MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE
Tuesday 14 July 2026 at 5.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Rubin (Chair), Chadha, Thomas, Unger (substitute) and Warsame

1. Exclusion of the Press and Public

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

2. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

Apologies were received from Councillor Nirmala Patel, who was substituted by Councillor Unger.

The Chair led introductions and welcomed those present as new members of the Committee.

3. Declarations of interests

None.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the last meeting, held on 13 April 2026, be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

5. Matters arising (if any)

None.

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

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

J provided details of an event Empire had attended in Birmingham known as Amplified, for which Empire had been shortlisted for a grant. J had delivered a leadership workshop and spread the message of what Empire did to inspire other care experienced young people across the nation. J had also attended the BCJ Empire Summer Day which had included team sports, game stations, open mic sessions and other events.

K had delivered several speeches at the recent Children, Young People and Community Development Practice Conference, including a speech about leadership and a 'walk in my shoes' exercise to get staff thinking more actively from a young person's perspective. As

part of the work to find a dedicated safe space for care leavers, K would be viewing a Council building to see if it was an appropriate space. The building had been closed for renovations for 3 years following a flood and the Council was considering how to bring that back into use.

In providing further information on the work of BCJ Empire to the new Committee members, K informed members that some of BCJ Empire were employed as care ambassadors with the Quality Assurance Team to review placement providers, took part in interview panels for key staff, and were working on a Trusted Buddies programme for care leavers to mentor and befriend children in care. Empire was also working to get more young people in Brent in decision making spaces, and Empire members were also part of Brent Youth Parliament and other spaces to spread their message and voice. K highlighted that Empire members had rich and diverse experiences and many different interests to support the Empire work. Empire was also working to influence other boroughs as well.

The Chair congratulated Brent Care Journeys on the productive term, and commended the work being done to build the group and gain participation. He asked to return to the conversation around a dedicated safe space for care leavers at future meetings.

The Committee asked whether there were any London initiatives to bring care experienced young people together. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development, Brent Council) confirmed that there was a London Children in Care Council which Brent had previously had representation on and felt it would be good to get more presence in that space again. Some important agreements had come out of that group such as the waiver of Council Tax for Brent care leavers.

As no further issues were raised, the Chair thanked Empire Care Leavers for their updates and closed the item.

7. Outcome of Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)

Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development, Brent Council) introduced a report informing members of the outcome of the Ofsted inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) that took place between 27 April 2026 and 1 May 2026, which was published on 17 June 2026. In introducing the report, he explained that the Council was regularly inspected by Ofsted, with a full inspection every 3 years across a two-week period. Inspectors reviewed all services including the Brent Family Front Door, children adopted, children fostered and children leaving care and was very thorough. He confirmed that Ofsted had reviewed many cases and spoken to many people. He was pleased with the outcome where Brent Council was judged ‘good’ across the board. For leaving care, Brent had been close to outstanding. The report detailed the strengths identified, and he was pleased that the voice of children and young people had been recognised as a strength as it was a priority for the Council. There were two areas for improvement relating to corporate parenting; life story work to enable children in care long-term to better understand their life history and; training for foster carers and improving the take up rate. The Council was required to submit an action plan outlining how it would improve those areas to Ofsted, and Councillor Rubin, as the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, would have sight of that action plan before it was shared.

The Chair congratulated Children’s Services on the outcome, thanked Nigel Chapman for the introduction and invited contributions from the Committee, with the following points raised:

The Committee asked whether any of BCJ Empire had spoken to the inspectors when they visited. K confirmed that many members of both Empire and Care in Action, the younger group of children in care, had been spoken to during the inspection. In response to whether

K felt the inspectors asked the right questions, K advised that they had not asked many questions and had not asked what children and young people did to participate and engage with each other and the Council. Many of the interactions had related to individual cases and life experiences.

The Committee asked how many care leavers were in employment, education or training compared to previous years. Nigel Chapman advised that the rate of young people in education, employment and training between 16-17 was good, but average for 18-21 year olds. He added that there were many factors in care experienced young people's lives affecting why education, employment and training might be more challenging to get into, but there was a need for the Council to be persistent and follow up with young people through dedicated Personal Advisors. Brent did have higher rates of young people at university compared to other boroughs and offered work experience and apprenticeship opportunities, but he felt there was more that could be done in that space. He confirmed that the programmes available were very targeted as it was a relatively small cohort, and linked young people to opportunities through Brent Works. Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) added that the service continually looked to find connections for young people such as through John Lewis and IKEA, and was trying as much as possible to diversify the opportunities available and reach as many young people as possible. Nigel Chapman received data on education, employment and training monthly and shared that with the Cabinet Member on a quarterly basis for oversight. He agreed that some of that data could be brought to the Committee. Councillor Rubin added that the Employment Strategy was currently in development and a strand around care leavers could be included in that.

