



Corporate Parenting Committee
19 October 2022

**Report from the Corporate Director,
Children and Young People**

Placement Stability Report 2021/2022

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
Background Papers	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	<p>Zafer Yilkan Interim Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes, CYP</p> <p>Kelli Eboji, Acting Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency, CYP</p> <p>Elena Muller, Service Manager, Looked After Children and Permanency , CYP</p>

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 There was an increase of multiple placement moves amongst children in care in 2021 and 2022 (from 11% March 2021 to 15.7% in March 2022). This report explains the reasons for this increase and articulates the work undertaken to minimise unplanned moves for looked after children.

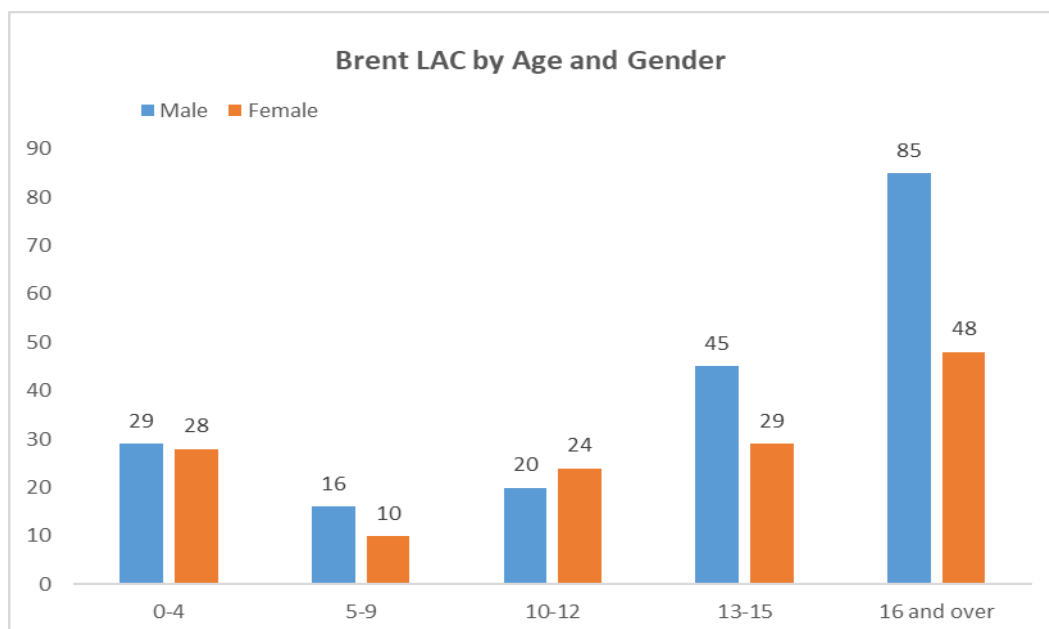
1.2 Placement stability for children is closely linked with sufficiency of placements. A report on placement sufficiency¹ was presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC) in April 2022.

2 Recommendations

2.1 The CPC is requested to review and comment on the contents of this report and note the activity undertaken to enhance placement stability for looked after children in Brent.

3 Detail

3.1 Changing demographics of looked after children has been one of the drivers of placement moves. Over the last 12 months, Brent's LAC population has increased from 312 in September-2021 to 334 in September-2022. The total Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child (UASC) population has dropped from 65 (20.8%) in Sep-2021 to 52 (15.6%) in Sep-2022. Some of these young people had to be placed in emergency placements pending the outcome of their age assessments. Hence, such process has increased the number of placement moves. Additionally, 40% of Brent's LAC population are 16+, with cases featuring contextual safeguarding concerns such as gang affiliation criminal and child exploitation and frequent missing episodes. Some cases of adolescents bring a higher degree of complexity and make placement stability more challenging due to presenting issues such as difficulties around emotional and mental health, self-harming and suicidal ideation. The below graph includes age and gender profile of looked after children in Brent:



¹ <https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=446&MIId=6614&Ver=4>

