Journeys 2.0 (BCJ 2.0), taking on the learning of the last 4-5 years with Barnardo's and embedding new ways of providing participation for young people.
- The service was working on developing accommodation pathways and independence skills for young people, detailed in section 18 of the report.
- An action plan following the findings of the most recent Bright Spots Survey had been established and would be implemented over the summer.
- There was increased focus on developing and improving practice on life story work with multiple bespoke life story work training offers for staff and a life story work pilot with frontline teams to improve the way that work was started when children were newly in care. This included a life story work online platform that the service was looking to introduce in the coming year.
- Work had been undertaken on the Corporate Parenting Committee structure and the way it worked in Brent, and she thanked the young people for their commitment through that journey and the improved format where young people were much more involved in meetings and discussions.
- Some priorities from 2024-25 would remain the same for the incoming year, particularly around embedding the redesign of children's services and the government's new Families First priorities as they related to children in care and care leavers.
- A continued focus would remain on kinship care as the first option for children unable to live with parents and reunification with birth families where possible and appropriate.
- There would also be continued focus on the voice and engagement of children and young people in day-to-day practice through co-design and co-production approaches.

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

The Committee noted the improved permanency in the workforce and asked what was being done to sustain the almost 100% permanent workforce. Kelli Eboji advised that there was a good Learning and Development offer for social workers and personal advisors. Around two years previously the biggest challenges in turnover occurred in the LAC teams, which had been addressed and retention maintained. Since Palvinder Kudhail (Director Early Help and Social Care, Brent Council) had started at the Council there had also been improved focus on converting agency workers to permanent staff to help retention, and it was hoped that her redesign of the department would create systems where staff felt clearer about their roles, remits and the systems they were required to use. The new model had been implemented on 2 June 2025 and there had been a training session every day since then to ensure staff understood the new structures and requirements through a 12-week intensive programme. This programme had been designed following a consultation phase of all staff, including early help practitioners, to understand their skills readiness and what they needed going forward.

In relation to the numbers of children in care across the last few years, it was noted that the rate of children coming into care was going down, and the Committee asked why that was. Kelli Eboji explained that Brent had historically maintained a relatively low population of children in care which was likely due to the demographics of the movable and transient population where people entered and left the borough. She also felt that Brent had higher thresholds compared to other places for taking children into care as there was a focus on early intervention and keeping children with their families wherever possible.

Noting that the children in care population in Brent was predominantly adolescent ages, the Committee asked if that was consistent nationally or specific to Brent. Kelli Eboji advised that it varied between local areas, but Brent typically had higher percentages of adolescents in care.

The Committee highlighted the statistics in the report that 17% of children at any one point were missing which was an increase from the previous year. They asked how the service planned to address that going forward whilst recognising the work being done to minimise children going missing through the Exploitation, Violence and Vulnerability Panel (EVVP). Kelli Eboji confirmed that the service had been reflecting on what the causes of the increase could be. There was some consensus that it could be related to an increase in awareness and reporting as the figures also included absenteeism. She felt that there was work the service needed to do with placement providers around what they were reporting and when. In terms of addressing children going missing going forward, there was a new Targeted Prevention Hub which pulled together all contextual safeguarding resources for better consistency to support practitioners. The LAC teams would also continue embedding protocols around decriminalisation.

The Committee asked for assurance that the service knew who the young people going missing were and for how long. It was confirmed that the service received data from the police every week so knew exactly who was missing and for how long, and when Strategy meetings took place it was clear what police actions were. In terms of whether police treated reports of missing incidents seriously and treated young people equally, Kelli Eboji highlighted that it was difficult to generalise the response as many young people were placed out of borough, meaning the police response would depend on the local area and the police resources allocated. From the Council's point of view, getting the right police around the table for strategy discussions was crucial, and if that happened then good work came from that. Sabine Kadhaya (Service Manager – Safeguarding and Reviewing, Brent Council) added that police attended the EVVP where missing children were discussed and issues addressed straight away. The Committee were reassured that, where there were issues with the response from police, this could be escalated to the relevant Detective Chief Inspector.

Brent Care Journeys 2.0 (BCJ 2.0) provided a perspective on some of the reasons young people might go missing, which included disliking the area they were living in, not feeling safe, not liking the home environment they were in or the people they lived with. Sometimes it was about not feeling heard. The importance of getting the placement right was emphasised. BCJ 2.0 also highlighted the importance of young people being comfortable with their social worker so that they felt able to share their feelings with them about their placement, and that there should be a mechanism for young people to feed back about their social worker.

BCJ 2.0 asked how soon after care leavers have bid for accommodation should a direct offer be expected, highlighting that many care leavers wait for years. Kelli Eboji highlighted the challenges in giving specific timeframes for that, emphasising the pressures on the housing stock in Brent which had directly impacted how quickly care leavers were receiving direct offers. The service was looking to address that, as the time it now took for care leavers to receive an offer was increasing. The service was trialling the Shared House and were setting up auto-bidding for some care leavers. Work was being done with colleagues in Housing to identify specific properties for care leavers as well as the Housing Companies in Brent to broaden out the options available. Afzal Ahmed (Service Manager – LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) added that care leavers were on Band 2 priority, compared to homeless people on Band 1. Whilst the service was trying to be creative in supporting young people into housing, officers were also being realistic about the low housing stock

across London and the pressures in the Council's budget that access to housing was causing.

In considering the response, BCJ 2.0 asked how much encouragement was given to staying put arrangements, feeling that was a good option where young people could stay with people they knew, transition easier into adulthood and become independent. Kelli Eboji responded that there was emphasis on encouraging staying put arrangements, but there was a balance needed because foster placements were also needed. BCJ 2.0 highlighted the importance of good placement matching for this, explaining that their staying put arrangements had worked when they stayed with a family of the same cultural background and heritage which had been a key factor. It was agreed that training could be considered for foster carers who entered into staying put arrangements to support them with that transitional time to adulthood where the young person might be looking for more independence.

In relation to section 14.3, which detailed the aim of the service for care leavers to be introduced to a personal advisor by 17.5 years old, the Committee raised concerns that this was quite late. Kelli Eboji advised that the service would prefer to begin that introduction process at 16, but highlighted this target was what the service could currently achieve with the resources available. This area was a particular pressure point that the service wanted to improve, but it was challenging without additional resources. In relation to the causes of the pressures to achieve this target, Afzal Ahmed advised that Covid had impacted the service, as had the increase of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and referrals from the 4 hotels in the borough for age assessments. The legislation had also changed, meaning young people were staying in the service longer, and so the service was trying to keep caseloads to a manageable level.

It was confirmed that the Sufficiency Strategy detailed in the report related to having a plan in place to ensure Brent had as many foster carers as possible.

As no further issues were raised, the Committee resolved to note the report.

9. Annual Looked After Children (LAC) Health Report

Kim Lewis (Head of Clinical Services – Brent Children, CLCH) introduced the report, which provided information relating to the health needs of Brent Looked After Children and the services provided in 2024-25. In providing some context, she highlighted that, nationally, Looked After Children entered care with a worse level of health than their peers and often needed support above and beyond their peers. She then provided the following information:

- In Brent, the LAC Health Team had a caseload of 328 as of 31 March 2025, compared to 268 the previous year. The caseload fluctuated throughout the year.
- The LAC Health Team was currently fully and correctly staffed in accordance with the intercollegiate guidelines for ratios, and was made up of a Named Nurse, 3 Children Looked After Nurses, 2 Consultant Paediatricians conducting Initial Health Assessments (IHAs), one of which was the Named Doctor for Looked After Children, and a cohort of Junior Doctors on a 6-month rotation. There were also some medical advisors in place for adoption and fostering.
- The report included an analysis of monthly performance on timely completion of IHAs and Review Health Assessments (RHAs), including explanations for breaches.
- The Integrated Care Board (ICB) had recently flagged concerns with IHA performance across all 8 NWL boroughs and was undertaking a programme to address that, which health and social care teams were involved in. The most

common causes of breaches were where children were placed out of borough and waiting for assessment in the borough they were placed in, ongoing challenges with referrals, and children and young people who were not brought to their appointment or chose not to attend. The Brent Health and Social Care Teams and Designates from the ICB were exploring the referral challenges and how they could be addressed.

- The team had worked to streamline referral forms to make the process quicker and easier which had received positive feedback.
- She highlighted the need for centralised solutions to improve the breaches to statutory timeframes for children placed out of borough, where Brent's health and social care team had limited control.
- A new NWL ICB core offer specification to standardise the commissioning of children looked after across all 8 boroughs was expected, which would change how systems operated to ensure all 8 NWL boroughs were providing the same service to children regardless of where they lived.
- In 2023-24 there had been an improvement in the number of children whose immunisations were up to date, who were registered with a GP and who had received a recent dental check. The data for 2024-25 was not yet available.
- The number of children who had seen an optician for their RHA had improved.
- Data had not yet been received for mental health support and substance misuse, and the previous year there had been large gaps in the number who reported issues and those actually receiving support, highlighting the large number of young people waiting for support in those areas.
- The Central London Community Healthcare health team had established a Quality Council Project with young people in care to develop an animation discussing the experience of being in care and how they would like health professionals to speak to them. The animation included myth busting about children looked after and was due to launch soon, and had been shortlisted for 2 awards.

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

Cecilia Gabriel (Service Manager – LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) offered thanks for the work done to improve the RHA process and new form which she advised had made a big difference for social workers in Brent.

The Committee highlighted the difficulties people faced in asking for interventions for mental health and asked what support was available to allow young people to disclose that information and receive support. Kim Lewis highlighted the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires which examined a child's mental wellbeing along four broad categories to plan therapeutic support referrals, which was a national tool used by health visiting staff and social workers. There was a national requirement to complete an SDQ every 12 months. She advised that the key to these was ensuring the team had built good relationships with young people so they felt comfortable asking for that support, as well as consistency of staff. In terms of the emotional wellbeing support available to young people, Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) highlighted a number of other providers outside of CAMHS known as tier 2 support such as WEST, Elev8 and VIA New Beginnings. There was also a new wellbeing service being launched specifically for former UASCs.

The Committee asked whether the figure in 5.9 of the report, stating that 90% of looked after children were reported with substance misuse, was correct. Officers agreed to check

that figure but believed it to be correct, highlighting that alcohol, smoking and vaping would be included in that figure as well as cannabis use. In checking that figure, the Committee asked to be provided with the national average for adults.

The Committee asked where the complexities in meeting statutory obligations for health assessments arose. Kim Lewis explained that social workers completed the set referral form to request a health assessment. If the child was placed out of borough, the team made the referral to that local borough, however, it was noted that other boroughs tended to prioritise their own children which caused delays. For those in NWL, the CLCH team then dealt with the referral. Once the assessment was complete, they would write a report which was quality assessed by the LAC Health Team. Where children were placed out of borough, the quality of those reports were not always the required standard, and this resulted in back and forth with the other borough to get the report into an acceptable standard. She highlighted that this was happening across the whole country and felt it needed national focus.

Noting the table in the report providing monthly performance of IHAs, the Committee highlighted a drop in July and October, and asked if there had been any reflection and insight into why that was. Officers explained that the numbers did fluctuate depending on where young people were placed. In October, 3 children were in borough and 9 were out of borough, where there were more delays. There had also recently been some young people in hospital where those assessments could not be carried out. She assured the Committee that the reasons for exceptions were provided in the report to the ICB and highlighted that the small caseloads did affect the figures.

The Committee noted that section 5.4 of the report described the number of HPV immunisations delivered for girls only and highlighted that the policy in schools was now to immunise both girls and boys. Kelli Eboji confirmed that the immunisation was offered to both boys and girls, and agreed that there was further work needed in the coming year regarding vaccinations. There was a need to work with public health and health teams to improve vaccination rates and increase the messaging around eligibility.

It was noted that, whilst the report noted a slight increase of 5% in immunisations, since the report had been published the finalised figures showed a decrease in immunisation rates between the reporting year and the previous year. Cecilia Gabriel suggested that could be due to the smaller cohort of children being supported to be placed long-term, larger sibling groups where parents had not consented to immunisations, and UASCs who arrived with no immunisations or evidence of immunisation status. Officers felt that messaging and education was needed in that area, and a UASC project with public health had begun to develop some of that educational messaging, including using foster carer platforms such as newsletters and training.

The Committee asked how the service was ensuring that young people leaving care fully understood how to access their health histories. Kelli Eboji advised that the report detailed the positive work on health histories and summaries. She emphasised that the health team worked hard to ensure every young person leaving care had a health summary. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) brought that information to their reviews as part of the care leaver pathway plan, and social workers were now prompted to make sure a young person had received their health history, and check they had any questions or needed any support.

As no further issues were raised, the Committee resolved to note the report.

10. Annual Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Report 2024-2025

Sabine Kadhaya (Service Manager, Safeguarding and Reviewing, Brent Council) introduced the report, which provided the annual report detailing the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to the quality assuring and improvement of services for Looked After Children. In terms of priorities for 2024-25, the service had successfully appointed 3 in-house IROs, and she highlighted that having Brent Care Journeys 2.0 (BCJ 2.0) representatives on the panel had been very beneficial. The new IRO contract was now commissioned with 2 permanent IROs. The priority to improve the timeliness of LAC reviews had seen an improved focus and that would continue going forward. The fourth priority to engage children and young people in more creative ways continued.

The Chair thanked Sabine Kadhaya for her introduction and invited comments and questions from those present, with the following issues raised:

The Chair acknowledged the unique role of the IRO and asked for examples of where an IRO might intervene to improve the experience of children and young people. They heard that an IRO might intervene if there had been a delay or deviation from a child's agreed care plan or if a young person reached out to the IRO. The IRO would liaise with the guardian of the child if they were in care proceedings to agree what was best for the child, and provided scrutiny of the care plan for the child. The IRO was a statutory duty defined in the Children's Act 1989.

The Committee was pleased to see the percentage of reviews happening within statutory timeframes had improved, and asked whether it was possible to improve that moving forward. Sabine Kadhaya advised that there was a priority in place to increase that to 90 by the following year, and there was now an IRO manager in post who had not been previously, providing additional focus to enable that improvement to happen.

The Committee asked what BCJ 2.0's experience of their IROs had been. J advised that he had the same IRO for his entire time in care, and had a good bond with her and they understood each other well. She had prepared him well for his reviews and helped him complete the forms required for each meeting and ensured his voice was heard. S also had a positive relationship with her IRO. She added that she sat on the Family Justice Young People's Board who wrote a letter to the children when they left, and suggested that a goodbye letter from IROs would be useful for care leavers, as well as their personal advisors and care leavers. Sabine Kadhaya thanked BCJ 2.0 for their feedback, and added that IROs were asked to take the young person out to say goodbye after their final review, allowing a therapeutic process to saying goodbye. The Committee asked that an IRO was invited to the meeting when this was next discussed.

11. Any other urgent business

Brent Care Journeys 2.0 asked whether there was anything the Council could do to offer discounts on driving lessons to help care leavers learn to drive, as they were now very expensive. It was agreed officers would look into this.

The meeting closed at 7:20 pm

Councillor Gwen Grahl
Chair

	Corporate Parenting Committee 13 October 2025
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People and Community Development
	Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools - Councillor Gwen Grahl
Progress report 2025: The London Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
List of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers - A protocol for London: The national protocol on reducing unnecessary criminalisation of looked-after children and care leavers. The national protocol on reducing unnecessary criminalisation of looked-after children and care leavers (publishing.service.gov.uk)
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Palvinder Kudhail Director, Early Help and Social Care Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk Kelli Eboji Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Kelli.Eboji@brent.gov.uk Serita Kwofie Head of Early Help Serita.Kwofie@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide information and updates to the

Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC) about the London Protocol (The Protocol hereafter) on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers, published in March 2021¹. Previous reports on reducing the criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers were presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in January 2022 and February 2024.

- 1.2 Progress against the priorities identified in the 2024/25 report on The London Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers have been updated throughout the body of this report. In summary:

Priority a)

Accommodation Provider forums to explore how we can together aim to reduce criminalisation of LAC and care leavers by ensuring staff/carer responses to behavioural difficulties which may be viewed as criminal, are proportionate and appropriate and the need for Police involvement and/or court action is minimised.

A forum was held with attendance of over 20 accommodation providers in September 2025. Presentations were given by the YOS and Corporate Parenting staff. The presentation was well received. Agreement was reached to develop a joint protocol to ensure:

- LAC and Care Leavers are not criminalised unnecessarily,
- Restorative approaches are used to deal with incidents occurring in placements when this is more appropriate.

Priority b)

Training to be provided to foster carers that focus on de-escalation when working with young people presenting behavioural difficulties.

Half day Training was delivered to foster carers by the Early Help, Youth Justice Service (YJS) Restorative Justice Officer. Further training was delivered to foster carers, fostering and kinship teams.

Priority c)

Training for Personal Advisors on providing advocacy when supporting young people in prison.

A joint programme is being developed with the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) and will be delivered by the end of the year.

Priority d)

A joint LACP and YJS staff forum.

A joint forum took place in July 2024. Staff from LACP and YJS collaborated to raise awareness about the statutory support and enforcement tools available to the local authority when care experienced young people have been convicted of an offence or receive an out of court disposal (OCD).

- 1.3 This report provides a summary of Brent's current practice and actions taken to reduce the criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers in line with the London Protocol. It contains evidence of services and approaches provided to looked after children and care leavers at a strategic and operational level.
- 1.4 The protocol will ensure there is consistency when responding to incidents it will include descriptions of incidents and the level of response. A draft of this was shared at the 2 events including foster carer's and providers all participants were keen to work together to develop this further and implement this in their work with looked after children and care leavers.
- 1.5 A revised local protocol that incorporates the principles of the pan London protocol will be worked together with carers, supervising social workers and accommodation providers and will be published by the end of January 2026.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 It is recommended that the CPC review and comment on the contents of this report. This ensures the CPC is fulfilling its responsibility to advocate in support of the key principles set out within the London Protocol on behalf of looked after children and care leavers when exercising their duties as corporate parents.
- 2.2 The protocol will be shared with carers and accommodation providers it will ensure there is consistency of practise and looked after children and care leavers are not criminalised unnecessarily, and that restorative justice approaches are used to deal with incidents occurring in placement where this is more appropriate.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

- 3.2 This report sets out the management of the local authority's Corporate Parenting service and the developments that have taken place in the 2024/25 reporting period. The work of the LACP service contributes to the following borough priorities:
- The Best Start in Life
 - Prosperity and Stability
 - A Healthier Brent
 - Thriving Communities

4.0 Background

- 4.1 In November 2018, a national protocol on reducing unnecessary criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers was published by the Department for Education (DfE), Home Office and Ministry of Justice (MoJ). The protocol was the first national guidance aiming to tackle this issue. It provided a framework

for local authority children's services, local care providers, youth offending services, the crown prosecution service, Police, HM Courts and Tribunal Services and local health services. A Pan-London Protocol was published by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) in March 2021 and sets out a framework for practice relevant to London.

- 4.2 The national protocol's key objectives and principles focused on a practice model that aimed to introduce preventative measures, reduce re-offending behaviour and rehabilitate young people who had offended through effective joint working between relevant agencies. The protocol highlighted the impact of previous trauma, attachment issues and specific vulnerabilities of looked after children and care leavers. All agencies were encouraged to use a trauma-informed approach to their practice. The Protocol recommends that restorative approaches should be used in a child-centred way to enable integrated, coordinated, and proactive responses to prevent and address challenging offending behaviour.
- 4.3 Children's early life experiences have a significant impact on their development and future life chances. As a result of their experiences before entering care, and during care, children in care are at greater risk of entering the youth justice system than their peers. Children in Care are more likely to be exposed to the risk factors established in research as associated with the onset of youth offending than the general population of children. Risk factors for youth crime, and the factors leading to reception into care are similar. Risk (and protective) factors for young people who offend are categorised across four domains: the family; school; community; and those which are individual, personal, and related to peer group experiences.
- 4.4 The London Protocol sets out the roles and responsibilities of each group involved in the care of looked-after children and care leavers in reducing their involvement in crime – as these groups have a role in protecting these vulnerable young people from a life of crime. This includes children's home carers, foster parents, Police officers, the Crown Prosecution Service, health services and local authorities.
- 4.5 The Youth Justice Service works in accordance with the London Protocol by supporting children and young people to maintain relationships and placement stability. This helps Children's Social Care to implement corporate parenting principles, coordinate services to promote positive outcomes for looked after children and care leavers and reduce their unnecessary criminalisation. The expansion of preventative support in Early Help via the Targeted Prevention Hub (TPH) affords greater access to support services that reduce the number of first-time entrants into the youth justice system, reduce reoffending, and tackle risk factors that draw young people into crime.

5.0 Brent's Approach

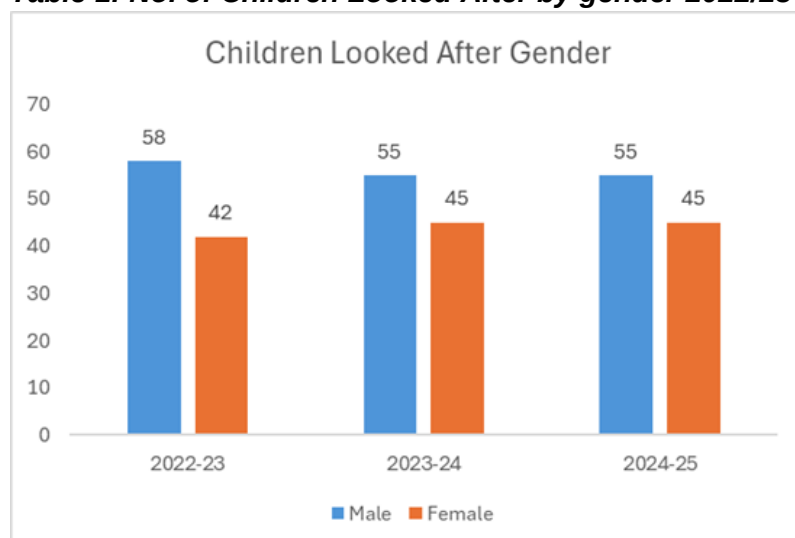
- 5.1 Looked after children and care leavers interact with a whole range of agencies and professionals and it is important that all of them understand the reasons

why looked after children and care leavers may behave in particular ways which are different to the universal population; key to this is their understanding of the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma on children, young people and adults.

- 5.2 A key part of Brent's approach is to raise awareness of why looked after children and care leavers need to be specifically considered when making decisions about involvement in the criminal justice system. Locally this has been and will continue to be done through a range of face to face and virtual training options. This includes building the agreed approach for looked after children and care leavers into current training packages.
- 5.3 Ensuring looked after children and care leavers have the right placements that meet their identified needs will significantly contribute to the prevention of criminalisation. It is recognised that caring for and managing children and young people with behaviour that can be perceived as difficult or challenging can be an integral feature of work within care placements.
- 5.4 At the 31 March 2025 Brent had 296 children in care compared to 307 children on 31 March 2024, a decrease of 3.6%. This represented 40.1 children per 10,000 child population against the rate for England of 71 per 10,000 head of child population, a decrease in rate by 1.8 from the previous year (1.9). In 2024/25, 142 children became looked after, compared to 131 children last year, and an average of 180 per year over the previous four years.

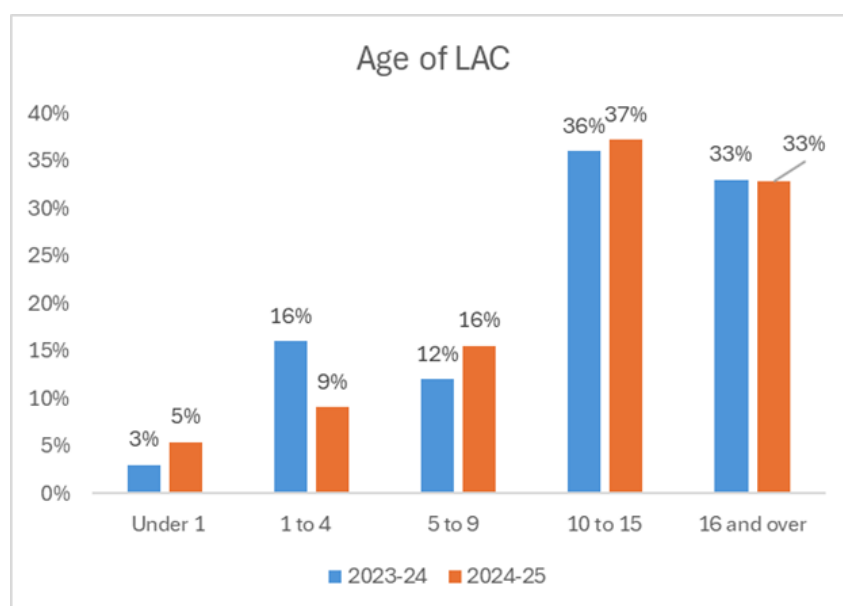
The decrease in looked after Children is likely to be the result of robust Entry and Care oversight and the increased use of pre-proceedings.
- 5.5 Of the 296 looked after Children on 31/03/25, 41 had had a previous looked after period. This represents 14% of the looked after children cohort.
- 5.6 The gender of the looked after Children population consists of 55.4% male and 44.6% female. This is broadly the same as in 2022/23 and 2023/24.

Table 1: No. of Children Looked After by gender 2022/23 to 2024/25



- 5.7 32.8% of the care population in Brent was aged 16 and over, compared to 32.6% at the end of March 2024. 70% of the care population in Brent was aged 10 and over. Having a predominantly adolescent care population presents challenges around outcomes such as placement stability, education, employment and training. Many young people present with emotional and behavioural difficulties and complex needs that foster carers may not feel equipped to manage. Additionally, there continues to be a national lack of sufficiency for foster carers that have the skills to provide care for teenagers.
- 5.8 Whilst the number of children in care in Brent is lower than our statistical neighbours, there is an identified trend that those children who do come into our care are often older children who have entered the care system at a later stage and are therefore more likely to experience unstable care. Despite these challenges, Brent's placement stability has improved in this reporting period.