In response to a question around school attendance, Nigel Chapman advised that school attendance at primary school was above average, but secondary school had lower attendance due to late entrants to care. The Brent Virtual School (BVS) worked proactively with parents and foster carers to enable attendance at school or find alternative pathways and the exclusion rate was very low.

Noting point 3 of the Ofsted report, which highlighted that the cumulative nature of risk and need identified in referrals did not always inform risk assessment and decision-making, the Committee asked what was being done in order to improve that. Palvinder Kudhail (Director of Early Help and Social Care, Brent Council) responded that the Council received referrals from many different agencies daily and all those referrals needed to be reviewed by a manager and allocated in the Front Door for further exploration. Often, there was not enough information provided in the referral so there may be a need to go back to the referring agency to understand more information, contact the parents or, where appropriate, speak with the child. Other multi-agency partners were also posted in the front door to assist with that. The inspection suggested that more work was needed to gather that information, data and history more cohesively in order to make the right final decision based on the context of that particular child and family. As a result, she had already made some adjustments in the Front Door to ensure that process was more robust every time, with an audit process in place to monitor that this was happening. Work was ongoing with partners to ensure that the Front Door received good quality information at the point of referral, and training was being delivered to ensure that practitioners within the Front Door were gathering cohesive data, with additional resource put in.

Noting the need to improve the number of foster carers undertaking training, the Committee asked what the Council would do to achieve that. Kelli Eboji advised that a targeted piece of work to improve training rates had already been established before the Ofsted inspection with a letter to all foster carers about training sent out and templates given to social workers to help them manage foster carer training more effectively. The focus was around ensuring the social work team knew what training had been completed and what the training offer was so that they could advise foster carers. The service had also introduced

personal development plans for foster carers during their annual reviews, and was being clearer with foster carers which training was mandatory and taking a more robust approach to that, such as imposing penalties on those who did not complete their mandatory training. She confirmed that she would report regularly to the Committee on this through the regular fostering update report.

The Committee asked what would be measured going forward to provide assurance that the Council had achieved the Ofsted improvements. Kelli Eboji explained that the practice improvement plan due to be submitted back to Ofsted would set out targets and the impact the Council would like to see, which would then be used to measure against. Each area would have multiple improvement actions with KPIs and there would be regular updates on the practice improvement plan. Palvinder Kudhail added that the Council regularly asked the 'so what?' question to understand the impact of improvements which was further tested through the Quality Assurance Programme, conducting dip samples of cases, speaking with young people to see if they had noticed any improvements, and continuing the audit programme.

The Committee asked how members could monitor the improvements. Nigel Chapman confirmed that the Council would have its annual engagement meeting with Ofsted at the end of the year and would report back on that meeting to the Corporate Parenting Committee. As such, he confirmed that an update report would be brought specifically around the two corporate parenting actions of improving life story work and foster carer training uptake. K added that this was where Empire could add value, such as through speaking to young people about life story work and whether they had seen a positive difference.

In relation to the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted, Empire asked for some participation sessions to delve further into those, particularly on life story work. Kelli Eboji confirmed that this would be done over the summer period.

Nigel Chapman signalled that Ofsted were going out to consultation on the inspection framework. They were proposing to dispose of single word judgements and use a scorecard approach across a number of areas.

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

8. Annual Corporate Parenting Report 2025-26

Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the Annual Corporate Parenting Report 2025-26 detailing outcomes for Children Looked After and Care Leavers and a summary of the activity across the reporting year.

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

The Committee asked how the Council retained local foster carers. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development, Brent Council) advised that when foster carers were asked why they fostered for Brent, many responded that they wanted to give something back to their community. Fostering a child who lived in Brent meant it was easier for a local foster carer to get them to school and support contact with their family. If a foster carer looked after a child from another borough, then there was a need for them to travel more. Carers who continued to foster in Brent fed back that they enjoyed the support and relationship they had with their supervising social worker and training offer. Kelli Eboji added that the Mockingbird Constellation Model of Support, which Brent had introduced during the reporting year, provided an additional level of support. The

Council was now looking to establish a second constellation working with carers to build communities between themselves.

