



## Corporate Parenting Committee

**Monday 2 February 2026 at 5.30 pm**

**Members' Suite – Brent Civic Centre**

This meeting will be held in person.

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

### Membership:

#### Members

Councillors:

Grahl (Chair)

Dixon

Kennelly

Smith

Hirani

#### Substitute Members

Councillors:

Chappell, Conneely and Rubin

Councillor: Mistry and Maurice

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

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## **Notes for Members - Declarations of Interest:**

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

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

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

### **\*Disclosable Pecuniary Interests:**

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

### **\*\*Personal Interests:**

The business relates to or affects:

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

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

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

or

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

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

# • Agenda

Introductions, if appropriate.

Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members.

Item	Page
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<b>1</b>	<b>Exclusion of the Press and Public</b>
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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.

<b>2</b>	<b>Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members</b>
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<b>3</b>	<b>Declarations of interests</b>
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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.

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

<b>5</b>	<b>Matters arising (if any)</b>
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To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

<b>6</b>	<b>Update from Brent Care Journeys 2.0 (BCJ 2.0) Representatives</b>
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This is an opportunity for members of BCJ 2.0 to feed back on activities 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 the Bright Spots Action Plan.

<b>7</b>	<b>Update on actions from previous Committee meetings</b>
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To receive an update on actions agreed at previous Committee meetings.

**8 Ofsted Focused Visit Report**

9 - 18

To receive an update on the recent Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Focused Visit which took place in November 2025.

**9 Brent Looked After Children and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2025-2029** 19 - 54

To receive information about the implementation of the Brent Looked After Children and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2025-2029 outlining how Brent will meet the current and future placement needs of children looked after and care experienced young people.

**10 Progress report - Brent Residential Children's Home**

55 - 60

To receive an update on the progress of work undertaken to open the local authority's own Residential Children's Home.

**11 Any other urgent business**

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

**Date of the next meeting: Monday 13 April 2026**



## **MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE** **Monday 13 October 2025 at 5.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillors Grahl (Chair), Gbajumo, Kennelly (substitute for Councillor Dixon), 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 Councillor Dixon, who was substituted by Councillor Kennelly.

### **3. Declarations of interests**

None.

### **4. Minutes of the previous meeting**

None.

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

In relation to page 7 of the minutes where officers made a commitment to work with Public Health to improve vaccination rates for HPV immunisations and messaging around eligibility for children, the Committee asked for an update. Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) advised that officers had worked with Public Health at several different forums and meetings over the summer holidays around vaccination across the board for children, but this had not been specific to HPV. The LAC and Permanency Service Manager was working closely with Public Health currently around the way the service recorded and managed LAC immunisations. The Committee asked to receive an update specifically in relation to HPV immunisations for both boys and girls at the next meeting.

### **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. Prior to hearing from each of the young people present, the Chair advised that this would be J's final meeting with BCJ 2.0 and offered thanks for his involvement over the years. The Committee wished J well for the future.

K advised that she had recently worked with Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Community Development, Brent Council) and Palvinder Kudhail (Director for Early Help and Social Care, Brent Council) to interview candidates for Heads of Service roles, which had been a great experience for those involved.

N updated the Committee on summer activities, advising members of the summer fun day that took place in August 2025 for foster carers, looked after children and care leavers. There had been a DJ, food and drink, gifts, a bouncy castle and a ball pit.

NA updated the Committee on the residential trip that BCJ 2.0 had taken and presented some pictures from the trip. Activities included a farm visit, axe throwing, and pedalo rides which the organisation running the residential had offered for free.

S informed the Committee of the Ikea Day that BCJ 2.0 had undertaken following the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and School's lobbying for care packages. Those who had attended had been able to make suggestions to the care packages such as a laundry box, kitchen appliances, cutlery, crockery, towels, pillows and lights and the care packages included a living Bonsai tree. The Group presented a video of the day working with Ikea, which had included workshops where BCJ 2.0 learned more about the Company and its values. Following the day, Ikea was now looking to partner with Brent to provide jobs for care leavers, and NA highlighted that it seemed like a good place to work with good benefits.

The Group then made a presentation to the Committee outlining their wants to make BCJ 2.0 a success moving forward. Care leavers had come together across 5 workshops to design the BCJ 2.0 brand, with the aim to take control and ownership of their community, brand and identity. The group had brainstormed what their values were and what they wanted to stand for to create a name, logo and motto. Some of those values were around respect and feeling heard. The agreed name was currently 'Empire Care Leavers', and a logo had been designed representing a building with ladders towards a flag to represent care leavers building something together and reaching their highest potential. The motto was 'Empire believe in better' which BCJ 2.0 hoped would give care leavers hope towards a bright future and empower each other.

In outlining the new brand, the Group highlighted the importance of having their own identity, but the need to also consider younger groups, so care leavers would work with younger children to co-design their own brand and ideas that would link and co-align with Empire Care Leavers. A workshop to do that was scheduled during the October half term.

The Group had agreed to meet in person every 2 weeks going forward and virtually every week to plan activity. They were hoping to make care packages for care leavers in prison for Christmas and birthdays and start a mentoring programme for young people based on having an older and younger 'sibling' who would do activities together.

As a call to action to the Committee, the Group asked the Council to prioritise an increased budget for this work. This could be put towards branded hoodies and other merchandise, and, most importantly to them, a dedicated space for care leavers where they could relax, work, study, plan events and talk together.

Kelli Eboji highlighted that, corporately, the participation budget was limited and, whilst a certain amount of money was set aside, it was not large. She asked Committee members to reach out to organisations within Brent or to inform the service if they knew of any organisations that could provide materials that could then be branded or printing services for less. Members agreed to reach out with their contacts and consider other fundraising activities to fund the proposals.

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

In relation to the request for a dedicated space for care leavers, Kelli Eboji highlighted that the Curve space on the third floor of the Civic Centre had been given to young people and there was a want to improve that space for young people, but there were also potential spaces in other areas that could be considered. BCJ 2.0 expressed that there would need to be significant adjustments to the Curve space to make it practicable, as the space was sometimes used externally meaning young people did not have access to it. The space was also very open and used by many, meaning there was no ownership of it by BCJ 2.0. They did not want their space to be a professional space but more like a common room that they had permanent and reserved access to with bean bags and comfortable areas. It was agreed that Nigel Chapman and Palvinder Kudhail would attend a fortnightly meeting of BCJ 2.0 to talk about the specific requests and the options available.

BCJ 2.0 asked whether there had been any progress in the request to look at discounted driving lessons for care leavers. They advised that Barnet Council had a partnership with driving schools where they offered free or discounted driving lessons, so Brent could reach out to their counterparts to learn how they had achieved this. Kelli Eboji advised that she would look into this and feed back to BCJ 2.0 before the next Committee meeting.

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

## **7. Progress report - the London Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers**

Afzal Ahmed (Service Manager, LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report which updated the Committee on the London Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers, published in March 2021. In presenting the report, he highlighted the following key points:

- This was a joint report between the LAC and Permanency Service and Early Help.
- Emphasis over the past several years had been on prevention, such as through the Covid-19 Pathfinder 3-year Preventative Programme for Overrepresented Children, the investment in trauma recovery by Early Help, and the MOPAC funded disproportionality project that ended in 2023 which funded a range of activities in Brent Family Wellbeing Centres that were co-designed by young people.
- Early Help was now running Turnaround, a project contributing to the decrease in LAC participation in the youth justice system, which would run until 2026.
- He had been involved in the Your Choice programme providing training in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques to youth practitioners working with young people between 11-17 years old at risk of elevated harm. A total of 66 children and young people accessed the programme with 5 reoffending, only one of which was from the LAC cohort.
- Training for both services was delivered which had raised the need for clear protocols outlining when carers or key workers should make contact with the police. A grid system had been agreed and introduced to define when it was appropriate to call the police. The service now wanted to upskill providers to work with young people proactively before going to the police and give providers confidence in managing young people without police involvement. The intention was that every provider or commissioned service working with looked after children signed up to a protocol on this.

- In terms of the impact of the work, it was highlighted that, compared to the previous year, there had been a decrease in the number of care experienced young people involved in the youth justice system. This was attributed to effective partnership work, the preventative approach being taken, the work of the Exploitation, Violence and Vulnerability Panel (EVVP) and increased awareness of the protocol amongst practitioners.

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

The Committee asked whether the London protocol was working as intended, and, if so, what impact it had in Brent. Afzal Ahmed replied that the protocol had emphasised the importance of working in partnership with other stakeholders, as the solution and responsibility did not sit with the local authority on its own and needed partners to make that difference. The people that the LAC and Permanency Service worked with daily, including foster carers and key workers, needed to be upskilled in terms of their confidence in managing young people without police involvement through a child-focused approach.

Highlighting the reality that care experienced young people were more likely than others to experience the youth justice system, the Chair asked BCJ 2.0 to reflect on what they thought would be successful at supporting those young people at an early stage to prevent them becoming involved in the justice system. BCJ 2.0 felt that males in particular were vulnerable to exploitation through gangs, and emphasised the need for discussions with young people around these types of situations early, with a focus on prevention. Sometimes, care experienced young people might get involved in risky situations due to a lack of activity and friends due to multiple placement moves, resulting in boredom and getting involved with exploitative individuals. Money was seen as another motivator, particularly for young men, where they saw their peers getting money from their parents, or where they were not able to work but did not have the security of parental support, and they looked to build a safety net for themselves. BCJ 2.0 added that, where a care experienced young person did not have family, they needed community, and they might then find it amongst criminal groups. This was linked back to BCJ 2.0's request for a dedicated space for themselves to build a safe community.

In continuing to consider what support might help, BCJ 2.0 felt that the reaction that many people had to get police involved in a challenging situation often made things worse as it created tension and trust issues, so BCJ 2.0 agreed with the need for upskilling in that area. Many felt like their social worker saw them as a 'case', particularly when they were moved between placements often, as key workers behaved a certain way towards them based on what had been recorded in their file. Some care leavers had experienced their key workers telling them that their personality did not match up to what they had read about in their file, which they highlighted lacked sensitivity. As such, BCJ 2.0 felt that key workers could benefit from training in this area. In addition, a programme to help young people regulate their emotions, with parallel training for key workers to help young people manage their emotions, was proposed. Emphasis was given to social workers and key workers using a person-centred, sensitive approach based on the individual. They advised that, where possible, having a social worker who had a similar culture to the young person also helped young people stay on track.

In response to the comments from BCJ 2.0, Palvinder Kudhail confirmed that the service was working hard to understand children's networks and who might be the best person within that circle to manage a particular situation, which might be different at different times in that young person's journey. She assured the Committee that, once a person became known to the youth justice system, the assessment was very individualised and focused on the person's wishes, feelings and ambitions for the future. Nicole Levy (Quality Assurance



and Learning Service Manager, Brent Council) committed to providing training for practitioners on recording in files to incorporate positive details, in collaboration with young people. The Committee noted the importance of the information professionals recorded about young people and how that impacted how young people felt about themselves, their future and their sense of identity.

The Committee asked whether young people were given access to their record. Nicole Levy advised that young people could make a formal Subject Access Request for that. Nigel Chapman added that young people had access to many documents written about them on a daily basis, such as their LAC reviews and personal education plans, which they were able to talk through and contribute to, but there would be a need to follow appropriate processes in terms of accessing their entire file.

In relation to priority C of the London protocol, training for personal advisors on providing advocacy when supporting young people in prison, the Committee asked whether that training was being provided. Afzal Ahmed explained that the training was being delivered as a joint initiative with NYAS who worked in prisons and youth justice system secure units. A programme had been developed, to be delivered between October – November 2025, for personal advisors to advocate on behalf of the young people they were visiting in prison to support them in their rights. He agreed to report back to the Committee on that work in the next update.

The Committee asked whether there were appropriate employment, education, skills and training placements available for care leavers to help to deter them from the youth justice system. Officers felt that the opportunities for employment for care leavers in Brent were good, with Brent Start helping to secure apprenticeships and apprenticeships within the Council. There were also initiatives across London that the service benefited from, and the dedicated Leaving Care Manager who led on those opportunities ensured that the Council was securing every opportunity it could for young people. Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) highlighted the importance of diversifying those options and having as many opportunities for care leavers as possible. The service connected with partners in the NHS and Ikea to expand those opportunities, and where opportunities did come up, they were shared in the care leaver WhatsApp group, made up of around 180 young people. Personal advisors also encouraged young people to get into employment, education or training.

The Committee highlighted the new space in the Civic Centre called the Base that could be used to hold training and skills workshops for care leavers. Afzal Ahmed agreed this was something that the service could look at utilising, working with Brent Start.

The Committee asked why there had been no public health element included in the report. James Salter (Service Manager, Youth Justice Service, Brent Council) drew members' attention to the substance misuse provision within the Youth Justice Service and officers were in advanced discussions about extending that offer. They were also considering how sexual health could be incorporated into that service. He added that the Youth Justice Service was led by the programmes that officers could access at a given time, which was often dependent on funding which came with its own remits and conditions, but the service could now influence and develop the Targeted Prevention Hub in partnership with others, including health. That hub focused on early intervention to ensure support was provided early to young people through a partnership approach.

The Committee advised that, using the data in the report, it was difficult to follow the degree to which looked after children were following the same trends as all children and young people in Brent, with the data often switching between cohorts.

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

## 8. **Six-Monthly Adoption Report - Adopt London West**

Debbie Gabriel (Head of Service, Adopt London West) introduced the report which provided an update on the adoption performance data for the period 1 April 2025 to 30 September 2025, the progress, activity and outcomes of Adopt London West, and the Adopt London West Annual Report 2024-25. She advised that Adopt London West had approved 8 adopter households during the reporting period and had since approved a further 3, and had a target to approve more than 20 adopters by year end. Brent had placed 10 children the previous year which had been the highest for several years and, whilst the numbers were slower this year, Adopt London West was likely to place a few more by the end of Quarter 3.

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

The Committee noted that the average time taken to place a child entering care had increased from 180 days the previous year to 208 days in the reporting period, and asked if there was any insight into why that was. Debbie Gabriel advised that the cohort size was small, so delays with only a few children, as a result of care proceedings or finding a placement for children with complex needs for example, could skew the average number of days. She advised that, when placing a child, the focus was about the particular child and their needs, and it was important to take the time to get that right. She added that the average number of days was still in line with the London average and only slightly outside of the national average.

The Committee asked whether it was easier to find people who wanted to adopt in London compared to other areas of the country. Debbie Gabriel confirmed that there was a steady stream of adopters coming to the attention of Adopt London West, which was not the case nationally and there were parts of the country struggling to attract adopters. The sufficiency issue had not yet affected London, but where Adopt London West were not able to place a child then there was a need to look across the country for adopters which caused delays. Two separate children had recently been placed in Devon. She added that Adopt London West would always place children with the best adopters for their particular needs.

