



Corporate Parenting Committee

Monday 12 October 2026 at *6.00 pm

Boardrooms 3&4 - Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way,
Wembley HA9 0FJ

This meeting will be held in person.

The press and public will be excluded from this meeting.

*Please note the later start time of 6pm.

Membership:

Members

Councillors:

Rubin (Chair)
Chadha
Thomas
Unger
Warsame

Substitute Members

Councillors: Dixon and Grahl
Councillors: Madabhushi and Chowdhury
Councillors: N. Patel and Want
Councillors: Alexandre and Vakani

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

For electronic copies of minutes, reports and agendas, and to be alerted when the minutes of this meeting have been published visit: **www.brent.gov.uk/democracy**

Notes for Members - Declarations of Interest:

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

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

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

***Disclosable Pecuniary Interests:**

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

****Personal Interests:**

The business relates to or affects:

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

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

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

or

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

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

• Agenda

Introductions, if appropriate.

Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members.

Item	Page
1 Exclusion of the Press and Public	
The committee is advised that the public may be excluded from meetings whenever it is likely in view of the nature of the proceedings that exempt information would be disclosed. Meetings of the Corporate Parenting Committee are attended by representatives of Care In Action (CIA), the council's Children in Care Council. The committee is therefore recommended to exclude the press and public for the duration of the meeting, as the attendance of CIA representatives necessitates the disclosure of the following category of exempt information, set out in the Local Government Act 1972: - information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.	
2 Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members	
3 Declarations of interests	
Members are invited to declare at this stage of the meeting, any relevant disclosable pecuniary, personal or prejudicial interests in the items on this agenda.	
4 Minutes of the previous meeting	1 - 10
To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record.	
5 Matters arising (if any)	
To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.	
6 Update from Brent Care Journeys - Empire (BCJ 2.0) Representatives	
This is an opportunity for members of BCJ 2.0 to feedback on recent activity.	
7 Annual Participation Report	11 - 18
To provide an overview of participation activity with young people which has been led or supported by the participation team in 2025-26. Participation activity includes Brent Youth Parliament (BYP), Brent Care	

Journeys – Empire (BCJ 2.0) and participation work across Children and Young People teams.

8 Briefing for Senior Local Authority Officers and Lead Members on the Development of Regional Care Co-operatives 19 - 26

This briefing provides an overview of London's Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) following the successful award of Department for Education (DfE) funding. It explains the purpose of the RCC, London's approach to implementation, and the key areas of work that will be progressed during mobilisation and early delivery. The briefing also outlines the role of Lead Members as the programme develops.

9 Six-monthly Adoption Report from Adopt London West 27 - 84

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

10 Six-monthly Fostering Service Report 85 - 113

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).

11 Any other urgent business

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

Date of the next meeting: Monday 1 February 2027



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

	Corporate Parenting Committee 12 October 2026
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development
	Lead Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Employment and Climate Action - Cllr Jake Rubin
Annual Participation Report 2025-2026	

Wards Affected:	ALL
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	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:	None
Background Papers:	None
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Alice Weavers Participation and Engagement Manager alice.weavers@brent.gov.uk Nicole Levy Service Manager Quality Assurance and Learning and Development nicole.levy@brent.gov.uk

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an overview of participation activity with Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) 2.0. BCJ 2.0 is the participation programme for children in care and care leavers. Through BCJ 2.0, young people share their views about the

development of services. This report highlights how young people have been involved in decision-making and service development.

- 1.2. The work of the Participation Team aligns with the Brent CYP Participation and Engagement Strategy 2024-2027.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1. That the CPC review and comment on the contents of this report. This ensures the CPC is fulfilling its responsibility to monitor and scrutinise the activity of Brent's Children and Young People (CYP) service including opportunities for children and young people to participate in decisions which affect them.

3. Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities and Strategic Context

This report sets out updates on participation programmes and activities for children in care and care leavers. The work of the participation team contributes to the following borough priorities:

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

4. Participation team

- 4.1. The participation team is part of the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance service. The team runs Brent Youth Parliament (BYP) which is Brent's youth council open to all young people and BCJ 2.0 for care experienced young people. The team works with other teams to advise and collaborate on participation activities, such as staff recruitment, training and council decision-making.
- 4.2. When fully staffed, the team comprises a Participation and Engagement Manager (0.4 FTE), a Participation and Engagement Officer (0.8 FTE) and two Participation Support Officers (0.3 FTE).
- 4.3. In 2026/7, three sessional participation worker roles will be added to the team, with the roles aimed at care experienced individuals to offer opportunities for care leavers to become formally improved in the Council. This follows a model used within Brent Care Journeys (run by Barnardo's) which transitioned to BCJ 2.0 in 2024/25. The participation team is developing a comprehensive training package for sessional workers.

- 4.4. The team has experienced staff vacancies since the second half of this reporting period. Recruitment is underway for Participation and Engagement Officer and Sessional Participation Worker roles with new staff expected to start in autumn 2026.

5. Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) 2.0

- 5.1. Young people have their voices heard in the design and delivery of services and within council decision-making processes through the BCJ 2.0 programme, led by the participation team. BCJ 2.0 is the programme for Brent's Children in Care Council for young people age 7-17 (previously called 'Care in Action') and projects for care leavers age 18-25 (previously called 'Care Leavers in Action'), providing space and opportunities for different groups to meet in a safe environment to take part in participation activities throughout the year and engage in trips and events in school holidays.
- 5.2. In 2025/26, 28 young people under 18 and 25 care leavers engaged in BCJ 2.0 activities and events and many more young people shared their views through peer research and consultation opportunities which are led by BCJ 2.0 members. For example, young people attending Corporate Parenting Committee as BCJ 2.0 representatives share questions on the Hub WhatsApp group to ask care leavers what they think about different issues, such as whether they would like support from the council for driving lessons. Another example is a BCJ 2.0 member who is developing a trusted buddy scheme for care experienced young people and wrote her own survey for care leavers and staff which over 20 people in each group have taken part in. The participation team will be continuing to recruit young people to the group and activities and reach more young people.
- 5.3. Looked after children and care leavers also had their voices reflected in various ways during 2025/2026, starting with direct work at the assessment stage, continuing through regular visits via longer term intervention and then also as part of the IROs overseeing the progression of their care plans. Looked after children also have access to Coram Voice advocacy that enables them to have independent support in expressing their wishes and feelings. IROs are often a continuing person of trust for many looked after children, who might have several Social Workers involved in their lives.
- 5.4. BCJ 2.0 projects and events in 2025/26
- 5.4.1. We provided fun spaces for young people to connect and build positive relationships during the holidays. In May 2025 half term, young people aged 7-

17 took part in a mini golf activity at Box Park. In October 2025 half term, young people aged 7-17 attended a Halloween party in the base in the civic centre. This included fun Halloween themed games and was supported by young people from the care leavers group. In November 2025, young people aged 7-17 attended an end of year party. They took part in fun games, shared food and were joined by the Mayor of Brent who answered their questions about his role.

- 5.4.2. In December 2025, care leavers attended an end of year dinner in Wembley. They shared their reflections on the year and chatted with Nigel Chapman who attended to meet the group. These trips ran alongside other projects in the BCJ 2.0 programme including co-design workshops, arts programmes and a range of participation opportunities.
- 5.4.3. The participation team formed a new partnership with arts charity Create Arts in 2024 which continued into May 2025 to deliver an arts programme for young people in Brent Care Journeys 2.0. The programme included four projects: two with care leavers (ceramics and music) and two with young people aged 11-17 (visual arts and drama). The ceramics project ran in November 2024 for 6 weeks and the visual arts project ran for 3 days in February 2025 half term and were reported on in the last annual report.
- 5.4.4. The drama project ran for three days in the easter holidays and the music project ran for 6 weeks in April 2025. Young people really enjoyed being create and having a social and creative space to chat to each other. Young people involved in the music project enjoyed being able to work with a professional musician and have access to music production software and instruments. The group wrote, produced and recorded their own song about their experiences of being a care leaver which was really powerful and has since been used in presentations.
- 5.4.5. We hosted a summer fun day in August at the Unity Centre in Harlesden for children in care, care leavers, foster carers and staff with over 60 people attending. There were a lot of indoors and outdoors activities for all ages, including a bouncy castle, ball pit, arts activities, pool table, quiz and a DJ. Attendees shared positive feedback of the event:



"Friendly people
very kind and
helpful"



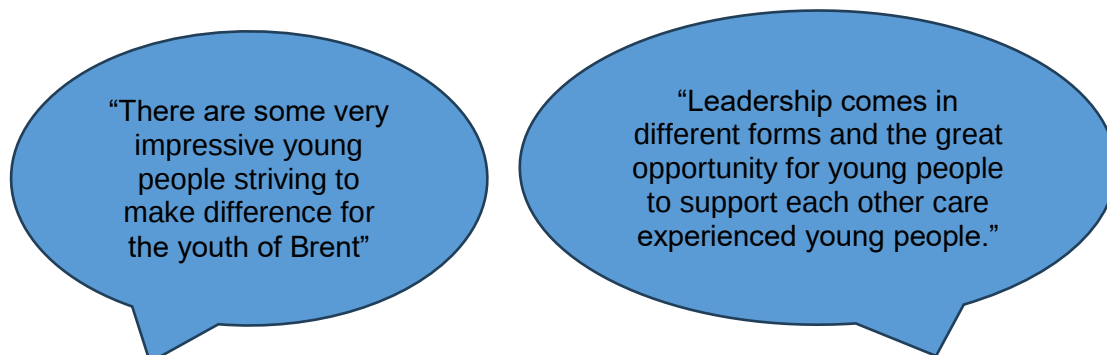
"The staff/workers
were a blessing very
nice each and
everyone"

- 5.4.6. In summer 2025, 11 care leavers attended Stubbers Adventure Centre for a two-night residential. The aim of the residential was for care leavers to get to know each other and begin a co-design project to rebrand BCJ 2.0. The trip involved fun activities, workshops, and discussions. They took part in activities such as high ropes, kayaking and laser tag.
- 5.4.7. In summer 2025, seven young people from the 11-17 group attended a one night residential at Gordon Brown Centre. They took part in activities such as climbing, laser tag and spending time with the animals. The group also took part in a co-design session to share their ideas on rebranding BCJ 2.0 and an activity linked to Bright Spots about trusted adults to share their views on the skills and qualities a social worker and foster carer should have.
- 5.4.8. In September 2025, 12 care leavers took part in a workshop with Ikea to design care crates for young people leaving care. The group worked with Ikea staff to put together the ideal crate with all the equipment and furnishings they felt were important for young people to create their own homes. This included kitchen equipment, bedding, storage units and plants.

5.5. Participation in decision-making

- 5.5.1. Young people have led a co-design project to rebrand BCJ 2.0 which has involved sessions with both groups since summer 2025 and ending with a launch event in April 2026 (which will be reported on in the next annual report). This involved 21 sessions with care leavers, three sessions with the 11-17 group, group catch up calls, weekly group updates, one-to-one support and home tasks, research and prep. The group led a consultation with their peers on branding and logos and used this to design and test several different logos. They presented their work at Corporate Parenting Committee and took on board feedback from Councillors and officers. Through the co-design project, young people built confidence and skills in decision-making, consultations, leadership and design.
- 5.5.2. Participation has been embedded in the Corporate Parenting Committee since the space was re-designed by young people and councillors in 2024/25. Young people now have a dedicated slot to set the agenda for a discussion topic and they feel more comfortable in the re-designed space to share their views and work with the committee members. Young people have attended every committee meeting and have shared updates on their activities and discussed issues related to the agenda papers. Young people look forward to attending the committee and have developed their understanding of local democratic structures and decision-making processes.

- 5.5.3. Young people from BCJ 2.0 and BYP have spoken at staff conferences to hundreds of members of staff about their experiences of participation. Young people developed their confidence in public speaking and their participation was praised by staff members:



- 5.5.4. Care leavers have been involved in several interview panels to recruit staff for roles in the new children's home and three Heads of Service roles. On all panels, young people have joined senior staff to ask interview questions and share their views in recruitment discussions.
- 5.5.5. Representatives from BCJ 2.0 care leavers group wrote the Forward to the Looked After Children and Care Leaver's Strategy 2025-2027, in collaboration with the Head of Service of Looked After Children and Permanency Service.
- 5.5.6. Young people in the 11-17 group took part in the Ofsted focused visit in November 2025 as BCJ 2.0 ambassadors. They represented their peers in meetings with Ofsted Inspectors to share their views about their time in care.
- 5.5.7. Young people in the 11-17 group refreshed the Brent Pledge at the end of 2025. They shared feedback on the design and ideas for how it could be improved. The refreshed pledge was presented to Corporate Parenting Committee in April 2026.
- 5.5.8. Young people from BCJ 2.0 helped participation staff write a funding application for the Amplified By Care Experience project ran by Coram Voice. The project will identify strong youth-led initiatives created by children in care councils, care experienced groups and local authorities and support them to grow. The aim is to take the best local ideas and help them reach more care-experienced young people across England. The BCJ 2.0 application focused on youth voice and leadership to show how care experienced young people can be more involved in decision-making in local authorities. In April 2026, BCJ 2.0 was shortlisted for the project and young people presented at a national event in Birmingham in May 2026 (this will be reported on in the next annual report).

- 5.5.9. Six care experienced young people continued to be employed as Care Quality Ambassadors (CQAs), one of whom also attend the Corporate Parenting Panel. Care Quality Ambassadors continue to be encouraged to attend quality assurance visits and positively impact on the lives of other children and young people. On these visits they speak to the children and young people living in the placement to hear directly from them, and they provide their own report at the end of a quality assurance visit.

In the 2025 /2026 financial year, Care Quality Ambassadors participated in 16 quality assurance visits out of a total of 32 undertaken by the Commissioning Resource Team, which was 50% of all quality assurance activity undertaken. Quality assurance visits have been undertaken to children's residential home providers and supported accommodation providers. This approach will continue for the 2026/2027 financial year.

- 5.10. Participation priorities for 2026/27 include; launching the rebranded BCJ 2.0; recruiting and training care experienced sessional participation workers; involving more looked after children and care leavers in participation opportunities; exploring opportunities for external funding with national charities.

6. Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 6.1. Stakeholder consultation and engagement is essential to participation, and we are committed to continuing to evaluate and develop new and creative ways of hearing from young people, carers, staff and partner organisations.

7. Financial Considerations

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

8. Legal Considerations

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

9 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

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

10. Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 10.1. There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

11. Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

11.1. There are no human resource or property considerations.

12. Communication Considerations

12.11 At this stage there are not any communication considerations.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development

	Corporate Parenting Committee
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development
	Lead Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Employment and Climate Action - Cllr Jake Rubin
London's Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) Briefing for Senior Local Authority Officers & Lead Members	
Wards Affected:	ALL
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	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 - London's Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) Briefing for Senior Local Authority Officers & Lead Members
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Kelli Eboji Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Kelli.Eboji@brent.gov.uk Palvinder Kudhail Director, Early Help and Social Care Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This briefing provides Lead Members for Children's Services and Corporate Parenting Committees (CPC) with an overview of London's Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) following the successful award of DfE funding. It explains the purpose of the RCC, London's approach to implementation, and the key areas of work that will be progressed during mobilisation and early delivery. The briefing also outlines the role of Lead Members as the programme develops.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Lead Member and CPC review and comment on the contents of this report.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

- 3.1.1 The purpose of RCCs are to help local authorities work together on challenges that are difficult to solve individually, including foster care recruitment, placement sufficiency, commissioning, and management of the children's care market and therefore 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 safe, stable homes with primary carers who love them and who are able to meet their holistic needs. RCCs will contribute to these priorities by strengthening local authorities collective bargaining power, influence, and ability to recruit more local foster carers, share fostering and placement resources across authority areas, and provide safe, stable, loving homes for children and young people when they are unable to remain with their birth parent/s.

4.0 Background

- 4.1 Please refer to Appendix 1, London's Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) Briefing for Senior Local Authority Officers & Lead Members.

5.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 5.1 The purpose of presenting this briefing to CPC is to inform and update Members, boroughs, partners, and stakeholders on the RCC development as it is entering its mobilisation phase, preparing partners to be able to contribute to the development of a detailed operating model and implementation plans.

6.0 Financial Considerations

- 6.1 There are currently no financial implications arising from this report.

7.0 Legal Considerations

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

8.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

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

9.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

9.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

10.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

10.1 There are no human resource or property considerations.

11.0 Communication Considerations

11.1 At this stage there are not any communication considerations.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development

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London's Regional Care Cooperative (RCC)

Briefing for Senior Local Authority Officers & Lead Members

Purpose of this Briefing

This briefing provides Lead Members for Children's Services with an overview of London's Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) following the successful award of Department for Education funding. It explains the purpose of the RCC, London's approach to implementation, and the key areas of work that will be progressed during mobilisation and early delivery. The briefing also outlines the role of Lead Members as the programme develops.

What are Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs)?

Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs) are a key part of the Government's programme of children's social care reform. They are designed to help local authorities work together on challenges that are difficult to solve individually, including foster carer recruitment, placement sufficiency, commissioning and management of the children's care market.

By acting collectively, councils can strengthen their influence over the care market, improve the availability of placements, reduce unnecessary competition between authorities and support better outcomes for children and young people

The Department for Education (DfE) has identified RCCs as the primary vehicle for delivering long-term reform of the children's care system. London has been selected as one of five regions nationally to establish new RCCs and has been awarded £1.7m of transformation funding to support implementation. The programme is being led by the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance (LIIA) on behalf of the Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS), with the support of all London local authorities. Camden is acting as Lead Local Authority.

Key Messages for Lead Members

London's Regional Care Cooperative provides an opportunity for boroughs to work together to address some of the most significant challenges facing children's social care.

The immediate focus is on increasing the number of children who can live in safe, stable family homes by strengthening fostering and kinship care, improving the recruitment and retention of foster carers, and building a more sustainable care system across London.

Achieving this ambition will require collaboration across borough boundaries and between partner agencies. Through a **'One Customer' approach**, the RCC will support councils and partners to work together more effectively around the needs of children, young people and families, creating a more integrated and sustainable system of care.

As the RCC programme develops, Lead Members will receive further briefings on individual projects and any decisions requiring local consideration. There is no immediate action required at this stage.

The RCC is designed to support collaboration between boroughs and partners. It does not replace local political accountability for children's services, which remains with individual local authorities and their elected members.

London's Vision

A central ambition of London's RCC is to increase the number of children who can live in family-based homes rather than residential settings wherever this is safe and appropriate to do so. This reflects a shared commitment across London to ensuring that more children grow up in stable, loving family environments and remain connected to their families, communities and support networks.

Achieving this ambition will require more than increasing the availability of provision. It will require local authorities and partners to work together in new ways, aligning resources, commissioning approaches and support around the needs of children, young people and families. The RCC will therefore adopt a **'One Customer'** approach, bringing together local authorities and partner agencies to work collectively in planning, commissioning and delivering services. By aligning activity across organisational boundaries, London can create a more integrated system that responds more effectively to the needs of children and young people while making better use of public resources.

Key Areas of Early Delivery

As the RCC moves into implementation, the initial focus will be on three interconnected priorities: growing the availability of family-based care across London, developing a more integrated, system-wide approach to commissioning and service delivery, and strengthening collaboration across local authority children's homes.