In terms of recruitment of foster carers, Kelli Eboji advised that there was a lot of work in that space which would be detailed in the next fostering update report. A report was due to be submitted to Cabinet to extend the current recruitment programme the Council had with West London, which was a West London Fostering Hub made up of 8 West London Boroughs with a shared Front Door for recruitment. The extension of the agreement would include foster carer assessments and approvals. Nigel Chapman added that the principle behind that agreement was to share resource, work more collaboratively across boroughs to avoid fragmentation, and deliver a more co-ordinated offer across the region which offered an alternative to independent fostering agencies.

The Committee looked to understand whether there was a particular type of foster carer the Council needed, such as short term or long-term carers. Kelli Eboji advised that the Council needed more foster carers across the board and had many different types of foster carers. Some carers provided only respite care, some were short-term carers and the Council was currently exploring options for people wanting to provide shorter periods of care such as those who had weekends free to provide care. The Council was much less likely to place a child with a long-term carer straight away and therefore short-term carers were equally needed. The Committee advised that this messaging may incentivise more people to apply to foster. Officers added that word of mouth was very powerful and that councillors could play a role in spreading that message and letting the service know of anyone in the community interested in fostering. Nigel Chapman added that work had been done with members in the past around fostering which the Council may benefit from repeating now that there were new councillors elected.

The Committee asked what feedback mechanisms the Council had for foster carers. Kelli Eboji advised that there were many avenues for foster carers to feed back such as biannual questionnaires, monthly support groups, coffee mornings and during their annual review.

Noting that the report detailed some foster carers had found it difficult to get support for older children in care with complex needs, the Committee asked how the Council was addressing that. Kelli Eboji responded that Mockingbird was one way to address that through finding a respite foster carer. The Child Resilience Service also provided therapeutic input with foster carers for young people they found challenging or were struggling to work with and foster carers also received training from a therapeutic view and, depending on the needs of the young person, were offered various options of support such as individual work and joint work. In those circumstances the foster carers relationship with their Supervising Social Worker was important and their social worker should tailor the support offer to what that placement needed for stability.

In relation to placement stability, Nigel Chapman drew members' attention to table 6.5 which demonstrated a reduction in the number of children who had 3 or more placement moves over a 12-month period which was a positive improvement. This had been partly driven by having a more stable workforce, but he felt there was still further work to do to improve stability further. He also drew members' attention to the positive work being done to increase participation and engagement to hear the voice of children and young people through Empire, with Empire contributing to the Annual Report.

Nigel Chapman advised that children at risk of exploitation or missing from care had been reviewed during the inspection and there was a lot of audit activity taking place to assure the service that when children were missing from care they were followed up to understand the reasons that might drive them to go missing on a regular basis. As such, he reassured the Committee that the Council knew who went missing regularly, was working to

understand the reasons behind their missing episodes, and undertook follow ups with young people to prevent that happening on a more regular basis. In response to a query on how Brent's missing from care numbers compared nationally, Nigel Chapman advised that it was difficult to compare across boroughs because the ways in which missing episodes were recorded may be different and there was no national definition for that data. Anecdotally, in Brent, predominantly early teens around the age of 15 years old were more likely to have repeat missing episodes. As there was no benchmarked position on this, the Council used the position from previous years and quality assurance work to show the impact of activity.

The Committee asked what services were in place to support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), particularly those waiting for a decision from the Home Office. Kelli Eboji responded that UASCs were supported until the age of 25, including those who did not have their Home Office status and therefore had no recourse to public funds. When they turned 25, the young person would be referred to the Home Office for accommodation and support as an adult and would then be supported through solicitors. UASCs were eligible for legal aid which could be easily accessed. Whilst UASC were being supported through children's services, they had access to a Personal Advisor, accommodation and subsistence if they were eligible for public funds. A dedicated mental health and wellbeing service had recently been commissioned specifically for UASCs due to the increased levels of isolation, uncertainty and anxiety for that group of young people. Some UASCs also took part in Empire, and previously a group called Brothers had enabled UASCs to come together to talk about their challenges from home.

The Committee asked whether the levels of staffing were sufficient in this area. Palvinder Kudhail advised that the Personal Advisor service was very stable with most posts filled and managers appointed in that service. In relation to Social Workers, she advised there was a national shortage with every area looking to recruit more Social Workers. As a result, many Social Workers were agency staff, but in Brent this was slowly moving to a more permanent in-house workforce, with a significant reduction in the agency workforce to ensure young people had stable Social Workers.

