



Corporate Parenting Committee

Monday 13 April 2026 at 5.30 pm
Members' Suite

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
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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.

Item	Page
1 Exclusion of the Press and Public	
<p>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.</p>	
2 Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members	
3 Declarations of interests	
<p>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.</p>	
4 Minutes of the previous meeting	1 - 11
<p>To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record.</p>	
5 Matters arising (if any)	
<p>To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.</p>	
6 Update from Brent Care Journeys 2.0 (BCJ 2.0) Representatives	
<p>This is an opportunity for members of Brent Care Journeys 2.0 (BCJ 2.0) to feedback on recent activity.</p>	
7 The Brent Pledge to Children in Care	11 - 16
<p>To provide information to the Corporate Parenting Committee on the updated Brent Pledge for Children in Care.</p>	
8 Annual Report form Brent Virtual School for Children in Care 2024-25	17 - 40

To inform the Corporate Parenting Committee of the work undertaken by the Brent Virtual School and school results for Looked After Children in the 2024-26 academic year. The delay in presenting the report is due to the need for exam results to be ratified.

9 Fostering Service 6-monthly / End of Year Update Report 41 - 66

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

10 Six-Monthly Adoption Report from Adopt London West 67 - 77

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

11 Any other urgent business

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

Date of the next meeting: To be confirmed



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

PRESENT: Councillors Grahl (Chair), Kennelly and Dixon

1. **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

RESOLVED: that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the duration of the meeting, on the grounds that the attendance of representatives from the council's Children in Care council, necessitated the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 2, Part 1 of Schedule 12A, as amended, of the Act, namely: Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.

2. **Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members**

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

3. **Declarations of interests**

None.

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. Ofsted Focused Visit Report

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

9. Progress report - Brent Residential Children's Home

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

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

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

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

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


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

10. **Any other urgent business**

None.

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

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 <p>Brent</p>	<p>Corporate Parenting Committee 13 April 2026</p>
	<p>Report from the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development</p>
	<p>Lead Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Employment - Cllr Gwen Grahl</p>
<p>The Brent Pledge 2026</p>	

Wards Affected:	ALL
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the duration of the meeting, on the grounds that the attendance of representatives from the council’s Children in Care council, necessitated the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 2, Part 1 of Schedule 12A, as amended, of the Act, namely: Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
List of Appendices:	Appendix 1 - The Brent Pledge 2026
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Nicole Levy Service Manager Quality Assurance and Learning Nicole.levy@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report sets out the work completed through participation with children and young people in care to update the Brent Pledge.
- 1.2. The revised Brent Pledge is being shared at Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC) on 13 April 2026 for formal adoption.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 It is recommended that CPC:
 - Approve the proposed plan for changes to the Brent Pledge.
 - Approve the plan to co-produce an additional companion guide.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities and Strategic Context

3.1.1 The promises set out in the Brent Pledge contribute 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 the support of social workers who can build relationships and trust with them, help them to understand their history and journey, develop a clear identity and positive sense of self whilst they are in the care of the local authority.

3.2 The Brent Pledge

3.2.1 The Brent Pledge provides an overarching commitment to the children and young people the Council work with, outlining the core promises Brent makes to children in care. The Brent Pledge was completed in March 2021 and is now being refreshed five years later to ensure it reflects the needs of the current population of children in care.

3.2.2 The Brent Pledge covers identity, involvement in decisions, stability, emotional and practical support, safety, health, education, and preparation for independence. These commitments emphasise respect for individual identity, active listening, consistency of social work support, opportunities to build relationships, access to advocacy, support to stay healthy and active, encouragement to achieve in education, and guidance in developing life skills such as managing money and cooking.

3.2.3 The Brent Pledge has two aims: to provide accessible information to children in care about the promises Brent makes as their Corporate Parent so they know what to expect while they are in care. It also keeps Brent accountable to children and young people as they are able to use this document to ensure all of the promises are being fulfilled.

3.2.4 To refresh the Brent Pledge, the participation team ran a feedback session with young people in Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) Empire (the participation programme for care-experienced young people). Young people reviewed the 2021 version and gave feedback on what things they liked, what could be changed and whether anything was missing. Young people provided a range of constructive comments on the Brent Pledge, with many expressing a desire for a version that is easier to read and more visually engaging.

3.2.5 Several highlighted that “there’s a lot of writing” and asked for “shorter sentences,” although it was also acknowledged that the content contains essential information that is difficult to condense without losing meaning. The

document was amended to ensure that the language used was child centred and subsequently changed from “they” to “you,” reinforcing that these promises are made directly to children and young people in care.

- 3.2.6 Young people also felt that the document could be made more appealing, suggesting “brighter colours or emojis” to help it feel more inviting. In response, colours within the images were updated.
- 3.2.7 Another key theme in the feedback was the importance of clarity and visibility of key messages. Young people asked for the “important bits” to stand out so they could “notice them straight away.” We have highlighted the key words in each sentence.
- 3.2.8 Young people also emphasized the importance of having accessible contact information, asking for details of “who we can talk to if we need help or want to share our views.” A contact box was added in response, with details of the participation team and a space for social workers to handwrite in their contact details. This will make each pledge personal for the young person.
- 3.2.9 Some young people considered changing the title, offering ideas such as renaming it “Your Rights in Care” to better communicate what children and young people can expect. After discussion this was not adopted, as the Pledge reflects commitments rather than statutory rights. However, it was suggested that the participation team could co-produce a companion one-page rights guide to address this need.
- 3.2.10 They also suggested including quotes from young people with “speech bubbles,” noting that it “would be cool to see things young people have said.” While this was not added to the pledge itself, to avoid making the document longer, the idea will be explored as part of co-production, when developing the proposed companion guide.
- 3.2.11 The co-production of the proposed companion guide will begin to be developed in BCJ Empire Easter sessions.
- 3.2.12 We will share the updated Pledge with staff through Viva Engage, newsletters from the Corporate Director of CYP CD, team meetings within frontline teams, and Safeguarding and Quality Assurance for IROs.
- 3.2.13 We will review the implementation of the Pledge through audit processes and regular feedback from young people to ensure it is being properly promoted and implemented.

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 4.1 The update to the pledge is being proposed following consultation and engagement with Brent’s children and young people in care.

5.0 Financial Considerations

5.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

6.0 Legal Considerations

6.1 There are no specific legal considerations to note.

7.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

7.1 Children and young people in care are in care as a result of adverse experiences, which results in specific vulnerabilities and disadvantages for this cohort of young people, which can negatively impact on outcomes. This pledge sets clear, consistent expectations for how our children and young people can expect to be cared for and supported by services in CYP CD.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

8.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

9.1 There are no human resource/property considerations.

10.0 Communication Considerations

10.1 This pledge will be shared with practitioners across the department, with children and young people by their allocated social workers and IROs, and published on the Brent Council website.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development

THE BRENT PLEDGE

The Brent Pledge is a list of promises to children and young people in our care. These are things that we will do so that you have the best support and help possible.



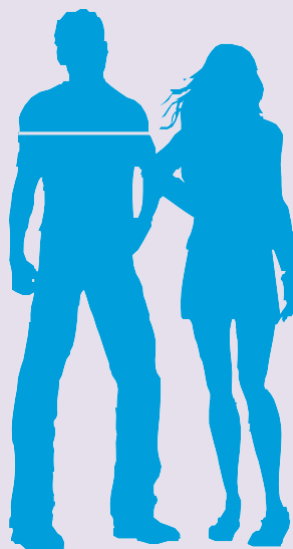
We promise

To respect and honour your identity

- ✓ We will respect your **personal beliefs, values, culture and heritage**.
- ✓ We will support **who you are and what you want to be**.
- ✓ We will provide you with **information about your background** that is appropriate for your age.
- ✓ We will **support and encourage relationships** between you and **members of your family**.

To involve you in the decisions about your life

- ✓ We will **actively listen** to your **views and opinions** and act on your behalf.
- ✓ We will **explain our decisions** and make sure that you fully understand what has been decided.
- ✓ We will **involve you** in planning the services that you receive.



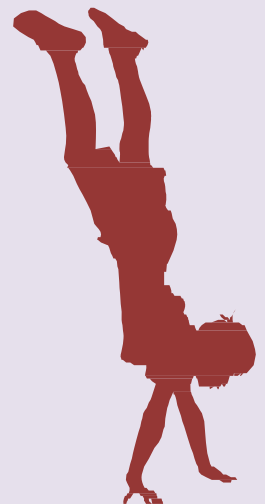
To provide stability for you

- ✓ You will have your **social worker's telephone number** and know where they work so you can speak to them when you need to.
- ✓ If your social worker leaves you will be told when and know details of your **new social worker** and their manager.

- ✓ We will do our best to make sure you **don't have too many changes of social workers** and move too many times.
- ✓ Your **Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)** will **listen** to you and make sure your views are heard.

To support you

- ✓ We will help you to **manage challenging relationships**.
- ✓ You can tell us **how you feel** and we will help you choose what **you want in your life**.
- ✓ We will support you to become the person **you want to be**.
- ✓ We will make sure you get to **meet other children in care** where you live and in other places so you can **help each other** and talk about the things you like and don't like.
- ✓ Your **social worker** will come and see you and **you can talk to them on your own** every time they come.
- ✓ When we come to see you we will make sure you can be there and that you **are not in school**
- ✓ We will tell you and other people when you have **done something really well**.
- ✓ We will ensure that you have access to an **independent person** (an advocate) upon request.
- ✓ We will remember your **birthday** and other **important days**.



To provide you with a safe, stable and happy place to live

- ✓ We will ensure that your **carer** knows enough about you to be able to **support** you.
- ✓ We will support your carer to **understand you** and the things that you are going through.
- ✓ We will provide you with a **safe place** that you can call **home**.
- ✓ We will do everything possible so that you can **meet your new carer before you move**.



To support you to be active and stay healthy

- ✓ We will provide you with opportunities to take part in **fun activities** such as **sports**, **access to the outdoors**, and other activities you are interested in.
- ✓ We will support your **physical** and **mental health** and encourage you to make **healthy and positive choices** for your life.
- ✓ We will make sure that your carer takes you to see your **doctor**, **dentist** and other healthcare professionals when you need to visit them.
- ✓ We will provide you with information and advice about **healthy eating**, **exercise**, **smoking**, **drugs** and **sexual health**.

Work with you to achieve your goals and targets in education

- ✓ We will **value** your **strengths**, **gifts**, **talents** and encourage you to have **high ambitions**.
- ✓ We will support you to **learn**, help you to **achieve your very best at school** and support you when you are **making decisions about your future**.
- ✓ We will ensure that you have the things you need for your education, including **access to a laptop**.
- ✓ If needed, we will find an **advisor**, **life coach** or **mentor** to support you.

Preparing you for independence

- ✓ We will work to ensure that you are ready for **independent living**, including how to **manage money** and **how to cook**.
- ✓ We will work with you on your **Pathway Plan** at the age of **16** so that you are clear about what will happen next and what support you will receive.




- ✓ We will provide you with **information** about what you are **entitled to** and how to **access your entitlements**.
- ✓ We will consider **your wishes** to stay living with your **foster carer** after the age of **18**.

Updated March 2026

To share your views, contact **Brent Care Journeys Empire: participation@brent.gov.uk**

To access help, contact your **social worker**:



	<p align="center">Corporate Parenting Committee</p> <p align="center">13 April 2026</p>
	<p align="center">Report from the Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development</p>
	<p align="center">Lead Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Employment – Cllr Gwen Grahl</p>
<p>Brent Virtual School for Looked After Children Annual Report September 2024 - August 2025</p>	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	
<p>Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</p>	<p>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.</p>
List of Appendices:	0
Background Papers:	0
<p>Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)</p>	<p>Michaela Richards, Headteacher: Brent Virtual School Michaela.Richards@brent.gov.uk 020 8937 1075</p>

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 The purpose of the Brent Virtual School (BVS) annual report is to outline the activity and impact of the BVS during the academic year 2024/25 in monitoring and supporting looked after children to achieve the best possible educational outcomes. Data contained in this report is for looked after children who were in the care of Brent Council for the academic year 2024/25, and the report includes outcomes for all children who have been in care for a year or more as of 31 March 2025 (“the eligible cohort”).¹

2.0 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

¹ 1.1 The DfE sets the eligible cohort for reporting on external examinations as at least 13 months before the day of the first exam. This is acknowledgement of services requiring time to be able to support and affect positive changes.

2.1 This report sets out the work of BVS, the achievement of Brent's looked after children and the developments that have taken place in the reporting period. The work of the virtual school contributes to the following borough priorities:

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

3.0 Context

3.1 At the end of the academic year in 2024/25, 350 children and young people were on roll with the BVS. Throughout the course of the academic year this number will have fluctuated by as much as 10% in either direction due to the nature of the cohort. There were 47 under four-year-olds, 180 pupils were aged 4-16 years old and 123 were 16–18-year-olds, this figure includes a sizable number of care leavers in Year 13 who turned 18 during the academic year but are still monitored by BVS until the end of Year 13.

3.2 BVS sits within the Education, Partnerships and Strategy Department in the Children and Young People and Community Development (CYPCD) directorate. The Virtual School operates as a multi-disciplinary team focused on supporting children and young people in care to achieve their full potential and experience positive educational outcomes.

3.3 The team includes a range of specialist roles, comprising both teaching and non-teaching advisory staff, an Educational Psychologist, Education Officers, a dedicated Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and Year 11 Education Officer, a Post-16 Advisor and an Enrichment Coordinator. A nominated officer in the CYPCD Performance Team also provides analytical and data support to the service, strengthening the Virtual School's ability to monitor outcomes and identify areas for targeted intervention. During the 2024/25 academic year, in addition to the core team, BVS draws on the expertise of commissioned services delivered on behalf of the local authority, including Prospects, which provides careers education, information, advice and guidance, and the Wellbeing and Emotional Support Team (WEST), which offered specialist support to promote emotional wellbeing and resilience.

3.4 BVS staff work in close partnership with social workers, foster carers, colleagues within the CYPCD Inclusion Service and staff across schools and educational settings. This collaborative approach ensures that children looked after receive coordinated and holistic support that addresses both their educational needs and wider wellbeing.

3.5 The priorities for BVS in 2024/25 were:

- a) To continue to work closely with schools, social care colleagues, carers and young people to further improve attendance, especially in Key Stage 4 (for progress see sections 4 and 5)

- b) To utilise the post-16, grant funding to support Key Stage 5 LAC into EET and higher education opportunities and improve EET figures from 80% to 85% or higher (for progress see section 9.1)
- c) To implement the proposed statutory strategic duty to promote the educational achievement of children with a social worker and children in kinship care (for progress see section 17.1)
- d) To ensure that BVS is aligned with the strategic direction for virtual schools as proposed in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill alongside all other relevant developments locally and nationally.

3.6 BVS successfully delivered against most of the priorities agreed for the 2024/25 academic year, the detail of which is set out within the relevant sections of this report. While progress has been made in supporting the 16-19 cohort to access education, employment or training (EET), participation rates have fluctuated during the year, reflecting the transitional nature of post-16 pathways. Strengthening EET participation and ensuring young people access sustainable post-16 destinations will remain an important area of focus for the Virtual School and its partners in the coming academic year.

3.7 A further priority for 2024/25 was to ensure that BVS remains aligned with the evolving national direction for Virtual Schools, including proposals outlined within the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill and other relevant policy developments. As the Bill is still progressing through the legislative process, the Virtual School continues to monitor national developments and position the service strategically to respond to any changes to the statutory role and expectations of Virtual School Heads.

