



Corporate Parenting Committee

13th October 2021

Report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People

Support for Brent's Looked After Children and Care Leavers from Afghanistan

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)	Open
No. of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	N/A
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1 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of activity undertaken to support Brent's looked after children and care leavers who originate from Afghanistan.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Committee review and provide comments on the contents of this report.

3 Context

- 3.1 Recent developments in Afghanistan has changed the political regime and societal context in the country. Brent has a large population of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and also those who are former UASC, currently supported as care leavers. Out of both UASC and former UASC population, Brent currently supports 21 Afghani looked after children and 53 care leavers.
- 3.2 Following the developments in Afghanistan, all social workers (SWs) and personal advisers (PAs) contacted Afghani children and young people on their caseloads to check in and assess their welfare. Additionally, a targeted meeting with all PAs and managers was held to discuss the issue. It became apparent that many were worried and anxious about their families and loved ones who remained in Afghanistan.

4 Support available for Looked After Children and Care Leavers in Brent

- 4.1 The main source of support for the children and young people has been their networks including immediate or distant relatives and friends. SWs and PAs have been in touch with young people, explored peer support as well as specific support for each individual depending on level of need. Details of available services for Afghani young people have been shared on the Care Leavers' WhatsApp group.
- 4.2 Social Work and Leaving Care Teams have explored mental health and emotional wellbeing services such as Safe Base Brent (therapeutic consultation for Brent care leavers), WEST (Anna Freud Centre, commissioned by Brent) and 'Kooth', online counselling. Some young people have taken up a counselling offer and PAs made relevant referrals. Additionally, voluntary organisations or relevant charities have also been contacted such as Young Roots who offer some emotional support to young people.
- 4.3 A multi-agency meeting, held on 26th August 2021, between Brent officers, health care partners, community and voluntary groups explored options to

support Afghani children and families. As a result of this meeting a list of community groups and organisations able to provide support to Afghani communities in Brent was shared with Afghani looked after children and young people known to Brent LAC and Leaving Care Teams. The list included a number of agencies such as the Afghan Islamic and Cultural Centre and Afghanistan and Central Asian Association.

- 4.4 Additionally, an Afghani mental health and wellbeing resource pack created by the Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS) was shared with relevant children and young people and their key workers. This was also available in the Pashto and Dari languages.
- 4.5 A separate meeting between the Community Mental Health Borough Director and Brent senior leaders has resulted in therapeutic group work being planned for Afghani children and young people. Two groups are planned to be held; one with under 18 UASC (to be delivered by specialist CAMHS, CNWL NHS Trust) and one with care leavers (to be delivered by Community Mental Health, CNWL NHS Trust). Preparations are currently ongoing with the view to have the first group meeting in October 2021.
- 4.6 Emotional wellbeing sessions are currently promoted and discussed between SWs/PAs and young people. Dari and Pashto interpreters will be available if the young people need them. Currently six UASC and three care leavers expressed an interest in attending the initial session.
- 4.7 Foster carers provide a pivotal role when it comes to emotional and social support for Afghani children. Therefore, supervising social workers have liaised with all foster carers who look after Afghani children to ensure that both they and children in their care receive an appropriate level of support. Foster carers shared that they have been available and supportive of Afghani young people by linking them with relevant community groups or mosques.
- 4.8 Some care leavers requested advice from Brent to help bring their families to the UK. Young people were advised that Brent did not have the power or authority to provide such support but young people were put in touch with the relevant central government agencies for specialist advice. However, two care leavers made decisions to travel independently to Afghanistan, without the prior knowledge of the Leaving Care team, in order to provide help and assistance to their families. Once in Afghanistan both made contact with their PAs, seeking assistance once it became clear that they were unable to relocate their family members to a neighbouring country. The PAs and managers were in regular close contact with the young people via social media. To facilitate one young person's return, financial support was provided to enable him to fly back from Pakistan. At the time of writing the other young person remains in Afghanistan. Close contact continues to be made with him and the Foreign Office are also aware of the current situation.

Report sign off:

Gail Tolley

Strategic Director Children and Young People