



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE Monday 2 February 2026 at 5.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Grahl (Chair), Kennelly and Dixon

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 Councillors Hirani and L. Smith, and Palvinder Kudhail (Director of Early Help and Social Care, Brent Council).

3. **Declarations of interests**

None.

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the last meeting, held on 13 October 2025, be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

5. **Matters arising (if any)**

Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) provided an update in relation to the request for discounted driving lessons. Officers had contacted other local authorities to ask about their offer, and had identified that local authorities who did fund or subsidise driving lessons had strict criteria for how, why and when that assistance would be provided. Barnet's offer had been reviewed, who partnered with a charity, and there may be an option for Brent to partner with a charity who may be able to apply for grant funding. Officers were now putting together a proposal for the local offer to set out how, when and why care leavers would be supported financially to undertake driving lessons. Once that detail was fully understood the offer would be brought back to the Committee.

In relation to the vaccination rates for HPV for looked after children and care leavers, Kelli Eboji had met with Public Health and Vaccination UK, and been advised that they were not currently in the HPV promotion cycle and were focused on MMR for the current term. The following term would be focused on HPV, so officers were working with Public Health around communications on that. The meeting had been positive with officers feeding back some of the barriers young people faced. A detailed communications plan would be developed and disseminated through Brent channels including Whatsapp, social media, newsletters, the Brent magazine and the website. In person and online sessions would also take place in Brent schools to inform parents and carers about the vaccinations programme.

In relation to training for social workers on casework recording, Nicole Levy (Quality Assurance and Learning Manager, Brent Council) was including this in the training for all practitioners which would be launched in the next few months.

Debbie Gabriel (Adopt London West) had confirmed that she was talking to the web team about marketing and communications on the Adopt London West website to analyse the data and how it was being used.

In relation to the action for the Committee to receive the link for the public consultation on the adoption support fund, members were advised that the consultation had not yet been launched, and so this would be circulated when the consultation went live, likely in March 2026.

6. 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.

SA outlined the budget and merchandise proposals the rebranded Care Leavers Group – Empire Care Leavers – were requesting from the Council. She reminded members of the budget request, and provided several options for merchandise dependent on the budget the Council could allocate to this branding project. She explained that the branding project would help young people feel a sense of belonging and part of a group, and she presented the recreated logo which would be printed on the merchandise. The group had agreed that they would visit semi-independent providers to spread the word about Empire Care Leavers and offer them a package that included the branded merchandise to make them feel a part of the group. She hoped to have ordered the merchandise for the packages by February 2026.

N updated the Committee on the meeting Empire Care Leavers had with Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development, Brent Council) the previous month, where they had discussed opportunities for a dedicated care leavers space. Three options had been proposed and the group were waiting to get keys for a viewing for two of them. She noted that the Curve, which was currently available as a space for young people, was felt not to be appropriate as it was unwelcoming and not private, with staff members moving young people along from there as they did not know the space was for them. The main ask was for the space to be somewhere care leavers could have some form of permanency, and one of the spaces had outside space and a kitchen which had been positive.

K informed the Committee of the recruitment drive Empire were planning, with a target to visit 5 residentials and 5 semi-independent homes to do fun activities, such as cooking sessions, to build rapport with care leavers and encourage them to join the Empire. She had also delivered a presentation with other care leavers at the Children and Young People and Community Development All Staff Conference, speaking about the launch of their business and the importance of leadership in front of over 200 people. Staff present had praised their presentation. She also informed members of the leadership programme that was being developed, where care leavers would train young people to become leaders, which would help to upskills both care leavers through delivering training and those joining Empire.

S informed the Committee of her upcoming Trusted Buddies project, which aimed to provide a mentoring-style programme where 18-25 year olds buddied with a care experienced young person aged 11-18 years old and did activities together so that they developed a trusted relationship with each other. Surveys had gone out to garner interest amongst 18-25 year olds and they would then move on to the pitching stage. N added that

having a dedicated space would be useful for the Trusted Buddies project because it was a space where multiple care leavers and looked after children could come together to do activities, such as cooking, working together to support looked after children.

The Chair congratulated Brent Care Journeys on the productive term, and was pleased to hear they were undertaking active recruitment to get people involved, which they hoped would make a difference. She added that the recent Ofsted focused visit had commented that Looked After Children felt they had participation in what the Council delivered, which she attributed to the work of Brent Care Journeys.