4.0 Attendance and Attendance Monitoring and Intervention

4.1 Primary (Key Stages 1 and 2)

Attendance for children looked after in Key Stages 1 and 2 was 95.1% in 2024/25, compared to 97% in 2023/24. While this represents a notable decrease, it is important to contextualise this within both cohort dynamics and wider national trends.

Full national comparator data for children looked after is not currently available; however, overall attendance for primary-aged pupils nationally is 94.9%. This indicates that, despite the reduction, attendance for Brent's children looked after at primary phase remains above national averages.

The decline is reflective of a small cohort where the attendance of a limited number of pupils can significantly impact overall percentages. In addition, factors such as placement instability, emerging SEND needs, and increased emotional wellbeing needs have contributed to reduced attendance for a minority of pupils. BVS continues to work proactively with schools, carers and social workers to address these issues through early intervention, targeted support and close monitoring, ensuring that attendance remains a key priority.

4.2 Secondary (Key Stages 3 and 4)

Attendance for children looked after in Key Stages 3 and 4 was 86.3% in 2024/25, compared to 89% in 2023/24, representing a more significant decrease than seen at primary phase.

While full national attendance data for children looked after is not available, overall national attendance for secondary-aged pupils is 91.5%, indicating that attendance for this cohort remains below national averages and continues to be an area of focus.

The reduction reflects a combination of factors typically associated with older cohorts, including placement changes, school transitions, increased complexity of need, disengagement, and higher levels of persistent absence. A small number of pupils with particularly low attendance have had a disproportionate impact on overall figures, which is characteristic of this cohort.

In response, BVS has strengthened its attendance strategy, including earlier identification of pupils at risk (below 95%), regular tracking meetings, and targeted multi-agency interventions for those below 90%. This includes close partnership working with schools, designated teachers, carers and social workers to remove barriers to attendance and re-engage pupils in education. Improving secondary attendance remains a key strategic priority moving forward.

- 4.3 BVS maintains a strong strategic focus on promoting high levels of attendance for children looked after, recognising the well-established link between regular school attendance, educational progress and improved wellbeing outcomes. Attendance is monitored through a dedicated online tracking system, enabling the Virtual School to analyse patterns, identify emerging concerns and intervene at the earliest possible stage. Attendance is also embedded as a key priority within all Personal Education Plans (PEPs), ensuring that schools, carers and professionals maintain a shared focus on improving attendance outcomes and reducing absence.
- 4.4 Where attendance falls between 90% and 95%, early intervention measures are implemented to prevent further decline. This includes review through fortnightly attendance monitoring meetings, where pupils whose attendance falls below 95% are identified and targeted support strategies are agreed. Where attendance drops below 90%, the Virtual School undertakes proactive engagement with schools, carers and other professionals to address barriers to attendance and implement timely interventions aimed at securing sustained improvement. This systematic monitoring approach enables the Virtual School to maintain robust oversight of attendance across the cohort and to ensure that concerns are identified and addressed at the earliest opportunity.

5.0 Monitoring and Securing School Placements

- 5.1 The majority of Brent's children looked after are placed in a suitable educational setting within the statutory 20-day timeframe. Where cases present additional complexity—such as placement instability, vulnerability factors or significant additional needs—the BVS leadership team works in partnership with social care, inclusion and SEND services, both within Brent and across other local

authorities, to ensure that a coordinated and holistic approach is taken to securing appropriate provision.

5.2 As in previous years, challenges remain in securing timely placements for children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) who reside outside of the borough, particularly where consultations with schools do not result in an offer of placement within expected timescales. To strengthen oversight and improve coordination for children looked after with additional needs, a SEN Advisory Officer joined the BVS team in March 2025. This role has provided enhanced strategic oversight of children looked after with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and has already had a significant impact in supporting this cohort. The post has strengthened engagement with schools, SEND teams and partner authorities, enabling more effective advocacy for children looked after with SEND and helping to secure appropriate educational provision in a more timely and coordinated way than previously.

5.3 Children Awaiting Educational Provision: At any point during the academic year there may be a small number of children looked after who are temporarily without a confirmed school placement. This may occur for several reasons, including children arriving from overseas as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), children entering care through emergency placements, or where a change of care placement takes place at short notice. In some cases, a school placement may also break down before a suitable alternative provision has been secured. During the 2024/25 academic year, the number of children in this position fluctuated between two and six pupils at any given time. The Virtual School maintains close oversight of this cohort to ensure that children do not experience prolonged periods without education and that progress towards securing an appropriate school placement is actively monitored. Children who are not currently on a school roll are subject to regular oversight through fortnightly monitoring meetings, where the suitability of interim provision is reviewed and progress towards securing a permanent school placement is closely monitored.

5.4 To ensure that children who are between school placements do not miss out on education, BVS commissions 1:1 tuition in the core subjects of English and Mathematics, funded through the Pupil Premium Grant. This provision is typically delivered within the home environment to ensure continuity of learning during periods of transition. For older pupils, tuition may also take place in community settings such as local libraries, providing a more independent learning environment where appropriate. This interim provision ensures that children remain engaged in learning, maintain progress in core subjects and continue to receive structured educational support while a permanent school placement is secured.

6.0 Exclusions

6.1 During the 2024/25 academic year, there was a small increase in the number of fixed-term exclusions of children looked after, with 22 recorded compared to 20 in the previous academic year. The overall number, however, remains low in comparison to previous local data and the current national data. Importantly,

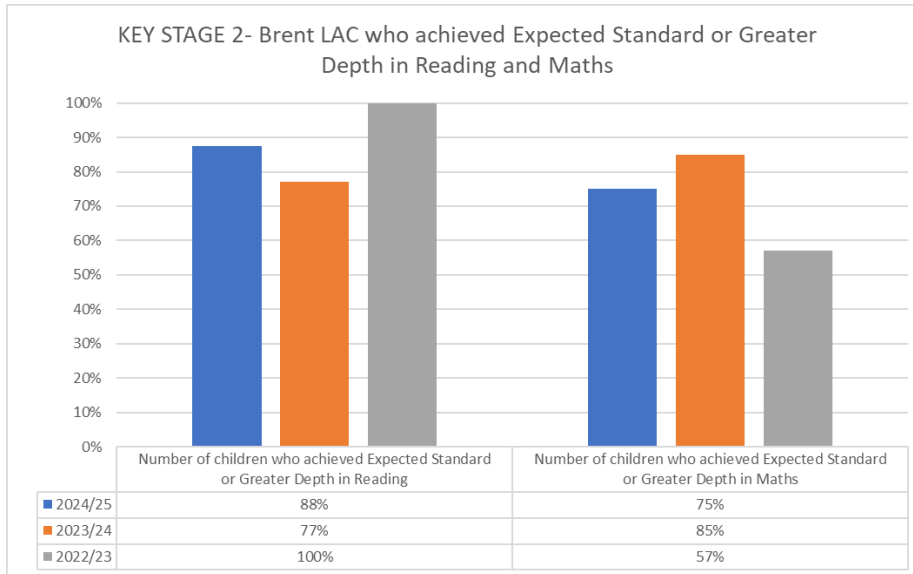
there were no permanent exclusions of children looked after during the year. This reflects the strong commitment across Brent's partnership to ensure that children in care remain supported within education and that exclusion is avoided wherever possible.

- 6.2 Through its corporate parenting responsibilities, BVS works closely with schools, designated teachers, foster carers and social workers to identify emerging risks at an early stage and implement targeted support and appropriate adjustments for children at risk of exclusion. The BVS leadership team maintains strategic oversight of behaviour and exclusion data, enabling timely intervention and coordinated planning where concerns arise. This preventative and collaborative approach supports schools to adopt inclusive practices and tailored support strategies, helping children looked after to remain engaged in education and reducing the likelihood of issues escalating to permanent exclusion. This reflects the national expectation that permanent exclusion of children looked after should be avoided wherever possible through early intervention, inclusive practice and strong multi-agency partnership working.

7.0 Progress and Attainment Key Stage 2

- 7.1 The academic year 2024/25 was the fourth year of testing since the pandemic and the results for the whole cohort are positive for all measures, showing improvement from the previous year's results. In 2024/25 Brent CLA continued to outperform LAC regionally and nationally for the same measures (Graph 1). It should, however, be noted that the number of children in the cohort is relatively small, which means that one or two children can have a significant impact either way on results.
- 7.2 At the time of the 2025 KS2 tests, Brent had 11 CLA in Year 6 for whom there are results for 8 children. Three children did not sit KS2 tests due to their level of SEND/SEMH needs (one has an Education, Health and Care Plan). Graph 1 below captures the outcomes for the 8 children and shows trend data for the last 3 years.

Graph 1: 2025 KS2 All CLA in KS2 cohort

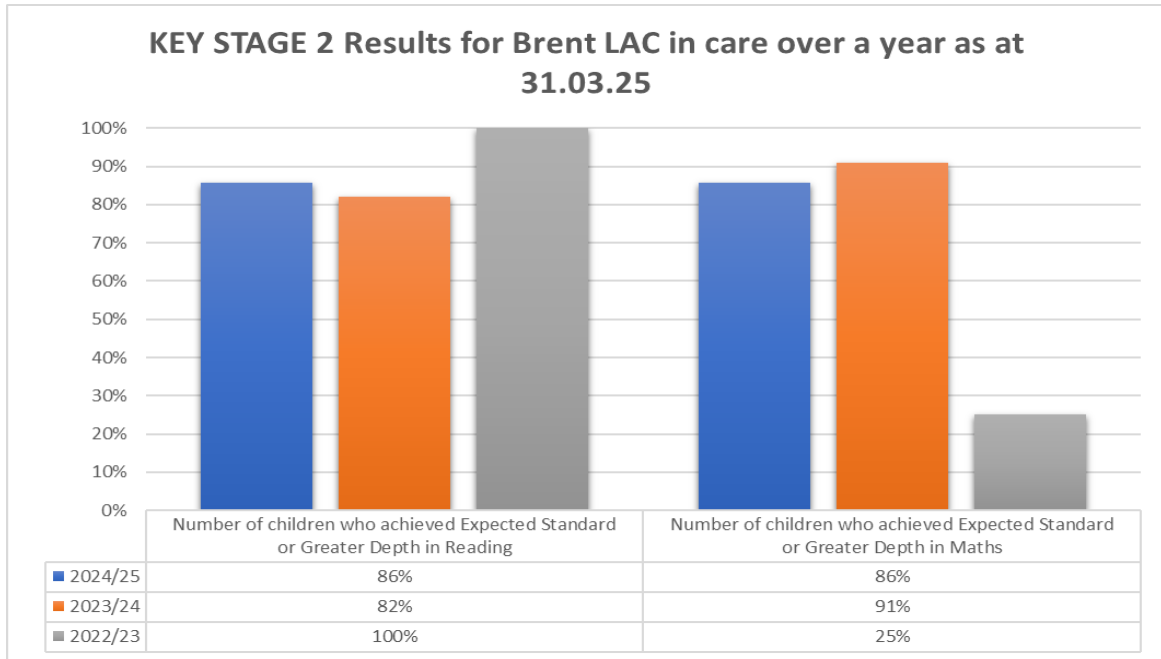


7.3 Of the 11 pupils in the overall cohort, seven had been in care for at least one year as of 31 March 2025, forming the eligible cohort for statutory reporting. Graph 2 presents the outcomes for this group. In reading, attainment improved by 4 percentage points compared with 2024, reflecting continued progress in this area. In mathematics, outcomes were 5 percentage points lower than the previous year.

Given the small cohort size, year-on-year outcomes can fluctuate and should be interpreted with caution, as the performance of individual pupils can have a notable impact on overall percentages. It is also recognised that, more broadly, increased length of time in care is often associated with greater educational stability and improved outcomes, as children benefit from consistent support, placement stability and sustained engagement in education.

Brent Virtual School continues to work closely with schools, designated teachers and carers to ensure that targeted support in core subjects is in place and that pupils are supported to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Graph 2: 2025 KS2 CLA in care at least one year at 31/03/2025



7.4 During 2024/25, as with previous academic years, the BVS subscribed to the Letterbox Club – a subscription that delivers books and educational games to children aged 5 to 12 years. Subscription to Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library that offers a book subscription that covers babies to 4 years old. A book club was led by the primary advisory teacher. BVS again supported tuition intervention for students and booster programmes for year groups sitting external exams (Year 6 and Year 11). In total 43 children engaged in either booster programmes or tuition throughout the academic year, whilst a further 26 had access to Maths and/or Literacy subscriptions during the academic year.

Year 7 Case Study

BN is a year 7 student who has been in local authority care since 2022 and is in a stable long-term foster placement. She is supported by her carer, social worker, BVS Advisory Officer and Designated Teacher. In September 2023, while in Year 6, an Educational Psychologist observed BN following concerns around possible ASC traits. The assessment found that BN is academically able but experiences some social communication difficulties, including challenges with empathy and understanding others' perspectives.

In summer 2024, BN's birth mother sadly passed away. To ensure appropriate support during this time and ahead of her transition to secondary school, BVS arranged an early PEP meeting. Strategies from the EP report were shared with the school to support her learning and social development. Weekly art therapy was commissioned by the Designated Teacher to provide a safe space for BN to process her bereavement and support her emotional wellbeing.

BN was identified as a gifted and talented pupil with Maths being a particular strength. PPG funding supported her participation in robotics club through the purchase of a coding kit and Robots in Motion building set. A laptop and handwriting resources were also provided to support her academic progress.

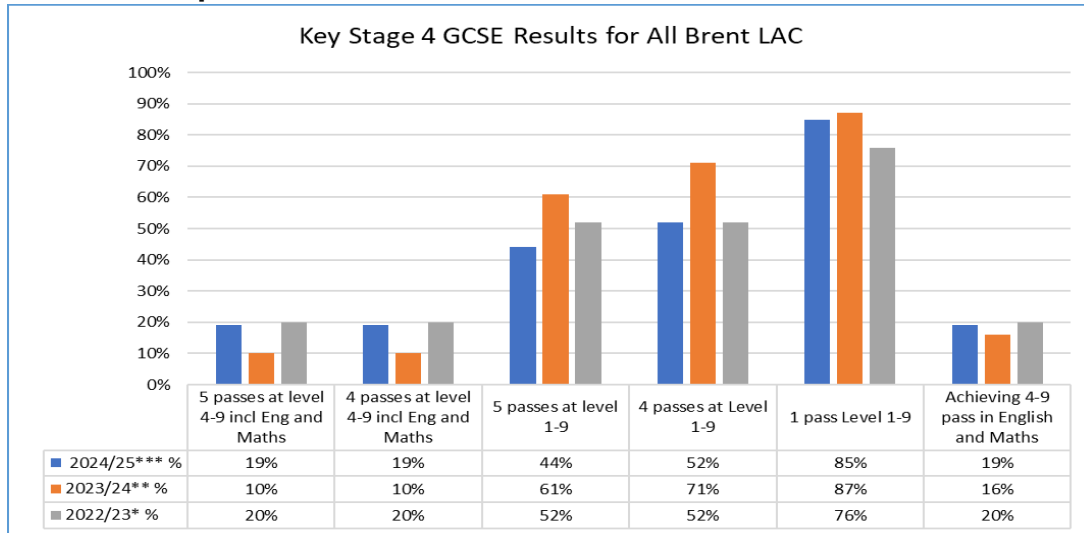
With coordinated support from BVS, the school, and her carers, BN has transitioned successfully into Year 7, engaged well with enrichment opportunities, and is making positive progress both academically and emotionally.