The Committee asked what training Personal Advisors received. Kelli Eboji confirmed that they had access to the full training programme and some training was commissioned specifically for Personal Advisors, such as advocacy training. As the job description required an NVQ in Social Care, many Personal Advisors came into the role with a lot of experience.

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

9. Annual Looked After Children Health Report 2025-26

Kim Lewis (Head of Clinical Services – Brent Children, CLCH) introduced a report providing information on the health needs of Brent looked after children and services provided to looked after children in 2025-26. In introducing the report, she highlighted the following key points:

- It was understood that, nationally, children in care often entered care in worse levels of health than their peers. As such, they benefited from support to navigate the health services that were available universally and often needed additional support from specialist nurses.
- CLCH had a caseload of 349 looked after children, which was a 5% increase on the previous year. The majority of children looked after in Brent that CLCH saw were between 5-16 years old, and the under 5 cohort was increasing whilst the under 16 cohort was reducing.

- CLCH had a very small health team with one Named Nurse post shared between two, two Looked After Children Nurses for Review Health Assessments (RHAs), 2 Consultant Community Paediatricians for Initial Health Assessments (IHAs), one Named Doctor, and a cohort of Resident Doctors from Northwick Park Hospital to support the team. Bank staff were also available to provide advice around adoption and fostering and were involved in the assessment of those who had applied to become adult foster carers and children going through the adoption process. There was a 2 day a week vacancy in the nursing service currently.
- IHAs were required to be completed within 15 days of a child coming into care. RHAs were conducted twice a year for children under 5 and once a year for children over 5. Monthly reporting on performance was sent to the West and North London Integrated Care Board (WNL ICB), including an analysis of any breaches of the deadlines.
- WNL ICB recently conducted an audit of IHA performance and as a result was looking to develop a core specification to ensure consistency across the 13 WNL boroughs with set standards.
- The three most common causes for breaches to the deadline were; challenges with referrals from the Council's LAC team to the health team in a timely way; out of borough placements waiting for an assessment within the borough they were placed; and missed appointments.
- She had been meeting with Kelli Eboji to explore how to overcome some of the challenges in meeting the IHA and RHA deadlines. A deep dive on the breaches identified that there were multi-factorial reasons for the breaches and now that those were understood more deeply officers could start addressing them in a more cohesive way to improve performance.
- In relation to the health needs of looked after children, the number of children and young people with up-to-date immunisations was usually around 50% when they entered care which rose to 60% at review. The number of children with an up-to-date dental check was around 60% at entry to care which rose to 80% at review which was a good improvement, and the number of children with an up-to-date eye check was around 30% at IHA and 60% at RHA. The number of children registered with a GP had increased by 20%.
- 21% of young people reported having emotional wellbeing and mental health concerns with only 11% accepting a referral to CAMHS or other support.
- 80% of young people reported experiencing substance misuse, which included smoking, with only 2.4% accepting support.
- Going forward, the main focus was on improving the time breaches of assessments, particularly for out of borough placements which were out of CLCH's control and needed a centralised solution.

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

The Committee raised concerns regarding the table outlining the breaches of assessment timeliness, highlighting that it appeared there had been no assessments conducted on time in February 2026. Kim Lewis explained that this was due to the very small cohort, and therefore this could refer to only one or none. She explained that this was the way the ICB required breaches to be reported, in percentage format, but agreed that presenting the actual figures could be explored for future annual reports presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

In response to how the ICB changes had impacted this work, Kim Lewis advised that children looked after was a key priority for the ICB currently. The ICB was looking to develop a core offer specification which she had been heavily involved with, and she confirmed there was a real commitment from the ICB to improve services, as currently the offer was very fragmented across the WNL area and the ICB wanted to ensure consistency. In terms of the funding for the Children Looked After teams, Kim Lewis confirmed that the ICB held the funds, but commissioning differed across boroughs which was why the core offer was being reviewed.

In relation to how the local authority worked with the health service to reduce breaches in assessment timeliness, Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) advised that her team had done work this year to improve the referral form on the reporting system which helped Social Workers ensure they were reporting the relevant information through pre-populated information. The local authority was also considering the admin resource allocated to this area to see if that could be adjusted. The Committee asked to receive information in the future as to the impact of the improvements, particularly the streamlined referral process.

