



**Brent**

**Corporate Parenting Committee**

20<sup>th</sup> July 2021

**Report from the Strategic Director of Children  
and Young People**

**Annual Corporate Parenting Report April 2020 - March 2021**

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	N/A
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b>  (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
<b>No. of Appendices:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Brent Promise to Looked After Children</li><li>2. Care Leavers' Charter</li><li>3. Brent Local Offer for Care Leavers</li></ol>
<b>Background Papers:</b>	N/A
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b>  (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Onder Beter Head of Service, Looked After Children and Permanency Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Brent 020 8937 4382</p> <p>Sharon Buckby Head of Virtual School for Looked After Children Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Brent 020 8937 3813</p> <p>Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley, Brent 020 8937 4091</p>

## **1.0 Summary**

- 1.1 This report fulfils the Council's statutory obligation to present an annual update to the Corporate Parenting Committee on outcomes for Looked After Children, in line with The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010). This paper summarises the activity, highlighting strengths and areas for growth in supporting looked after children and care leavers in Brent.
- 1.2 Progress against the previous year's priorities identified in the previous Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2019/20 have been updated throughout the body of this report. The report also sets out the priorities of the Looked After Children and Permanency service for 2021/22.

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Committee review and provide comment on the contents of this report. This ensures the CPC are fulfilling their responsibility to monitor and scrutinise the activity of Brent's LACP service over the past year, thus ensuring that adequate care and support are being provided to looked after children and care leavers in the borough.

## **3 Corporate Parenting**

- 3.1 The concept of Corporate Parenting was introduced by The Children Act 2004, which placed collective responsibility on local authorities to achieve good outcomes for all children in public care. The term 'Corporate Parent' defines the collective responsibility of elected members, employees and partner agencies to provide the best possible care for LAC and care leavers.
- 3.2 The notion of being a corporate parent was developed and strengthened by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which highlighted the following seven principles of being a corporate parent. These are:
  - to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being of those children and young people;
  - to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
  - to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
  - to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
  - to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;

- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

3.3 Brent has continued to be an active, strong and committed corporate parent during this reporting year. Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC), which is chaired by the Lead Member and attended by representatives from Care in Action and Care Leavers in Action groups, provides robust challenge to officers and partners. Brent's local offer for care leavers was refreshed in April 2020, taking into account feedback from professionals from a range of sectors including health, education and housing alongside the views of around a third of care leavers who participated in consultation activity prior to publication of the new offer. The revised offer was endorsed by the Lead Member in April 2020 on behalf of the CPC which could not meet during the first Covid-19 national lockdown.

3.4 Elected members in Brent carry out their corporate parenting duty as follows:

- a The Corporate Parenting Committee, chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Young People with cross party Member representation where service performance is scrutinised. This occurs on a quarterly basis.
- b Attendance of CIA (Care in Action) and CLIA (Care Leavers in Action) representatives at the Corporate Parenting Committee.
- c Weekly liaison meetings between the Lead Member for Children and Young People, the Strategic Director Children and Young People and other senior staff within the Local Authority as appropriate.
- d Regular meetings between representatives of CIA and CLIA with the Lead Member, Strategic Director, and Operational Directors for Children and Young People
- e By ensuring Brent's 'Promise' to LAC, 'Care Leavers' Charter' and Local Offer for care leavers is abided by. See a copy of Brent's Promise and Care Leavers' Charter and local offer at appendices 1, 2 and 3.
- f An annual, mandatory Member Learning and Development session on Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting.

3.5 One of the Corporate Parenting Committee meetings due to take place in April 2020 was cancelled as it coincided with the first Covid-19 national lockdown. The Meetings took place for the rest of the reporting year in a virtual way due to Covid-19 restrictions preventing face to face gatherings. During 2020-21, the Corporate Parenting Committee was presented with

reports on a variety of topics. The Committee provided support, scrutiny and challenge on the following areas:

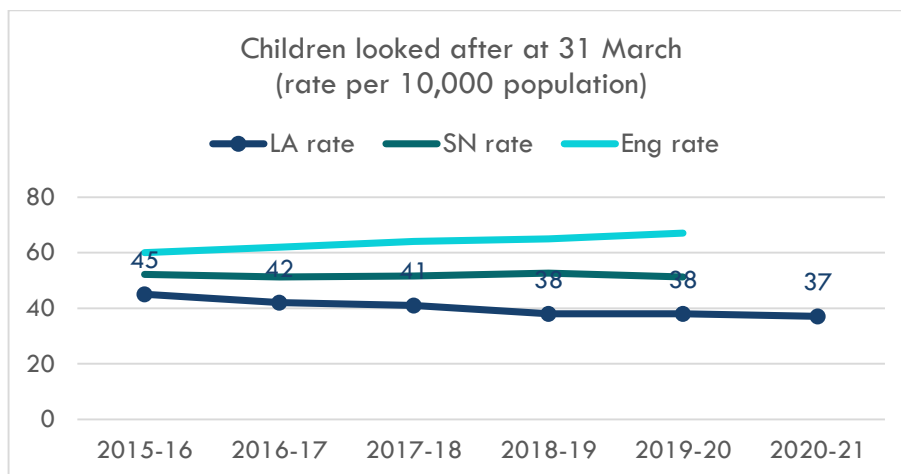
- a. Members of Care in Action and Care Leavers in Action continued attending the Committee to provide updates on their recent activity. These updates were noted and supported by the Committee.
- b. The Committee received quarterly updates from the Fostering Service, including on Brent's Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, the joint fostering project, and the recruitment of foster carers. The Committee noted that foster carers had been supported to cope with the demands of Covid-19.
- c. The Committee received six-monthly updates on the performance of adoption activity managed by Adopt London West. These reports were co-written by Adopt London West and Brent. The reports included information on activity on marketing/recruitment, assessment and approval of adopters; adoption scorecard information; family finding and matching; post adoption and post Special Guardianship Order (SGO) support including how Adoption Support Fund has been utilised. The Committee noted the success of the partnership but raised their concerns about services funded by Covid-19 sources being withdrawn. The Committee agreed to consider which services should continue to be funded by Brent after Covid-19 funding had ended.
- d. In July 2020, the Committee was presented with a report on the impact of the pandemic on children in care, care leavers, and foster carers. The report outlined that risk assessments had been implemented, and that increased support had been offered where needed. Financial support for care leavers was discussed, and the Committee highlighted the importance of sustainable funding. A further update on the impact of Covid-19 was provided to the Committee in October 2020. This included information on financial support and support to young people in further education.
- e. The Annual Corporate Parenting report for 2019/20 was presented to the Committee at the July 2020 meeting. At the same meeting, the Committee also reviewed the Annual Report from the Brent Virtual School, which outlined the activity and impact of the Virtual School during the 2018-19 academic year.
- f. In October 2020, the Committee received a report summarising the actions taken following the recommendations of the Ofsted focused visit on arrangements for care leavers. In the same meeting, the Committee was presented with the revised Brent Promise for Looked After Children,

and the Brent Care Leavers' Charter. The updated documents were endorsed by the Committee to proceed to final design stage.