The Committee asked about progress on the Black Adoption Project. Debbie Gabriel stated that the project had been busy with activity outlined in the annual report. There had been a need for some additional funding for a particular initiative which had now been secured and committed, and a Project Manager was leading on several workstreams for the project. A young people's group was also up and running. Adopt London would be launching phase 2 of the project soon which included a Black Education Programme that young people had specifically asked for. She added that the 'let's talk about adoption' group for Black adopters was going very well and entirely facilitated by Black adopters affiliated with the project. In terms of the project's impact, she explained that it was a long-term change so it would take time to see the effects of the activity, but there was a lot of interest already. A Meet The Adopters event for Black adopters had recently been ran which had seen all spaces filled for that event.

In relation to the reduction in funding for the Adoption Special Guardianship Support Fund, the Committee asked how Adopt London West was dealing with that. Debbie Gabriel confirmed it had been challenging but there was a lot of lobbying of central government around that. Families were relieved that the government had announced a public consultation about the future of the fund, due to go live in the new year, that they could put their voice to. Adopter peer support groups across the country were also lobbying. In terms of managing without that funding, she advised that some activity could be delivered through the core offer, but many therapeutic parenting programmes were seeing a dip in take-up

because without that fund adopters were now required to fund the course through their allowances. As a result, many families were declining those courses and using funds for individual therapy. At the same time, the government had also removed the £2.5k grant for specialist assessments, which was also having an impact on families. The Committee asked for the public consultation information to be shared with members.

Noting that the report detailed a fall in webpage views compared to an increase in social media following, the Committee asked whether social media was the right platform for promotion. They highlighted that social media might receive more followers but if that did not translate to clicks through then it was unlikely to be increasing interest in adoption. As such, they asked whether Adopt London West was promoting adoption in the right places and to the right audiences. They added that LinkedIn and TikTok were also good platforms to spread the message. Debbie Gabriel agreed this was a fair challenge and agreed to get feedback from the Communications and Marketing Team. In terms of feedback on promotion, she advised that feedback did suggest that the website was helpful, particularly blogs and articles which made people want to be a part of the Adopt London West partnership. Adopt London West continually improved and evolved the website to ensure it was appropriate for its aims so that anyone affected by adoption could find the website useful to them.

In response to some of the queries raised during the discussion, Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Schools, Brent Council) assured the Committee that there was appropriate challenge of Adopt London West performance overall. He and Palvinder Kudhail (Director of Early Help and Social Care, Brent Council) were members of the Adopt London West Partnership Board where that performance was scrutinised.

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

## **9. Fostering Service 6-monthly Report**

Tom Donovan (Service Manager, Looked After Children and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report, which provided information about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it achieved good outcomes for children, including relevant performance data and updates on the functioning and progress of Foster Panel. In introducing the report, he highlighted the following key points:

- The service was focused simultaneously on recruitment and retention of foster carers to ensure Brent had as many foster carers as possible.
- The service had a duty to raise awareness of fostering and did that through a mixture of digital campaigning and outreach. A digital campaign would be launching that week to boost digital awareness raising and see whether that translated into interest.
- Enquiries had increased through Meta to Fostering West London, but the quality of applications through that route were not what the service would want, so there was a need to put more investment into search engines. It was noted that someone was more likely to be ready to foster if they were already doing their own research.
- Foster West London had launched a new application called Care Friends, which was helping people to refer their friends to fostering.
- The Fostering Recruitment Manager, Tee Malik, was supporting the fostering team to set up stalls in different areas to have a physical presence to promote fostering, and had done some promotion in Queen's Park, libraries, schools, and GP surgeries.

- Good feedback was being received on the Mockingbird Project.
- An upcoming celebration was scheduled to show support for carers, and officers would use that opportunity to get marketing materials through photos and testimonials.
- The service had visited other local authorities to learn from them.

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

Noting that the report detailed the role of housing in foster carer application's being rejected due to the lack of a spare room, the Committee asked how the housing crisis was impacting fostering. Tom Donovan confirmed that, nationally, the housing crisis and cost-of-living crisis was impacting fostering recruitment, which Foster West London had fed back to the previous Children's Minister. Children were moving out of their parents' houses much later meaning there were fewer spare rooms for a placement and people were retiring much later. He advised that the service was limited in what it could do to influence the housing crisis, but officers were being creative where possible. For example, when doing outreach work, officers raised the possibility of fostering very young babies if there was no spare room, or to install a fire-safe partition between two rooms. Children could also share bedrooms where they were placed with certain family members such as cousins so there was still energy and focus encouraging kinship placements. Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) added that, previously, if an applicant were in social housing, they could apply for another bedroom to foster, but that was no longer an option. She had not heard from other local authorities whether they were doing anything in this area with their housing departments.

The Committee noted that Brent's next recruitment campaign would focus on LGBT+ communities and asked if officers felt that would help to increase the number of LGBT+ foster carers. Tom Donovan highlighted that he was hopefully and ambitious that the campaign would attract carers, as the service did not currently have any LGBT+ carers. He added that the campaign would not have a significant cost but if there was no evidence of an increase in enquiries and applications then the service would move on to a new group.


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

#### 10. **Any other urgent business**

Brent Care Journeys 2.0 advised the Committee that November marked Care Leavers Month and activities would be shared with members.

The meeting closed at 7:30 pm

COUNCILLOR GWEN GRAHL  
Chair

	<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>  2 February 2026
	<b>Report from the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development</b>
	<b>Lead Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Employment - Cllr Gwen Grahl</b>
<b>Outcome of Ofsted Focused Visit under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Framework</b>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	ALL
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	N/A
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
<b>List of Appendices:</b>	1. Ofsted Focused Visit Letter dated 18/12/2025- <a href="https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80489">https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80489</a>
<b>Background Papers:</b>	N/A
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Kelli Eboji Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency <a href="mailto:Kelli.Eboji@brent.gov.uk">Kelli.Eboji@brent.gov.uk</a>  Palvinder Kudhail Director, Early Help and Social Care <a href="mailto:Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk">Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk</a>

## 1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report informs Members of the outcome of the Ofsted Focused Visit about children in care that took place on the 18 and 19 November 2025 and was published on 18 December 2025. Please see Appendix 1 for the Focused Visit letter.

## 2.0 Recommendation(s) That the Corporate Parenting Committee:

- 2.1 Note the findings of the Focused Visit.
- 2.2 Note and comment on the action plan to address the two areas for improvement arising from the Focused Visit.

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

The inspection activity being reported on is related to the work being carried out by the local authority's Corporate Parenting service. 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 The Ofsted framework for the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services focuses on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements in the following areas:

- to help and protect children
- the experiences and progress of children in care wherever they live, including those children who return home
- the arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after, including adoption
- the experiences and progress of care leavers.

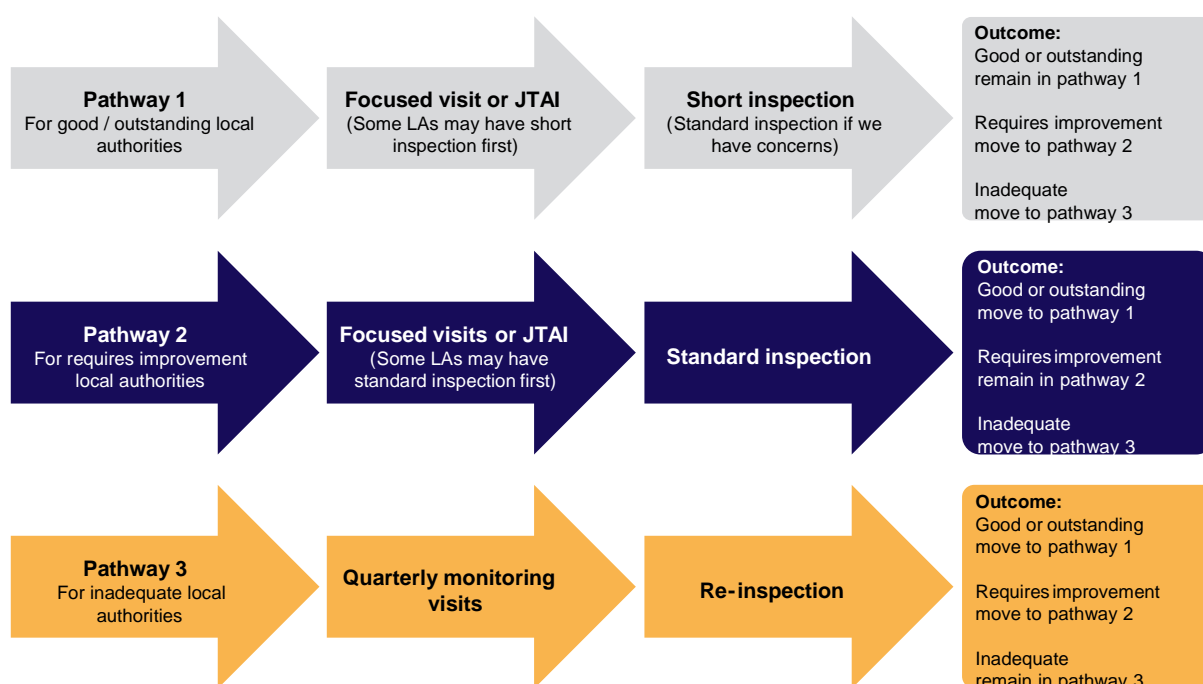
While the framework is primarily focused on social work and the quality of professional practice, the effectiveness of leaders and managers, the impact they have on the lives of children and young people as well as how well equipped and supported the workforce is to deliver effective practice are also evaluated.

4.2 ILACS is an inspection 'system', introduced in January 2018 aimed at making inspection risk-based and proportionate through more frequent contact tailored to each local authority. It comprises:

- an annual engagement meeting (Brent's most recent was October 2024) between the local authority and an Ofsted regional representative to reflect on what is happening in the local authority and to inform future engagement
- standard inspections (usually for local authorities judged requires improvement to be good)
- short inspections (for local authorities judged good or outstanding)
- ***focused visits*** that look at a specific area of service or cohort of children, taking place over 2 days, usually in between standard / short inspections
- monitoring visits for authorities rated 'inadequate'
- Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAI).

Local authorities are also encouraged to participate in activity outside inspection, such as sharing a self-evaluation for discussion at the annual engagement meeting.

4.3 The following diagram summarises the three inspection pathways in the ILACS framework. Brent is on Pathway 1, having been previously graded as 'Good' at the last ILACS inspection in February 2023.



4.4 Brent was notified on 11 November 2025 that a Focused Visit would be undertaken and off-site activity commenced immediately. The focus of the inspection was the local authority's arrangements for and experience of children in care, specifically at assessment, planning and decision-making. Two inspectors were on site at the Civic Centre on the 18 and 19 November 2025 and spent time with front line staff reviewing the quality of casework. Inspectors also met with a group of children in care to hear their views and experiences.

4.5 As part of the visit the inspectors also evaluated the impact of leaders, the arrangements for continuous learning and effectiveness of quality assurance activity, as well as performance management and decision making.

Focused Visits do not result in a graded judgement; however, inspectors consider whether the quality and impact of practice has been maintained, improved or deteriorated since the last ILACS inspection.

4.6 The inspection team tested the validity of Brent's most recent self-evaluation (September 2025) with the main focus on social workers' direct practice with children and young people in care and the impact on outcomes for those same children and young people. The inspection involved reading case files and supporting documentation, including evaluating individual children's records that had been audited by the Local Authority.

### Key Findings

4.7 Inspectors noted that since the last ILACS inspection in 2023, children in care continue to benefit from effective services led by an experienced, stable senior team, with strong political and corporate support. They also noted the progress that leaders had made in overcoming previous recruitment challenges and strengthening workforce stability and retention, which had been particularly important for children in care.

4.8 The inspection identified many strengths within the Local Authority and how it delivers services for and supports children in care:

- Children enjoy stable and supportive relationships with their social workers, who know them and see them regularly

- Children said that they are happy with the care and support they receive
- Children are supported to live within an extended kinship network when safe to do so, and when this is not possible, children are supported to maintain relationships with family and friends
- Most children in care live in homes that are suited to their needs, with carers who are able to promote their religious and cultural needs
- Disabled children in care receive good support from social workers who are able to skilfully develop relationships with them and their families and have a good understanding of their needs. They live in stable homes with caring families and receive strong multi-agency support
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children receive thoughtful care with social workers who are attuned to their needs. Senior leaders have good oversight of the progress of this group of children
- Decision-making for children in care is informed by thorough assessment of need, with clear rationale for care plans. Social workers provide comprehensive, child-centred, up to date assessments
- Direct work with children in care is “evident in lively and engaging methods” which enable children to share their feelings and worries with their social workers
- Children’s education and health needs are supported proactively and effectively, with the Brent Virtual School having a positive impact for children in care
- Children have benefitted from improvements made to the IRO service since the last inspection, most children participate in their reviews and know their IROs well
- Children say that they know senior leaders in the local authority and that they are given opportunities to be included and influence service, with participation being a priority for the Council and senior leaders always looking for ways to include children in care in decision-making

4.9 The Focused Visit highlighted two areas for improvement:

- The consistency and rigour of responses to children who go missing from care (Outcome 3, national framework)
- Life-story work for children in long-term care (Outcome 4, national framework)

4.10 An action plan to address the above areas has been developed and will be monitored through the directorate’s existing quality assurance processes.

4.11 Activity to improve our responses to children who go missing from care will include a review of our local Missing Protocol and related processes, updated training for practitioners, and ongoing improvements to our recording systems.

There will also be increased multi-agency activity in this space because of the Families First programme. An example of this is a multi-agency workshop held at the Civic Centre on ‘Children Missing from Care Homes and Implementing the Philomena Protocol’ on the 22 January 2026 co-ordinated by the police and attended by Brent, Harrow and Barnet police, practitioners, Care Home managers, and others.



- 4.12 Activity to develop life-story work for children in long-term care will include identifying leads or 'champions' across social work teams, updated training for practitioners, continued focus on the quality of 3-monthly case summaries which provide a written "narrative" for children and young people of their journey through care, the introduction of a life-story work platform, and the potential of participating in national research.

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

- 5.1 During the Focused Visit inspectors met with social workers and children in care. Separate discussions also took place with the Lead Member for Children's Services, Education and Employment, the Head of the Brent Virtual School and the Corporate Director, Children, Young People and Community Development.
- 5.2 Inspectors were particularly interested to hear from children and young people in care. They looked for evidence of children's views in their inspection of files and in discussions with professionals.