Table 2: Age. of Children Looked After 2023/24 to 2024/25



5.9 Young people in the youth justice system are supported by the Brent Early Help managed, Youth Justice Service (YJS). The total number of LAC children supervised by Brent YJS in 2024 (23) decreased by 2 compared to 2023 (25). This represents a continuation of a trend experienced in recent years in which the number of looked after children known to the YJS is reducing. Comparison of open caseloads demonstrates the extent of this downward trajectory. In April 2020, 25 care experienced children were known to the YJS. By May 2024, the number of care experienced children receiving support by the YJS had decreased to 10. By April 2025 the number of LAC cases open to the YJS had increased to 17, however this was due to seven children receiving LAC status due to being remanded in custody for two serious offences. Analysis of these 17 children and young people shows that:

- 94% were male.
- 76% were aged 16 or 17 years.
- 41% were of Black African or Black Caribbean Heritage (60% in May 2024).
- 59% had committed a violent offence (70% in May 2024, 83% in June 2023, 72% in February 2022 and 37% in February 2021).
- 12% had committed a drugs offence (30% in May 2024, 17% in June 2023, 39% in February 2022 and 23% in February 2021).
- 26% had committed a robbery offence (10% in May 2024, 33% in June 2023, 39% in February 2022 and 9% in February 2021).

5.10 It is difficult to identify a single factor that is responsible for the decreasing number of Brent care experienced children within the youth justice system in recent years. However, it is notable that Brent Early Help increased its commitment to preventative provision during this time. In October 2020, the Brent COVID-19 Pathfinder for Overrepresented Children was established. This was a three-year preventative programme that provided

emotional wellbeing, mentoring and other support to more than 450 children and young people from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic Heritage groups that were 'at-risk' of entering the youth justice system.

- 5.11 Furthermore, Brent Early Help invested heavily in trauma recovery, and anti-racist training. This enhanced the ability of the YJS to deliver services to children and young people in accordance with *Child First* principles that recognise the needs, capacities, rights, and potential of children. It has also enabled the YJS to increasingly raise awareness among partners that structural barriers prevent many children and young people from participating fully.
- 5.12 The MOPAC funded 'Disproportionality' project (2022-2023) funded a range of activities in Brent Family Wellbeing Centres, including sports, art, mentoring, emotional health and wellbeing, beauty, music production and photography sessions co-designed by young people. All these sessions were facilitated by voluntary sector partners including the Young Brent Foundation, Sport at the Heart, Jason Roberts Foundation, Always Furthering and Nurturing Development, and JKing the Artist. One hundred and seven young people were involved in co-design and 172 young people across Brent took part in activities during summer 2023. More than fifty children from YJS participated.
- 5.13 In May 2024, the YJS Participation Worker, together with Young Brent Foundation and the Raheem Sterling Foundation, organised for a small group of young people to travel to the Foundation's headquarters to meet Raheem Sterling. They spent a couple of hours with the footballer playing games, being mentored, learning inspirational stories, and having snacks, before going home with a goody bag which included signed football boots.
- 5.14 Turnaround is a current Early Help initiative that contributes to the decrease in looked after Children participation in the YJS. It is a four-year programme which has been funded by the MoJ until April 2026 to:
- Work and offer additional support to young people who are on the edge of entering the youth justice system.
 - Support young people who come to Police attention.
 - Prevent further offending.
 - Help young people and their families where there are concerns around behaviour at school, in the community or at home.
 - Achieve positive outcomes for young people.

Turnaround extends support offered through the OOC Team to young people aged 10 to 17 years who are:

- Subject to a No Further Action (NFA) decision.
- Subject to a Community Resolution.

- Receiving a first-time youth caution.
- Released under investigation (RUI) or those subject to pre-charge bail (PCB).
- Discharged by a court.
- Acquitted at court.
- Fined by a court.

All the 70 Brent children who have accessed Turnaround in the three-year period up to March 2025 were either referred by the Police or Brent Early Help. Approximately 90% of referrals came via the Police. This is significant as prior to Turnaround these children would not have been given access to services. As it is a voluntary intervention consent from a young person and their family is required. Turnaround staff meet with young people and their parents to ensure the whole family participates in a holistic assessment. Turnaround participants are offered support including an NHS Mental Health screening assessment, substance misuse assessment and interventions, education training and employment advice, mentoring, and positive activities.

Turnaround outcomes include:

- Young people getting back into education or training.
- Increased self-esteem and confidence.
- Young people identifying their goals and creating a plan for their future. Having something to aspire to gives them more purpose and motivation to change their behaviour and engage with services.
- Providing children and families with a safe space to express their thoughts and feelings, wishes and hopes. This is something they may not have been able to do before.
- Helping children to identify their trusted adults and support network.
- Understanding what makes healthy family relationships. This enables participants to assess their current relationships and identify those that may be exploitative and unhealthy.

5.15 Challenging power imbalances occurs frequently in Brent. Examples include:

- Working with the Chair of the Willesden Magistrates Youth Bench to identify if service improvements are needed to ensure children understand court processes and that their voice is heard.
- Professional opinion, especially around issues such as undiagnosed mental health problems, is used to challenge disposal recommendations from the Police where appropriate through the identification of mitigating factors. This often leads to children receiving a lower tariff disposal than initially recommended.
- Enabling courts to see young offenders as children first and foremost. All Brent YJS court reports have been restructured so telling the story of the child

appears prominently at the beginning of report. This enables the judiciary to see the story of the child prior to considering offence details.

- A sustained period of ongoing volunteer recruitment has allowed YJS to draw from a younger and more diverse pool of Referral Order Panel volunteers.
- In 2023 Brent CYP refreshed its Practice Framework in consultation with staff working across the department. The framework continues to support trauma informed approaches and promotes the need to better understand and therefore respond to the diverse needs of young people.
- The Contextual Safeguarding and Violence Reduction Strategic Group (CSVRRSG), chaired by the Head of Service, Brent Community Safety Team, develops and coordinates initiatives that tackle extra-familial harm experienced by children and young people in the community or online such as physical, sexual, and criminal exploitation. It is a multi-agency initiative that includes representatives from services and partnership organisations including the Looked After Children and Permanency Service, Brent YJS, the Inclusion Service, Early Help, the Virtual School, the Police, Public Health, St.Giles Trust, and Air Network. The group meets quarterly to oversee the implementation of the CSVRRSG Action Plan which contains measures to safeguard children by tackling violent crime with a specific focus on knife crime, challenging domestic abuse, sexual abuse and preventing violence against women and girls, focussing on incidents impacting Brent communities, protecting those most vulnerable, and providing community reassurance.

5.16 The Brent Youth Justice Service Management Board includes senior representation from Social Care (Localities, and Looked After Children and Permanency services), the Police, Brent Probation Service, Youth Justice Service (YJS), Early Help, Willesden Magistrates Court, NHS, and Public Health. In October 2021, the Board identified three actions which were subsequently implemented and remain operational:

- Localities, and Looked After Children and Permanency representation on the YJS Out of Court Disposal Decision Making Panel.
- Localities, Looked After Children and Permanency representation during transitioning to Brent Probation meetings.
- Ensure the responsibilities and good practice outlined in the *London Reducing Criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers protocol* are embedded within Brent. Ongoing actions to maintain compliance include a joint YJS and Localities, Looked After Children and Permanency learning event at the Wembley Learning Zone, London Protocol themed practice development sessions, and including the London Protocol in staff induction.

5.17 The Contextual Safeguarding Lead together with YJS staff, have provided joint Contextual Safeguarding training for Social Care practitioners to broaden their understanding of 'harm outside of the home' and to reinforce the need to disrupt perpetrators, in addition to

increasing safety for young people. To ensure that victims are treated as such, and not as criminals. The Contextual Safeguarding Lead also chairs a Contextual Safeguarding Champions Group with partner agencies including Looked After Children team managers, Community Safety and YJS to look at trends within practice and explore opportunities for intervention across the borough.

- 5.18 Heads of Service provide briefings about high-risk children to the Director of Early Help and Social Care. The DCS and Lead Member are provided with regular updates and briefings about these cases by the Director. These procedures for the recording and reporting of critical incidents internally also demonstrate adherence to Youth Justice Board serious incident requirements.
- 5.19 The Exploitation, Violence and Vulnerability Panel (EVVP), which is jointly chaired by Children's Social Care and the Community Safety Team, leads on operational planning and co-ordination work between partners, driving strong interventions in response to individual young people at risk of exploitation. Most of the young people who are referred have contact with the youth justice system and the EVVP plays a key role in triggering interventions and resources to assist safety planning for young people. A transitional safeguarding plan is also used to further increase safety for young people who are on the verge of adulthood and effectively plan for their support network post adulthood.
- 5.20 A weekly operational meeting between CYP staff and the Police investigates individual cases of children who are missing from home or care – some of whom are at risk of, or are engaged in, criminal behaviour. Key themes from these discussions are fed into EVVP to promote consistency of practice.
- 5.21 Well-established practice is in place when it comes to working between looked after Children and Care Leavers who are in contact with the Youth Justice Service. Social Care and the Brent YJS work collaboratively whenever looked after Children enter, or are at risk of entering, the youth justice system. We continue to promote the use of joint supervision between social work and YJS teams, and we are working to embed this practice currently. These arrangements will formalise existing good practice by regularising ongoing joint risk management and decision making. Practitioners from partner agencies including CAMHS and the NHS will participate in group supervision whenever this is in the best interests of the child. Joint decision making and planning will increase our ability to ensure young people get the right interventions at the right time. Other benefits will include children receiving consistent information from practitioners, multi-agency safety planning, and greater clarity surrounding the remit and responsibilities of services.
- 5.22 The Out of Court Disposal (OCD) Decision Making Panel is a weekly Panel chaired by Brent YJS and attended by Police, Health, Social Care,

Early Help staff and Restorative Justice workers to jointly consider and determine Out of Court Disposal decisions. LAC Social Workers attend to assist the Panel to take mitigating factors into consideration and identify appropriate interventions and disposal conditions. The effectiveness of Brent OOCd decision making is monitored by a Metropolitan Police led Multi-Agency Scrutiny Panel, comprised of senior representatives from the Police, CPS, Judiciary, MOPAC and the YJB. The Scrutiny Panel audited six Brent OOCd cases in January 2025, and a further six cases in August 2025. Decision making in 11 out of 12 cases was afforded the highest marks issued by the Scrutiny Panel. A further benefit is that Social Workers are equipped with the information they need to explain OOCd conditions to children in their care and support them to successfully comply with legal conditions.

- 5.23 Brent children and young people arrested for the possession of cannabis may be offered a Community Resolution. This is a non-criminal disposal that functions as an alternative to entering the youth justice system. Despite the voluntary nature of Community Resolutions, children who receive them are offered a level of support that is commensurate to other OOCds. This includes assessment, and co-produced intervention and safety plans. Interventions offered to children include referrals to substance misuse counselling, Police led crime awareness sessions, and mental health screening and referral.
- 5.24 LAC Children and Young People Transitioning to Brent Probation receive dedicated support. LAC Social Workers and Personal Advisors contribute to all transition meetings between the YJS and Probation Service. This ensures that planning is as supportive as possible for LAC moving from the youth justice system to the adult criminal justice system. The adoption of this approach has improved support to LAC as the transitioning process is less technical and more child centred. The individual needs of young adults are central to transitioning and professionals work together to ensure LAC understand the differences between adolescent and criminal justice services, are less fearful about change, and are as prepared as possible to successfully complete their order.
- 5.25 Brent Council's Targeted Prevention Hub (TPH) was launched on 1 July 2025. The TPH is a new and developing service to provide professionals who are supporting children and young people (aged 10-18) with rapid access to a range of specialist support and advisory services. This is to ensure professionals are providing the best support and can make a real difference in the lives of the children and young people they support. The TPH has a particularly strong focus on prevention and early intervention and addressing safeguarding concerns outside the home. The LAC and Permanency Service is working with TPH to increase the access of looked after children to mentoring and other available provision which includes one to one support for children who are gang affected or affiliated, missing children support, and early interventions for young people on the edge of the youth justice system. In the future, the TPH will be expanded to include services such as careers advice, sexual health, sexual exploitation,

emotional health and wellbeing, domestic abuse support, family group conferencing, out-of-hours detached youth work and substance misuse. TPH Outcomes conform to the four provided in the DfE dashboard, as set out in Children's Social Care - Outcomes and Enablers (see The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide Delivery expectations for safeguarding partners in England March 2025, p.46). These outcomes include:

- Fewer children in care.
- Reduction in the number of vulnerable children and young people becoming looked after
- Increased understanding of youth criminal exploitation by children and their families.
- Reduced number of children entering the youth justice system.
- Reduction of children vulnerable to risk outside the home
- Reduction of victims vulnerable to risk outside the home
- Increase in the number of vulnerable children and young people being safely supported in the community.
- Improved access to, and performance of, preventative (wrap-around) services for young people and their families.

- 5.26 Practice development sessions are held regularly and include themes of relevance to the overrepresentation of looked after Children in the youth justice system. These include good youth participation techniques and understanding the impact of cultural differences when supporting children and young people.
- 5.27 Bail template letter background information has been expanded to provide the courts with details of any discrimination or trauma LAC young people have experienced.
- 5.28 YJS case studies are shared at YJS Board meetings to explore how the needs of children have been considered and take forward learning for case work.
- 5.29 As part of its contribution to the Willesden Magistrates Court Users Forum, Brent has delivered good practice sessions that raise awareness of the impact of trauma on a child's behaviour in court and anti-racism training.
- 5.30 Engage is a MOPAC Funded project that since September 2023 has provided a range of youth work support in Police custody suites across the NW Borough Command Unit. Barnet are the lead borough and have recruited youth workers who are based in the Wembley and Colindale custody suites. Youth workers meet young people in custody and offer a further two meetings post custody. During this time, they are given information, advice and signposted to Brent Early Help and Youth Justice Service interventions. Engage is open from 8am to 8pm

weekdays with a reduced level of cover over weekends. Brent has an Engage SPOC working collaboratively with the Barnet Service Manager who reports progress to the YJS Management Board via the Brent Youth and Youth Justice Manager.

- 5.31 The Your Choice programme provided training in CBT techniques to youth practitioners working with young people aged 11-17 years at elevated risk of harm. Comparing the outcomes of the treatment and control group measures the impact of Your Choice so long as the two groups are similar to each other. Teams of practitioners were randomly allocated to train and deliver Your Choice. Young people matched to trained practitioners received Your Choice. Young people matched to untrained practitioners are supported as per business as usual. Your Choice was delivered within the CYPD Accelerated Support Team between January and June 2022. Eighteen young people who engaged with the programme were at risk of contextual harm. The Programme commenced in YJS in August 2022 and transferred to the LAC and Permanency Service between April 2023 and December 2024. Fourteen care experienced children were recruited prior to the project returning to the YJS until its closure at the end of the funding agreement in June 2025. A total of 66 children and young people accessed Your Choice. Only five children who accessed Your Choice offended after their involvement in their programme. Only one of these children was part of the LAC and Permanency Service cohort.

"I have seen a noticeable difference in the behaviours and responses of the YP engaged with the YC Programme. Those children who are part of the treatment group have been afforded the opportunity to explore their thoughts and behaviours and the emotions attached. As a result, I have found the programme to be an effective method of engaging YP that are willing to explore these areas of their lives."

YJS Case Manager

- 5.32 The Looked After Children and Permanency Service identify children who will need support from Adult Social Care. Planning commences when children are aged 17 years and six months at Adult Social Care Transitions Pathways Planning Meetings. Progress is monitored at jointly convened Adult and Children's Social Care Transitions Tracking Meetings.

6.0 Disproportionality

- 6.1 Reducing disproportionality in the youth justice system is a highly challenging priority across London. The failure to achieve equity of treatment for all children in the youth justice system can also be found in Brent when using the YJB Summary Ethnic Disparity Tool to analyse children aged 10 to 17 years. This is particularly evident amongst Black African and Caribbean children and young people who are significantly overrepresented in the youth justice system. Overall, Black Heritage group children represented 37% of

the Brent YJS cohort in March 2025. This compares unfavourably to the 22% of all children and young people from these other Heritage groups living in Brent according to the mid-year 2021 census. The table below shows the breakdown by ethnicity over the last 5 years.

Table 3. No. of Brent Children in the Youth Justice System 2020 to 2025 by ethnicity

Ethnic group	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Percentage change year ending March 2020 to March 2025	2021 midyear 10-17 population by ethnic group
Asian	19	13	6	17	8	11	▼ -42%	10,322
Black	92	70	46	60	60	56	▼ -39%	7,982
Mixed	14	10	11	12	13	24	▲ +71%	2,764
Other	17	9	16	14	27	33	▲ +94%	4,287
Total BAME Heritage Groups	142	102	79	103	108	124	▼ -12%	25,355
White	26	22	18	20	15	22	▼ -15%	7,899
Unknown	0	2	3	1	0	4	N/A	-
All Heritage Groups	168	126	100	124	123	150	▼ -11%	33,254

6.2 What Brent YJS is doing to tackle disproportionality

- Trauma informed practice has improved the ability of YJS practitioners to tell the story behind the crime within the pre-sentence reports and the wider assessment and planning process. This includes explaining the experiences of children who have been adversely impacted by gang exploitation or have suffered trauma.
- Practice Development Sessions. These are held regularly and includes themes including Social Graces, and cultural competency.
- Court report background information has been expanded to include any experiences of discrimination or trauma to the courts.
- YJS case studies are shared at YJS Board meetings where attention is given to exploring whether the diverse needs of children have been considered.

- The CYP and YJS Audit programme monitors the quality of provision children receive.
- Magistrates training.
- Group supervision. Social Care and the Brent YJS work collaboratively whenever looked after Children enter, or are at risk of entering, the youth justice system.
- The Out of Court Disposal Decision Making Panel is chaired by Brent YJS and attended by Police, Health, YJS, Children's Social Care, Early Help staff and Restorative Justice workers to jointly consider and determine Out of Court Disposal (OCD) decisions. Social Workers attend the Panel - or complete a Professionals Information Form. This has strengthened the ability to take mitigating factors into consideration and identify appropriate interventions and disposal conditions.
- The London Protocol outlines the operational procedures and standards required when transferring supervision from the YJS to the Brent Probation Service.
- LAC Social Workers contribute to all transfer meetings between the YJS and Probation Service. This ensures that planning is as supportive as possible for LAC Young People moving from the youth justice system to the adult criminal justice system.
- Introduced in 2022/23, the annual Brent Youth Justice Service Disproportionality Action Plan (DAP) has been created to understand the extent to which youth justice disposals are disproportionately served, monitor the effectiveness of initiatives undertaken by YJS to support children from Black Heritage groups, and to consolidate actions youth justice partners are undertaking to tackle overrepresentation. The DAP is monitored by the Brent YJS Management Board biannually. The 2025 DAP focusses on preventing Black Heritage group children entering the criminal justice system, preventing re-offending within the Black Heritage cohort, preventing school exclusions, improving ETE outcomes, improving access to early support for ASD or neuro disabilities to prevent entry and re-entry into the criminal justice system, reducing disproportionality in custodial outcomes, and listening to children's voices and understanding their experiences.

6.3 It is difficult to determine the extent to which Brent YJS has contributed to a steady decline in the number of Brent children from Black Heritage groups in the local youth justice system: a 39% reduction between March 2020 (92) and March 2025 (56) – see Table 1. It is however possible to assert that to some extent the concerted partnership effort to reduce disproportionality is a key factor. Notwithstanding these gains, the overrepresentation of children from Black Heritage groups remains and is significant.

7.0 Child First

7.1 Brent YJS and the LAC and Permanency Team deliver services to children and young people in accordance with *Child First principles*. It is an approach that recognises that services must prioritise the best interests of children and recognise their needs, capacities, rights, and potential. For this reason, Brent supported Crest Advisory, an independent crime and justice consultancy, as

part of ongoing research, commissioned by the YJB to understand the implementation of Child First in the youth justice system. This involved a series of staff interviews, and an in-person workshop that offered practitioners the opportunity to help shape the support that youth justice services receive from the YJB to operationalise Child First effectively. Key themes included, perceptions and practical applications of Child First, collaboration across youth justice services and partner organisations, and the YJB's role in driving the implementation of Child First.

- 7.2 Brent's strong corporate parenting ethos recognises the care system is not just about keeping children safe, but also about promoting recovery, resilience and wellbeing. This requires corporate parents to ensure that work across Social Care, placement providers, educational settings, health services, the Police and other criminal justice partners, prevents unnecessary criminalisation.
- 7.3 All professionals working with looked after Children, and care leavers understand the impact of trauma and abuse on development, particularly their effect on emotional and behavioural development and self-regulation. Professionals, including YJS workers, Social Workers, teachers, children's home staff and foster parents, health services, Police, CPS, HMCTS and local Youth Panel (Magistrates), at both senior and frontline levels, receive appropriate training.
- 7.4 The importance of understanding our children and young people is a key theme for Brent. All work is child focused and recognises structural barriers to full participation. This is reflected in the CYP training offer which includes anti-racist, and cultural competency training. Furthermore, YJS practice development sessions are delivered regularly and frequently make use of YJB effective practice resources to enhance the skill with which practitioners consider the importance of structural inequalities, racial discrimination, and the impact of trauma. YJS assessments are commenced after a young person, and their parent / carer's self-assessments have been completed.
- 7.5 By taking an inclusive approach to service delivery and design, Brent engages more children and young people in an accessible manner. Brent YJS promotes a child's individual strengths and capacities to develop their pro-social identity for sustainable desistance, leading to safer communities and fewer victims. All work is constructive and future-focused, built on supportive relationships that empower children to fulfil their potential and make positive contributions to society. Brent's continued focus on trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), such as experience of the care system, in its work with children and young people assists practitioners to identify those at higher risk of harm. Specific work can then be identified when a young person has complex issues, is 'stuck' or where there is high anxiety within the professional network.
- 7.6 Brent is proactively encouraging children's active participation, engagement, and wider social inclusion. The Brent CYPCD Participation strategy describes how young people and children have meaningful and inclusive

involvement throughout the decision-making process for services that impact them. It provides a structured approach to creating an environment that enables children, young people, and their families to have active involvement which influences decision making, policy and service development. Overall, participation offers numerous benefits for young people, giving them a voice and platform to be actively heard, fostering personal growth promoting social connections and enabling them to have a meaningful impact on their own lives and the wider community.

- 7.7 Adopting this approach has strengthened YJS's ability to form meaningful and creative collaborations. During 2024/25, YJS children from Black Heritage groups identified the need for music and creative activities to form a greater part of the YJS offer. As a result of this, children from YJS have been supported to access an extensive range of music, sport and creative activities at Family Well-being Centres. All programmes have been designed to respond more specifically to children's needs and provide an open space for self-awareness. This work will be extended over the next three-years in line with the priorities contained in Brent's recently launched Youth Strategy 2025-2028 which are: Being Heard and Taking Part, Reaching Goals and Enjoying Yourself, Feeling Good and Staying Safe.
- 7.8 Brent listens closely to the voice of the child. It is heard through a range of activities that are designed and implemented by young people. This has enabled Brent YJS to move beyond hearing their views to ensuring young people are part of decision making, planning and implementation. Creative and interactive approaches, such as enabling children and young people to create podcasts and short films, have proven to be a popular and effective means of communication
- 7.9 Brent YJS commitment to co-production and young participation continues to be a priority. This is demonstrated through delivering the Council's responsibilities for coordinating and monitoring the Brent Youth Strategy, and establishing youth led activities at Family Wellbeing Centres. This has enabled YJS to promote service user access to a much wider range of youth participation opportunities than was previously possible. It has increased participation to a range of universal provision that had previously been difficult for many children from the YJS to access.
- 7.10 During 2024 an extensive survey took place with 68 YJS young people. Participants were given multiple choice questions, afforded the opportunity to provide explanatory information, and asked to rate responses on a scale to 10 - higher is better. Of the 68 young people, 38 (56%) were subject to a referral order and 8 (12%) were subject to a Youth Rehabilitation Order. There were 2 (3%) subject to a Detention and Training Order. There were a wide range of responses to the question 'What led you to offend? These included frustration, anger, fear, stupidity, being bullied, not thinking, decision making both positive and negative, homelessness and money and a sense of justice. A few children maintained their innocence. Other findings include:

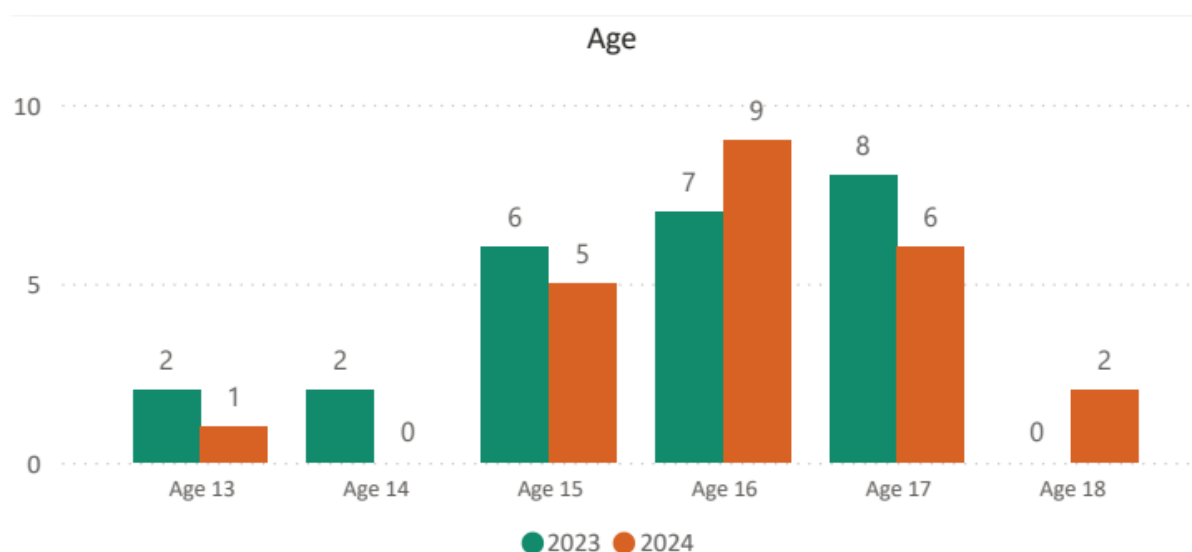
- 94% (64) believe the Case Manager understands what has happened in their life.
- 96% (65) described their strengths as a person as sporting, nice person, resilient, good at DIY, sociable, fighting and music.
- 96% (65) said they had their court order explained to them by the YJS officer.
- The overall court experience was viewed in varied ways by young people. This ranged from 'stressed, nervous, scared, trials are not fair', to 'it was ok, alright, calm, very good' and 'it was ok, but the fine was inconvenient'.
- 73% (19) said the YJS officer explained what the court order meant (42 young people skipped this question).
- 100% of young people said their Case Manager had completed work with them prior to an initial referral order panel. This included a learning questionnaire, YP assessment, mood questionnaire, screening tools, parent assessments, career choices, negative peers, and learning styles assessment.
- When asked what has worked well or made the biggest difference on your order, responses included 'Obtaining a passport, kept me busy, knowing right and wrong, understand things more, anything can be a weapon, appointments give me a routine, cast off some friends, how to think and behave, good substance misuse sessions, helped my self-esteem and mental health, engaging with ETE, advice to keep me out of trouble, I like talking to you, session on decision making, having help from different people, substance misuse and mental health assessment'. One respondent stated: 'I am not the person I was 2 years ago and that is a good thing.'