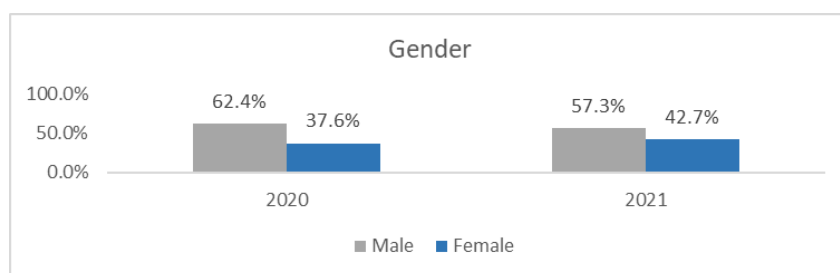
- g. In the February 2021 meeting, the Committee was presented with the Independent Reviewing Officers' (IRO) annual report (2019-20). This report outlined the contribution of IROs to the quality assurance and service improvement for Looked After Children, and provided qualitative and quantitative evidence of the impact.
- h. A report on the health needs of Looked after Children was presented to the Committee by Brent CCG in February 2021. This report provided an update on the current situation and recent improvements to the service. The Committee heard that an audit of initial health assessments showed that service users were very satisfied with the service.

#### 4.0 Profile of Looked after Children and care leavers

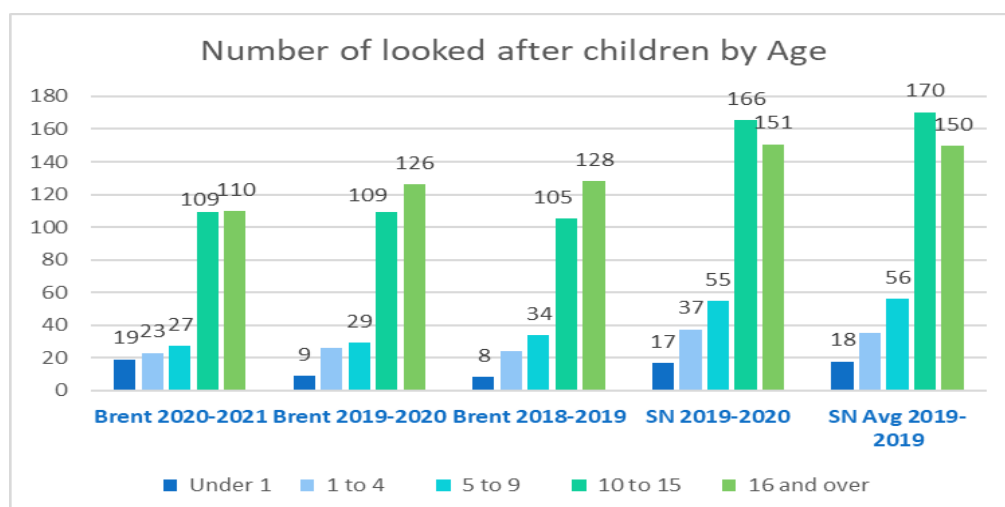
- 4.1 As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 Brent had 288 looked after children and young people. This compares with 299 children on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. This represents 37.1 LAC per 10,000 head of child population against the rate for England of 62 per 10,000 head of child population.



- 4.2 On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, the Local Authority looked after 40 UASC compared with 61 in March 2020. This represented 13.9% of the total Brent LAC population. The number of UASC declined nationally due to the pandemic, as a result of restriction of movement across borders. Brent had fewer referrals from the National Transfer Scheme and Pan London rota and a reduction in self-presentation of UASC this reporting year. Additionally, some UASC ceased to be looked after by reaching their 18<sup>th</sup> Birthday.
- 4.3 The gender of the LAC population consists of 57.3% male and 42.7% female, which is different from the previous year 2019/2020 of 62.4% male and 37.6% female.



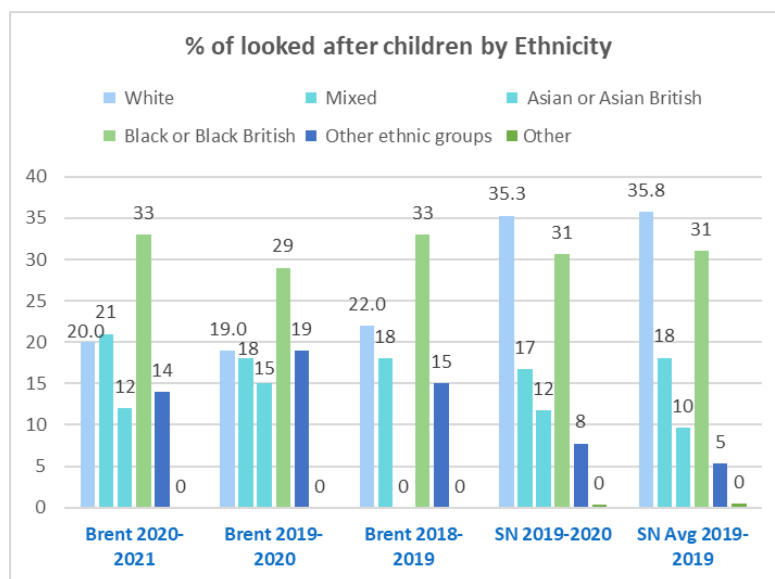
4.4 38.2% of the care population in Brent is aged over 16 years old, compared to 41.9% at the end of March 2020. Over 76% of the care population in Brent are aged 10 and over. There has been an increase in younger children coming into care during 2020/21, although Brent's LAC population continues to show a high proportion of young people entering care in their teenage years, many of whom have multiple vulnerabilities such as the risk of exploitation by gangs or CSE. At the end of March 2021, 21% of the LAC population was under the age of 10 compared to a similar percentage, 21.4% in March 2020 and 55% was aged over 13 years old (compared to 61% in March 2020). As at 31 March 2021, 38.4% were aged 16-18 (42.2% in March 2020).



#### 4.5 Ethnicity of LAC

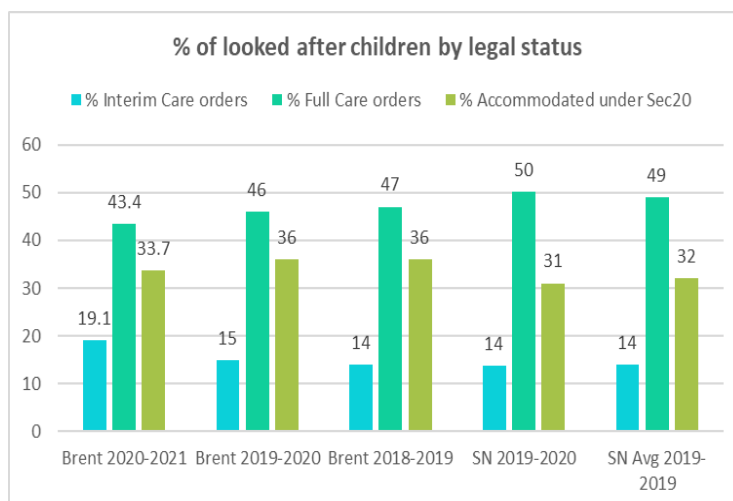
4.6 The ethnicity of looked after children broadly remained the same compared to the previous year. However, there has been an increase in the number of looked after children from a 'mixed' heritage and Black or Black British backgrounds, with a decrease of children from 'Other Ethnic' groups and of an Asian background. This is related to a lower number of UASC within the LAC population this year due to Covid-19 impacting on travel across borders.

The number of Black or Black British children and young people in care remains comparable with data from statistical neighbours.



## 5 Legal Status of LAC

5.1 The majority of looked after children were subject to Care Orders under the Children Act 1989, representing 62.5% of all LAC in this reporting year. A further 97 children (33.7% of all LAC) were in care through a voluntary agreement with the parents/carers as pursuant to Sec 20 of the Children Act 1989. The number of children in care through a voluntary agreement with parents decreased compared to the previous year (36%).