8.0 Progress and Attainment Key Stage 4

- 8.1 At the end of the academic year 2024/25 there were 43 Year 11 students of whom 8 were UASC. The Statistical First Release (SFR eligible cohort) was 20, of whom 2 were children with an EHCP who had significant needs which meant that they did not sit exams. 18 students therefore sat exams and are counted in the SFR results.
- 8.2 To support both the primary and secondary cohorts, Pupil Premium funding was utilised in several ways. Primarily, funding was sent to all schools to ensure that PEP targets were achieved. The funding that was retained by BVS supported the enrichment programme that had a focus on attainment and wellbeing. Where required, schools received the full Pupil Premium funding to support children and young people who had significant barriers to learning. Several children accessed mentoring and/or tuition at key points in the year.
- 8.3 The proportion of children looked after achieving the headline measure of five GCSE passes at grades 4–9 including English and Maths was 19% in the 2024/25 academic year. This represents an improvement of almost 10 percentage points compared with the previous year and brings outcomes back in line with those achieved in 2022/23.
- 8.4 Performance against the Statistical First Release (SFR) cohort measure also improved significantly. This year's figure was 28%, representing a substantial increase of almost 20 percentage points compared with the previous academic

year and a 4-percentage point improvement on 2022/23 (Graph 3). This positive trend reflects the continued strategic focus of BVS and partner schools on raising attainment at Key Stage 4, including targeted academic support, robust monitoring through the PEP process, and strong collaboration between schools, carers and professionals to support children looked after to achieve their potential.

Graph 3: Achievement rates for GCSEs 2022/23 - 2024/25

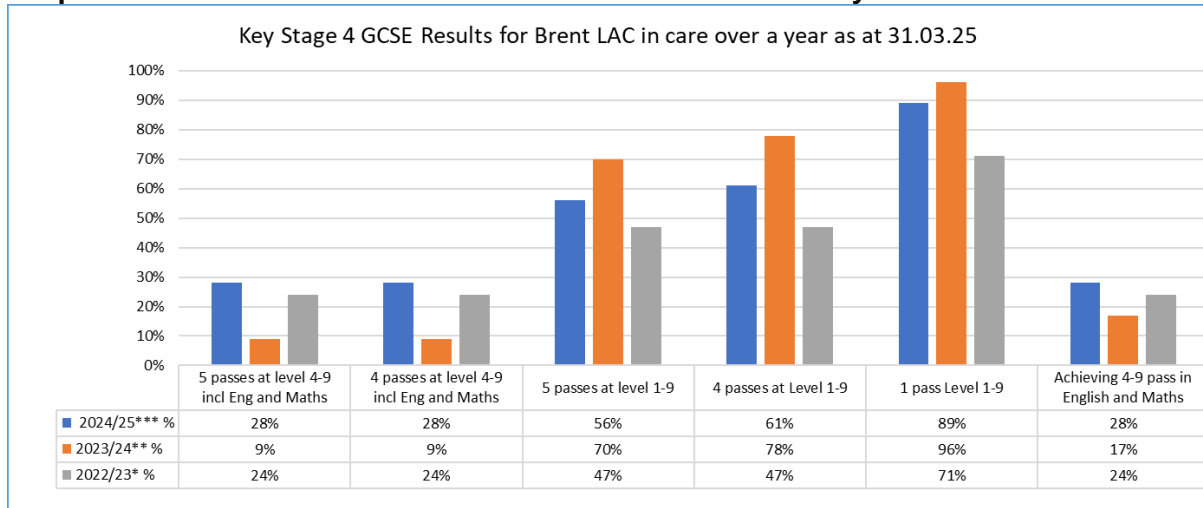


*The above data is for the whole LAC cohort minus SEN/disabilities and ESOL (10 LAC) - total cohort- 35

**The above data is for the whole LAC cohort minus SEN/disabilities and ESOL (12 LAC) - total cohort- 43

***The above data is for the whole LAC cohort minus SEN/disabilities and ESOL (5 LAC) - total cohort- 32

Graph 4: GCSE achievement rates for LAC in care for over a year 2022/23 -2024/25



*The above data is for the eligible LAC cohort minus SEN and ESOL (5 LAC) - total SFR cohort-22

**The above data is for the eligible LAC cohort minus SEN and ESOL (6 LAC) - total SFR cohort-29

***The above data is for the eligible LAC cohort minus SEN and ESOL (2 LAC)- total SFR cohort-20

8.5 All five pupils, who had been in care for between 5 and 15 years and achieved the headline outcome of five GCSE passes at grades 4–9 including English and Maths, had experienced long-term care stability. Four of these pupils were living in stable long-term foster placements, while one pupil was in residential care and

attending a grammar school outside the borough. One pupil within the group also had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and was educated in a specialist setting. All five pupils had previously met or exceeded age-related expectations at Key Stage 2, highlighting the importance of sustained educational support and stability over time.

- 8.6 A few common factors were evident across this group. Each pupil demonstrated significant resilience, linked not only to stable care placements but also stable school placements from Key Stage 2 through to Key Stage 4, and support from aspirational carers and committed education professionals. These protective factors were instrumental in enabling the pupils to maintain strong engagement in learning and achieve positive educational outcomes.
- 8.7 All pupils who achieved five GCSE passes at grades 4–9 including English and Maths benefited from targeted academic support throughout Key Stage 4. Each pupil had access to 1:1 tutoring in core subjects, delivered either through their school or externally through the Lumina Programme in partnership with Harrow School. In addition, all pupils attended school-led booster and intervention sessions and maintained strong attendance throughout Key Stage 4, which further supported their academic progress.
- 8.8 Several pupils also accessed wider enrichment and aspiration-raising opportunities. One pupil participated in the Brunel University Scholars Programme, while two pupils took part in John Lyon's Charity and BVS enrichment activities. The Lumina Programme provided a combination of academic tuition and pastoral mentoring, supporting pupils to build confidence, resilience and aspiration alongside improving attainment. As one tutor involved in the programme commented:

"It has taken a bit of time to get to know my tutee, and for her to get to know me; my main feeling is that she needs confidence in her own ability more than anything, so I see my role as very much to support that confidence, celebrating successes within the tutor sessions, and setting her up for success in classes so that she can sustain this confidence in school."

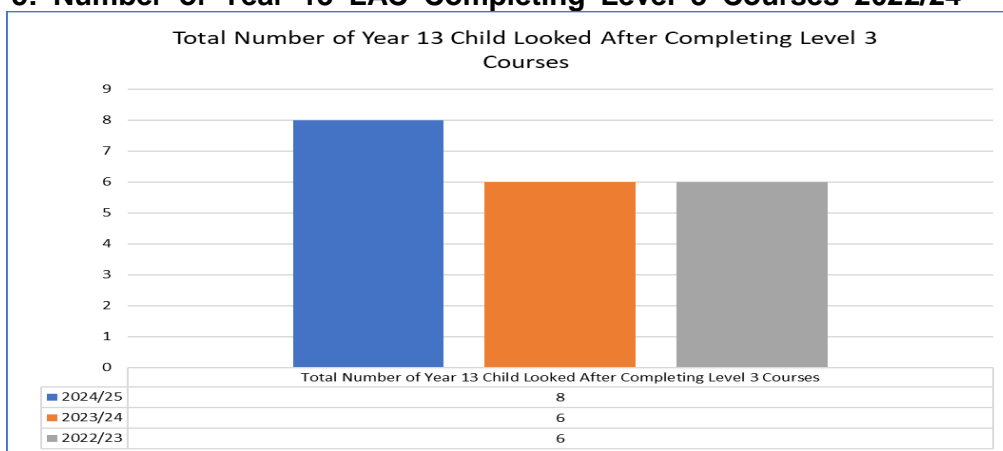
9.0 Post-16:

- 9.1 The proportion of care leavers aged 17–18 who are participating in education, employment or training (EET) can fluctuate throughout the academic year due to the transitional nature of post-16 pathways and the individual circumstances of young people as they move between courses, training opportunities and employment. During the past academic year, Brent's EET rate has ranged between 77% and 83%. These fluctuations are often associated with key transition points, including the completion of courses, changes in placement, or young people reassessing their next steps before re-engaging with education or training. As Corporate Parents, the Council remains committed to supporting care leavers to achieve positive and sustainable destinations. BVS works closely with social workers, personal advisers, post-16 providers and careers services to closely track participation, identify young people who may be at risk of becoming NEET at an early stage, and put in place targeted support to help them re-engage quickly and access appropriate opportunities that raise

aspirations and support long-term independence. During the 2025/26 academic year, the Virtual School commenced work on embedding the Family Business Model across services, aimed at strengthening collective responsibility and ensuring that all parts of the Council play an active role in supporting care leavers to access and sustain positive education, employment and training pathways.

9.2 In 2024/25, a total of eight Year 13 students successfully completed Level 3 qualifications, representing an increase on the previous academic year. Of these young people, three have progressed to university, while the remaining five have secured employment. This includes one young person who has begun a Teaching Assistant Apprenticeship with a pathway into teaching.

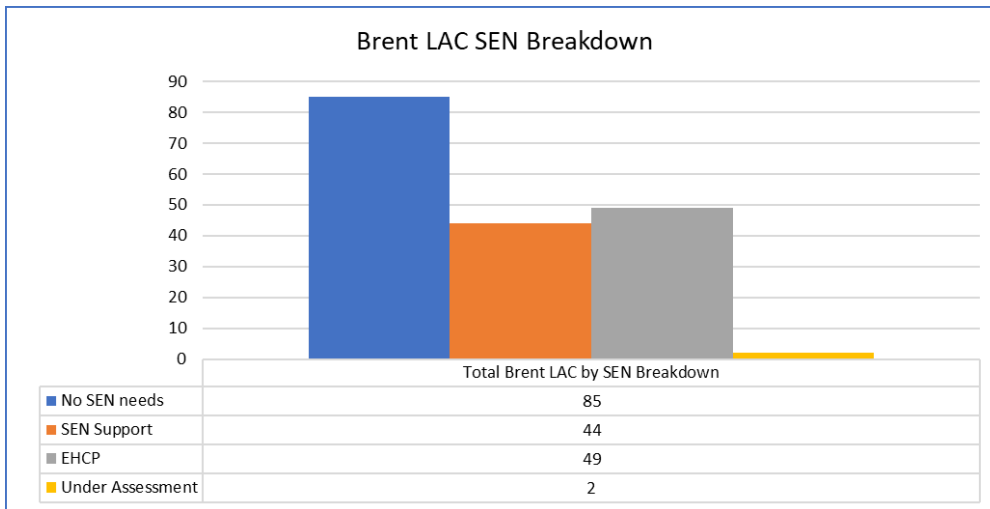
Graph 5: Number of Year 13 LAC Completing Level 3 Courses 2022/24 – 2024/25



10.0 SEND

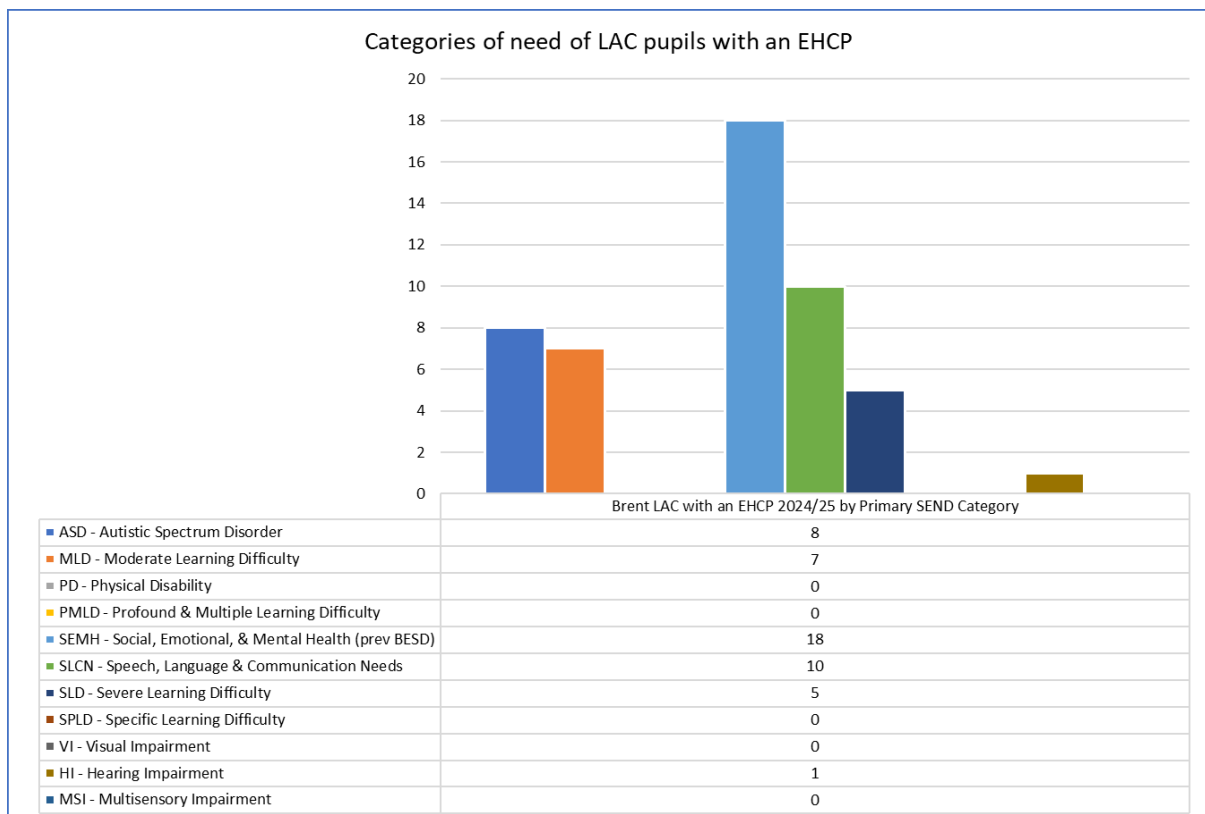
10.1 The number of statutory aged young people in care under the BVS with an EHCP is 49, equating to 27% of the cohort. In comparison, as of July 2025 4.6% of the general population on roll in Brent schools had an EHCP (which was similar to the national rate). Seven of this group were in a residential setting or secure unit and 12 were placed in SEN special schools. 36 of the 44 in schools were educated outside of the borough.

Graph 6: Looked After Children with SEND



10.2 Graph 7 outlines the categories of need of LAC pupils with an EHCP. The highest area of need in the LAC cohort continues to be social, emotional and mental health (SEMH). These figures reflect the vulnerability of young people becoming LAC and the complex trauma and challenging environments many experienced prior to becoming LAC.

Graph 7: Categories of need of LAC pupils with an EHCP



11.0 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

- 11.1 During the 2024/25 academic year, 7 new statutory- aged UASC entered the care system, consistent with the number admitted in the previous year. All young people in this group were in Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 5, 10 UASC entered the care system in 2024/25, compared with eight in the preceding year, representing an increase in older arrivals. The BVS worker continued to provide dedicated support and advocacy for this cohort, ensuring that each young person gained swift access to education and enrichment opportunities immediately upon entering the care system.
- 11.2 Generally, UASC are disapplied from KS4 assessments as new arrivals into the country. For most their entry into education is through one of the three local ESOL provisions in Brent schools. There is often a keen interest in education and language acquisition for this cohort. With the new funding stream for Post-16, BVS has been able to deliver a wider tuition resource including Saturday school in a neighbouring borough.

UASC Case Study

MD, a 12-year-old unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC), was referred to Brent under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) after arriving in the care of Kent County Council. Upon transfer, he was placed with an experienced foster carer. However, the placement was not culturally compatible. The foster carer was of Jamaican heritage while MD was Syrian, leading to differing expectations around food, routines, and household norms. MD preferred to prepare his own meals and struggled to adapt to the carer's rules, particularly regarding curfew and boundaries. As tensions escalated, MD made a number of allegations against the carer. A stability meeting was convened to address these relational difficulties and explore ways of improving the placement, although challenges persisted.