1. Growing Family-Based Care

Increasing the number of children who can live in family homes is the RCC's primary priority. To achieve this, the RCC will focus on increasing the recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers and strengthening support for both foster and kinship carers.

Early work will include:

- Developing a stronger digital presence for fostering across London, making it easier for prospective carers to access information and begin their fostering journey.
- Expanding the Foster Friendly programme, encouraging public sector organisations and other employers to introduce policies that better support foster carers.

- Testing innovative approaches to supporting carers during periods of crisis, helping to reduce the numbers of carers leaving fostering.
- Reviewing London's approach to kinship care and identifying opportunities to strengthen support for kinship carers.
- Strengthening alignment and collaboration across London's Fostering Hubs, building greater consistency and maximising the benefits of collective working. There are now five Fostering Hubs in London, covering 28 local authorities across the capital.

Together, these initiatives will help increase the number of children who can benefit from stable, high-quality family-based care.

2. Delivering a 'One Customer' Approach

Alongside this work, the RCC will begin developing a 'One Customer' approach, bringing together local authorities and partner agencies to better align services around the needs of children and families.

Early work will focus on identifying opportunities for greater collaboration across commissioning, service delivery and procurement, including where services can be better aligned, integrated or jointly commissioned. The aim is to create a more sustainable system while making better use of collective resources across London.

3. Supporting Local Authority Children's Homes

London has a strong track record of collaboration in the provision of local authority children's homes and is well placed to build on these foundations as the RCC develops.

There is, however, significant scope to strengthen London's collective approach. Compared to some other regions, London has a smaller proportion of local authority-owned children's homes and remains heavily reliant on independent provision. The RCC provides an opportunity for boroughs to work together to improve sufficiency, expand local authority and not-for-profit provision where appropriate, and develop a more sustainable care system for London's children and young people.

To support this ambition, the RCC will work with councils to strengthen partnership working across children's homes through communities of practice, shared learning, joint planning and the development of new collaborative approaches that improve quality, sustainability and sufficiency. This will include supporting boroughs that are opening, or planning to open, new children's homes by helping them access expertise, share learning from existing providers, develop workforce capacity and explore opportunities for collaboration with neighbouring authorities.

Early activity will include supporting workforce recruitment and development. One example is **Jobs in Children's Homes** ([link](#)), a shared recruitment platform developed through a partnership between London and the Southeast RCC (Home & Future). The platform raises the profile of careers in children's residential care,

supports recruitment across participating authorities, reduces duplication and provides valuable workforce intelligence. It also demonstrates the potential benefits of regional collaboration in addressing workforce challenges.

Over time, this work will contribute to the RCC's wider ambitions around workforce development, placement sufficiency, commissioning and service improvement, helping local authority children's homes play a stronger role within London's care system.

What Happens Next?

The RCC is now entering its mobilisation phase.

Over the coming months, the RCC Board and programme team will work with boroughs, partners and stakeholders to develop the detailed operating model and implementation plans.

Lead Members can expect:

- Regular programme updates.
- Briefings on specific projects and workstreams.
- Information to support local governance and decision-making where required.
- Examples of how individual projects can support local ambitions for children and families.

As individual projects mature, more detailed information will be shared on a project-by-project basis.

If you have any questions about the development of the RCC, please contact

Tim Aldridge

Executive Director for Children and Learning in Camden and RCC Board Chair

Tim.Aldridge@camden.gov.uk.

For operational or programme-related queries, please contact

Jonny Woodthorpe

Head of RCC Delivery in LIIA

Jonny.Woodthorpe@londoncouncils.gov.uk

	Corporate Parenting Committee 12 October 2026
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People and Community Development
	Lead Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Employment and Climate Action - Cllr Jake Rubin
Brent Adoption Report 6-monthly report: 1 April to 30 September 2026	

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

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to both present a report and provide a briefing to the Corporate Parenting Committee in relation to:

- Adopt London West annual report for 2025/26
- adoption performance data for the period 1 April 2026 – 30 September 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 annual report includes the progress and activity of Adopt London West.

- 1.2 This is the thirteenth 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 the reports. This is to provide evidence that the management of the adoption service is being monitored and challenged 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.

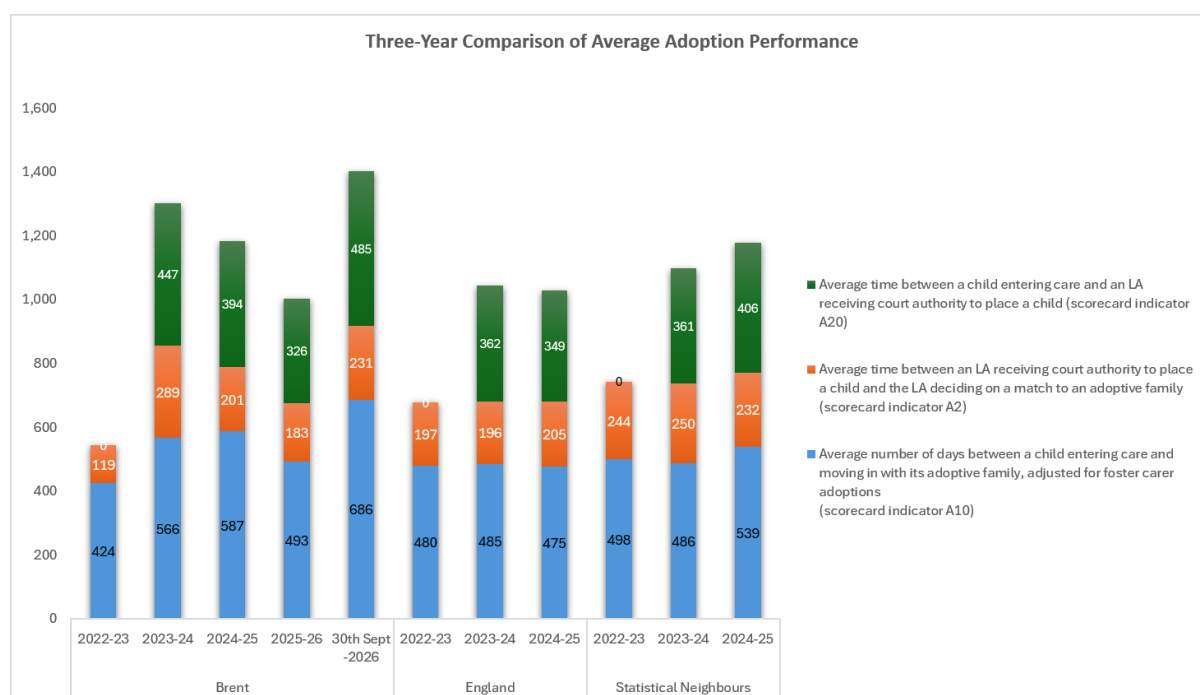
4.0 Responsibilities

- 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 considers 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) (686 in the last 12 months) as at 30 September 2026.
 - 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) (231 days in the last 12 months) as at 30 September 2026
 - 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) (485 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 as of the 30 September 2026.



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, or a small group of children due to extended complex care proceedings, the individual needs and age 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 from the point a Placement Order was granted.

5.4 The increase in all three performance measures at the end of this reporting period is related to three specific children, because of lengthy care proceedings and the individual health and developmental needs of the children, which impacted on family finding.

6.0 Child related data

6.1 There have been 6 Adoption Orders granted so far in this reporting year.

6.2 3 children have been placed with their new families so far this year,

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

- Four children are placed with their new families, all placed with adopters approved by ALW. Three children were placed in 2026/27, but the Adoption Orders have not yet been granted.
- Nine children are subject to a Placement Order but are not yet placed, four have a potential link with a new family.

- Two children were relinquished and have been placed in early permanence placements.
- Four 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 three children placed this year, all have been placed with families who reflect their racial and cultural background and identity.

7.0 Adopter Recruitment

- 7.1 8 Adopter households have been approved so far in 2026/27, the current projections are for 25 approvals by the end of March 2027 which would be the highest number of approvals to date.
- 7.2 There are currently 33 ALW approved adopters: 7 of whom already have a child/children placed with them, 12 are in the active family finding stage, 6 of these families are already matched or linked with children 8 families are on hold due to their personal circumstances.
- 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 2026/27 in Quarter 1 shows the London average for Stage 1 was 155 days, and ALW average for those adopters approved is 162 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 Q1 the London average for Stage 2 is 208 days, the average for ALW is = 158 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 26 Brent children, families or individuals who have required support. Five children continue to be open to a social worker and are receiving a social work support service. 16 Brent children are receiving an Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) therapeutic service that is under review. As of the end of August 2026, there were eight requests for access to adoption records held by the National Adoption Society; five such request were allocated for social work support and we were awaiting 44 more records to be located and shared with us for allocation and support to clients.
- 8.2 In addition, at the end of Aug, there were 172 keeping in touch arrangements (formerly referred to as contact) being facilitated for Brent families - 31 direct contact arrangements and 141 active letter exchanges.

8.3 Feedback from families

Special Guardian – *"We did not know about you until the school told us you may be able to help. I really appreciate the promptness with which my emails were dealt with and the support offered."*

Adopter – *“ALW’s reactivity to reach out to support me was helpful. I have just started being in contact with ALW as I need therapeutic parenting advice and other supports to help my son and they’ve been efficient in trying to set up some support for me, especially. They have been reactive as to help me find support which I am awaiting for now. Guiding me to support for therapeutic parenting and NVR courses has been helpful. I am looking forward to start courses which will help me better support my teenage son’s needs and his life story, as well as learning to communicate better with him.”*

Feedback from recent ‘Foundations for Attachment’ training for adopters and special guardians:

- *The ALW facilitators were knowledgeable, allowing space to discuss. It felt they were invested in our experiences and not rushing the sessions.*
- *It was helpful to have some of the practical advice and discussions with the group.*
I enjoyed hearing from other experiences, that I can learn and compare to my situation.
- *The ALW team was amazing, empathic and very friendly.*
- *Everything was helpful to be honest, I enjoyed all the advice and knowledge given and how engaging and helpful each session was.*
- *Meeting parents in a similar situation and having a discussion. Very engaging; staff were great, and getting all the valid points across, and relating these to our experiences.*
- *The experience I had with the people, and the explanations of the topic. Overall, I learned a lot of things.*

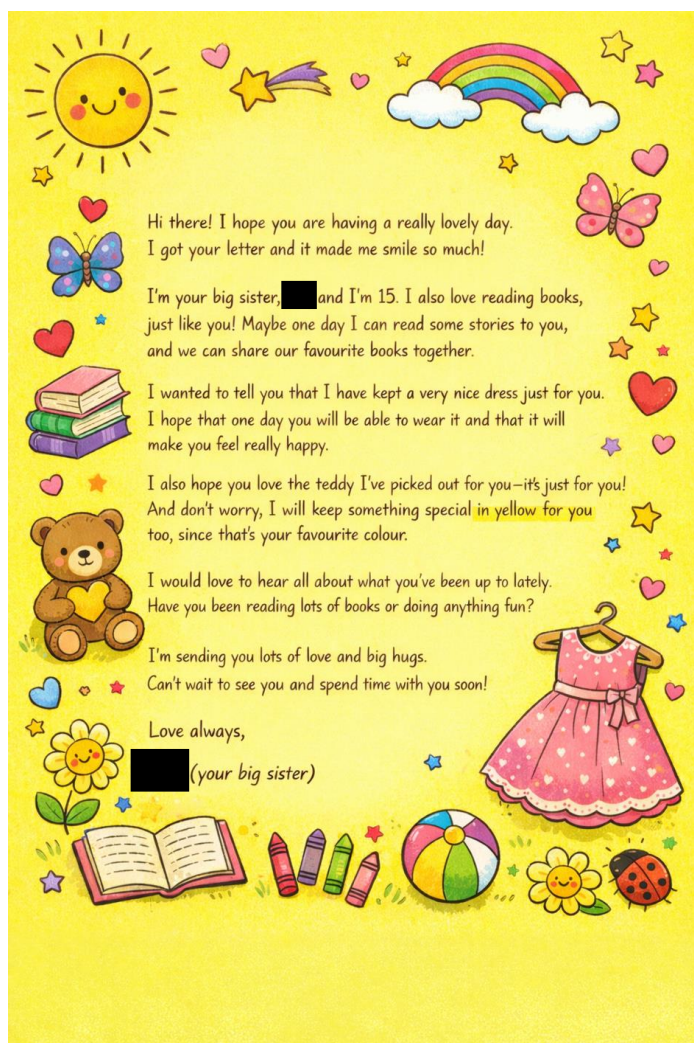
8.4 Some examples of positive joint work between Brent and ALW,

One case involved the child’s social worker, birth mother’s leaving care worker and team manager from Brent with the ALW team including the adopters’ social worker, ALW support social workers and the keeping in touch team. Professionals worked well together to manage several complexities and were able to support the adopters and birth mum to meet face to face which went very well. The adopters are also currently attending the ALW ‘Foundations for Attachment’ course.

In August 2026 an ALW keeping in touch worker supported an initial family time session between a Brent child, his adoptive parents, his birth grandmother and his two birth siblings. This session was very positive, and the adoptive parents will carry this on themselves, with a plan to do so 3 times a year. Grandmother said *“the meeting more than met our expectations, we were so happy to meet T and his parents. We all felt so at ease and comfortable and we all got on so well. Thank you, for making the arrangements, we felt that you went above and beyond to make this happen. I can’t believe it happened and will never forget. Thank you so much.”*

ALW have also been working with S, a 23-year-old Brent care experienced young person, and her Personal Advisor for several years to try and connect her with multiple brothers and sisters who were adopted. This work has resulted in making a connection between S and her youngest sibling and their Special Guardian. They are in direct contact now and are all so happy.

Below is an example of a “letterbox” letter to a 3-year-old adopted child from her 15-year-old older sister who is in care.



9.0 Priorities for 2026/27- taken from ALW Annual Report

- Complete ALW service review and finance modelling.
- Continue to lead and influence practice development in Keeping in Touch arrangements for children.
- Continue to lead the Adopt London Multi- Disciplinary team and implement plans to integrate therapeutically informed social work practice model across London.
- Develop understanding of sensory processing difficulties in children who have experienced developmental trauma through the delivery of BUSS to both staff and families
- Extend the offer of group work interventions for families by delivering the Great Behaviour Breakdown and Non-Violence Resistance programmes
- Lead the pan- regional innovation grant project across London including appointing a youth worker to progress peer support and voice and influence opportunities for adopted children and young people. As illustrated in the infographic below

10.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

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

11.0 Financial Considerations

- 11.1 Brent Council's contribution to the cost of running the functions of ALW in 2025/26 was £0.403m, funded through existing general fund budget allocation for the service.
- 11.2 The overall benefits of a shared service are also realised through the practice improvement and opportunities that are possible now that small individual services have become part of the wider Adopt London collaboration and the national RAA network. It was previously not possible for LA Adoption services to offer the range of support and services that can now be delivered as a Regional Adoption Agency.
- 11.3 A review is currently underway in relation to the future financial sustainability of ALW in its current form. This has been commissioned by the ALW Board, and a decision is likely to be made before the end of this financial year.

12.0 Legal Considerations

- 12.1 There are no additional legal considerations arising from this report.

13.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

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

14.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 14.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

15.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

- 15.1 There are no human resource or property considerations.

16.0 Communication Considerations

- 16.1 Considered within the main body of the report.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development

Adopt London West

Annual Report

1st April 2025 – 31st March 2026



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Executive Summary

This annual report sets out the activity, performance, partnership arrangements and strategic development of Adopt London West (ALW) for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. ALW is the Regional Adoption Agency for Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith & Fulham and Hounslow, hosted by the London Borough of Ealing. The service delivers adoption and special guardianship support functions on behalf of the four partner local authorities, with local authorities retaining responsibility for individual children and working alongside ALW through shared governance, quality assurance and performance oversight arrangements.

The report demonstrates that ALW has continued to operate as a stable and mature regional partnership, supported by quarterly Partnership Board meetings, bi-monthly Heads of Service oversight and strong collaboration across the wider Adopt London network. The staff group remains stable, with 32 team members working across recruitment and assessment, family finding, adoption and special guardianship support, and business support. All permanent social work posts are occupied, and an additional fixed-term social work post was agreed to strengthen recruitment capacity.

Financially, ALW continues to be funded through partner contributions based on the agreed demand-led formula. Total partner contributions for 2025/26 were £1.920m, with Hounslow contributing the largest share at 31.50%, followed by Ealing at 28.37%, Brent at 21.02% and Hammersmith & Fulham at 19.11%. Work to review the financial model began in early 2025 and remains ongoing. This review is important given changing demand, inter-agency placement costs, and the need to ensure arrangements remain equitable and sustainable for all partners.

Demand for adoption and special guardianship support remained high. ALW submitted 410 applications to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF), compared with 363 in 2024/25, and claimed £832,367 in funding compared with £741,663.77 the previous year. This increase occurred during a period of significant national change to the fund, including the reduction of the Fair Access Limit from £5,000 to £3,000, the removal of funding for assessments, and the end of match funding for complex therapeutic packages. These changes reinforce the importance of strengthening early, preventative and sustainable support that does not rely solely on external funding.

Performance in 2025/26 was strong in several key areas. ALW placed 34 children with adoptive families, compared with 31 in 2024/25, representing the highest number of placements since the service began in 2019. Adoption Orders also increased to 26, compared with 25 in 2024/25 and 21 in 2023/24. ALW approved 23 new adoptive families, an improvement from 18 households in the previous year and again the highest number since the service began. These achievements are particularly notable in the context of a national decline in adoption activity, with the number of children adopted nationally falling by 10% and adopter sufficiency continuing to decline across England.

ALW's performance against national adoption indicators shows a mixed but broadly positive picture. The average time from entering care to moving in with an adoptive family was 584 days, broadly in line with the London average of 585 days but above the England average of 480 days. The time from Placement Order to match was 244 days, better than the London average of 275 days but above the national average of 222 days. The time from entering care to Placement Order was 337 days, better than the London average of 406 days and close to the national average of 324 days. Stage 1 adopter

assessment performance was affected by delays in statutory checks, while Stage 2 performance was stronger than the London average and close to the England average.

The report highlights continued benefits from the wider Adopt London partnership, which brings together four Regional Adoption Agencies serving 24 London boroughs. During 2025/26, Adopt London continued to strengthen shared governance, commissioning, marketing and communications, workforce development and practice improvement. The annual staff conference provided an opportunity to share learning and innovation, including the introduction of the BUSS® model, with Level 1 training commissioned for September 2026. The partnership also benefited from Adoption England and Department for Education grant funding to develop clinical leadership, commissioning capacity, staff and adopter training, peer support for young people, and multidisciplinary team interventions.

The development of clinical and multidisciplinary practice is a major theme. ALW led successful bids for funding to expand the clinical hub delivered with West London NHS Trust, including psychologists and occupational therapy input. Since early 2026, the multidisciplinary consultation offer has delivered 44 consultations, reaching 59 professionals, nine foster carers and five adopters. The BAsES model is being developed to provide early support around matching, transitions and placement stability. ALW's embedded Clinical Psychologist resumed service delivery in October 2025 and provided consultation, reflective practice, adopter preparation, training and direct therapeutic support, strengthening trauma-informed and relationship-based practice across the service.