8.0 Measuring impact

A comparative analysis of the 2023 LAC cohort involved in the YJS and the 2024 LAC cohort involved in the YJS shows some positive impact has been made in the past 12 months.

8.1 Age

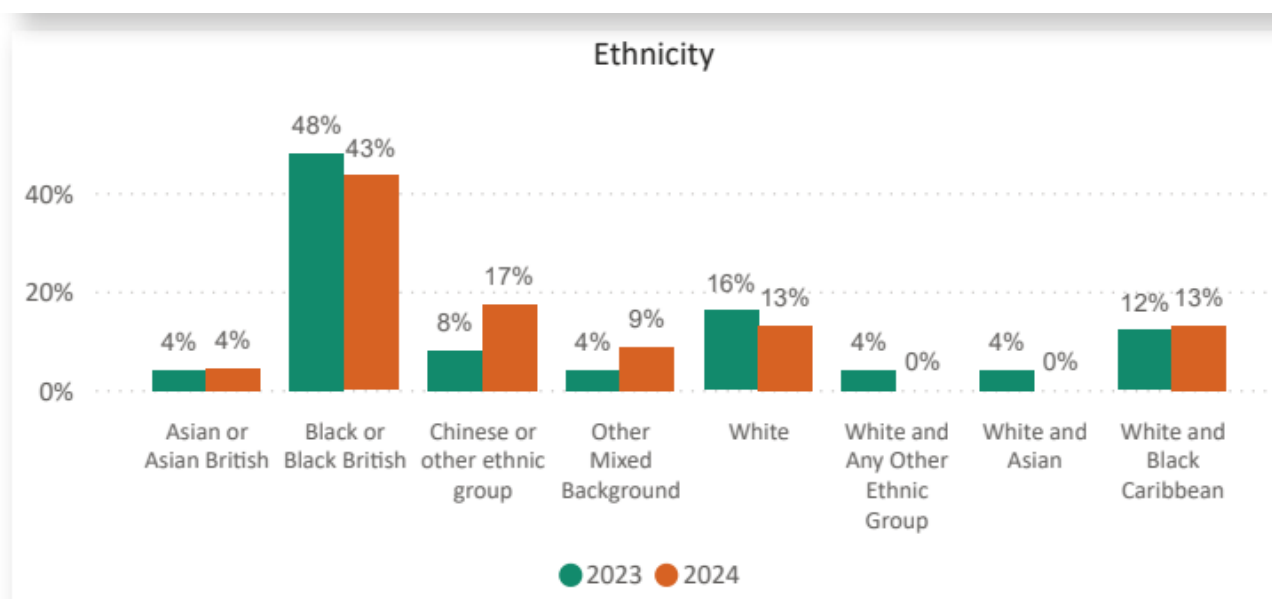
Table 4: No. of Looked After Children receiving YJS support 2022/23 to 2024/25



Four LAC children aged between 13 and 14 were supported by the YJS in 2023. This reduced to one in 2024. Although it is not possible to ascertain why three fewer children offended, the adoption of the Met Police's Child First Policy, which seeks to only criminalise children as a last resort is likely to have been influential. In Brent this includes close working between the Police and YJS through the Brent Out of Court Disposal Panel, where non-criminal disposals (Triage and Community Resolutions) are issued wherever possible to avoid children being criminalised for low level offences.

8.2 Ethnicity

Table 5: Percentage of Looked After Children receiving YJS support by ethnicity 2022/23 to 2024/25

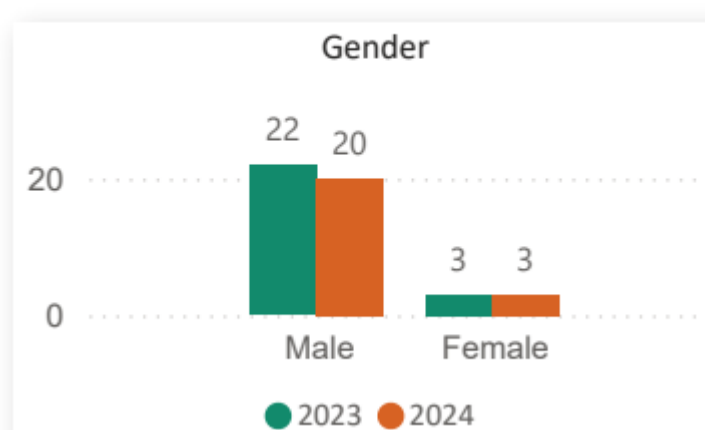


The ethnicity of looked after Children supported by the YJS in 2024 closely resembled the ethnicity of this group in 2023. The only two categories to experience an increase were the “Chinese and other ethnic group”, which increased from 2 children from Arab Heritage groups to four from the same Heritage groups, and “White and Black Caribbean” Heritage group children which increased by 1% to represent 13% of all children.

A 5% decrease in looked after Children from Black or Black British Heritage groups was the most significant reduction to be found across all ethnic categories. Although statistically modest, the overrepresentation of care experienced children from Black Heritage groups in the Youth Justice System is a persistent problem in Brent so any reduction is a positive outcome. LAC and Permanency Service and other Social Care representation on the OOC Panel, joint Children’s Social Care and YJS complex strategy meetings, and changes introduced via the YJS Management Board DAP are likely to have combined to reduce the number of looked after Children from Black Heritage groups entering the youth just system. Nonetheless, children from Black Heritage groups make up 24% of the total 0-17 years Brent population. It is of paramount importance that this downward trajectory continues in 2025/26.

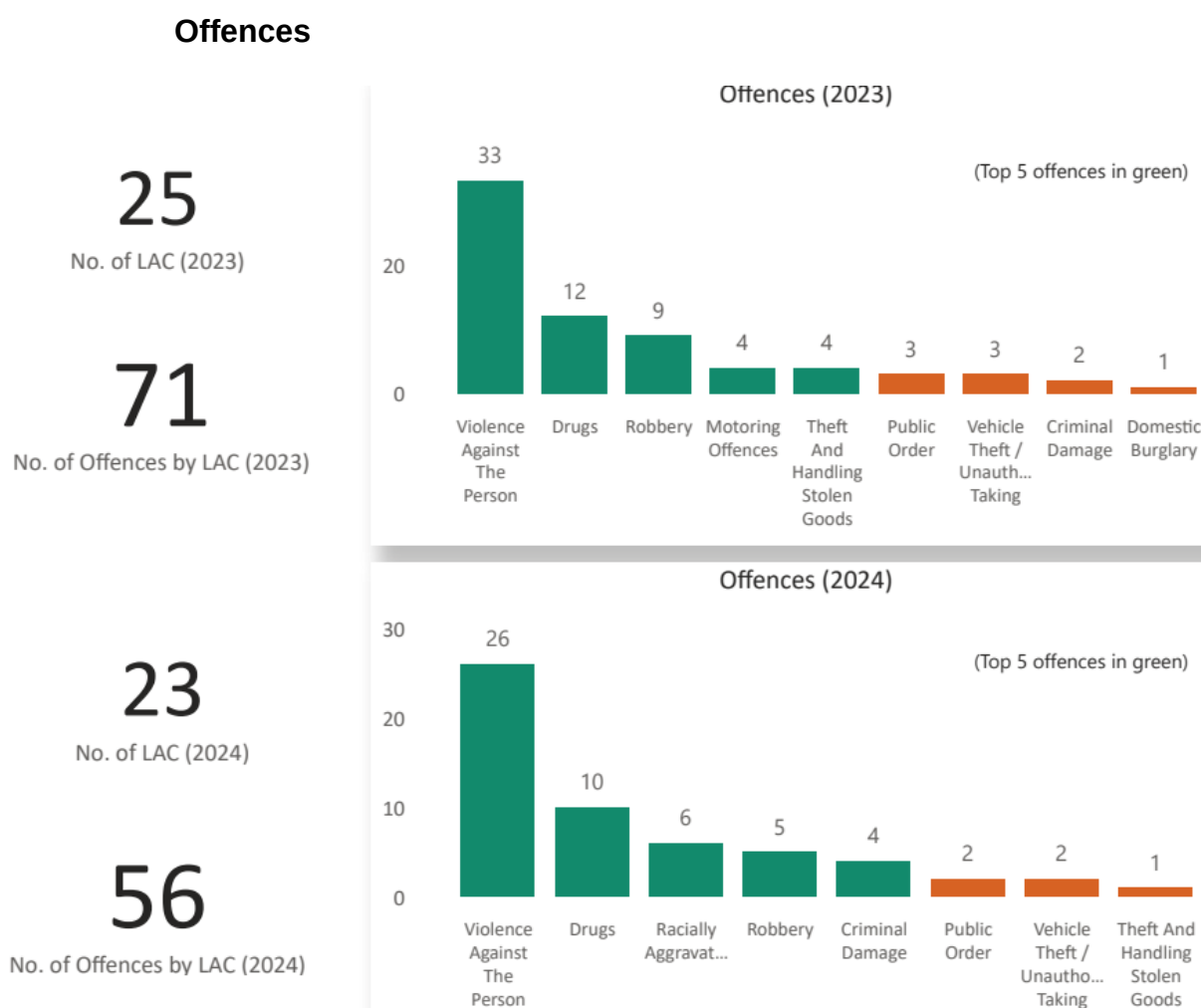
8.3 Gender

Table 6: Percentage of Looked After Children receiving YJS support by gender 2022/23 to 2024/25



Two fewer care experienced children were supported by the YJS in 2024 than was the case in 2023. Both were male. The percentage of looked after Children young women in the youth justice system (15%) is slightly higher than the overall proportion of all young women in the youth justice system which normally fluctuates between 5% and 12%.

Table 7: Looked After Children offending 2022/23 to 2024/25



8.4 Overall, offending by care experienced children decreased in terms of volume and type. Although the total care experienced children supported by YJS cohort decreased by only 2 (8%) in 2024, the total number of offences decreased by 15. The number of offences committed by this group also decreased or remained the same when compared to 2023 in eight out of nine major crime categories. Violence against the Person is the one crime category where performance in 2024 (33 offences) was worse than 2023 (26 offences).

8.5 Reoffending by ethnicity and gender

Table 8: Looked After Children reoffending by ethnicity and gender 2023/24

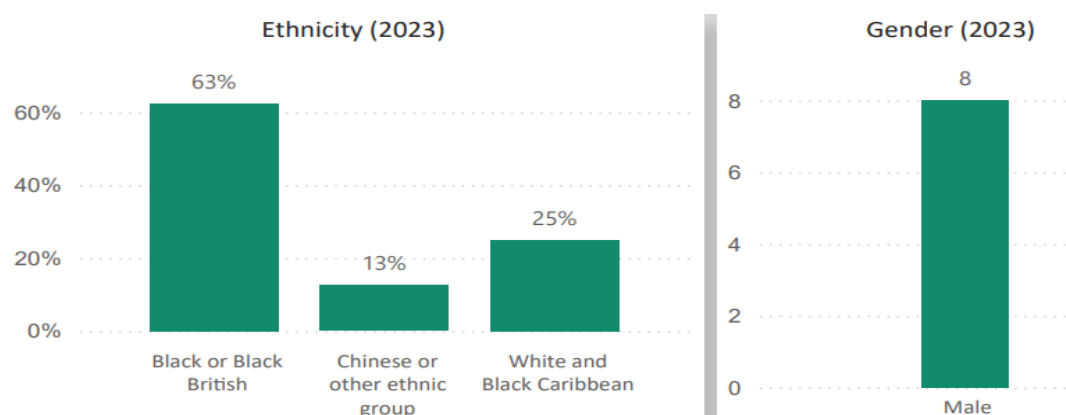
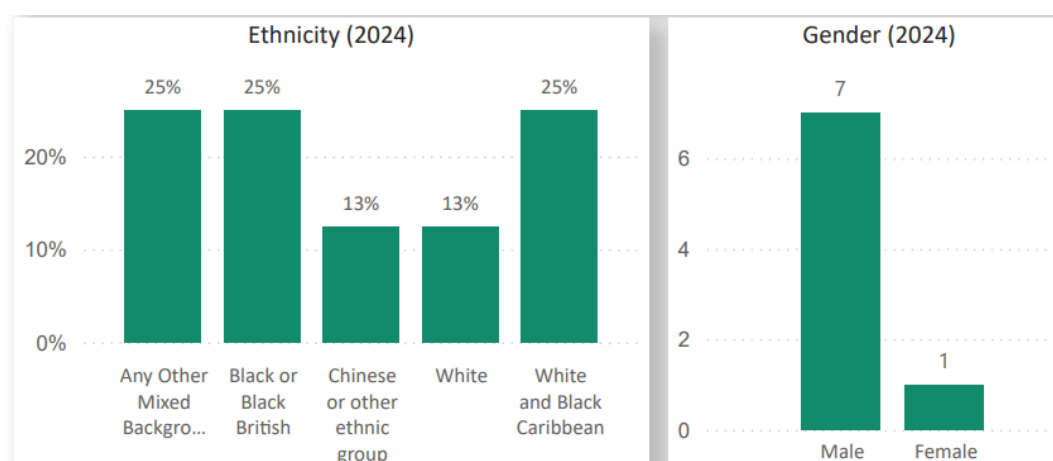


Table 9: Looked After Children reoffending by ethnicity and gender 2024/25



The volume of reoffending by care experienced children remained the same in both 2023 and 2024 - eight children reoffended in both years. No females reoffended in 2024 compared to one in 2023.

The proportion of looked after Children who offended from “Black of Black British” Heritage groups fell significantly from 63% in 2023 to 25% in 2024. A decrease of this scale is uncommon in any analysis of crime by ethnicity and more so within Black or Black British” Heritage groups where the over representation of children is most pronounced. It is also only slightly above the percentage of “Black or Black British” Heritage group children aged 0-17 years residing in Brent (24%). “White and Black Caribbean” Heritage group reoffending remained the same as in 2023 (25%). “Chinese or other ethnic group” was also unchanged – 13% in both 2023 and 2024.

Reoffending from looked after Children from “Any other mixed background” Heritage groups increased from 0% in 2023 to 25% in 2024. This was comprised of two children – one from Scottish, Irish and Egyptian Heritage, and the other from Italian and African American Heritage. The reoffending of children from “White” Heritage groups increased from 0% to 13%.

8.6 First Time Entrants

Table 10: Looked After Children first-time offending by ethnicity and gender 2023/24

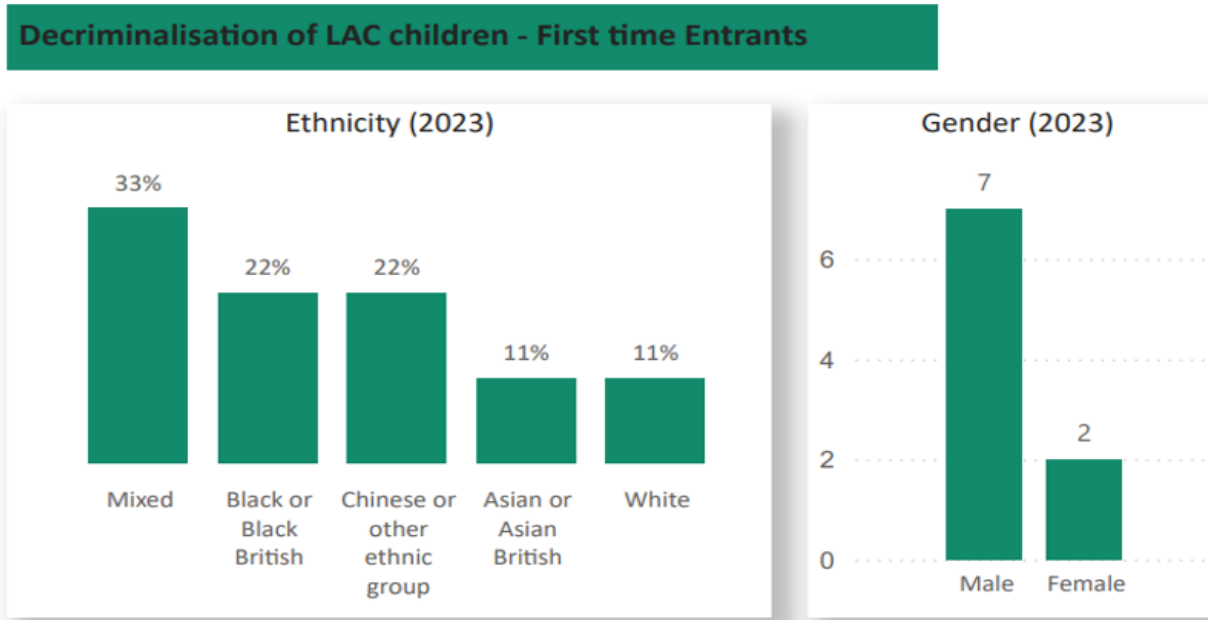
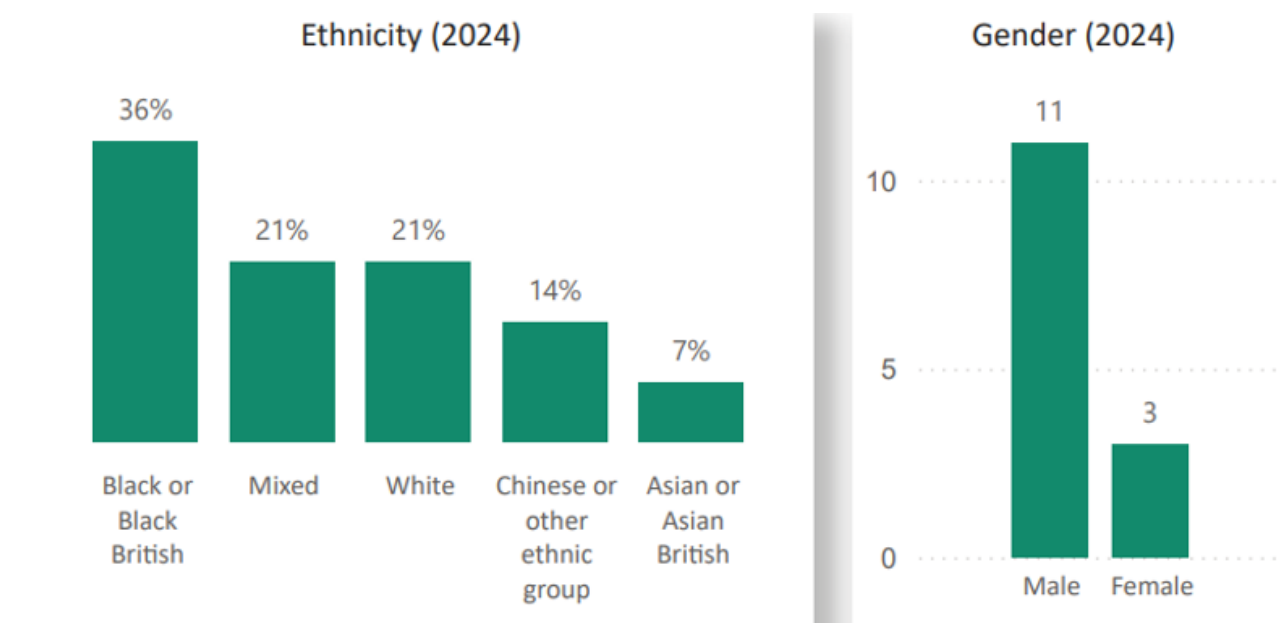


Table 11: Looked After Children first-time offending by ethnicity and gender 2023/24 to 2024/25



The number of looked after Children who received a criminal disposal for the first time increased from 7 in 2023 to 11 in 2024. Although an increase of 4 is statistically small it suggests that the improved early intervention offer made available to care experienced children through the establishment of TPH is much needed. The number of looked after Children females who

became First Time Entrants to the youth justice system increased from 2 in 2023 to 3 in 2024.

The percentage of looked after Children from “Black or Black British” Heritage groups who received a criminal disposal for the first time increased from 22% (2 children) in 2023, to 36% (3 children) in 2024. The proportion of care experienced children from “White” Heritage groups who committed a first offence almost doubled from 11% in 2023, to 21% in 2024.

8.7 Dip Sample Audit: Quality of work with LAC and care leavers on remand/prison

A dip audit of 30 cases was undertaken by six YJS Managers in May 2024 to better understand the quality of work undertaken with Looked after Children and care leavers on remand or sentenced to prison.

This dip sample looked at two cohorts. The largest of these consisted of all 18-25 care leavers currently remanded in custody or serving custodial sentences (28 young adults aged 18 – 24 years). The second cohort is comprised of two Looked After Children. One of these is remanded in custody and the other is remanded into the care of the local authority.

The audit found that:

19 out of 30 cases showed evidence of effective multi-agency, resettlement, and transition planning.

Communication was a consistent theme with cases that lacked effective multi-agency planning, resettlement and transition planning. This was evidenced as follows:

- On three occasions a Personal Advisor (PA) failed to receive notification from a Young Offenders Institution (YOI) that a young person was being moved to another custodial establishment. Their PA only became aware of this when they booked a visit to see the young person.
- On one occasion there was no evidence of requested information from a custodial establishment regarding the young person’s prison support.
- On one occasion there was minimal contact with the YOI.
- On two occasions young people refused to meet their PA.

Evidence of regular contact with children and care leavers in custody was present in 16 out of 29 cases

Thirteen children and care leavers did not receive regular contact with their Social Worker or PA whilst in custody. Of these:

- Seven young people declined to see their Social Worker or PA when visits had been booked.
- Regular contact was not made with three other children.

- In one case there was no evidence of visits taking place.
- In one case a prison move occurred without the PA's knowledge.
- There were also visit cancellations, and difficulties encountered arranging visits due to limited visiting time slots. On one occasion visits were cancelled by a prison between March 24 and May 24. Prior to this, the young person had not been seen for 9 months.
- In one case supervision notes stated that visits had been taking place, but this was not supported by evidence.
- In another case the first custodial visit occurred four months post-sentence. There was no evidence of the young person's views.

Racially minoritized children face a range of inequalities that make them vulnerable to criminalisation.

The audit sought to understand whether any of the following been a contributing factor to the child's current custodial placement:

- **Poverty and Austerity:**
12 cases identified this as a factor likely to contribute to criminalisation.
- **Education:**
19 Cases identified this as a factor likely to contribute to criminalisation.
- **Neurodiversity:**
10 cases identified this as a factor likely to contribute to criminalisation.
- **Mental health and wellbeing**
13 cases identified this as a factor likely to contribute to criminalisation.
- **Racism and identity**
10 cases identified this as a factor likely to contribute to criminalisation.
- **The Care System**
13 cases identified this as a factor likely to contribute to criminalisation
- **Being female**
2 cases identified this as a factor likely to contribute to criminalisation.
- **Intersectionality**
14 cases identified this as a factor likely to contribute to criminalisation.
- **Racism and Youth Justice**
14 cases identified this as a factor likely to contribute to criminalisation.

The audit report author noted that without completing a deep dive on the cases being dip sampled it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions and clearly understand the true extent to which these factors make offending more likely. Achieving this would require detailed knowledge, such as that possessed by a Case Manager. For this reason, the following recommendation was made to the Performance and QA Board:

“With regards to better understanding the factors affecting racially minoritized children, this might be achieved if practitioners had a list of factors they could select when completing case summaries. This would make the identification of factors easier and assist in planning.”

Identified strengths

- Overall, the way the voice of the child is captured within plans in the first person and quoted is a strength.
- Most of the plans seem to address planning and transitions.
- One case provided especially good evidence of multiagency, resettlement and transition planning within case diary entries with email threads and within the pathway plan, which shows joint working with YJS, Social Care, the Custodial Placement Manager, and Resettlement practitioners.
- It was good to see that during a LAC visit the Social Worker remembered it was the child's birthday the next day. This is a good example of Brent Social Workers treating children in care as their own.