## **6.0 Financial Considerations**

- 6.1 There are no immediate financial implications associated with this report.

## **7.0 Legal Considerations**

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

## **8.0 Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Considerations**

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

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

- 9.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

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

- 10.1 There are no additional human resources or property considerations.

## **11.0 Communication Considerations**

- 11.1 The outcome of the Focused Visit has been published and shared across CYP CD, the wider Council and with Members. The link to the online report is here: <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80489>.

There are no additional communication considerations.

### **Report sign off:**

**Nigel Chapman**

Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development

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18 December 2025

Mr Nigel Chapman  
Director, Children, Young People & Community Development  
Brent Civic Centre,  
Engineers Way, Wembley,  
London HA9 0FJ

Dear Mr Chapman

### **Focused visit to Brent children's services**

This letter summarises the findings of the focused visit to Brent children's services on 18 and 19 November 2025. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Michele Henry and Nicholas Stacey.

Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for children in care.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework.

### **Headline findings**

Since the last ILACS inspection in February 2023, children in care continue to benefit from effective services led by an experienced, stable senior team, with strong political and corporate support helping them to sustain the conditions for effective frontline practice. Leaders are reflective and have an in-depth understanding of service strengths and of the discrete areas where they need to make improvements.

The progress leaders have made in overcoming previous recruitment challenges and strengthening workforce stability and retention has been particularly important for children in care. Children enjoy stable and supportive relationships with their social workers, who know them well and see them regularly. The enduring, trusting relationships that children have with their social workers and carers provide a secure base from which they can grow, feel safe, develop confidence and thrive in care. Children say they are happy with the care and support they receive.

### **What needs to improve in this area of social work practice?<sup>1</sup>**

- The consistency and rigour of responses to children who go missing from care (Outcome 3, national framework)

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<sup>1</sup> The areas for improvement have been cross-referenced with the outcomes, enablers or principles in the [Children's Social Care: National Framework](#). This statutory guidance sets out the purpose, principles for practice and expected outcomes of children's social care.

- Life-story work for children in long-term care (Outcome 4, national framework).

## **Main findings**

Children are supported to live within their extended kinship network when it is safe for them to do so. When this is not possible, social workers, carers and parents work collaboratively to help children maintain their relationships with family and friends.

Most children in care live in homes that are suited to their needs. Social workers and carers thoughtfully consider their religious and cultural needs. Many children live with carers who share their religious and cultural backgrounds.

Disabled children in care receive good support. Their social workers skilfully develop relationships with children and their families and have a sound understanding of their needs. These children live in stable homes with caring families and receive strong multi-agency support.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children receive thoughtful care. Their social workers are especially attuned to their needs. They make timely arrangements to respond to children's education and health needs, and children access effective support, tailored to their circumstances. Senior leaders have good oversight of the progress of this group of children. They have recently commissioned a new service to provide them with mentoring, therapeutic help and other well-being support.

Decision-making for children in care is informed by thorough assessments of their needs, providing a clear rationale for their care plans. Social workers ensure that their assessments are comprehensive, child centred and updated when children's circumstances change.

Direct work with children is evident in lively and engaging methods, enabling children to share their feelings, including their worries, and providing the opportunity for them to explore sensitive matters with their social workers. Direct work with disabled children is especially strong. Carers and social workers regularly gather photos and other reminders of children's lives.

Social workers and independent reviewing officers capture children's experience through detailed and sensitively written records. Children are listened to, and their views are taken into consideration about where and with whom they live.

While direct work is routinely carried out, social workers are not consistently capturing children's life stories, allowing them to better understand their personal histories and to integrate their past and present experiences. This was also noted at the last ILACS inspection.

When children in care go missing, the response is inconsistent. Return home interviews are not always completed, leading to gaps in risk assessment. Management oversight and actions to mitigate risk are not always clear from

children's records. This means that opportunities are not always taken to mitigate risk and to reduce the likelihood of children going missing in the future.

The work of the virtual school is having a positive impact for children in care, with most children progressing well and some achieving particularly high results in their exams. Children in care attend school regularly, and there have been no permanent exclusions. Children also have good opportunities to take part in a wide range of enrichment and fun activities, including an annual celebration event.

The health of children in care is promoted effectively. A dedicated emotional and well-being service helps to ensure that children in care receive timely support when required.

Children in care benefit from improvements made to the independent reviewing officer (IRO) service since the last inspection. Increased IRO capacity and manageable workloads mean that IROs are better able to scrutinise children's plans robustly, preventing drift and delays in care planning and securing permanence. Most children participate in their reviews, and they receive carefully crafted letters confirming to them the outcome of the meeting. Children say that they know their IROs well and how to contact them if they need to. Mid-way reviews help to keep children's progress on track, and IROs escalate issues to tackle problems when identified. Managers are putting steps in place to improve the way the IRO 'footprint' is captured on children's records.

Children also say that they know senior leaders in the local authority and that they are given opportunities to be included and influence services. Participation is a priority for the council; senior leaders are always looking for ways to include children in care in decision-making.

Leaders in Brent are keen to improve placement sufficiency for children in care, and they are actively pursuing initiatives with other London boroughs. Brent developed its own local foster carers' constellation in May 2025. It is developing well and supporting the work of the foster carers involved, allowing children to live in stable homes with supportive adults. The council is also progressing plans for its own children's home, to allow more children in care to live in the local area, close to their families, friends and schools.

Social workers speak very positively about working in Brent. Many of them note the ethnic diversity within the community among the reasons they like working in the area. Social workers describe managers who are accessible and knowledgeable, who are interested in their personal well-being and their professional development. They describe senior leaders as visible, approachable and humble.

Plentiful training and development opportunities mean that social workers feel that they can progress their careers in Brent.

Social workers in the care planning teams have manageable caseloads, allowing them to focus the time needed on each child. Some social workers working with

disabled children in care have significantly higher caseloads, which means they have less time to work with individual children. Senior leaders are aware of this and have put actions in place as they implement the Families First reforms, although the impact is yet to be seen.


Regular management oversight and supervision support effective practice with most children in care. Senior managers maintain good oversight of decision-making and planning for children through case discussion, permanence tracking and residential panels. Leaders are working to better align permanence tracking across service areas to strengthen monitoring in the earlier stages of children's plans and allow children to move more quickly into permanent homes.

An honest and thorough self-evaluation forms the basis for continuous learning and a developing quality assurance process. Quality assurance activity provides leaders with a balanced appraisal of the quality and impact of social work practice for children in care. Leaders target training to areas of practice that audits, and other quality assurance activity, have highlighted as needing improvement. Senior leaders are working to enhance the auditing skills of frontline managers to increase internal quality assurance capacity.

Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account when planning the next inspection or visit.

Yours sincerely

Michele Henry  
His Majesty's Inspector

 <b>Brent</b>	<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b> 2 February 2026
	<b>Report from the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development</b>
	<b>Lead Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Employment - Cllr Gwen Grahl</b>
<b>Brent Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy: 2025-2029</b>	
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	ALL
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	N/A
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>List of Appendices:</b>	1. <a href="#">Brent Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy</a>
<b>Background Papers:</b>	N/A
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Michelle Gwyther Head of Forward Planning, Performance and Partnerships <a href="mailto:Michelle.gwyther@brent.gov.uk">Michelle.gwyther@brent.gov.uk</a>

## 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Brent Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2025-2029 sets out how Brent Council, as a Corporate Parent, meets its statutory Sufficiency Duty as laid down in Section 22G of the Children Act 1989. The Strategy also draws on statutory guidance regarding Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children (DfE 2010), the Children Act 2004, the Children Leaving Care Act 2000, the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023.
- 1.2 The Strategy describes how Brent will meet the current and future placement needs of children looked after (CLA) and care experienced young people. It builds on existing duties in law to promote and safeguard the welfare and wellbeing of children and high-quality care planning. The Strategy provides an update on progress in delivering the previous Looked After Children and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2024, detailing current and planned actions to meet placement sufficiency over the next four years in line with the demographic profile of Brent's population.

- 1.3 There are many challenges that local authorities are experiencing when delivering and building sufficiency. Nationally there is an increasing number of children entering care which often exceeds the number of suitable placements. Locally, whilst the number of children in care has remained relatively stable over the past 4 years, due to the increased number of children with complex needs, older children coming into care and sibling groups means finding a suitable placement is difficult. This in turn increases the likelihood of placement instability, which can cause placement breakdown and further disruption to the child or young person.
- 1.4 Recruitment and retention of foster carers is a pressure for local authorities and the private sector. As explained in biannual reports to the Corporate Parenting Committee, local authorities are finding it increasingly challenging to find fostering placements, especially for those with complex needs and older teenagers. As there is a shortfall of foster carers, there is a requirement to provide a competitive offer to be successful in recruitment. The Strategy also considers the issue of out-of-area placements, where they are not necessary for safeguarding reasons but have had to be made due to sufficiency reasons. Out-of-area placements disrupt education, friendships, family networks and make it more difficult for professionals involved in the lives of children and young people to provide high quality, consistent support.
- 1.5 This Strategy is focused on a strategic principle of increasing the *local* sufficiency of placements for children and young people through increasing the number of in-house foster carers and increasing the *availability* of residential placements which can support a range of complex needs. Collectively this will achieve the outcome of keeping children and young people close to their own communities in high quality, value for money and locally available care.
- 1.6 This strategy aligns with other Brent strategies including but not limited to:
- The Looked After Children and Care Leavers' Strategy 2025-2027
  - The Brent Youth Strategy 2025-2028
  - The Brent SEND Strategy 2021-2025
  - The Brent Participation Strategy 2024-27
  - The Brent Youth Justice Plan 2025-2028

## **2.0 Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the CPC review and comment on the contents of this strategy. This ensures the CPC is fulfilling its responsibility to monitor and scrutinise the activity of Brent's Children, Young People and Community Development (CYPCD) directorate, thus ensuring that adequate care and support are being provided to Brent's children looked after and care leavers.

## **3.0 Detail**

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



3.1.1 Placement sufficiency is a key element to the safety and wellbeing of children looked after and care leavers. Placement sufficiency 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 access to safe and loving homes, where their physical, emotional, psychological and identity needs are met. It is also important that children and young people are able to remain as close to their family, friends and networks as possible.

#### **4.0 Background**

4.1 Please refer to Appendix 1, Brent Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2025-2029.

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

5.1 Please refer to page 14 of the strategy for details of how children and young people's voices have contributed to the development of the Sufficiency Strategy.

#### **6.0 Financial Considerations**

6.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report. The Sufficiency strategy details the achievements, challenges and progress to date from 2020 to 2024. The Financial pressures, for example, of the increased reliance on residential accommodation or the shortage of in-house foster carers in the last few years are well documented.

6.2 Achieving the targets of the outcome measures agreed as part of the Sufficiency Strategy for next year will be key for the department to manage the expected financial pressures in Children Social Care as part of the Medium Term Financial Outlook included in the Budget and Council Tax 2026/27 report.

#### **7.0 Legal Considerations**

7.1 There are no specific legal considerations to note.

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

8.1 Children and young people who are looked after and care leavers are in care due to adverse experiences, which results in specific vulnerabilities and disadvantages for this cohort of young people, which can negatively impact on outcomes. By keeping children close to their communities, in safe and stable

placements, their identity needs are met, and the local authority is able to provide them with an equitable service.

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

9.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

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

10.1 The creation of Brent's new Residential Home, "The Gardens" is referenced in the Strategy and is a key property consideration.

## **11.0 Communication Considerations**

11.1 This Strategy is published on the Brent Council website.

11.2 Additional action will be undertaken to communicate the strategy through simple, audience-specific approaches. This may include the development of a summary which will enable Brent Council staff and young people to understand and be able to engage with the strategy in a meaningful way.

### **Report sign off:**

***Nigel Chapman***

Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development

# Brent Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2025 - 2029

**Date published:** September 2025

**Date for first review:** February 2026

**Document authors:** Alexandra Eyre, Education, Partnerships and Strategy Programme Lead and Michelle Gwyther, Head of Forward Planning, Performance and Partnerships

## Contents

<b>Foreword .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Executive Summary.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The Brent Approach.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Brent Context .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Levels of Need.....	7
Profile of Looked After Children (CLA).....	8
Profile of Care Leavers.....	9
<b>Delivery of the 2020 – 2024 Sufficiency Strategy.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>The Voice of Children and Young People in the Strategy .....</b>	<b>14</b>
Achievements during the 2020 – 2024 Sufficiency Strategy.....	16
Challenges during the 2020 – 2024 Sufficiency Strategy .....	17
<b>The 2025 - 2029 Sufficiency Strategy .....</b>	<b>19</b>
Adoption .....	20
Fostering and Kinship Care .....	20
Residential Care.....	22
Care Experienced Young People .....	25
Supported Accommodation.....	26
Leaving Care and preparing for independence .....	26
<b>The Future of Sufficiency Planning.....</b>	<b>28</b>
Action Plan.....	28

## Foreword

Writing a new sufficiency strategy amidst a changing children's social care landscape has provided many challenges. There have been and will continue to be several significant factors, each with the potential to reshape the environment in which this strategy will operate. Despite these uncertainties, the focus remains on ensuring children and young people have access to the right support, at the right time and in the right place to meet their needs.

Recommendations from the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and the change in government following the 2024 General Election has led to shifts in policy priorities, funding allocations and the overall strategic direction of children's social care. Brent, along with all other local authorities is developing and delivering local responses to national policy direction, (the Families First reform programme) to develop multi-agency child protection teams and family group decision making, as well as supporting families with the cost-of-living crisis.

The cost of residential placements has risen over the period of the previous strategy placing strain on budgets, also exacerbated by the fluctuation in the number of children placed in these settings across a single year which at the time of writing this new strategy is the highest it has been for several years. There have been changes to regulations for supported accommodation for 16 – 17-year-old young people, and these reforms have redefined the standards and expectations for care, further influencing how sufficiency is planned and achieved. It is unclear if this will be the last reform to regulated services or whether there is more to come for 18+ providers.

Given these factors, this sufficiency strategy has been developed with a commitment to flexibility and responsiveness. Brent recognises the assumptions made today may need to be revisited as new information becomes available and as the broader context evolves. This strategy is designed to be a live document, capable of adapting to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. It is within in this context that this strategy will now be reviewed and refreshed annually.

## Executive Summary

The Brent Looked After Children and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2025-2029 sets out how Brent Council, as Corporate Parent, meets its statutory Sufficiency Duty as laid down in Section 22G of the Children Act 1989. The strategy draws on statutory guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children (DfE 2010), the Children Act 2004, the Children Leaving Care Act 2000, the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023.