Adoption support has remained a key strategic focus. Across Adopt London, a review began in 2025/26 to move support towards a more consistent, accessible and preventative model. Priorities include earlier intervention, stronger adoption support planning, a consistent core offer, therapeutic social work practice, multidisciplinary working, workforce development and regular wellbeing check-ins. ALW's own support offer includes education support groups, Foundations for Attachment courses, special guardianship support through Kinship, PAC UK advice and counselling services, and therapeutic parent-toddler support. ALW is distinctive within Adopt London in offering special guardianship support across its partner authorities.

Several areas of practice development and innovation are highlighted. ALW's Keeping in Touch work continues to be recognised nationally, reflecting a shift towards more open, identity-focused and relationship-based adoption practice. Indirect adoption arrangements increased significantly from 334 in 2023/24 to 659 in 2025/26, alongside 243 direct adoption arrangements and 157 special guardianship arrangements. ALW also contributed to national and regional learning through presentations to family justice partners, CAFCASS and Research in Practice, while continuing to support partner local authorities with kinship practice, life story work, transitions, early permanence, and child permanence report quality.

The Black Adoption Project remains a significant programme of work across Adopt London. During 2025/26, grant funding enabled increased programme capacity and the continuation of pilot projects focused on recruitment, peer support, identity and workforce development. Key achievements include Black adopter recruitment and engagement events, the ongoing delivery and evaluation of 'Let's Talk About Adoption', the launch of 'Exploring My Black Identity' for young people, and workforce development linked to Requisite Black Parenting. The project has built a trusted foundation with Black adoptive parents and prospective adopters, while recognising that urgent and sustained work is still required to address disparities for Black children waiting for adoption.

Digital engagement and community support have also strengthened. Adopt London created 11 new webpages and introduced enhanced website functionality to improve accessibility, personalise content and support targeted recruitment. Website developments included dedicated content for single adopters, transracial adoption, domestic adoption, eligibility, the Black Adoption Project and LGBTQ+ prospective adopters. We Are Family continued to deliver extensive peer support, with more than 1,570 Adopt London members, 116 webinars, 35 podcasts downloaded 24,000 times, and a range of in-person events. The Adopt London Choir also continued to provide creative peer connection and wellbeing support for adopters and professionals.

Adoption Panel activity remained consistent and responsive. ALW held 21 panels during the reporting year, usually every three weeks. The panel considered 29 child matches, 23 prospective adopter approvals and two plans of adoption. Feedback indicates that reports from ALW teams are generally of good quality, although Child Permanence Reports from partner local authorities remain an area for continued development. Themes considered by panel included transcultural placements, early permanence, early support, medical advice, panel membership, timescales and report quality. A new panel adviser was appointed during the year, with post-panel meetings supporting continuity, learning and timely follow-up.

Overall, the report shows that ALW has delivered strong outcomes in a challenging national context. The highest number of children placed and adopters approved since 2019 demonstrates progress against core sufficiency objectives. At the same time, the report identifies important risks and priorities: maintaining adopter recruitment, reducing delay, increasing the proportion of children placed with Adopt London families, responding to ASGSF funding changes, sustaining grant-funded innovation, strengthening support for Black children and prospective adopters, and embedding a consistent preventative adoption support model. The priorities for 2026/27 should therefore focus on sustaining performance improvements, completing the financial model review, continuing practice development, embedding multidisciplinary and clinical support, and ensuring children and families receive timely, inclusive and effective services.

1. About Adopt London West

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Context and responsibilities

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

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

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

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

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

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

- *corporate parenting*
- *agency decision making responsibilities and all legal responsibilities for children looked after.*
- *early permanence, care and adoption planning*
- *provision of and review of financial allowances to adopters and special guardians*

In partnership with the RAA, each partner contributes to:

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

1.1.2 Governance arrangements

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

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

1.1.3 Ofsted Inspections

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

No ILACS inspections have taken place within the ALW partnership in 2025/26.

DfE and Ofsted have confirmed that thematic inspections of between 6-8 Regional Adoption Agencies will take place in Autumn 2027.



2. ALW Team Structure

2.1 Workforce

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

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

All are employed by Ealing as the host Local Authority with the exception of the Clinical Psychologist (0.6FTE) who is employed by West London NHS Trust.

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

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

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

3. Financial Arrangements

3.1 Financial arrangements

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

The financial contribution formula was reviewed and agreed for a period of two years by all partners and implemented in April 2022, the revised formula reflects a demand based budget. A further review

of the financial model planned for late 2023 was delayed due to capacity pressures in key finance personnel, this work began in the early part of 2025 and continues at the time of writing this report.

Financial contributions for 2025/26 are set out in the table below:

<i>LA</i>	<i>2025/26 FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION</i>	<i>PERCENTAGE CONTRIBUTION</i>
<i>BRENT</i>	<i>£403,629</i>	<i>21.02%</i>
<i>EALING</i>	<i>£544,898</i>	<i>28.37%</i>
<i>HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM</i>	<i>£367,099</i>	<i>19.11%</i>
<i>HOUNSLOW</i>	<i>£604,994</i>	<i>31.50%</i>
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>£1,920,620</i>	<i>100%</i>

The following paragraphs describe the key areas of financial activity.

3.1.1 Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund

Adopt London West manages all applications from families living in each partner LA to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) a Department for Education fund for the direct provision of therapeutic support to families. Applications to the fund are made following a Social Work assessment and identification of a therapeutic provider. 410 applications were made to the fund in 2025/26 compared to 363 in 2024/25 and total funding claimed was **£832,367** an increase from £741,663.77 in 2024/25.

Significant changes to the fund were made in April 2025, the Fair Access Limit for applications was reduced from £5,000 to £3,000, in addition, funding for assessments was removed and match funding of applications for complex therapeutic packages also ended.

2024/25	Number of applications	Total
Brent	81	£178,466
Ealing	133	£257,236
H&F	79	£165,766
Hounslow	117	£230,897
TOTAL	410	£832,367

3.2 Interagency placements

Inter-agency placements are purchased when no adopters approved by Adopt London West are available or are not considered to be the most suitable match for a child. 38% of the children placed in 2025/26 were placed with ALW approved adopters, which is a decrease e from 58% in 2024/25, this is disappointing as a number of other children are linked or matched with ALW families but for various reasons their placements were delayed. Once those children are placed in Q1 of 2026/27 the number of ALW placements will be much more favourable.

The cost of Inter Agency placements was **£705,335**. Inter-agency income from ALW families matched with children from other regions was **£67,184**.

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

There is a shared commitment across the Adopt London partnership to place London children with London families where possible, maximising the use of all potential families within the partnership provides the best outcome for children and adopters, placing children locally means that, when necessary, high quality, timely support can be arranged. Therefore, increasing the number of children placed with Adopt London adopters across each of the 4 regions remains a priority. 13 children were placed with ALW adopters, 3 in other Adopt London regions, a further 5 children were placed with families in London who were approved by Voluntary Adoption Agencies. Of the remaining 14 children who were placed outside of the London region, all but 3 children were placed in towns and cities that are culturally diverse and reflect the children's background and heritage.

Children placed - Interagency & ALW Placements 01 April 2024 – 31 March 2025			
LA	ALW	Interagency	Total
Brent	4	4	8
Ealing	2	7	9
H&F	2	2	4
Hounslow	5	9	13
TOTAL	13	21	34

4. Performance

4.1 Children

The number of children Adopted nationally fell by 10% in 2025/26 to 2,730, in London 250 Adoption Orders were granted. There was a fall in the number of children placed for Adoption across London to 180 children compared to 200 children in 2024/25

However, 34 children were placed by ALW in their new families in 2025/26, compared to 31 children in 2024/25 and the highest number of children placed since ALW began

DfE (ASG) published adoption performance targets set out three main performance indicators for children with a plan of Adoption.

- **A10** – entering care to moving in with adoptive family.
- **A2** - length of time between a Placement Order and match with an adoptive family, the expected timescale is 121 days.
- **A20** – entering care to Placement Order

The tables below, show ALW's performance for each indicator with comparators for England and London averages in days

A10: ENTERING CARE TO MOVING IN WITH ADOPTIVE FAMILY

Area	Days
England average	480
London	585
ALW	584
Brent	693
Ealing	639
H&F	569
Hounslow	489

A2: PLACEMENT ORDER TO MATCH

Area	Days
England average	222
London	275
ALW	244
Brent	249
Ealing	299
H&F	219
Hounslow	211

A20: ENTERING CARE TO PLACEMENT ORDER

Area	Days
England average	324
London	406
ALW	337
Brent	338
Ealing	488
H&F	245
Hounslow	287

4.1.1 Adoption Orders

Adoption Orders granted	Brent	Ealing	H&F	Hounslow	Total
2023/24	4	4	3	10	21
2024/25	8	1	3	13	25
2025/26	4	8	3	11	26

Of the

34 children placed in 2025/26, 41% are of White ethnicity, 24% are Mixed Black ethnicity, 14% are Asian, 3% are Asian/White and 18% are of other mixed ethnicity backgrounds.

Included in the 34 children were 3 sets of twins, 5 children were placed under Early Permanence arrangements, this means children were placed with adopters who are also approved as foster carers and often before Court proceedings have concluded, enabling the child to move in with their new family, sometimes months earlier than is usually possible.

4.2 Adopters

23 new adoptive families were approved in 2025/26 an improvement from 18 households in 2024/25.

56% of adopters approved in 2025/26 are White, 9% Black African, 4% Indian, 9% Black Caribbean/White, 4% Black African/White, 9% Asian/White and 9% other mixed ethnicities. 26% are from the LGBTQ+ community.

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

- **Stage 1** – should be completed in 60 days, the England average time was 133 days, London average was 137 days, ALW = **167 days**.
- **Stage 2** – should be completed in 121 days, the England average time was 149 days, London average was 178 days, ALW = **153 days**.

Stage 1 performance in 2025/26 was not as strong as in previous years, affected by significant delays in the statutory checks process for a small number of households. However, Stage 2 performance was stronger than the London average and just outside of the overall England average. As noted in previous reports, all regions across the UK struggle to keep within assessment timeframes.

ALW placed the highest number of children for adoption and approved the most adopters in 2025/26 since the service began in 2019

5. National Adoption landscape



Adoption England oversees the coordinated efforts of the 34 Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA's) in England, focusing on key areas identified in the [Adoption England Strategy](#). The Department for Education (DfE) provides funding for Adoption England through a centrally funded staff team and grants available to RAA's collaborating in pan-regional partnerships.

5.1 Summary of the Adoption England Annual Report 2025/26

The 2025/26 Adoption England Annual Report highlights significant progress and ongoing challenges in adoption services across England. The year was marked by innovation, partnership, and a strong focus on improving outcomes for children, adoptive families, and birth relatives.

Key Achievements:

- **Adopter Recruitment:** The 'You Can Adopt' campaign led to a 20% increase in adopter registrations and a 16% rise in approvals, with targeted efforts to engage Black and Black Mixed Heritage communities. Despite these gains, adopter sufficiency remains a challenge.
- **Support and Relationships:** The launch of National Practice Standards for Staying in Touch and the expansion of the Culture Change programme have promoted lifelong, child-centred relationships. The Family Connect pilot provided intermediary support to over 2,000 individuals from pre-1976 adoptions, with high satisfaction rates.
- **Voice and Influence:** Adopted people, birth parents, and young people have played a central role in shaping policy and practice, including co-producing guidance and participating in national conferences. The Youth Forum and reference groups have influenced recruitment, training, and support services.
- **Timely Matching and Inclusion:** Initiatives like the Just Heart, Just Hope, Just Home programme and the Black Adoption Project have addressed the needs of children from global majority backgrounds.

- **Tailored Support:** Multidisciplinary team models and pilots for the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund have enhanced early, coordinated support for families. The Becoming a Family framework and revised Adoption Support Plans have strengthened early intervention and planning.

Budget and Forward Planning: The Department for Education funded a range of projects, with a total budget of £8.8 million in 2025/26 and £9.6 million planned for 2026/27. Priorities include further innovation, strengthening support, and building a coherent national adoption support model.

Conclusion: The report underscores the importance of lived experience, research, and collaboration in driving improvements. While challenges persist, particularly in adopter recruitment and consistency of support, the sector is moving towards more inclusive, evidence-informed, and responsive adoption services. [Adoption England 2025/26 annual report](#)

5.2 National adopter sufficiency and children waiting for adoption

The number of available approved adopters nationally continues to fall causing a significant drop in adopter sufficiency across England. Adoption and Special Guardianship data (ASG) published data for 2025/26 shows that the number of approved adopters available is 1,400 a decrease of 7% compared to last year. However, there are 3,010 children waiting for adoption, an increase of 3%, of those, 1,560 have been waiting 18 months, an increase of 13%.

6. Adopt London

6.1 Adopt London structure



Four RAA's collaborate under the 'Adopt London' umbrella, collectively serving 24 boroughs across all regions of London. Adopt London stands out nationally for its close partnership among such a large number of

local authorities.

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



6.2 Governance

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

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

During **2025–26**, the Adopt London strategic work programme continued to focus on strengthening governance and commissioning arrangements, enhancing operational practice, securing opportunities through national funding, developing marketing and communications activity, and ensuring the voices of adopted children, adopted adults, adopters and birth family members continue to inform service development.

Our annual **Adopt London Staff Conference**, held in **February 2026**, brought together colleagues from across all four RAAs. The event celebrated partnership achievements, showcased innovative practice, provided opportunities for professional learning, and reinforced our shared commitment to delivering outstanding adoption services for children and families across London.



Sarah Lloyd, Consultant Occupational Therapist and Play Therapist, Author and Director of BUSS® (Building Underdeveloped Sensorimotor Systems), attended the Adopt London Staff conference as the keynote speaker to deliver an engaging introduction to

the BUSS® Model. Developed to improve outcomes for children who have experienced developmental trauma, the model focuses on strengthening underdeveloped sensorimotor systems that can impact a child's emotional regulation, behaviour, learning, and relationships.

The presentation provided valuable insight into how targeted sensorimotor interventions can support children's development and wellbeing, helping them to build the foundations necessary for greater resilience and engagement in family and community life.

The session was extremely well received by staff, who recognised the potential benefits of adopting this approach within adoption support services. Many attendees felt that the BUSS® Model could offer significant value to adoptive children and families by providing a trauma-informed framework that addresses underlying developmental needs and supports long-term positive outcomes.

Following the presentation and discussion, **Level 1 BUSS® Model training** has been commissioned for delivery in September 2026 for Adopt London staff. This will enable staff to deliver a 10 week 'Leaplets' course using the BUSS® model to parents and children together.

6.3 Adoption England grant funding & multi-disciplinary team development

Since December 2023, ALW along with the other Adopt London (AL) RAAs, has been part of the Adoption England (AE) National Commissioning Programme. The National Commissioning Programme has provided additional development funding as well as training delivered by the Institute of Public Care (IPC) at Oxford Brookes University. AE continues to support the programme and works closely with the regions to deliver the Adoption Strategy.

In 2025, the partnership delivered a refreshed needs assessment, which identified a number of areas for focus for the partnership. Those areas of focus included raising skills in the teams, enhancing the core support offer to children and to families and investing in therapeutically informed interventions. The needs assessment has been the basis on which ALW, and other AL RAAs, has begun to develop the vision and ambition for the teams and for the support it can offer to adopters and to adoptees. In 2025/26 we began testing our potential clinical models, as well as training AL staff to deliver some of our own specialist therapeutic parenting programmes, as part of a long-term goal to increase access to these programmes and reduce reliance on commissioning from external providers. This ambition has been further developed in 2025/26 as the Adopt London partnership was successful in its bid for a number of Department for Education (DfE) and AE grants to deliver those areas of focus and ambition.

In 2025/26 the Adopt London partnership received further **Pan-regional Innovation funding** which has been invested in;

- Developing clinical leadership
- Supporting commissioning activities
- Training for social workers and for adopters
- Peer support programmes for young people

Also in 2025/2026, we successfully trained social workers and adopters to deliver the **Great Behaviour Breakdown (GBB)** programme which focusses on the parent-child relationship and helps parents/carers create environments for their children which are safe and conducive to building strong love-based attachment relationships. The commissioning of this training has improved and enhanced the core support offer as well as raising the skills of social workers. As part of this funding, we also delivered the **Transition to Adulthood** peer support programme for young people. As we've been successful in our bid for this funding for 2026/27 and 2027/28, we can continue our investment in

skill raising and commissioning. We will also increase our focus on and investment in supporting children and young people with the creation of a senior youth worker post for the coming two years ensuring that we develop adoptee peer spaces from babyhood to adulthood.

ALW has also led the successful bids for AE development funding for the creation of **Multi-disciplinary Team (MDT)** interventions for the AL RAAs. In 2025/26 this funding was invested in the expansion of the clinical hub based in ALW delivered in partnership with West London NHS Trust. This hub includes psychologists and an occupational therapist (OT) who, with clinical leadership, deliver a range of interventions which underpin the developing therapeutically informed adoption support to children and families. These interventions include;

- Brief Assessment Early Support programme (BASs)
- OT led sensory approaches and screening
- Case consultation
- Co-working cases
- Reflective practice (specific service areas)
- Training and workshops
- Co-delivery of therapeutic parenting programmes

Having been successful in funding for this programme in 2026/27 again, ALW will further develop the clinical hub offer as well as commissioning skills training for social workers in the **BUSS®** model which brings together an understanding of how a baby and young child's sense of themselves on a bodily level develops through experiences of being touched, held and of moving, all within the context of nurturing relationships'.

Lastly, we worked with IPC to develop a Theory of Change process which helped us to develop our thinking in terms of identifying the mechanisms which allow change and those that might hinder. This process supported us to identify what we needed to do to sustain and maintain the many changes we have begun to introduce into the work of the teams. In 2026/27, we will develop a further Theory of Change process focussed on supporting the interdependencies of all of the work funded by the National Commissioning Programme.

6.4 Adopt London multi-disciplinary team



West London
NHS Trust

Since the service described above commenced in early 2026, a total of 44 consultations has been delivered, including both initial and follow-up sessions. These consultations have reached 59 professionals, including Adopt London social workers across various teams, local authority children's social workers, foster carers and supervising social workers. In addition, the service has directly engaged nine foster carers and five adopters, further indicating its expanding impact of consultation and formulation across the wider network.

The BASs model has been developed by the team with a view to provide targeted clinical support to strengthen early adoption practice by focusing on:

- **Matching:** Supporting decisions that meet the child's needs and promote long-term stability.
- **Transitions:** Facilitating smooth, child-centred moves from foster care to adoption.

- **Early Support:** Providing timely guidance and intervention during the initial stages of placement.

Following consultations with professionals, a clinical psychologist or occupational therapist from the clinical team may offer brief, needs-led support to prospective adopters, children and foster carers, alongside indirect support to the wider professional network. A key component is psychological and/or occupational/sensory assessment, informing a shared comprehensive formulation that promotes trauma-informed, relational practice across the child's system. The model aims to strengthen parent-child relationships by helping prospective adopters to understand their child(ren)'s needs in the context of early trauma and attachment disruption, supporting therapeutic parenting and emotional attunement. It recognises the challenges of adoption transitions and emphasises early, proactive support to promote stability, relationship-building, and positive outcomes.