Improvement priorities

Ongoing data analysis of care experienced children will enable us to identify which TPH services are most effective for reducing offending and reoffending, of looked after children known to YJS. These will be extended to foster carers and placement provider staff to enhance their management of risk, reduce the unnecessary criminalisation of care experienced children and young people, and provide greater placement stability.

8.8 Case study

Background

KJ is a 16-year-old female of Black British and Jamaican Heritage who:

- KJ received a 10-month Youth Rehabilitation Order for the possession of offensive weapon, Assault Emergency worker x 2 and Theft.
- She has been a Brent Looked After Child since December 2020.
- KJ has a good relationship with her mother, brother and grandparents.
- KJ has lived in placements in Shrewsbury, Essex and Enfield.
- KJ aspires to become an air hostess.
- KJ is passionate about completing a Travel Tourism course at college.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Numerous missing episodes to unknown locations and with unknown individuals
- Vulnerable to sexual and criminal exploitation when missing
- Not attending school and being excluded from school
- No remorse towards her victim
- Anger management
- Pro-criminal peers

The negative impact of Adverse childhood experiences



Support and interventions

Joint working from YJS and the LAC and permanency Service was supportive and focussed on relationship building. This helped to foster the trust and confidence for KJ to constructively engage with a range of interventions including:

- Weapons awareness.
- Decision making skills.
- Consequential thinking.
- Mentoring support.

Impact

- A change in thinking and attitude towards her peers.
- Acquired a positive understanding of the dangers of absconding with strangers.
- KJ feels remorse towards her victims and recognises the harm she has caused.
- KJ secured a place at college and is attending regularly.
- KJ got a part-time job at a café.
- Attended all sessions with her YJS Case Manager.

8.9 Training and development for staff and foster carers

8.10 Three priorities emerged from two training forums offered to staff and foster carers. It is expected that adopting these new workstreams will build upon the gains already made towards reducing the involvement of looked after Children in the youth justice system:

- The development of a local decriminalisation of looked after Children protocol that will be adopted by all accommodation providers and fostering agencies, and our internal foster carers.
- Supporting accommodation providers to develop internal behaviour management policies that align with the key question: *'Would this be good*

enough for my child’?

- Offering half-day restorative practise training to foster carers and accommodation providers.

9.0 Partnership support and commitments

9.1 Partnership work undertaken or led by the Looked After Children and Permanency service and the YJS to reduce the criminalisation of looked after Children conforms to the YJB’s *Supporting Care Leavers to Prevent Custody Evidence summary* November 2024. The report recommends that:

- Targeted prevention and diversion should be used to minimise the unnecessary criminalisation of care experienced children.
- Protocols should be developed to minimise the vulnerabilities experienced by care experienced children in terms of being drawn into the criminal justice system.
- Securing suitable and appropriate accommodation prior to being released from custody helps to support care experienced children.
- Integrated service structures such as “adolescent services” which bring together multiple services for children under a single structure and service manager, often allow for closer relationships between YJ Services and Children’s Social Care teams.
- Mental health and trauma-informed approaches should be used.

9.2 The YJS Management Board monitors progress of the Brent Youth Justice Plan 2025/28 to ensure the effective delivery of youth justice services that aim to reduce re-offending and safeguard children and young people. This includes the effectiveness of work undertaken by the YJS, Social Care and partnership organisations to reduce the criminalisation of children in care and care leavers. The aims of this work were outlined in last year’s *Progress report: The London Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2024*:

- *Explore new opportunities to achieve good outcomes for LAC children through ever closer working between the Looked After Children and Permanency Service and YJS.*

The Looked After Children and Permanency Service and YJS teams are located alongside each other in the Brent Civic Centre. The proximity of the two services is beneficial for the undertaking of routine joint responsibilities such as informal and formal information exchanges, organising and attending complex strategy meetings, and preparing for risk and resource panels such as EVVP and the YJS Risk Forum.

The closeness of the two teams has also produced good strategic outcomes. The respective Heads of Service are currently identifying Family Group Conference delivery models that are best suited to the needs of children and young people, as part of plans to expand TPH provision. More broadly, the Head of LAC and Permanency Service was involved throughout the planning and

implementation of TPH to ensure services meet the needs of care experienced children and young people and care leavers.

- *Promote the Brent YJS restorative justice offer to care homes and foster carers.*

Restorative Justice is currently offered by the YJS to all victims of crime. This will be extended to carers and key workers as a non-criminal remedy. The aim of this work is to avoid criminal prosecutions by raising awareness that restorative justice is an effective alternative to informing the Police about low level incidents in many instances. Victims Work, inclusive of Restorative Justice, has been included as one of the areas of enquiries undertaken by inspectors as part of the new His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation inspection of Youth Justice Services regime. The adoption of new victim contact procedures in line with HMIP inspection standards has delayed plans to work with care homes and foster carers. Training resources have however been developed, and delivery will commence in early 2026.

- *Ensure that YJS work to tackle the over representation of children and young people from Black Heritage Groups includes a specific focus on Looked After Children.*

A list of all looked after Children known to the YJS by ethnicity is shared with the Looked After and Permanency Team every month. These will be subject to joint supervision by Team Managers from both services from October 2025. The overrepresentation of looked after Children from Black Heritage groups in the youth justice system is particularly pronounced within the Brent custodial population. To redress this Brent has produced a multi-agency Disproportionality Action Plan that is monitored by the YJS Management Board. Improvement priorities outlined in this report will be included in the Draft Disproportionality Action Plan 2025/26. This draft report will be presented to YJS Management Board members for adoption in October 2025.

- *Further develop work with placement providers and foster carers. This will include supporting them to identify and share information about children who are at risk of going missing in line with the Philomena Protocols.*

The need to maintain and share records containing vital information about children in placements with the Police and Social Workers was highlighted during the LAC and Permanency led Accommodation Provider Forum in September 2025. This requirement was also covered during half-day de-escalation training for Foster Carers.

- *Strive to find solutions to the challenges associated with placing young people in suitable accommodation where they are free from contextual safeguarding harm and near enough to avoid disrupting their education and relationships with families and positive friends.*

YJS and the Looked After Children and Permanency Team work closely with the CYP CD Commissioning and Resources Team to ensure early

conversations are held during a child's sentence to plan where they will live upon release. Progress and case planning is subject to monthly oversight by the Brent Resettlement and Aftercare Panel.

Joint working between the LAC and Permanency Service and the Virtual School ensures looked after Children at risk of offending are well supported to explore employment, education and training opportunities. Contact hours are reviewed to ensure CIC receive the appropriate level of support. Early co-allocation of a Personal Advisor enables effective joint planning for young people in custody. This includes effective release planning and securing suitable and stable accommodation. Care Leavers aged 18 and older are regularly visited by their Personal Advisor who will also liaise with the Offender Manager Unit whenever welfare or safeguarding concerns arise.

Contextual Safeguarding responsibility will be moved to TPH when a new Contextual Safeguarding Lead Officer is appointed in October 2025. A renewed focus on risks in the community affecting placements, plans to remove children from harm, and measures to disrupt criminal exploitation will be explored by this officer in collaboration with the LAC and Permanency Service.

- *Ensure youth participation work captures the voice of LAC children supported by YJS. This will include creating opportunities to use film and other media to raise awareness across the youth justice system.*

Between 2023 and 2024 the YJS Youth Participation Worker worked closely with the Early Help Family Support Worker to introduce young people who had their first missing episode to a range of positive activities and to encourage them to communicate with YJS Board members via short films. They also produced a film on online harm that was shared with the Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Group. Youth Participation support is now delivered as part of TPH. Progress will be tracked by the YJS Management Board via scrutiny of the 2025/25 YJS Improvement Plan.

- *Expand the range of diversionary activities and preventative services available to LAC children and young people working closely with community and voluntary sector partners to increase LAC access to existing early intervention initiatives that seek to prevent children and young people from entering the youth justice system.*

Care experienced children can access mentoring and gangs' worker provision via TPH. They are also supported to access and codesign positive recreational activities at Family Wellbeing Centres. TPH are currently working with Public Health to expand their preventative offer to include sexual health, substance misuse and emotional wellbeing support.

- *Continue to educate partners and stakeholders about their responsibilities under the London Reducing Criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers protocol.*

The Looked After Children and Permanency service and the YJS have meaningfully collaborated to introduce new ways of working and improved access to existing interventions in line with the Protocol. Partners have responded positively in many ways. In terms of provision this includes a seconded CAMHS practitioner who refers children to CAMHS for assessment, NHS mental health screening of all children in Police custody, ETE support from Prospects, transitioning support from the Probation Service, and Police led crime awareness sessions. Public Health have demonstrated genuine commitment to widening access to commissioned services and the Community Safety Team have included increasing YJS access to mentoring provision as part of their new commissioning cycle.

Brent is fortunate to have partners and stakeholders that are committed to reducing the overrepresentation of looked after Children. Brent Council has a key role to play in ensuring this commitment is maintained by continuing to promote London Protocol responsibilities to health, care, and criminal justice partners via the YJS Management Board. Presenting this paper to the Board as part of a wider exploration of new commitments will take place in October 2025.

10.0 Financial Considerations

10.1 There are currently no specific financial considerations arising from this report.

11.0 Legal Considerations

11.1 There are currently no specific legal considerations arising from this report.

12.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

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

13.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

13.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

14.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

14.1 There are no human resource or property considerations.

15.0 Communication Considerations

15.1 At this stage there are no communication considerations.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development

	Corporate Parenting Committee 13 October 2025
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People and Community Development
	Lead Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools - Cllr Gwen Grahl
Brent Adoption Report 6-monthly report: 1 April 2025 to 30 September 2025	
Wards Affected:	ALL
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	OPEN
List of Appendices:	Appendix 1 - ALW Annual Report 2024-2025
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Debbie Gabriel Head of Service, Adopt London West Brent's Regional Adoption Agency GabrielD@ealing.gov.uk Kelli Eboji Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Kelli.eboji@brent.gov.uk Palvinder Kudhail Director, Early Help and Social Care Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a briefing to the Corporate Parenting Committee in relation to:
- adoption performance data for the period 1 April 2025 – 30 September 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 CYPCD; the remainder of this report includes the progress and activity of Adopt London West.

- 1.2 This is the eleventh 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 note, review, comment on, and question the contents of this brief report and the 2024/25 annual report that is an appendix to 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 2022-25 is:

- **A1** (The average time taken for a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 522 days (3-year average) (563 in the last 12 months) compared with 503 days in 2024-25.
- **A2** (The average time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 184 days (3-year average) (208 in the last 12 months) compared with 180 days in 2024-25
- **A20** (The average time between a child entering care and the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child): 371 days (3-year average) (362 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 has been 3 Adoption Orders granted in this reporting period (Q1 and Q2, 2025-26).

6.2 There have been 3 children placed for adoption since April 2025, compared to 5 children placed for adoption at the end of Q2 in 2024/25. It is expected that a further 2 children will be placed by the end of November 2025.

6.3 There are currently 17 children with an adoption plan who have not yet been adopted. The details of these children's cases are as follows:

- 8 children are placed with their new families, 4 of those are placed with adopters approved by ALW.
- 2 children are subject to a Placement Order but are not yet placed but have been linked or matched with their new family, and introductions and transitions are due to start imminently.
- 3 of the children are likely to have a change of care plan due to an updated assessment of their needs.
- ALW and Brent are exploring potential families for the remaining 4 children who are subject to Placement Orders.

7.0 Adopter Recruitment

7.1 8 Adopter households have been approved so far in 2025/26,

75% are White British, 25% are Black, or mixed Black households.

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. Please see 2024/25 annual report for more detail on the activity in the Black Adoption Project

- 7.2 There are currently 36 ALW approved adopters: 11 of whom already have a child/children placed with them, 10 are in the active family finding stage, 5 of these families are already matched or linked with children 6 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 26 prospective adopters in the formal stages of assessment. 15 households are in Stage 1, 11 in or about to commence Stage 2.

8.0 Casework

- 8.1 At the end of August 2025 In this reporting year so far ALW has offered a service to 176 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, 20 are receiving a social work support service, a further 44 are receiving an Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) therapeutic service that is under review. 32 requests have been made for access to adoption records held by Brent.
- 8.2 In addition, there are 235 keeping in touch arrangements (formerly referred to as contact) being facilitated for Brent families - 59 direct contact arrangements and 176 active letter exchanges.

9.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

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

10.0 Financial Considerations

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

10.2 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.

11.0 Legal Considerations

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

12.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

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

13.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

13.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

14.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

14.1 There are no human resource or property considerations.

15.0 Communication Considerations

15.1 At this stage there are not any communication considerations.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children, Young People and
Community Development

Adopt London West

Annual Report

1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025



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1. About Adopt London West

Introduction

Context and responsibilities

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In partnership with the RAA, each partner contributes to:

- Quality assurance and performance tracking

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

Governance arrangements

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

The Heads of Service group meets monthly and has membership at Head of Service and / or Service Manager level from each partner borough. The purpose of this group is to monitor and improve partnership working across the boroughs and ALW, including making decisions and proposals about practice and procedures that relate to adoption work across the agencies.

Ofsted Inspections

ALW support and participate in the adoption elements of any partner local authority inspection including 'inspecting local authority children's services' (ILACS) and focused inspections looking at permanency or children in care.

In 2024/25, ALW were involved in the ILACS inspection that took place in Ealing in April 2024. Comments made in the Ofsted report were positive about the offer from ALW and the strong partnership working between the Local Authority and ALW.



DfE representatives have indicated to Adoption England that a further thematic inspection of Regional Adoption Agencies is likely to take place in Autumn 2027.

2. ALW Team Structure

Workforce

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

- a small recruitment and assessment team who are responsible for the recruitment, assessment preparation and training of adopters.
- a family finding team who are responsible for early identification of children, family finding and early permanence arrangements

- an adoption and special guardianship support team offer a comprehensive range of services to families, children and adopted adults and manage a large volume of applications to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund on behalf of families who require a therapeutic service.
- a business support team provides a range of services including, management of initial enquiries, data collection, reporting and analysis, financial systems and budget monitoring, co-ordination and administration of Adoption Panel, core administrative services, the business management of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund process including a statutory annual assurance statement

All are employed by Ealing as the host Local Authority with the exception of the 2 Clinical Psychologists(1FTE) who are employed by West London NHS Trust.

ALW is managed by a Head of Service, Team Managers and a Business and Performance Manager. In addition to the core team, sessional social workers undertake some assessments of adopters to provide additional capacity.

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

The staff group remains stable, all permanent social work posts are occupied, one 1 year fixed term social work post in the recruitment and assessment team was agreed by the partnership board to provide additional capacity to improve recruitment numbers.

3. Financial Arrangements

Financial arrangements

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

The financial contribution formula was reviewed and agreed for a period of two years by all partners and implemented in April 2022, the revised formula reflects a demand based budget. A further review of the financial model planned for late 2023 was delayed due to capacity pressures in key finance personnel, this work began in the early part of 2025 and is expected to report to the Board in Autumn 2025.

Financial contributions for 2024/25 are set out in the table below

LA	2024/25 FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION	PERCENTAGE CONTRIBUTION
-----------	---------------------------------------	--------------------------------

BRENT	£424,462	20%
EALING	£763,626	35%
HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM	£348,943	17%
HOUNSLOW	£575,089	28%
TOTAL	£2,112,120	100%

The following paragraphs describe the key areas of financial activity.

Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund

Adopt London West manages all applications from families living in each partner LA to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) a Department for Education fund for the direct provision of therapeutic support to families. Applications to the fund are made following a Social Work assessment and identification of a therapeutic provider. 363 applications were made to the fund in 2024/25 slightly less than in 2023/24 and total funding claimed also decreased to £741,663.77 from £984,057 last year.

The reduction in applications and funding in 2024/25 is due to a very late decision by Government on the continuation of the fund for 2025/26, applications were effectively suspended from early in the New Year. An announcement was finally made in early April, confirming significant changes to the fund, the Fair Access Limit for applications was reduced from £5,000 to £3,000, in addition, funding for assessments was removed and match funding of applications for complex therapeutic packages also ended.

2024/25	Number of applications	Total
Brent	67	£139,870.22
Ealing	125	£264,790.17
H&F	80	£142,255.30
Hounslow	91	£194,748.08
TOTAL	363	£741,663.77

Interagency placements

Inter-agency placements are purchased when no adopters approved by Adopt London West are available or are not considered to be the most suitable match for a child. 58% of the children placed in 2024/25 were placed with ALW approved adopters, which is an increase from 52% in 2023/24 and 18% in 2022/23.

The cost of Inter Agency placements was **£362,872 compared to £566,810 in 2022/23**. Inter-agency income from ALW families matched with children from other regions was **£149,700**.

Currently each partner local authority is responsible for the payment of inter-agency fees, as part of the financial modelling work planned a review of the current inter-agency payments arrangements will take place with the aim of reaching agreement on an approach that is mutually beneficial and equitable to all partners.

There is a shared commitment across the Adopt London partnership to place London children with London families, maximising the use of all potential families within the partnership provides the best outcome for children and adopters, placing children locally means that, when necessary, high quality, timely support can be arranged. Therefore, increasing the number of children placed with Adopt London adopters across each of the 4 regions remains a priority. 2 of the 13 children placed in Interagency placements in 24/25 were placed with Adopt London families.

Children placed - Interagency & ALW Placements 01 April 2024 – 31 March 2025			
LA	ALW	Interagency	Total
Brent	6	4	10
Ealing	2	5	7
H&F	0	0	0
Hounslow	10	4	14
TOTAL	18	13	31

4. Performance

Children

The number of children being placed for Adoption nationally has risen slightly to 3071 from around 3000 in last few years, in London there has been a slight decrease in the number of children placed in 2024/25 to 200 from 212 in 2023/24

31 children were placed by ALW in their new families in 2024/25, an increase of 6 children from 25 placed last year.

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

- **A2** length of time between a Placement Order and match with an adoptive family, the expected timescale is 121 days.
- The average for ALW was 224 days, outside of the expected timescale but only slightly outside the national average of 218 days, but stronger than the London average of 284 days.

Adoption Orders

Adoption Orders granted	Brent	Ealing	H&F	Hounslow	Total
2023/24	4	4	3	10	21
2024/25	8	1	3	13	25

Of the 31 children placed in 2024/25, 35% are of White ethnicity, 16% are Black, 26% are of Mixed ethnicity, 19% are of any other Asian background and 3% Brazilian include 1 sibling groups of 2 aged between 5 – 7 years.

Of the 31 children placed, 4 were placed under Early Permanence arrangements, this means children were placed with adopters who are also approved as foster carers and often before Court proceedings have concluded, enabling the child to move in with their new family, sometimes months earlier than is usually possible.

Adopters

18 new adoptive families were approved in 2024/25 a reduction on 20 approvals in 2023/24, the reduction was mainly due to staffing pressures, a permanent member of staff left the recruitment and assessment team in October 2024, it took until February 2025 for a new social worker to start. In addition, several families who we had hoped to present to panel for approval before the end of March, needed to take a break due to bereavement or serious medical conditions emerging.



28% of adopters approved in 24/25 are Black, Asian, or mixed ethnicity and 17% are from the LGBT+ community.

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

- **Stage 1** – should be completed in 60 days, the average time in ALW was **121 days**, in line with the London average of 122 days
- **Stage 2** – should be completed in 121 days, the average time in ALW was **190 days**, slightly outside of the London average of 185 days.

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

5. National Adoption landscape

Adoption England



regional adoption agencies working together

Adoption England oversees the coordinated efforts of the 33 Regional Adoption Agencies in England, focusing on key areas identified in the [Adoption England Strategy](#). The Department for Education provides funding for Adoption England through a centrally funded staff team and grants available to Regional Adoption Agencies collaborating in pan-regional partnerships.

In recent years, the Adopt London partnership has successfully obtained grant funding to support joint practice development across areas including the matching of children with adoptive families, early permanency practice, the Black Adoption Project, and the development of new models for adoption support.

This section of the report highlights key areas of national practice development which are supported by the work of Adoption England. You can read more about the work of Adoption England in their [annual report](#).

Modernisation of contact in adoption

In November 2024, the adoption subgroup of the Public Law Working Group published their final report, '[Recommendations for Best Practice in Respect of Adoption](#)', following an interim report and sector consultation launched in September 2023.

The report makes a range of detailed recommendations about adoption practice and court procedures, particularly in relation to the use of direct contact in adoption. These recommendations have significant implications for local authorities and Regional Adoption Agencies if implemented by courts, however the Department for Education has to date not committed to making any changes to the law or statutory guidance to support the court's agenda.

Research and insights from those with lived experience support the need for adoption plans to more frequently recommend direct contact between adopted children and their birth families, and for this to be more robustly supported on a long-term basis.

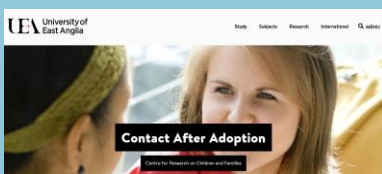
However, due to models of adoption contact being historically based on indirect communication, most Regional Adoption Agencies (including Adopt London West) have not been set up with the capacity to provide the type of contact service that this change in practice would require. Nevertheless, within current resources available, ALW have refocussed the practice in the small 'keeping in touch' service to establish more additional direct contact arrangements for adopted children and their birth families. At the time of writing this report this amounts to more than 100 new arrangements with at least one family member.

Practice highlight

Maintaining relationships: learning from research & lived experience

- ❖ Everyone's experience is unique – there can be no single model for maintaining relationships that fits for every adopted person, and different forms of contact may be best for different children
- ❖ When adopted people do have some kind of contact, it can help them:
 - Understand why they were adopted
 - Provide information about their birth family
 - Reassure them that they have not been forgotten
 - Let them know that their birth family accepts their dual connection to two families
- ❖ Contact needs change over time based on the views of the adopted person and the situation in the birth family – even if it is not right at the beginning, it might be later on
- ❖ Being involved in decisions about contact provides young people with a sense of control over their lives
- ❖ Having safe and supported contact reduces the likelihood of risky unplanned online contact
- ❖ Contact can support adoptive families to feel closer to their adopted child through learning more about their history together
- ❖ Even when contact cannot happen consistently or directly, conversations about contact within the adoptive family support wider discussions which help young people make sense of their story

Learn more about this topic and hear directly from those with lived experience by following these links:



Changes to the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF)

As mentioned earlier in the report, the ASGSF provides access to funding for essential therapeutic support for children living in adoptive and special guardianship families. As the end of 2024/25 approached, there was significant uncertainty about the future of the Fund as the Department for Education delayed making a commitment to the 2025/26 financial year. Early in the 2025/26 financial year an announcement was made by the government that funding allowances for each family would be reduced significantly (from a £5,000 cap to £3,000 cap), with additional restrictions including the end of specific funding for specialist assessments and 'match funding' for particularly complex needs or families at risk of breakdown. The government have also announced a review into the future delivery of the Fund, with no commitment yet made for 2026/27 and beyond.

Significant changes to the ASGSF model will have major implications for the way RAAs deliver adoption support services nationally and is likely to impact the fragile adoption support provider market. In response to this uncertainty RAA leaders came together through Adoption England to publish an '[options appraisal](#)' setting out the views of RAAs on potential alternative models for the Fund. The Department for Education have indicated that further announcements about the Fund may take place in autumn 2025.

'Becoming a Family' framework

Adoption England have led work to develop a national framework to support the early stages of becoming a family through adoption. The framework is designed to provide a consistent level of good practice in early placement support across England and support parents to build confidence and begin to put into practice what they have learnt in their preparation training. The framework is built around five key principles:

- Be preventative and support foundational building blocks of parenting in adoption
- Enable adoptive parents to begin developing confidence as therapeutic parents
- Build resilience through strong social networks and peer support
- Respond to individual needs with access to a wide range of multi-agency services
- Offer consistency in support across England, particularly for families adopting a child from another region.

The framework is currently being piloted until April 2026 before being rolled out to RAAs nationally.

National adopter sufficiency

Over the last 18 months there has been a significant drop in adopter sufficiency across England. Starting in the north of England but spreading across most regions, RAAs and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) have seen the impact of economic conditions play a particularly prominent role in preventing people coming forward for adoption, alongside housing difficulties and a broader sense of global insecurity. Adoption England are supporting some regions to pilot various approaches for providing economic support to prospective adoptive parents, with learning to be shared nationally.

In London we have not seen such significant challenges with the recruitment of adopters however, we continue to monitor this closely and observe changes. Even with stable adopter

recruitment locally however, the national picture does impact London RAAs through a shortage of available inter-agency placements for London children.

6. Adopt London

Adopt London structure



Four Regional Adoption Agencies collaborate under the Adopt London umbrella, collectively serving 24 boroughs across all regions of London. Adopt London stands out nationally for its close

partnership among such a large number of local authorities.

This partnership provides a London-wide platform for the recruitment of adoptive parents, enables the delivery of some support services at scale, and allows for sharing and standardisation of practice. Heads of Service, Service Managers, Team Managers, Panel Advisors, and Marketing & Communications leads collaborate with their counterparts throughout Adopt London to develop shared services and establish common practice standards, and Adopt London increasingly provide regular opportunities for practitioners to meet to share practice and specialist knowledge.



Heads of Service and the host borough Directors and Directors of Children's Services meet quarterly as the Adopt London Executive Advisory Board, which oversees the joint project work of Adopt London and considers issues that need the support of other senior leaders to resolve.

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

Some highlights of the joint work across Adopt London in 2024-25 include:

- *Adopt London staff conference*
- *Adult adoptee support*
- *Matching project*
- *Telling children about adoption*
- *Early permanence project*
- *We Are Family peer support*
- *Adopt London choir*
- *Adoption support commissioning*
- *Black Adoption Project*

Adopt London staff conference

Our annual Adopt London Staff Conference was held in February 2025, bringing together 160 staff in an event that helps develop ownership of the partnership working within Adopt London, and gives a chance to learn about new areas of work and visions for the future.