The Committee endorsed the asks in terms of merchandise and branding, emphasising this would encourage a feeling of pride in a community of future leaders. They were also pleased that the group was thinking about succession planning and progression for young people.

Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) added that young people had also contributed to the Looked After Children and Care Leaver Strategy, developing a foreword for that document.

Noting that the next local borough elections would be taking place in May 2026, it was suggested that children and young people presented these asks at a member induction session post-election.

As no further issues were raised, the Chair thanked BCJ 2.0 for their updates and closed the item.

7. Ofsted Focused Visit Report

Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report, which updated the Committee on the outcome of the recent focused visit from Ofsted which took place in November 2025. The inspection had a specific focus on the experiences of Looked After Children and Care Leavers. In presenting the report, she highlighted the following key points:

- Section 4 of the report outlined the background of the Ofsted inspection framework, and 4.7 summarised the key findings of the visit. The report also provided a link to the letter received from Ofsted following their visit.
- The inspectors noted that, since the last ILACS inspection in 2023, children in care continued to benefit from effective services led by an experienced, stable senior team, with strong political and corporate support. They also noted the progress leaders had made in overcoming previous recruitment challenges and strengthening workforce stability and retention.
- In terms of strengths identified by Ofsted, they found that children enjoyed supported stable relationships with their social workers and were happy with the care and support they received. Children were supported to live with their extended families where possible, or were supported to maintain those relationships if that was not possible, and the matching process worked well. Children with disabilities in care also received good support from their social worker.
- In terms of areas for improvement identified by Ofsted, they found two areas to work on; consistency in response to children who go missing from care, including return home interviews and following up on children who go missing; and life story work for children in long term placements.

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

The Committee heard from Brent Care Journeys about their life story work, with SA commenting that she had done life story work with her previous social worker who helped her make an art book about her life and the people in it in an age appropriate way. She agreed it was meaningful for young people to have an understanding of why they were where they were. Kelli Eboji was pleased to hear she had meaningful engagement with her life story, but noted that it was the consistency of children in care receiving that support with their social worker and foster carers that needed to be improved. She noted the comments about needing to be age appropriate, mindful and sensitive, and undertake that life story work at an appropriate moment, but added that social workers should be having regular check-ins with children in care so that the young person had ongoing opportunities to ask those questions and explore those themes in an organic way. In order to improve this work, the service had introduced regular case summaries on files to take place every three months, where the social worker would summarise the previous 3 months with the young person and look forward to the next 3 months outlining what they hoped to achieve with the young person, with the aim of delivering a continuous narrative for the young person of their journey through care. The service was providing life story guidance for social workers which would be launched in March 2026, and was introducing an online platform for hosting life stories which young people could directly contribute to with their foster carers, and their birth families where appropriate. The platform would allow uploads of photos, journal entries and other media. The service was also looking at how foster carers could be better supported to progress life story work.

Committee members highlighted that life story work was something that social workers had been doing for a long time so asked why it was an area for improvement. Kelli Eboji explained that most children would have some form of direct life story work, and whilst that would not look the same for each child, there were a few standard areas that could be required to improve the consistency of life story work across all children in care. The comments received by Ofsted about the direct work were very positive, but there was improvement to be done around creating the narrative with young people.

The Committee asked whether the Council and its providers was signed up to the Philomina Protocol in relation to children going missing from care. Kelli Eboji confirmed that there was sign-up to the protocol, but where there had been staff turnover there was a need to ensure teams were refreshing newer staff members on the principles of that, and there were some providers not up to speed with the protocol. She explained that it had been designed by the police, with partners, to ensure the families and providers that children were placed with were proactively trying to find children missing from placement and working with the police, ensuring all relevant information was up to date and ready to go in 'grab bags' for the police to take if the young person did go missing. Placement providers were asked to visit places they thought the young person might be and contact relevant individuals before reporting a child missing, in order to reduce the young person's contact with the police as part of the agenda to reduce the criminalisation of children in care and care leavers. In response to how the service was looking to ensure providers were up to standard with the protocol, Kelli Eboji confirmed that a provider and partner forum had been held on the protocol the previous month. There was more work to be done in reaching providers and ensuring they had all the consistent information. Michelle Gwyther (Head of Forward Planning, Performance and Partnerships, Brent Council), whose team searched for and commissioned placements and held provider forums, hoped to provide train the trainer sessions on this and use market provider engagement events to cascade information around Philomina Protocol. There were 6 Care Quality Ambassadors who could also ask those questions of semi-independent providers and check that they had 'grab bags' ready. There were also issues around management oversight and actions to mitigate children going missing which were not always clear in the children's records, and