In response to a query on how Brent data compared to other local authorities covered by CLCH, Kim Lewis confirmed that the data was similar across the local authorities that CLCH covered, with Brent sitting around the middle across the 13 WNL boroughs. She advised that CLCH sent reporting data to the ICB on a monthly basis which could be provided to Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development, Brent Council) on a regular basis to give the local authority greater oversight of performance.

The Committee asked whether there was any learning from the other boroughs CLCH covered that could be replicated in Brent. Kim Lewis advised that she attended many joint meetings where the ICB brought boroughs together to understand what was working or whether there were any common difficulties. There were variances in how things were done across boroughs, with Brent's IHA performance relatively good compared to other boroughs because Consultant Paediatricians undertaking those assessments were employed directly whereas other boroughs relied on acute colleagues undertaking those assessments on their behalf.

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

10. Annual Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Report 2025-26

The Committee received a report from Sabine Kadhaya (Service Manager, Safeguarding and Reviewing, Brent Council) providing information on the activity of IROs to the quality assuring and improvement of services for looked after children across the 2025-26 reporting period. In introducing the report, she highlighted the following key points:

- The IRO report had received positive external validation via feedback from Ofsted.
- In relation to priority one – to make Looked After Child (LAC) reviews more child-led and encourage participation, the minutes of reviews were now written in the form of a therapeutic letter to the child which formed part of life story work, and there was high participation in reviews with LAC able to choose how their review was done in creative ways.
- A Practice Manager was now in post, directly managing four permanent IROs, but the service was still reliant on external agency staff to support that. There were discussions as to whether to bring another IRO in-house.

- A new performance management dashboard had been established, particularly to drive improvements in the timely completion of reviews.
- The average caseload of an IRO was 55, which was manageable.
- A significant increase in the use of Coram Voice for advocacy for older young people was being seen.
- Priorities for the current year were to increase the timely completion of LAC reviews, formalise the escalation process, improve transition planning post-18, and continue to improve child-centred practice.

The Chair thanked Sabine Kadhaya for her introduction and invited contributions from those present, with the following points raised:

The Committee asked what the statutory timescales for review were. Sabine Kadhaya explained that the first review upon a child entering care should take place within 3 months, and then reviews should happen every 6 months. If the child entering care was a baby then they had more regular reviews. Part of her role was to ensure those reviews happened within the statutory timeframes required and were reported to the DfE. She was under separate line management from the Head of LAC and Permanency to ensure there was some independence if there was a need to escalate issues.

In response to a query regarding the top areas that IROs felt needed further focus, Sabine Kadhaya advised IROs reported that children placed out of borough made completing reviews more difficult if there was a need to spend a long period of time travelling to complete the assessment. In addition, ensuring documentation for the child was ready before a review took place needed improvement.

Acknowledging the response that out of borough reviews were challenging, the Committee asked what percentage of children were placed out of borough. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development, Brent Council) confirmed that 80% of children lived within 20 miles of Brent, with some children and young people having specific needs which could only be provided out of borough.

In response to how the service tracked the issues raised by IROs, Sabine Kadhaya explained that there was an escalation process on the system allowing tracking of that issue. This also enabled the service to identify themes and trends. It was agreed that the Committee could be provided that data in future reports. In terms of the levers in place to influence service improvements, Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) advised that the IRO would raise any issues they had identified in reviews with the Social Work Team Manager responsible for that child. If the issue did not resolve it was then escalated to Service Manager level, and subsequently to the Head of Service if the issue remained unresolved. Discussions with the team responsible for that child would take place to ensure the issue was understood and addressed. Palvinder Kudhail (Director of Social Care and Early Help, Brent Council) agreed that aspects of the escalation data could be shared with the Committee for future reports.

Noting the budget allocation for this service, the Committee asked what plans there were to bring more IROs in house. Officers confirmed that the service was looking to move one IRO from external agency to in-house to reduce external agency spend and increase oversight and supervision.

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

11. Any other urgent business

The Committee felt that it would be useful to have a work planning item at a future meeting, but acknowledged the need for a number of regular statutory reports that must be brought to the Committee which limited the number of items that could be added into the work programme. Where possible, the Committee would want to see future agenda items relating to; placement sufficiency; a dedicated space for care leavers; children and young people and decision-making; education, employment and training and the Council's Employment Strategy; delivery against the Care Leaver's Charter and; an update from the annual engagement meeting with Ofsted.

The meeting closed at 7:20pm

COUNCILLOR JAKE RUBIN, CHAIR