The strategy describes how Brent will meet the current and future placement needs of looked after children (CLA) and care experienced young people. It builds on existing duties in law to promote and safeguard the welfare and well-being of children and high-quality care planning. The strategy provides an update on progress in delivering the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2024 and details current and planned actions to meet placement sufficiency over the next four years in line with the demographic profile of Brent's population.

There are many challenges that local authorities are experiencing when delivering and building sufficiency. Nationally there is an increasing number of children entering care which often exceeds the number of suitable placements. Locally, the number of children in care has remained relatively stable over the past 4 years however, due to the increased number of children with complex needs, older children coming into care and sibling groups means finding a suitable placement is difficult. This in turn increases the likelihood of placement instability, which can cause placement breakdown and further disruption to the child or young person.

Recruitment and retention issues of foster carers is felt both within local authorities and the private sector. This is particularly prevalent for local authorities to both recruit and retain internal foster carers, especially for those with complex needs and older teenagers. As there is a shortfall of foster carers, there is a requirement to provide a competitive offer to be successful in recruitment. There has been an increase in out-of-area placements which were not necessary for safeguarding reasons but have had to be made due to sufficiency reasons. This disrupts education, friendships, family networks and makes it more difficult for professionals involved in the lives of children and young people to provide high quality, consistent support.

This strategy is focused on a strategic principle of increasing the local sufficiency of placements for children and young people through increasing the number of in-house foster carers and increasing the availability of residential placements which can support a range of complex needs. Collectively this will achieve the outcome of keeping children and young people close to their own communities in high quality, value for money and locally available care.

The Brent Looked After Children and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2025-2029 is based on Brent's values and ways of working and has been developed with the views of children and young people very much at the forefront.

This strategy aligns with other Brent strategies including but not limited to:

- The Borough Plan 2023-27, particularly the Best Start in Life
- The Looked After Children and Care Leavers' Strategy 2025-2027
- The Brent Youth Strategy 2025-2028
- The Brent SEND Strategy 2021-2025
- The Brent Participation Strategy 2024-27
- The Brent Youth Justice Plan 2025-2028

## The Brent Approach

The Brent Sufficiency Strategy is steered by the five priorities set out in the borough plan:

- Prosperity and Stability in Brent
- A Cleaner, Greener Future
- Thriving Communities
- The Best Start in Life
- A Healthier Brent

Brent's Children, Young People and Community Development Directorate operates to ensure that the following outcomes are achieved:

- Children and young people are happy, healthy and thrive
- Children and young people are cared for in homes that are safe and secure
- Children, young people, and their families can reach their full potential
- Families and communities are safe and resilient.

Brent values for children and young people:

- Children, young people and families are at the heart of service design and delivery and adopt a child/ family journey approach to service delivery
- Hold the views of children and young people and their families as paramount importance
- Ensure that frontline staff can spend as much time as possible with children and young people, and their families, so that they can make a real difference to their lives  
Enable children and young people and their families to only have to tell their story once and are able to rely on long-term relationships with professionals.

In March 2024, Brent published its revised Ways of Working document, 'This is Brent CYP. This is how we grow'. This document builds on the previous practice framework and embeds anti-racist practice into daily interactions with children, young people and their families.

Brent's approach to meeting its sufficiency duty is underpinned by a clear alignment between borough-wide priorities, directorate-level outcomes and a set of core values that place children, young people, and their families at the centre of service planning and delivery. This integrated framework ensures that sufficiency is not viewed in isolation, but as part of a broader commitment to equity, inclusion and long-term wellbeing. The revised Ways of Working, with its emphasis on anti-racist and relationship-based practice, further reinforces this commitment, embedding it into everyday professional interactions. Collectively, these guiding principles ensure that Brent's Sufficiency Strategy is both responsive to need and reflective of the borough's ambition to support all children and young people to thrive.

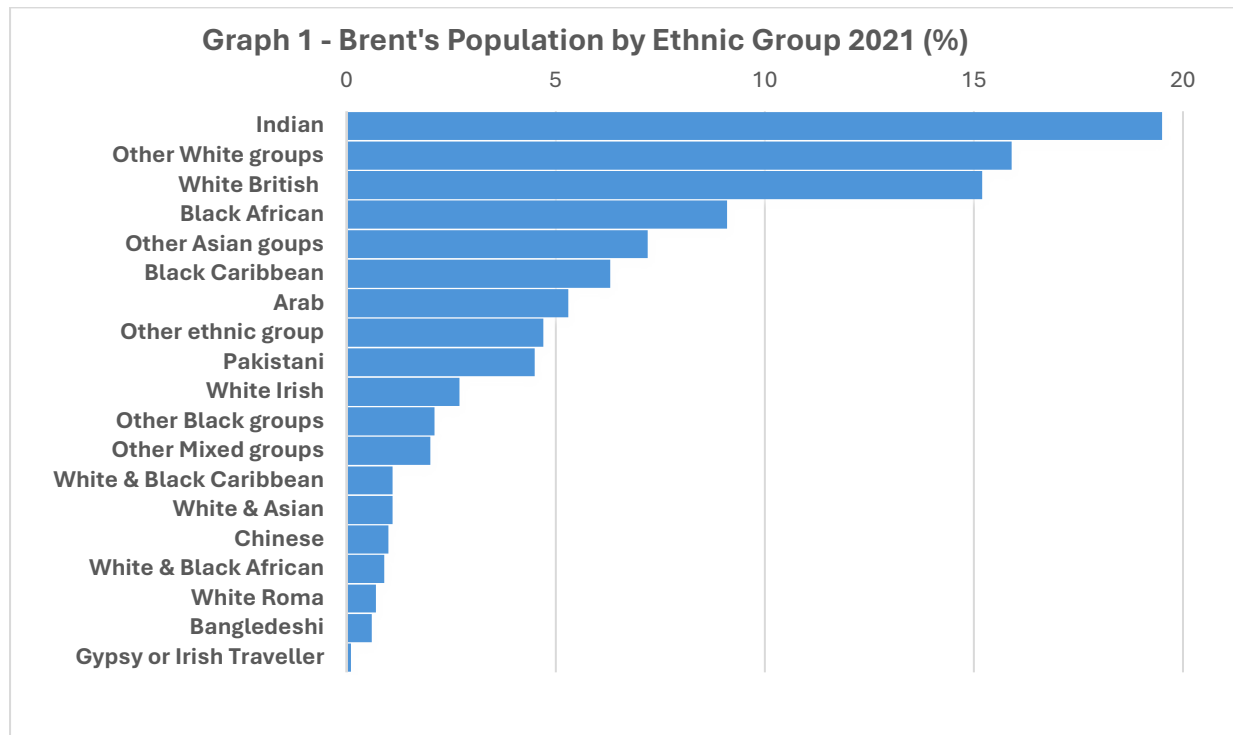
## The Brent Context

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates the population of Brent to be approximately 344,500 as of June 2023, making Brent the 5<sup>th</sup> largest borough in London by population size.<sup>1</sup> Brent is the most densely populated Outer London borough and 14<sup>th</sup> highest in England.<sup>2</sup>

The 2021 Census showed that compared to 2011, Brent's 0 to 4 population decreased by 11%. However, its 5 to 9 population increased by 6%, 10 to 14 population increased by 16%, 15 to 19 population increased by 11% and 20 to 24 population increased by 2%.<sup>3</sup>

The Office for National Statistics showed Brent was the 67<sup>th</sup> most income-deprived local authority in England in 2019. 33 Brent neighbourhoods, out of 173, were among the 20% most income-deprived in England.<sup>4</sup> The End Child Poverty coalition estimated in 2022-2023 that 35.1% of children in Brent were living in poverty, which equates to 28,137 children.<sup>5</sup>

Brent is one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in London and has the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest percentage of Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups in England and Wales after Newham at 65%. A high-level breakdown is 34.6% White ethnic groups, 32.8% Asian/ Asian British groups, 17.5% Black/ Black British groups, 5.1% Mixed/ multiple ethnic groups and 10% other ethnic groups.<sup>6</sup> Around 150 languages are spoken in Brent based on language data from the January 2020 Pupil Census<sup>7</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> [Population change in Brent Briefing 2024](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Population change in Brent Briefing 2024](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Brent population change, Census 2021 – ONS](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Exploring local income deprivation](#)

<sup>5</sup> [End Child Poverty](#)

<sup>6</sup> [2021 Census - Ethnicity topic report](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Community profile](#)

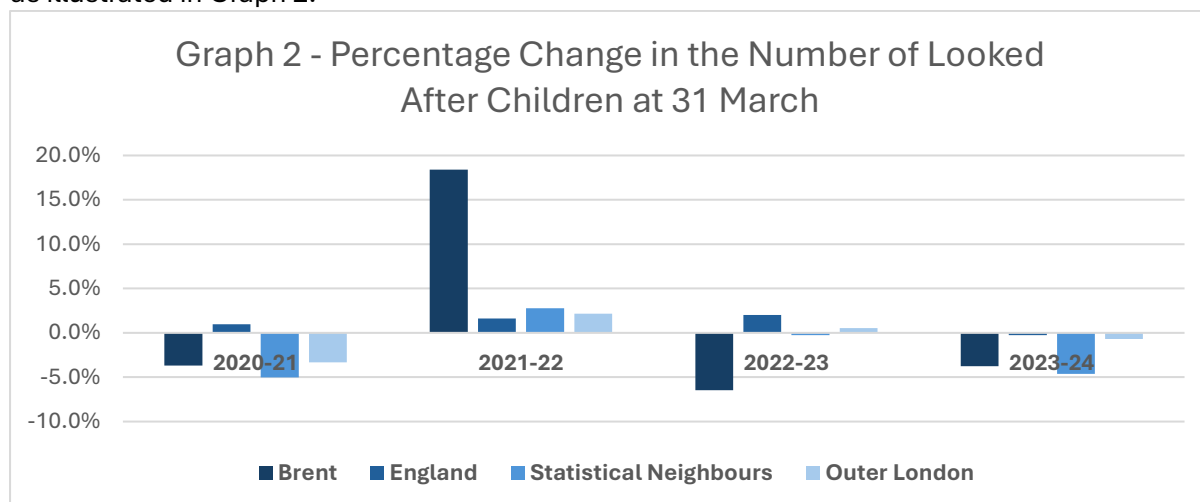


## Levels of Need

In the year ending 31 March 2024, Brent recorded 5,297 episodes of need, equating to a rate of 718 per 10,000 children. While this is slightly below the average for statistical neighbours (738 per 10,000), it is higher than the national average for England (630 per 10,000). This highlights a continued level of demand for early help and statutory social care services in the borough.

As of the same date, 3,500 children and young people in Brent had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Since 2020, the number of maintained EHCPs has grown at an average annual rate of 8.8%, reflecting increasing complexity of need and demand for specialist support across education, health, and care. This growth has been consistent over the last year and as of 31 March 2025, the local authority was maintaining 3,907 EHCPs.

The Looked After Children (CLA) population in Brent has shown some fluctuation over the past five years. From a peak of 341 children in March 2022, the number decreased to 307 by March 2024 and reduced further to 298 in March 2025. This represents a notable percentage reduction, outpacing the trends seen in both statistical neighbours, the Outer London and national average, as illustrated in Graph 2.

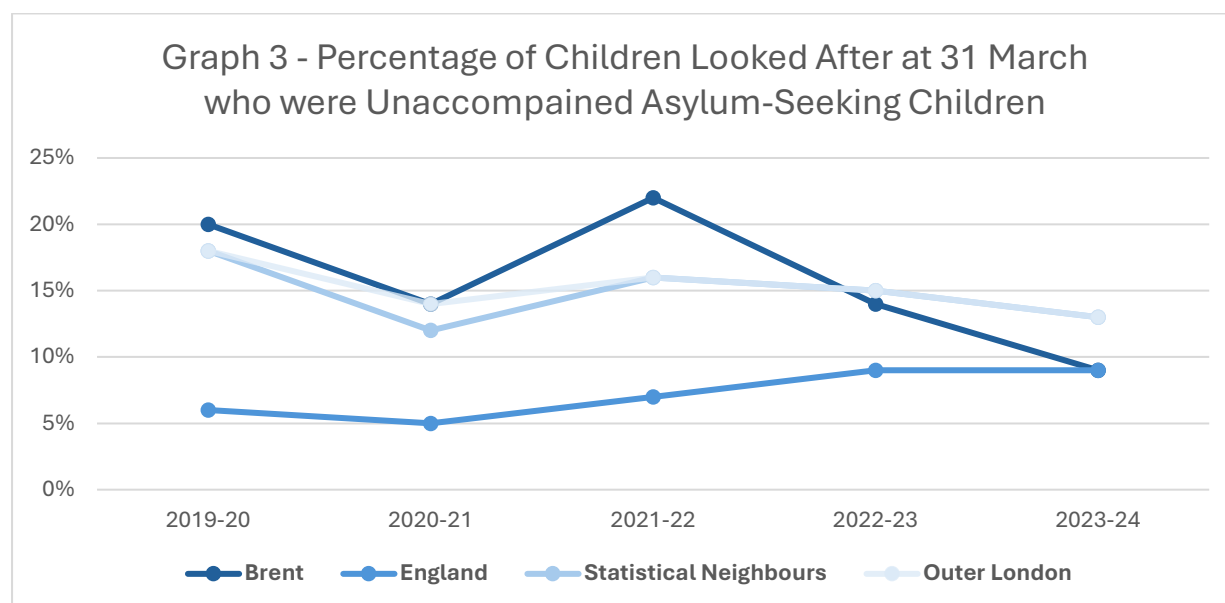


Brent's CLA rate per 10,000 children remains below statistical neighbours, England and Outer London averages, as shown in Table 1 below, indicating effective early intervention, permanency planning and a reduction in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). As of March 2025, the rate of looked after children per 10,000 children under the age of 18 has lowered to 40. The comparative data for Statistical Neighbours, Outer London and England was not published at the time of writing this strategy.

**Table 1: Rate of Looked After Children per 10,000 Children Under the Age of 18**

Year Ending	Brent	Statistical Neighbours	Outer London	England
31 March 2020	39	52	46	68
31 March 2021	38	51	44	69
31 March 2022	47	53	46	70
31 March 2023	44	53	46	71
31 March 2024	42	50	45	70
31 March 2025	40	-	-	-

The temporary increase in CLA numbers in 2022 coincided with a sharp rise in UASC. This was driven by a surge in arrivals via small boats across the English Channel, the implementation of the mandatory National Transfer Scheme by the government of the time, and a significant increase in asylum applications, particularly from Albanian and Afghan nationals. Graph 3 shows in Brent the number of UASC has now decreased to be comparable with England averages, but is lower than Outer London and statistical neighbours. As of March 2025, the percentage of UASC has slightly increased to 10% (it should be noted that the number of UASC has remained the same but due to the overall CLA population reducing, the proportion is higher).