6.5 Strengthening Adoption Support Across Adopt London

Demand for Adoption Support Services has remained consistently high across London for a number of years, reflecting national trends across England. In response, the four London Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) began a review project in the early part of 2025/26 to review adoption support across the capital. The project aimed to develop a more consistent, accessible and preventative model of support, ensuring adopted children, adoptive families and others affected by adoption receive the right support at the right time.

Working collaboratively with Adoption Support Team Managers across London, the project focused on improving outcomes through earlier intervention, stronger support planning, enhanced therapeutic practice and greater regional consistency.

6.5.1 Key Priorities

The review identified a number of strategic priorities for the future development of adoption support across London:

- Improve adoption support services and outcomes for adopted children and their families.
- Develop a consistent, accessible and responsive adoption support offer across all London RAAs.
- Embed the new national Adoption Support Plan within practice, supported by regular reviews.
- Shift from a predominantly crisis-led model towards earlier intervention and preventative support.
- Strengthen therapeutic social work practice through multidisciplinary approaches, including clinical psychology and occupational therapy.
- Build workforce capability through training, shared learning and evidence-informed interventions.
- Audit current adoption support assessments to identify, share and embed best practice.

6.6 National Context

The project was undertaken during a period of significant uncertainty regarding the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF).

Historically, the ASGSF provided funding of up to £2,500 for specialist assessments and £5,000 for therapeutic interventions, with additional match funding available where required. During early 2025, uncertainty surrounding the future of the fund resulted in assessments and therapy being temporarily paused.

Although funding was confirmed for 2025–26, substantial changes were introduced:

- Therapy funding reduced from £5,000 to £3,000 per child.
- Funding for specialist assessments was removed.
- Match funding arrangements ceased.

While the ASGSF has since been extended until March 2027, uncertainty remains beyond this period. These changes reinforce the importance of developing sustainable adoption support services that are not wholly dependent on external funding.

6.6.1 Alignment with National Priorities

The recommendations from the London project closely align with Adoption England's national strategy, which promotes:

- timely, tailored support throughout the adoption journey;
- implementation of the new Adoption Support Plan;
- multidisciplinary working across social care, health and education; and
- holistic assessments that recognise the impact of trauma, neurodiversity, mental health needs and Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

6.7 Developing a Preventative Model of Support

A key recommendation is to move adoption support "upstream", ensuring support begins before an Adoption Order is made rather than only when difficulties arise.

The proposed model includes:

- involvement of Adoption Support Teams during matching and introductions;
- adoption support social workers contributing to support planning before placement;
- building trusting relationships with families from the earliest stages of the adoption journey; and
- using Adoption Support Plans as dynamic working documents that are reviewed regularly to respond to changing needs.

This relationship-based, preventative approach aims to improve placement stability, reduce crises and ensure families receive timely, proportionate support.

6.8 Developing a Consistent Core Offer

The project also recommends the introduction of a consistent Adopt London Core Offer, ensuring every adoptive family can access a minimum level of support regardless of where they live.

The Core Offer would include:

- early help and preventative support;
- advice, information and guidance;
- training programmes and workshops;
- peer support opportunities;
- therapeutic interventions that do not rely solely on ASGSF funding;
- annual wellbeing check-ins; and
- targeted interventions where additional support is required.

Publishing and regularly updating the Core Offer through the Adopt London website will improve transparency, reduce variation across the region and provide families with clearer information about available support.

6.9 Adult Adoptee Support

Transracial Adult Adoptee Network

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

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

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

6.10 Telling Children about Adoption

In October 2025, Adopt London launched the Telling Children About Adoption guide, a practical resource developed by Adopt London social workers, with input from a clinical psychologist, to support social workers and foster carers in having sensitive and age-appropriate conversations with children whose care plan is adoption. A conference was held to launch the guide on 21st October 2025 participants attended from all 24 London boroughs in the Adopt London partnership. The event focused on sharing good practice, reflecting on lived experience, and ensuring that resources were widely available for practitioners to take back to their teams and use in their day-to-day work.

Designed for children aged 18 months and above, the guide provides a structured, step-by-step approach to helping children understand why they are unable to live with their birth family, what foster care means, and why adoption has been identified as the best plan for their future. Recognising the lifelong importance of these early conversations, the resource offers practical guidance, suggested language, and activities to help professionals communicate difficult information with honesty, compassion, and clarity.



The publication is supported by a range of complementary resources, including emotion cards, family tree activities, visual aids, and book recommendations, enabling children to explore their experiences, express their feelings, and make sense of significant changes in their lives in a safe and supportive way.

The resource is available to social workers and foster carers across the 24 Adopt London boroughs and has strengthened practice by promoting consistent, child-centred life story work. By equipping professionals with the tools to support children's understanding of their adoption journey, the guide helps foster emotional wellbeing, resilience, positive identity development, and a greater sense of security and belonging.

The resource has enhanced professionals' confidence and capability in delivering difficult conversations, ensuring children receive timely, honest, and supportive explanations about their circumstances. This contributes to better preparation for adoption and supports children in developing a clearer understanding of their life story and future.

6.11 Early Permanence Project



The Other Side of Adoption: Birth Parents' Experience of Care Proceedings and Contact

In 2025, Adopt London produced **The Other Side of Adoption: Birth Parents' Experience of Care Proceedings and Contact**, a short film designed to promote understanding, reflection, and meaningful discussion about the role of contact in adoption. Featuring the voices and experiences of birth parents whose children were adopted, the film provides a rare and powerful insight into the emotional impact of care proceedings and the importance of maintaining connections that support children's identity and life story.



Developed within the Adopt London's Early Permanence Project, the film project sought to encourage greater empathy and understanding among adopters, social workers, and professionals involved in adoption. The film highlights key messages about the value of relationship-based contact, recognising birth parents as an important part of a child's history, and supporting adopters to navigate lifelong connections with confidence and sensitivity.

The film will be used as a training and engagement resource across Adopt London, helping prospective adopters and professionals explore the benefits of thoughtful, child-centred contact arrangements. By amplifying the lived experiences of birth parents, the project contributes to a more open and compassionate approach to adoption practice, strengthening understanding of how contact can help adopted children develop a stronger sense of identity, belonging, and connection to their personal history.

The project broadened understanding of birth family perspectives, promoted reflective adoption practice, and provided a valuable resource to support discussions about contact, identity, and lifelong relationships within adoption. It reinforces Adopt London's commitment to placing children's needs, voices, and life stories at the centre of adoption support services.

6.12 We are Family peer support



Adopt London continued our successful partnership with **We Are Family (WAF)** is an independent peer-to-peer support charity, founded by adoptive parents for adoptive parents. Adopt London provides annual grant funding to enable WAF to deliver structured peer support alongside access to a wide range of expert resources for adoptive families, including through the WAF Member Hub.

All prospective adopters are encouraged to join We Are Family free of charge during Stage 1 of their assessment. The support available expands as families progress through the adoption journey, from approval through to their child or children moving in. More than 1,570 adoptive parents across Adopt London are currently members of We Are Family

WAF offers a diverse programme of support, including locality-based peer support groups and specialist groups for single adopters, early permanence carers and parents of teenagers. It also organises family meet-ups, summer picnics and opportunities to access cultural events across London. During the year, WAF delivered 45 events across the Adopt London partnership, including 71 parent support meet-ups. There were also 'Big Days Out' to London Zoo in July 2025 with 180 members attending, in December 2025 Winter Wonderland with 40 members attending and finally a trip to the Panto in January 2026 with 100 members attending.

"[Events like these] make my children feel special and that others understand they are struggling with their journey to us. It makes us as parents feel supported and part of a community." WAF member

In partnership with Adopt London, WAF also provides a range of accessible digital support. Its **WAF Talks** programme has now delivered 116 webinars, enabling adoptive parents to participate live or access recordings on demand. WAF also produces **Adoption Shared**, a specialist podcast that explores and deepens understanding of the lived experience of adoption, further extending support and learning opportunities for adoptive families. WAF has produced 35 podcasts which have been downloaded 24,000 times.

Members report since joining WAF, 53% of members report feeling more confident in their parenting knowledge and abilities and 70% of members report having found our digital resources and content helpful (e.g. Talks, Podcast, Toolkits, Blogs)

"It is always important to have in one's network people that are or have shared experiences. This can offer validation and reduce the sense of isolation. It is always useful to be in a space with people who have or are experiencing such things as this can add perspective on where things currently are and inject much needed hope. Nice to chat and share a little laughter when possible."

Adopt London Choir

6.13 Adopt London Choir

The Adopt London Choir is a unique community choir that brings together adoptive parents, prospective adopters and adoption professionals from across the Adopt London network. With around 30 members, the choir provides a welcoming and supportive environment where participants can connect through music while benefiting from peer support, social connection and improved wellbeing.



Established in June 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, the choir was initially launched as a 12-week virtual programme to help combat isolation and provide additional support for adoptive families and adoption practitioners during a particularly challenging period. Led by professional vocal coach, actor and foster carer Megan Tanner, weekly online sessions created opportunities for participants to sing together, learn new songs and build relationships with others who shared similar experiences.

What began as a short-term initiative quickly evolved into a valued support network. Members consistently reported improved confidence, reduced feelings of isolation and stronger connections with fellow adopters and professionals. For many, the choir became much more than a singing group, serving as an important source of friendship, encouragement and emotional resilience.

Today, the Adopt London Choir continues to demonstrate the value of creative, community-based support. Its success lies not only in the music created by members but in its ability to reduce social

isolation, strengthen peer networks and promote wellbeing among those involved in adoption across London.

Member quotes

Jay – *‘This choir has become so much more than a weekly singing group. It has evolved into a community of people connected by some of life’s most challenging parenting journeys. As adoptive parents and carers, many of us live with experiences that can feel isolating and difficult for others to fully understand. Within this choir, we have found something precious: a space where we can be ourselves without explanation, where joy and sorrow can sit side by side and where we are met with understanding rather than judgement.*

*Singing
We lift
I can h
to carr
gratefu*

Trish – *‘This is so much more than a choir. It’s a family, a supportive community, a port in a storm. We’re here for each other. We understand each other’s challenges. The singing is a bonus with all the mental health benefits.’*

s this choir truly special is the community that has grown around it. one another too.

I groups I hav ever belonged to. It reminds me that none of us has on and under ing found here are invaluable and I am deeply

Amanda – *‘Adopt London Choir is a support group as much as it is a choir. Everyone listens to what each other are going through and understands, as we all have our own similar challenges. There is no explaining or justifying needed as everyone just gets it. Every week we have the opportunity to share our successes and challenges which is invaluable..... Through choir I have made local contacts who I now meet up with. My whole family is involved in choir and it’s a lovely way for us to connect as a family.*

6.14 Black Adoption Project

The Black Adoption Project is a long-term commitment by Adopt London to address the significant disparities experienced by Black children and families within the adoption system, including lower of adoption, longer waiting times for children, and lower retention amongst Black prospective adopters. Thanks to receiving Adoption England grant funding for a second year, the Black Adoption Project was able to recruit a Business Co-ordinator to the existing Programme Lead, increasing our capacity to progress projects and embed changes in Adopt London systems whilst



rates
rates

join
pilot

developing evidence about what works. Gradually, the Black Adoption Project is building systems-wide support across the adoption process with the aim of transforming the support available to prospective adopters and therefore the outcomes for Black children with a care plan of adoption. This section of the report highlights some of the Black Adoption Project's key achievements during 2025/26 including:

- Development of Black prospective adopter recruitment and engagement events
- Ongoing delivery and completed evaluation of 'Let's Talk About Adoption'
- Launch of 'Exploring My Black Identity' programme for young people
- Workforce development partnership focused on 'Requisite Black Parenting' research.

The Black Adoption Project's use of the word 'Black':

When we say 'Black', we use it as a broad and inclusive term. This includes people who identify as Black, mixed-race Black, or have Black heritage through their family background. The Black Adoption Project also welcomes people of any racial background who have a Black partner. We use the term 'Black' to help people quickly understand whether our support is right for them, but we recognise that Black people come from many cultures, countries and lived experiences and we celebrate all these differences.

6.14.1 Strengthening our community of Black adoptive parents

Through the Project we have developed a community of experienced Black adoptive parents who are passionate about supporting others to adopt and improving experiences. This community grows each year and are available to contribute to different areas of work, give advice as part of our Adoptive Parent Stakeholder Group, and meet to build connection and peer support through our social events. This group are the backbone of the Black Adoption Project and critical to every project we develop. Some of the questions discussed in depth by the Adoptive Parenting Stakeholder Group this year are:

- What gave you the confidence to move from an interest in adoption to an application?
- Were Black adopters or professionals represented in your process? What this important?
- What support did you get during the assessment process and what else was needed?
- How have you supported your child's sense of identity as a Black, adopted young person?
- As an adoptive family, what experiences have you had with friends and family?
- Have you tried to access adoption support and what was this like?
- Were you able to access culturally appropriate adoption support?

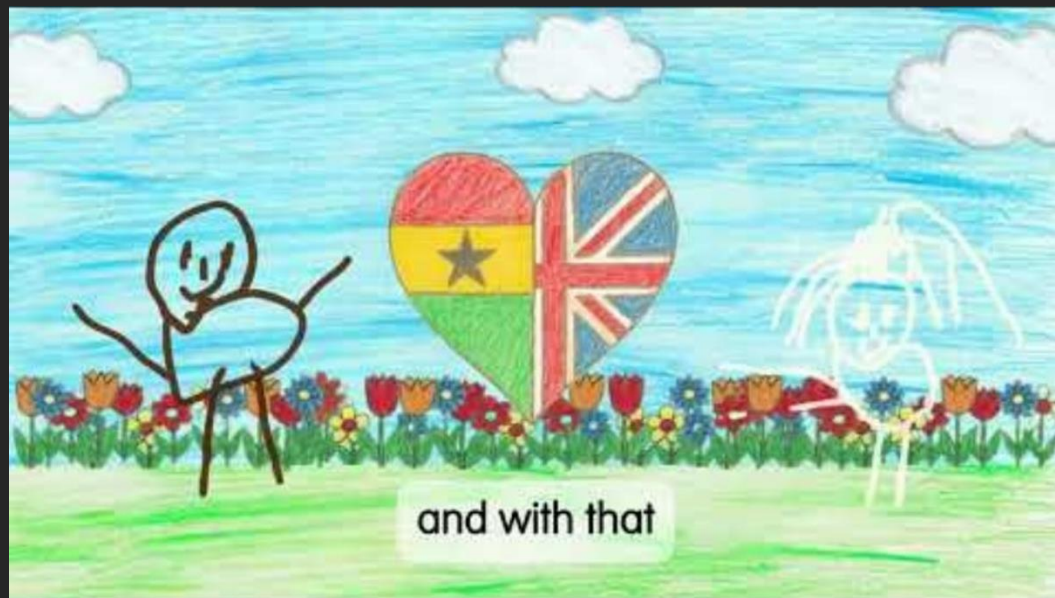
"I was relieved to find the details of the Black Adoption Project; relieved the change I seek, is actively sought by others with greater knowledge of the adoption system, expertise, combined resources, and a passion for Black children and thriving Black families. I want in!"

"From the start of our family's adoption journey, it was always clear to me that it is almost impossible to navigate the immense amount of barriers without the support of family and community."

6.14.2 Listening to the voices of Black adoptive parents

This year the Black Adoption Project’s community of adoptive parents came together to develop a short film which features adoptive parent’s voices alongside illustrations drawn by their own children. This powerful and fun film shows the wide range of different family types and experiences within the group and highlights their passion to encourage other people to consider adoption.

Please take a moment to watch and share it with others.



6.14.3 Providing information to those interested in adoption

At the very start of the adoption process we are working to create spaces where Black individuals and couples feel safe and comfortable taking a first step to find out more about adoption. A key strand of this work has been the development and ongoing delivery of Black Adoption Project ‘Meet the Adopters’ events, which provide a welcoming, low-pressure opportunity for people to hear directly from Black adopters about their experiences and to ask honest questions about adoption.



This approach recognises how important representation is. The events are led by Black adopters and focus on providing visible role models, honest lived experience and culturally relevant discussion. Feedback has consistently shown that prospective adopters value hearing from people ‘like themselves’, which gives them the confidence to explore further. We have implemented follow-up surveys and interviews to understand what encourages people to move from initial interest into formal enquiry and assessment.

Alongside these events, the Project has developed buddying opportunities, strengthened information available on our website and through social media, and to produced community-focused resources.

“It was helpful to learn that our questions were other people's questions. We have been to a few info sessions that were more about the steps in the process so the space being focused on just asking questions was great. As a mixed person in a relationship with a white person, feeling that it is important to me to adopt a mixed child or a Black child, it felt supportive to be in that space.”

“It was good to hear from everyday people like us what that process was like for them... We felt like we had pages and pages of notes after the Meet the Adopters because it was just giving us information or nuances that we didn't know before.”

“Being able to see people who look like you go through the adoption process, I think it's very beneficial.”

6.14.4 Supporting Black, mixed and Black adopters

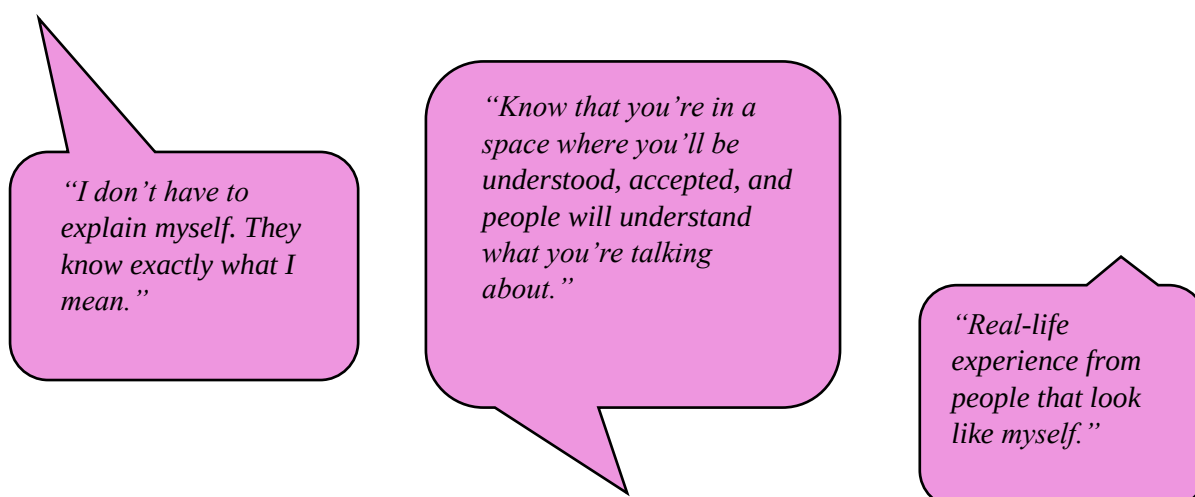
**Let's Talk
About
Adoption**
For Prospective Black Adopters

Another of the project's main focuses has been improving the experience of Black prospective adopters once they enter the assessment process. We have done this through:

- Working with experienced parents to co-design a support group for prospective Black adopters
- Training and development of Black adoptive parents as group facilitators
- Launch and ongoing delivery of the 'Let's Talk About Adoption' peer support group
- Completion of a formal evaluation for the group after the first phase
- Expansion of group support beyond approval into the early placement period.