- 3.2 A national shortage of suitable placements also contributes to multiple placement moves. There is unprecedented demand for placements nationally and regionally (in London), caused by rising national numbers of children in care, shortage of foster carers and issues within the market around residential care for children with increasingly complex and additional needs. The Independent Review of Children Social Care² highlighted the shortage of placements, particularly foster placements on a national scale.
- 3.3 The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has also recently undertaken a market study into children's social care placements in England, Scotland and Wales. The CMA's final report (March 2022)³ highlighted the lack of sufficient placements and the high placement costs.
- 3.4 Locally, West London authorities have recently reported an increasing complexity of need and an older age range of young people entering the care system. This is putting significant strain on individual local authorities' sufficiency of suitable foster placements. Speaking to neighbouring authorities across West London, the following difficulties have been voiced:
- Insufficient number of local foster placements – for individual young people, sibling groups and mother and babies
 - Children placed at a distance from their families, communities, friendship networks, schools and local services
 - Too much placement instability – particularly for older children
 - Variability in placement planning and support contributes to placement breakdown and/or escalation to residential care
 - Challenges of recruiting foster carers – competing recruitment campaigns by boroughs
 - Increased costs due to reliance on independent sector
 - Residential placements being used due to lack of “specialist” or “therapeutic” supported foster placements
 - Future demand profiling indicates a higher-than-average increase in 10-14 year olds and 16+ across the sub-region
 - Many residential homes being reluctant to accept local children and young people because of the risks they present given proximity of family and friends networks
- 3.5 A reduction in the number of in-house fostering beds has also contributed to placement moves by limiting the choice to get the right placement at the right time for children and young people. The Local Authority has a greater degree of control and support over in-house placements compared to IFAs and they are at a lower cost. Over the last 12 months Brent fostering available beds/places have

² [Final Report - The Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk\)](https://www.independent-review.org/children-social-care-final-report)

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-market-study-final-report>

reduced from 153 to 146, in addition the impact of Care Leavers remaining in foster placements in Staying Put arrangements has meant the number of available beds have reduced during this reporting period. Brent had 101 fostering households at year end.

3.6 Whilst Brent has experienced a reduction of in-house fostering placements, the demand for placements has increased during the pandemic. Brent has seen a significant increase in demand across children's services, with caseloads increasing by 3.5% over twelve months period:

- an increase in child referrals from 2,326 in Sept 21 to 2,538 in Sept 22 (9.1%)
- an increase in children in need under 18 yrs from 2,246 in Sept 21 to 2,296 in Sept 22 (2.2%)
- an increase in the number of children subject of Child Protection Plans from 318 in Sept 21 to 403 in Sept 22 (26.7%)
- an increase in the number of Looked after Children (LAC) from 312 in Sep-2021 to 334 in Sep-2022
- a decrease in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) from 65 (20.8%) in Sep-21 to 52 in Sep-22 (15.6%)
- an increase in the number of care leaver population aged 18-25 years from 432 in Sept 21 to 481 in Sept 22 (11.3%)

3.7 Alongside the increase in demand, there has been increase in number of looked after children with complex emotional and behavioural needs who cannot safely remain living with their foster carers which contribute to placement moves.

3.8 Brent has seen an increased number of young people being placed in semi-independent accommodation this year. This is partly due to national lack of sufficiency around foster carers for teenagers, including within Brent's in-house fostering service and the increasing number of older children coming into care in their late teens. The number of LAC placed in semi-independent provision increased from 41 in April 2021 to 86 at the end of March 2022. This increase is in line with the UASC increase who are mostly placed in semi-independent provisions.

4 Main headlines of analysis

4.1 Placement stability remains a challenge and a priority area for Brent. As of March 2022, there has been a significant increase in the number of children and young people with two or three placement moves compared to previous years. This has coincided with increases in Brent LAC population over the last 12 months. The cases of children who have experienced 2+ placement moves were reviewed and below were the main headlines:

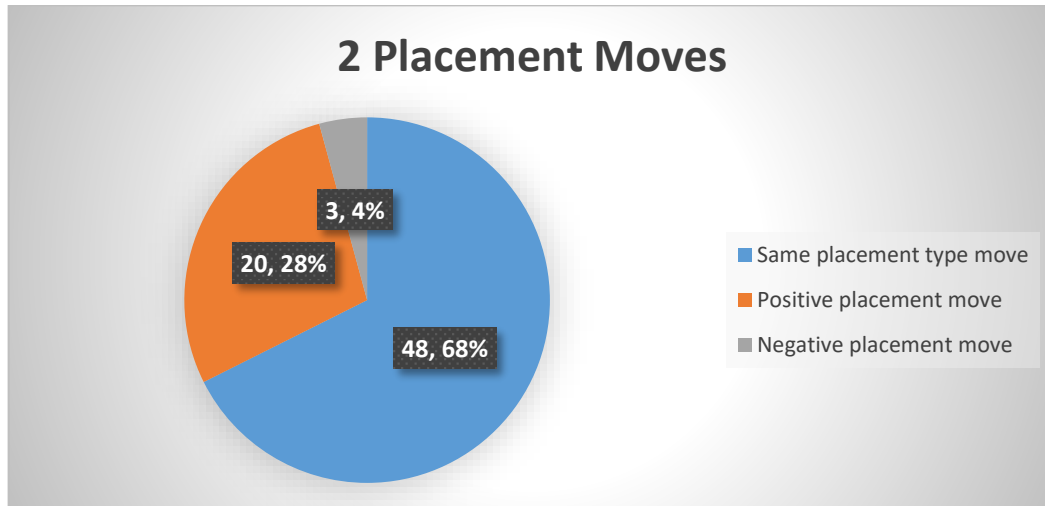
Children and young people with 3 Placement Moves

- **End of 20/21** 11% or 34 children
- **End of 21/22** 15.7% or 55 children

Children and young people with 2 Placement Moves

- **End of 20/21** 17% or 49 children
- **End of 21/22** 21% or 71 children

4.2 The chart below shows the breakdown of number of children with 2 or more placement moves for this reporting period. The data indicate 28% of placement moves are due to positive placement endings involving successful transition to alternative arrangements as per care plans.