## Profile of Looked After Children (CLA)

As of 31 March 2024, Brent's CLA population was predominantly composed of older children, with 36% aged 10-15 and 33% aged 16 and over. This age profile is mirrored in entry points into care, as 29% of new entrants were aged 10-15 and 31% were 16 and over. These figures reflect a consistent trend of older entrants into care, observed both nationally and among Brent's statistical neighbours, continuing patterns identified in the previous Brent Sufficiency Strategy (2020-2024). The provisional March 2025 data shows this trend as continuing.

This demographic trend presents significant placement sufficiency challenges. Older children entering care are more likely to have complex emotional, behavioural, and / or mental health needs, which can limit placement options.

Table 2 outlines the demographic composition by gender, ethnicity and age of Brent's CLA population as of 31 March 2024 and provisional data for March 2025. The gender distribution aligns closely with both statistical neighbours and the national CLA profile in England, indicating a consistent trend across regions.

However, a significant disparity is observed in the ethnic breakdown. Black or Black British children are markedly overrepresented in Brent's CLA population (33%), with proportions substantially exceeding those of England (7%), statistical neighbours (25%) and Outer London (20%). This overrepresentation presents challenges in securing culturally appropriate placements that fully meet the individual needs and identities of these young people.

Conversely, children from Asian or Asian British and White backgrounds are underrepresented when compared to Brent's broader population demographics. This imbalance highlights the importance of developing targeted strategies to ensure equitable support and culturally responsive care for all children particularly in their placements, while also addressing the systemic factors contributing to disproportionality.

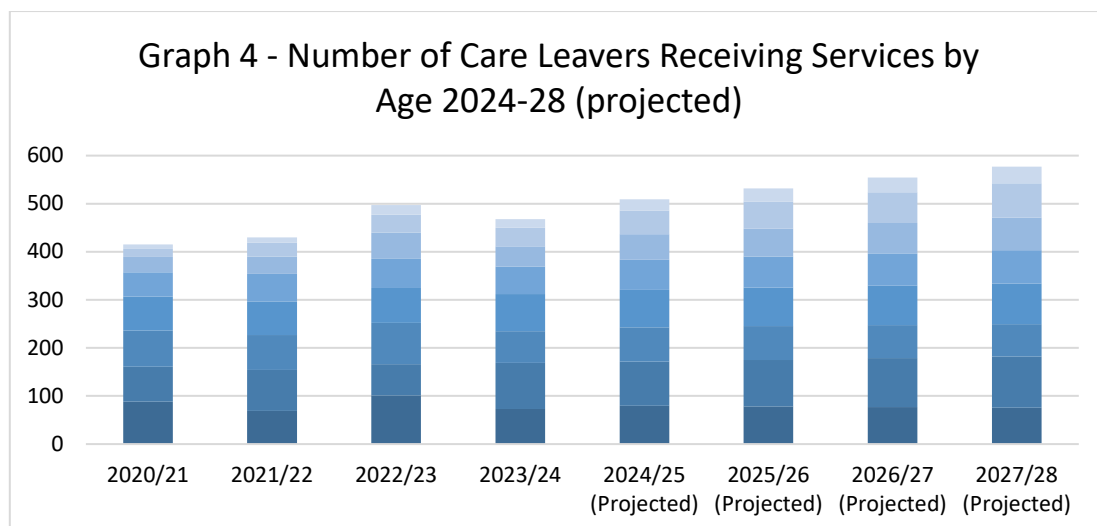
**Table 2: Profile of Looked After Children as at 31/03/2024 and 31/03/2025**

	March 2024	March 2024 %	Provisional March 2025	Provisional March 2025 (%)
Number of children in care	307		296	
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	170	55	163	55
Female	137	45	133	45
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
Asian or Asian British	28	9	36	12
Black or Black British	102	33	87	29
Mixed	61	20	62	21
Not Known	0	0	0	0
Other Ethnic Group	46	15	46	16
White	70	23	65	22
<b>Age</b>				
Under 1	10	3	16	5
1-4	50	16	27	9
5-9	37	12	46	16
10-15	110	36	110	37
16 and over	100	33	97	33

## Profile of Care Leavers

Brent's care leaver population (501) is broadly in line with its statistical neighbours (476). As of 31 March 2024, Brent had 81 care leavers aged 17-18, comparable with statistical neighbours averages of 86. There were 264 care leavers aged 19-21, compared to statistical neighbours averages of 253 care leavers and Brent had 156 care leavers aged 22-25 who requested and received support compared to the average of 137 care leavers for statistical neighbours.

Graph 4 below outlines a projection of the future number of care leavers eligible to receive services up to 2028.

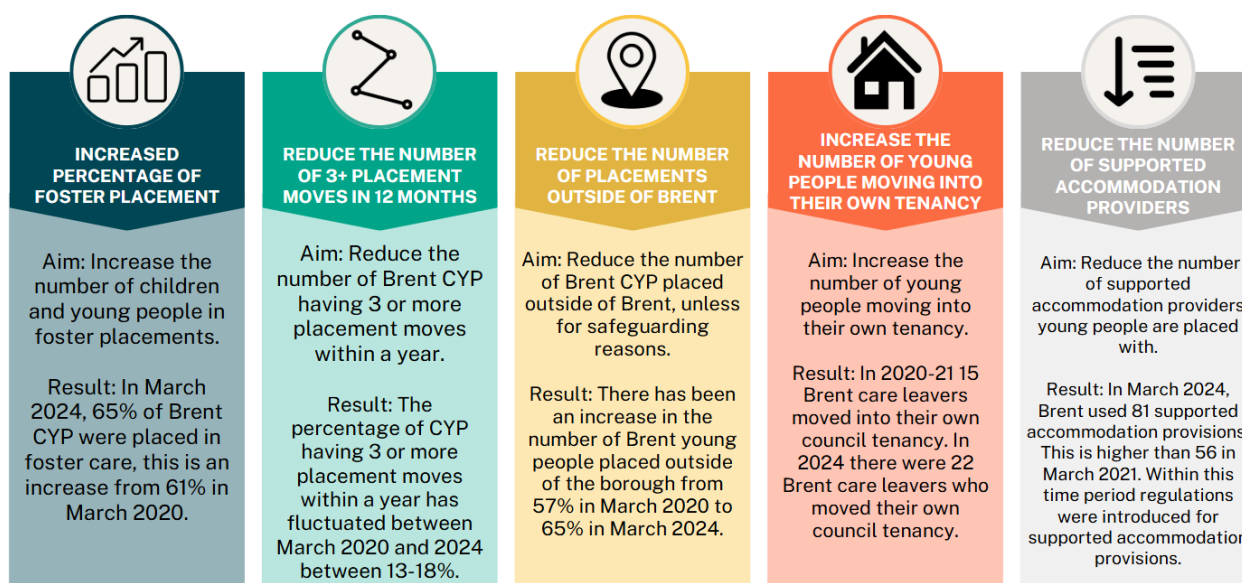


This upward trend is driven in part by the cohort of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who entered care in 2021–22 and who have now transitioned into care leaver status. Delays in asylum decisions, averaging 758 days in early 2022, have contributed to prolonged periods in care, increasing the number of eligible care leavers.<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, housing pressures in Brent, also being experienced nationally, have led to a rise in homelessness applications in the general Brent population. This has reduced the availability of social tenancies for care leavers, despite their Priority B status, as demand for housing is higher than the rate social housing can be supplied. As a result, many care experienced young people remain in Local Authority funded accommodation for longer than both required and anticipated. These factors combined suggest that Brent will face growing demand for placements and may need to extend support arrangements such as Staying Put and explore Staying Close.

<sup>8</sup> [Home Office asylum delays worse for unaccompanied children since 2015 with Albanian children most affected - Migrant & Refugee Children's Legal Unit](#)

## Delivery of the 2020 – 2024 Sufficiency Strategy



The 2020-2024 Sufficiency Strategy identified a number of actions to address the challenges facing the local authority across different placement types. The table below outlines the progress against the outcome measures for these actions.

Placement	Action in 2020-24 Strategy	Outcome Measure	Progress
Fostering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of local foster carers for children in older age groups through targeted recruitment campaigns.</li> <li>• Work with West London authorities to develop a regional approach to fostering services.</li> <li>• Work with the WLA to develop a market of high support foster placements for complex children, including those stepping down from residential placements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More children and young people placed in foster placements, including as step-down arrangements from residential settings</li> <li>• A reduction in CLA experiencing 3+ placement moves within 12 months</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In March 2024, 65% of Brent children and young people were placed in foster care, there is an increase from 61% in March 2020.</li> <li>• The percentage of children and young people having 3 or more placement moves within a year has fluctuated but was 16% at both 31 March 2020 and 2024.</li> </ul>
Supported Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review block contract arrangements</li> <li>• Identify a small group of providers who can deliver local placements to enable young people to live close to their</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brent places in a smaller number of semi-independent providers</li> <li>• A reduction in LAC experiencing 3+ placement moves</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In March 2024, Brent used 81 supported accommodation providers. This is higher than the 56 supported accommodation providers used in</li> </ul>

	<p>family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a quality assurance framework informed by care lived experience and sets quality standards in line with or above national expectations</li> <li>• Deliver a series of provider forums and training events to develop a market that meets the needs of Brent's young people</li> <li>• Embed an accredited life-skills programme for care leavers through semi-independent providers</li> </ul>	<p>within 12 months</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More care leavers moving into their own tenancies before the age of 20</li> </ul>	<p>March 2021. Within this time period new regulations were introduced within the supported accommodation sector and the Brent care leaver population increased.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 2020-21, 15 Brent care leavers moved into their own tenancy. In 2024, 22 Brent care leavers moved into their own tenancy. This has become more challenging with the increase in care leavers and shortage of social housing available.</li> <li>• Implementation of an independence programme delivered through Brent's Gordon Brown Centre attended by 50 young people in 2024/25.</li> <li>• Quality assurance framework implemented and includes Care Quality Ambassadors.</li> <li>• Development of a shared house model through a pilot</li> </ul>
Residential provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embed an outcomes-based commissioning approach with residential providers to develop a shared understanding of expected outcomes</li> <li>• Develop relationships with local providers who will work with the council to meet the needs of Brent's most complex young people</li> <li>• Work closely in partnership with health partners in identifying provision that meets the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More young people stepping down to foster placements before the age of 16</li> <li>• A reduction in placements outside of London (unless for safeguarding reasons)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There has been an increase from 57% to 65% of children placed outside of the borough between March 2021 to March 2024.</li> <li>• 71% of Brent children were placed within 20 miles of the child's home, this has increased from 60% in March 2020.</li> <li>• Development of a new local authority residential home, due to open in 2025.</li> </ul>

	needs of complex children and children with SEND		
Parent and baby assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commission a new service for independent community assessments</li> <li>• Work with local providers to develop family assessment services that meet Brent's needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to a greater range of high-quality family assessment options that reduce the need for use of residential settings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through working with the Commissioning Alliance a framework has been implemented to support the provision of parent and baby assessments. This was introduced in 2024 and therefore, the impact cannot be fully measured.</li> </ul>

## The Voice of Children and Young People in the Strategy

“We want all our young people from all backgrounds to be seen and heard in our services. We will create more opportunities and spaces to empower our young people to have their say.” (Brent Borough Plan 2023-27)

Every two years the Bright Spots survey is distributed to Brent young people to enable them to reflect on their experiences which can then be used to influence services, and the most recent survey (August 2024) has influenced the development of this strategy.

82 looked after children completed the survey and their feedback on placements is below:

- 93% of young people aged 4-17 reported ‘always’ feeling safe where they lived (82% general population).
- 100% of 4-7 years reported feeling settled at home and liking their bedroom.
- 56% of children aged 8-11 years reported ‘always’ feeling settled where they lived (78% of children in other LAs) and 44% ‘sometimes’ feeling settled where they lived.
- 76% of 11-17 years reported ‘always’ feeling settled at home.

140 care leavers responded to the survey, a response rate of 29%. Of those who completed the survey, 36% live in a flat or house they rent, 22% live in supported accommodation and 14% are with foster carer(s) (staying put). 3 young people were in short term/ emergency accommodation and 6 selected ‘other’.

- 77% of care leavers reported ‘always’ feeling safe at home (other LAs average 64%).
- 69% of care leavers reported ‘always’ feeling safe in their area (other LAs average 60%).
- 64% of care leavers reported ‘always’ feeling settled where they lived (other LAs average 51%).
- 66% of care leavers responded ‘mainly yes’ when asked if where they lived was right for them (84% general population).

“I feel great about where I live. I get along with staff and the other people I live with.”

“Very good accommodation with enough space for me as I live alone. Nice view.”

“I really feel comfortable where I live.”

“It’s okay for me but I feel ready to move on into independence.”

“Did not originally plan on renting a private room and living with others... but it’ll do for now.”

“It’s too far from everywhere I need to go (work/college). I feel isolated from my friends and family. I want to move close to them.”

In reflecting on the development of this strategy, it became clear that the voice of young people with lived experience was not as prevalent as it should have been. Recognising this gap, Brent took meaningful steps in 2023 to strengthen youth participation in shaping services. This included the recruitment of care experienced young people as Care Quality Ambassadors, ensuring their voices directly inform quality assurance and service improvement. Young people were also invited to sit on the interview panel for the new Brent residential children’s home, embedding their perspectives into key decision-making processes and inform key developments of the home such as the décor.



Additionally, the implementation of the new Brent Participation Strategy 2024-2027 has provided a structured framework to ensure that children and young people are consistently engaged in shaping the services that affect them. This strategy outlines how Brent works with children and young people to have meaningful and inclusive involvement in decision-making and co-design of services.

Some of the ways young people can participate is through Brent Youth Parliament, Brent Care Journeys 2.0 and Brent Youth Forum, and care experienced young people are part of Council meetings and committees to provide scrutiny, present questions to officers and members, and provide young people's views on issues. There has been an increase in the last two years of the current strategy of young people challenging officers and elected members in a range of Council forums on issues which affect young people.

An action plan will be created to ensure that the voice of young people is heard, listened to and acted upon over the period of this strategy. These developments mark a significant shift towards more inclusive and responsive commissioning practices that meet the needs of Brent young people.