Kelli Eboji confirmed that there was some development work around supervision and management oversight which was due to be disseminated to managers, particularly around reflective supervision and how managers could make that as effective as possible.

Committee members asked whether the complexity of placements, location and working with different agencies was impacting the ability to deliver the Philomina Protocol. Kelli Eboji advised that a new Contextual Safeguarding Lead had just been appointed to drive forward that strategic partnership work, collaborating with the police, providers and other partners to improve implementation of the Philomina Protocol amongst all stakeholders. She added that the Met Police were currently undergoing structural changes so there was a need to wait to see the impact of that, but the local authority would continue to build those relationships and work within the structures available. In addition, the service was piloting a new way of undertaking strategy meetings in the Brent Family Front Door and committing extra resources to the Targeted Prevention Hub for return home interviews, building relationships with children who went missing regularly and ensuring all available avenues were being used to address this area for improvement.

Noting the positive comments from social workers about working in Brent, who had fed back that managers were accessible and knowledgeable and interested in their staff's professional development, and that social workers had manageable workloads, the Committee asked what had been done to succeed in that regard, to the point where the service was able to reduce agency staff, and how it would ensure that continued. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development, Brent Council) advised that when caseloads were manageable, social workers felt better able to do a good job and felt less stressed and were therefore more likely to want to continue working for Brent. Having a permanent manager helped to build relationships and consistency, and almost all of the social work team in LAC and Permanency were now permanent with manageable workloads. He highlighted the importance of creating an environment for that to happen, and added that the London-wide Pledge around managing agency work also helped to reduce that spend. The service was currently focused on ensuring that the supervision that managers had with social workers was consistent and reflective.

As no further issues were raised, the Committee resolved to note the report and was encouraged by the feedback from Brent Care Journeys who agreed with the Ofsted letter that Brent was doing a good job for care leavers.

8. Brent Looked After Children and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2025-2029

Michelle Gwyther (Head of Forward Planning, Performance and Partnerships, Brent Council) introduced the report, which outlined how Brent would meet both current and future placement needs. In outlining the report, she advised that Brent wanted to increase the number of local placements in the borough, as many young people were having to move a long way from Brent. In order to do that, there was a need to increase the number of in-house foster carers in Brent and the number of residential placements, with it noted that there were not many residential placements in London. Brent had its own residential care home due to open and there was the success of the Mockingbird project, looking to keep children and young people as close to their own communities, networks, families and schools as possible and living in high quality, value for money placements. She pointed members to the action plan detailed on page 51 of the agenda pack.

An update was then provided on the West London Residential Home Project, which was being led by Hounslow Council in partnership with Brent and Ealing Council, which aimed to open a 6-bed residential home in 2027. Brent was also involved in a Pan London Secure Children's Home Project to support older children and young people with complex needs at

risk of harming themselves or others. She added that Brent was ready to take advantage of any future projects, whether independent, tri-borough, or across London, where they were right for Brent's children and young people and financially viable.

The Chair thanked Michelle Gwyther for the report and then invited comments and questions from Committee members with the following raised:

The Committee was pleased to see the multiple examples of Brent working across London and with other local authorities to achieve the best quality placements for children and young people.

The Committee asked for further details about the Pan-London Secure Unit, noting that a potential site had been identified in Waltham Forest. Michelle Gwyther advised that the DfE had temporarily paused the project due to issues identified with funding, but the project had recently started again and transferred to Waltham Forest to take the lead, so it was anticipated it would move forward much quicker. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Community Development, Brent Council) added that there would be a need for each individual local authority involved in the project to take this through their Cabinet to commit to supporting the secure home, as there would be a financial commitment from each local authority required. Once signed up, Brent would share the burden of liabilities for running the home alongside the other 32 London boroughs. He confirmed that there were currently no secure children's homes in London and children were required to travel long distances to access a secure unit, often with very complex needs. He agreed to bring a future report to the Committee about the Council's readiness for this project.