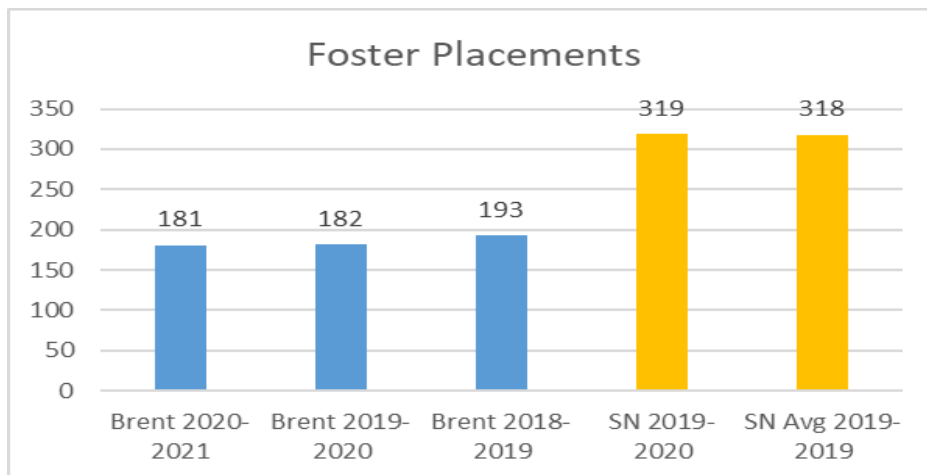


5.2 The proportion of children placed more than 20 miles away from their home address as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 was 19.8%, comparable to 20% in 2019/20 (the national average is 14%). Brent Children’s Services aims to place children closer to their families and local support networks and children are only placed away from Brent when it is in their best interests. All out of borough placements are scrutinised at relevant Panels chaired by senior

managers (such as the Entry to Care Panel or Children’s Placement Panel) to ensure that children’s needs will be met. As of 31 March 2021, 55.7% of LAC are placed outside of Brent compared to 57.8% in 2019/20. The sufficiency market for local placements for older children in care and provision for placements accommodating vulnerable adolescents is underdeveloped. Securing foster placements that meet the needs of Brent’s most vulnerable adolescents remains a challenge. The Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2024 identifies this issue as a local and regional issue, including measures to work in partnership with internal and external partners to broaden placement options for looked after children and making sure LAC are placed in good quality local provisions.

### 5.3 Placements of LAC in Brent

5.4. Most children resided within fostering placements (181) – 63% of all LAC, an increase from the same point in 2020 (61%). Despite this slight improvement, this area of work has remained a challenge as identifying foster placements for older LAC has continued to be a struggle due to lack of sufficiency in foster placement and the majority of LAC being teenagers. Increases in late entrants to care coupled by a lack of foster placements for teenagers meant that many children were placed in semi-independent accommodation, although semi-independent accommodation can be the right placement option for young people as per their needs.



5.5. In 2020-21, 6 new fostering households were recruited, despite the impact of the pandemic. Brent Children’s Services have a successful track record of placing children within kinship arrangements where it is safe to do so. There have been 11 connected persons’ placements during 2020-21, compared to 6 in 2019-20. The below case study is an example of Brent’s tenacious work to identify and assess connected people in children’s networks:

### **Case Study – Permanency with Kinship Carers**

DL is the first child of her mother and second child of her father. During her mother's pregnancy, the local authority had significant concerns due to repeated incidents of domestic abuse, initially between DL's parents. In addition, there were concerns about the impact of her father's drug misuse on his ability to parent and protect her from harm. The local authority worked closely with DL's family and professionals involved, however the incidents of domestic abuse continued.

As part of early permanency planning, contact was made with all family members put forward by DL's parents. Three maternal relatives were positively assessed at viability assessment stage, with two progressing to a full Special Guardianship Order (SGO) assessment.

After DL's birth, she and her mother were placed together in a parent and child foster placement. Unfortunately, due to DL's mother's abusive behaviour towards the foster carer, this placement broke down quickly. Despite finding new placements to try to keep DL and her mother together, her mother's behaviours resulted in repeated placement break-downs. The local authority sought to separate DL from the care of her mother following five placement breakdowns and DL was placed in the care of her maternal family members on separate occasions but both have not lasted due to mother's behaviour and efforts to disrupt placements. Eventually, DL was placed with a Brent foster carer. This was her 8<sup>th</sup> placement in 11 months.

The full assessments undertaken on all family members ended negatively. As adoption was the parallel plan, the local authority was granted a Care Order and Placement Order at the end of proceedings. An adoptive family was identified and introductions started. However, the local authority was then contacted by a couple, distant relatives of DL, who had just found out that DL was not in the care of her mother. The couple contacted the local authority immediately and made an application to the Court for an SGO assessment to be completed. Following a very positive assessment, the Court agreed to trial the placement with this couple as a foster placement for a period of three months. DL had significant attachment difficulties due to the numerous placement changes early in her life, however the kinship carers worked closely with DL's foster carer to manage an extended transition plan. The mother also agreed to an undertaking that she would not attend the local authority of the kinship carers (something she had previously not accepted).

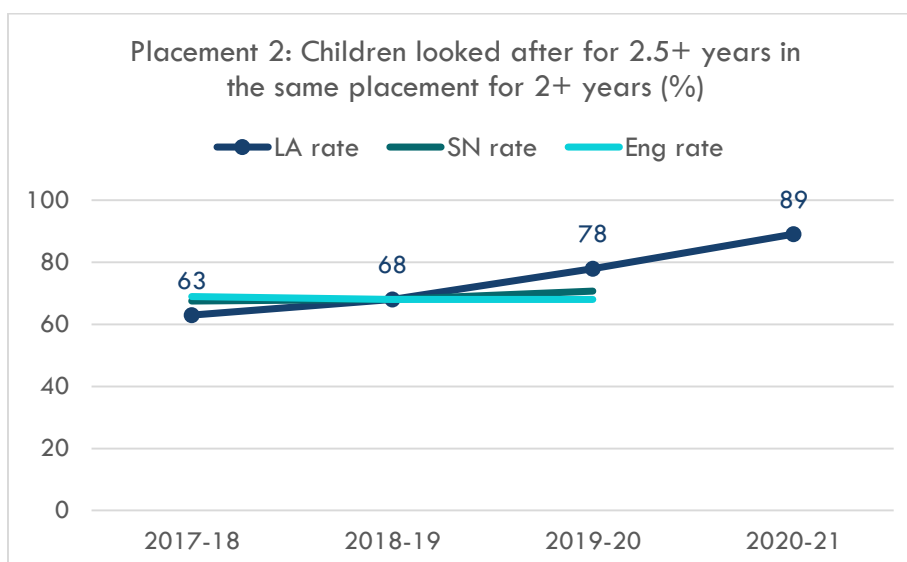
DL moved into the kinship placement after a successful transition period and at the final hearing beginning of 2021, the Court granted a Special Guardianship Order to the couple. DL continues to thrive in the placement.

- 5.6 Recruitment and retention of foster carers remains a priority for 2021/22. The plan, following a successful fostering feasibility study in 2020-21, to create a joint fostering service primarily aimed at increasing placement options for teenagers, continues in 2021-22. Brent, Ealing and Harrow have agreed to work together, initially in combining marketing, recruitment and training offers. Brent is leading this piece of work and four work streams (sufficiency,

placement stability, co-production and engagement and performance and finance) attended by the relevant managers in Social Care, commissioning and marketing are meeting regularly to plan for this.