At school, increasing concerns emerged around the MD's engagement and wellbeing. Attendance had fallen to 89%, comprising both authorised and unauthorised absences. He arrived late due to reported transport issues and became involved in several conflicts with peers. MD expressed feelings of isolation and disconnection within the school environment. In response, school staff and professionals began implementing measures to support his emotional wellbeing and reinforce his sense of safety and belonging.

MD had two uncles residing locally in Brent. Social care explored the feasibility of a kinship placement; however, both uncles were unable to assume care responsibilities due to their own family circumstances. One uncle subsequently identified an aunt who might be able to care for the YP. Following a positive assessment, a kinship arrangement was formalised, and MD moved into his aunt's care.

BVS was notified of the planned transition. As part of proactive educational planning, the social worker received support to submit an application to the secondary school closest to the aunt's home.

Following the move and the transition to a new school, notable progress was recorded at the autumn PEP meeting. MD's attendance improved significantly, rising to 97%. Teaching staff confirmed that he had settled well, with no concerns relating to behaviour, academic participation, or peer relationships. This represented a substantial improvement from earlier challenges involving isolation, and inconsistent access to learning. The move to his aunt's care, coupled with a collaborative, multi-agency approach - including BVS, school staff, and the social worker - proved instrumental in addressing barriers and enhancing the MD's educational experience. This demonstrates the positive educational impact of a nurturing, stable, and culturally attuned home environment.

12.0 Personal Educational Plans (PEP)

- 12.1 During the academic year 2024/25 the PEP completion rate was 98%. For several years PEP completion has been above 90%, indicating a consistency of strong practice. As a result, the focus over the past three years has been on the quality of PEPs. The PEP process is key to capturing the educational pathway and voice of looked after children and young people, so it is imperative that this is a quality document. Monthly PEP training is ongoing for new social workers and where necessary individual training was also offered. There are still schools, predominantly out of borough, that do not always maintain Brent's expected standard and where this becomes an issue this is addressed with school leadership and through training with school governors.
- 12.2 The quality of PEPs is reviewed each term. The foci changes dependent on current workstreams with at least one audit focused on LAC with EHCPs or SEN Support.

13.0 Mental Health and Wellbeing

- 13.1 During the academic year 2024/25, the mental health and wellbeing of LAC was supported by the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) and the Wellbeing and Emotional Support Team (WEST), a service commissioned by the Local Authority and delivered by the Anna Freud Centre.
- 13.2 The WEST team worked with 46 children looked after in 2024/25. In terms of ethnicity, the highest proportion were Black/Black British (39%), and the most frequently referred age was 14-16. There were 31 females (67%) and 15 males (33%). 132 sessions were delivered, comprising 92 direct sessions and 40 indirect sessions. 51 sessions were delivered face to face. The rate of attendance at sessions was 97%. Alongside direct interventions with LAC and young people, WEST provide weekly consultations and indirect intervention programmes supporting social workers, foster carers and other members of the child or young person's professional network to best support them.
- 13.3 A Reflective Fostering Group (RFG) for Foster Carers and Kinship Carers (online) ran in 2024/25 consisting of 6-8 two-hour workshops, developed by the Family Trauma Team at Anna Freud and specifically adapted by WEST Child and Family Specialists experienced in working with children in care to best meet the needs of Brent's kinship and foster carer populations. 10 foster carers were invited to attend the group and 4 foster carers attended. Content included: mentalising for self and others and techniques to support this; an exploration of the carer's experience of being parented/cared for and how this influences their approach to caring; an overview of trauma and how this impacts emotions and behaviour and reflecting on parenting styles. Evaluative feedback collected from participants was very positive; they gave high scores for the sessions' quality, delivery and effectiveness, and the average "How Helpful" score was 9.5 out of 10.

Feedback from carers

"I find that being in the group and the talking and learning has shown an amazing example of talking and learning, listening and building trust, which is what we're trying to do with these children."

“It touched on actual feelings ... I could connect to this course as it was real to me and my experiences.”

- 13.4 In partnership with the Kinship Care Team a 30-minute session was delivered reflecting on the challenges of being a kinship carer and offering some wellbeing support. A WEST Child and Family Specialist delivered the session to 18 kinship carers at the Chalkhill Community Centre, facilitating a discussion on the impact of trauma disrupted early attachments upon children in kinship care, in which participants could share and compare their experiences of being a kinship carer. The Child and Family Specialist then talked the participants through some grounding and breathing exercises which offered a moment of relaxation in the session and provided strategies that could be used in future to self-regulate. Feedback from kinship carers was positive:

“We get so focused on the children we forget about ourselves. The breathing technique was very good.”

“We’re all going through the same thing but in different ways. We’re all in this together but in different circumstances.”

Case Study

M is a 14-year-old girl (mixed/dual background) referred to WEST by her school for anxiety and low mood. She is a child in care, living with foster carers. She has previously been cared for by her mother, grandmother and aunt at different times.

At the start of the intervention M was attending a Pupil Referral Unit due to behavioural difficulties. She said that was not always able to manage her frustration and it could come across as being rude and insolent. Goals for the intervention:

Goals:	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
To manage my frustration	2/10	7/10
To communicate better with others	4/10	7/10
To have a better understanding of myself	3/10	8/10

Intervention sessions were held in school and included follow-up meetings with pastoral staff as part of the reintegration plan. M presented as wanting to be accepted and liked by others, but her emotional expression, often led to contradictory responses from others. The intervention focused on exploring the link between experiences, emotions and behaviour. Beneath feelings of anger and frustration lay sadness often. By finding alternative, healthier ways of expressing sadness, M reported feeling calmer and less reactive in difficult situations.

Consequences were also explored. M was helped to consider how her actions might influence the thoughts, feelings, and responses of others. Improved communication helped to minimise avoidable consequences. Throughout the sessions, M engaged in developing a new narrative about who she is and how she wishes to present herself.

Intervention outcome measures: RCADS saw a decrease in both anxiety and low mood. M reported to finding all the sessions useful as she was heard and felt understood and was able to implement changes to improve communication with others. By the end of the intervention, M was attending mainstream school 3 days a week with a clear plan to return full time.

14.0 Pupil Premium Spend

- 14.1 BVS retains 50% of the Pupil Premium Plus grant (PPP) which is used to fund several resources and activities including mentoring, residential trips, enrichment activities, online and face-to-face training and 1:1 tuition for students out of school. The remaining 50% is allocated to schools to support the progress of children and young people looked after by Brent, the use of which is monitored through the PEP process. The enrichment programme is one of the BVS's priorities and offers LAC a wide range of opportunities both local and further afield and the Virtual School is constantly looking at ways to improve the offer.
- 14.2 Some of the retained PPP is used for BVS staff to provide a comprehensive training programme to a range of professionals working with vulnerable students. The content of these sessions includes:
- Governors' Training, promoting positive outcomes for disadvantaged groups and the effective use of pupil premium.

- Governors Training-Supporting LAC and disadvantaged children
- Online workshops for foster carers and kinship carers delivered by WEST (monthly)
- Education Online Training Programme (Click Learning) for Designated Teachers, school staff and social workers
- Designated Teacher Forum (2nd July 2025).
- EPEP training for new social workers (half termly).
- WEST reflective practice for SW
- Foster Carer Training-Supporting the Learning and Achievements of Young People in Care (1st July 2025)

15.0 Enrichment Programme

15.1 BVS is proud of the enrichment programme and the variety of experiences that it offers young people. Within Brent work occurs with Brent Care Journeys (BCJ 2.0) on the coordination of enrichment activities as well as promoting the work of BCJ 2.0. The relationship with John Lyons Foundation and the Harrow, Ealing, Barnet, and BVSs means that Brent LAC have continued to engage in a wider range of activities. Over the past academic year, 105 LAC attended enrichment, cultural and aspiration-raising opportunities as follows:

- Thorpe Park – 15 young people
- The Lion King theatre trip – 10 young people
- Woburn Safari Park – 10 young people
- Disney on Ice – 10 young people
- Toca Social – 8 young people

A number of young people also engaged in education and aspiration-focused programmes, including:

- Transport for Learning – West London Universities programme – 7 young people
- Imperial College outreach programme – 6 young people
- Harrow Study Club – 6 young people
- Springboard Youth Academy – 7 young people
- Brunel Urban Scholars programme – 3 young people

In addition, smaller group activities provided opportunities for creativity, skills development and outdoor learning:

- Creative Futures – 5 young people
- Ceramics workshops – 2 young people
- Music Lessons and Hear My Voice programme – 4 young people
- Floating Classroom experience – 3 young people
- A Slice of Nice – cake baking and decorating workshop – 4 young people
- Phoenix Outdoor Centre – 2 young people

16.0 Celebration of Achievement

- 16.1 A key element of BVS's enrichment and achievement programme is the annual Celebration of Achievement evening. This event provides an opportunity for the Brent community to come together and recognise the accomplishments of children looked after over the previous academic year. It enables those who support young people—including carers, social workers, school staff and corporate parents—to celebrate their successes, reflect on progress and encourage continued aspiration for the future.
- 16.2 The event is funded through the retained Pupil Premium Grant (PPG). The celebration held in December 2025, recognising achievements from the 2024/25 academic year, was themed 'Winter Wonderland'. The event celebrated the diversity of Brent's children looked after and the wider Brent community, with all children aged 3 to 18 recognised in some way for their achievements. Approximately 250 people attended, including children and young people, carers, school staff and members of the Brent Corporate Parenting Committee, creating a positive and inclusive environment in which the achievements of Brent's young people could be celebrated collectively. The event also reinforces the council's corporate parenting commitment to champion the achievements of children looked after, raising aspirations and ensuring that young people feel recognised, valued and supported to pursue their future ambitions.

17.0 Extended Duties for all Children with a Social Worker

- 17.1 The Extended Duties Team differs from the Virtual School in both its cohort and function. While the Virtual School focuses specifically on children looked after and care leavers, the Extended Duties Team works more broadly with children who have a social worker, including those on Child in Need or Child Protection plans, as well as those previously known to social care. Their role is more preventative and advisory, aiming to intervene early to reduce risk, prevent exclusion, improve attendance and attainment, and remove barriers to education before children enter care. The team works directly with families, schools and social workers, providing consultation, guidance and, where needed, hands-on support and multi-agency coordination. In contrast, the Virtual School has a statutory responsibility for promoting the educational outcomes of children in care, whereas the Extended Duties Team operates as an early intervention and system support function, strengthening educational outcomes for vulnerable children at the edge of care.

The Extended Duties Team delivered direct work with 151 children during 2024/25, with the team maintaining a maximum caseload of 50 children at any one time. This group includes children educated out of borough, those who have experienced the most fractured education, children with extremely low attendance and children who are at risk of permanent exclusion. Children on the waiting list are seen within two weeks for assessment of needs and work will typically start within three weeks.

- 17.2 Approximately 40% of all referrals are listed as attendance concerns due to mental health issues (social anxiety disorders). In addition, the bulk of the other

60% of referrals relate to social and emotional issues, previously undiagnosed learning difficulties, gang affiliations and parental issues (parents with mental health problems, parents keeping children off school or parental lack of engagement). Almost 20% of the referrals relate to children at substantial risk of permanent exclusion from out-of-borough schools. A rise is also being seen in the numbers of children's parents needing support to help their children to access education and educational support. Examples of the work undertaken include:

- Preventing the exclusion of a Year 8 pupil attending an out of borough academy school by working with the Brent Inclusion Team to facilitate a managed move to a Brent school
- Working with a school to review an exclusion and getting them to subsequently rescind it and recognise the young person had unmet medical needs. School was supported to make an application for an EHCNA and the young person transitioned to a specialist provision, with an EHCP.
- Running workshops and consultation sessions for Social Workers at both Willesden Library and the Civic Centre, to upskill them in education related matters (Admissions; suspensions and exclusions; SEN; EBSA; supporting children with unmet needs; understanding elective home education and off-rolling).

17.3 As of September 2024, the role of the Virtual School Head (VSH) has further expanded to include promoting the educational attendance, attainment and progress of children in kinship care. Brent Virtual School provides strategic, tailored support to carers, including advice on school admissions and special educational needs (SEN), and works to strengthen partnerships between schools and social care to improve outcomes, under the direction of the VSH.

While this duty has now been formalised through national expectations, this is not a new area of practice for Brent. The Virtual School has already been actively supporting children in kinship care and their carers, and this expansion of the VSH role reflects and reinforces existing practice within the service.

These duties sit alongside the VSH's statutory responsibility to promote the educational achievement of previously looked-after children (PLAC), including those adopted or subject to special guardianship or child arrangement orders. This work continues to be delivered through the Extended Duties Team, under the direction of the VSH, providing advice, guidance and information to parents, carers and schools to support improved educational outcomes.

18.0 Strategic Priorities for 2025/26

18.1 The core values of BVS—attendance, achievement and aspiration—remain central to the work of the service. Building on the progress achieved during the 2024/25 academic year, the Virtual School will continue to strengthen its strategic leadership role in improving educational outcomes for children in care and other vulnerable cohorts. In line with national policy developments and the evolving role of Virtual Schools, the priorities for the 2025/26 academic year are as follows:

a) **Strengthen strategic oversight of attendance and inclusion for children looked after**

Continue to work in partnership with schools, social care, carers and young people to improve attendance across the cohort, with a particular focus on Key Stage 4, where the risk of disengagement can increase. This will include strengthened monitoring of attendance data, early identification of emerging concerns and targeted intervention to support sustained engagement in education and reduce the risk of exclusion.

b) **Improve post-16 participation, progression and destinations**

Maximise the use of Post-16 Pupil Premium and associated funding streams to support young people to access and sustain education, employment or training (EET) opportunities, including pathways into further and higher education, apprenticeships and vocational training. The Virtual School will work with partners to increase the proportion of young people in EET from 80% to at least 85%, while continuing to raise aspirations and broaden progression opportunities.

c) **Embed the Family Business Model**

During the 2025/26 academic year, BVS will provide strategic leadership in embedding the Family Business Model across Children and Young People's Services, strengthening shared accountability across the Council and partner agencies for improving the educational outcomes, attendance and aspirations of children looked after and care leavers.

d) **Align BVS with national policy developments and legislative change**

Ensure that the work of the Virtual School remains fully aligned with emerging national expectations and legislative developments, including proposals outlined within the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, SEND and Alternative Provision reforms, and wider national developments relating to attendance, inclusion and support for vulnerable children.

e) **Strengthen strategic oversight and support for children looked after with SEND**

Continue to improve outcomes for children looked after with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), including those with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). This will include strengthening partnership working with SEND services, schools and partner authorities, improving oversight of placement and provision, and ensuring that children with additional needs are able to access appropriate education provision without delay.

f) **Use data and insight to drive improvement in educational outcomes**

Further develop the use of data, performance monitoring and cohort analysis to identify trends, address emerging risks and target support where it is most needed. This will enable BVS to provide strong strategic oversight of outcomes, inform service development and ensure that resources are directed effectively to support the children and young people who need it most.

19.0 Stakeholder consultation and engagement

19.1 Stakeholder consultation and engagement takes many varied methods within the service, and we are committed to evaluating and developing new and creative ways of hearing from stakeholders.

19.2 Carers views are sought through one-to-one discussions with their linked advisory teacher/worker, PEP, and Support Groups. Carers are encouraged to provide written feedback on the work of the Virtual School.

19.3 Children and young people provide feedback through discussions with their social worker, IRO, school or linked advisory teacher/worker, Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings, and Participation activities.