4.3 50% of positive moves were linked to children moving from fostering to semi-independent placements as part of transitioning to adulthood. 35% were step down moves from residential children's home to fostering placement. 15% were moves from semi-independent to fostering placement

4.4 Negative placement moves (4%) reflect those children who have moved from a fostering or semi-independent placement to Children's residential homes due to their complex needs requiring more specialist care and support.

4.5 68% of children experienced placement moves involving "same or similar" types of provision e.g. foster carer-giving notice on placement and child moving to alternative fostering arrangements or residential placement disruption involving moves to alternative residential provision.

4.6 Further work is underway to scrutinise, monitor and review all placement moves during 2022/23 to better understand circumstances that lead to placement moves e.g. whether they were planned or unplanned and early interventions involving placement stability meetings enhanced/increased placement stability and achieved positive outcomes for children.

5 Actions taken to increase placement stability

- 5.1 A Lead Practice Consultant for placement stability monitors and tracks all placement moves, identifying emerging trends associated with placement disruption/breakdown.
- 5.2 The Practice Consultant works closely with LAC teams to identify and strengthen “fragile placements” and any additional support is required to prevent placement breakdown. The Council’s Commissioning and Resources Team (CRT) are working with providers to get these packages of support put in place swiftly.
- 5.3 Both LAC Teams and CRT can access the Lead Practice Consultant who chairs placement stability meetings to explore options and implement steps/measures for supporting fragile placements e.g. through agreed “wrap-around support” or additional therapeutic support packages.
- 5.4 Placement Stability Core Group Meetings are held monthly, chaired by the Fostering Service Manager and attended by
 - i) CYP Performance Manager
 - ii) Lead Practice Consultant
 - iii) CRT Manager
 - iv) Performance Team

The group are responsible for tracking/reviewing actions for reducing placement moves and sharing quantitative and qualitative data/information to identify the cohort of CYP currently in ‘fragile placements’ where early intervention and additional support is required. More recently, the Lead Practice Consultant completed specific work analysing the data of children with 2 plus moves to inform early intervention/support plans with allocated social workers that can help to avoid unplanned endings.

- 5.5 The Council’s Children’s Placement Panel also monitors use of placements and authorises additional support required to sustain the placement, if need be.

5.6. Enhanced support and resources for Brent’s foster carers

A review of supervision and support provided to in-house foster carers has recently been started. The review has already identified creative, cost-effective ways in which to enhance our service offer to carers and looked after children recognising the need for dedicated in-house specialist support aimed at strengthening placement stability and building confidence and resilience in carers. For example, the review explored approaches/best practice in “growing our own” especially regarding development of more specialist and therapeutic

carers to care for children with more complex needs. The findings from the review will be provided to the CPC in the next Quarterly Fostering Report.

- 5.7 The review is also exploring securing additional in-house clinical support for foster carers via utilising existing commissioned services, i.e. the West Service and using family support workers to provide a more flexible, targeted multi-disciplinary approach that is trauma-informed and rooted in achieving placement stability and permanency for children. The outcome of this review will be shared with the CPC in the next Quarterly Fostering Report.
- 5.8 The CPC has been provided with regular updates on the 'West London Fostering Project', which aimed at creating a joint entity to recruit more foster carers, particularly for adolescents. There has been a slow progress in the project for various reasons including some financial pressures in partner local authorities. There is an added difficulty around equalisation of payments to foster carers as Brent's fostering allowances are below the average allowances paid to foster carers in West London.
- 5.9 The Independent Review of Children's Social Care has recommended the establishment of regional fostering cooperatives in order to maximise placement options for children in care. The government is expected to respond to the review by the end of the calendar year. This might open up some funding opportunities for Brent and neighbouring authorities to build on the work undertaken in relation to the West London Fostering Project. The CPC will be updated accordingly.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1. Placement stability for children in care is linked to positive outcomes for children, including educational attainments, improved physical and mental health, sense of belonging and happiness and successful transition to adulthood. Placement choice and stability is a priority area for Brent. This report draws attention to some of the local, regional and national activities to increase placement stability for children as well as the challenges in Brent.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman
Corporate Director Children and Young People