## 5.7 Placement Stability

- 5.7.1 Stability has improved for children who have had 3 or more placement moves in a year. Brent's performance around 3 or more placement moves improved from 15.3% in March 2020 to 12% in March 2021, a reflection of strong joint working between social work teams and the Commissioning and Resources Team. Scrutiny of all placement change requests at the weekly Children's Placement Panel has ensured a robust process for decision-making around placement changes and ensuring that change is only supported when it is in the child or young person's best interest. This activity has resulted in more looked after children remaining in their long-term placements for more than 2 years.



- 5.7.2 A monthly placement stability meeting was established to track multiple placement changes and share learning with practitioners and foster carers with the view to support placement stability. A social work practice consultant with the focus on placement stability has provided support to practitioners and chaired placement stability meetings. There continued to be a number of children and young people with complex needs who found it difficult to settle and where placement moves have been necessary. The focus of work is identifying and commissioning the right intervention for each young person to support stability. Where a placement is at risk, placement stability meetings are held with key professionals. Individual placements are monitored by social workers and by IROs as part of LAC Reviews and by the LAC Tracking Panel, chaired by the Head of Looked After Children and Permanency.

5.7.3 The Operational Director continued to approve any out of area placements and provided scrutiny at this level of operational service decisions to ensure placements meet the needs of children.

## 5.8 Permanency Planning

5.8.1 Between 01/04/2020 and 31/03/2021, there were 6 children adopted and 13 children who left care through the making of Special Guardianship Orders. In addition, in this reporting period, 3 children were made subject of a Placement Order and 4 children were matched and placed with their adopters.

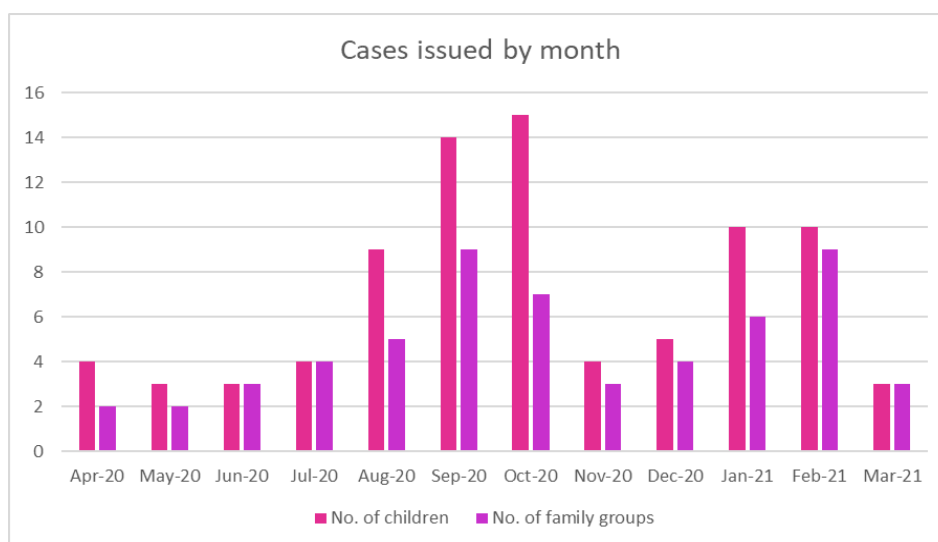
5.8.2 The non-published data at the end of March 2021, in comparison to the published national and statistical neighbour averages, demonstrates that adoption timeliness remains strong when placing children for adoption once court authority to place has been granted. However, the average time taken for a child entering care to being placed for adoption is 450 days and compares less well against the Brent 2016-19 national average of 376 days and the statistical neighbour average of 370. This decrease in performance is due to a number of cases where parents' appealed Placement Orders leading to delayed completion of care proceedings - 5 cases that were contested and appealed by parents, extending the court proceedings and delaying the Placement Order applications. The average time taken from the local authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved is 169 days which compares favourably to the national average of 178 days and the statistical neighbour average of 203. The Corporate Parenting Committee provides six-monthly scrutiny on adoption performance.

5.8.3 Adopt London West (ALW), established in October 2019, continues to provide adoption and post-order support work on behalf of Brent. The regional adoption agency has been operational for 18 months and the evidence to date is that the service provided is of a high standard. Adopt London West is hosted by Ealing and works closely with the other three regional adoption agencies within the Adopt London group. Unlike the other London RAAs, ALW also offers support to Special Guardians, a significant group requiring longer-term support. Over the past year, the new arrangements have become embedded with effective services being maintained for Brent's children.

5.8.4 ALW works closely with staff in Brent Children's Services once permanence for a child is first discussed. ALW ensures that adoption plans and associated family finding are progressed quickly and a robust approval and matching process is in place for children. Family finding for Brent children has continued to be a priority with ALW involved in permanency tracking activity on a monthly basis and leading on permanency planning meetings for children who have a care plan of adoption.

## 5.9 Care Proceedings

5.9.1 The number of care proceedings initiated by Brent has fallen with a total of 57 cases being issued in 2020/21 compared to 73 cases in 2019/20. This decrease is connected to the Covid-19 pandemic and the significant periods of lockdown that were experienced in this reporting year. These lockdown periods were followed by “peaks” in proceedings activity in August, September and October 2020 and then again in January and February 2021.



5.9.2 Timeliness of care proceedings concluded in 2020/21 is 39.5 weeks. This points to a better performance than the national average at 41 weeks, a reflection of strong joint working between social work and legal teams as well as effective care proceedings tracking arrangements.

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
<b>Brent</b> (Internal data 2020/2021)		35 weeks	38 weeks	35 weeks	39.5 weeks
<b>London average</b> (Baker Bulletin Q1 and 2)		31 weeks	33 weeks	37 weeks	Not available
<b>National average</b> (CAFCASS data)		29 weeks	31 weeks	32 weeks	41 weeks

5.9.3 There continued to be multiple and complex reasons for cases that exceeded the expected 26 week timeframe for proceedings and these include:

- Complexity within cases - new children born within proceedings, larger sibling groups, Fact Finding hearings and delays due to outstanding criminal charges/court processes.

- International elements, which require travel, liaising with foreign authorities, legal bodies, and often prolonged, complex family assessments.
  - There has been noted delay in this period related to difficulties in securing independent experts and completing expert assessments due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 5.9.4 Brent has continued to track care proceedings cases via an established monthly 'Care Proceedings Tracking meeting', chaired by senior CYP managers and senior lawyers of the Local Authority. The meeting aims to quickly identify any issues that might cause or create delay within proceedings and rectify them as well as provide advice and guidance to practitioners on complex court cases.
- 5.9.5 A Social Work Practice Consultant (SWPC - specialist in permanency planning and court work) has continued supporting and developing social work practice in these areas by co-working court cases. The SWPC also works with looked after children teams to ensure that permanency planning is taking place for children, including those with a plan of adoption, in a timely manner. They have also been a pivotal link with Adopt London West.
- 5.9.6 This year has seen a significant increase in the number of court hearings. Virtual court hearings have presented several benefits, like decreased time taken to travel to and from court, less sitting and waiting around at court. However, the change to virtual hearings has also presented some challenges: additional hearings, limited ability to discuss, negotiate and liaise with parties in person and a lack of physical support for parents during hearings.