20.0 Financial Considerations

20.1 There are no additional financial considerations arising from this report.

21.0 Legal Considerations

21.1 There are no additional legal considerations arising from this report.

22.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

22.1 There are no specific climate change or environmental considerations.

23.0 Communication Considerations


23.1 There are no specific communication considerations.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director: Children, Young People and Community Development

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 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 13th April 2026
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development
	Lead Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Employment - Cllr Gwen Grahl
Brent Fostering Service 6-monthly Monitoring Report: 01 October 2025 to 31 March 2026	
Wards Affected:	ALL
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the duration of the meeting, on the grounds that the attendance of representatives from the council's Children in Care council, necessitated the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 2, Part 1 of Schedule 12A, as amended, of the Act, namely: Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
List of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	Renewing fostering: homes for 10,000 more children (February 2026) https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/renewing-fostering-homes-for-10000-more-children
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Kelli Eboji Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Kelli.Eboji@brent.gov.uk Tom Donovan Service Manager, Looked After Children and Permanency Tom.Donovan@brent.gov.uk Palvinder Kudhail Director, Early Help and Social Care Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it

is achieving good outcomes for children. It includes relevant data on the service's performance and activities, as well as updates on the functioning and progress of the Fostering Panel. Additionally, the report outlines the developments that have taken place in the Service throughout the year, as well as any planned initiatives for the upcoming period. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).

1.2 Brent Fostering Service operates in accordance with the Fostering National Minimum Standards, the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. These regulations are the foundation of the regulatory framework for fostering services under the Care Standards Act 2000. This report details the activity of Brent's fostering service from the 01 October 2025 to the 31 March 2026.

2.0 Recommendation

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

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

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

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

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

4.0 Background

4.1 Service Priorities

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

- To have a strong and renewed focus on recruitment, assessment and approval of new

foster carers with the view to achieve a net gain of **10** new carers by the end of the financial year.

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

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

- The service has recruited 3 carers this period. There are 5 assessments in progress as well as 5 potential carers who are at the initial visit stage considering progressing to an assessment. 1 foster carer has resigned this period and 2 foster carers were deregistered by the service, due to safeguarding concerns. The net increase for this financial year so far is 0.
- Brent's fostering offer is competitive and is well received by Brent foster carers. In this period no carers have transferred from Brent to other local authorities or Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs). However, foster carers do feedback they would like more benefits including council tax reductions/reimbursements, financial contributions to utility bills as well as other benefits including better parking options in the London Borough of Brent.
- Brent's first Mockingbird Constellation continues to progress well. The foster carers in this programme have fed back they are thankful for the support of this new programme and enjoy the community that is being built.
- Whilst there hasn't been an increase in in-house fostering capacity in this reporting period, placement stability is good and the vacancies with in-house carers are being fully utilised, meaning if a carer is free to foster a child then a child is placed with them swiftly, after careful planning, risk assessment and matching.
- Uptake of training by foster carers still needs to significantly improve but the number of

training courses available is good; the training catalogue is robust and additional training courses are added on specific topics when requested by foster carers.

- Brent, and 7 other neighbouring West London Local Authorities (Ealing, Harrow, Hounslow, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster and Hillingdon) started a regional fostering hub; Foster with West London. The Department for Education has asked all Local Authorities to expand the remit of regional fostering hubs by summer 2026 to undertake 'end to end' recruitment, which will include assessments of new foster carers.
- The Brent fostering service utilises the current pool of foster carers for emergency care arrangements whenever a vacancy arises.
- The fostering service has identified a lead social worker to work closely with Brent's participation service. Work is ongoing to identify a foster carer to lead the Foster Carer Forum and better utilise feedback from the foster carers who attend the Brent support groups.
- The fostering service provides regular service updates to foster carers via monthly email newsletters as well as sharing updates in foster carer support groups. 'Coffee with Kelli' sessions continue to be offered to foster carers and carers are encouraged to provide feedback via surveys sent to them and via their supervising social worker. Carers are celebrated at fostering panel and events such as the end of year celebration; letters of thanks are also sent from the Head of Service or Service Manager when carers have gone above and beyond. The service launched a WhatsApp Community to share updates, feedback, events and information as requested by the Brent foster carers.

4.2 Staffing Arrangements

4.2.1 The organisational structure of the Fostering Service remains consistent with that outlined in the last report. The Fostering Service consists of two teams: one Recruitment, Support and Assessment Team, and one Kinship Care Team. The service is overseen by a Service Manager.

4.2.2 The Fostering Support and Assessment Team consists of 8 supervising social workers and one Team Manager. There are also two part-time fixed term contract posts in the service:

- 0.5 Fostering Recruitment Officer
- 0.5 Mockingbird Liaison Officer

Both of these posts are currently held by one individual staff member. The current post-holder has secured employment in another directorate in the Local Authority and leaves the service on 01 April 2026. A decision has been made to not recruit to these roles until clarity is known regarding the resources required by Brent for the expanded regional fostering hub, Foster with West London (FwWL) is known. Further information in relation to the FwWL is included later in this report.

4.2.3 The Kinship Care Team consists of 8 social workers and one Team Manager. One social worker left the department in January 2026, after a successful round of recruitment the vacancy is expected to be filled by an external candidate by May 2026.

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

workers for ongoing support.

4.3 Placement Activity

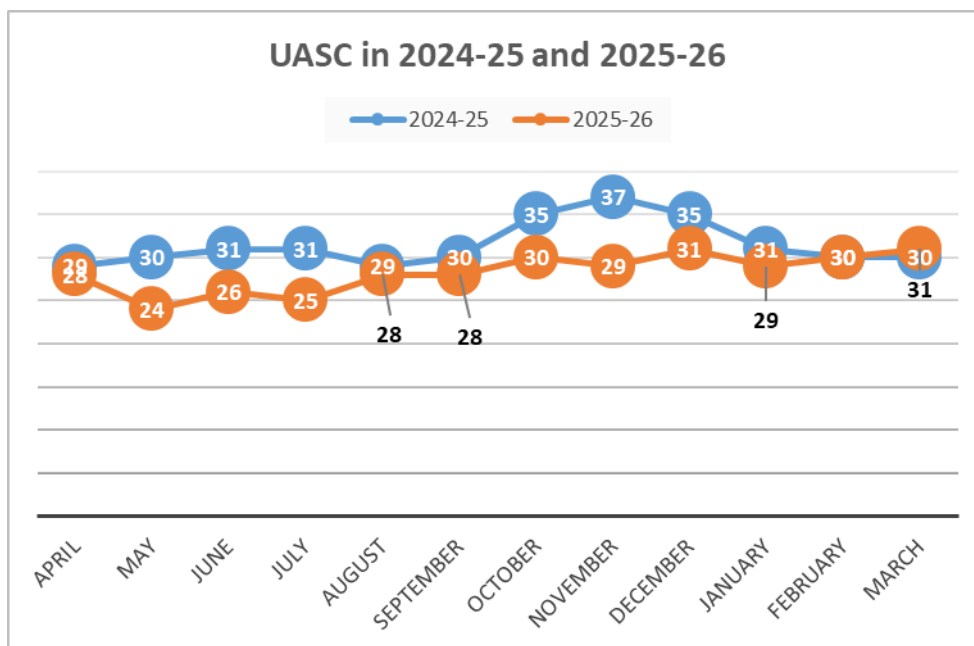
4.3.1 The total number of children in care as of 16/03/2026 was 299, an increase of 8 children from 291 on 30/09/2025.

The corporate performance targets for 2025/2026 are as follows:

- Percentage of children looked after placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers as of 31st March 2026 was 17%, a decrease of 5 children to 52 children. However, this remains below the annual target of 25%
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend as of 31st March 2026 was 15%, an increase of 3 children (44) – below the annual target of 20%
- Percentage of looked after children placed with independent fostering agencies as of 31st March 2026 was 30% (89 children), the same percentage of children as 30/09/2025
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements as of 31 March 2026 was 62% (185 children), a decrease of 3 children and 2%.
- There were 44 looked after children placed in registered supported accommodation as of 31 March 2026, an increase of 7 young people from 30 September 2025. 44 children represent 15% of all looked after children placed in registered supported accommodation.

There were 31 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) as of 31 March 2026, an increase of 3 UASC from 30 September 2025 (28 UASC).

The number of UASC placed in registered supported accommodation as of 31st March 2026 was 19, 8 more UASC as of 30 September 2025, none in residential children's homes and 12 UASC placed in foster placements.



17 children were placed with 14 new Kinship Carers who have started fostering since October 2025, 4 of whom have also ceased placements.

At 31 March 2026 there are 6 children in 6 unregulated placements which have exceeded 24 weeks where the carer has not yet been approved as a connected persons carer. The carers have been presented to the Panel for approval, but the ADM is awaited.

1 Brent child was made subject to a Special Guardianship Order in this reporting period.

4.4 Recruitment and Assessment of new foster carers

Recruitment

4.4.1 During this reporting period, the monthly information evenings were moved from Zoom to Microsoft Teams, following feedback from attendees. The service attended both face-to-face and online recruitment events targeted at communities in various parts of the borough. The recruitment activity continues to have a broad focus, to capture as much interest as possible. FwWL offer regular information evenings run by the foster carer ambassadors that potential Brent carers can also utilise.

Any potential enquiries that come to Brent are redirected swiftly to FwWL to ensure the regional hub are capturing all potential enquiries. Brent marketing material and information make clear the working relationship between Brent and FwWL. Brent and FwWL work together to establish as many potential enquiries as far as possible.

Outreach Work:

- 4.4.2 The fostering service has been working hard to raise awareness of fostering across Brent through targeted outreach and putting up posters.

Schools - The service maintained a consistent presence in Brent schools through regular poster drops to ensure that information about fostering remained accessible to families, staff and school communities. Poster deliveries have so far taken place at 24 schools in the borough. These visits ensured fostering messaging remained visible on reception and community boards.

Libraries - To strengthen collaboration with libraries, important community hubs across Brent, the fostering service established a regular monthly slot on the final Thursday of every month, rotating between libraries across the borough. A system for ongoing check-ins, allowing staff to request new posters and leaflets when needed. Continued display of fostering materials on local community noticeboards within libraries. A new partnership with the Brent Libraries lead, who will notify the service of upcoming community events that may offer further outreach opportunities.

Supermarket and High-Footfall Engagement - To increase visibility in everyday community spaces, fostering posters were delivered in January 2026 to 4 of the biggest supermarkets in Brent. Posters were placed on in-store community noticeboards.

Community and Faith Outreach - In January 2026, the service visited the Brazilian community (SCHILD) and engaged with parents to promote fostering and provide information about the approval process. In February 2026, the service attended the Brent Multi-Faith Forum, establishing valuable links with faith networks. In February 2026, the team attended the Serene One outreach day on Harlesden High Street. This event enabled direct engagement with members of the community and resulted in new contacts within the Brent Health, Somali Community and Brent Libraries. In February 2026 the service held a stall at Wembley Mosque encouraging members of the Muslim community in Brent to consider fostering.

Civic Centre Engagement - Throughout this reporting period, the fostering service maintained a physical presence at Brent Civic Centre through information tables. These engagements provided opportunities for staff, visitors and residents to speak directly with fostering officers, increasing awareness across the council and the wider public.



Finding Foster Carers using advanced digital marketing:

4.4.3 To tackle continued recruitment challenges, the service completed a three-month recruitment campaign with CAN Digital between late November 2025 and the end of January 2026. The campaign significantly improved Brent's search visibility in a highly competitive fostering landscape, the headlines included:

- Search impression share increased from ~30% to ~76%, placing Brent at the top of search results for fostering-related terms.
- Brent outperformed Independent Fostering Agencies across key indicators including click-through rate, top-of-page rate and overall visibility.
- META activity alone produced over 100,000 impressions and more than 2,200 link clicks across Facebook and Instagram.
- Display advertising reached over 250,000 users across high-traffic national and local news sites such as Sky News, The Guardian, Evening Standard, BBC Good Food and Kilburn Times.
- Enquiries to FWWL significantly increased (from around 30 per month to 120 per month) during the period the CAN digital campaign ran. The service plan to run a similar campaign from April 2026 to July 2026.

As stated in previous reports, feedback from FWWL and other Local Authorities is that new foster carers find fostering services via word-of-mouth or online searches rather than social media or traditional leaflets. The CAN digital campaign invested mostly in search, to ensure that potential fostering families saw Brent fostering in their results over other fostering providers. Some spend was utilised in social media to spread the Foster with Brent brand however it is believed that those who are searching for fostering are more ready to foster than those who click through via social media.

Below are the number of enquiries made to FWWL (specifically in relation to Brent) before the CAN campaign and during the CAN campaign:

- August 2025, 40 enquiries, 3 referrals to Brent for an initial home visit (IV)
- September 2025, 35 enquiries, 5 referrals to Brent for an IV
- October 2025, 32 enquiries, 1 referrals to Brent for an IV

- November 2025, 115 enquiries, 3 referrals to Brent for an IV
- December 2025, 125 enquiries, 1 referral to Brent for an IV
- Jan 2026, 148 enquiries, 4 referrals to Brent for an IV
- February 2026, 31 enquiries, 3 referrals to Brent for an IV

For the 3 referrals received by Brent in February 2026. 1 candidate has their initial visit booked for 30.03.2026, 1 candidate asked for their initial visit in April 2026, 1 candidate had their initial visit undertaken on 09.03.2026 (unfortunately this candidate cannot progress).

Although the significant increase in enquiries has not resulted in the same increase in referrals, we have committed to a further 3-month campaign with CAN digital to continue to test and refine our online presence.

To assist the Committee, here is a brief outline of the fostering assessment process in Brent:

- The potential fostering family makes an enquiry to FwWL hub. FwWL provide information about fostering. FwWL ask for consent for the potential fostering family to be passed to Brent for an Initial Home Visit or to attend a Brent fostering information session (whichever approach the candidate prefers).
- The referral is passed to Brent by FwWL. Brent staff ask to book an Initial Visit as soon as possible to the potential fostering family.
- Initial Visit takes place. The supervising social worker provides more information about the assessment process, completes a health and safety check and asks the carer to sign a consent form to progress to stage 1 of a fostering assessment.
- Stage 1 – During this stage the potential fostering families usually attend a skills to foster training. The service aims to get Stage 1 completed in 8 to 10 weeks.
- Stage 2 – The service aims to get Stage 2 completed in 4 to 6 months. To avoid delay in some circumstances Stage 1 and Stage 2 can be completed concurrently.

Finding Foster Carers using other digital approaches:

4.4.4 Since July 2025 a Brent Foster Carer ‘Job Advert’ has been placed on the Brent Job section web page. Whilst the Brent Fostering pages are up-to-date on the Brent Website, this job advert aims to target individuals who may be looking for work or additional income, to consider fostering. In this reporting period 7 enquiries came to FwWL from individuals who saw this job advert on the Brent website.

FwWL launched an App called ‘Care Friends’, which has had success in Wales, the app gives points (that can be converted into cash prizes) for every friend/associate in your network who applies to be a foster carer. It works on the principle that current carers know other potential carers and pays current

carers to refer their network to Brent. This further incentivises and digitises our existing 'refer a friend' offer in Brent.

Of all the Local Authorities in West London, Brent's fostering community downloaded and registered the most amount of users for the app. We have assured foster carers who do not want to use the app that our "refer a friend scheme" still continues without the app (either approach can be utilised). One of our recently approved foster carers was from the 'refer a friend' incentive and the Brent foster carer received her £1000. To clarify the individual receives the £1000 once the referred individual has passed their fostering assessment and has begun fostering for Brent.

Regional Fostering Hub (FwWL):

4.4.5 Alongside our local recruitment efforts, work continues in partnership with the FwWL Hub, a collaborative initiative between several neighbouring boroughs aimed at increasing the visibility and impact of fostering recruitment across the region. Our involvement includes joint planning, shared campaigns, and contribution to regional strategy.