A discussion was had with Brent Care Journeys / Empire about the potential for care leavers to become residential care home providers, with Brent Care Journeys highlighting their unique experiences as care experienced young people which they felt would benefit residential care homes. Michelle Gwyther highlighted that it was a long process to open a residential home with set rules and regulations governed by Ofsted, as well as it being very costly in terms of property prices, so recommended that young people wanting a career in that space first volunteered or worked in a residential home to gain that experience, building their understanding of what would be required to open a residential home themselves. She added that another route would be to become a foster carer. In response to whether care leavers could have priority for roles in residential care homes, Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) highlighted that Brent Council now recognised care experience as a protected characteristic, therefore where there were jobs that care leavers met the criteria for they would automatically receive an offer of interview. The service could work with applicants to advise on what was required for those roles and what skills and experience would be needed to apply for those positions. The Chair suggested that once the new Brent residential home was running, some of those roles could be expanded to take on apprenticeships or work experience placements where possible.

Brent Care Journeys reported feedback from other care leavers that they sometimes felt pressured to sign tenancy agreements and were moved into accommodation that was not fully complete or fit for habitation, and asked whether there were any advocacy services available for care leavers to challenge that on a legal basis. Kelli Eboji responded that all young people were encouraged to bid for a unit within the timeframes required, and should be bidding for properties before being given managed moves. She advised that Brent was still in a fortunate position where young people were being offered social tenancies, which many local authorities no longer offered, and Brent was expanding its offer, working with the Housing Department to improve that relationship and ensure they understood their duty as corporate parents. She emphasised the importance of working with the Leaving Care Team to ensure young people understood what they were entitled to and their

responsibilities around bidding and engaging with the housing process, highlighting that her service was not in control of that but worked in collaboration with Housing. There were workshops for care leavers to help them understand their housing options, and Brent Care Journeys agreed to advertise those sessions to other care leavers. Kelli Eboji added that ensuring young people had access to advocacy services was important so agreed to look into what was available and provide an update.

Brent Care Journeys fed back that some looked after children had many hours available to them with their key worker, with up to 5 or more hours a week, but that many young people did not use all their allocated hours with their key workers. Brent Care Journeys highlighted that the unused resource could be put elsewhere, and suggested asking young people how many hours with their key worker they would want instead of a blanket approach. Kelli Eboji thanked Brent Care Journeys for the suggestion and agreed to take this under consideration.

In relation to table 3 of the sufficiency strategy – Placement Profile of Looked After Children as at 31/03/2024 and 31/03/2025 – the Committee asked what the ‘other’ placement type would cover. Michelle Gwyther explained that this would likely include young people on remand and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) but agreed to check this information. Following the meeting, further information confirmed that ‘other’ referred the following categories; NHS / health trust / establishment providing medical or nursing care, parent and baby unit, youth offending institution, residential school, regulation 24 foster carer, unregulated 16+ supported accommodation provider (which was now regulated), and unregulated residential home (one of which was now regulated).

Noting the aim of the strategy for children to only have to tell their story once when it came to interacting with practitioners, the Committee asked Brent Care Journeys what their experience of telling their story had been like. There was a mixed response, with some young people not needing to repeat their story, and others having had to repeat their story several times. The Committee highlighted the issue of consistency in relation to this and ensuring any social workers re-assigned to a case had read the young person’s file so that their story did not need to be repeated. Brent Care Journeys highlighted the importance of finding the right personal advisors and social workers in order for young people to connect with them, and for reporting mechanisms to be in place for if that relationship was not working. Kelli Eboji highlighted that this was a very sensitive topic and relationship based, acknowledging that people may not relate to each other straight away, but emphasising the limited resource of social workers and personal advisors available to the service. She advocated for young people to build those relationships and develop strategies to deal with any issues, and agreed that there was a need for the service to support young people to do that and ensure mechanisms were in place where things went wrong. Brent Care Journeys took an action away to do a workshop on this topic and gather feedback, and Nicole Levy (Quality Assurance and Learning Manager, Brent Council) thanked them for their feedback, which she would incorporate into the life story training that would begin in March 2026.