Feedback from participants consistently highlights the value of role models, peer support and having a safe space to discuss experiences of race, identity and adoption with people who share similar lived experience.

We aim to continue to deliver and develop this group to ensure additional support is available for all Black prospective adopters being assessed by Adopt London, with the aim of ensuring more families feel well supported through the process, go on to be approved, and ultimately to adopt a child.



6.14.5 Supporting Black adopted children and young people

Alongside our focus on the recruitment side of the adoption process, the Black Adoption Project aims to create safe, culturally specific support spaces for adoptive families. The creation of these spaces and the commitment behind them both strengthens existing Black adoptive families and gives confidence to those just starting their adoption journey.

Our children and young people's groups launched in Spring 2025 for those age 8 – 19 years, have worked together to create their own group names and plan future sessions and activities. The groups meet monthly on a Saturday, welcoming adopted young people from across London to a space where they can truly be themselves, with both their adopted and their Black identities welcomed and celebrated.



This year we also invested heavily in launching ‘Exploring My Black Identity’ – an 8 week Black history education programme for young people aged 14 – 19 years. Launched in February and running until May 2026, this programme has been running fortnightly on a Saturday across a whole day to introduce young people to Black experts across a range of topics which they have chosen to learn about. Topics include music and pop culture; hair, style and self-expression; Black British and global history; resistance, joy & pride; and this history of Black adoption. The programme is supported by a therapist and is being formally evaluated by the University of East London. We look forward to sharing more once the programme and evaluation are complete.



6.14.6 Requisite Black Parenting model

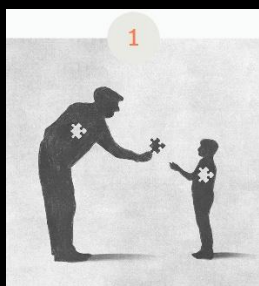
Requisite Parenting is an evidence-informed Black parenting approach developed by Dr Cynthia Okpokiri through research with Black parents and children in England. While it builds on established parenting theories, it extends them by recognising the unique realities of raising Black children in societies where experiences of racism, discrimination and inequality can significantly shape family life. Requisite Parenting was developed in response to concerns that traditional parenting models often fail to account for these structural factors, leaving important aspects of Black families' experiences overlooked.

As part of the Black Adoption Project's workforce development strand, in 2025/26 we partnered with Dr Okpokiri to run a series of reflective workshops with our assessing social workers. The workshops provided a space for social workers to think critically about their role in assessing Black prospective adopters, utilising the concepts from the Requisite Parenting model.

Requisite Parenting is underpinned by:

- A strengths-based, culturally responsive framework
- Six core principles that represent essential attributes of positive Black parenting

- Recognition of the impact of structural factors such as racism and poverty on parenting experiences
- Research evidence demonstrating its relevance and credibility among Black children, parents and professionals.



Selfless love



Pride



Adaptability



Resourcefulness



Courage



Spirituality

You can read more about Requisite Parenting by following these links:



6.14.7 Challenges and ongoing priorities

Despite significant progress, important and urgent challenges remain. Creating an adoption system which is fair and equitable and in which Black children experience the same outcomes as other children is a long-term commitment. Without this work Black children will continue to experience

longer delays before moving into an adoptive family and be less likely to be adopted at all; both factors which have a significant negative impact on a range of long-term outcomes.

Key challenges for the Black Adoption Project are:

- **Change is needed urgently:** There are Black children with care plans of adoption now, waiting for us to identify suitable adoptive families, but we do not have enough approved adoptive families waiting. The timescale for these children is urgent.
- **Funding is limited and short-term:** The Project is delivered with the equivalent of 2.2 full-time equivalent staff and there is no funding commitment beyond summer 2027. This greatly limits the pace and reach of work and makes it hard to plan for the future.
- **The context is challenging:** The wider societal and global context is making it more difficult for people to commit to adoption at all, and Black communities experience additional barriers to adoption created by discrimination and injustice in wider society. The Black Adoption Project has no control over these factors.
- **Evidencing change can be slow:** Systems change is long-term work, and adoption is a slow process, which means that we won't see miraculous changes quickly. Most people considering adoption take years to think about it and prepare other aspects of their lives before committing to an adoption assessment – this makes it essential that we continue to invest in change now, so that we see change in years to come.

Despite these challenges, the Black Adoption Project has built a strong foundation which is increasingly recognised and trusted by Black individuals and couples considering adoption. In 2026/27 we will continue to build on our existing successful pilot initiatives, focusing on the experiences of those first approaching adoption and identifying ways for the Black Adoption Project to scaffold their journey through the early stages of the process. We also look forward to sharing formal evaluation reports for several of our pilot projects, alongside more informal learning from other areas of our work.

You can find out more about the Black Adoption Project by:

- Looking at our [website](#)
- Following and supporting us on Instagram or LinkedIn @BlackAdoptionProject
- Sign up to our [mailing list](#)

6.15 Adopt London brand



Our shared marketing and communications team work together to ensure that the Adopt London brand continues to be recognised as a strong partnership of regional adoption agencies. A shared website continues to maximise opportunities for anyone considering adoption in London to

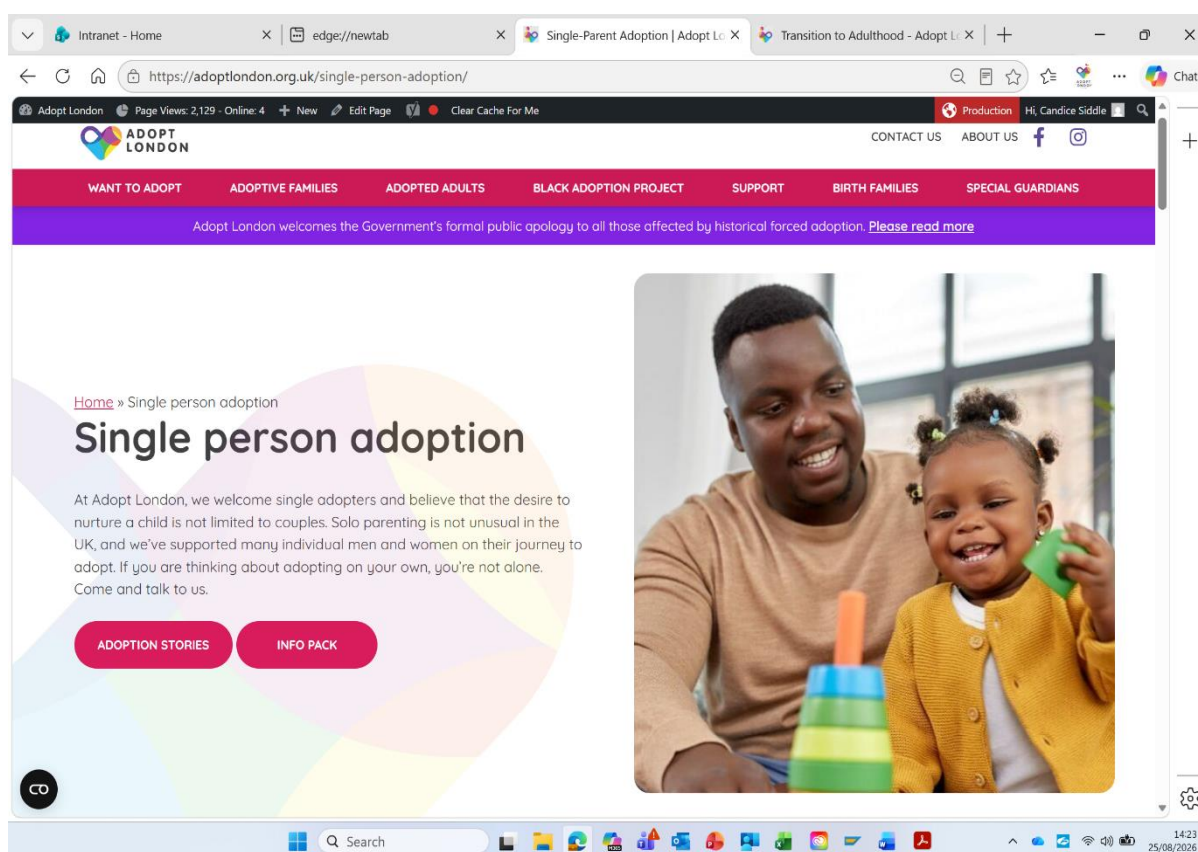
easily find us.

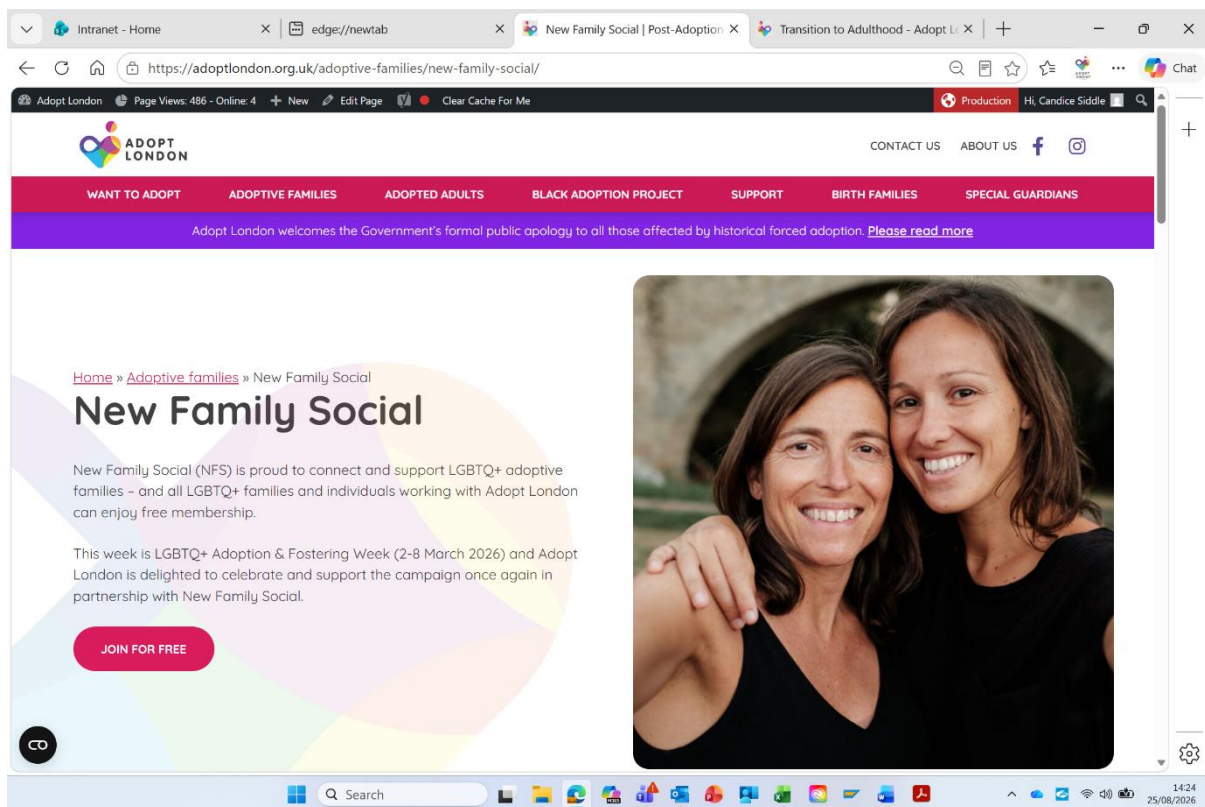
A shared recruitment and communications strategy focuses on recognising and championing the diversity of the London region and the needs of London children.

6.15.1 Website Development and Digital Engagement

During 2025/26, Adopt London significantly enhanced its website to improve the experience of prospective adopters, adopted people, and families seeking information and support. The website was expanded through the creation of **11 new webpages**, providing clearer pathways to information, improving accessibility, and strengthening targeted recruitment and engagement activity.

Key developments included the enhancement of the **adopter recruitment section**, with new landing pages designed to support specific audiences, including **single people, transracial adoption**, prospective adopters seeking information about **eligibility, summary page for domestic adoption**. This additional content was developed to help families better understand the adoption journey and navigate the process from initial enquiry through to registration of interest.





The **Black Adoption Project** section saw substantial growth, with the introduction of dedicated pages **Meet The Team, Our Work, Our History** highlighting the project's aims, history, achievements, team members, and community activities, including its **Saturday groups**. These developments have strengthened awareness of the work being undertaken to engage, support, and recruit Black adopters, while providing a richer representation of the voices and experiences of Black families within adoption.

Further website improvements included the continued development of resources for LGBTQ+ prospective adopters and families. A **New Family Social** webpage was launched to showcase the group's activities, promote peer support opportunities, and encourage membership and engagement from LGBTQ+ individuals and families considering or experiencing adoption.

The expanded website has improved access to information for prospective adopters and families, strengthened targeted recruitment activity, increased visibility of specialist programmes including the Black Adoption Project and LGBTQ+ support networks, and provided clearer digital pathways for people seeking to learn more about adoption and the support available through Adopt London. The enhanced online presence supports Adopt London's commitment to inclusive engagement, accessibility, and reaching a diverse range of prospective adopters and families.

6.15.2 Enhanced Website Functionality and User Experience

Alongside the creation of 11 new webpages during 2025/26, Adopt London introduced a range of enhanced website features designed to improve navigation, personalise content, and provide visitors with easier access to relevant information and support.

The new functionality enables content to be tailored to specific audiences and embedded directly within key webpages. Visitors can now access **frequently asked questions, adoption stories, case studies, news articles, blogs, resources, podcasts, books, and events** relevant to their interests without having to search across multiple sections of the website.

For example, prospective adopters visiting the LGBTQ+ adoption pages can access tailored frequently asked questions from LGBTQ+ adopters, read relevant adoption stories and case studies, find recommended books and podcasts, and view the latest news, events, and support opportunities available to the community. Similar enhancements have been introduced across other priority areas of the website, ensuring users can quickly find information that reflects their circumstances and interests.

The improvements create a more dynamic and engaging digital experience, allowing users to explore adoption topics in greater depth while accessing practical information, lived experiences, and specialist resources in one place. This approach helps prospective adopters make informed decisions, increases engagement with support services, and encourages visitors to continue their adoption journey with confidence.

These new website features have transformed the website from a primarily informational platform into a richer, user-centred resource hub. By presenting tailored content, lived experience stories, expert resources, and relevant support opportunities alongside core information, Adopt London has improved user engagement, strengthened accessibility to adoption support, and enhanced the ability of prospective adopters and families to find the information most relevant to their needs.

6.16 Partnerships with Voluntary adoption agencies and Adoption Support Agencies

ALW commissions a service from PAC UK which includes:

- An advice line, supporting adopted adults and birth parents'
- Counselling services for anyone affected by Adoption or Special Guardianship arrangements living in any of the 4 partner boroughs.





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

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



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

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

6.17 Adopt London West

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

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

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

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

6.17.1 Keeping in Touch – 'KIT'

ALW's approach to Keeping in Touch arrangements has been commended nationally, this remains a priority for ongoing development within the ALW partnership and is influencing practice in other areas of the country. The following summaries some of the activities in 2025/26

- **Presentation to West London Family Justice board followed by**
- **National MOJ conference for Family Justice Boards: November 2025;** Presented ALW's approach to Keeping in Touch alongside Adoption England, invited back to present our work with kinship carers.
- **London CAFCASS; October 2025;** Presented to meeting of all London CAFCASS guardians on Keeping in Touch, Identity, Life Story
- **ALW reviewed and will feature as a case study in** Research in Practice's guide to Kinship Care

6.17.2 Supporting practice

ALW staff have been supporting colleagues our 4 partner local authorities in shaping the local kinship offers and supporting staff development in the transitions to Family First. In addition to the ALW core offer of 10 lunch and learns per year on a variety of topics, we have also delivered bespoke training and consultancy across teams. Examples include:

- IROs: bringing together IROs from across the LAs; starting quarterly meetings, first meeting was around children's identities
- Joined Brent permanence leads in their all staff Families First training programme
- Contributing to Hounslow's improvement board for special guardians
- Setting up 1:1 meetings with all H&F IROs on specific topics
- Supporting Ealing with Southall pilot, linking with Early Help
- Chairing bi-monthly meetings with virtual school colleagues, sharing practice
- 'Weekenders' supporting Ealing and LBHF to include Special Guardianship children in the weekenders' programme.
- 'Booktrust story explorers' project ; monthly packages of free books and activities for children aged 2-4 to promote bonding. 55 ALW children receive this; 37 adoptees, 15 children living with Special Guardians, 3 children living with birth family.
- Brent - 17 Children
- Ealing - 15 children
- H&F – 7 children
- Hounslow – 16 children
- Siblings' Day at CORAM – October 2025, the day was organised by Coram, supported by ALW staff who attended, the event was for families to connect with other families, where siblings have been placed separately. A Hounslow adoptive family were able to connect with their child's older sibling, living elsewhere.

The family's social worker 'my adopters really enjoyed this and found it extremely helpful and have started to make a good connection with their child's sibling and her adopters.'

The adopted young person said about the day was 'My best day ever!'

6.17.3 KIT casework

There continues to be an increase in the referrals for keeping in touch support for children and their families. Evidence from research and the voices of adoptees and adopted adults is positively influencing practice to be more open as we now have a much richer understand of children's needs to understand their complex identities and life stories. Practice has shifted and continues to do so, for example

- Encouraging children to stay in contact with their foster carers (based on child-centred and thoughtful transitions)
- Supporting adopters and birth families to meet, some regularly. These meetings support adopters to talk about their child's birth families and humanises both sides.
- Focus on supporting relationships between brothers and sisters

In addition to changing practice for new families, we have seen an increasing number of adopters/ children requesting increased contact e.g. sharing of videos, adults meeting as a pathway to children seeing their families.

6.17.4 KIT arrangements

Indirect arrangements – overall numbers

2023/24	334
2024/25	489
2025/26	659

Indirect arrangements (Adoption) 2025/26	
Brent	153
Ealing	181
H&F	100
Hounslow	225
Total	659

Direct arrangements (Adoption) 2025/26	
Brent	29
Ealing	46
H&F	22
Hounslow	106
Total	243

There are also a further combined number of KIT arrangements for Special Guardians, that figure for 2025/26 = 157

Brent	29
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Ealing	46
H&F	55
Hounslow	27

6.17.5 Special Guardianship Support



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

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

Brent – 14

Ealing – 19

Hammersmith & Fulham –17

Hounslow - 8

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

6.17.6 Group work

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

May 2025 – Supporting transitions big and small and selecting a new school

June 2025 – Your child's friendships

October 2025 – Home/School partnerships – how to work well with your school

November 2025 - Helping your school to be more trauma-aware

January 2026 – Supporting children with anxiety around school

March 2026 Understanding Special Educational Needs and Education, Health & Care Plans

Parents and carers tell us that the group is a helpful forum to understand how to meet their children's educational needs and get the best out of school, as well as meeting people and learning from their experiences. Those who attend have expressed that they find the sessions greatly beneficial, and parents

of siblings may attend the same topic twice. We also have adopters who may have moved out of our support area that choose to continue attending.