The Brent fostering service (including our Mockingbird Home Hub Carers) were invited to attend an event with the new Minister for Children and Families, Josh MacAlister, on 03 February 2026 held at Coram BAAF's offices in Bloomsbury. Josh MacAlister made an announcement about the forthcoming publication from the Department for Education about reforms to the fostering system in England.



The key headlines from the fostering reform include the following:

- Mr MacAlister has a clear aim of 10,000 more fostering places for children in England.
- The fostering reforms aim to avoid delays in assessment of foster carers, reduce the reliance on residential care and avoid children living further away from their home local authority.

- The Department for Education (DfE) are of the view that regional fostering hubs get better results therefore want Local Authorities without a regional fostering hub to implement a hub.
- Those Local Authorities with a hub already (such as Brent) will expand their hubs to an 'end to end' model; to include processing enquiries, completing Form F (fostering) assessments and training of new foster carers. £12.8 million to expand and redesign regional fostering hubs will be provided in England. DfE have confirmed this will be £602K for FwWL. FWWL predict their annual costs will be £1.4m to £1.6m annually (more accurate costings are expected to be presented to cabinet in the coming weeks).
- A 6 week consultation to take place, to consider how to improve assessments of new fostering carers, including considering removing the need for new fostering households to be presented to a fostering panel. The consultation period ended on 17 March 2026. Brent foster carers were encouraged to provide their views to the DfE. Consultation feedback was sent on behalf of the Brent fostering service.
- A 6 week consultation to take place to consider updating/revising the Care Planning, Placement and Review Guidance; Fostering National Minimum Standards; and the Fostering Regulations. To remove some potential barriers and reform the approach taken when allegations are made in respect of foster carers. This also closed on 17 March 2026.
- The DfE want to see more Mockingbird constellations, to support foster carers. £8.9million will be provided in England.
- There will be an expansion on the 'Roommakers' programme (started in Greater Manchester), meaning Local Authorities will be asked to rapidly approve loft extensions, room dividers, garden pods and other creative solutions to support carers make room for children. £25 million in capital grants will be provided in England. DfE have asked Local Authorities to ensure financial processes in Local Authorities do not cause delay for foster carers receiving this funding.
- There will be an expansion on the 'Weekenders' programme, providing more respite opportunities for children.
- The DfE have given an ambitious timescale of expanded hubs being active from Summer 2026.

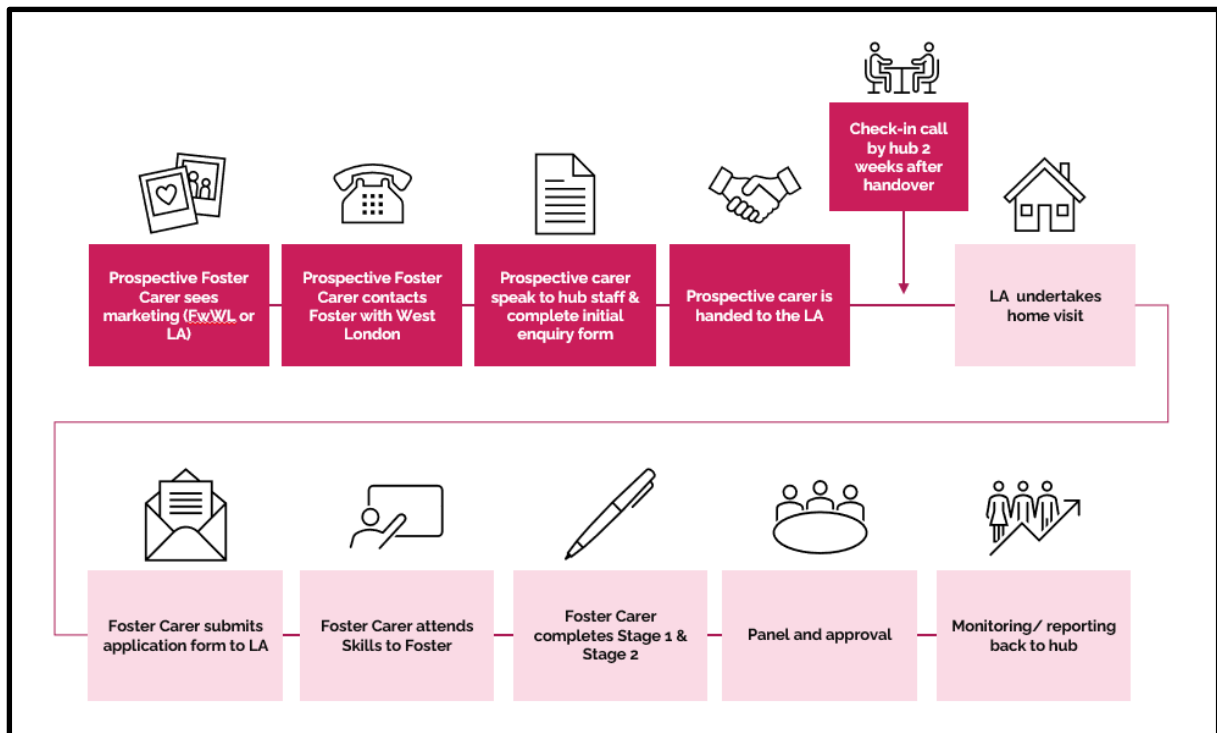
In response to the DfE announcement, FwWL are consulting with local authorities to create the new model for FwWL. Final costings will be presented to cabinet for formal sign off following the May 2026 elections. Staff in Brent's fostering service have been kept up-to-date and are aware that secondments, taupe or other arrangements may be considered.

Assessments

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

Contacts made to FwWL specifically for Brent	Enquiries passed to Brent from FwWL (Referrals)	Initial Visits to be undertaken by Brent	Stage 1 of Fostering Assessment	Stage 2 of Fostering Assessment	Approved by Brent Fostering Panel and ADM
451 contacts made to FwWL for Brent this reporting period.	12 Referrals passed to Brent. (Which recommend Brent call the potential carer and book a home visit) (Please note 8 referrals from the previous reporting period were carried over, still in the IV stage)	5 are currently at IV Stage, the social workers are encouraging the applicant to have a home visit currently	5 currently in Stage 1 (please note 2 of these applicants were carried over from the previous reporting period)	0 currently in Stage 2 (please note 3 carers recently at stage 2 are now approved carers, which is positive)	3 in this reporting period
		3 IVs were completed and the applicant progressed to Stage One.			There has been 1 formal resignation and 2 terminations
		6 withdrew from having an initial visit when offered by Brent			
		3 withdrew after having an initial home visit by Brent			
		3 families were rejected by Brent following the home visit			

This diagram below from FwWL depicts the potential carer's current journey in the fostering recruitment system. As outlined above, when FwWL implement an end-to-end system, this journey will change.



4.4.7 As highlighted in previous reports, when a referral is received from FwWL the Brent fostering service contacts the potential fostering family promptly. It is common at the initial visit stage however for applicants to put off their initial home visit for some time. The assessing social workers are patient, supportive and understanding at this stage to ensure all potential fostering families feel that their fostering journey takes place at their pace. This can mean that applicants look as though they remain at the FwWL enquiries stage and the Brent initial visit stage longer than necessary however this is usually at the request of the applicant.

4.4.8 To review if there are any potential difficulties for applicants to move from enquiry to referral, the service manager in Brent undertook two ‘secret shopper’ exercises. Feedback was provided to FwWL highlighting where the service from FwWL could improve but overall it was felt that FwWL dealt with the enquiries appropriately, worked at the pace of the applicant and passed the details to Brent in a timely way.

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

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

support and guidance during difficult periods. Many of the Brent foster carers have had the same supervising social worker for many years.

One foster carer provided feedback via email to the service on 22 October 2025 stating: *"I feel over the last five years Brent has been a part of my life I feel sometimes they're more like my family. Especially Tamiko. She's ever so supportive between the good days and the bad days she's always at the other side of the phone even half the time I don't know what I'm on about. I just thought I'd share that today girls thank you all ever so much for being ever so understanding"*.

Another fostering family provided feedback on 04 December 2025 via email following a difficult incident; the foster carer was supported over the phone outside of working hours to unpick the difficult experience: *"I really appreciate you taking some time to discuss the matter with me today. I am truly grateful"*.

- 4.5.2 The fostering team works closely and in partnership with the children's social work teams to ensure that the care plans for children are progressed without delay and the children's needs are met whilst receiving the best care. The supervising social workers (and team managers when needed) attend placement planning and permanency planning meetings, children in care reviews and all other relevant statutory and non-statutory meetings, supporting their foster carers to build positive relationships with the 'team around the child'.
- 4.5.3 Placement stability is an important factor in offering an effective fostering service and is crucial to ensuring that Brent delivers good outcomes for each child in care. Over recent years, there has been considerable focus on supporting foster carers to maintain placements. It remains a necessary and priority task to ensure that foster carers and their families feel supported in their valuable role therefore supervising social workers work to support carers to carry out their role successfully. Supervising social workers source external support promptly when required also.
- 4.5.4 In addition to the support the carers received from social workers, the foster carers attend monthly support groups organised and facilitated by the fostering service. This is an informal and relaxed event where foster carers new and more established are able to meet and get to know each other. This works well to provide support to newly approved carers. The monthly foster carers' support group continues to be facilitated virtually as this remains the foster carers' preferred option. Minutes of these meetings are taken and shared with the carers. With permission from attendees, guests attend this group at times to meet with the carers.
- 4.5.5 As part of the commitment to engaging with foster carers and improving the service, we have continued with Foster Care Reference Group feedback sessions previously rebranded previously as "Coffee with Kelli." These informal gatherings provide foster carers with a valuable opportunity to discuss their experiences, share feedback, and offer recommendations directly with the Head of Service. 1 session was held during this reporting period, on 23 October

2025. 1 session in February 2026 was cancelled due to limited uptake by foster carers. Topics raised by the foster carers in the October 2025 session included:

- Challenges of managing contact (family time) in kinship fostering arrangements.
- Positivity around Brent's Mockingbird constellation, the carers were very happy to be part of the constellation
- Positive feedback in relation to the Mockingbird celebration event held in October 2025.
- How foster carers can contribute positively to Life Story Work for children.

Due to limited booking on the February 2026 Coffee with Kelli session, the fostering service will offer this event as a virtual session on 23.04.2026 to explore if holding this virtually increases participation.

4.5.6 The fostering service with the support of the Brent Communication service keeps foster carers engaged and informed by providing a monthly newsletter. Updates are also provided by the Brent fostering service in the WhatsApp community.

4.5.7 Tickets for Foster Carers and Children in their Care: As stated in previous reports, Brent's fostering service are linked in with the Wembley Community Club and the Disney Theatre Group to access discounted or free tickets for fostering families. There are a number of different events for children in care and care experienced young people however some young people and their carers have feedback there is a benefit to events being offered to the entire fostering household as it can avoid children in care feeling a stigma or them simply not wanting to alone. These joint events are also a great opportunity for children to strengthen relationships with their foster carers, their families as well as Brent staff. When possible to do so the Brent fostering service has also encouraged children's social workers and leaving care personal advisors to attend alongside their young people. This helps to strengthen professional relationships and reduce barriers between young people and the professionals supporting them. During this reporting period the service has organised 2 theatre trips: The Lion King (November 2025) and Hercules (January 2026).

The service is already planning future events, which currently include:

- Football Match, England vs Japan, 31 March 2026
- Football Match, England vs Spain, 14 April 2026
- Hercules Theatre Trip, May 2026

Brent Annual Foster Carer Celebration Event: As part of Brent's fostering offer the service holds an annual celebration event. One of the foster carers recommended a sports club for the event to be held at.

On 5 December 2025, Brent's fostering community gathered at Tithe Farm Social Club in Harrow for our annual End of Year Celebration. It was a wonderful opportunity to honour and celebrate the hard work, commitment, and dedication shown by our foster carers throughout the year. The event brought together foster carers, their families, staff, and special guests, including the

Deputy Mayor, Cllr Narinder Bajwa. Guests enjoyed a delicious Caribbean buffet, accompanied by live music from a talented saxophone player, creating a warm and uplifting atmosphere. The evening was expertly hosted by MC Mr Cee, whose humour and energy kept the celebration lively and engaging.

A key highlight of the night was the Foster Carer Awards, recognising the remarkable contributions made by carers across the service. This was followed by heartfelt speeches from Head of Service Kelli Eboji and Corporate Director Nigel Chapman, both expressing deep appreciation for the dedication and resilience shown throughout 2025. The celebration continued with an exciting raffle before the DJ brought everyone to their feet.

A fostering survey has recently gone out to the Brent fostering community asking for feedback on the fostering service but also exploring what activities or celebrations they want to see for the remainder of 2026.



Brent Participation & Brent Fostering – The link supervising social worker meets regularly with Brent’s participation service to discuss, plan, prepare, and support events and activities. Recent events have included the Halloween activity, the end of year celebrations, and the upcoming February half term event. The two services are also currently working together to support the Brent children in care community to design a logo or mural for ‘The Curve’ area of the civic centre, which is the area for Brent children and young people.

4.6 The Kinship Care Team

4.6.1 The Kinship Care team undertakes both planned and emergency assessments of prospective family members and friends who come forward as alternative carers when it is not possible for a child to remain in the care of their parents.

The team provides placement support to the connected persons carers and training during the assessment period.

4.6.2 In this reporting period the Kinship Care team received 49 referrals for viability assessments of a relative, friend and people connected to the child. Kinship referrals do fluctuate month to month and are demand led.

4.6.3 In this reporting period, following 22 positive viability assessments, 17 Connected Persons assessments were allocated to social workers. 2 of these assessments did not progress fully as the family made the decision that they did not wish to be assessed at this time. Of the positive viability assessments, 5 were not progressed to a Connected Persons assessment as the child returned home to the care of the birth parent or another alternative arrangement was made for the child.

The service has noticed an increase in families making their own private applications to family court for Special Guardianship Orders. In these circumstances the Local Authority are still required to undertake the assessment. In this reporting period 6 private application assessment were undertaken by the team.

4.6.4 In this reporting period 13 children were placed in 11 new Regulation 24 (often referred to as Reg 24) Connected Persons arrangements between October 2025 to March 2026. 1 child was placed in a respite arrangement with a Connected Person when their foster carer needed respite.

4.6.5 Children who remain in kinship placements beyond 24 weeks, where the carer has not been approved as a Connected Persons carer (following presentation and recommended for approval at the Brent Fostering Panel) are considered to be in 'unregulated placements' because the temporary approval under regulation 24 and regulation 25 has expired. As at the end of February 2026, there were 5 children in 5 unregulated placements. Most often the reasons for delays in presenting carers to the Brent Fostering Panel are primarily in relation to delayed information being shared by the carer, delayed DBS and medical checks or lack of clarity with the care plan for the child.

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

4.6.6 4 Connected Persons foster carers were presented to the Brent Fostering Panel for approval as carers between October 2025 and March 2026.

4.6.7 3 Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) were granted in this reporting period; the SGOs granted were all private applications made by family that Brent had

completed the assessments for. In this reporting period 1 SGO was granted for children open to Brent Children's Social Care.

4.7 Fostering Panel

4.7.1 The Brent Fostering Panel is constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The service maintains a diverse and highly experienced central list of panel members. In March 2026 the elected member Councillor Moeen resigned from the central list; a replacement councillor will be considered following the May 2026 elections.

The new independent fostering panel chair started in September 2025. Appraisals of current panel members took place in March 2026 with the independent panel chair and service manager (panel adviser). The service added 7 internal social workers to the central list, following their induction training on 14th November 2025, to provide more flexibility for the fostering panel.