The Committee asked why there had been an increase in the time taken from a child entering care to moving in with their adoptive family, compared to the previous year. Nigel Chapman explained that Brent Council received a 6-monthly report from Adopt London West (ALW), and because there were very small numbers this meant even one child who was an outlier would skew the average time. In this case, there were cases in court proceedings for a very long time, but once the Council had authority through a placement order to place a child it acted very quickly to do that as there was good availability of adopters. As such, the delay was primarily in court.

Noting that there were now 81 young people in supported accommodation, which was 56 higher than in March 2021, the Committee asked how the service would continue that positive momentum to move more people into supported accommodation. Michelle

Gwyther explained that supported accommodation providers were now regulated by Ofsted under similar processes and procedures to Registered Providers, which included inspection. Brent was leading in North West London in terms of holding inspections and young care ambassadors undertaking quality assurance visits to providers. One visit had resulted in team managers closing a provider down, highlighting the importance of the Council ensuring providers being used were of high quality. Brent was increasing the number of providers slightly, ensuring that quality assurance processes were happening and that no young people were living somewhere unsuitable.

The Committee asked how the service was improving placement sustainability, noting that the percentage of children with three or more placements during a year had consistently been around the 16% average. Michelle Gwyther highlighted that there had been a drop in that percentage recently to 12%, but there were fluctuations because the service did have to act relatively quickly to do some moves. Whilst some of these were emergency moves, there were positive reasons for moves as well, such as to a more suitably matched placement, a long-term placement, a kinship arrangement or adoption. Kelli Eboji added that minimising placement moves was a priority for the service. The service was robust in undertaking stability meetings to try to resolve any issues and improve placements to keep the child in situ. Appropriate matching was fundamental to sustainable placements and the Children's Resilience Service had a therapeutic offer for children at risk of placement breakdown for both the young person and the carers, showing the range of ways the service was addressing placement stability. The local authority was also challenging providers where there were risks of a placement breakdown to ensure they had done everything possible to avoid that, ensuring that social work teams and providers were working together to discourage providers from ending placements in crisis and supporting providers to work with social workers to sustain that placement and resolve any issues.

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

9. Progress report - Brent Residential Children's Home

Tom Donovan (Service Manager, Looked After Children and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report, which provided an update on the progress of opening a Council-owned residential children's home in Brent. In introducing the report, he highlighted the main challenge currently was recruitment and onboarding of a Deputy Manager, as the person recently appointed had withdrawn. He was checking with the Recruitment Team that the grading for the role was correct because this was the third recruitment round for the Deputy Manager post. He confirmed that it was possible for the home to open without a deputy. Other progress made included the completion of renovations, with furniture now ordered, and the Council was now quality assessing that so that the home was ready for inspection.

The Chair thanked Tom Donovan for the introduction and invited comments and questions from those present, with the following issues raised:

Noting the recruitment challenges outlined, the Committee asked why there were difficulties in retaining someone in the Deputy Manager post. They heard that there were residential home recruitment issues nationwide, as Ofsted had strict safer recruitment criteria around senior and deputy residential posts. When the department had sent reference requests for the most recent offer holder, the person had withdrawn, and Tom Donovan advised it was good to be rigorous now at the onboarding stage to avoid these types of issues occurring later into the running of the home. The staff who had been onboarding were keen to start, and it was planned that a robust induction programme that was residential specific would be delivered across March 2026.

Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development, Brent Council) highlighted that the Council had undergone its annual engagement meeting with Ofsted the previous week, and flagged the importance of expediting the inspection as quickly as possible. He was hopeful that this would be done in April 2026 so that the home could open as soon as possible.

The Committee asked whether this type of initiative was being done in other local authority areas. Tom Donovan confirmed that there was a lot of activity in this space due to the lack of placements nationally, but the Regional Manager Inspector had made clear that they were significantly behind in undertaking inspections. Those who had received DfE funding were getting priority, which Brent was one of, so it was hoped the process could be expedited. The Registered Manager was visiting Greenwich Council's residential home which had opened the previous year to learn from them and any issues they faced in opening their home, as well as any messages they had from their inspection.

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

10. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 7:20pm
COUNCILLOR GWEN GRAHL, Chair