The first half of the conference this year focused on a new research model designed to support decision-making about the placement of global majority children in ‘transracial’



adoptive families. Dr Tam Cane from University of Sussex presented her research to staff with the support of a young person with lived experience of transracial adoption.

During the second half of the conference people with lived experience from the Black Adoption Project updated attendees on new developments and opportunities arising from the project and spoke powerfully from their own lived experience about the changes that are

needed and how staff can be a part of this. We were honoured to be joined for part of the day by Janet Daby MP, Minister for Children & Families, who held a roundtable discussion with Black Adoption Project representatives during the lunch break and gave a speech to the conference stating her commitment to support this work.

At the end of the day staff expressed how inspired they had been by the lived experience speakers and renewed their commitment to supporting these practice areas in their own work.



Practice highlight

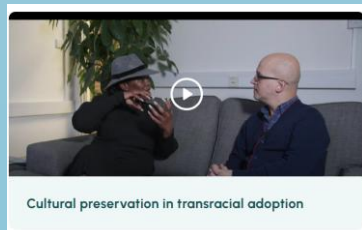
The AFDiT model for decision-making in transracial adoption

- ❖ Supports social work decision making around moving children to placements which do not reflect their heritage or ethnicity
- ❖ Highlights the lived experiences of those who have been transracially adopted
- ❖ Provides firm examples of the types of support transracially adopting parents can offer their children to mitigate the challenges they face
- ❖ Encourages the assessment of both the 'racial and cultural consciousness' and the 'race intentionality' of prospective carers – emphasising that carers need to have a strong commitment to support their child's heritage, as well as a strong understanding and awareness of their likely needs
- ❖ Provides guidance on applying the principles of the model to the decision-making period, during transitions to a new carer, and within the support period after a child has moved.

"Sometimes I hated my skin. I wanted to peel it off... The risk of racialised trauma, as I now know it, really needs to fully be considered." Adoptee, page 52 AFDiT framework

"Don't expect them to be mini 'mes'; let them pursue what they want and who they want to be, even if it means challenging white-dominant environments to let your child fit in." Adoptive parent, page 60 AFDiT framework

Learn more about this topic and hear directly from those with lived experience by following these links:



Adult Adoptee Support

Transracial Adult Adoptee Network

Our peer support group for transracial adoptees offered in partnership with the adoptee-led 'Transracial Adult Adoptee Network' (TAAN) has continued to grow and strengthen, hearing from a range of interesting speakers and building their relationships with one another.

This group is offered to any transracial adoptee willing to travel to London for meetings and has members who regularly travel from other parts of the country to attend, ranging in age from 20s to 70s.

The opportunity to meet in person with other transracially adopted adults often has a profound, life-changing impact on adoptees who attend meetings. This year facilitators from the group led a workshop at the national Adoption England conference, encouraging other Regional Adoption Agencies to initiate their own peer support groups for adult adoptees and sharing their blueprint for doing this in partnership with adopted adults.

Matching Project

The Adopt London matching project, supported by funding from Adoption England, has concluded this year after successful work to increase family finding between Adopt London RAAs and develop regular 'stay and play' events at London Zoo which provide prospective adopters with an opportunity to meet children who have a plan for adoption and their foster carers. The family finding team manager from ALW was seconded to lead the matching project from July 2024 until the project ended in March 2025 due to grant funding ceasing.

The project, also benefited from the expertise of a clinical psychologist, Dr Megan Hollett, who was available to support more complex matching decisions and transitions planning. Social work teams working with many children placed for adoption through all of the Adopt London regions benefited from a clinical consultation model and this additional reflective support, Adopt London now aim to build on this learning to develop an ongoing clinical support offer focused on the transitions and early placement period using additional grant funding to become available in 2025/26.

Practice highlight

The needs of neurodivergent children in adoption transitions

Our clinical psychologist, Dr Megan Hollett, worked with family finding teams and Professor Beth Neil at the University of East Anglia to develop her work on transitions planning for children ([Moving to Adoption](#)) and consider how plans could be adapted for neurodivergent children. She produced a guide which supports practitioners' understanding of the relationship between neurodivergence and trauma, including the impact on the 'window of tolerance' a child may have to manage significant changes and stress – such as during adoption transitions.

Key areas identified for practitioners to focus on providing additional support include:

- Increasing predictability in the transition. This includes the use of visual support such as visual timetables and photographs, and the use of routine, ritual and familiarity to help children feel safe and secure.
- Supporting social interactions for the child such as providing additional 'scaffolding', reducing demands, and allowing for extended introductory periods.
- Supporting regulation including emotional and behavioural presentation but also sensory needs and special interests.

You can find out more about the Moving to Adoption model at this link:



Telling children about adoption

Two family finding social workers in Adopt London North, supported by their team and Dr Megan Hollett, have developed a booklet for children's social workers and foster carers to support the difficult task of talking to children about their care plan of adoption. The booklet talks through the stages of care proceedings and key messages that can be given to children at each stage, with ideas for specific language to use and resources to support this

crucial work. The booklet will be launched in autumn 2025 with a conference for local authority social workers who will become 'champions' in this area.

Early Permanence Project



Also supported by Adoption England funding, the early permanence project has been working towards its planned conclusion in September 2025. Much of the work developed within the project will transition back to RAAs so that these new services continue to be offered into the future.

In the past year the project has:

- Delivered over 20 training courses for practitioners across all London boroughs
- Filmed a new video about the perspectives of birth parents in early permanence
- Worked with stakeholders to develop guidance on supporting final contact meetings between children and their birth parents prior to adoption
- Introduced Paediatric First Aid training for all Adopt London prospective adoptive parents and developed separate safeguarding training for early permanence carers
- Moved to standardise early permanence training for all Adopt London prospective adopters to support an increase in families available to provide these placements (previously the training was only for those who opted into this)
- Introduced the co-delivery of early permanence training by adoptive parents with experience of early permanence
- Developed guidance for practitioners on meeting fostering standards in early permanence placements.

We are Family peer support



We Are Family (WAF) is an independent peer-to-peer support charity that was founded by adoptive parents for adoptive parents.

Adopt London support WAF through an annual grant, to provide formal peer support to adopters along with access to a range of expert resources.

All prospective adopters are encouraged to join WAF which is free to join, during stage 1 of their assessment, and the range of support available increases as they progress through to approval and have their adopted child/ren move in with them.

Currently over 1500 adoptive parents in London are members of We Are Family, 248 of those belong to West London groups

In addition to locality-based support groups and specialist groups for single adopters, early permanence carers, and parents of teens, WAF regularly support family meet ups, summer picnics, and access to London-based cultural events. This year WAF delivered 63 events in Adopt London areas including 27 parent support meet-ups, 13 playgroups, and 15 family meet-ups.

In partnership with Adopt London, We Are Family also provide a range of accessible digital support through 'WAF Talks', a programme which has now delivered over 100 webinars available for adoptive parents to join live or watch back on demand, and through 'Adoption Shared', a specialist podcast designed to deepen understanding of the lived experience of adoption.

"I felt very alone dealing with the challenges of adopting children that experienced so much trauma, meeting experienced adopters gave me more confidence and helped me feel I was not a rubbish parent. The support provided by other adopters was inspiring."
We Are Family member

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

83% OF MEMBERS AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE THAT SINCE JOINING WAF, THEY HAVE ACCESS TO MORE RESOURCES, INFORMATION AND SUPPORT TO MANAGE THE CHALLENGES OF ADOPTIVE PARENTING.



Adopt London Choir

Adopt London's choir, established in response to the pandemic in 2020, has continued to thrive, providing an accessible and fun way to build social connections between adoptive

families. Families meet weekly online to learn specially selected songs and have occasional social meet-ups or performances in person.

"I have been happier due to the love of singing and having something to look forward to, and bond with my son more as we listen and sing songs together, it has helped me with my emotions and self-doubt."

Adoption Support Commissioning

Following background work and the development of a regional needs assessment for London completed in June 2024, Adopt London have received further funds from Adoption England to develop our capacity to undertake joint commissioning, and to test out the provision of an Adopt London clinical hub to bring some commissioned services in-house. As well as testing out potential clinical models in 2025/26, we plan to train Adopt London staff to deliver some of our own specialist therapeutic parenting programmes, as part of a long term goal to increase access to these programmes and reduce reliance on commissioning from external providers.

Black Adoption Project

The Black Adoption Project is delivered by Adopt London in partnership with Laurelle Brown Training and Consultancy, aiming to reduce long-standing disparities for Black and mixed Black heritage children in our adoption system. It is a long-term project focused on creating change across all aspects of the adoption system to better meet the needs of Black prospective adopters, families, and children.



- Black children who have a plan for adoption agreed by the court are around 20% less likely than other children to go on to be adopted, often because suitable adoptive families cannot be identified.
- Black children who are adopted wait an average of 6 ½ to 8 months longer than other children to move into their adoptive family.
- Black prospective adopters are 5 – 6 times more likely to drop out during the adoption assessment process and not go on to adopt a child.



The project was awarded Adoption England grant funding in 2024/25 to help mobilise a range of pilot projects developed in response to our [phase 1 research](#), and in partnership with those with lived experience of Black adoption. We highlight progress with some of these pilot projects in this section of the report.

A key project principle is to support wider change through dissemination of learning, and therefore regular webinars are being held and are available after the event to [watch on demand](#).

The work of the project is supported by a Steering Committee made of up those with personal and professional experience of Black adoption, co-chaired by an adopted person and children's services Directors. An Adoptive Parents Stakeholder Group and Research & Evaluation Advisory Group provide additional insight, challenge, and support.



'Some members of the Black Adoption Project Steering Committee'.

Many of those with lived experience of adoption have spoken at national events this year on behalf of the Black Adoption Project, including presentations to the Department for Education, Adoption England's national conference, and Children & Young People Now conference.



You can find out more about the background to the Black Adoption Project [at this link](#), or sign up to receive regular updates [at this link](#).

Improving support for Black prospective adopters



One of the pilots launched this year is co-designed with Black adoptive parents to improve the support and advocacy available for Black prospective adopters (including racially diverse couples) during the assessment process. The pilot aims to reduce some of the additional barriers Black households may face coming into the adoption process and increase the

proportion who complete the assessment and go on to adopt a child.

Following the design process a support group called 'Let's Talk About Adoption' was launched, run directly by adoptive parents. The group aims to provide a space away from professionals where prospective adopters can ask questions, access support to escalate issues within the RAA if needed and meet role models who reflect their own racial heritage.

The support available from the group also provides an additional incentive for Black families considering adoption to choose Adopt London as their agency. Positive feedback has already been received by those accessing the group and its importance recognised in Prospective Adopter Report assessments and at approval panel meetings. The impact is being independently evaluated by a research partner.

Supporting Black adopted children & young people

Black and mixed Black heritage adopted children who participated in our theory of change process identified several key areas where the Black Adoption Project could help to improve their wellbeing. These included opportunities to socialise with other Black adopted young people, and support to better understand their Black identity and Black history within the context of their adoption.

In response to these messages and through a co-design process for young people, a social group was launched in spring 2025. Meeting in a youth centre on a Saturday, the group aims to provide young people with an opportunity to build friendships with other Black adopted young people and provide creative ways for them to share their views and experiences with others. Although not the initial motivation for the group, it also provides an opportunity for parents to meet, network, and provide mutual support - including white parents who have transracially adopted.

Further to the successful launch of the social group, a second pilot has been developed for launch in autumn 2025 aimed specifically at older young people called 'Exploring my Black Identity'. This is a 16 week programme run by an experienced Black history youth worker and a therapist, designed to support young people to learn and reflect on Black UK and global history and Black identities within an adoption context. Topics identified with the young people will include music and pop culture; hair, style, and self-expression; Black British and global history; resistance, joy & pride; and Black adoption. The therapist will support the young people to integrate emotional regulation practices and will provide 1:1 reflection points within the programme. Young people will be encouraged to keep a reflective

journal and use photography to highlight their insights, both of which will contribute to an evaluation being undertaken by our research partner.

Specific information & advice to Black prospective adopters



Through the Black Adoption Project, Adopt London have started to offer specific sessions for Black and mixed Black heritage families considering adoption. Run in a similar format to our regular 'Meet the Adopter' events, these provide an opportunity for households to hear from a panel of Black adoptive parents and be provided with information about the additional support available through the Black Adoption Project, including the offer of 1:1 discussions with an experienced Black adoptive parent for anyone considering adoption. These events give us an opportunity to target our advertising specifically at Black households, including through social media and personal connections. We will continue to run these sessions through 2025/26 in different formats to evaluate the most effective model and impact on adopter recruitment.

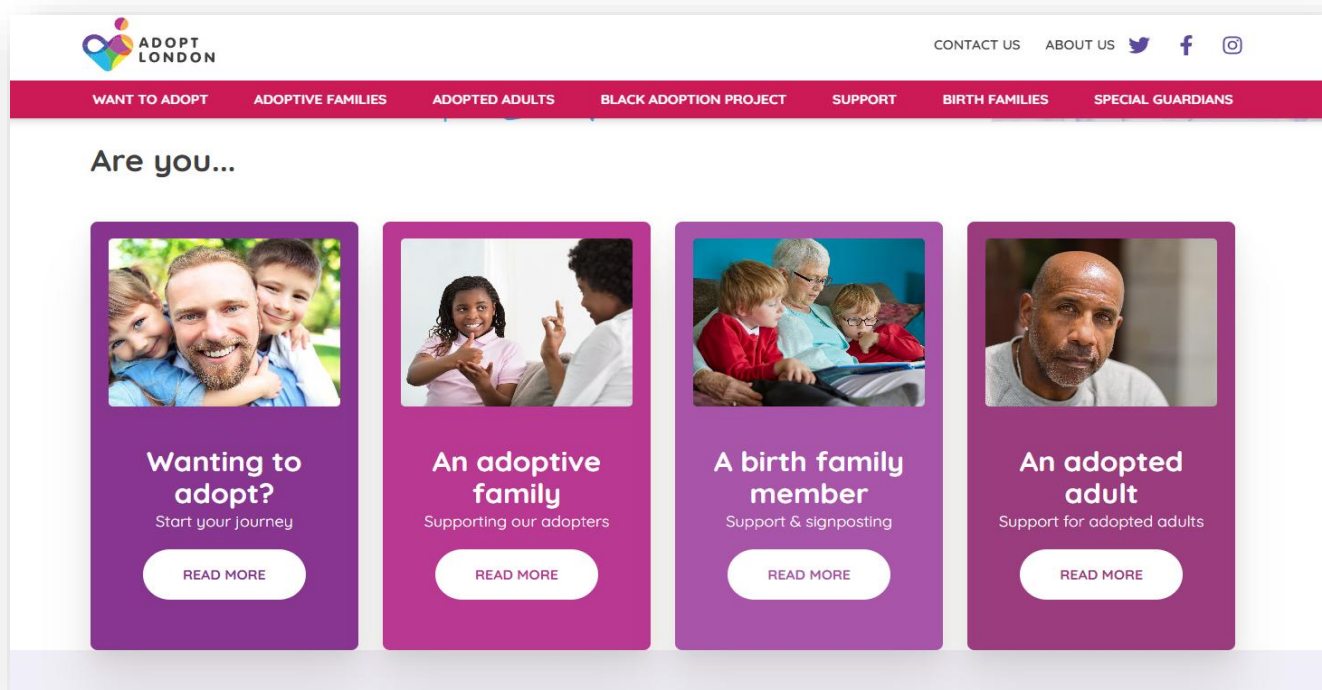
Adopt London brand



Our single Adopt London presence on the web continues to maximise opportunities for anyone considering adoption in London to easily find us. We have a shared recruitment and communications strategy which focuses on recognising and championing the diversity of the London region and the needs of London children. Our online presence is spearheaded by the Adopt London [website](#) which provides rich information for people considering adoption in a range of formats, from [frequently asked questions](#) to [lived experience case studies](#) and relevant [news items](#).

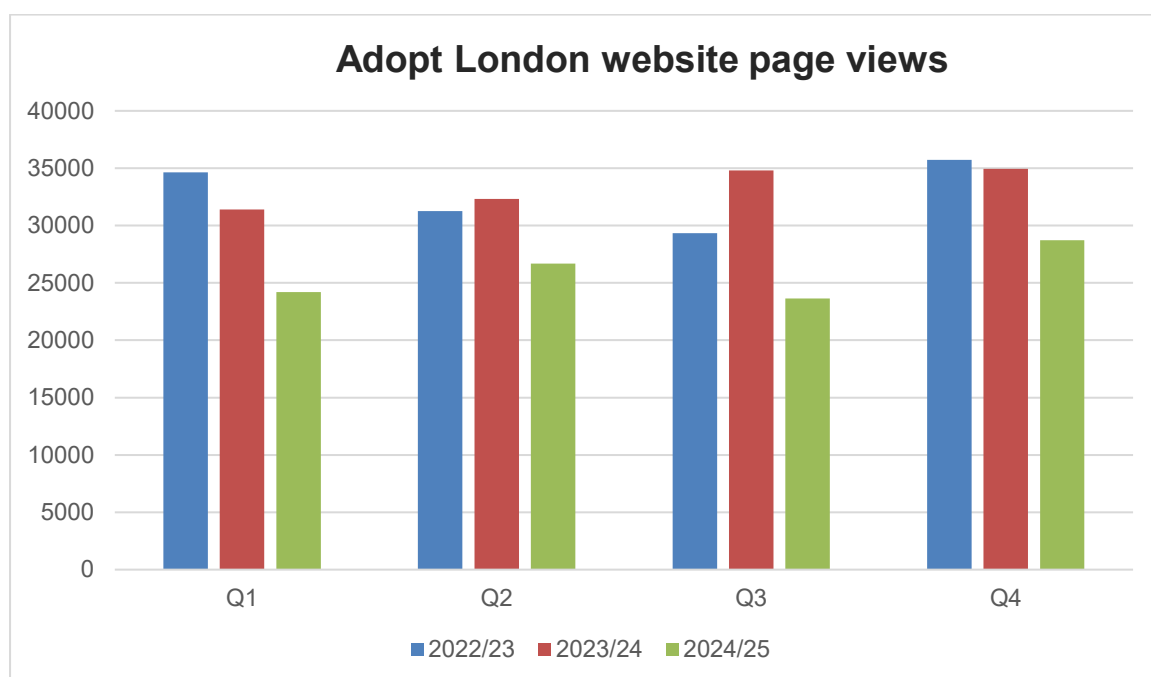
This year we have undertaken a significant move to a new website hosting partner who is more able to support our future planned developments. The website has been updated to provide a clearer pathway for other groups seeking information from Adopt London, such as adoptive parents and adopted adults, and we have completed work ensuring the website is accessible.

Website metrics are tracked to support our work in targeting recruitment and to ensure those who need to access support can do this. Adopt London website page views remain very high, with a total of 103,245 page views in 2024/25. However, there was a drop this year from the previous two years which may reflect [national trends](#) around a reduction in adopter recruitment but may also in part be attributed to the website hosting changes made this year. Website data will be monitored through 2025/26 to gain a better understanding of these changes.



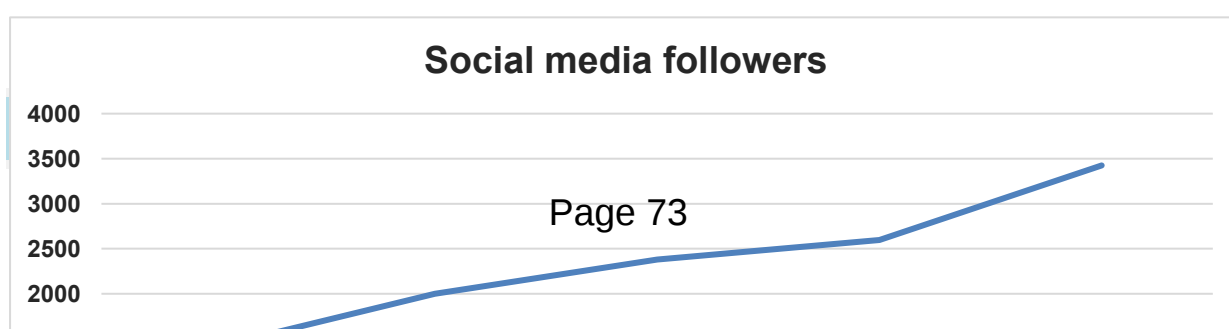
The Adopt London social media channels post regularly to communicate and inform a range of audiences impacted by adoption. Our social media followers continue to organically increase and using these channels can be an effective way to engage and support people in London who are considering adoption but not yet ready to begin an assessment.

Year	Social media followers
2020/21	1400
2021/22	2000
2022/23	2380
2023/24	2596
2024/25	3425



Adopt London website page views			
Qtr	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Q1	34628	31396	24210
Q2	31260	32316	26690
Q3	29343	34806	23628
Q4	35722	34957	28717

The Adopt London social media channels post regularly to communicate and inform a range of audiences impacted by adoption. Our social media followers continue to organically increase and using these channels can be an effective way to engage people in London who are considering adoption but not yet ready to begin an assessment. This year has seen a significant increase in follower numbers due to the introduction of new [Black Adoption Project](#) channels on Instagram and LinkedIn.



Partnerships with Voluntary adoption agencies and Adoption Support Agencies



PAC-UK



ALW commissions a service from PAC UK which includes:

- An advice line, supporting adopted adults and birth parents'
- Counselling services for anyone affected by Adoption

or Special Guardianship arrangements living in any of the 4 partner boroughs.



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

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



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

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

ALW Practice and support services

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

Training & support to Local Authority partners continues to be a priority, lunch and learn events take place regularly on a series of core topics including

- Meaningful Child Permanence reports
- Early Permanence
- Transitions in Adoption
- Supporting Children's Identities through Life Story work
- Keeping in Touch

ALW team members also attend staff forums in each partner Local Authority when invited to maintain connections between the services and build new connections when staff changes occur.

Keeping in Touch

As mentioned earlier, ALW have maintained a focus on developing practice relating to maintaining relationships for children as part of the so called modernising adoption agenda. It is now widely recognised that if children maintain some level of relationship with their birth or 'first' families it contributes to a stronger, more positive sense of identity for adopted children. They grow up with a better sense of who they are and why they could not remain in their original families. Whilst there is much work still to do, a message that modern adoption means more openness, honesty and transparency is delivered right from the beginning of the adoption journey which for most prospective adopters begins at an Information session.

As a result of a continued focus on keeping in touch arrangements, overall numbers continue to grow, indirect keeping in touch/ letter exchanges have increased by a smaller proportion as more direct arrangements are agreed, nevertheless there are now 540 indirect arrangements from 489 in 2023/23. Direct keeping in touch arrangements have increased from 56 in 2022/23 to 123 2023/24, and 162 in 2024/25. An increase of 31% in a year and 189% from the 46 arrangements in 2022/23. This work is hugely rewarding for the staff team as they have facilitated a number of very moving reconnections of children with their birth siblings, grandparents and parents.

Special Guardianship Support



Special Guardianship support is a unique feature of ALW, the other 3 Adopt London regions do not offer support to families living within special guardianship arrangements. ALW commission a service from Kinship, a national charity (formerly known as Grandparents Plus) the service offers membership to all families living in any of the 4 ALW partner authorities who are caring for a child in a kinship arrangement regardless of the legal status of the arrangement.

In addition, a more specialist level of service is also included in the contract that offers direct more intense support for up to 60 families a year. During this reporting year 56 families benefitted from the service.

Brent – 10

Ealing – 26

Hammersmith & Fulham – 6

Hounslow - 14

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

Group work

ALW offer a range of group work as part of ALW's support offer to families, one of the groups is an **Education Support group**, facilitated by an Educational Psychologist and ALW social worker, the group meets once every half term. The following topics were covered throughout the year

May 2024 – Supporting transitions big and small and selecting a new school

June 2024 – Supporting children with anxiety around school

Oct 2024 – Home/School partnerships – how to work well with your school

Nov 2024 - Helping your school to be more trauma-aware

January 2025 – Understanding Special Educational Needs and Education, Health & Care Plans

March 2025 – Your child's friendships

Parents and carers tell us that the group is a helpful forum to understand how to meet their children's educational needs and get the best out of school, as well as meeting people and learning from their experiences. Those who attend have expressed that they find the sessions greatly beneficial, and parents of siblings may attend the same topic twice. We also have adopters who may have moved out of our support area that choose to continue attending, attendees this year, families from.

Brent = 11

Ealing = 34

H&F = 8

Hounslow = 15

Feedback:

- Thank you, this session has been helpful and interesting, great advice from the group
- Thank you, I found this session really helpful.
- It really helpful and good to think back about what we've achieved and how there is support available all of the time
- Informative session, good reflective space
- Thanks for the session. Always good to find out new techniques
- Reassuring - I knew quite a lot of this stuff, but helpful to know I'm not alone and I'm on the right track!
- an eye opener, very useful and informative, so glad i came

Feedback is excellent, families report increased confidence in working in partnership with schools to identify supports to their child.

Special Guardianship support group – a monthly group is co facilitated by a Special Guardian and ALW social worker, this is both a social group but also invited speakers attend to discuss items of interest to the group

Drama group for young people – the during the Easter holiday break, 9 young people took part in a 4 day drama workshop facilitated by ALW Social Workers and an independent drama therapist, funded by the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund. The workshop was open to 11-13 years old young people in both Special Guardianship and adoptive families.

The 9 young people, aged 11-13 years of age, started the week looking at setting the scene, building characters and roles, and creating stories, progressing to directing. The children worked together, supporting each other to bring one of their stories to life. All of the children attended all of the 4 days and established friendships, parents commented that they would support their children to nurture these new friendships.