6.17.7 Foundations for Attachment therapeutic parenting courses 2025/26:

ALW have run 3 Foundations for Attachment courses throughout the year for adopters and special guardians, the courses are jointly facilitated by a Clinical Psychologist and a social worker, the course is an evidence-based Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) informed programme, based on the DDP practice model developed by Dan Hughes (2009, 2011). The aim is to provide carers/parents with an opportunity to hear ideas, learn new strategies and to meet other parents and carers who may be struggling to understand their child's behaviour, facilitators aim to provide a safe sharing environment and help the carers/parents become more confident in getting to know their child's inner world, explore therapeutic parenting strategies and techniques, feedback is consistently positive.

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.

6.17.8 Chorus Adoption Parent-Toddler Group (APTG) – a parent/carer-toddler group, with weekly therapeutic playgroup sessions to families, with professional observation to help the adult 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 in mind. The group was funded via the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF).

7. Clinical Psychology in ALW

Adopt London West's embedded NHS Clinical Psychologist (0.6 WTE) provides a Tier 2 CAMHS, consultation led service, supporting both social work staff and adoptive/special guardianship families. Following a period of reduced provision due to maternity leave, service delivery resumed in October 2025.

7.1 Key activity and impact

- **Social work consultation:** 19 consultations supported life story work, prospective adopter assessments, therapeutic recommendations, understanding children's emotional and behavioural needs, and implementation of the UEA Moving to Adoption Model. Feedback highlighted improved reflective thinking, planning, and understanding of carers' experiences.

*"The consultation was helpful. Helped me in mentalising how the foster carer was feeling, which I had lost sight of."
"Thorough discussion and write-up in response to query.
Helped me plan next steps."*

- **Reflective practice:** Regular reflective practice sessions were facilitated for the social work team, providing a dedicated space to consider the emotional impact and complexity of adoption and special guardianship work, strengthen reflective capacity, and support staff wellbeing.
- **Adopter preparation and training:** Psychology-led sessions explored developmental trauma, therapeutic parenting, and the post-adoption parenting experience, including the emotional responses that can arise for adoptive parents. Feedback from prospective adopters indicates that these learning opportunities have encouraged reflection, increased self-awareness, and enhanced understanding of developmental trauma and relationship-based parenting approaches. Participants also demonstrated greater recognition of the importance of parental self-regulation when responding to children's needs and behaviours.

"The section dealing with attachment styles was also very informative and made me reflect on my own attachment style and how my upbringing helped shape it. I need to be more aware of this and my own emotional response, as sometimes a child's behaviour may activate these negatively, and my ability to stay regulated will be crucial."

- **Direct therapeutic support:** ASGSF-funded interventions included psychological assessment and formulation, attachment-focused group work through the delivery of Foundations for Attachment, and Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy informed interventions. Families reported feeling understood, supported, and better equipped to meet their children's needs.

"[name of clin psych] is an attentive listener and understood my child's issues and was in turn able to help me understand and guide me on how to support my child"

“We’ve very much enjoyed working with [xxx]. She not only listened to our concerns but also took the time to clarify her understanding by asking follow-up questions and, at times, rephrasing questions to ensure she had understood our perspective. She also encouraged us to look at situations from different angles. Throughout the process, we felt heard and supported.”

7.2 Case Study Summary: D

D is a 12-year-old girl living with her paternal grandmother under a Special Guardianship Order. Due to early experiences of relational trauma, loss and instability, she experiences difficulties trusting adults, managing emotions and often experiences emotional overwhelm at home and school, and maintaining friendships. Irregular family-time with her birth mother contributes to feelings of uncertainty. D’s grandmother reported challenges in knowing how best to support her when she feels sad, lonely or distressed.

Clinical psychology support focused on strengthening the caregiver-child relationship through a Dyadic Developmental Parenting intervention. Work with D’s grandmother helped her develop a more curious, empathic and responsive understanding of D’s emotional needs, while supporting meaningful conversations about D’s experiences at school, relationship with her birth mother and her life story. Clinical psychology also facilitated multi-agency coordination between social care, CAMHS and school, and supported the school to consider additional relational strategies and transition planning.

As a result, D’s grandmother reported feeling more able to respond to D with empathy and compassion during difficult interactions, leading to a deeper understanding of D’s experiences and emotions. She also described the intervention as beneficial for her own wellbeing, increasing her confidence and capacity to support D effectively.

8. Adoption Panel

The ALW Adoption panel hears recommendations on.

Proposed matches of children with prospective adopters

Adoption as a suitable care plan for children whose parent/s have consented to adoption (formerly referred to as relinquished babies)

Suitability of prospective adopters to be approved

Reviews of adopters and recommendations to rescind approval.

21 ALW Panels from 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026, running every 3 weeks, with due consideration to the need for additional panels, as per the demand by ALW in ensuring that decisions are made in a timely and effective manner.

8.1 Children

This year a total of 29 children were matched, (matches and placements can occur in different reporting years so numbers do not correlate with other sections of the report). The panel also considered the suitability of 23 families to adopt (an increase of 5 compared to 24/25) in addition the panel considered 2 plans of Adoption for children - 1 Brent and 1 Ealing child.

8.2 Panel feedback to ALW / quality of reports

Following each case, the Panel has submitted its feedback to the ALW Head of Service and the child's responsible LA in case of a match, inviting all to consider this and return it back with any comments for the Panel to then further considered in the future and improve their practice. The aim is for this be considered at the next Panel meeting and learning from the Heads of Service feedback taken on board.

This year a new panel adviser has been recruited and took over from the long standing panel adviser in June 2025. As part of ensuring continuity and building good working relationships a post-panel meeting takes place after each panel which is attended by the Adviser, Chair and all available managers from ALW. The purpose is to have an immediate debrief from the cases heard that day, identify any follow up needed and to plan for the next panel. This has been working well, particularly as having a new adviser and chair has meant that some changes to functioning and style of delivery have been made.

8.3 Themes

Quality of Reports – reports received from both teams are consistently of good quality with occasional specific advice needed from the Panel Adviser. Panel members often report that the reports reflect the applicants they meet at panel.

Transcultural placements – the majority of matches heard by panel this year, do have considerations for how the adopters will meet the diverse identity needs of their adopted child. There is strong focus on this from panel members, who are able to use their lived experiences in their question formulation. Panel welcome the anticipated change in document from the Transracial document to a more inclusive document which considers all of the child's identity needs.

Early Permanence placements – It has been noted that in a few Early Permanence placements that this has been the chosen route due to delays in getting matches to Panel. The Panel appreciates the difference in presentation, clarity and confidence of adopters who attend the Panel for a match when they have a child in placement, as the discussion then is based on practical examples, as opposed to theoretical knowledge only.

Commitment to Early Support – The Panel recognises ALW's commitment to this via the early guide to adoption and the consultations with a clinical psychologist offered to adopters.

Medical consultations between adopters and the medical adviser – In all matches that have been presented to panel in this period the adopters have been able to meet with the medical advisor to talk through their child's long term health needs prior to panel. In one case, the match was postponed allowing the adopters more time to consider the challenges that may come. Panel recognise the importance of adopters feeling supported to understand as much as they can at this time and to be able to share with panel any reservations or outstanding questions they may have.

Panel membership - There have been some changes to panel membership, specifically in relation to Social Work representatives which has prompted the recruitment of new panel members to the central list, adding new perspectives and experience to the reviewing process as well as increasing the central list to ensure quoracy at panel.

Timescales - While ALW has not always been able to meet the target of the DfE adoption scorecards, the Panel knows that ALW and its partners are working hard to address any delays and increase the number of adopters and matches for those children with adoption plans/Placement Orders. The Panel will always work flexibly to ensure that no delays are incurred by its process, and it has welcomed the use of Early Permanence Placements for some children where this was an appropriate placement choice.

CPR's - effective writing of Child Permanence Reports (CPR) continues to be an area of development for the Children in Care Social Workers at the four local authorities that are part of ALW. The Panel Adviser and the Panel always provide constructive feedback on this, as there is real variance between the quality of these reports, so this will be kept under constant review to ensure that Child Permanence Reports continue to serve their multipurpose.

8.4 Training (NMS 23.13–23.16)

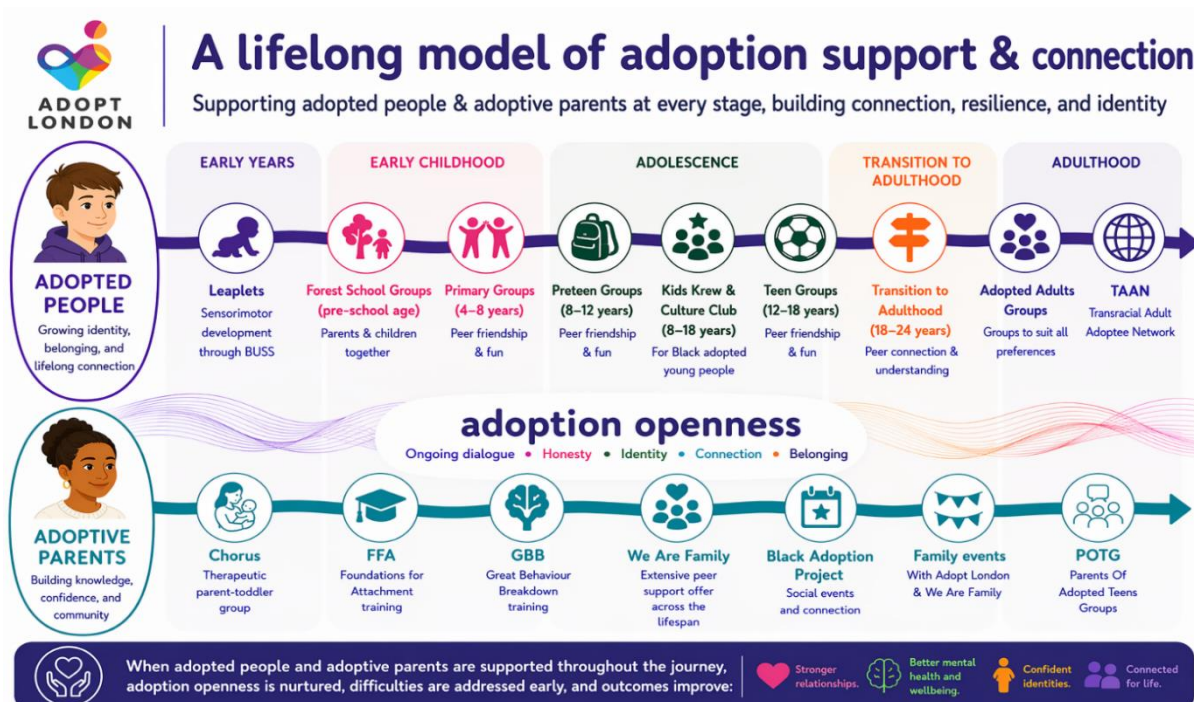
The Chair and Adviser take part in the CoramBAAF national Practice Forum, considering new research, case and literature reviews and focusing on good practice ideas.

The Panel Coordination is also part of a national working group for practice coordinators, following which will meet with the Adviser to discuss any good practice ideas for us to consider.

In addition to the annual joint training day (November 2025) across Adopt London, a bespoke training programme for ALW has been planned for panel members. This will comprise of bitesize workshops. The first workshop was on preparation for Panel which explored cultural bias and the formation/appropriateness of questions.

9. Priorities for 2026/27

- *Complete ALW service review and finance modelling.*
- *Continue to lead and influence practice development in Keeping in Touch arrangements for children.*
- *Continue to lead the Adopt London Multi- Disciplinary team and implement plans to integrate therapeutically informed social work practice model across London.*
- *Develop understanding of sensory processing difficulties in children who have experienced developmental trauma through the delivery of BUSS to both staff and families*
- *Extend the offer of group work interventions for families by delivering the Great Behaviour Breakdown and Non-Violence Resistance programmes*
- *Lead the pan- regional innovation grant project across London including appointing a youth worker to progress peer support and voice and influence opportunities for adopted children and young people. As illustrated in the infographic below*
- *Progress Adopt London's ambition to design and implement a lifelong model of adoption support and connection shown in the infographic below*



Priority for 2026/27	Where this stems from in the report
Complete ALW service review and finance modelling.	This stems from section 3, which explains that the financial contribution formula review began in early 2025 and continues at the time of writing. It is also linked to section 3.2, where inter-agency placement costs, the payment arrangements between partner local authorities, and the need for an equitable future approach are identified as part of the financial modelling work.
Continue to lead and influence practice development in Keeping in Touch arrangements for children.	This stems from sections 6.17.1 to 6.17.4, which describe ALW's nationally commended Keeping in Touch practice, regional and national presentations, increasing referrals for KIT support, and the significant growth in indirect arrangements from 334 in 2023/24 to 659 in 2025/26, alongside direct adoption and special guardianship arrangements.
Continue to lead the Adopt London Multi-Disciplinary Team and implement plans to integrate a therapeutically informed social work practice model across London.	This stems from sections 6.3 and 6.4, which set out ALW's leadership of successful Adoption England development funding bids for MDT interventions, the expansion of the clinical hub with psychologists and occupational therapy input, and the early impact of 44 consultations reaching professionals, foster carers and adopters. It also links to section 7, where the embedded Clinical Psychologist's consultation, reflective practice, adopter preparation and direct therapeutic support are described.
Develop understanding of sensory processing difficulties in children who have experienced developmental trauma through the delivery of BUSS to both staff and families.	This stems from section 6.2, where the Adopt London Staff Conference introduced the BUSS® model and Level 1 BUSS® training was commissioned for September 2026. It also links to section 6.3, which states that further funding will support skills training for social workers in the BUSS® model as part of the clinical hub development.
Extend the offer of group work interventions for families by delivering the Great Behaviour Breakdown and Non-Violence Resistance programmes.	This stems from sections 6.3 and 6.17.6 to 6.17.8. Section 6.3 records that social workers and adopters were trained to deliver the Great Behaviour Breakdown programme to strengthen the core support offer and reduce reliance on externally commissioned provision. Sections 6.17.6 to 6.17.8 evidence ALW's existing group work offer, including education support, Foundations for Attachment and therapeutic parent-toddler support, providing the platform for further group interventions.
Lead the pan-regional innovation grant project across London, including appointing a youth worker to progress peer support and voice and influence opportunities for adopted children and young people.	This stems from section 6.3, which explains that pan-regional innovation funding has supported clinical leadership, commissioning, training and peer support programmes for young people. It specifically notes that funding for 2026/27 and 2027/28 will enable the creation of a senior youth worker post to develop adoptee peer spaces from babyhood to adulthood. It also

links to the national emphasis on voice and influence set out in section 5.1.

10. Feedback

"I'll just keep it at this, not all superheroes wear capes! We are so grateful for your help and proactivity in making this and many other things happen. Thank you for passing our feedback to the rest of the team. Bravo to you all!"

"We treasure all the help, support and advocacy you have furnished and provided us with. You have been a fierce and super amazing advocate and supporter in our times of need. We will never forget that. It is reassuring as well to know that should further help be required, we can always call on you, and you will be available"

"Thank you for your help, support and advocacy over the course of this year. Words cannot convey or express fully how grateful and appreciative we are. It's been great to work with you too - you've made everything so easy and helpful, and made us feel like we're entitled to the help we've been getting"

"I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for putting me in touch with S. It has meant the world to me. You are like a secret angel. You are such a passionate and amazing champion and advocate for our fight regarding T. We could not do it without your support. We really appreciate you and your efforts"

Birth parents:

"I'm sure a big part of your jobs is often difficult, but please know that our small corner of the world will always be grateful beyond belief for what you did for us by finding and reconnecting us"

"Thank you very much for doing a great job with me having contact with my daughter"

"At one point, everyone, including my family, had given up on me, but you continued to stay in steady contact with me, and that means so much to me. Just writing this and thinking about it has brought tears to my eyes"

Debbie Gabriel
Head of Service
September 2026

	Corporate Parenting Committee 12 October 2026
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development
	Lead Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Employment and Climate Action - Cllr Jake Rubin
Brent Fostering Service 6-monthly Monitoring Report: 01 April 2026 to 30 September 2026	

Wards Affected:	ALL
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	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:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Kelli Eboji Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Kelli.Eboji@brent.gov.uk Tom Donovan Service Manager, Looked After Children and Permanency Tom.Donovan@brent.gov.uk Palvinder Kudhail Director, Early Help and Social Care Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

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

Additionally, the report outlines the developments that have taken place in the Service throughout the year, as well as any planned initiatives for the upcoming period. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).

- 1.2 Brent Fostering Service operates in accordance with the Fostering National Minimum Standards, the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. These regulations are the foundation of the regulatory framework for fostering services under the Care Standards Act 2000. This report details the activity of Brent's fostering service from the 1 April to 30 September 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's 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 set the following service priorities for 2026/2027:

- To maintain a strong focus on recruitment, assessment and approval of new foster carers, in partnership with Foster with West London (FwWL), keeping our target of **10** new carers by the end of the financial year.
- To enhance the support offered 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.

4.1.2 Progress against these priorities in this reporting period include:

- The service has recruited 3 carers this period. There are 6 assessments in progress as well as 3 potential carers who are at the initial visit stage considering progressing to an assessment. 0 foster carers have resigned in this period, and 0 foster carers were deregistered by the service. The net increase for this financial year so far is 3.
- Brent's fostering offer is competitive and is well received by Brent foster carers. In this period the department undertook a market evaluation exercise and increased Brent fostering fees by 3% (1.5% on the carer's element, 1.5% on the child's fees). 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, improved communication around financial payments 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 programme and enjoy the community that is being developed. The department is considering whether a second Mockingbird Constellation can be implemented in Brent to build on the positive progress made by the first constellation.
- Placement stability is good, with short term stability currently at 11.8% in line with national and statistical neighbours. Brent "long term" stability is currently 63.2% which is slightly lower (approx. 5% lower) than national and statistical neighbours. The primary reason for this is due to Brent older

cohort of children entering care.

- 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.
- The completion of mandatory training for approved foster carers was highlighted as an area requiring improvement in the 2026 Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS), and significant progress has been made to date in relation to the recording and monitoring of mandatory training, improved uptake of mandatory training by foster carers in this reporting period. The current training catalogue is robust, and additional training courses are added promptly 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) share a regional fostering hub; FwWL. The Department for Education has asked all Local Authorities to expand the remit of regional fostering hubs to undertake 'end to end' recruitment, which will include assessments of new foster carers. This is due to go live on 1 October 2026.
- A lead fostering social worker works closely with Brent's participation service, creating a link between foster carers, children in placements and the participation offer
- The service has also identified a fostering family as "lead foster carers" for the foster carer support groups and forums. Foster carers utilise support and advice from the lead foster carers; and the lead carers feedback to the service on behalf of carers and supports the service to plan developments for the service.

4.2 Staffing Arrangements

- 4.2.1 The organisational structure of the Fostering Service has undergone a minor change since the last report. The dedicated 0.5 FTE Fostering Recruitment Officer and 0.5 FTE Mockingbird Liaison Officer posts are no longer filled. The Fostering Recruitment Officer post has been held vacant due to expected changes with FwWL and the funding for the Mockingbird Liaison Officer ended. The responsibilities previously undertaken through these roles have been absorbed within the existing team structure, ensuring continuity of service delivery and maintaining the service's recruitment, support and Mockingbird programme functions whilst development with FwWL continues.
- 4.2.2 The Fostering Support and Assessment Team now consists of 8 Supervising Social Workers and one Team Manager. The service continues to be overseen by a Service Manager.
- 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 was filled by an external candidate in September 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 requests for assessments to be completed by private care proceedings in the family court.

4.3 Placement Activity

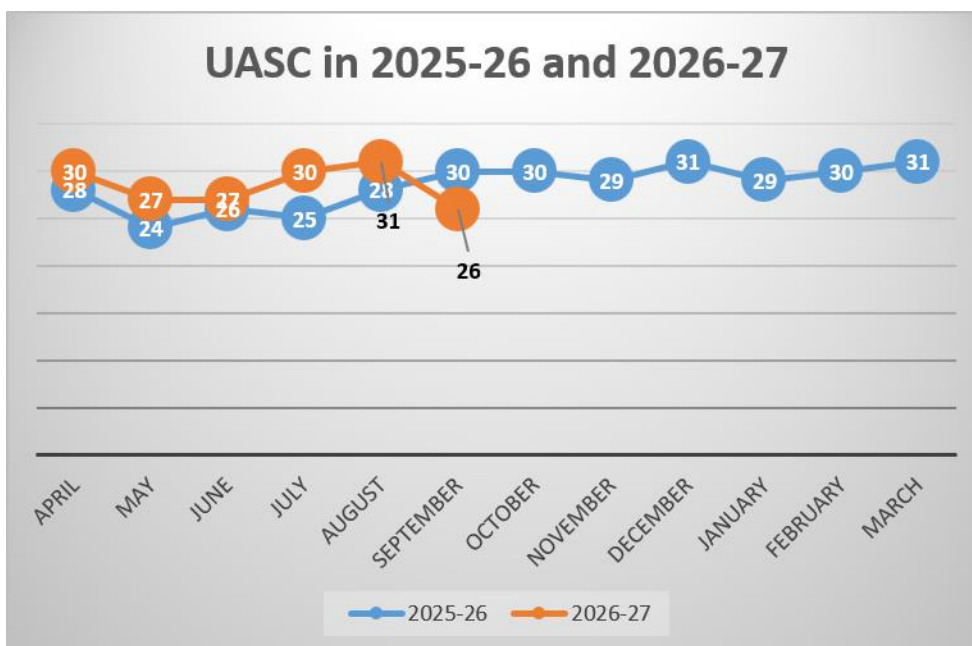
4.3.1 The total number of children in care as of 30/09/2026 was 291, a decrease of 4 children from 295 on 31/03/2026.

4.3.2 The corporate performance targets for 2026-27 are as follows:

- Percentage of children in care placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers as of 30 September 2026 was 17%, same as 31 March 2026. However, this remains below the annual target of 25%
- Percentage of children in care placed with a relative or family friend as of 30 September 2026 was 16.5%, an increase of 6 children (48), _ below the annual target of 20%
- Percentage of children in care placed with independent fostering agencies as of 30 September 2026 was 30% (86 children), same as 31 March 2026
- Percentage of children in care within foster placements as of 30 September 2026 was 62.5% (182 children), an increase of 1.5% from 31 March 2026
- There were 42 children in care placed in registered supported accommodation as of 30 September 2026, same as 31 March 2026. 42 children represent 14.4% of all looked after children placed in registered supported accommodation.

4.3.3 There were 26 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) as of 30 September 2026, a decrease of 4 UASC from 31 March 2026 (30 UASC).

4.3.4 The number of UASC placed in registered supported accommodation as of 30 September 2026 was 13, 6 fewer UASC as of 31 March 2026, none in residential children's homes and 13 UASC placed in foster placements.



4.3.5 As at 30 September 2026 there are 3 children in 2 unregulated kinship foster placements. Details provided in section 4.6.

4.3.6 9 children were made subject to Special Guardianship orders in this reporting period.

4.4 Recruitment and Assessment of new foster carers

Recruitment

4.4.1 During this reporting period, the Brent fostering monthly information evenings have continued virtually on MS Teams. 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. All Brent fostering campaigns complement the campaigns by FwWL to ensure services are not competing with each other. Ideas, resources and best practice are shared across the West London region. 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 remained focussed on raising awareness of fostering across Brent, helping to build engagement and understanding despite ongoing recruitment challenges. The service has undertaken outreach in key areas across Brent.

Libraries Outreach – The service continues to have a presence at libraries across the borough. The service is updated about library campaigns/events to ensure our fostering outreach target the libraries during key times/events.

Community and Faith Outreach - In July 2026 and September 2026, the service attended the Brent Multi-Faith Forum, nurturing valuable links with faith networks. In May 2026 the service attended at an event at Victory Community Church encouraging members of the Christian community in Brent to consider fostering. In June 2026 the service held a stall at Wembley Mosque encouraging members of the Muslim community in Brent to consider fostering. In the next reporting period the service plans to confirm dates with other places of worship across Brent.

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. One potential fostering family currently now in assessment made clear it was this fostering stall at Brent Civic Centre that encouraged her to take steps to be assessed by Brent.

Foster Care Fortnight Campaign - Foster Care Fortnight is a national campaign that runs for 2 weeks every year in May. The purpose of Foster Care Fortnight is to celebrate our existing fostering community, to raise awareness about fostering and to encourage more families to foster. During Foster Care Fortnight 2026 an extensive social media campaign (11-24 May) was delivered by Brent, supported by a news story and local press release, advertising in the Civic Centre Atrium and libraries, and in-person engagement events.

The social media campaign featured four videos (three showcasing current foster carers sharing their experiences and one outlining the support available for foster carers in Brent), alongside one still image quoting a foster carer and directing audiences to an in-depth interview (79 views) about their experience fostering with Brent. Content was shared across LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook.

Combined performance of social media posts across all platforms:

- LinkedIn: 4,034 views/impressions, 70 reactions and 247 clicks
- Facebook: 8,806 views, 26 reactions
- Instagram: 4,447 views, 47 reactions

Notably, LinkedIn generated the highest level of engagement with 70 reactions and 247 clicks through to www.brent.gov.uk/fostering.

During Foster Care Fortnight, on 13th May 2026 a 'Community Brew' event took place at Harmony Kitchen in Brent Civic Centre. The event was open to Brent staff, external professionals and all fostering families. The session provided an opportunity for rich discussions to take place, celebrating fostering stories, as

well as allowing members of the public to hear real life fostering stories from current Brent foster carers.



Queen's Park Day Outreach - The Brent Fostering Team attended Queen's Park Day on 13 September 2026, a free family-friendly community event organised by the Queen's Park Area Residents Association. The fostering outreach stall attracted significant interest throughout the day, providing an excellent opportunity to raise awareness of fostering and promote the need for more foster carers for Brent children. The team engaged with members of the public, answered questions about fostering, shared information on the different fostering options available, and encouraged residents to consider how they could make a positive difference in a child's life.

The event enabled the team to connect with a diverse range of local families and community members, helping to increase understanding of fostering and the vital role foster carers play in supporting vulnerable children and young people. Many visitors stopped by the stall to learn more about the fostering journey and the support available to foster carers.

A highlight of the day was a visit from the Mayor of Brent, Councillor Amer Agha, who took the time to speak with the team about their recruitment efforts and show support for fostering in Brent.



Wembley Jobs Fair Outreach – On 15 September 2026 the fostering service held a stall at the Wembley Jobs Fair at Wembley Stadium. This highly publicised event is well attended by various communities across Brent. At this event the service spoke to members of the public as well as other providers regarding the benefits, flexibility and significant impact fostering has.



Link with Wembley Football Club – One of our Brent fostering families is connected with Wembley Football Club. Through this link the Football Club has offered free promotion of Brent fostering. The service provided ‘warm-up’ T shirts for the players as well as banners for the stadium. Brent fostering is also promoted at key games and events.



In this reporting period the outreach events were organised and undertaken by supervising social workers in the service as the service no longer has a fostering marketing and recruitment officer. From 1 October 2026 Foster with West London (FwWL) will have a FTE dedicated Events and Engagement Officer (EEO) to be shared across all 8 Local Authorities. FwWL have made clear that the Brent fostering service are expected to continue to organise and undertake outreach events but FwWL will also undertake outreach on behalf of Brent. Brent fostering will share local links, local knowledge and other key information to allow the EEO at FwWL to participate in outreach events on behalf of Brent. FwWL have committed to undertaking outreach in Brent once per fortnight under the new end-to-end regional model approach that goes live from 1 October 2026.

Finding Foster Carers using advanced digital marketing:

- 4.4.3 In the last reporting period the service engaged in a 6-month recruitment campaign with CAN Digital between late November 2025 and the end of May 2026. The campaign significantly improved Brent's search visibility in a highly competitive fostering landscape, and enquiry numbers in the first 3 months of the campaign increased significantly, i.e. 3 or 4 times this number prior to the campaign. Unfortunately, despite this increase in enquiries, this did not translate into increased referrals and Initial Visits.

After the first 3-month period the campaign was extended for a further 3 months to properly test this resource, however we saw similar results in the second 3 month period with no translation from enquiry to referral/assessment, and therefore a decision was made to not continue.

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 12 enquiries came to FwWL from individuals who saw this job advert on the Brent website.

FwWL previously 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. Brent foster carers continue to use this App. A FwWL competition took place during Foster Care Fortnight (May 2026); those who downloaded the app were entered into a draw to win £100. One of our Brent foster carers was a lucky winner which helped promote the app in Brent.

Regional Fostering Hub (FwWL)

- 4.4.5 Brent have been part of a regional fostering hub (FwWL) since late 2024. As outlined in the Cabinet Report dated 27 July 2026 (background paper attached) FwWL is expanding to an end-to-end model from 01 October 2026. The Brent Fostering Service has made a substantial contribution to the development of the expanded regional fostering hub, investing significant time and resources through attendance at multiple planning meetings and design forums, providing detailed data and evidence, and sharing local knowledge and expertise. This collaborative approach has helped ensure the hub reflects the needs of Brent's communities and strengthens opportunities to increase the number of fostering households. Brent fostering service will closely monitor the progress of the regional fostering hub to ensure it meets the needs of Brent families.

On 4 February 2026 the Department for Education (DfE) published the paper 'Renewing Fostering: Homes for 10,000 More Children' which outlines reforms to the fostering system in England. As Brent is continuing in our regional fostering hub, the DfE have confirmed that from September 2026 Brent local authority has access to further support from the DfE, including:

- Funding for set-up of a potential new Mockingbird Constellation in Brent. This funding cannot be used to fund the current Brent Mockingbird Constellation. The funding is for financial year 2026/2027 therefore the fostering service is currently evaluating/planning a new constellation.
- Funding, under the Room Makers scheme, to support approximately 3 fostering households with home improvements to create more fostering space/bedrooms. This funding is limited and cannot be used for loft extensions. The service is currently exploring options to possibly utilise this funding.
- Funding to work with charitable organisation Now Foster to recruit 'Weekender' foster carers. These are foster carers who are fully assessed and then after careful matching, commit to caring for a child one weekend per month on a long-term basis. The service is identifying children in the service who may benefit from this resource.

During this reporting period the Brent Fostering Team Manager supported FwWL with shortlisting and interviews for the new assessing social worker posts, to ensure the right candidates were selected for our regional hub.

FwWL also created 2 roles for foster carers and/or care experienced young people to consider and apply for, that can be undertaken alongside fostering. These roles are:

- Fostering Ambassador and Enquiry Officer (part time)
- Fostering Communications and Events Officer (full time available, open to part time or job share)

These roles were shared with Brent care experienced young people and Brent foster carers. A number of Brent foster carers applied for these roles and are waiting to hear a response regarding their applications. They can continue to foster with Brent whilst undertaking these roles (if successful).

Assessments by Brent:

- 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	Applicant progressed to referral stage (the applicant completed their application form)	Initial Visits to be undertaken by FwWL on behalf of Brent	Stage 1 of Fostering Assessment	Stage 2 of Fostering Assessment	Approved by Brent Fostering Panel and ADM
278 contacts made to FwWL for Brent this reporting period.	25 Referrals created and recorded as progressing.	18 Initial Visits were undertaken	4 currently in Stage 1	2 currently in Stage 2	3 in this reporting period
	4 candidates have not yet progressed to an Initial Visit, they continue to be encouraged to have an Initial Visit.	7 candidates were rejected by FwWL following the Initial Visit.			There has been 0 formal resignations and 0 terminations
	3 candidates are due to have Initial Visits undertaken by FwWL soon.	4 candidates progressed to Stage 1 assessment with Brent.			
		7 candidates withdrew after having an Initial home Visit.			

At present FwWL process enquiries and undertake Initial Home Visits on behalf of Brent. FwWL create a 'referral' for Brent at the Initial Home Visit (IV) stage. From 1 October 2026, FwWL will complete all the marketing, enquiries, assessments and training of new fostering families on behalf of Brent and will

pass families to Brent following their assessment and presentation at fostering panel. There is more information in the 27 July 2026 cabinet paper regarding the expansion of the FwWL regional model.

- 4.4.7 As highlighted in previous reports, it is common at the initial visit stage 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 enquiries stage and 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 undertakes 'secret shopper' exercises. Feedback is 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. The service manager also undertakes dip sampling of enquiries, referrals and initial visits to ensure that processes and decisions are appropriate, inclusive and helpful for potential fostering families. Further 'secret shopper' exercises will be undertaken as FwWL expands.

4.5 Support from Supervising Social Workers (SSW)

- 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 03 June 2026 stating: *"Jenine thanks for everything you do for me I do really appreciate it there should be more social workers like you but I just wanted to say thanks because I know I don't say it very often"*.

Another foster carer provided feedback via email to the service on 14 Sep 2026 regarding the fostering team manager stating: *"Good morning, Diana, just wanted to say thank you for all your help Monday getting things sorted ASAP. (Child name removed) on the mend doing so great, thank you. Anytime I have to call you for anything you are on the ball 100%."*

- 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 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 continue 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.

4.5.4 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. 2 sessions were held during this reporting period, on 23 April 2026 and 17 September 2026. Topics raised by the foster carers in these sessions included:

- Challenges of managing contact (family time) in kinship fostering arrangements.
- Positivity around Brent's Mockingbird constellation.
- How foster carers can contribute positively to Life Story Work for children.
- Frustration when overpayments occur, it is difficult to understand how repayments are calculated.
- Mandatory training expectations and how carers can avoid the withholding of fostering fees.
- Celebrations in relation to positive GCSE results and other positive outcomes for children in placement.
- Feedback on foster carer Support Group, what's working well and how could we improve.
- Discussion about the Brent fostering offer and suggestions for improving this i.e. Council Tax exemptions, parking permits (especially for contact)
- Savings for children in care, progress on taking saving from source and also Share Foundation information.

Attendance at 'Coffee with Kelli' has been far better attended when this is held virtually rather than in-person therefore these reference groups will continue virtually. Foster carers have fed back this provides them with greater flexibility. To ensure fostering families still feel a personal touch when required they are offered a home visit by the head of service or service manager if they want to discuss concerns or feedback in person.

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

- 4.5.6 Tickets for Foster Carers and Children in their Care: As stated in previous reports, Brent's fostering service is 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 fed back 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 be 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, 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 several trips/events, outlined below.

Hercules Musical - On 18 May 2026, 30 tickets were allocated to children in care, care leavers, and their foster families to attend the Hercules musical at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane. The event provided an enjoyable cultural experience and an opportunity for families and young people to share a memorable outing.



Harry Styles Concert – One Brent child in care and her best friend were allocated tickets to attend the Harry Styles concert at Wembley on 20 June 2026. She thoroughly enjoyed the experience, which was particularly meaningful as she has been a dedicated One Direction and Harry Styles fan for many years!

Bruno Mars Concert - A kinship family who are based outside of London were allocated tickets to attend the Bruno Mars concert on 18 May 2026. The family reported greatly appreciating the opportunity to attend such a popular event together.

The Weekend Concert - Two care experienced young people and one child in care has been allocated tickets to attend The Weekend concert on 19 August 2026.

England vs Japan and Lionesses vs Spain Football Matches - Twelve tickets were allocated to Brent children in care and their foster families to attend the England vs Japan match. A further ten tickets were provided for Brent children in care and their foster families to attend the Lionesses vs Spain fixture. These opportunities enabled

young people and carers to experience high-profile international sporting events together.

Celebration Events for Brent Foster Carers: As part of Brent's fostering offer the service holds celebration events throughout the year for foster carers, including: an end-of-year festive celebration, a summer day trip and a foster care fortnight celebration. In this reporting period the foster carers opted to visit Great Yarmouth for the summer day trip. The foster carers also had a celebration at a local church hall during Foster Care fortnight. The service is currently planning the end-of-year celebration and will pass on the invite to the committee in due course.

Foster Care Fortnight Celebration, May 2026 - The Foster Care Fortnight celebrations concluded on 20 May 2026 with a celebration event attended by 22 foster carers. The service arranges for beauty therapy students and hairdressing students from City of Westminster College to give our wonderful foster carers a pampering session including massages, nails and new hair styles. The event also included food, a raffle, certificate prize giving, a quiz and sharing of fostering stories.



Summer Trip to Great Yarmouth, August 2026 – Despite it being quite a windy day many of our foster carers and their families boarded our coach to Great Yarmouth for a day of activities. The carers and their families thoroughly enjoyed building sandcastles, going on slides and having lunch.



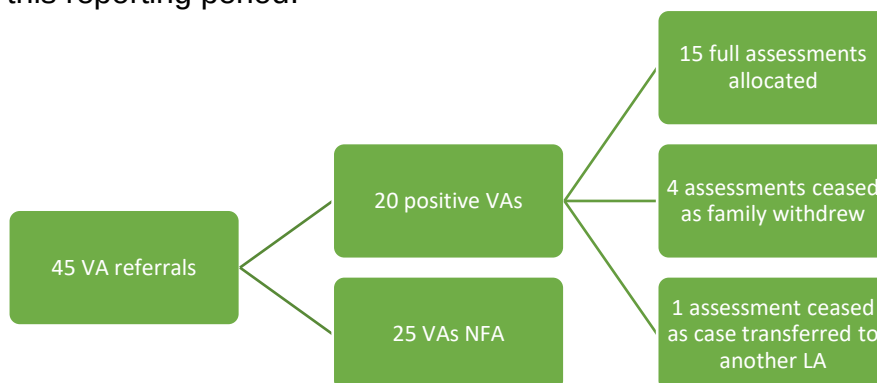
Brent Participation and Brent Fostering – The link supervising social worker meets regularly with Brent’s participation service to discuss, plan, prepare, and support events and activities. A recent event was the Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) Empire Fest summer event in August 2026. This event was attended by several children in care and their carers including those in Brent’s residential children’s home and those with Brent foster carers. The fostering service will continue to work closely with the participation service to ensure feedback from children and young people is fed into our service development.

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.

In this reporting period the Kinship Care team received 45 referrals for viability assessments (VA) of a relative, friend and people connected to the child. Kinship referrals do fluctuate month to month and are demand led.

In this reporting period:



The service has continued to notice an increase in families making their own private applications to family court (private proceedings) for Special Guardianship Orders. In these circumstances the Local Authority are still required to undertake the assessment and create support plans. In this reporting period 3 new private application assessments were undertaken by the team in addition to progressing 6 assessments from the last reporting period.

In this reporting period 24 children were placed in 12 new temporarily approved Connected Persons arrangements (often referred to as Reg 24) between April 2026 and September 2026. 10 of these arrangements ended, 1 child returned home and ceased to be LAC, 1 child was placed with their parent in an alternate provision, 1 child was placed with parent at home, 1 child was placed in an alternate suitable placement (foster care) 1 child was moved to another kinship carer and 5 children were made subject to SGOs.

Children who remain in Reg 24 arrangements beyond 24 weeks, where the carer has not been approved as a Connected Persons carer (following presentation at Fostering Panel and approval from the ADM for Fostering) are considered to be in 'unregulated placements' because the temporary approval under regulation 24 and regulation 25 has expired. As at the end of September 2026, there were 3 children in 2 unregulated placements. One of the carers has been presented to the Fostering panel within timescales and they have been recommended for approval but the ADM decision sheet is awaited. In the case of the second carer, there has been a change in the care plan with the child remaining in placement although there was an initial negative assessment. 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 Connected Persons foster carers were presented to the Brent Fostering Panel for approval as carers between April and September 2026.

9 Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) were granted in this reporting period as an outcome of care proceedings (children being previously children in care). 1 SGO was granted in a private proceeding case where the court application had been made by the prospective Special Guardian and Brent had completed the assessment in support of this application.

Brent's Kinship Local Offer: The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 requires every local authority to publish a clear and accessible kinship local

offer, which sets out the support available to kinship carers and their families. The service launched the Brent Kinship Local Offer in April 2026 following careful planning and consultation with partner agencies, children, young people, birth parents and kinship carers. This document is available on Brent's website and outlines the current kinship carer assessment process, defines the kinship arrangements, outlines support available as well as details agencies/services families can contact if required. The Kinship Local Offer has been sent internally as well as to schools, partner agencies, services and other professionals.

When The Kinship Care Team are initiating new assessments, the team signpost prospective and existing kinship carers to the Kinship Local Offer and encourage them to refer to it for information, guidance, and available support. Families who contact the service seeking information about private Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) are also directed to the website and Kinship Local Offer.

The Kinship Local Offer is further promoted through our Kinship Preparation Training, which is provided to new kinship carers. This training is well received by Brent carers. The service now sells spaces on this training to other local authorities to send their kinship carers to as the training is accessible and well received.

Private Fostering arrangements fall under the umbrella of Kinship Care. The service already held private fostering awareness training with internal teams in CYPCD as well as with external partner/agencies. The service has now expanded this training; it is now called 'raising awareness of children in different kinship care arrangements (including private fostering)'. These training sessions are well received internally and externally. A mailout to all Brent schools has taken place offering them all in-person or virtual Kinship Awareness training.

Post SGO support for Brent families is provided by our Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) Adopt London West (ALW). ALW were consulted when compiling the Brent Kinship Local Offer; ALW have been asked to promote it during coffee mornings and support group meetings. The Brent Kinship Care Team also work with local kinship support group leads to disseminate information and raise awareness of the support available through the Kinship Local Offer.

Every quarter senior managers from across frontline social work teams meet quarterly with CAFCASS (Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) to discuss best practice when supporting families through care proceedings in the family courts. Through this link the Kinship Care Team are attending the CAFCASS service meetings to promote the Brent Kinship Local Offer to allow CAFCASS guardians to signpost families and professionals to this helpful guide.

Supporting Kinship Families beyond the SGO being granted – In February 2026 the DfE released further guidance called 'Improving the Kinship Local Offer and

Approach to Kinship Care' which encourages Local Authorities to continue to check-in with Kinship families and undertake reviews even after SGOs are made and their cases have formally closed. In Brent families are asked to seek post SGO support from our RAA which is ALW should they need advice, support or guidance at all.

Although the post order support for Special Guardians is regionalised and is in the remit of work done by Adopt London West (ALW), the Brent Kinship Team continues to receive regular contact from families requiring advice, guidance, and additional support following the granting of the SGO. Post-order support remains a significant aspect of the Kinship Care Team's work in Brent and we continue to respond to the needs of these families.

Where families request a review of a child's support needs after an SGO has been granted, the Kinship Team undertakes a review to assess how best to support the families to maintain the placement, in line with our local offer and policy. We continue to receive several requests for housing support and continuation of the SGO allowance post the child's 18th birthday due to them being in education and not ready to live independently.

The Kinship Team is also working closely with the Brent Performance Team, which is currently undertaking reviews of the financial support packages for all existing Special Guardians. Where concerns regarding a child's welfare are identified through this process, referrals are made to the Kinship Team, where the SWs in the team then undertake enquiries to ensure that the child is safe and that their needs are being met appropriately.

The Brent Kinship Team adapt to the presenting needs of families however several complex situations are referred to the team even after SGOs are made. The support offered to these families by the Kinship Care Team has impacted workloads and capacity in the service. The service continues to meet with ALW to explore how best these families can be supported. During this reporting period the Kinship Care Team has not commissioned any Independent Social Workers (ISWs) to complete kinship assessments on behalf of Brent however if workloads continue to increase additional assessments will need to be commissioned.

Kinship Celebrations – Similar to our mainstream foster carers, our kinship carers are also celebrated and thanked for their support given to our Brent children. Kinship Care Week (5 to 11 October 2026) is a nationally recognised time to shine a light on the vital role of kinship carers, relatives and friends who step up to raise a child when their parents are unable to. During Kinship Care Week the Brent Kinship Care Team run workshops and training to raise awareness with professionals and members of the public of the different types of kinship arrangements and the support they may need. The service also organises for displays/posts on the Brent Civic Centre Atrium, Brent Library Screens, the internal intranet 'The Loop' as well as in the Brent Magazine.



This year the Brent Kinship Care Team are organising a family fun day celebration for Kinship families at our newly opened Freeman Family Centre on Saturday 10 Oct 2026. The day will include face painting, activities, games, quizzes, celebrations as well as an awards ceremony to thank our Kinship carers to committing to caring for our Brent children.

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; following the elections Councillor Joyce Angela De Souza joined the central list in June 2026.

The current 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 now has 13 Brent social workers to the central list, to provide more flexibility for the fostering panel.

4.7.2 Most of the external independent panel members have personal experience of the fostering system, including 1 independent panel member who was brought up in a kinship arrangement, 2 members who are experienced foster carers and 5 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 currently recruiting 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 1 April 2026 to 30 September 2026: 9 fostering panels were held with 27 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.
 - 7 carers were re-approved as part of their 3 yearly annual review.
 - 5 carers were re-approved as part of their first annual review.
 - 4 fostering approval/status - terminated/resigned (this includes kinship carers who ended being carers as an SGO was granted or the child returned home).
 - 2 carers were presented for Standards of Care, both resulted in additional support/training and continued approval.
 - 5 Brent children (2 fostering households) 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 observed the Chair on 10 April 2026, and the Director of Early Help and Social Care observed the chair on 22 May 2026.
- 4.7.8 Approval of new fostering households is only a small percentage of the work completed by Brent's fostering panel therefore; despite new carers being approved by a regional panel, there is still a need for Brent's fostering panel to continue. The DfE guidance outlines that all Kinship approvals, Kinship reviews, mainstream carer reviews, standards of care, changes of approvals and long-term matches continue at the Local Authority panel. New fostering households will have their first fostering panel at the regional panel but will then come to Brent's fostering panel for all future presentations.

4.8 Training and Development for Foster Carers

- 4.8.1 The Ofsted ILACS inspection in April 2026 identified the need for stronger assurance that all foster carers and kinship carers complete mandatory training, renew their learning within the required timescales, and have their compliance monitored consistently. The service was advised to improve the accuracy and oversight of training records; identify individual learning needs through supervision, annual reviews and Personal Development Plans; and take timely action when requirements are not met.

The findings also reinforced the need for a sufficient, relevant and accessible training offer. This includes targeted support for carers who experience language, digital or other barriers, alongside reflective discussion demonstrating how learning is applied in practice. Progress is being monitored through the Ofsted Improvement Plan, regular performance oversight and a comprehensive audit of fostering training compliance and sufficiency.

4.8.2 During the reporting period, senior managers, supported by the Learning and Development Team, implemented the following measures:

- Issued clear communications to carers setting out expectations for completing mandatory training.
- Introduced proportionate consequences for continued non-compliance, including withholding the carer element of fostering allowances where appropriate.
- Embedded mandatory training requirements in the revised Foster Carer Agreement.
- Promoted engagement with learning from the earliest stages of fostering and kinship assessments.
- Strengthened oversight through regular monitoring of compliance data and discussion at monthly performance meetings.
- Required foster carers to include SMART learning objectives in their Personal Development Plans.
- Updated Annual Review templates to include all mandatory training requirements.
- The Learning and Development Team has begun a comprehensive audit of foster carer training compliance to identify gaps, monitor progress and support targeted follow-up.

4.8.3 The service is also exploring different ways to reduce barriers for carers in respect of accessing training. Some areas include: one to one support with interpreters, materials in multiple languages, multi-lingual trainers, online access for carers to be able to view their own training records and bookings.

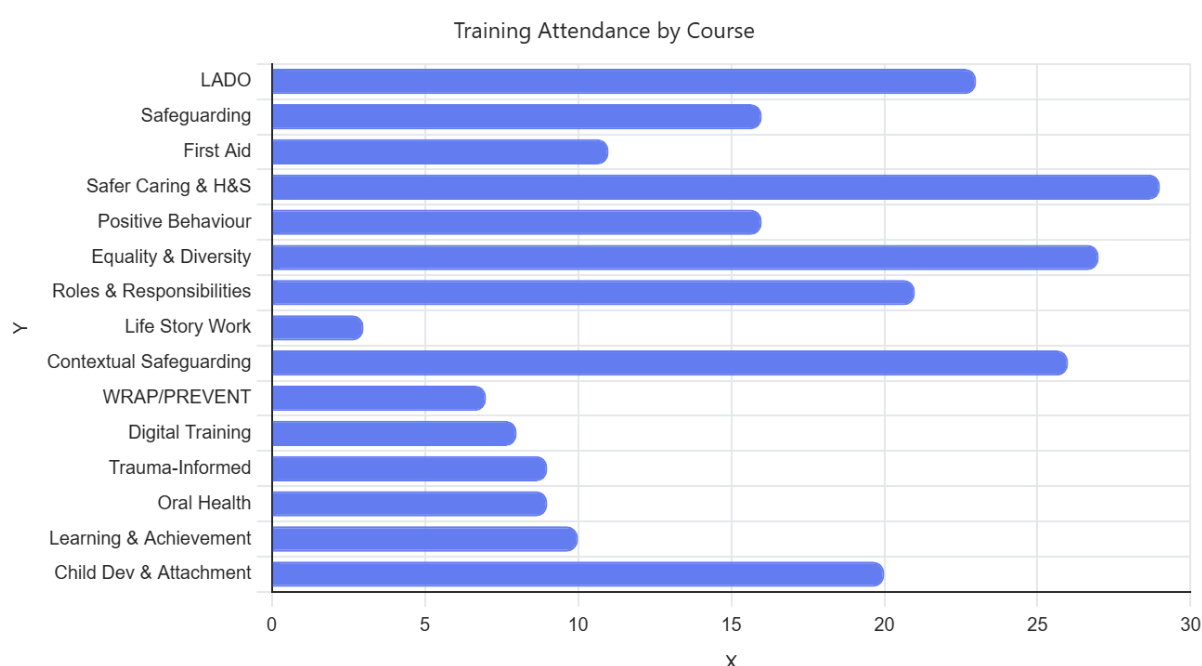
4.8.4 As a result of the above improvement measures, this reporting period shows improved foster carer engagement with training, particularly in relation to mandatory safeguarding and compliance requirements. Stronger oversight, clearer expectations and more accessible delivery methods appear to have contributed to increased participation.

Foster carers are required to complete 14 mandatory training courses within their first year of fostering. The current position is:

- 7 carers have completed all required training.
- 23 carers have fewer than 6 courses outstanding and are close to full compliance.
- The remaining carers have 6 or more courses outstanding. This group includes newly approved carers who still have several months in which to complete their mandatory training.

4.8.5 The Brent CYPCD Learning Academy, part of the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service, continues to provide a comprehensive training programme for foster carers and connected persons carers. Training is delivered through a blended model, including face-to-face, virtual and E-Learning opportunities. E-Learning courses remain accessible at any time and are the carers preferred method of delivery, allowing them to complete learning flexibly around their commitments. Virtual and in-person sessions are offered on weekdays and Saturdays to maximise accessibility. To further support participation, all carers have been provided/offered either a laptop or tablet to access online training and resources.

4.8.6 During the reporting period, carers participated in 15 facilitated training sessions, representing a small increase in attendance compared to the previous period.



4.8.7 The data continues to demonstrate increasing engagement with mandatory safeguarding-related training, which is directly related to the improvement work completed in this period ahead of a mid-September target.

During this period, the Learning Academy piloted the delivery of combined mandatory training sessions where appropriate. This approach was well received by carers and helped them complete mandatory learning requirements more efficiently.

4.8.8 Analysis of E-Learning data also shows increased engagement with online learning, with foster carers completed approximately 175 individual E-Learning courses across 54 different topics through the Learning Academy platform. Several carers completed multiple courses, demonstrating strong commitment to their ongoing development. The most frequently completed courses on the platform were Keeping Data Safe (GDPR), Diversity and Equality, and

Safeguarding and Safer Care, reflecting continued focus on mandatory requirements and key safeguarding responsibilities. This data demonstrates that E-Learning continues to provide a flexible and accessible route to learning, supporting improved training participation and compliance.

- 4.8.9 The increase in engagement has been supported by ongoing communication and monitoring arrangements. The Learning Academy continues to send reminders and targeted communications and ensures that training information and joining links are distributed well in advance. Participation is closely monitored, and feedback is collected following each training session. Feedback remains consistently positive, with carers reporting that training is relevant, accessible and beneficial to their role. During this reporting period, carers particularly valued the Equality and Diversity training, highlighting its relevance to contemporary discussions around identity and the experiences of children and young people in care. Feedback indicated that learning from the course had informed carers' day-to-day practice and strengthened their confidence in supporting children from diverse backgrounds. Attendance at foster carer support groups and staff meetings remain an important mechanism for gathering feedback directly from carers and staff. The Learning Academy will continue to use these forums to understand barriers to engagement and ensure that training remains relevant, responsive and aligned with carers' needs.

Overall, the data shows a significant increase in engagement with the mandatory training programme, particularly across safeguarding, safer caring, professional responsibilities, equality and diversity, and child development. Opportunities remain to further promote specialist and developmental training to broaden carers' knowledge and skills.

4.9 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints

- 4.9.1 During the reporting period, there were no formal allegations made against any Brent foster carer by a child. When an allegation or complaint is made these are promptly investigated and usually result in additional support being put in place and the foster carer being booked onto relevant training.

The Brent fostering service holds Brent foster carers to a high standard ensuring our children receive the best care and support. During this reporting period 2 standards of care investigations have been undertaken in response to these concerns. These standards of care investigations were presented at Brent's fostering panel. 0 fostering households were deregistered. 2 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 Enhanced Support and Resources for Brent Carers

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 During this reporting period Brent Foster Carers and the children in their care continued 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. The contract with CRS has ended on the 30 September 2026 and alternative services and supports are still being considered.
- 5.2 Children in Brent foster placements are supported to access mental health support via the new pilot Brent Partnership Local Youth Resource and Advice Service (LYRA). LYRA is the single point of access mental health service for children who live in Brent.

6.0 Retention

6.1 Brent's First Mockingbird Constellation

- 6.2 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.

As part of ongoing Mockingbird activity, the Mockingbird Alpha family attended a "Roost" event organised by The Fostering Network on 27 May 2026 at London Zoo. This was a fun day for all the families involved in Brent Mockingbird to

spend time together but also meet other Mockingbird communities across London.

The day started with a fun and creative group activity, where families worked together to design an outfit for their Mockingbird mascot, 'Alpha'. This was a fantastic way to bring everyone together, encouraging creativity, teamwork, and a shared sense of identity within the constellation.

- 6.3 Following this, the group travelled around the zoo, enjoying the wide range of animals and attractions. The setting provided a relaxed and engaging environment for both children and carers to connect, build relationships, and share experiences.



The Roost event offered a valuable opportunity for fostering families to come together in an informal space, strengthening peer support networks and reducing isolation. Children were able to socialise, play, and enjoy a memorable day out, while carers benefited from connecting with others who understand the fostering journey.

Events like these are central to the Mockingbird model, helping to nurture a strong sense of belonging and community. The Alpha family thoroughly enjoyed the experience, and the day was a great success for everyone involved.

The Alpha hub continues to host monthly coffee mornings and social activity days.

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 carers led flexible support structures have strengthened placement stability and provided practical, timely assistance when families needed it most.

New families have joined the constellation during this period and have been warmly welcomed. Mockingbird support is most effective for families with limited wider support as well as with new fostering families. With more fostering households needing to work alongside fostering, Mockingbird provides a valuable resource to allow carers to continue fostering. Feedback from new carers has been positive, and they are integrating well into the community.

7.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 7.1 Stakeholder consultation and engagement take many varied methods within the service, and we are committed to evaluating and developing new and creative ways of hearing from stakeholders.
- 7.2 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.
- 7.3 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.

8.0 Financial Considerations

- 8.1 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 £1.23m with a projected break-even position for 2026/27. In addition, a £0.4m contribution is being made to the Adopt London West Partnership in collaboration with neighbouring boroughs. Although there are no pressures in the existing budgets, the planned expansion of the Foster with West London (FwWL) regional fostering hub is expected to generate pressures in 2026/27 and 2027/28, should there be no changes to the existing service structure as per the Cabinet report dated the 27 July 2026. These pressures are expected to be mitigated using the Department for Education transformation grant funding available until March 2029, alongside service redesign and operational efficiencies arising from the regional model.
- 8.2 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. The average weekly cost of an in-house fostering placement is approximately £416 per week, whilst equivalent independent fostering placements are £1,079 per week. Consequently, each additional in-house fostering household has the potential to generate net savings of approximately 35K per year through reduced reliance on external placements.
- 8.3 As mentioned in paragraph 6.0, Recruitment and Retention remain a key priority for the fostering service. After careful consideration and market comparison exercises Brent increased fostering fees in April 2026. The recruitment and retention initiatives outlined within this report, including enhancements to the fostering offer and the increase in fostering fees implemented from April 2026, are funded through growth allocated to the Children, Young People and Community Development (CYPCD) Directorate as part of the Council's approved budget. The associated costs have therefore

been reflected within the Directorate's financial planning and do not represent an additional unfunded budget pressure to the service.

9.0 Legal Considerations

- 9.1 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.

10.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

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

11.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 11.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

12.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

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

13.0 Communication Considerations

- 13.1 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.

Related Documents:

Brent Cabinet Report - West London Fostering Recruitment and Retention Programme (Cabinet 27 July 2026)

<https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/mgChooseDocPack.aspx?ID=8703>

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children, Young People and
Community Development

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