## **6.0 Participation of looked after children, young people and care leavers.**

- 6.1 Looked after children continued to have their voice heard and influence exerted during 2020/21. Their views have consistently been reflected in assessments and applications to court, gathered through direct work using Signs of Safety tools and through IROs who meet with children as part of the LAC review process. IROs continued to provide good independent oversight of decision-making. The child/young person attended and spoke for themselves in 59% of LAC reviews in 2020/21 and 93% of LAC reviews occurred within timescales.
- 6.2 In Brent children and young people who are the members of Brent's Children in Care Council call their groups 'Care in Action'. There are three groups who meet once a month as:
- Junior Care in Action (JCIA) (7-11 year olds)

- Care in Action (CIA) (12-17 year olds)
- Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) (18 – 25 year olds)

6.3 Due to the emergence of Covid-19 and subsequent lockdowns Care in Action groups became predominantly virtual sessions, a new experience for most participants and facilitators. Session leads had to adapt how to engage with participants to make sure that the groups remained informative, fun, interactive and rewarding and children and young people needed to engage in a new way through technology.

6.4 Feedback from group members is positive with members highlighting meeting others, helping to improve services, being listened to and having fun as consistent reasons for their attendance. The groups are directly promoted to children and young people through foster carers, social workers, personal advisors, the Virtual School and Independent Reviewing Officers. We also encourage children and young people to promote the sessions with their peers.

“I am a part of Care in Action because I feel like my views matter and I feel valued – I feel like a valued asset and I feel wanted. I’d encourage people to come because we are a friendly, open and honest group and we do lots of fun activities.” CIA Member, 16 years old,

“Care Leavers in Action provides an opportunity to make changes in the system. You also get to be around other likeminded people who understand our struggle. The Participation Team encourage us to implement change in all aspects. You encourage us to be honest and open and actually ask us for our opinions to make sure our views are heard.” CLIA member, 23 years old, March 2021

6.5 In the past year, the Strategic Director and Lead Member for Children’s Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care and other senior leaders attended each of the groups. CIA/CLIA members have asked questions about their work and given feedback on their experiences.

6.6 Members of CIA/CLIA have attended every Corporate Parenting Committee meeting in 2020/21. They represent their peers and explain what each group has accomplished. The members take their responsibility to represent their peers seriously and support each other to prepare and represent themselves and their peers well. In addition, representatives of CIA/CLIA attended the

Local Partnership Meeting with LAC and Care Leavers and are members of the Voice and Influence sub-group of this meeting. The Local Partnership Meeting is a multi-agency meeting of partners working together to improve outcomes for LAC and care leavers. Participants include representatives from CCG, CAMHS, Central North West London NHS trust, Anna Freud Centre; Probation, various providers as well as Brent staff from Housing, YOS, Brent Virtual School for LAC, Localities, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance and Looked after Children and Permanency service.

## 6.7 Overview of all Care in Action Activity

6.8 Despite all the challenges due to Covid-19, members of CIA/CLIA remained focussed and engaged. Some of the key achievements include:

- Care in Action groups have been involved with commissioning new services, including a new Independent Advocacy/Independent Visitor service, Provision of Social Care Specialist Assessment as well as development of a quality assurance framework for semi-independent placements. The care leavers learned a lot from these processes and were supported to use these experiences on applications and in interviews to highlight their skills. Below feedback from a care leaver demonstrates the importance of young people being involved in commissioning arrangements:

*"It is important for young people to be part of the process. If companies cannot engage with us through this process how can we trust that they will be able to engage with us once they have the contract "*  
CLIA member (24 years old) December 2020

- Care in Action groups developed an agreed way of demonstrating that they 'approve' documents they have been consulted on through the development of a digital stamp.
- Care Leavers in Action conducted their first youth-led inspection. Eleven Care Leavers came together to receive inspector training. The group then decided on the key areas they wanted the inspection to focus upon. They used the Care Leavers Charter and the latest OFSTED Reports as resources that allowed them to select key areas of service provision. The inspection covered the following themes:
  - Services and support
  - Pathway Plans
  - Education and employment
  - Being a lifelong champion

The findings of the inspection will be shared for learning in 2021/2022.

The below quote from a young inspector shows what it means to young people to be involved in such activity:

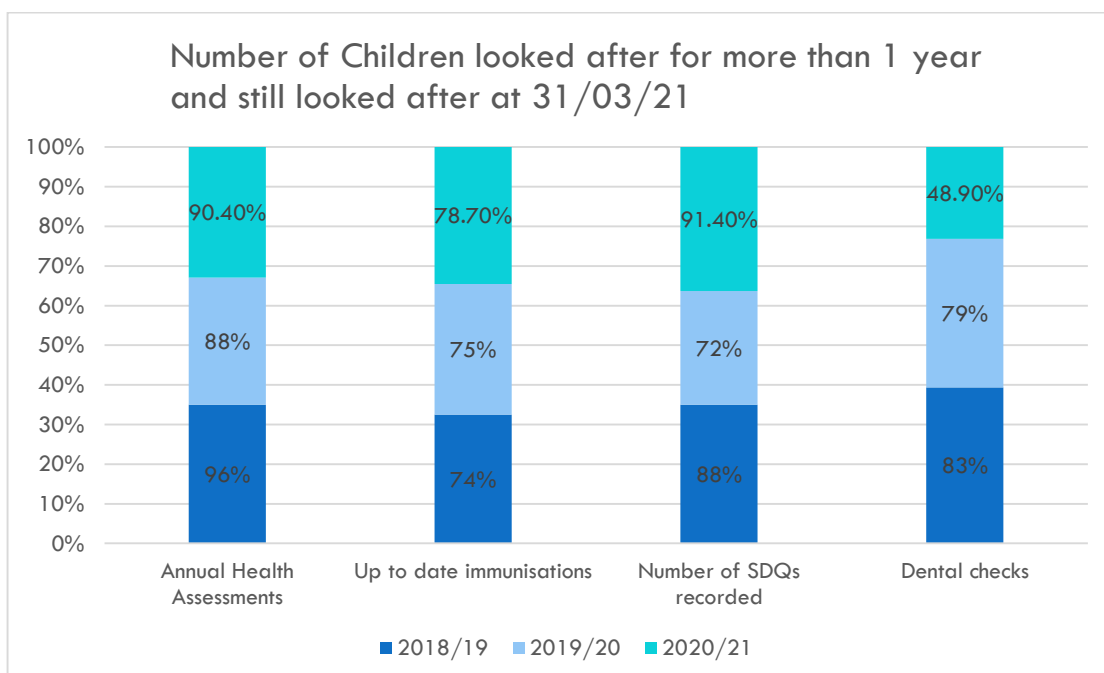
“I feel as though I’ve gained a lot of opportunities and experience through the group such as the inspections. Our views are valued.” CLIA member (23 years old), March 2021

- Care Leavers in Action developed the Care Leavers’ Financial Guide and this has been distributed to 16 and 17 year olds and professionals to support young people prepare for leaving care

## 7 Health of Looked After Children

7.1 Local Authorities, as the Corporate Parents, are responsible for ensuring that LAC receive regular health checks (six monthly for children under the age of 5 and annually for those over the age of 5), dental checks and appropriate immunisations. Statutory health data for LAC is reported for those children who have been in care for more than 12 months.

7.2 LAC Health data for 2020/21 has not yet been submitted to the DfE as part of the statutory data reporting requirement and will not be submitted until August 2021. Unpublished data shows that health outcomes remain strong for looked after children.