In February 2025, a **Children's consultation event** took place at the Natural History Museum, three children attended this event. The feedback on the day was:

- The three children who attended provided positive feedback on the activities that they were offered by ALW. All had attended the Drama Group which they said they enjoyed and would like to do again.
- The three young people said that they would like more activities offered by ALW.
- The activities proposed by the staff of the Natural History Museum were particularly popular with all the children who attended.

Foundations for Attachment therapeutic parenting courses 2024/25:

ALW have run 4 Foundations for Attachment courses in 2024/25, the courses are jointly facilitated by a Clinical Psychologist and a social worker, the course is an evidence-based Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) informed programme, based on the DDP practice model developed by Dan Hughes (2009, 2011). The aim is to provide carers/parents with an opportunity to hear ideas, learn new strategies and to meet other parents and carers who may be struggling to understand their child's behaviour the facilitators aim to provide a safe sharing environment and help the carers/parents become more confident in getting to know their child's inner world, explore therapeutic parenting strategies and techniques, feedback is consistently positive.

7. Clinical Psychology in ALW

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

This is a Tier 2 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS); the service offers a range of provision to both social work staff and adopted/special guardianship families. The practice model for Clinical Psychology is based on a consultation model, clinical formulations help inform the most appropriate social work and clinical support offer to families. Due to maternity leave there has been a significantly reduced service in 2024/25, clinical psychology remains an important priority in ALW, it is hoped that services will resume in 2025/26.

8. Adoption Panel

The ALW Adoption panel hears recommendations on.

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

16 ALW Panel meetings took place from 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, running every 3 weeks, ensuring that decisions are made in a timely and effective manner.

Between April 2024 and March 2025, 31 children were placed in their new families, but the Panel made positive matching recommendation on behalf of 40 children. Out of those 40 matches presented to the Panel, 19 were made with ALW approved families and 21 with families approved by other RAAs/VAAAs. The Panel also made a recommendation on the adoption plan for 1 Hounslow child.

NB – matches and placements of children can happen in different years, 40 children were placed during the year, but some may have been matched in the previous year, and some children were placed in Early Permanence arrangements, so the numbers may not correlate.

The Panel has considered the suitability of 18 families to adopt. All Prospective Adopter Reports (PARs) presented to panel have had a unanimous positive recommendation from panel and are deemed good to excellent reports and this evidences the excellent work that the ALW recruitment team complete to ensure thorough and evidence-based assessments. -
- Alongside the above 18 approvals, the Panel was asked to consider 3 resignations due to change of personal circumstances and disengagement with the process.

Panel Training requirement: (National Minimum Standards: 23.13, 23.14, 23.15 and 23.16)

It is a requirement that Adoption Panel's hold a minimum of one training event per year to contribute to the professional development of the panel and its individual members. Training may take the form of formal training or a facilitated professional discussion. the following took place in this reporting year.

22/04/2024 -- Honesty in Adoption and the role of the Panel – discussion about the importance of transparency and honesty in adoptive families and life story work when considering the children's previous experiences of loss and trauma and offered a reflective space for Panel members to consider this.

Keeping in touch – discussion around the importance of maintaining family relationships with significant others for a child who has already experienced loss and trauma and the impact of this on their self-esteem and secure identity.

11/11/2024 – Positive Identity – Presentation and consideration of the AFDIT framework, developed by Dr. Tam Cane, University of Sussex and a process of cocreation with adoptees. Further reflection about this learning took place on 24/02/2025.

Future training topics being planned – ALW is working with the other 3 Panels across the Adopt London network to bring resources together and run a series of wider training event/conference with various speakers on adoption-related topics.

Practice Groups – in addition to the training events, the panel adviser attends a working group with the other 3 Adopt London RAAs' panel advisers and an Adopt London Head of Service. This group meets 6-weekly to discuss any practice dilemmas, exchange good practice ideas and focus on developing practice across Adopt London.

The Chair and Adviser take part in the CoramBAAF national Practice Forum, considering new research, case and literature reviews and focusing on good practice ideas.

Any issues which have arisen in the functioning of the Panel, or the adoption service have always been successfully resolved because of the effective working relationship that exists between the Panel and the Regional Adoption Agency. The quarterly meetings between the Panel Chair, the Panel Vice Chair, the Panel Adviser, the Adoption Team Managers, and the ALW Head of Service are productive in progressing development, change and improvement in the work of an adoption agency. The observation of Panel by the RAA ADM and the local authority ADMs is welcomed, and the feedback given has always immediately been considered and put in place, as necessary.



Feedback to the Panel -- Following each panel meeting, the Adviser would send feedback forms to all those who attended the Panel meeting and the professionals involved. The Panel also submits its feedback to the Head of Service and managers, any feedback to the panel is considered at the next Panel meeting to ensure that there is quality assurance both ways. The overall feedback from attendees is very positive:

- *The kindness and openness of the panel members, the preparation with our social worker, the quality of the discussions during the panel and the clarity of the explanations before and during the panel all contributed to a positive experience.*
- *As a professional, I found it really helpful to meet with the panel advisor beforehand and this isn't something we do at our panel. I found the chair and all the panel members really welcoming. I thought it was really helpful for my adopter to receive the questions in advance and have the option to submit some written answers. It was a very positive panel experience.*
- *The level of transparency was helpful. The panel explained their rationale for their decision.*
- *It was a fantastic experience - I appreciated how kind the panel members were and their efforts to put me at ease. I liked that each panel member provided reasons for recommending the match and also hearing from the family finding social worker about why.*
- *A lot of information was gathered up front making the actual time spent with panel feel more appropriate to the end goal which is to create a family unit and move forward together.*
- *The friendly smiles and the diversity of the panel members.*
- *The meeting with the Adviser was very helpful, she was friendly and reassuring.*
- *Felt very natural and we enjoyed contributing. What made it positive were the people! Lovely group who made us feel very welcome.*
- *Professional, but friendly, with clear questions and recommendation.*
- *Everyone's views were heard and strengths acknowledged throughout discussions*
- *The Panel Advisor gave us the information needed so we were prepared for Panel. The meeting was organised and well presented. They were clear and honest with the questions and answers.*
- *The Panel advisor is very helpful in the lead up to ensuring all things are in order and to offer alternative thoughts on areas that could be raised.*
- *I was put at ease by the chair and everyone present. The chair gave me the opportunity to ask any questions. That panel were understanding patient with me. The panel were extremely kind. I felt well informed and it was great to touch base with the adviser in advance of the meeting. . And we appreciated the preview questions in advance. The panel members were all very sincere and it was clear they had read the report thoroughly. It felt very validating and authentic, everyone clearly cared about S and her future.*
- *We were prepped in advance both by our social worker and the panel advisor thoroughly. Every single person in the meeting made us feel at ease.*
 - *The members were mindful of diversity.*

9. Priorities for 2025/26

- *Increase the opportunities for those with lived experience to influence the practice in ALW. A series of consultation discussions with children, birth parents and adopters will take place in 2025/26. A pilot friendship group for adopted children is planned to take place in the school holidays to see if this is something that children want to engage in.*
- *Continue to progress the aims and objectives of the Black Adoption Project, including supporting the pilot projects to improve services to Black children and prospective adopters*
- *Adoption England have confirmed grant funding is available to explore the potential of establishing multi-disciplinary teams. ALW will lead on the development of a clinical hub across the Adopt London partnership.*
- *Secure additional Adoption England grant funding to further develop adoption support services on a pan -regional basis with a focus on a core offer of support that spans children's developmental ages and stages*
- *Increase engagement of a wider group of ALW staff with Adoption England focus groups and other practice improvement activities to ensure they are involved and connected to national developments*
- *Complete financial modelling review in partnership with all ALW member Local Authorities to ensure ALW remains financially viable and represents value for money for each partner.*

10. Feedback

Recruitment and Assessment team Social Worker: Finally thank you so much for all your support throughout this process. I think you know that part of the reason we even went with West London Adopt was because we liked you so much when we first met you and I can't think of a more sensitive, sensible and supportive social worker to have walked with us through this past year. I do hope we can stay in touch.

Hope you are well. Just wanted to give some feedback about G from our side. She has been the most incredible social worker - she is friendly, kind, supportive and exceptionally efficient. She has guided us and been there for us from the start of our journey with S. She has also answered all our questions and made us feel comfortable with the adoption process.

On top of the above, G has also really helped me navigate a difficult time when my dad passed away by coming up with practical solutions to make sure things work at our end and that S receives the best care and support too.

G is fantastic and we can't speak highly enough of her.

Thanks,

I thought it was very informative. As I am in the situation of adoption the information was relatable and easy to understand. I think as one person said it would be great to have it written down what exactly is the processes and also what is the children's social worker vs ALW role. I found it helpful knowing how valuable the CPR is to your service because for us social workers it is bane of our existence that we just want to get done 😊 But I suppose without a quality one, it makes your jobs harder and it's not fair to our families/ children we work with. I also realise I need to include more positive attributes of the family as it definitely can feel all doom and gloom reading.

Drama group -- Also although it's a little late, I haven't forgotten and wanted to congratulate you and team for such a successful and excellent Easter holiday camp. D looked forward to every day with great excitement, (that was really refreshing to witness) and her mood has been much lighter since attending! And she wants to say. "You put so much hard work into it and your hard work paid off!, my favourite part was playing with new friends, spending time with you and seeing you dance 😊 Thank you for inviting me to your club and can I come again soon? 😊"

I just wanted to say thank you for sending me examples of using “Pupil Passports.” I have used this principle for all of S’s learning needs. All I do is send a copy of his current “Pupil Passport” (see attached) along with other supporting documents to the relevant teachers (when applicable/relevant). This has saved me so much time and anxiety in having to explain S’s learning challenges. A positive example of this is. S has group swimming class and recently I have booked him to also have 1:1 session to help him move up to the next level. S’s swimming teacher was so grateful for the information and I could see how his approach to teaching S helped S and the teacher produce a positive and productive learning outcome for both S and his teacher. As you know, S and R developed a friendship after meeting at the Drama Therapy Workshop organised by your team earlier this year. Myself and R’s mum have made contact and have pencilled some playdates. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you so much for all your help.

FFA -- there is not enough words to describe how essential this training is for everybody who is going through adoption. It gives reassurance, encouragement to follow the PACE guidelines for parenting, tools to have a better understanding and build unconditionally loving relationship with children, partner, parents. Thank you all so much for the opportunity to be part of this valuable experience.

FFA -- A HUGE thank you to you both, I’ve learnt so much over the last 6 weeks, and feel that I’m now much better equipped to handle the challenges that parenting an adopted child may throw my way. I’m already seeing positive changes in how my children and I relate to each other. Thank you for always providing a space & welcoming space for us to share our thoughts, and for giving us a brilliant toolkit to be better allies for our children. This course has been time very well spent!

After struggling for years trying to get help and support with getting the girls assessed and diagnosed to no avail, in comes S who I felt really listened to me and actually heard me and then got things moving S immediately found me and my family therapy and counselling sessions, particularly the wonderful therapist. S also attended the monthly Children in Need meetings set up by the social worker where she helped to advocate and speed up the assessment and diagnosis for one of my girls with CAMHS. I and my family have been through a very stressful time, and S was there for us every step of the way, if she wasn’t able to help us with a particular issue we would be having, she would quickly find someone who can. The invaluable advice she has given me, particularly during a very stressful period this year has really helped us and made such a great and important difference to me and my family’s wellbeing. I just wanted you to know how lucky you are to have S in your service, and how thankful we and other families are to have her in our corner working with us and representing us. Thank you.

It's been a positive experience

It was very helpful. There were lots of practical advice.

Very positive. Great to connect with fellow adopters who understand some of what I'm experiencing. Good to have the varied experiences of the facilitators given their various roles within the team.

I've had a positive experience of the course, very glad we got to go.

I have found the whole experience really helpful and informative. I have enjoyed the webinars, the sessions and the videos. lots of information to take on board and understanding from others going through similar things as us.

Very enjoyable indeed. I am so glad I attended. Speaking with other adopters and hearing of their own experiences was quite comforting in a very strange way.

Overall a good experience, but I would have liked to see more content in addition to the webinars during the live sessions. Breakout rooms were a bit too repetitive. I think the live sessions could be a bit shorter.

I enjoyed the course as the sessions were a safe zone where we could share our experiences and struggles with other adopters and professionals who did their best to provide a constructive feedback and concrete examples we could use in our day to day parenting. I really enjoyed the course and I was looking forward to it every Thursday.

EDUCATION SUPPORT GROUP: The idea to ask a previous teacher to send a postcard once the child has moved onto a new school was a lovely idea! A great way to help the child know they are still being thought about and not been forgotten.

Thank you there have been some amazing tips that have made me feel like I can be better prepared to support L transition to high school in a positive way

I've just recently got a diagnosis of autism & adhd for my 10 year old daughter, one of which I would not have had without P's help & persistence in trying to help us. It's been 4 years or so that I've been looking for answers and not knowing where to turn. She has helped us so so much and I am so grateful that we did find her. B has had a long road to get to where we are now, great ormond street gave us the diagnosis this month & I just wanted to tell you that we will be eternally grateful for all the help that we have been given by P & from what the doctor told me at great ormond street she has helped other families as much as she has helped us .. she is amazing

Debbie Gabriel

Head of Service

September 2025

	Corporate Parenting Committee 13 October 2025
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development
	Lead Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools - Cllr Gwen Grahl
Brent Fostering Service 6-monthly Monitoring Report: 01 April 2025 to 30 September 2025	
Wards Affected:	ALL
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
List of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Kelli Eboji Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Kelli.Eboji@brent.gov.uk Tom Donovan Service Manager, Looked After Children and Permanency Tom.Donovan@brent.gov.uk Palvinder Kudhail Director, Early Help and Social Care Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children. It includes relevant data on the service's performance and activities, as well as updates on the functioning and progress of the Fostering Panel. Additionally, the report outlines the developments that have taken place in

the Service throughout the year, as well as any planned initiatives for the upcoming period. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).

- 1.2 Brent Fostering Service operates in accordance with the Fostering National Minimum Standards, the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. These regulations are the foundation of the regulatory framework for fostering services under the Care Standards Act 2000. This report details the activity of Brent's fostering service from the 01 April 2025 to the 30 September 2025.

2.0 Recommendation

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

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

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

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

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

4.0 Background

4.1 Service Priorities

- 4.1.1 The in-house fostering function, located within the Looked After Children and Permanency Service (LACP) in the Children, Young People and Community Development Directorate has the following service priorities for 2025/2026:

- To have a strong and renewed focus on recruitment, assessment and approval of new foster carers with the view to achieve a net gain of **10** new carers by the end of the financial year.
- To enhance the support offer to Brent's foster carers and kinship carers, by rolling out the new fostering offer and deliver existing and new therapeutic support to increase placement stability and develop carers' ability and resilience in managing more complex and challenging placements.
- To implement the first Mockingbird constellation in Brent. The Mockingbird Family Model of fostering builds communities of six to ten foster families called constellations. Each constellation is led by a hub home carer and liaison worker. The constellation offers vital peer support and guidance alongside social activities and sleepovers to strengthen relationships and permanence.
- To improve the outcomes for the looked after children by providing local and in-house placement options, minimising change of social workers and placements and keeping children connected to their networks.
- To promote and improve the take up of learning opportunities for new and experienced foster carers and connected persons using different delivery methods comprising of face-to-face, online/virtual and E-Learning.
- To consolidate and strengthen the partnerships with neighbouring authorities to recruit and retain more foster carers by working collaboratively with neighbouring local authorities to implement the West London Recruitment Hub.
- To recruit, train and retain foster carers that can offer emergency placements to children and young people who come into care in unplanned circumstances.
- To continue to develop and transform the service in consultation and collaboration with care experienced young people and foster carers through regular feedback and co-designed training and steering groups.
- To ensure that the foster carers feel supported and valued by providing regular service updates, promoting a sense of belonging to a wider fostering community and celebrating the carers achievements and commitment to their role.

4.1.2 Progress on these priorities will be explored throughout this report, in summary achievements in 2025 against our priorities so far, include:

- 0 foster carers have resigned this period. The service has not recruited any new carers this period; the net increase for this financial year so far is 0. The Local Authority continues to be ambitious in relation to fostering recruitment and continues to strive to meet the goal of 10 new carers by the end of this financial year. Presently the service has 6 assessments in progress as well as 6 potential carers who are considering progressing to assessment.
- Brent's fostering offer is competitive; it is well received by Brent foster carers. In this period 0 carers have transferred from Brent to other Local Authorities or Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) however foster carers do feedback they would like more benefits including council tax reductions/reimbursements, financial contributions to utility bills as well as

other benefits including better parking options in the London Borough of Brent.

- Brent's first Mockingbird Constellation is now live. The foster carers in this programme have fed back they are thankful for the support of this new programme and enjoy the community that is being built.
- Whilst the Local Authority have not increased in-house fostering capacity in this reporting period, placement stability is good and the vacancies with in-house carers are being fully utilised, meaning if a carer is free to foster a child then a child is placed with them swiftly, after careful planning, risk assessment and matching.
- Uptake of training by foster carers still needs to improve but the number of training courses available is good; the training catalogue is robust and additional training courses are added on specific topics when requested by foster carers.
- Brent, and 7 other neighbouring West London Local Authorities (Ealing, Harrow, Hounslow, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster and Hillingdon), received funding from the Department for Education for the West London Fostering Hub to improve recruitment and retention of foster carers in September 2023 and a new joint fostering recruitment hub (dedicated "front door" for fostering enquiries) was created and became operational from May 2024. The 8 Local Authorities share training, resources, ideas, feedback and good practice to improve all services in West London.
- The service utilises the current pool of foster carers for emergency care arrangements whenever a vacancy arises.
- The fostering service has identified a lead social worker to work closely with Brent's participation service. Work is ongoing to identify a foster carer to lead the Foster Carer Forum and better utilise feedback from the foster carers who attend the Brent support groups.
- The fostering service provides regular service updates to foster carers via monthly email newsletters as well as sharing updates in foster carer support groups. 'Coffee with Kelli' sessions continue to be offered to foster carers and carers are encouraged to provide feedback via surveys sent to them and via their supervising social worker. Carers are celebrated at fostering panel and events such as the end of year celebration; letters of thanks are also sent from the Head of Service or Service Manager when carers have gone above and beyond. The next step is to implement a WhatsApp Community to share feedback, events and information as requested by the Brent foster carers.

4.2 Staffing Arrangements

- 4.2.1 The structure of the Fostering Service remains the same since the last report. The Fostering Service consists of two teams: one Recruitment, Support and Assessment Team, and one Kinship Care Team. The service is overseen by Service Manager, Tom Donovan.
- 4.2.2 The Fostering Support and Assessment Team consists of 8 supervising social workers, one Team Manager, one part-time Fixed Term Contract

Mockingbird Liaison Officer and one part-time Fixed Term Contract Fostering Recruitment Officer post.

4.2.3 The Kinship Care Team consists of 8 social workers and one Team Manager. Following recruitment activity taking place, the Kinship Care Team has been a stable team of permanent social workers since May 2025.

4.2.4 The workload in the fostering team continues to be at manageable levels, whilst the Kinship Team has experienced an increased number of cases over this reporting period as new kinship carers are assessed, approved and allocated to supervising social workers for ongoing support.

4.3 Placement Activity

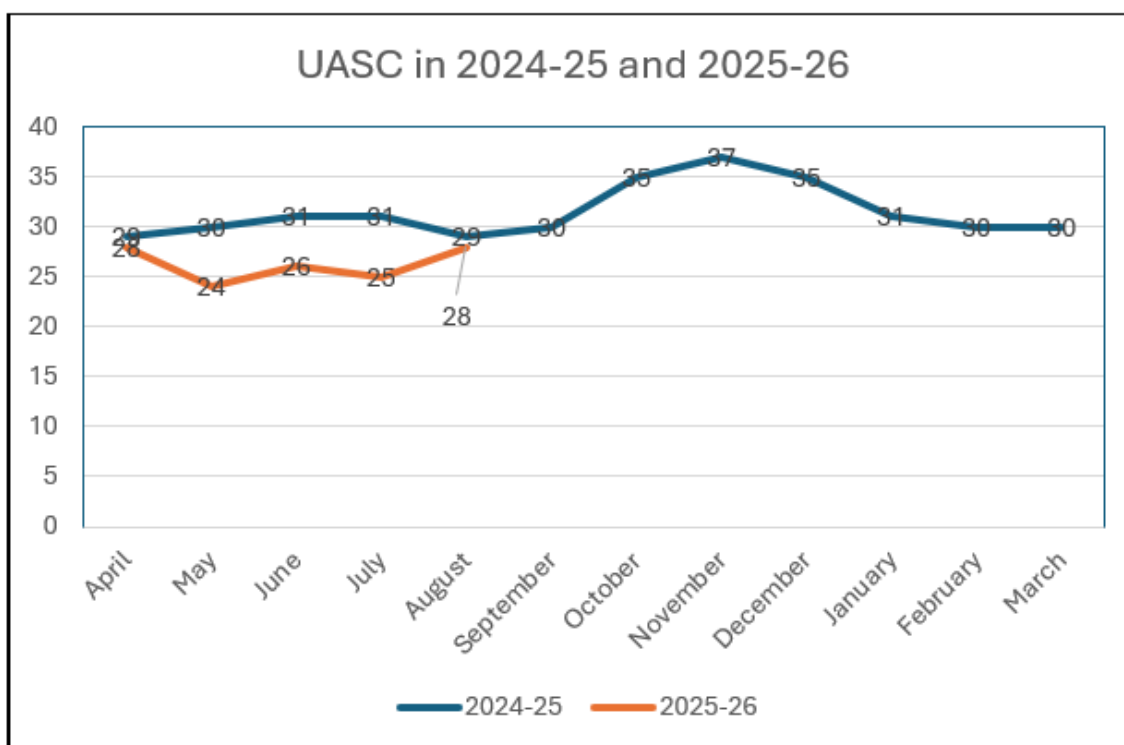
4.3.1 The total number of looked after children as of 30/09/2025 was 291, a decrease of 7 child from 298 on 31 March 2025.

4.3.2 The corporate performance targets for 2024/2025 are as follows:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers as of 30th September 2025 was 20%, an increase of 12 children to 57 children. However, this remains below the annual target of 25%
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend as of 30th September 2025 was 14%, a decrease of 4 children (41) – below the annual target of 20%
- Percentage of looked after children placed with independent fostering agencies as of 30th September 2025 was 30% (87 children), the same number of children as 31/03/25
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements as of 30 September 2025 was 64% (185 children), an increase of 6 children and 3%.
- There were 37 looked after children placed in registered supported accommodation as of 30 September 2025, a reduction of 5 young people from 31 March 2025. 37 children represent 13% of all looked after children placed in registered supported accommodation.

4.3.3 There were 28 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) as of 30 September 2025, a decrease of 2 UASC from 31 March 2025 (30 UASC)

4.3.4 The number of UASC placed in registered supported accommodation as of 30 September 2025 was 11, 4 less UASC as at 31 March 2025, none in residential children's homes, and 17 UASC placed in foster placements. 8 UASC are aged under 16.



4.3.5 10 children were placed with 10 new Kinship Carers who have started fostering since April, 2 of whom have also ceased placements.

4.3.6 As at 30 September 2025 there are 2 children in 2 unregulated placements which have exceeded 24 weeks where the carer has not yet been approved as a connected persons carer. The carers have been presented to the Panel for approval, but the ADM is awaited.

4.3.7 3 children were made subjects to Special Guardianship orders in this reporting period.

4.4 Recruitment and Assessment of new foster carers

Recruitment

4.4.1 During this reporting period, the monthly information evenings were held on Zoom, and the team attended both face-to-face and online recruitment events targeted at communities in various parts of the borough. The recruitment activity continues to have a broad focus, to capture as much interest as possible. Foster with West London (FwWL) offer regular information evenings run by the foster carer ambassadors that potential Brent carers can also utilise.

Any potential enquiries that come to Brent are redirected swiftly via Foster with West London to ensure the regional hub are capturing all potential enquiries. Brent marketing material and information make clear the working relationship

between Brent and FwWL. Brent and FwWL work together to establish as many potential enquiries as far as possible.

Outreach Work:

- 4.4.2 The fostering service has been working hard to raise awareness of fostering across Brent through targeted outreach. As part of this effort, we have visited 5 Brent libraries, 10 schools and 10 GP surgeries to display fostering recruitment posters in key areas and to supply leaflets to families who utilise these services. This helps us to reach families and staff who may be interested in fostering. This work is part of our ongoing strategy to increase enquiries and highlight the vital role foster carers play in supporting children and young people in Brent.
- 4.4.3 Foster Care Fortnight ran from 12 – 25 May 2025, the service had stalls at Brent Civic Centre (public areas) as well as organising a professionals specific event targeting Brent employees in breakout/lunchrooms.



- 4.4.4 The Brent communications service used social media to promote foster care fortnight with organic posts on Facebook, Nextdoor, Whatsapp and Instagram Stories - promoting the Foster Care Fortnight stands at the Brent civic centre. There are 16k followers on Facebook and nearly 8k followers on Instagram.

The Brent communications service also supported promoting the foster care fortnight foster carer celebration event, as well as the Brent staff information stands for staff to attend. On the combined posts there were 651 views, 15 reactions and 4 comments.

Posted in All Company

 **Thomas, Khadisha**
May 13 • @3

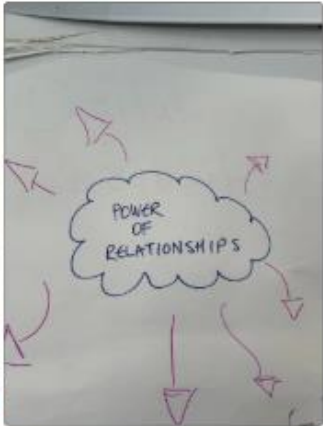
Seen by 368 ...

Foster Care Fortnight Celebration 🎉

Today we hosted a lunch with our amazing foster carers to show our appreciation for their hard work providing loving and safe homes to children and young people in Brent.

In keeping with this years theme of Foster Care Fortnight: the power of relationships, foster carers and care leavers shared stories about the connections that made all the difference on their journey, and interacted with each other over a fun general knowledge quiz.

On 21 May there will be a Fostering stand on the **1st Floor of the Brent Civic Centre**. If you have ever considered fostering pop by to meet with our friendly social workers and foster carers to find out more about fostering.


👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

👍 ❤️ Nessa, Sheikh and 7 others

[Show 2 previous comments](#)

4.4.5 In July 2025 a Brent Fostering advertisement was placed in Police Life Magazine and Metropolitan Life Magazine, promoting the Brent fostering offer and benefits in a magazine that is distributed to and read by public servants. Police Life and Metropolitan Life is a national magazine/newspaper for the Police Service which provides a mixture of news from around the UK combined with features on topics away from the job, for ex professionals in this industry as well as current employees.

Tech boosts Met's fight against violence towards women and girls

The Metropolitan Police Service has unveiled a revolutionary new technology being rolled out across London that makes it easier to photograph and visualise bruising on victims of violence, particularly on darker skins.

A trial of the first of its kind device, known as Project Archway, allows officers to better assess victims' injuries – a game-changing development in the ongoing fight against violence towards women and girls (VAWS).

Previously, officers often faced challenges in capturing visible evidence of bruising, particularly on darker skin tones or during early stages of injury. This could limit evidential strength at the charging stage. Now, with Project Archway, this critical gap is being closed.

The innovative handheld device, developed in-house by the Met, uses a technique called cross-polarisation to dramatically enhance the visibility of injuries, particularly bruises that may not appear clearly to the naked eye.

This is not just about visibility

– it's about viability in court. Clearer images help investigators build stronger files, support CPS charging decisions, and give courts the visual evidence needed to hold perpetrators accountable.

The technology is already improving justice outcomes – of 33 uses during a pilot in south London, 45% have resulted in charges, with several others under investigation.

With this innovation, the Met becomes the only force in the UK to develop and deploy this kind of frontline equipment to strengthen evidence, support victims from the first police contact, and help bring violent perpetrators to justice.

Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley said:

"We have made big strides in protecting women and girls from predatory men – and this

new device is a bold symbol of that transformation.

"Compared to three years ago, our charge rate for offences for violence against women and girls offences has tripled, and we're going after the most dangerous individuals through our V100 programme. Women in London are better protected, and this is reflected in the trust gap between men and women closing.

"These improvements are a credit to our people – to their empathy, determination, and courage as they take on these heartrending cases day after day.

"The Met is leading nationally on innovation that puts victims first. We are the only police service to develop this kind of frontline technology, and we're already seeing how it strengthens evidence, builds trust, and ensures victims feel seen and heard from the moment they report abuse."

Plans to regulate pedicabs in London

Transport for London (TfL) has announced the next steps for regulating pedicabs in London after publishing the results of a consultation held earlier this year, which contained proposals to regulate pedicabs in London for the first time.

Safety

The report says bringing pedicabs into regulation will make them safer, ensuring that they are driven, maintained and operated in a safe and professional manner. The report shows the public's overwhelming support for regulation of the industry, to improve driver and safety standards.

The consultation, which received more than 7,500 responses, set out policy principles and sought views from a wide range of stakeholders. Feedback from the consultation included:

- 75 per cent of people who responded currently feel unsafe when using a pedicab in London;
- 95 per cent of respondents agreed that pedicab drivers

should be required to pass UK criminal background checks, bringing them into line with taxi and private hire vehicle drivers;

- 97 per cent of respondents felt that pedicabs should have appropriate insurance in place to carry passengers;
- 96 per cent of respondents felt that music and other audio from pedicabs should be controlled. More than 2,400 comments in response to the consultation were about music in the vehicles;

- 85 per cent of respondents felt that pedicab fares are too expensive.

The consultation responses are now being used to develop

op detailed policy proposals for pedicabs in London which will be subject to a further consultation later this year.

This further consultation is necessary to ensure that the pedicab industry and Londoners are able to have their say on TfL's specific proposals for regulations, including details on safety regulations and a potential fare structure. This is with a view to regulations coming into force in early 2026.

This ongoing engagement will ensure that any future regulation is fair, proportionate and effective in addressing concerns raised while supporting a safe and professional pedicab industry in London.

Will Norman, London's Warring and Cycling Commissioner, said:

"Pedicabs should be a fun and sustainable way to explore what our city has to offer, but without regulation some drivers are behaving unsafely or anti-socially and charging extortionate prices. The Mayor and I have always been clear that regulation is needed to ensure pedicabs can operate safely in London, and this report shows that Londoners agree. We're looking forward to pressing on with next steps and further consultation, with a view to introducing regulation next year, as we build a fairer and safer London for everyone."

Have you ever considered fostering?

- ✓ Brent foster carers can live anywhere in England
- ✓ Earn up to **£495.00** per child, per week
- ✓ Benefit from extensive learning and training opportunities
- ✓ Receive dedicated support

Find out more

Phone: 0800 001 4041

Email: fostering@brent.gov.uk



4.4.6 In August 2025 a Brent foster carer case study was utilised in an article, alongside the Brent advertisement in the same magazines.

Become a Foster Carer for Brent

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- Receive dedicated support.

Janet's Story

Janet started her fostering journey with Brent Council in 2008, what started as a short-term placement soon developed into a long-term placement.

As a single mother Janet would often host her nieces and nephews so that her son had company and because she enjoyed playing with the children. Her brother who had been approved as a foster carer suggested that she would be a good candidate for fostering which encouraged Janet to start the fostering process with Brent.

Initially Janet's day to day with her foster children was busy, consisting of preparing pack lunches, doing the school run, and attending medical appointments. The routine changed as her foster children grew older. Despite the hard work Janet believes the best thing about

being a foster carer is having the ability to change a child's situation.

"I have been even more blessed that what started as a short-term placement back in 2008 turned into a long-term placement that has been running for over 16 years. They joined our family as toddlers and are now young ladies in their late teens. The girls are fully integrated in my family and are rarely referred to as 'foster girls' within my family" Janet said.

When asked about what advice she would give a prospective carer, Janet said: "if you are patient, understanding and of course open and loving you have the perfect skill set to be-

come a foster carer. There will be challenges as is the way in life but the rewards of seeing a young person flourish and making progress is priceless."

"My experience as a foster carer with Brent has been positive. I have found that both teams have been very supportive and responsive. My current social worker has supported me greatly as I have carried out my role. When there has been challenges in the placement or I have needed help in another way, she has always been just a phone call away and that can also be said for her manager and the various children's social workers that I have worked with over the years."

• To find out more about fostering call 0800 001 4041 or email fostering@brent.gov.uk

£6m Holiday Hope programme for young Londoners

Last month before the summer holidays The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, launched a new £6 million programme to provide holiday activities and opportunities for young people at greatest risk of exploitation and violence.

The Mayor's new Holiday Hope programme provides young people at greatest disadvantage with something to do, something to aspire to, and something to eat.

Key to his ambition of supporting young people is Holiday Hope, which will deliver positive activities over the summer and school holidays to keep children and young people safe, combined with access to skills and routes into training and employment. Every activity funded through the Mayor's £6m Investment will also come with food.

Holiday Hope is a key manifesto commitment that will directly contribute to the Mayor's pledge to provide 250,000 young people with activities and positive opportunities during their term.

Holiday Hope will bring together and strengthens activities delivered across the capital

for young people in the greatest need of support.

It builds on existing and effective delivery of summer holiday activities funded through London's Violence Reduction Unit, the Mayor's Fund for London, The Felix Project and wider City Hall delivery.

Increased funding through the Holiday Hope programme will bring delivery together through investment in more than 100 community organisations, increasing young people's access to youth spaces, activities, opportunities, and food during the challenging holiday period.

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said: "I'm determined to make London the greatest city in the world to grow up in and one where every young person has the support and opportunities that they need to be safe and to thrive."

"The school holidays should be a time to celebrate the best

of our city and build experiences and friendships, but we also know it also is a time when young people are vulnerable to exploitation and violence."

"Our Holiday Hope programme, backed up by £6m investment, will provide the helping hand and support that children and young people need, offering them something to do, something to aspire to and something to eat, as part of my commitment to build a fairer and safer London for everyone."

Lib Peck, Director of London's Violence Reduction Unit, said: "School holidays are both a time of fun and opportunity for young people, but it also represents challenge as we know there is greater risk of violence."

"The Mayor's new Holiday Hope programme seeks to bring together diversionary activities and opportunities to develop important life skills that will provide support for children and young people throughout the crucial summer period."

"We are committed to delivering what young people need to stay safe and to thrive."

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4.4.7 On Sunday 14 Sep 2025 Queen's Park Day was held, the Brent fostering service held a stall and obtained details for 6 potential fostering families whilst also raising awareness of fostering in the borough to local residents and communities.



4.4.8 Brent currently does not have any foster carers who identify as LGBT+ despite the 2021 Census highlighting that 3.2% of Brent's population identify as LGBT+, which is average for England and Wales (although lower for London). The Brent fostering service's next campaign will focus on this community (see leaflets below).



Finding Foster Carers using advanced digital marketing:

4.4.9 To tackle continued recruitment challenges, the service finalised a plan to use CAN digital (Council Advertising Network), an outside agency that specialises in working with local authorities, to trial a 3-month digital campaign to target potential foster carers to make enquiries to Brent, via Foster with West London (FwWL). CAN digital has had success with FwWL and other local authorities and will target Brent information and adverts to those considering fostering. The 3 month campaign will run throughout October, November and December 2025 with frequent review points throughout.

FwWL are aware of the Brent campaign with CAN digital and have reassured the Local Authority they are equipped to process a surge in enquiries expected to result from this campaign. Similarly, the Brent fostering service will undertake more initial visits and fostering assessments. The Local Authority is optimistic that this campaign will result in more enquiries; CAN digital are aware of the

need to target the right individuals to ensure those enquiring are able to progress through the fostering pipeline to approved foster carers.

Finding Foster Carers using other digital approaches:

- 4.4.10 The Brent communications service released a foster carer (JG) case study on YouTube, since this was published in April 2025 there has been 930 impressions (total number of times video thumbnail was shown to viewers) 2.4 click through rate (the amount of times a viewer watched the video after seeing the impression) 68 views of the video in total. The analysis of the interactions with this video informs the service that shorter videos are required next. A plan is in place with Brent's communications service to undertake filming to create shorter video content that can be used on YouTube and other social media platforms.

In June 2025 the same foster carer case study (JG) was placed in Your Brent Magazine (Summer Edition) with a summary of the events that took place in foster care fortnight. Impressions (potential reach): 135,000 homes and community venues in the borough. Brent is home to 329,800 residents of whom 64% are from Black, Asian and other minority groups. Your Brent is promoted across Brent social media channels. There are over 24,000 Twitter (now called 'X') followers.

Since July 2025 a Brent Foster Carer 'Job Advert' has been placed on the Brent Job section web page. Whilst the Brent Fostering pages are up-to-date on the Brent Website, this job advert aims to target individuals who may be looking for work or additional income, to consider fostering. This job advert has been promoted on the National Careers Service Website, Indeed, LinkedIn and on the Department for Work and Pensions website. On Indeed the role had 2456 impressions and 113 clicks. The job role was also promoted in the Autumn Edition of the Your Brent Magazine.

West London Fostering Hub:

- 4.4.11 Alongside our local recruitment efforts, work continues in partnership with the FwWL Hub, a collaborative initiative between several neighbouring boroughs aimed at increasing the visibility and impact of fostering recruitment across the region. Our involvement includes joint planning, shared campaigns, and contribution to regional strategy. The hub has enabled us to pool resources, learn from best practice, and reach a wider audience of prospective foster carers. We have participated in collaborative events, supported the development of shared FwWL marketing assets, and aligned our messaging to ensure consistency and stronger brand recognition across West London. This joint approach is helping to strengthen Brent's fostering presence while ensuring we benefit from collective insight and economies of scale.

FwWL held a 1 year anniversary event on 15 May 2025. This event noted the milestone of pooling resources to enact a coordinated sub regional and local recruitment strategy, which has seen increased interest and profile. The event identified unique London challenges to fostering regarding housing, cost of

living and demographics – which requires pan London and cross governmental approaches.



Also, on 15 May 2025 FwWL, Brent and other Local Authorities met with MP Janet Daby. At the time Ms Daby was the minister for children and families. The ministerial visit was for Ms Daby to review the regional approach to fostering and explore the challenges local authorities face in increasing the number of fostering families.

FwWL are launching an App called 'Care Friends', which has had success in Wales, the app gives points (that can be converted into cash prizes) for every friend/associate in your network who applies to be a foster carer. It works on the principle that current carers know other potential carers and pays current carers to refer their network to Brent. This further incentivises and digitises our existing 'refer a friend' offer in Brent. The points are allocated as below:

- *3 points – downloading the app (funded by FwWL)
- *1 point – sharing a listing (funded by FwWL)
- *2 points – initial enquiry (funded by FwWL)
- *1000 points – approval (from Brent's existing refer a friend scheme)

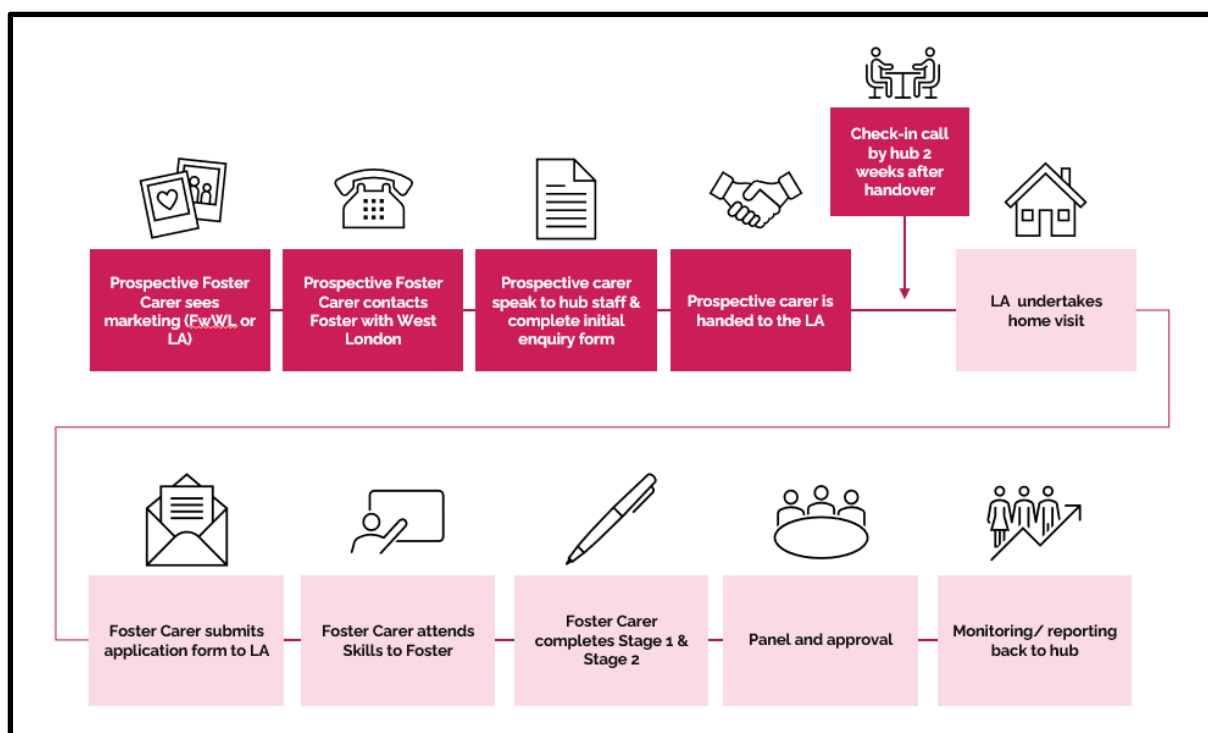
FwWL suggested spreading the £1000 referral bonus to paying referrers at earlier stages, such as paying the referrer 50 points when their referred individual completes their fostering application, 250 points when their referred individual completes their fostering assessment, then in turn reducing the approval points from 1000 to 700. The app was launched on 15 Sep 2025 and will be promoted by FwWL and Brent.

Assessments

- 4.4.12 Following feedback from the previous Committee discussion, a table has been included below depicting the 'fostering journey pipeline' to highlight where potential fostering families left the pipeline during this reporting period. As a reminder, if any prospective carer presents directly to Brent asking to become a carer, the individual is processed via FwWL, to ensure we capture all our enquiries via our FwWL hub.

Contacts made to FwWL specifically for Brent	Enquiries passed to Brent from FwWL (Referrals)	Initial Visits to be undertaken by Brent	Stage 1 of Fostering Assessment	Stage 2 of Fostering Assessment	Approved by Brent Fostering Panel and ADM
269 contacts made to FwWL for Brent this reporting period.	16 Referrals passed to Brent.	6 at IV Stage, the social workers are encouraging the applicant to have a home visit currently	5 currently in Stage 1 (please note 2 of these applicants were carried over from the previous reporting period)	1 currently in Stage 2 (please note this applicant was carried over from the previous reporting period)	0 in this reporting period
		3 IVs completed and the applicant progressed to Stage One.			There have been 0 formal resignation or terminations
		4 withdrew from having an initial visit when offered by Brent			
		2 withdrew after having an initial home visit by Brent			
		1 family was rejected by Brent following the home visit			

This diagram from FwWL depicts a potential carer's journey in the fostering recruitment system.

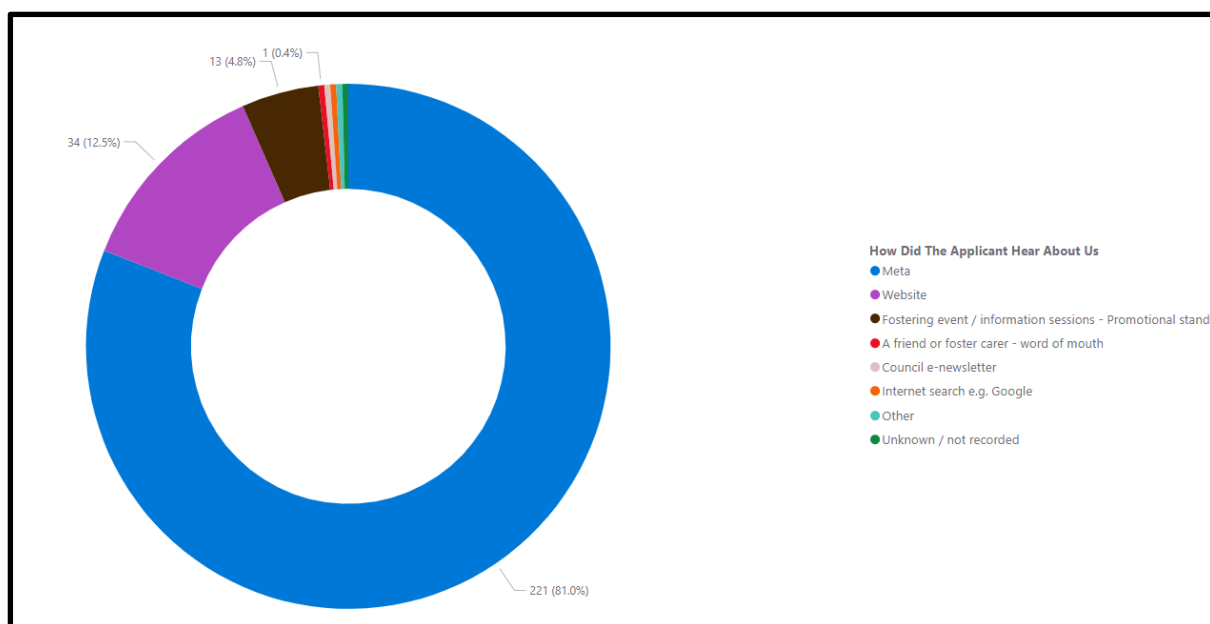


4.4.13 Of the 6 families at the Initial Visit stage outlined above, 1 applicant has asked for more time before scheduling their home visit, 1 is no longer responding to the service. It is common to have applicants put off their initial home visit for some time however the service is supportive and proactive at this stage.

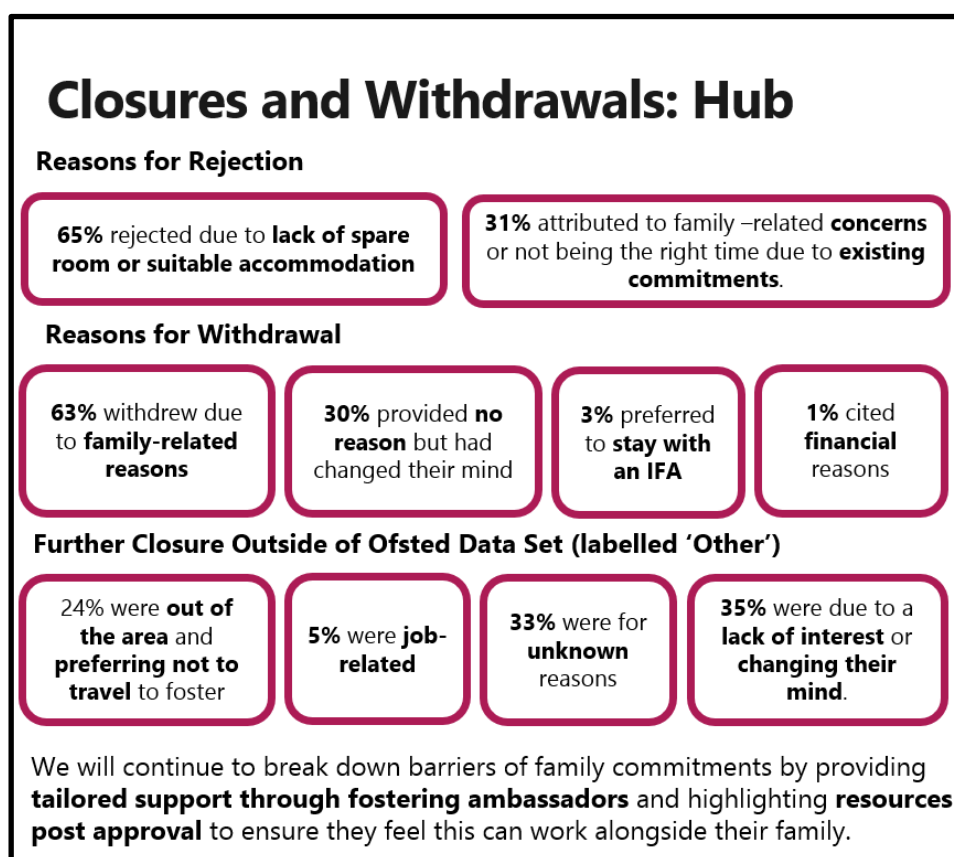
Of the 5 families at the Stage One stage outlined above, 2 have had concerns raised that require further exploration, the remaining 3 are progressing well.

4.4.14 The 1 family at Stage Two outlined above; there have been some delays to this assessment however the assessing social worker has booked her into the Brent Fostering Panel for in late November 2025.

The chart below identifies where the enquiries made to FwWL originated. The feedback from FwWL is that whilst Meta (Facebook and Instagram) provides the highest number of enquiries; the analysis by FwWL has shown that these applicants are usually not ready to start fostering. Whilst there are fewer enquiries made via the websites (and Google searches) these applicants are felt to be more ready to foster and progress further in the fostering pipeline.



4.4.15 Across the FwWL network there is a significant number of potential carers who drop out during the 'enquiry stages', please see below summary from FwWL in relation to this.



FwWL and Brent's fostering service work at the pace of the applicants. Whilst all services are very keen to progress applicants as quickly as possible through

the fostering pipeline the services take a pragmatic approach to ensure applicants feel informed, held and supported throughout their fostering journey. This can mean that applicants look as though they remain at the FwWL enquiries stage and the Brent initial visit stage longer than necessary however this is usually at the request of the applicant.

- 4.4.16 FwWL are piloting their service completing initial visits on behalf of local authorities. Brent have not taken up this offer from FwWL as the number of referrals passed to Brent from FwWL that progress to an Initial Visit are currently low. Not all referrals made to Brent from FwWL result in a home visit at the IV stage as many candidates do withdraw.

The Brent fostering service have capacity to complete all IVs, the Brent social workers have local Brent knowledge and since the service is 'assessment and support' the service is able to reassure potential carers they will remain with their allocated worker from the first home visit all the way through their fostering journey and beyond. The service wants to avoid changes of worker where possible therefore are committed to completing the Brent IVs and assessments within Brent. Should there be a surge of enquiries, the service will ask FwWL to support Brent with IVs to avoid any delay for applicants. When comparing ourselves to our neighbours in West London, Brent had the fewest closures at the 'pre initial home visit stage' compared to the other 7 Local Authorities evidencing that the assessment process is successful at retaining potential carers where possible.

FwWL plan to build a pool of Independent Social Workers (ISWs), to be managed by FwWL, to complete assessments as/when required. As above, Brent do not require this support/service at this stage but will utilise if/when required. IVs and fostering assessments are initiated promptly by Brent. Any delays in fostering assessments reaching completion are often due to delays in references/checks from other organisations or information not being provided by the applicant in a timely way. The service is confident that the fostering assessments are not related to capacity issues in the service.

4.5 Support from Supervising Social Workers (SSW) and the fostering service

- 4.5.1 The retention of foster carers continues to be one of the fostering service's main priorities. The foster carers continue to report positive relationships with their supervising social workers and the feedback received during their annual reviews and attendance at panel has highlighted the importance of the support received from the highly skilled and experienced supervising social workers. The quality of the relationship they have with the social workers has been cited as the main reason for their commitment to Brent and this continues to be the case. The foster carers report being able to contact their supervising social worker when in need and receive appropriate level of support and guidance during difficult periods.

One foster carer provided verbal feedback at the Brent Fostering Panel on 05 September 2025 stating: *"It has been great working with Varghese and Rocio,*

I found the support really helpful. There has been great teamwork between all the social workers and the children have been doing really well".

Another fostering family provided verbal feedback at the Brent Fostering Panel on 16 May 2025 stating: *"Jenine has been our social worker for years, she really is great and we can ask her anything, it has made things so easy for us. Our experience has been great with Brent"*.

- 4.5.2 The fostering team works closely and in partnership with the children's social work teams to ensure that the care plans for children are progressed without delay and the children's needs are met whilst receiving the best care. The supervising social workers (and team managers when needed) attend placement planning and permanency planning meetings, looked after children's reviews and all other relevant statutory and non-statutory meetings, supporting their foster carers to build positive relationships with the 'team around the child'.
- 4.5.3 Placement stability is an important factor in offering an effective fostering service and is crucial to ensuring that Brent delivers good outcomes for each child in care. Over recent years, there has been considerable focus on supporting foster carers to maintain placements. It remains a necessary and priority task to ensure that foster carers and their families feel supported in their valuable role therefore supervising social workers work to support carers to carry out their role successfully. Supervising social workers source external support promptly when required also.
- 4.5.4 In addition to the support the carers received from social workers, the foster carers attend monthly support groups organised and facilitated by the fostering service. This is an informal and relaxed event where foster carers new and more established are able to meet and get to know each other. This works well to provide support to newly approved carers. The monthly foster carers' support group continues to be facilitated virtually as this remains the foster carers' preferred option. Minutes of these meetings are taken and shared with the carers. With permission from attendees, guests attend this group at times to meet with the carers, including the Service Manager and Training Co-ordinator. In August 2025 Ofsted released an update to their inspecting local authority children's services (ILACS) framework; the update *'Added the head of the foster carer forum to the list of people the social care regulatory inspector will speak to when evaluating the effectiveness of the recruitment, assessment, training and support for foster carers'*. Brent's foster carer forum does not currently have an assigned head therefore the service have asked the foster carers for nominations; a lead foster carer will be selected by 10 October 2025. The service manager and/or Head of Service will meet quarterly with the support group forum head/lead carer to continue to develop the service utilising the feedback from the foster carers.
- 4.5.5 As part of the commitment to engaging with foster carers and improving the service, we have continued with Foster Care Reference Group feedback sessions previously rebranded previously as "Coffee with Kelli." These informal gatherings provide foster carers with a valuable opportunity to discuss their experiences, share feedback, and offer recommendations directly with the

Head of Service. 1 session was held during this reporting period, in July 2025. Topics raised by the foster carers in this session included: Parking at the Civic Centre for bringing /picking up children for Family Time (Contact), currently foster carers need to pay for this

- Identifying the supervisor when bringing children to Family Time at the Civic Centre, as there have been changes of staff in the contact service
- Brent's Mockingbird Programme, the support has been appreciated
- Updates on Freeman Family Centre, the family centre is currently being refurbished
- Communication when children are being placed with foster carers and the need for Discharge Planning Meetings when children are placed directly from hospital, to ensure all information is provided to foster carers
- Foster Carer recruitment, all foster carers were encouraged to refer friends, family, neighbours, acquaintances to Brent (via FWWL) to increase our pool of foster carers

4.5.6 The fostering service with the support of the Brent Communication team keep foster carers engaged and informed by providing a monthly newsletter and the carers also receive a quarterly letter directly from the Head of Service.

4.5.7 Brent Foster Carer's Summer Trip to Southend-On-Sea: The Brent foster carers were asked where they wanted to go for their summer trip; Southend-On-Sea in Essex was the winner from the vote. 2 small coaches were organised to take Brent foster carers and their families on 02 Aug 2025. 80 people attend including foster carers, their children, their family members and friends who support them in fostering. This was very well received by the Brent foster carers; feedback included:

"It was a fantastic day out, we had lots of fun and a lovely time – music, food and drinks, basked in the sun, games, rides on the theme park, played in the seawater, made new friends, lots of young people who were well behaved, we enjoyed and had a lovely time".

"I just want to thank you and all of the fostering team for organising this lovely day out to the beach. We really had a wonderful time. We all enjoyed ourselves. Again, many thanks".

A post in relation to the summer trip was included in the monthly foster carer newsletter.



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4.5.8 Tickets for Foster Carers and Children in their Care: The fostering service ask for support from other departments (and partner organisations) to ensure foster carers and their families are celebrated as key members of Brent's community. In this reporting period our foster carers have enjoyed free tickets to football matches at Wembley stadium. The carers fed back that they feel the offer of free tickets to these events make them feel special, valued and appreciated.

Brent Summer Fun Day: Brent Fostering Families were invited to attend the Children's Social Care Summer Fun Day on 01 Aug 2025 at Unity Centre, Willesden. This fun day was organised by the Brent participation service. The children thoroughly enjoyed all the activities including basketball, bouncy castles, board games, colouring and football. Children, their fostering families and Brent staff all sat down for a catered lunch sharing stories and catching up. Then the day ended with dancing and music as seen in the photo below! Brent foster carers enjoyed the day and expressed feeling lucky to spend time as a community with staff and other fostering families.



4.6 The Kinship Care Team

- 4.6.1 The Kinship Care team undertakes both planned and emergency assessments of prospective family members and friends who come forward as alternative carers when it is not possible for a child to remain in the care of their parents. The team provides placement support to the connected persons carers and training during the assessment period.
- 4.6.2 In this reporting period the Kinship Care team received 44 referrals for viability assessments of a relative, friend and people connected to the child. Kinship referrals do fluctuate month to month and are demand led.
- 4.6.3 In this reporting period, following 21 positive viability assessments, 14 Connected Persons assessments were allocated to social workers. 1 of these assessments did not progress as the family made the decision that they did not wish to be assessed at this time. Of the positive viability assessments, 7 were not progressed to a Connected Persons assessment as the children remained in their birth parents' care and an alternate living arrangement was no longer needed.
- 4.6.4 7 children were placed in 7 new Regulation 24 (often referred to as Reg 24) Connected Persons arrangements between April 2025 to September 2025. 1 child was placed in a respite arrangement with a Connected Person for one week while their foster carer travelled on a holiday.
- 4.6.5 Children who remain in kinship placements beyond 24 weeks, where the carer has not been approved as a Connected Persons carer (following presentation and recommended for approval at the Brent Fostering Panel) are considered to be in 'unregulated placements' because the temporary approval under regulation 24 and regulation 25 has expired. As at the end of August 2025, there was 1 child in 1 unregulated placement. Most often the reasons for delays in presenting carers to the Brent Fostering Panel are primarily in relation to delayed information being shared by the carer, delayed DBS and medical checks or lack of clarity with the care plan for the child.

When any living arrangement for a Brent Looked After Child becomes unregulated a risk assessment is completed for the unregulated placement which is signed by a Head of Service. There continues to be close monitoring of this unregulated placement through more frequent visits being undertaken by the child's social worker and the supervising social worker, until the arrangement is regulated again - by the carers assessment being presented at the Brent Fostering Panel and the approval being ratified by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for the Fostering Service.

- 4.6.6 3 Connected Persons foster carers were presented to the Brent Fostering Panel for approval as carers between April 2025 and August 2025.

4.6.7 6 children were made subject to Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) in this reporting period. 1 of these was a private application while 5 children had been subject to public care proceedings.

4.6.8 Brent's Kinship Local Offer, which will replace the Kinship Policy in Brent, has been completed and is in its final sign-off stage. The last step, prior to publication, is to review the final draft with kinship carers during Kinship Care week which is taking place from the 6-10 October. The Kinship Local Offer will be published in early November 2025. The process of developing our new Kinship Local Offer has taken longer than originally anticipated, however it has been essential, in line with the intention of this offer, to engage with kinship carers directly, as well as wider services and partners in the development of the offer. As a reminder, an in-person consultation morning was held with the Brent Kinship Carers on 26th February 2025 to obtain their views on what they would like to see included in the Local Offer. A virtual consultation morning was held with the Brent Kinship Carers on 24 March 2025 to obtain the views of carers who were unable to attend in person.

A new support group was started by the Kinship Care team for Brent Kinship Carers, with the first session taking place on 23rd July 2025, this was in response to the feedback received from Brent Kinship Carers when exploring what support they feel would be of benefit to them. The Brent Kinship Carers expressed a need to have a local in-person support group in order to support each other. Whilst initial attendance at this group was low it will continue to be promoted.

Kinship Care Week runs from 06 to 12 October 2025; it is a national week of awareness, recognition, and celebration of kinship families across England and Wales. In Brent the Kinship Care Team will hold an afternoon tea celebration for Kinship Carers and their families. Awareness raising events of Kinship Care will also take place to spread awareness within the Local Authority, partner agencies and local communities. The service will utilise Kinship Care Week to raise awareness for the upcoming Brent Kinship Local Offer publication, to ensure families and professionals are aware of the support available to Kinship Carers.

4.7 Fostering Panel

4.7.1 The Brent Fostering Panel is constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The service maintains a diverse and highly experienced central list of panel members that includes an elected member. The previous independent fostering panel chair retired from chairing Brent's fostering panels in February 2025 after 11 years of service. Recruitment for a replacement independent chair took place in March 2025; it was hoped the new chair would be in post by May 2025 however due to delays with references she did not start until September 2025. In the interim the vice chair of Brent's Fostering Panel continued to chair the panels ensuring there was no disruption to service in the interim period.

- 4.7.2 Despite the previous chair retiring no other fostering panel members have resigned from our central list. Most of the independent panel members have personal experience of the fostering system, including one independent panel member who was brought up in a kinship arrangement and three panel members who are care experienced. The work of the Fostering Panel is supported by the Panel Adviser.

Whilst our fostering panel central list is compliant with the regulations and already diverse the Brent Fostering Service want to continue to improve and develop the service. Now the new independent fostering panel chair is in post the service will look to increase the fostering panel member central list with more social work representatives and health representatives. The annual training day for fostering panel members will be combined with an induction for new fostering panel members; this is booked to take place in-person on 14 Nov 2025 at Brent Civic Centre.

- 4.7.3 Fostering Panels are generally held three times every two months and extra panels are arranged if there is an increase in demand. Most panels take place virtually; and face to face when the number of cases presented is high or if the nature of the circumstances would benefit from a face-to-face panel.

- 4.7.4 The functions of the fostering panel are to consider:

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

- 4.7.5 During this period April 2025 to September: 6 panels were held with 25 cases presented, of which:

- 5 carers were recommended for approval as short-term connected persons (kinship carers)
- 0 carers were recommended for approval as short-term carer
- 7 carers were re-approved as part of their 3 yearly annual review
- 1 carer was re-approved as part of their first annual review
- 6 connected person carers had their fostering approval/status terminated/resigned (due to the child no longer being looked after)
- 1 carer was terminated at stage 2 of assessment
- 3 carers were presented for change of approval, to long-term carers
- 1 carer was re-approved as a long-term carer
- 1 fostering family were long-term matched to the children in their care

- 4.7.6 All the recommendations made by the panel were ratified by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

- 4.7.7 The Head of Service for Looked after Children and Permanency acts as the ADM for the Fostering Service. The ADM, upon reviewing the recommendation

of the Fostering Panel, decides whether applicants should be approved as foster carers or not. The ADM also has the responsibility of determining the continued suitability of foster carers following completion of annual reviews of foster carers and recommendation from the Fostering Panel. The ADM meets with the Panel Chair several times a year and observes the independent chair at the fostering panel at least once a year. The ADM will observe the chair in panel in the next reporting period once the new chair has settled into their role.

4.8 Training and Support for Foster Carers

- 4.8.1 The Brent CYPCD Learning Academy, part of the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service, provides training for carers, including foster carers and connected persons. Training is available in-person, virtually, and through E-Learning. E-Learning can be accessed by foster carers whenever they wish. Virtual and in-person sessions take place on weekdays and Saturdays for flexibility.
- 4.8.2 During the reporting period, carers participated in nine learning sessions. These included five workshops exclusively for carers, one multi-agency session delivered through the Brent Safeguarding Partnership, and two workshops conducted jointly with broader CYP Practitioners. The carer-only workshops covered Paediatric First Aid for Foster Carers, Managing Behaviours and De-escalation Techniques, Safer Caring, Decriminalising Young People and Oral Health Awareness for Foster Carers.
- 4.8.3 Most sessions continue online, reflecting carers' feedback gathered during periodic consultations by Brent CYPCD Learning Academy in carer support group meetings, and Fostering and Kinship Team meetings with supervising social workers.
- 4.8.4 Attendance at facilitated learning sessions remains low, matching national trends. The Fostering Panel monitors and follows up on training compliance, while the CYPCD Learning Academy sends reminders. Sessions with fewer than five pre-booked carers for external commissioned training had to be rescheduled to improve participation. Attendance improved somewhat after online links were sent to all carers, and targeted outreach emails addressed mandatory training renewals.
- 4.8.5 The service track attendance and collect feedback after each session to support improvement. Post-session feedback shows participants are satisfied with session relevance, content quality, and trainer expertise.
- 4.8.6 Participant feedback:
For "Supporting the Learning and Achievement of Children in Care" in response to the evaluation question: "What is the most significant piece of learning you have taken away from the session?"
"That children in care massively under achieve compared to those who are not"
"Be non-judgemental but look at the bigger picture"

“Understanding the development of our children in early year stages of their development.”

In response to evaluation question *“From what you learned, what do you plan to apply to your role as a carer?”*

“Try and give more educational support to looked after child. Show more interest in their homework. Work closer with the school.”

“To make sure our children stay in school and get the education they need from an early age.”

- 4.8.7 In addition to facilitated learning, Brent CYPCD Learning Academy provided carers with the option to access E-Learning courses at any time. Since April 2025, 35 carers have completed 119 courses in a range of subjects. During the August summer holiday, E-Learning courses are available as facilitated sessions are not offered. From middle July 2025 to 2nd September, there were 221 logins from 13 carers, resulting in the completion of 34 courses on the platform. The platform has enabled carers to prepare for new placements and address emerging needs, with an increase in participation from those who had not previously used e-learning.
- 4.8.8 There are some exciting developments planned for the next reporting period to streamline the training offer to carers. The service are collaborating with the wider Brent Council Learning and Development Team to make our current Learning Hub Learning Management System available to foster carers for self-service training enrolment. This change is expected by the end of 2025.
- 4.8.9 The Brent Fostering Learning and Development Brochure April 2025 to March 2026 offers a wide range of training for foster carers, including some local support such as an overview of Brent Family Wellbeing Centre support for children and carers, and digital skills resources at the Brent Digital Skills Hub.
- 4.8.10 Training was also provided through utilising partner agencies and internal staff, including Brent Safeguarding Partnership, Brook, and Brent WEST, to offer carers a wide range of support and development opportunities. In September 2025, Brent CYPCD Learning Academy, with support from supervising social workers, will promote five facilitated courses for carers: (1) Sleep Routines for Young Children, (2) Sexual Health in the Community, (3) Child Development & Attachment, (4) Advanced Safeguarding Level 3, and (5) Roles & Responsibilities of Foster Carers.
- 4.8.11 In addition to this formal training offer for foster carers, outlined above, Brent also commission Brent Children-In-Care Resilience Service (CRS). This service offers drop in training to foster carers; in this reporting period an estimate of 240hours of training has been offered to foster carers. The focus of this training is to support the emotional wellbeing and family functioning of fostering families, with a focus on preventing placement breakdown and support families to live happy, healthy lives.
- 4.8.12 In June 2025 Brent launched its first Mockingbird Constellation, further information is outlined later in this report. It is important to note that an

expectation of the fostering families in the Mockingbird Constellation is for the entire constellation to attend an informal training session per month to learn and reflect together. This is another training source Brent Foster Carers access. The CRS service attended the Mockingbird Coffee morning to deliver training to the families in the Mockingbird community, tailored specifically to their needs.

- 4.8.13 Overall, the fostering training and development offer for this reporting period was successful in enhancing the skills and knowledge of foster carers. The upcoming offer for 2025-2026 aims to continue this trend, providing a comprehensive range of training sessions to support foster carers in their roles. The upcoming offer will continue to provide a mix of online, in-person, weekday, evening, and weekend (Saturday) sessions, with a focus on mandatory trainings.
- 4.8.14 The Practice Development Lead in the Brent CYPD Learning Academy occasionally attends the foster carer support groups to ask carers directly for their views and feedback on training, to ensure training is targeted at their preferences and any barriers to training are removed where possible. The majority of carers have stated they prefer virtual training as this is more convenient for them.
- 4.8.15 For Foster Care Fortnight in May 2025 the fostering service completed a short training on ICT upskilling, where foster carers were asked to complete an 'ICT Skills Quiz' to focus on filling the gaps in their computer and online skills. As the needs of our children continue to evolve and our ways of working continue to develop the service wanted to ensure foster carers are supported during these changing times.

4.9 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints

- 4.9.1 During the reporting period, there were no formal allegations or complaints made against Brent foster carers by children, families or professionals. The Brent fostering service holds Brent foster carers to a high standard ensuring our children receive the best care and support; concerns for Brent fostering families were identified by the service and during this reporting period and 3 serious concerns investigations have been undertaken in response to these concerns. These will be presented at upcoming Brent fostering panels for formal review.
- 4.9.2 The Fostering and Kinship Teams received numerous positive comments from foster carers during assessments, annual reviews and from other colleagues and professionals. The practitioners' achievements and good practice continued to be acknowledged and celebrated at the bi-monthly LAC and Permanency Forums. Additionally, the Fostering Panel provides feedback to practitioners on the quality of the reports and their presentation at panel.
- 4.9.3 All the foster carer annual reviews that were due in this reporting period have been completed. There have been **35** annual reviews completed in this reporting period.

- 4.9.4 Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) for fostering conduct all the annual reviews of foster carers, ensuring impartiality and providing a safeguarding mechanism for both the child and the carer. The Fostering Independent Reviewing Officers also complete Serious Concerns and Standards of Care Review meetings, where concerns have been identified regarding carers. This allows a level of independence from the Fostering Service, and the officer will then take these to Fostering Panel where appropriate for fuller discussion and recommendations on continued approval.

Service Development

5.0 Kinship Care

- 5.1 As outlined above, Kinship Care Week 2025 will be held from 06 to 12 October 2025. Any feedback received from kinship carers during this week will be implemented into service development.

As outlined to the committee on 03 February 2025, the service has developed and designed Brent's Kinship Local Offer in consultation with kinship carers in response to government guidance released in 2023 and 2024. Once Brent's new Kinship Local Offer is published in early November 2025, a 'user friendly' short version will be created alongside this and used in promotional materials to support Kinship Carers to be fully aware of the support available to them in Brent. The Kinship Care Team also plan to deliver workshops to partner agencies and schools to raise awareness of what Kinship Carers do and Brent's Kinship Local Offer; this is in response to Kinship Carers informing the service that they are frustrated when some professionals are not aware of the role of a Kinship Carer.

6.0 Enhanced Support and Resources for Brent Carers

- 6.1 The Fostering Service continues to remain committed to supporting carers and maximising the chances of placement stability/success by providing practical, financial and therapeutic input. Foster Carers and the children in their care are supported to access help from Brent WEST or CRS (Children-In-Care Resilience Service) when they are struggling, feeling vulnerable or need to debrief after a difficult incident. Brent Fostering Service are embedding a culture of children, Foster Carers and professionals reflecting on themselves and accepting help – in order to reduce carers feeling isolated and alone when undertaking care of children.
- 6.2 CRS Brent has had a total of 44 active referrals since Jan 2024, an increase of 9 referrals since the last reporting period. It is positive referrals for CRS have increased, believed to be due to CRS visiting team meetings and spreading awareness of the service. Brent CRS has worked with 18 children intensively and offered consultations to 13 families. The remaining 3 have been given brief advice and signposted to other services.

As outlined earlier in this report, CRS Brent offer drop-in trainings which foster carers are encouraged to attend. These sessions can be adjusted according to the needs and wishes of the foster carers attending.

7.0 Recruitment and retention

- 7.1 Recruitment and retention remains the key priority for the fostering service, and this reporting period has seen significant activity and efforts to improve both the recruitment of new foster carers and the retention of the carers the service has.
- 7.2 The service continues to compare the Brent fostering offer to other Local Authorities and IFAs, to ensure it is competitive. The service uses details of the Brent fostering offer on promotional marketing materials consistently. In this reporting period 1 potential new carer made clear they are going to pursue fostering with an IFA due to a better financial offer, despite this feedback it is the assessment of the service that the service is not losing significant number of potential carers to other Local Authorities, but Brent is facing challenges like most London Local Authorities that are preventing families from fostering. In summary these challenges include the national housing crisis impacting the number of spare rooms available for potential carers, the housing crisis impacting older adult children from moving out of the family home, the current cost of living concerns resulting in potential carers needing to work full-time and not being available for fostering, families retiring later and not being available to foster.

Brent's First Mockingbird Constellation

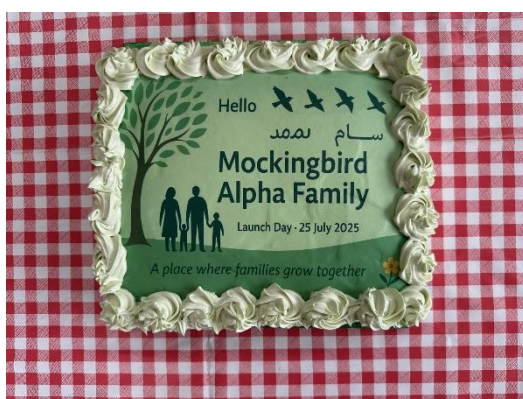
- 7.3 The Fostering Service launched Brent's first Mockingbird constellation in May 2025. The Mockingbird programme is an innovative method of delivering foster care using an extended family model where mockingbird hub carers are specially trained to offer sleepovers, peer support, emergency support, joint planning and social activities to fostering homes. Mockingbird supports children and foster carers by creating extended communities of support around the children and fostering families in the constellation. Mockingbird Home Hub carers are supported by a Mockingbird Liaison Officer to deliver support to other foster carers in the constellation. The overarching aim of the Mockingbird model of fostering is to support foster carer retention and placement stability.

Mockingbird has proven to be successful in over 100 Local Authorities. As of Feb 2025, 220 constellations were in place in England, Scotland and Wales. The Brent Mockingbird Liaison Officer and Service Manager attended a South London Local Authority to learn best practice around implementing Mockingbird successfully as the South London Local Authority have 6 constellations in place with no additional funding from the Department of Education.

The Brent fostering service recruited Home Hub carers in November 2024 after an extensive awareness and recruitment campaign. The Home Hub carers are experienced Brent Foster Carers. In March 2025 the couple were presented at Brent's Fostering Panel for a change of circumstances to become Mockingbird Home Hub carers. The Home Hub carers and the Brent Mockingbird Liaison

Officer received Mockingbird training from The Fostering Network in May 2025 allowing us to go live with our constellation shortly after.

The Fostering Network advised the constellation should be as varied as possible. Brent's first constellation therefore consists of Kinship Foster Carers, Carers with a preference to care for babies as well as Carers with a preference to care for older children. The constellation has named themselves the 'Alpha Family' and had their first celebration social event in July 2025.



- 7.4 A celebration event of Brent Mockingbird is scheduled for 21 Oct 2025 12.15pm to 2.30pm at Brent Civic Centre. All Committee members are invited to attend. The service will use photos and videos from this event as marketing materials to encourage potential carers to apply as foster carers to be part of our Brent family/community as other Local Authorities have informed that new carers have only agreed to come to their Local Authority if they are guaranteed to be in Mockingbird.

Informal feedback from the families in the constellation is very positive. One of the 'baby carers' has utilised the respite/sleepovers and has found the support invaluable in order to allow her to continue fostering. The service has had one expression of interest from another Brent foster carer wanting to be considered as Mockingbird Hub Carers for the next Brent constellation.

7.5 **Service Priorities for 2025-2026:**

The service priorities for the next period remain the same as outlined earlier in this report. The service priorities will be reviewed again in the next reporting period.

8.0 **Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement**

- 8.1 Stakeholder consultation and engagement takes many varied methods within the service, and we are committed to evaluating and developing new and creative ways of hearing from stakeholders.
- 8.2 Carers views are sought through one-to-one discussions with their SSW, Annual Foster Carer Reviews, Support Groups and Foster Carer Reference Groups. Carers are encouraged to provide written feedback on their experiences of assessment and panel process.

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

9.0 Financial Considerations

- 9.1 There are no immediate financial implications associated with this report. The current budget allocation for the Fostering Support and Kinship teams in Brent is £1.2m, with a projected underspend of £0.1m for this financial year. In addition, a £0.4m contribution is being made to the Adopt London West Partnership in collaboration with neighbouring boroughs.

10.0 Legal Considerations

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

11.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

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

12.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 12.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

13.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

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

14.0 Communication Considerations

- 14.1 As detailed at section 4.6.8 Brent's new Kinship Local Offer publication will be complemented by effective awareness raising to ensure officers, professionals and families are aware of the support available for kinship carers and how this support can be accessed.

As detailed at section 4.4.2 Brent's fostering service continue to raise awareness around the important role the Brent foster carers undertake as well as the need for more foster carers for Brent children. The fostering service utilise several communication channels to raise awareness and promote Brent's fostering offer.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children, Young People and
Community Development

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