4.7.2 Most of the independent panel members have personal experience of the fostering system, including one independent panel member who was brought up in a kinship arrangement and three panel members who are care experienced. The work of the Fostering Panel is supported by the Panel Adviser.

Whilst our fostering panel central list is compliant with the regulations and already diverse the Brent Fostering Service want to continue to improve and develop the service. The service is recruiting a young care experienced panel member as well as a representative with a background in health.

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

4.7.4 The functions of the fostering panel are to consider:

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

4.7.5 During this period October 2025 to April 2026: 7 panels were held with 29 fostering households presented, of which:

- 4 carers were recommended for approval as short-term connected persons (kinship carers).
- 3 carers were recommended for approval as new short-term carers.
- 6 carers were re-approved as part of their 3 yearly annual review.
- 3 carers were re-approved as part of their first annual review.

- 5 fostering approval/status - terminated/resigned (this includes kinship carers who ended being carers as an SGO was granted or the child returned home).
- 0 (zero) carers were terminated at stage 2 of assessment.
- 1 carer was presented for change of approval, to a long-term carer.
- 1 carer was re-approved as a long-term carer.
- 4 carers were presented for Standards of Care, 2 resulted in deregistration.
- 5 children were presented for Long Term Matches with their IFA foster carers.

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

4.7.7 The Head of Service for Looked after Children and Permanency acts as the ADM for the Fostering Service. The ADM, upon reviewing the recommendation of the Fostering Panel, decides whether applicants should be approved as foster carers or not. The ADM also has the responsibility of determining the continued suitability of foster carers following completion of annual reviews of foster carers and recommendation from the Fostering Panel. The ADM meets with the Panel Chair several times a year and observes the independent chair at the fostering panel at least once a year. The ADM is booked to observe on 10.04.2026 and the Director of Early Help and Social Care is booked to observe on 22.05.2026.

4.8 Training and Support for Foster Carers

4.8.1 The Brent CYPCD Learning Academy, part of the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service, provides training for carers, including foster carers and connected persons. Training is available in-person, virtually, and through E-Learning. E-Learning can be accessed by foster carers whenever they wish. Virtual and in-person sessions take place on weekdays and Saturdays for flexibility. All carers have been given a laptop or tablet to access training on.

4.8.2 Virtual delivery remained the preferred format for the majority of carers, based on ongoing consultation in support groups and through supervising social workers. Across the reporting period, carers participated in 14 facilitated sessions, marking an increase in attendance compared with the previous period. These sessions covered a wide and purposeful range of topics, including Paediatric First Aid, Safer Caring, Digital Safety, Drug Misuse in a Safeguarding Context, Professional Boundaries and Record Keeping, Loss and Bereavement and Health and Safety. These sessions included 7 externally commissioned trainings, two multi-agency workshops delivered via the Brent Safeguarding Partnership, two sessions from the Wellbeing and Emotional Support Team (WEST), and two joint workshops delivered with broader CYPCD practitioners, demonstrating the strength of collaboration across services.

Course	Attendees	Mandatory
First Aid	6	Yes
TSDS	3	No
Safer Caring	9	Yes
SUDI	6	Yes (for baby carers)
Advanced Safeguarding level 3	13	Yes
Building connection with your child	6	No

Digital Safety	9	No
Drug Misuse in a Safeguarding Context	3	No
PREVENT WRAP: Concerned with Radicalisation	3	No
Professional Boundaries and Record Keeping	12	Yes
Loss and Bereavement	5	No
Safeguarding level 1 and 2	6	Yes
Health and Safety	13	Yes

The data shows strong engagement in mandatory safeguarding-related courses, with Advanced Safeguarding Level 3 and Health and Safety being the most attended (13 attendees each). Professional Boundaries and Record Keeping and Safer Caring also attracted high numbers, indicating carers' priority on core safeguarding competencies.

There was steady uptake in child-specific safety courses, such as Paediatric First Aid (6) and SUDI (6), reflecting continued focus on safe care for younger children as well as therapeutic courses such as Loss and bereavement (5) and Building connection with your child/young person (6).

Non-mandatory courses such as Drug Misuse in a Safeguarding Context (3) and PREVENT (3) may indicate perceived low relevance or that carers are engaging in wider contextual safeguarding topics.

Overall, safeguarding and compliance-based courses are the most popular, while reflective or relational training areas may need further promotion or alternative delivery approaches.

Training attendance, while improving, continues to reflect national patterns of lower engagement in facilitated sessions. To encourage participation, the Learning Academy issued reminders and outreach messages and ensured that online session links were widely circulated. The Learning Academy continued to track participation rigorously and collected feedback after each session, with carers consistently reporting that the training was relevant, well-delivered and practically useful. Carers commented on improved communication with children, increased confidence in safeguarding responsibilities and a greater commitment to supporting educational progress, illustrating that the learning offer is contributing to meaningful changes in day-to-day practice.

E-Learning continued to play a key role demonstrating a steady increase in engagement. 59 e-Learning courses were completed by 23 carers. There has also been a slight increase in uptake among existing carers who had not previously engaged with the e-learning offer. Alongside these formal learning routes, members of the Mockingbird Constellation continued to engage in informal training sessions, offering additional opportunities for carers to learn and reflect together. The Children in Care Resilience Service (CRS) also delivered tailored sessions during Mockingbird Coffee Mornings, with plans to promote and widen access to carers outside the constellation in the coming year.

Feedback from carers and social workers highlighted the importance of accessibility, particularly for carers with disabilities or communication needs. In

response, accessibility statements were added to training communications. In addition, the Learning academy are exploring providing one to one sessions with carers who may require an interpreter to go through particular training. It is also positive that devices were provided to support digital inclusion under the 2025 offer to foster carers which allowed for better access to online training. As the Learning Academy, attendance at carer support groups continued to be an essential mechanism for hearing carers' views directly, ensuring training remains relevant, responsive, and aligned with carer preferences.

The Brent fostering service has recognised a pattern of foster carers completing several different training courses but not always completing their mandatory training on time. For Foster Care Fortnight in May 2026 the fostering service plans to launch new annual review forms, foster carer agreements and other updated templates making clear the expectations on foster carers to complete their mandatory training to ensure all these documents consistently highlight what training carers are required to complete and by when.

A significant upcoming development is the introduction of Brent Oracle access for carers from April 2026, allowing them to manage their own training records and track their progress more easily. The Learning Academy will also work more closely with fostering and kinship teams to explore creative ways of learning such as hourly lunch and learn workshops. Work is also planned to address gaps in learning provision for kinship applicants, SGO carers and privately fostering families, with attendance at SGO support groups forming part of efforts to understand and respond to their specific training needs.

4.9 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints

4.9.1 During the reporting period, there was one formal allegation made against a Brent foster carer by a child. This was promptly investigated and resulted in the foster carer being booked onto relevant training. The foster carer felt supported throughout this process and understood why the concerns had to be investigated.

The Brent fostering service holds Brent foster carers to a high standard ensuring our children receive the best care and support. Aside from the one allegation outlined above, concerns for Brent fostering families were identified by the service and during this reporting period 5 standards of care investigations have been undertaken in response to these concerns. These standards of care investigations were presented at Brent's fostering panel. 2 fostering households were deregistered. 3 fostering households were given further training and support to continue fostering with close monitoring by the department.

4.9.2 The Fostering and Kinship Teams received numerous positive comments from foster carers during assessments, annual reviews and from other colleagues and professionals. The practitioners' achievements and good practice continued to be acknowledged and celebrated at the bi-monthly LAC and Permanency Forums. Additionally, the Fostering Panel provides feedback to practitioners on the quality of the reports and their presentation at panel.

4.9.3 All the foster carer annual reviews that were due in this reporting period have been completed. There were **44** annual reviews completed in this reporting period.

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

Service Development

5.0 Kinship Care

5.1 The Kinship Charity has initiated a week each year in which Kinship Carers are recognised nationally; this year Kinship Care Week was 6-12 October 2025. Brent partners with The Kinship Charity to ensure Brent's Kinship Carers are celebrated and have an opportunity to get together.

Our carers attended their celebration day on 8th October 2025; we had 16 carers attend and it was a great way to celebrate with fun, food and cake.

An online survey was sent to attendees following this event, 5 attendees completed the survey. All 5 of these respondents stated they were 'very satisfied' or 'extremely satisfied' with the event. The respondents were asked how likely they were to recommend the event to other carers and all carers marked '10 (highly likely)'. The kinship carers enjoyed connecting together and have now made their own carer led and carer run support group, open to all kinship carers.

6.0 Enhanced Support and Resources for Brent Carers

6.1 The Fostering Service continues to remain committed to supporting carers and maximising the chances of placement stability/success by providing practical, financial and therapeutic input. Foster Carers and the children in their care are supported to access help from Brent CRS (Children-In-Care Resilience Service) when they are struggling, feeling vulnerable or need to debrief after a difficult incident. Brent Fostering Service are embedding a culture of children, Foster Carers and professionals reflecting on themselves and accepting help – in order to reduce carers feeling isolated and alone when undertaking care of children.

6.2 CRS Brent has had a total of 51 active referrals since Jan 2024, an increase of 11 referrals since the last reporting period. It is positive referrals for CRS have increased, believed to be due to CRS visiting team meetings and spreading awareness of the service.

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

7.0 Recruitment and retention

7.1 Recruitment and retention remain the key priority for the fostering service. The service continues to compare the Brent fostering offer to other Local Authorities and IFAs, to ensure it is competitive. The service uses details of the Brent fostering offer on promotional marketing materials consistently. It is hoped, with fostering becoming more regionalised, that a consistent offer across all Local Authorities that is competitive with Independent Fostering Agencies will prevent Local Authorities competing with each other. Brent implemented a significant fostering fee uplift in 2025 however many other Local Authorities took a similar approach making Brent's offer less competitive.

Brent's First Mockingbird Constellation

7.2 Brent's first Mockingbird constellation has continued to develop strongly during this reporting period, with carers reporting high levels of support, connection and shared problem-solving. The constellation has now established a rhythm of regular activities, peer support structures and training opportunities, which have contributed to increased stability and strengthened relationships within fostering households.

Since October 2025, the constellation has held official monthly social gatherings, creating positive shared experiences for fostering families. Activities have included: Tenpin Bowling, Visit to the Upside Down House and celebrations/ gatherings at the hub home.

In addition to scheduled activities, carers also benefit from regular coffee mornings, which provide a safe and informal space to discuss challenges, share advice and offer mutual support. These sessions have been described as invaluable in helping carers feel less isolated and better equipped to respond to children's needs.

The hub home has been used effectively throughout the period, providing sleepover support, childcare during the day, assisting carers to facilitate family time (contact) arrangements, assisting carers with school runs as well as emotional support for each other. These carer led flexible support structures have strengthened placement stability and provided practical, timely assistance when families needed it most.

The constellation share learning with each other but also have asked external organisations to speak at their coffee mornings. The constellation has had bespoke training sessions delivered, including:

- Groundwork for Success in Fostering
- Prevent and Prevail
- Navigating Relationships in Fostering

- IT and digital skills training

The Mockingbird model continues to demonstrate clear impact on placement stability and carer resilience. One example during this period involved a carer who was experiencing significant strain due to increased contact commitments for their foster child. The placement was at risk of breaking down. The hub home carers stepped in, providing temporary support with contact arrangements and helping establish a sustainable longer-term plan. This intervention directly contributed to preventing a placement breakdown and stabilising the situation.

Carers have shared the following feedback during this period:

“The support from other carers has made such a difference.”

“Mockingbird feels like having an extended family.”

“The hub home has helped us feel less alone.”

New families have joined the constellation during this period and have been warmly welcomed. Hub carers have supported their induction, helping them settle in, build relationships and understand how to access the range of support available. Feedback from new carers has been positive, and they are integrating well into the community.

While the service has not yet made progress toward forming a second constellation, the recent positive government announcements regarding funding and national support for the Mockingbird programme are encouraging. Brent is awaiting further detail on how this support will be implemented practically and operationally. Once this becomes clearer, the service will be better positioned to explore sustainable expansion.

As a service we still hear some professionals say “what is Mockingbird” therefore the service held a Mockingbird Celebration event on 21st Oct 2025 to spread awareness of the Mockingbird programme. Foster carers, their families, social workers, fostering network representatives, FwWL representatives and other professionals were invited for tea, cake and sandwiches to meet the Brent Mockingbird Constellation. Attendees listened to the positive experiences from home hub carers Michael and Misgana and constellation carer Barbara.

7.3 Service Priorities for 2026-2027:

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

- To maintain a strong focus on recruitment, assessment and approval of new foster carers, in partnership with FwWL, keeping our target of **10** new carers by the end of the financial year.
- To enhance the support offer to Brent’s foster carers and kinship carers, by rolling out the new fostering offer and deliver existing and new therapeutic support to increase placement stability and develop carers’ ability and resilience in managing more complex and challenging placements.
- To improve the outcomes for the children in care by providing local and in-house placement options, minimising change of social workers and

placements and keeping children connected to their networks.

- To promote and improve the take up of learning opportunities for new and experienced foster carers and connected persons using different delivery methods comprising of face-to-face, online/virtual and E-Learning.
- To recruit, train and retain foster carers that can offer emergency and respite placements to children and young people who come into care in unplanned circumstances.
- To continue to develop and transform the service in consultation and collaboration with care experienced young people and foster carers through regular feedback and co-designed training and steering groups.
- To ensure that the foster carers feel supported and valued by providing regular service updates, promoting a sense of belonging to a wider fostering community and celebrating the carers achievements and commitment to their role.

8.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

8.1 Stakeholder consultation and engagement takes many varied methods within the service, and we are committed to evaluating and developing new and creative ways of hearing from stakeholders.

8.2 Carers views are sought through one-to-one discussions with their SSW, Annual Foster Carer Reviews, Support Groups and Foster Carer Reference Groups. Carers are encouraged to provide written feedback on their experiences of assessment and panel process.

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

9.0 Financial Considerations

9.1 There are no specific financial implications with the report. The cost of implementing the various priorities of the plan will be met within existing resources. The current budget allocation for the Fostering Support and Kinship teams in Brent is £1.27m with a projected break-even position for 2025/26. In addition, a £0.4m contribution is being made to the Adopt London West Partnership in collaboration with neighbouring boroughs.

9.2 Increasing and retaining the pool of in-house foster cares is also a priority from a financial perspective as they provide a more cost-effective way of meeting the statutory obligations of the department for children in care.

10.0 Legal Considerations

10.1 Regulation 35 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 provides for a system of monitoring and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. These obligations align with the overarching duties of

local authorities under the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in care.

11.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

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

12.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

12.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

13.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

13.1 There are no additional human resource or property considerations.


14.0 Communication Considerations

14.1 As detailed at section 4.5.6 Brent's fostering service continue to raise awareness around the important role the Brent foster carers undertake as well as the need for more foster carers for Brent children. The fostering service utilises several communication channels to raise awareness and promote Brent's fostering offer.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development

 <p style="font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold; margin-top: 10px;">Brent</p>	<p style="font-size: 18pt; font-weight: bold;">Corporate Parenting Committee</p> <p style="font-size: 16pt;">13 April 2026</p>
	<p style="font-size: 16pt; font-weight: bold;">Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People and Community Development</p>
	<p style="font-size: 16pt; font-weight: bold;">Lead Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Employment - Cllr Gwen Grahl</p>
<p style="font-size: 16pt; font-weight: bold;">Brent Adoption Report 6-monthly report: 1 October 2025 to 31 March 2026</p>	

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

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a briefing to the Corporate Parenting Committee in relation to:
- adoption performance data for the period 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026

- the progress and activity of Adopt London West
- how good outcomes are being achieved for children.