- 7.3 There has been a change in Tier 2 CAMHS service provision to looked after children in this reporting period with the Brent Emotional Wellbeing Service (BEWS) becoming the Brent Intensive Support Team (BIST). This provides support to children and young people with disabilities where there is significant risk of family breakdown and/or the child or young person has moderate/severe learning disability presenting with a significant behavioural challenge or emotional difficulties. Referrals for this service will be made by the Brent's Disabled Children and Young People 0-25 Team only. BIST continues to be provided by the Central North West London Health Trust.
- 7.4 The Wellbeing and Emotional Support Team (WEST) provides a targeted service for identified vulnerable groups, including Looked After Children, and is delivered by the Anna Freud Centre. The service provides support, clinical advice and training for professionals working with children and young people and a range of evidence based interventions working directly with children, young people and families in the identified priority vulnerable groups. Additional capacity has been built into this service from 1 October 2020 to support professionals working with vulnerable children, including social workers and foster carers. When the need arises for a Tier 3 CAMHS referral, clinicians support social workers in completing those referrals.
- 7.5 A CAMHS LAC and Transition Mental Health Care Coordinator was appointed in 2020/2021, who is co-located with LAC teams to work alongside social workers. The Coordinator will ensure that the emotional wellbeing and mental health needs of children and young people who are accommodated outside of Brent are met. This role has been put in place as part of a pilot project for 12 months, aiming to improve emotional and mental wellbeing of children placed out of borough. Feedback from social workers has been positive in early months about the impact resulting in out of borough CCGs acting more timely in relation to CAMHS assessments and interventions for some children.

## **8 Multi-agency Partnership for LAC and Care Leavers**

- 8.1 Brent continued to have strong and effective multi-agency arrangements with external partners such as CCG, schools and other educational settings and various providers. The Children's Trust, chaired by the DCS has a strategic overview of partnership working. The Joint Commissioning Group (JCG), chaired by the Operational Director for Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy and reporting to the Children's Trust, continued monitoring the effectiveness of partnership working and commissioning arrangements for LAC and Care Leavers.
- 8.2 An operational multi-agency partnership meeting for looked after children and care leavers has continued to meet regularly with participation from CIA/CLIA, Brent colleagues from the Looked After Children and Permanency Service, the Virtual School for looked after children, YOS, Housing, Public Health and external partners from CAMHS, CCG, Probation, Anna Freud

Centre and other providers when required. The meeting promotes collective responsibility and takes a systemic approach to improve overall outcomes for children in care and care leavers.

## **9 Children Missing or Absent from Care**

- 9.1 In the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, 74 children in care were reported to be missing from their placements at least once compared to 94 in the previous year. This represented 15% of all LAC looked after at any point during the year (n=462) compared to over 20% in the previous year. There has been a reduction in number of missing incidents as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as some young people who were regularly going missing from their placements ceasing to be looked after. 46 of the 74 had more than one missing incident in the year. In this reporting year 34 children were reported as being absent from their care placement compared with 42 in 2020/21. An absence may be a situation where a child has not returned home at an agreed time but their whereabouts is known.
- 9.2 Children who are missing from care are offered return home interviews (RHIs). Learning from RHIs and data on missing children are reviewed weekly by the Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes and the rate of RHIs is being continuously monitored by senior management. Some of the learning from the RHIs in 2020/21 was that some looked after children go to see their parents outside of the arrangements made in accordance to their care plans; some wished to see friends despite Covid-19 restrictions; contextual safeguarding issues including county lines. Learning from the return home interviews is shared with partners as well as social workers, IROs and personal advisors.
- 9.3 A Vulnerability Risk Assessment tool has continued to be used to assess risk holistically and plan with multi-agency partners to reduce risk. A programme of training on Missing Children and the completion of Return Home Interviews is an integral part of the Learning and Development calendar. Social workers and Personal advisors have continued to receive one to one support from a Social Work Practice Consultant who has a specialist role in supporting vulnerable adolescents.
- 9.4 Brent has a collaborative approach to provide a coherent overview of the most vulnerable adolescents, including looked after children and care leavers. In order to enhance Brent's coordinated operational approach to vulnerable children, the Child Exploitation and Missing Panel was merged with the Violence and Vulnerability Panel, led by Police and Community Protection, to form the Exploitation, Violence and Vulnerability Panel. The panel reviews cases and supports practitioners where multi-agency escalation is required. It also decides which cases need to come back to panel for review and this is dependent on the level of risk. A number of LAC and care leavers' cases have been presented to EVVP panel, which has

ensured a collaborative approach from all partners to help reduce risk and safeguard children and young people.

- 9.5 A strategic overview of operational activity is provided by the Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Group - a strong multi-agency forum, supported by a Vulnerable Adolescents Data Analyst who triangulates data to identify children and young people at risk.

## **10. Education of Looked After Children**

- 10.1. As the spring term 2019/ 2020 ended and the country moved into the first national lockdown. Brent Virtual School (BVS) reconsidered how services would be delivered for looked after children as well as how communication with foster carers, schools and social workers would maintain an on-going focus on children's attendance and their continued progress. From the start of the lockdown in March 2020 all carers and young people were contacted to ascertain their access to information technology and as a result over 50 devices were ordered and directly delivered to young people (learning resources were distributed as well as laptops, tablets and dongles).
- 10.2. Additionally, BVS led the IT and Wi-Fi rollout from the DfE for vulnerable young people and carers, which involved the distribution of over 750 laptops and tablets and over 150 wireless routers. BVS coordinated the pilot of 'Increasing internet access for children' which meant that a further 500 children were given access to BT Wi-Fi Hotspots.
- 10.3. In spite of the pandemic, working in partnership with settings, schools, social workers and carers, Brent Virtual School <sup>[1]</sup> (BVS) achieved the following for children and young people during the academic year 2019/20:
- Attendance prior to the first lockdown as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic had improved for the Virtual school pupil register as a whole, from 88% to 90%.
  - Fixed term exclusions significantly decreased for the Virtual school pupil register as a whole, from 26 pupils to 12 pupils. BVS had a personalised support offer for each of these children.
  - The number of days lost to fixed term exclusions reduced drastically by over 68%.
  - All 178 Looked after pupils received appropriate education, with 94% in Good or Outstanding schools, this is a 3% increase on the previous year.
  - All of the statutory cohort had access to appropriate IT and connectivity within the first 2 weeks of the first Covid 19 lockdown.
  - At Key Stage 4, 29% of the eligible cohort achieved a pass in both core subjects of English and maths. This was a considerable increase on

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[1] For detailed information on educational outcomes for looked after children in Brent, please see Brent Virtual School Annual Report 2019/20 presented at the Corporate Parenting Committee on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

previous data and the highest recorded results for the Brent LAC cohort.

- 97% of LAC had a destination school or college place secured for September 2020.

There were no Permanent Exclusions, as per previous year's data.

## **11. Care Leavers**

- 11.1 The Local Authority has a dedicated Leaving Care Service that provides support and guidance to all young people who leave their long-term care from the age of 18 years (including those leaving care at age of 16 and 17) until they reach the age of 25, even if they are not in education or employment.
- 11.2 All care leavers have an allocated personal advisor who is introduced to them at the age of 17, before their transition to the leaving care service. This ensures that all those in care approaching 18 years of age, already know their personal advisor and have developed a positive relationship in working alongside their allocated social worker. Due to the impact of the Social Work Act 2017, there has been an expected increase in overall number of care leavers. In line with this growth in demand Brent has allocated additional resources to increase the capacity of Leaving Care Teams in 2021/22. With an increased capacity of leaving care, personal advisors will start work with all care leavers from the age of 16.
- 11.3 A personal advisor is not a qualified social worker but will have a background in working with young people in a variety of settings such as in youth justice, housing organisations or youth groups. In 2020/21, the staffing establishment of the Leaving Care Service consisted of two teams with 16 personal advisors supervised by two team managers. The teams also had co-allocated external partners such as Prospects, 2 part-time DWP workers as well as Barnardo's Care Journey's Team members.
- 11.4 As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, Brent was responsible for the support to 307 Former Relevant Young People [aged 18 - 21] (an increase of 41% from 218 last year) and 108 young people aged 22-25 (a decrease of -17% from 130 last year). In line with the Social Work Act 2017, Brent offers a 21+ service providing support, advice and guidance to any care leaver who may wish to have this support up to the age of 25.