## Achievements during the 2020 – 2024 Sufficiency Strategy

### **ILACS Ofsted Inspection**

On 20 – 24 February 2023, Brent Council's Children's Services was inspected by Ofsted and received an overall rating of 'good', reflecting the positive impact on children's lives and futures. The report highlighted the 'passionate and committed' practitioners, 'strong political support for children's services' and 'investment to grow the workforce'. The below list outlines the areas of sufficiency raised in the report:

- The creation of the Accelerated Support Team provided effective support to families through strengthening relationships and enabling children to remain at home or return quickly.
- Managers respond quickly to ensure children are moved into appropriate settings quickly and appropriately safeguarded avoiding the need for unregistered children's homes.
- Although children regularly have suitable placements such as foster carers, family and friend carers, children are often not placed locally.
- UASC are placed in 'well-matched homes' and receive relevant support by specialist services.
- 'Suitable and safe accommodation' is found for many care leavers.

### **Brent's own Children's Residential Home**

In June 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) opened applications for its Wave 2 Children's Home Capital Grant Programme. This provided an opportunity for local authorities to apply for matched capital funding available to create provision for residential children's homes for children and young people in their own local area. Brent was successful and was awarded £1.1m which the Council match funded.

Brent's Residential Children's Home will deliver a four-bed residential step-down home within Brent for looked after adolescents (aged 12 – 16) with social, emotional and behavioural needs. It will provide three bedrooms for a step-down provision to prepare young people who are in residential settings away from the borough for a move into a local fostering placement, supported accommodation (if 16+) or to return home. The remaining one bedroom will be allocated for emergency placements to enable a short-term response for young people in crisis. This is due to open in the 2025/2026 financial year.

### **Brent's response to Supported Accommodation Regulations**

Brent Council responded decisively to the introduction of supported accommodation regulations in October 2023 for 16- and 17-year-olds by embedding a robust and accountable process to safeguard care leavers. This included the implementation of clear checks and balances, with senior managers providing regular scrutiny to ensure high standards were consistently met. The Council took a firm position by refusing to commission providers not listed on the Ofsted monthly register, reinforcing its commitment to regulatory compliance.

Brent also employed six former care experienced young people as Care Quality Ambassadors, ensuring the voices of those with lived experience inform quality assurance processes of providers. Alongside this, the Council continues to work constructively with providers to support improvements where needed, while also sharing information with West London colleagues to raise concerns and coordinate responses to unregulated providers. This multi-layered approach reflects Brent's strategic commitment to delivering safe, supportive, and high-quality accommodation for all young people leaving care.

## Challenges during the 2020 – 2024 Sufficiency Strategy

### Increased reliance on Residential and Supported Accommodation Provisions

In the last couple of years of the previous strategy, Brent Council has experienced increasing challenges in securing appropriate placements for older children entering care. This has been in particular with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) who are accepting fewer referrals for older young people. This is due to a growing trend of risk aversion among IFAs who themselves are grappling with issues of foster carer sufficiency, compounded by a reduction of available in-house foster carers.

There has been a decline in the number of internal foster households from 100 in 2021 to 88 in 2025 and the number of places has decreased from 153 to 128 (inclusive of mainstream foster carers and connected person carers). The Ofsted Fostering in England (1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024) report showed the amount of approved or newly approved mainstream local authority fostering households between 2020 and 2024 reduced by 14%, so this reduced sufficiency is a national issue and not unique to Brent.<sup>9</sup>

The impact of all of this is resulting in older children more likely to be placed in costlier, residential settings or an earlier transition into 16+ supported accommodation than would be preferred. Although now regulated for 16–17-year-olds, supported accommodation arrangements may not always provide the ideal level of support to meet identified needs and oversight, potentially impacting long-term outcomes for young people.

This reduction in overall foster carer sufficiency places additional financial pressures on local placement resources and can impact the stability and continuity of care for older children and young people.

### Adoption Rates

The 2023/24 Annual Report from Adoption England highlighted a growing disparity between the number of children with a plan for adoption and the number of prospective adopters coming forward. Economic uncertainty and the ongoing cost of living crisis have contributed to many individuals and families delaying decisions to expand their households. The report also underscores that delays in finding suitable matches are disproportionately affecting certain groups-particularly sibling groups, children aged five and over, and those from Black and mixed heritage backgrounds, further compounding the challenges in achieving timely and stable permanency outcomes and increasing the demand for foster placements.<sup>10</sup> That said, Brent is working closely with Adopt London West to ensure there are sufficient local adopts to meet the needs of children with an adoption plan.

### Placement Stability

Looked after children are enabled to have better outcomes when they have stable placements. The NSPCC outline how placement breakdowns can have harmful consequences on a child's emotional wellbeing and mental health.<sup>11</sup> In addition, it halts the development of stable relationships with adults who could support them. The Fostering Network echoes this stating that

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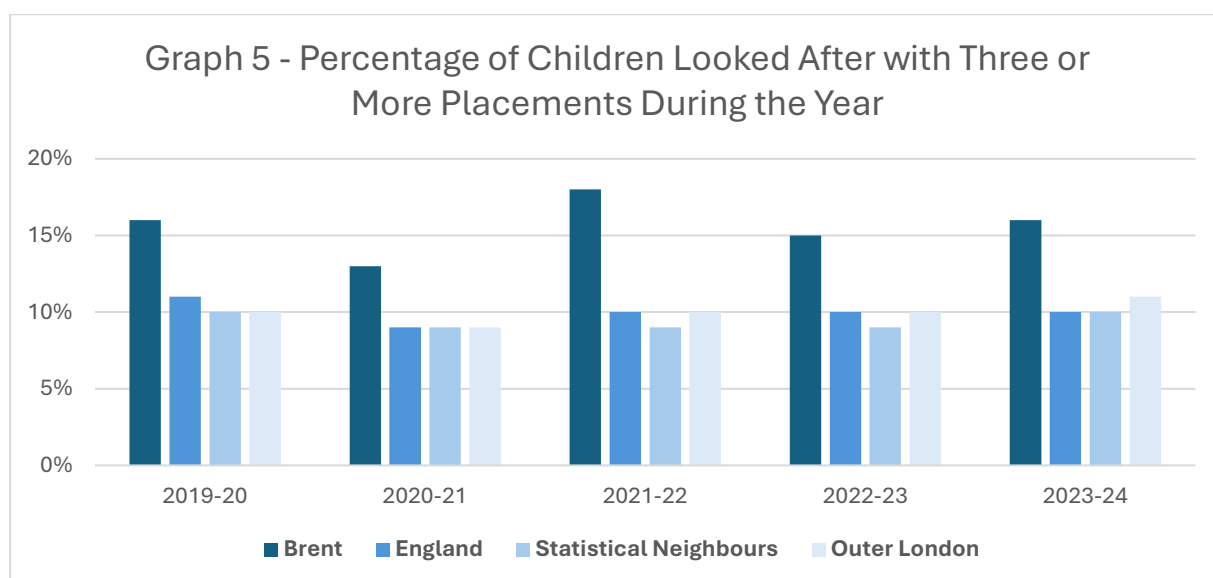
<sup>9</sup> [Fostering in England 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Adoption England Annual Report 2023-24 Web.pdf](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Looked after children | NSPCC Learning](#)

instability can lead to poor outcomes including poorer educational outcomes, breakdown of relationships with trusted adults and increase in vulnerability.<sup>12</sup>

Graph 5 shows the percentage of looked after children as of the 31 March 2019-2024 with three or more placement moves during the year. Over the five-year period, Brent's percentage values have consistently remained above both the English and Outer London average and those of its statistical neighbours. While these three groups have shown relative stability, hovering around 9–11%, Brent's figures have fluctuated more significantly, peaking at 18% in 2021–22 before returning to 16% in 2023–24. This has since further reduced to 12% as of March 2025.



Brent has taken proactive steps to reduce placement breakdowns by introducing placement stability meetings at an earlier stage, aiming to address emerging issues before they escalate to crisis point. This approach has been strengthened by improved collaboration between the Commissioning Resource Team, social workers and the Fostering Team, enabling earlier and more effective interventions. The Commissioning Resource Team has enhanced its engagement with providers, building stronger partnerships to discuss issues which are likely to disrupt a placement and has plans in place to further strengthen market management capacity.

The Commissioning Resource Team has also increased the frequency of quality assurance activities to ensure providers are held accountable for delivering high standards of care which is also assisting in managing the placement market in a positive way. This quality assurance activity involves six Care Quality Ambassadors, all of whom are Care Experienced Young People and of the 32 quality assurance visits between 2024–2025, 10 of which involved Care Quality Ambassadors.

Additionally, Brent Council has commissioned the Positive Support Group for the current financial year (2025-26) following a successful test and learn pilot that ran from July 2023. The Children in Care Resilience Service aims to increase the ability and confidence of foster carers and providers to successfully support young people to manage challenging and complex behaviours, prevent placement breakdowns and step ups from foster care into costlier residential placements.

<sup>12</sup> [full-response-to-the-independent-review-of-childrens-social-care-england-the-fostering-network.pdf](#)

## The 2025 - 2029 Sufficiency Strategy

As a local authority, the looked after children and care leaver placement profile as of 31 March 2024 highlights both strengths and areas requiring strategic focus. Data is a snapshot of provisional data from 31 March 2025, but also draws on data from 31 March 2024 that allows comparison to statistical neighbours, Outer London or national data for England (information for 2025 is yet to be published). It is important to note that numbers change throughout the year dependent on a range of factors including the number of children placed in residential homes and secure units. Youth Justice data indicates a higher-than-usual number of remand cases, with six young people in remand care at the start of 2025/26.

From a legal status perspective, the high proportion of children under Section 31 care orders (48%) reflects the long-term nature of many placements, while 28% remain under Section 20 arrangements. To strengthen sufficiency, Brent must look at increasing local placement options, particularly fostering. These steps will support better planning, reduce reliance on out-of-borough placements and ultimately improve outcomes for Brent children in care.

Notably, 65% of Brent's looked after children are placed out of borough, which impacts on their access to local services and community ties. This is similar to statistical neighbours (61%) and Outer London (60%) and higher than the average across England (45%). While 71% of placements are within 20 miles of the child's home, this strategy must address the 28% placed further afield or with unknown proximity.

**Table 3: Placement Profile of Looked After Children as at 31/03/2024 and 31/03/2025**

	March 2024	March 2024 (%)	Provisional March 2025	Provisional March 2025 (%)
<b>Placement Type</b>				
Adoption	5	1.6	7	2.4
Brent foster placement	49	16	47	15.8
Independent foster placement	98	31.9	86	29.1
Kinship placement	52	16.9	41	13.9
Placement with parents	8	2.6	13	4.4
Secure unit	1	0.3	1	0.3
Children's residential home	22	7.2	37	12.5
Supported accommodation	30	9.8	43	14.5
Other	42	13.7	21	7.1
<b>Placement Location</b>				
In borough	108	35	101	34
Out of borough	199	65	195	66
<b>Proximity to the child's home</b>				
Under 20 miles	219	71.3	213	72
Over 20 miles	59	19.2	53	17.9

Child's home is not known or recorded	29	9.5	30	10.1
<b>Legal Status</b>				
Section 20	87	28.3	86	29.1
Section 38	57	18.6	38	12.8
Section 31	146	47.6	150	50.7
Placement Order	16	5.2	16	5.4
Other	1	0.3	6	2

## Adoption

Brent Council remains part of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Adopt London West (ALW), in partnership with the London Boroughs of Ealing, Hounslow, and Hammersmith & Fulham. Inter-country adoption referrals continue to be managed by the Inter-Country Adoption Centre, a specialist Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA).

Due to the relatively small number of cases, assessing adoption performance remains challenging as anomalies can affect trends. The 2024/25 financial year recorded the highest number of adoptions since ALW began delivering services on behalf of Brent. Over the past three years, the number of days between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family has increased from 468 in April 2023 to 503 in April 2024 and 512 in April 2025 meaning they remain in current placement longer and is potentially prevents another Brent young person accessing a suitable placement.

In 2024/25, 18 adopter households were approved, a slight decrease from 20 approvals in the previous year. This reduction is attributed to the departure of a social worker, which temporarily impacted assessment capacity. Of the approved adopters:

- 72% identify as White British
- 11% as Black
- 17% as Mixed White/Asian
- 17% identify as LGBTQ+

There remains a notable shortfall in the number of Black adopters, a well-documented issue that led to the collaborative initiative of the Black Adoption Project between four Regional Adoption Agencies covering 24 London boroughs, aimed at addressing this gap. For the period of this sufficiency strategy, this project remains on-going and reducing adoption timescales is an area of development for the Looked After Children and Permanency Service.

## Fostering and Kinship Care

Foster and kinship placements remain Brent's primary provision, accounting for 64.8% of placements. This has reduced to 60% as of March 2025, which did not meet Brent's target of offering 70% of all looked after children's placements through stable, family-based care. However, the continued reliance and need for secure units (0.3%), children's residential homes (7.2%) and supported accommodation (9.8%) (data is all snapshots from March 2025), highlights the necessity to further expand foster care capacity, both short term to accommodation children who come into care in crisis, but may not need to remain in crisis and also for children with complex needs to reduce the reliance on other types of placements.

The average difference in cost of an Independent Fostering Agency compared to an in-house foster care in the 2024/25 financial year was around £630 per placement. This difference is

further exacerbated when a fostering placement (either in house or independent) cannot be found and a residential placement is required which puts significant strain on Council budgets. This has become more prevalent due to the number of complex and older children requiring a placement. There have been a number of projects to increase sufficiency which commenced under the previous sufficiency strategy and will continue and potentially further develop under this new strategy.

### **Growing the number of in-house foster carers workstream**

Brent put in place during the last year of the previous strategy, a workstream overseen by the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development to combat the reduction of in-house foster carers by encouraging the increase in the number of new foster carers and the retention of all carers. The workstream reviewed the current offer to in-house foster carers and the following recommendations were implemented:

- Weekly rate uplift: Brent aligned its payments with the North-West London average as of 2024/2025, and this uplift was completed over two financial years.
- Digital offer: laptops are offered to foster carers to help with the various administrative tasks relating to their placements.
- Additional benefits: mental health and wellbeing support through a universal training offer are provided as well as discounted shopping and leisure activities.
- Brent achieved Foster Friendly status on 13 June 2024, the Fostering Network has feedback that Brent is exceeding the minimum criteria for being “fostering friendly”.

### **The West London Fostering Hub**

In September 2023 Brent, alongside Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham (acting as the lead LA), Harrow and Hillingdon, Hounslow, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster Councils, were successful in securing DfE funding to deliver a regional fostering recruitment hub which is overseen by the Commissioning Alliance. This is called the West London Fostering Hub and has with a dedicated webpage entry point for enquiries. This went live in May 2024.

The increase to Brent’s fostering allowances ensured its fostering offer was comparable to neighbours, allowing the West London coalition to compete with IFAs in a unified way. However, as other LA’s adjust their fostering allowances in future financial years, Brent’s will also need to remain under regular review.

The hub has enabled resources to be amalgamated, and the sharing of best practice and consistent messaging has strengthened Brent’s fostering presence. The hub is also designed to provide support to foster carers enhancing Brent’s offer and increasing retention. This will support Brent’s target of recruiting a net gain of ten new carers at the end of the 2025/26 financial year.

### **The Mockingbird Model**

In addition to the West London Fostering Hub, available DfE funding was also used to implement the Mockingbird model in Brent. This is an extended family model where constellations are created with a hub carer and multiple fostering families. Hub carers were recruited in November 2024, and the first constellation launched in May 2025. The hub carers are specifically trained to provide support to foster carers in numerous ways encouraging retention of foster carers and a community wrapped around the children. The Positive Support Group also provide bespoke training to foster carers on a range of topics to build resilience in foster carers, particularly for

those with more complex and older children. At the time of writing this strategy nine Mockingbird foster carers are undergoing this training.

## **Kinship Local Offer**

Brent has a long-standing commitment to kinship care. Since 2007, it has operated a dedicated Kinship Care Team, established in recognition of the unique needs of kinship families and the importance of a tailored, specialist response. Over the past two decades, Brent has embedded a family-first approach, consistently prioritising the identification and support of family and friend carers wherever it is safe and appropriate to do so.

In February 2023, the Department for Education published *Stable Homes, Built on Love* in response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care. This set out the government's vision for transforming children's social care, underpinned by a £200 million investment to shift the system towards earlier, more supportive, and preventative interventions. Kinship care was identified as a central priority with a focus on strengthening support for kinship carers and extended family networks.

Building on this foundation, the then government launched *Championing Kinship Care: The National Kinship Care Strategy*, which outlines a long-term commitment to reforming kinship care to ensure more children can remain safely within their family networks. The current government has maintained this direction, culminating in the publication of updated statutory guidance in October 2024: *Kinship Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities*. This guidance replaces the previous *Family and Friends Care* guidance and mandates that all local authorities publish a Kinship Local Offer, detailing the support available to kinship carers in their area.

Brent is in the process of refreshing its Kinship Local Offer, in line with the new guidance. This offer will reflect both existing strengths and ambitions for continuous improvement. To support this, the Kinship Care Team has reviewed its practice against the key principles of the Kinship Practice Guide, which summarises the needs, experiences, and preferences of kinship carers across the UK. This review has informed the development of a local Kinship Action Plan, which sets out how Brent will enhance its services and ensure that interventions are accessible, acceptable, and effective for kinship families.

## **Residential Care**

Brent is a member of the Commissioning Alliance and uses their Dynamic Purchasing Vehicle (DPV) to commission residential provision, though over the last couple of years of the strategy, providers are electing to not join the alliance and placements are made through spot purchase arrangements. The local authority has managed a residential short break unit for children with disabilities since 2013. The unit is Ofsted registered and graded as *Good* in its most recent inspection in April 2025.

During the lifetime of the previous strategy the average cost of a residential placement has increased year on year as shown in table 4. It should be noted that due to the range in costs of a residential placement and whether they do or do not include additional staffing, means the average can be easily skewed. The lack of available secure unit placements nationally also increases the cost of residential placements.

**Table 4 – Average Cost of a Residential Placement in Brent**

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
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<b>Average Residential Placement Cost</b>	£4,866.67	£5,751.96	£6,446.99	£6,451.40
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As of March 2024, only 6% of children’s homes in England were in London, compared to 25% in the North West. The demand for children’s homes in London is reflected in that it had the highest proportional growth (24%) of the number of settings (43) from April 2023 to March 2024, the next highest was the South East with 14% proportional growth.<sup>13</sup>

### **Reviews of the top 10 highest cost Placements**

In January 2025, all 33 London local authorities participated in a survey to analyse the top 10 highest-cost placements, aiming to better understand the profile and needs of London’s high-cost cohort. The findings revealed that the average cost of a high-needs placement across London was £10,816, with Brent’s average at the time being £12,295 indicating a higher-than-average expenditure.

Notably, when looking at the highest costing placement in each borough all but one were commissioned through spot purchasing, highlighting both the reactive nature of placement sourcing and a move away from frameworks by providers. Furthermore, all but two boroughs cited the absence of a secure children’s home placement as the primary reason for commissioning these high-cost alternatives. Since 2023, there has been a 23% increase in the annual cost of the top 10 placements across London, underscoring the growing financial pressure on local authorities.

Of the 325 placements analysed (with the City of London providing data on its top five), 22% of children were diagnosed with autism spectrum condition or another neurodiverse condition, while 21% presented with complex needs not otherwise specified. These figures reflect the increasing complexity of the cohort and the urgent need for more tailored, specialist provision across the capital.

It is important to recognise this data represents a snapshot in time and is subject to rapid change through the entry into care of a single child into care or the escalation of support needs for an existing placement. This volatility presents ongoing challenges for local authorities in both securing appropriate placements and forecasting budgetary requirements with accuracy. Therefore, the top ten highest cost placements in Brent are kept under regular review.

### **Brent’s Children’s Residential Home**

Brent will open its own children’s residential home in 2025. This will deliver a four-bed residential step-down home within Brent for looked after adolescents (aged 11 – 17) with social, emotional and behavioural needs. The home will focus on young people who need support to successfully re-integrate into their home community, providing access to local services and helping the transition towards independence whilst being closer to their family and friend networks. One bedroom will be available for emergencies.

The home will follow Brent’s practice framework, enabling greater connection with social work services within the Children, Young People and Community Development directorate. The home will enable young people to maintain their networks providing stability, reduce the number of

<sup>13</sup> [Main findings: children’s social care in England 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

young people living outside of the borough, and reduce the average cost of residential placements.

### **Pan London Secure Children's Home Project**

In December 2022, Brent Cabinet provided agreement for Brent Council to join the Pan London Vehicle (PLV) to develop and oversee a London Secure Children's Home to support older children and young people with complex needs including a risk of harming themselves or others. These placements are high cost with more than 20 local authorities in 2022 paying over £20k per week (equivalent to £1 million per year) for individual placements, along with the average distance of a secure unit placement being 192 miles from a young person's home.

Following some unavoidable delays, this Pan London project has recommenced in 2025. Brent has provided agreement in principle to continue to participate in this sufficiency project and awaits further updates and will continue to remain as part of the project as long as it is financially viable to do so. Similarly, to the Brent Children's Residential Home, the London Secure Home will enable young people to remain close to their networks, support education, training and employment and provide consistency.

### **West London Residential Home**

Brent Council has partnered with Hounslow and Ealing to enable Hounslow to submit a successful bid to the DfE in March 2025 for a West London Residential Home as part of the DfE Wave 3 residential home funding. This positive outcome means Hounslow Council are able to develop a six-bedroom residential home for children and young people with complex needs which would be operated by Hounslow Council. Subject to no significant delays, the home could be operational by December 2027 and will provide increased sufficiency of residential placements for children and young people with complex needs closer to their home.

## Care Experienced Young People

As with placements of looked after children, Table 5 shows a snapshot as of 31 March 2024 and the provisional data for 31 March 2025 of the placement profile of care experience young people aged 17-21. The proportion of 17-21-year-olds in suitable accommodation is similar to England, Statistical Neighbours and Outer London. The proportion of this cohort remaining with former foster children is also below the average when compared to statistical neighbours. This can be partly attributed to the lower numbers of in-house foster carers and the number of young people studying at university who are no longer living with their former foster carer.

**Table 5: Placement Profile of Care Experienced Young People Aged 17-21**

	<b>Provisional Brent March 2025 (%)</b>	<b>Brent March 2024 (%)</b>	<b>England March 2024 (%)</b>	<b>Statistical Neighbours March 2024 (%)</b>	<b>Outer London March 2024 (%)</b>
<b>Care leavers aged 17-18</b>					
Supported accommodation	73	62	35	52	47
Independent living	- *	-	9	5	7
Former foster carer	17	15	17	20	17
Supported lodgings	-	-	7	0	3
With parents or relatives	-	-	12	9	9
In custody	-	-	2	0	3
Other accommodation	-	-	12	9	8
Do not have the information	-	6	6	5	6
<b>Care leavers aged 19-21</b>					
Supported accommodation	64	58	19	36	37
Independent living	7	12	34	27	28
Former foster carer	7	5	9	10	8
Supported lodgings	2	3	4	3	3
With parents or relatives	6	3	11	7	7
In custody	6	5	3	5	4
Other accommodation	4	5	13	6	6
Do not have the information	4	9	7	6	7
<b>Suitability of Accommodation</b>					
%17-18-year-olds in accommodation considered suitable	92	89	91	92	91

%19-21-year-olds in accommodation considered suitable	88	85	88	89	89
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*\*Where the number of Brent young people is less than 5, a percentage is not provided.*

## Supported Accommodation

Similarly to residential provision, supported accommodation placements are commissioned through the Commissioning Alliance Direct Purchasing Vehicle (DPV) with spot purchasing when necessary. Work is underway by the Commissioning Alliance to develop a new supported accommodation DPV and Brent is an active participant in shaping what this will look like for London Local Authorities. Supported accommodation placements are split between those for young people aged 16 – 17-year-old and for whom placement providers must be registered by Ofsted and who are subject to Ofsted inspections and supported accommodation placements for 18+ care experienced young people which are not regulated by Ofsted.

Brent has a notably higher proportion (62%) of care leavers aged 17 and 18 in supported accommodation, well above the national average of 35%, and higher than both statistical neighbours (52%) and Outer London LAs (47%). No care leavers in this age group are in independent living, which contrasts with national and regional trends.

The higher proportion of care leavers in supported accommodation is partly due to the requirement to provide appropriate support for these young people to meet their needs, and a shortage of foster carers to facilitate 'Staying Put' arrangements. A similar pattern emerges for care leavers aged 19-21, with 58% in supported accommodation, again significantly higher than national (19%) and regional averages. Brent has fewer care leavers in independent living (12%) and with former foster carers (5%) compared to all benchmarks.

The average cost of a supported accommodation placement in March 2024 was £772.14. This cost is not significantly different from 2021 (£718.42) and 2022 (£772.79). March 2023 saw a significant spike at £899.83 which could be attributed to a reaction by providers to the introduction of regulations for provisions accommodating 16-17-year-olds which came into force from April 2023. The reduction in 2024 is likely to be from a combination of the market understanding the true cost of the Ofsted regulations and Placement Team efforts to manage the market and challenge providers to search the market for placements that provided better value for money while maintaining quality.

As outlined in the achievements during the 2020-2024 Sufficiency Strategy, Brent has strengthened its quality assurance approach to ensure there are high standards of supported accommodation provision for its young people.

## Leaving Care and preparing for independence

Local authorities, as corporate parents, have a statutory duty to prepare young people for leaving care to enable them to have a successful adult life. This means providing good pathways to independent living to ensure positive outcomes for care leavers, as well as helping them to secure and maintain their own accommodation.

As of March 2025, there were 75 Care Leavers bidding for a social tenancy. Due to the shortage of social housing in Brent, the number of care leavers bidding for properties is continuing to grow in comparison to those receiving a social tenancy. 22 care experienced young people moved into their own tenancy in the 2024/25 financial year. In Brent, this problem has been exacerbated by a

high proportion of residents presenting as homeless to the Council which includes an average of 150 families per week thus further reducing the availability of social housing.

A corporate review of Brent's support for care leavers was undertaken in 2023 to realise both immediate and ongoing financial savings against the Care Leaver particular placement budget. This included making changes to organisational culture and practice to widen the scope of and improve the quality and timeliness of care leaver pathways to independence. The below following outcomes have come as a result of the review and a workstream has been created which is overseen by the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development to better support care leavers to transition into a successful independence at an earlier age.

### **Brent Shared Housing Model**

The Brent Shared House Test and Learn model commissioned an external provider, who is an Ofsted registered supported accommodation provider, to supply a six-bedroom property to house six Brent Care Leavers in a shared house arrangement and delivers 'floating support' to those living in the property.

The intended cohort for the Shared House model is young people who are currently bidding for independent living via the Council's social housing bidding route and for whom this is also a lower cost placement to their previous placement. A small number of support hours are available to them and can vary dependent on the amount required by each individual.

The model enables young people to be ready for independence by moving out of supported accommodation while they bid for their own property and helps to transition them toward independent living. Brent have identified a strong pipeline of Care Leavers who would benefit from the model and there have been no voids.

Brent is expanding this model to a second property which is expected to be operational in the latter part of 2025.

### **Independence Life Skills Programme**

Brent's Independent Life Skills programme for care leavers has been refreshed to better prepare care leavers to move into independent accommodation at an earlier age through learning and demonstrating life skills. The programme targets young people aged 17.5 with the expectation that by the age of 19.5, the majority of care leavers are in their own accommodation.

This builds on the current programme of support to complete the ASDAN life skills assessment and culminates with a residential weekend at the Council-run Outdoor Activity Centre in Hampshire which focuses on real life skills such as basic plumbing, dealing with issues such as a water leak as well as financial management. This has been well received by the 50 young people who attended a weekend in 2024/2025, who reported feeling more confident about living on their own and nearly all have been referred onto Brent's Housing Panel in order to secure a social tenancy.

Settle, a charity focused on supporting for Care Leavers as they leave care, has been commissioned by Brent to support care leavers both through tenancy coaching both pre and post tenancy with the aim of building the confidence of young people to have their own tenancy and reduce the risk of rent arrears. Settle have been commissioned to work with up to 30 young people until March 2026. There is a focus in the first year of this new strategy in ensuring as many of Brent Care Leavers are supported by Settle.

## Strategic Housing Pathways for Care Leavers

Children and Young People colleagues are working in close partnership with Housing colleagues to identify, design and implement innovative exit housing pathways for care leavers. This collaborative effort includes:

- Leveraging Council-owned housing companies: exploring opportunities for i4B and First Wave Housing to acquire properties specifically designated to care leavers and where this is not possible to include care leavers in their strategic business planning for existing properties.
- Adapting the housing bidding process: Reviewing and refining the bidding process to improve access to social housing for young people transitioning from care.
- Engaging the private rented sector: identifying and expanding viable housing options within the private rental market and appropriate support to reduce the likelihood of rent arrears.
- Enhancing communication: developing clear, supportive messaging to help care leavers understand the Council's housing offer and set realistic expectations in the current housing climate.

## The Future of Sufficiency Planning

This integrated approach aims to provide stable, suitable, and sustainable housing solutions that support care leavers in their journey towards independence. **Experienced Young People**

As outlined throughout this strategy, local authorities are navigating a complex and evolving landscape in fulfilling their sufficiency duty. The key challenges consist of an increase in the number of complex and older children entering care, the local, regional and national reduction in foster carers and availability of social tenancies to support those ready for independence.

These challenges are set in an uncertain period following changes to external partners, reform following the 2024 general election and the outcome of the 2022 Independent Review of the Children's Social Care. This is also set in a period of great financial pressures for the Local Authority and the ramifications of the Covid 19 pandemic are still being felt and new implications are coming to light. It is clear that local authorities can no longer act in isolation to deliver sufficiency and need to work in partnership at a local, regional and national level.

Due to the complex and evolving landscape affecting the Council's ability to meet its sufficiency duty as outlined throughout this document, this strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis to align with the nationally published data at the end of the calendar year. This will enable the document to be responsive, evidence-based and appropriately adapted to emerging trends and challenges to meet the needs of our children and young people.

## Action Plan


Provision Type	Action	Outcome Measure	End of March 2026 Target	March 2025 Position
Fostering	Cooperation with West London authorities on a regional approach to fostering recruitment services and ensuring Brent's weekly rate is aligned and competitive and placements are available for children with a wide range of needs.	Net gain of 10 mainstream foster carer households each financial year	Net increase of 10 mainstream foster carer households	44 mainstream foster carer households
Fostering	Cooperation with West London authorities on a regional approach to fostering recruitment services and ensuring Brent's weekly rate is aligned and competitive and placements are available for children with a wide range of needs.	Percentage of looked after children in a fostering placement	70%	60%
Fostering	Explore and expand different types of fostering with current and new carers which include but is not limited to respite and emergency foster carers.	Increase in the number of foster carers who can be on-call and offer emergency placements of up to a week which includes carers from Brent Council	At least one foster carer available and able to offer an emergency placement each week	One foster carer available per month (or less)
Fostering	Explore and expand different types of fostering with current and new carers which include but is not limited to respite and emergency foster carers.	Increase in the number of foster carers who can provide respite to children and young people living with in-house foster placements and support with transitions	5	4

Fostering	Implementation of the Mockingbird Model.	Retention of internal foster carers	Net increase of 10 mainstream foster carer households	44 mainstream foster carer households
Fostering	Implementation of the Mockingbird Model.	Reduction in the number of 3+ placement moves over 12 months	12%	12%
Fostering	Conduct surveys with in-house foster carers every 6 months.	Retention of internal foster carers	90% foster carers state 'Happy' or 'Very Happy'	6 out 8 respondents (75%) state they are either 'Happy' or 'Very Happy' with Brent's fostering service, 2 stated 'Somewhat Unhappy'
Fostering	Provide a comprehensive training offer to foster carers.	Increase the number of in-house foster carers who can accommodate older and more complex children	40 internal foster carers have accessed the universal training offer	6 foster carers accessed the Children in Care Resilience universal training offer
Residential and Secure	Open Brent's Children's Residential Home.	Percentage of looked after children in a residential placement	8%	13%
Residential and Secure	Open Brent's Children's Residential Home.	Percentage of looked after children placed within 20 miles of the borough	No less than 80%	82%
Residential and Secure	Increase number of young people stepped down to foster placements before the age of 16.	Percentage of looked after children in a fostering placement	70%	60%
Residential and Secure	Ensure young people age 16 – 17 step down from residential into supported accommodation as early as possible and in line with their care/pathway plan.	Percentage of looked after children in a residential placement	8%	13%



Residential and Secure	Ensure young people age 16 – 17 step down from residential into supported accommodation as early as possible and in line with their care/pathway plan.	FTE supported accommodation placements for 16 – 17-year-olds (LAC)	60 (additional 10 step down from residential provision)	50
Residential and Secure	Participate in current pan-regional and regional projects to increase residential sufficiency, and take advantage of future individual, pan regional and regional activities if financially viable.	Percentage of looked after children in a residential placement	8%	13%
Residential and Secure	Participate in current pan-regional and regional projects to increase residential sufficiency, and take advantage of future individual, pan regional and regional activities if financially viable.	Percentage of looked after children placed within 20 miles of the borough	No less than 80%	82%
Leaving Care	Prepare care leavers for independence through Brent's Independence Life Skills Programme.	The number of care leavers approved by the Housing Panel by the age of 20	60	40
Leaving Care	Increase the number of exit pathways for care leavers ready for independence through both internal (Council) mechanisms and any available external mechanisms.	Number of young people in their own tenancy	25	18
All	Input of young people is utilised in delivering sufficiency.	Bright Spot Survey Feedback	Maintain until next survey is conducted and then increase all positive responses by 10% (where possible)	93% of young people aged 4-17 reported 'always' feeling safe where they lived.  56% of children aged 8-11 years reported

				<p>'always' feeling settled where they</p> <p>76% of 11-17 years reported 'always' feeling settled at home.</p> <p>77% of care leavers reported 'always' feeling safe at home</p>
All	Increase the number of quality assurance visits conducted and to work with providers who do not meet the expected standards.	Suitability of placement	25 (Corporate KPI) 35 stretch target	32
All	Quality Assurance visits to include Care Quality Ambassadors.	Number of visits	12	10

	<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b> 2 February 2026
	<b>Report from the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development</b>
	<b>Lead Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Employment - Cllr Gwen Grahl</b>
<b>An update on the Brent Residential Children's Home project</b>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	Barnhill
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	Key
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
<b>List of Appendices:</b>	None
<b>Background Papers:</b>	None
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Kelli Eboji Head of Service, Looked After Children and Permanency <a href="mailto:kelli.eboji@brent.gov.uk">kelli.eboji@brent.gov.uk</a>

## 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Corporate Parenting Committee on the Brent Residential Children's Home project. This is to follow from the previous update on 3 February 2025.

## 2.0 Recommendation(s)

That the Committee:

- 2.1. Notes and comments on the progress of the Brent Residential Children's Home project.

## 3.0 Background

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

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

- 3.2. The Council's bid to the DfE's Children's Home Capital Programme was submitted on 9 September 2022. On 17 November 2022, the Council received a letter which confirmed the bid was successful. This notified Brent that it would be awarded in principle grant funding of £1.1m for the development of a residential children's care home in Brent subject to 50% match funding from the local authority. This match funding was agreed by the Council's Capital Programme Board in May 2023.
- 3.3. The Brent Residential Children's Home project will deliver a four-bed residential step-down home within Brent for looked after adolescents (aged 12 – 16) with social, emotional and behavioural needs. It will provide three bedrooms for a step-down provision to prepare young people who are in residential settings away from the borough for a move into a local fostering placement, supported accommodation (if 16+) or to return home. The remaining one bedroom will be allocated for emergency placements to enable a short-term response for young people in crisis.

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

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

#### **5.0 Detail**

- 5.1. A fortnightly cross Council working group was established with the aim of delivering the children's residential home. The working group is held to account by reporting to the Department for Education on a monthly basis, the Children's Residential Care Home Board on a monthly basis and the CYPCD Senior Leadership Team meeting on a quarterly basis, as well as the Corporate Parenting Committee. The working group did not meet between August and December 2025 owing to works being conducted to the home and officers being unable to safely access the site (see paragraph 5.5 below).

#### **Workstream Updates**

- 5.2. The project plan has been split into separate workstream and progress on each area with key milestones over the next three months can be found below.

#### **Capital Workstream**

- 5.3. Refurbishment work on the property commenced on 28 October 2024 following a procurement exercise. This comprised both interior and exterior works, including replacing the roof.
- 5.4. The capital works were completed by the expected date of March 2025. Whilst partial possession was secured on 3 April 2025, allowing officers in CYPCD to set up the home, practical completion could only be certified upon Building Control (BC) issuing their completion certificate. Capital colleagues met with BC on 10 June 2025 to establish actions required for sign-off. The actions identified by BC, for the residential home to receive a completion certificate, included:
- Amendments to the fire strategy and fire management plan to include more information on staff number, mobility and personal emergency evacuation plans
  - Three fire doors to be installed on the ground and first floor
- 5.5. Before the identified actions could be addressed, unfortunately on 12 August 2025 an incident occurred. The neighbour residing opposite property lost control of their car which resulted in a crash into the front wall of the children's home. The neighbour was taken to hospital for tests and fortunately was unharmed. The property was vacant at the time and fortunately nobody was injured. Officers sent flowers to the neighbour wishing him a speedy recovery.
- 5.6. The Council's Building Control structural engineer assessed the building and advised the need for internal props under the lintel before removal of the car. These were installed and then the car was removed from the driveway. A full structural survey was completed on 20 Aug 2025 to assess the works required. The breakdown of costs for this totalled £13,010.04
- 5.7. Prior to any works being completed the Council needed to present a claim (with the quotation) to the insurance company and obtain approval ahead of progressing any works. Unfortunately, the insurance company for the neighbour's car delayed responding to the Local Authority's quote and did not give agreement for the work to commence in a timely manner. The works began on 24 November 2025 and were completed by 19 December 2025.
- 5.8. Building Control visited the property on 20 December 2025; the completion certificate was received on 05 January 2026 and the practical completion certificate was received on 07 January 2026.

### **Recruitment Workstream**

- 5.9. A successful candidate for the Registered Manager role was onboarded and started in post on 28 February 2025. Unfortunately, this candidate made a personal decision to resign and left the Local Authority on 15 September 2025. Ofsted were made aware that the Registered Manager was leaving the department and made clear that the application for the children's home must go on hold until a new permanent Registered Manager was appointed and in-post.

- 5.10 An enhanced recruitment campaign for a replacement permanent Registered Manager took place in October 2025 with a successful appointment made. The new manager started in post in January. Ofsted have been updated and have shared they plan to complete a visit to the children's home and undertake the interviews of the Registered Manager and Responsible Individual in April 2026.
- 5.11 Three rounds of recruitment for the Deputy Manager position took place between February 2025 and November 2025. A successful candidate for the Deputy Manager role has accepted the position and is due to be onboarded in late February 2026.
- 5.12 All 3 Senior Residential Support Worker (SRSW) and 7 Residential Support Worker (RSW) roles were filled after a rigorous recruitment exercise. The successful candidates were kept updated that the project has been delayed owing to the issues described above relating to building repairs and manager recruitment. Three staff withdrew their interest in the role due to the delays and opted to secure employment elsewhere. The remaining candidates are excited to start their employment and are eagerly awaiting start dates.

Start dates will be given to all remaining candidates for end of February 2026, subject to notice periods from their current employment. Candidates will receive training and induction in March 2025 with the aim of the home being operational following the inspection and interviews planned for April 2026.

### **Registration Workstream**

- 5.13 The process to register the home with Ofsted is composed of three aspects, the submission of an SC1 document for the residential home, an SC2 document for the Responsible Individual and another SC2 document for the Registered Manager. The SC1 document includes details on the home and key documents and policies such as the Statement of Purpose and Residents' Guide. The SC2 documents provide details of the Responsible Individual and Registered Manager to ensure they have the knowledge and experience required for the role. Now the new Registered Manager has started in post an updated SC2 will be submitted to Ofsted to complement the SC1 and SC2 that Ofsted already have. As outlined above Ofsted have indicated an inspection visit and interviews to take place in April 2026.

### **Operational Update**

- 5.14 Operational aspects of the project are being reinstated now that the new Registered Manager has started in the Local Authority and the opening date for the home becomes closer. This includes furnishing and decorating the property, how the home will operate, for example shift patterns for staff assurance and the early identification of young people to move into the home.

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

- 6.1 Care experienced young people have been actively consulted throughout the development of the children's home, using various engagement methods to ensure broad participation. The goal was to gather their preferences on aspects such as the design, personalisation of private spaces, optimal use of communal areas, creating a sense of safety, and the overall operation of the home. In March 2025 young people from Brent Care Journeys 2.0 visited the site and gave feedback on the layout, use of space and set-up. Their feedback has been integrated into the planning process, and they will be kept informed about how their input has influenced decisions. The young people were impressed with the site and looked forward to it opening.
- 6.2 Young People from Brent Care Journeys 2.0 also assisted by sitting on interview panels with CYPCD staff that were undertaken for the new posts created. The Young People helped co-create interview questions and took part in the scoring of candidates. When Young People were not able to attend interviews, they put forward interview questions that were used in the interviews of candidates.
- 6.3. In response to the feedback from young people, a decision was made by the working group to leave the bedrooms in the property to be neutrally decorated. An allowance will be given to each young people upon moving into the residential home to personalise their room to their preference, taste and style. Items that young people suggested should go into the bedrooms for young people included LED and fairy lights, comfy rugs, artist posters, plushies or soft toys and gaming accessories.

## **7.0 Financial Considerations**

### **Revenue Costs**

- 7.1. Work was completed on the operational running cost for the home and this is estimated to be £1.027m per year, which comprises £0.203m running costs and staffing costs of £0.824m (including unsociable hours pay). This total is comparable to the estimated running costs of £1.1m in the original business case and was developed using available comparative information from a consultant, the Short Breaks Centre and benchmarking staffing costs against private and local authority owned children's residential homes.
- 7.2 The CYPCD department has a 2025/26 saving of £290K predicated on setting up and running the new residential home. This will not be achieved this financial year and it is part of the placements budget pressures in Children Services included in the Quarter 3 Financial Forecast update to Cabinet on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January.

### **Capital Costs**

- 7.3 The project budget was initially set at £2.2m, comprising £1.1m from the DfE grant and £1.1m in borrowing. The total budget is now forecast at £1.64m by

31 March 2026. Of this, £1.57m had been spent by 31 March 2025, with a further £0.06m projected for 2025/26.

7.4 Officers will undertake a reconciliation of project costs to confirm the final outturn.

## **8.0 Legal Considerations**

8.1 A children's residential care home run by Brent Council directly supports the Council in delivering a range of statutory duties as laid down the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004, the Children Leaving Care Act 2000 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

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

9.1 There are currently no additional Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) considerations arising from this report.

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

10.1 There are no additional climate change or environmental considerations other than to ensure the home's refurbishment improves its environmental efficiency rating.

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

11.1 There are no additional human resource or property considerations to those referenced in the report.

## **12.0 Communication Considerations**

12.1 The Barnhill Residents' Association is kept informed of changes in the project at necessary key intervals. The immediate residents either side of the property have been kept informed of works directly by the builder.

12.2 Information about the residential home is included on the Brent Council website.

## **Related Documents**

[Brent Children's Care Home Business Case](#), Cabinet Report, 22 May 2023

[Acquisition of Property Brent Children's Care Home Project](#), Cabinet Report 15 January 2024

### **Report sign off:**

**Nigel Chapman**

Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development