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

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

2.0 Recommendation(s)

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

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

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

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

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

for children and young people when they are unable to remain with their parent/s, means that they will have the best life chances.

3.2 Background - Adopt London West

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

4.0 Responsibilities

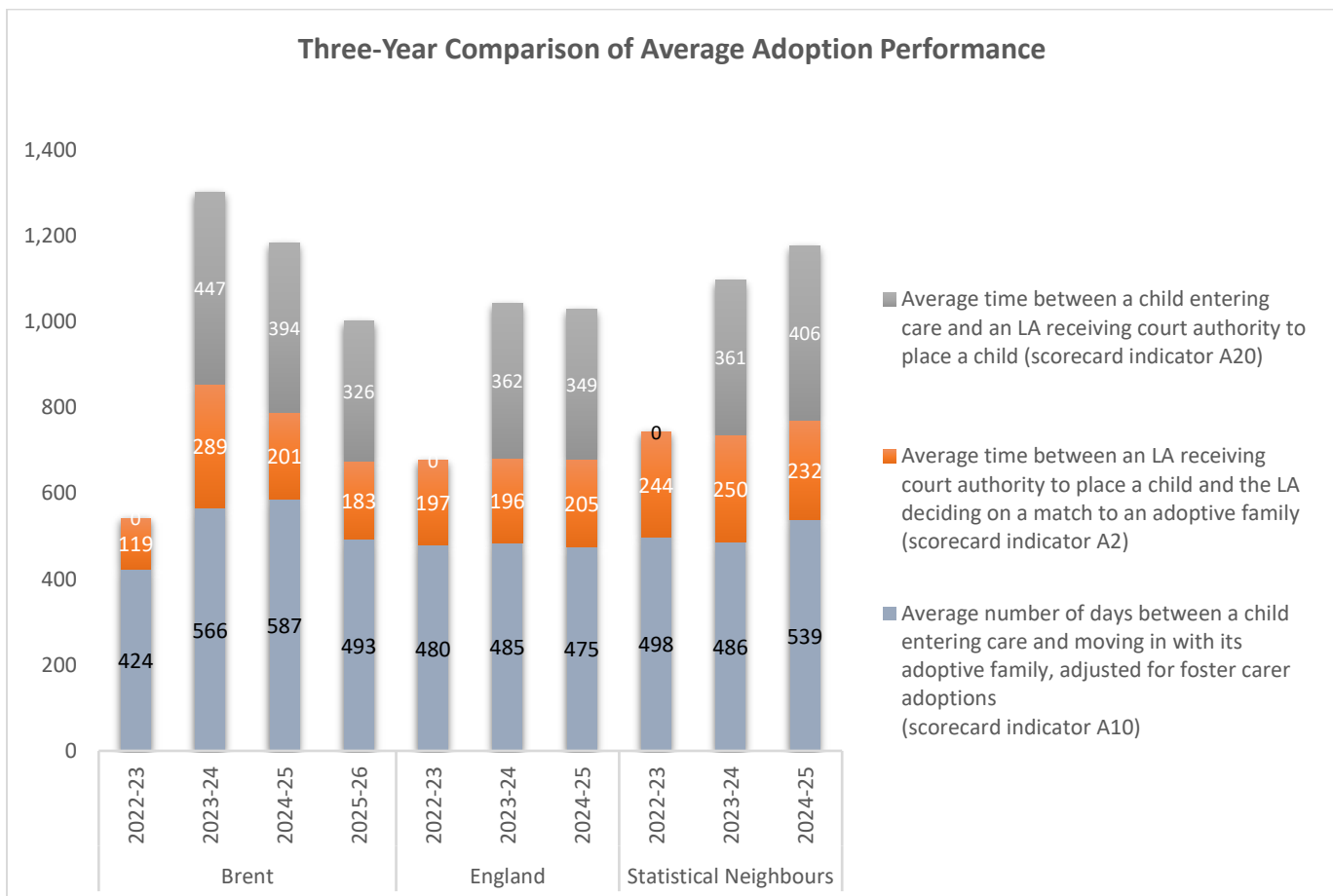
- 4.1 As delegated in the partnership agreement between Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham and Hounslow, Ealing (as the host Local Authority for ALW) is responsible for ensuring that children whose permanence plan is adoption in all four partner Local Authorities are matched in a timely way with adopters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

5.0 Performance Data

- 5.1 Brent's 3-year performance for 2023-26 is:

- **A1** (The average time taken for a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 554 days (3-year average) (493 in the last 12 months) compared with 503 days in 2024-25.
- **A2** (The average time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 212 days (3-year average) (183 in the last 12 months) compared with 180 days in 2024-25
- **A20** (The average time between a child entering care and the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child): 383 days (3-year average) (326 days in the last 12 months).

5.2 The below graph provides a comparison across Brent, England and statistical neighbours performance in relation to the A1, A2, and A20 indicators. This demonstrates a comparative and improving performance picture for adoption timeliness for Brent children.



5.3 Performance variance in this small cohort of children is caused by a range of factors, and can be the result of significant delays for just one child, due to extended complex care proceedings, the individual needs of the child impacting on the availability of suitable adopters and therefore ‘family finding’ taking longer

than hoped, these factors affect the average timescale for all children placed, some of whom may have been placed very quickly

6.0 Child related data

6.1 There have been 6 Adoption Orders granted so far in this reporting year. One adoption was a non-agency adoption of a child who had been living within a kinship placement.

6.2 There have been 5 children placed for adoption and 3 who were placed in Early Permanency placements, since April 2025, compared to 10 children last year (2024-25) Whilst numbers this year are slightly lower than last year, the number is still higher than the previous 4 reporting years.

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

- 10 children are placed with their new families, 7 of those are placed with adopters approved by ALW; 3 children were placed in 2024/25 but the Adoption Orders have not yet been granted.
- 4 children are subject of a Placement Order but are not yet placed, two have been linked or matched with their new family and introductions and transitions are due to start imminently. Three of the children are likely to have a change of care plan due to an updated assessment of their needs.
- ALW and Brent are exploring potential families for the remaining children who are subject to a Placement Order. Of the eight children placed this year, seven have been placed with families who reflect their racial and cultural background and identity. The other child has been placed with a family who have been assessed to be suitable to promote and support the child's understanding of their background and ensure they grow up with a positive sense of their story and identity

7.0 Adopter Recruitment

7.1 20 Adopter households have been approved so far in 2025/26, by the end of March it will be 23 households, the highest number of approvals since ALW commenced and an improvement on 18 households in 2024/25

Of the families approved, 14 households are White/British or White European, 5 households are Black African or households of mixed black identity and 2 families are Asian.

7.2 There are currently 37 ALW approved adopters: 9 of whom already have a child/children placed with them, 17 are in the active family finding stage, 6 of these families are already matched or linked with children 5 families are on hold due to their personal circumstances, 2 are likely to resign as adopters.

7.3 The adoption assessment process comprises 2 stages. Stage 1 assessments should take place within 2 months (60 days), this stage is described as "adopter led", where adopters work through exercises and complete various tasks that

contribute to a full and thorough assessment of their suitability. Department for Education (DfE) Adoption and Special Guardianship data for 2025/26 in Quarter 2 shows the England average for Stage 1 was 128 days, the London average was 130 days, and ALW average for those adopters approved is 116 days

- 7.4 Stage 2 should take a maximum of 4 months (120 days), this is a detailed assessment that is both reflective and analytical. In total, the comprehensive assessment process should be completed within 6 months. DfE data for Q2 of 2025/26 shows the England average for Stage 2 was 147 days, the London average was 173 days, the average for ALW is = 145 days
- 7.5 There are 25 prospective adopters in the formal stages of assessment. 15 households are in Stage 1 and 9 are in Stage 2.

8.0 Casework and partnership with Local Authority

- 8.1 In this reporting year so far ALW has offered a service to 176 Brent children, families or individuals who are accessing their adoption records – 33 children are open to a social worker and at various stages of family finding, 24 are receiving a social work support service, a further 52 are receiving an Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) therapeutic service that is under review. 38 requests have been made for access to adoption records held by Brent.
- 8.2 In addition, there are 235 keeping in touch arrangements (formerly referred to as contact) being facilitated for Brent families - 59 direct contact arrangements and 176 active letter exchanges.
- 8.3 Adoption and Special Guardianship support services offer a range of individual support and advocacy to families who are dealing with a variety of issues including CAMHS liaison for, emotional support for parents, school meetings for child including advocacy and knowledge of his needs and being dynamic with the therapeutic plan which was 1:1 therapy for the child alongside Non-Violence Resistance (NVR) for parents.
- 8.4 In relation to maintaining lifelong links – as an example, ALW are in the process of organising a video meet up between an adoptive mother and birth mother. While the child does not currently want any further contact, the service is being proactive in setting up a safe base for the adults to begin building a relationship with one another.

9.0 LA training

- 9.1 ALW offer monthly Lunch and Learn training events for social workers on 5 key topics, Keeping in Touch, Early Permanence, Honesty in Adoption, Purposeful Child Permanence Reports and Enabling and managing transitions).

10.0 Group support

- 10.1 In 2025/26, the following group support has been offered to children and their families:

- 10.2 Children's events/activities:** As a result of a previous consultation with young people, in June a pilot offering 3 (1/month) friendship groups to allow children both adopted and in special guardianship placements to come together, share experiences, ask questions and have fun. Some parents/carers also attended and found the peer support helpful. There were also some older adopted people who co-facilitated the groups. As a result of this pilot and consultations with the young people who attended, further events at each term holiday took place. These focused on topics such as identity, teamwork, school and families for example.
- 10.3 Education support group** – These support sessions are co-facilitated by an Educational Psychologist and a support social worker and take place six times per school year, focusing on topic relevant to families' lives. So far, since April, eight Brent families have attended.
- 10.3.1 Parents and carers tell us that the group is a helpful place to understand how to meet their children's educational needs and get the best out of school, as well as meeting people and learning from their experiences. Those who attend have expressed that they find the sessions greatly beneficial, and parents of siblings may attend the same topic twice. We also have adopters who have moved out of our support area that choose to continue attending, advising us that they find our support helpful, as suppose to the offer through their residing LA.
- 10.4 Kinship Reach referrals** – Since April 2025, 12 Brent family have been referred.
- 10.5 Non-Violent Resistance training** – this was supported via Ealing's training department, in which an ALW support social worker delivered the weekly training for 10 weeks from Sept 2026. Out of the 10 ALW families who attended, three were Brent families.
- 10.5 Foundations for Attachment therapeutic parenting course** - This is an evidence-based Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) informed programme, based on the DDP practice model developed by Dan Hughes (2009, 2011). The aim is to provide carers/parents with an opportunity to hear ideas, learn new strategies and to meet other carers in a similar situation to themselves. A Clinical Psychologist and Adoption Support Social Worker co facilitate the sessions and aim to provide a safe sharing environment and help the carers/parents become more confident in getting to know their child's inner world, explore therapeutic parenting while also help the adults looking after oneself. Out of the 18 families who attended, three were from Brent.
- 10.6 Chorus Adoption Parent-Toddler Group (APTG)** started in October 2025 and ran for five months, offering weekly therapeutic playgroup sessions to families. The families met for an hour and a half, along with two child psychotherapists and two assistants. The weekly structure includes hello and goodbye songs, a reflective discussion guided by parents' needs and experiences, and a snack. Aside from this, parents and toddlers play freely, allowing for professional observation to think about the children's feelings and behaviours, what they might be trying to tell others, and the different ways adults can respond. The

APTG is designed with toddlers who have experienced separation and loss and developmental trauma. By providing a consistent, predictable, child-led space for a small number of families, it helps to:

- Support children's development and emotional wellbeing
- Strengthen parent-child relationships
- Increase parents' confidence in their ability to understand and sensitively respond to children's feelings and behaviours

The group was funded via the Adoption Support Fund and one Brent family attended this.

10.7 Special Guardians Family Fun Day – annual fun event at which children play together and carers exchange stories with one another. ALW social workers are on hand to offer advice and support and to ensure that the event runs smoothly. This year there were 8 family units that attended, including 13 children.

10.8 Adolescents' parenting workshop – this took place in November 2025 and was facilitated by a clinical psychologist and a social worker from ALW. It began a conversation about the changing needs of a young person and how their brain chemistry alters as they get older, inviting parents to consider how attachment needs may change through this developmental stage and mentalizing (a preconscious, imaginative mental activity that helps parents interpret and develop an understanding of their child's behaviour) for their young person. A follow up session took place a week later to think further about some of the dilemmas discussed. Two Brent families benefited from this.

11.0 Feedback from adopters:

"We cannot thank S enough for the help, support, advocacy, compassion, and genuine care she has shown our family. She has created a safe and supportive space where we feel truly seen and heard. This has strengthened our confidence and helped us continue developing our skills as parents, despite the challenges we are currently facing. We are deeply grateful for the patience, dedication, and empathy S has consistently demonstrated in supporting our family to grow stronger together, even in the most difficult circumstances."

"We would also like to take this opportunity to extend our sincere gratitude to M. Her perseverance, commitment, and selflessness in helping us maintain a consistent and positive connection with our children's birth families mean a great deal to us. Her support, as we continue to navigate our adoption journey, is invaluable and very much appreciated."

Feedback from a birth father –

“Throughout my recent interactions with Adopt London West, S has been consistently professional, supportive, and transparent. I appreciated her honesty and clarity when explaining that she had consulted with her manager regarding potential mediation work and that a decision would need to be agreed at management level. Her communication was thoughtful, respectful, and reassuring, and it was clear that she was advocating in good faith while remaining mindful of professional boundaries.”

Feedback from an adopter of a Brent placed child

“...how helpful and ‘life changing’ the support team at ALW have been for S (and them as a family). S is currently engaging with sensory integration support which has supported him in transitioning to reception ‘seamlessly’. They said when there was an issue from the provider, ALW sorted it out within hours. They know of another family from a different area who do not get the same support as them and they feel this should be fed back as ‘they are so happy they are with ALW, the support being one of the main reasons.’”

“S has taken the time to listen, to keep me informed, and to explore supportive options with care and sensitivity. Her approach has helped me feel heard and supported during what can be a complex and emotionally significant process. She has also been proactive in sharing relevant resources and opportunities that may be beneficial.”

Feedback from an adopter of a Brent placed child in relation to Foundations to Attachment course

“As adopters, we wanted to share some feedback regarding our recent participation in the 'Foundation for Attachment' course, as well as our experience of starting therapy shortly after adopting our son. We found the course incredibly useful, insightful and resourceful, and it was genuinely helpful. It provided us with a clear and compassionate understanding of how early experiences shape a child’s emotional development and gave us practical tools for building secure connections. The focus on therapeutic parenting, attunement, emotional regulation and creating a playful and empathetic environment has been particularly valuable in supporting our son’s transition into our family. Starting therapy soon after the adoption has also been extremely beneficial. It enabled us to recognise and respond to our son’s needs promptly, helping us to strengthen our relationship with him through guided strategies and professional insight. The combination of the course and early therapeutic support has meaningfully impacted our journey as a family.”

“I wanted to formally acknowledge the positive impact of her work and to express my appreciation for the support she has provided. She has been excellent to work with, and her professionalism reflects very positively on the service.”

12.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

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

13.0 Financial Considerations

13.1 Brent Council's contribution to the cost of running the functions of ALW in 2025/26 was £0.403m.

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

14.0 Legal Considerations

14.1 There are no additional legal considerations arising from this report.

15.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

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

16.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

16.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

17.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

17.1 There are no human resource or property considerations.

18.0 Communication Considerations

18.1 Considered within the main body of the report.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development

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