## **12 Brent's Local Offer for Care Leavers**

- 12.1 The comprehensive local offer for care leavers, refreshed in April 2020, shows that the local authority is an ambitious corporate parent for care leavers. The local authority provides for appropriate tailored individual support, including 10 ring-fenced apprenticeships for care leavers, a traineeship programme, various workshops around vocational training and development opportunities. Care Leavers have access to a range of services including careers advice and guidance through daily drop-in sessions across

Brent, a dedicated Care Leavers Careers Advice worker and two life coaches as well as consultations with a DWP worker regarding financial support. Care Leavers who are parents are encouraged to be actively engaged in activities/programmes on offer in Brent's newly established Family Wellbeing Centres (former Children's Centres), including access to The Maternal Early Childhood Sustained Home-visiting (MESCH) through the Health Visitors Service. Care Leavers are supported by Brent Virtual School to achieve education outcomes. For example, the counselling phone line Safe Base has been made available to Care Leavers in Higher Education, to support with mental health issues and build resilience to stay the course. As part of Brent's Local Offer, 59 different commitments were made to care leavers. 8 of those commitments were statutory duties Brent needed to provide by law and 51 were additional, discretionary commitments made to care leavers.

- 12.2 DfE guidance suggests that the local authorities should review their local offers every 2-3 years. Senior leaders in Brent made a decision for the progress of the local offer to be reviewed on an annual basis with the view to revise it in a two yearly cycle. In this way, care leavers' needs continue to be kept on the agenda annually.
- 12.3 Brent has continued to meet its both statutory responsibilities as well as discretionary commitments to care leavers during the COVID-19 pandemic. During national lockdowns, the majority of care leavers were visited online and at times face to face when required. There has been significant impact on face-to-face activities such as the weekly football and monthly enrichment activities for care leavers.

### **13 Care Leavers' Enrichment Programme throughout the Pandemic**

- 13.1 Throughout the pandemic, the enrichment programme for care leavers has continued through a hybrid mixture of online and offline events. Young people organised a social gathering event in July and a Crazy Golf event in August 2020 when Covid-19 safety guidelines permitted. During the national lockdowns, there were many online events including quizzes, bingo and two motivational speaker events (17<sup>th</sup> February and 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021) which attracted up to 30 young people in each session. In addition, a group of care leavers attended a camping trip in September 2020 with Barnardo's Charity for a long weekend, involving outside activities such as paint balling and quad biking. Barnardo's also held a workshop with young people called 'Pizza and Privilege' including a discussion about race and the Black Lives Matters Movement.
- 13.2 One care leaver shared their experience of another camping trip she had been on with a charity, via the WhatsApp group, which led to a further 4 care leavers signing up to take part, all of whom greatly enjoyed the experience. Brent's enrichment programme jointly won the National Care Leaver Benchmarking Forum's Best Project 2020 award. The WhatsApp group has been used to share information, government guidelines, emotional support and practical tips through the pandemic.

*'When I was in foster care I felt like I was the only one who had lived like I had for years because everyone I knew lived with their parents and had a normal life. It was only until I found out about the care leaver group chat/events that made me feel like I wasn't alone. I felt so free and normal when I realised how many other young people lived the same as me. This was something that helped me realise I wasn't weird and I had a normal life just like everyone else. Being able to still be in contact with care leavers now has been really good for my development as a young person. They've all helped me grow as a person' (KF, case closed but remains engaged in the Hub)*

*'It was an amazing event, having a motivational speaker share his struggles and how he was able to turn it around and share his story was so useful. It was suited to us as people in care and the opportunity to ask questions was great. Came out feeling very positive and wiser which is amazing. Really enjoyed it' (A, care leaver)*

- 13.3 The Element arts programme was re-commissioned in autumn 2020 and took place weekly covering photography, drawing, mixed media, craft, poetry and drama with care leavers. Nine young people attended the project which was co-facilitated by a Brent care leaver, who is an Element Youth Champion and previous project participant. The plan was to run the sessions face to face but due to the announcement of the 2<sup>nd</sup> lockdown some of the sessions took place on-line. The group chose the name 'Agua La Vista' after expressing a strong interest in nature, particularly sea life, during the project. The artists joined a Zoom call, during one of the Element sessions and the young people developed and explored their ideas for what they wanted the online gallery to look like. It culminated in an online exhibition of the group's work on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2020. Since the project finished, 5 young people from the project have engaged in a various networking activities. This includes responding to creative challenges via a group in WhatsApp, attending an online Element group session and/or attending an online check-in with an Element member of staff, to work towards a Bronze Arts Award qualification. Feedback from young people participating the programme has been positive:

*"I enjoyed the poetry in particular, I haven't written like that in years",*  
care leaver

*"I have my mixed media piece up on my bedroom wall, I'm proud of what I made",* care leaver

- 13.4 A new programme to support young people into employment has also started including a 'Seeking employment' WhatsApp group. Jobs are being posted every day and Brent's commissioned provider for EET, Prospects, are part of the group, supporting young people with their CV and interview skills. One young person successfully gained a place on the civil service year-long internship based on information in this group and many others have asked for support and more information on various roles.

## 14 Grand-mentors Programme

- 14.1 Brent Local Authority and Volunteers Matters commenced a new initiative to support young people with bespoke mentoring from September 2020. Grand mentors is an innovative project using the power of inter-generational mentoring to support care leavers who may be in challenging life circumstances. These mentors are volunteers aged 50 and over who use their wisdom, their energy and their life experience to help keep young people leaving care on track. The following case study demonstrates the impact grand mentors have on young people's lived experience:

### Case Study – NN receives support from her grand mentor

*NN, a care leaver, was referred by her personal advisor (PA) in November 2020. NN is a young person originally from a middle eastern country, who has no family residing in the UK. NN is in her first year studying at a London university. NN's PA felt that she was under stress with her course and suffering from isolation and loneliness.*

*During an exploration call with NN to see if she would be interested in having a grand mentor, she became very emotional and said that she wasn't sure if she would 'get anything out of having a mentor'. She felt generally low, unsupported and isolated and could not see how a grand mentor could offer her solutions that would alleviate that. It was suggested that she could think about it for a few days. When NN was spoken to again, she still was not hopeful but agreed to have an initial conversation with her matched grand mentor, who is an entrepreneur and business woman who once presented her own televised talk show.*

*NN and her grand mentor's first phone call was over an hour long and since then they have been in regular contact. NN reported that she is 'very happy with the support I have received so far'. She was struggling with her assignments and was stressed about submitting them on time. The mentor was able to provide intensive support to NN regarding her assignment including giving constructive feedback. NN has appreciated the feedback very much. She has now reported that she feels more confident in writing her university assignment knowing that she has someone she can get support from. In the interaction below, one can see how much NN has appreciated this support:*



- 14.2 Feedback from another care leaver referred to have a grand mentor demonstrates the need for young people to have a mentor:

*“...I have only met her virtually due to the pandemic, but we got on from day 1. Her positive vibrant energy is like I have known her forever! She has a motherly aura that is non-judgemental, caring, encouraging and supportive with professional boundaries. I feel less restricted and reluctant to share; it’s almost like the cool aunt or big sister vibe that has your best interest at heart. I can go to for anything like a chat, advise, motivation, encouragement, and support...”*

## 15 Care Leavers in Education, Employment & Training

- 15.1 There were 49 young people in higher education in 2020/21. These included 25 young people aged 19-21 at university, studying a variety of subjects from Social Work, to Business Studies and Law. Additionally, 14 care leavers aged between 22 and 25 were in higher education at the end of the reporting year. Brent had a higher percentage of care leavers in higher education than statistical neighbours and nationally. The table below highlights some of the comparative data for young people at university:

Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in Higher Education	Brent	Brent %	Statistical Neighbour average	Statistical Neighbour average %	National figure	figure %
2019-20	24	10%	20	8%	1,920	6%
2020-21	24	10%				

- 15.2 At the end of the reporting year, the percentage of young people aged 19-21 in education, employment and training was just over 53%, compared to 57% last year. The difference is mainly due to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic which has left some care leavers, particularly those working within the hospitality sector and on zero-hour contracts, unemployed. Brent’s performance is in line with statistical neighbours and the national average. The national key performance measures as related to outcomes for care leavers in education, employment or training are as below:

Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in Education, Employment or Training	Brent	Brent %	Statistical Neighbour average	Statistical Neighbour average %	National figure	figure %
2019-20	137	57%	133	53%	16440	53%
2020-21	128	53%				

- 15.3 All care leavers attending University are provided with financial support that includes a Higher Education bursary [as endorsed by the Department for Education Charter for Care Leavers] of £2000 plus subsidised travel to assist with travel costs. In addition, as per Brent's local offer young people (subject to a financial assessment) received subsistence and rent payments from Brent Council during Christmas, Easter and summer vacations.
- 15.4 The case study below demonstrates Brent's commitment to support care leavers who aspire to attend higher education:

#### **Case Study – A care leaver in higher education**

JM is a 21-year-old care leaver; he is studying at university. He spends his holiday time with his Staying Put carer with whom he has a very strong relationship. When the pandemic started, he was unable to remain in accommodation on campus and he was supported to return to live with his carer whilst completing online lessons. Brent has continued to financially support the placement and JM.

Ongoing support allowed him to have stability and consistency from his support network whilst continuing to study and excel. He has now completed his second year and is waiting to see if he can return to face-to-face learning in September 21. He is involved in tango classes and chess club at university and despite having Asperger's, JM has 'thrown himself' into all aspects of university life. He has also taken up a job as a co-researcher for a few hours a week at university to top up his income.

## **16 Care Leavers' Accommodation**

- 16.1 All care leavers in Brent are given priority housing banding due to their leaving care status. Young people are only put forward for a council tenancy when they are ready to move on. The PAs complete a vulnerability assessment with the young person and recommend that they should be able to manage a council or housing association tenancy. Young people also need to complete mandatory tenancy workshops or ASDAN independent life skills programme before they move to their tenancies. A 'setting up Home Allowance' of £2000 is provided for care leavers to furnish their homes and buy essential items.
- 16.2 A monthly housing panel reviews all requests for tenancy nominations for care leavers. Although the Covid-19 restrictions have limited face to face interactions around the life skills programme, over 60 young people have been provided with an ASDAN 'Living Independently' workbook since April 2020. Additionally, personal advisors have been offered training on how to support their care leavers in completing the workbook. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, face to face workshops to re-inforce learning in certain areas have not been conducted. However, Brent has continued offering workshops to young people to better manage their finance and tenancy. MyBank Charity that works with young people provided training to care leavers on money management and Housing colleagues provided tenancy workshops for young people who are ready to be nominated for a tenancy in March 21.

- 16.3 At the end of the reporting year, 83% of care leavers aged 19-21 were in suitable accommodation. This performance is equal to statistical neighbours and slightly below the national average. This is partly due to some care leavers who were former UASC, being refused leave to remain in the UK and choosing not to be in touch with the Local Authority<sup>1</sup>

Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in suitable accommodation	Brent	Brent %	Statistical Neighbour average	Statistical Neighbour average %	National figure	National figure %
2019-20	197	82%	202	82%	26360	85%
2020-21	208	83%				

- 16.4 Care Leavers continue to be placed in appropriate and safe accommodation. Those who are not ready to move to independence are encouraged to stay put with their foster carers or in semi-independent accommodation until they are ready, with the expectation that carers identify how they will support transition to adulthood. The number of care leavers in semi-independent provision has increased from 106 in April 2020 to 136 in March 2021. This increase is partly due to the pandemic delaying young people's move into their tenancies. Additionally, there are several former UASCs who have been waiting for a Home Office decision which has been delayed due to the pandemic.
- 16.5 Brent has provided additional support to care leavers through the pandemic, including those who have had to remain in commissioned accommodation due to delays moving into their tenancies caused by the pandemic. The following case study demonstrates housing support offered to a care leaver who cannot live in Brent due to his previous involvement with gangs:

#### Case Study – Accommodation

TA is a 22 year old care leaver, an EU national originally from a country from Asia. He is married and has a daughter.

TA became looked after when his parents relinquished their care of him at age 16. He has had multiple placement moves and unfortunately has an offending history. In 2019 and 2020, Brent managed to re-engage with TA after tenacious attempts. The focus of the work was on enhancing his independent living skills. Following this work, TA secured his own council property.

Unfortunately, TA was arrested for assaulting his wife in summer of 2020 and remanded for 3 months. The court granted a restraining order effectively making TA homeless. This was an especially difficult time for TA and his family, particularly in relation to his emotional wellbeing. The Leaving Care Team provided him with a semi-independent placement whilst he sought to vary the terms of the restraining order. TA has made positive changes during this time. TA has secured a Business Administration apprenticeship in partnership with Brent

Works. He has 100% attendance and is waiting for the result of the first set of exams, he is hopeful he has done well.

The PA worked closely with his solicitor and provided the necessary evidence to the courts who recently varied the restraining order, which has allowed him to return to his tenancy. Brent continues to support TA as he seeks contact with his daughter as well as access to mental health support to manage his anger to reduce the risks of potential future violence.

TA has repeatedly expressed his gratitude for our support during this time *“I am determined to move forward from the negativity and criminal convictions of my past I am so grateful for you guys who believed I could do this and all the support you given me .”*

Leaving Care staff have remained aspirational for TA, and demonstrated a belief in him that he was not accustomed to. Our partnership with Brent Works has been instrumental in supporting TA to access education and training despite his criminal history. We continue to support TA and his family.

## 17 Priorities for Corporate Parenting Partners 2021/22

- Improving access to mental health support services, particularly specialist CAMHS support for looked after children and targeted support for care leavers in the light of the impact of COVID-19
- Increasing the number of looked after children and care leavers in education, employment and training including late entrants to the care system and Key Stage 4 pupils.
- Ensuring that the voice of looked after children and care leavers is seen within all service development initiatives.
- To ensure there continues to be effective multi-agency strategy meetings to shape a coordinated, collaborative safety plan for vulnerable adolescents. This will include commitment to raise further awareness on transitional safeguarding to ensure continuity of services for the most vulnerable young people after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- All partners to ensure potential increase in demand for services – in line with the impact of Covid-19 – does not have a negative impact on outcomes for looked after children and care leavers

### **Report sign off:**

*Nigel Chapman*

Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes