



## Corporate Parenting Committee

17 July 2023

### Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People

## Annual Corporate Parenting Report April 2022 – March 2023

<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>	N/A
<b>Background Papers:</b>	Local Offer for Care Leavers 2022-24, <a href="https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=446&amp;MIId=6614&amp;Ver=4">https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=446&amp;MIId=6614&amp;Ver=4</a>
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### 1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report fulfils the Council's statutory obligation to present an annual report to the Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC) on outcomes for Looked After Children and care leavers, in line with The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010). The report provides a summary of the activity alongside strengths and areas for development in supporting looked after children and care leavers in Brent.

1.2 Progress against the priorities identified in the previous Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2021/22 have been updated throughout the body of this report. The priorities were:

- Continuous focus from all partners to improve health services and outcomes for LAC and care leavers including but not limited to dental care, emotional wellbeing and CAMHS i.e. targeted support for UASC and former UASC.
- Partners to work together to increase the number of Brent's looked after children and care leavers in employment, education and training. In line with this, partners are encouraged to offer Brent care leavers workplace experiences and apprenticeships.
- Partners to have increased engagement with Brent Care Journeys Programme (in partnership with Barnardo's) enabling young people being involved in design and improvement of services across the borough.
- Ongoing work around transitional safeguarding to enable a coordinated approach based on collaboration from partners, i.e. completion of a joint protocol with Probation on care leavers being released from custody.
- Further work on accommodation pathways for care leavers, particularly those placed within semi-independent provision and their readiness to move on.

1.3 The report also sets out the priorities of the Looked After Children and Permanency service (LACP) for 2023/24.

1.4 The Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Service (ILACS) took place in February 2023 and judged services to be good in all areas, including the experiences and progress of children in care and the experience and progress of care leavers. There were many strengths highlighted by Ofsted about the support and services provided to Brent's care experienced children and young people which we will continue to build upon. The areas of improvement noted in the Ofsted report specific to looked after children and care leavers were:

- Attendance of children in care at their reviews and the quality of information provided to children following their reviews.
- Care leavers' understanding of and access to their health histories.

1.5 An action plan has been developed to address the areas for improvement.

## **2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended 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 over the past year, thus ensuring that adequate care and support are being provided to Brent's looked after children and care leavers.

### **3.0 Corporate Parenting**

- 3.1 The concept of Corporate Parenting was introduced by The Children Act 2004, which placed collective responsibility on local authorities and their partners to achieve good outcomes for all children in and those leaving 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 strengthened further 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 Elected members in Brent carry out their corporate parenting duty as follows:

- a. The CPC, chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Young People with cross party Member representation scrutinises service performance. This occurs on a quarterly basis.
- b. Attendance of CIA (Care in Action) and CLIA (Care Leavers in Action) representatives at the CPC.
- 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. By ensuring Brent's 'Promise' to LAC, 'Care Leavers' Charter' and Local Offer for care leavers is abided by.

- e. An annual, mandatory Member Learning and Development session on Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting.

3.4 Members of Care in Action and Care Leavers in Action continued attending the Committee every quarter to provide updates on their recent activity. These updates were noted and supported by the Committee. The CPC in 2022/23 scrutinised several reports on various issues affecting Brent care experienced children and young people including the following:

- a. In April 2022, the CPC were presented with a report on the progress of the Local Offer for Care Leavers and the proposed revisions to that offer for 2022-2024. The committee received an update on placement commissioning activity for care experienced children and young people. The CPC was provided with a quarterly update from the Fostering Service, including an update on numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, the West London Fostering Collaborative project which was placed on hold during year end budget setting and local authority elections by the other local authorities involved, and the recruitment of foster carers. The last item covered in April 2022 was the six-monthly update on the performance of adoption activity managed by Adopt London West. These reports were co-written by Adopt London West and Brent, including 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.
- b. In July 2022, the Committee was presented with a report on the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to the quality assuring and improvement of services for Looked After Children. The Annual Corporate Parenting report for 2021/22 was presented to the Committee at the July 2022 meeting. The Fostering quarterly report was presented alongside information to the Corporate Parenting Committee regarding engagement and involvement of foster carers in the revision / updating of Brent's Foster Carers Charter.
- c. In October 2022, the Committee received a report summarising the current position for placement stability. The report explained the reasons for the increase in multiple placement moves and articulated the work undertaken to minimise unplanned moves for Looked After Children. The CPC received quarterly fostering and six-monthly adoption reports.
- d. In the February 2023 meeting, the Committee was presented with a report on the Brent Care Journey partnership and how it is contributing to our participation work and achieving good outcomes for children and young people. The CPC heard from the service

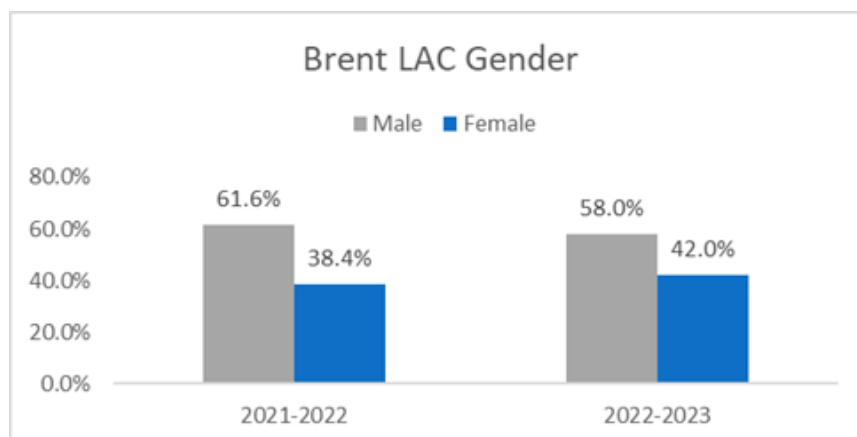
about the local authority's response to the National Safeguarding Review of Children with Additional Needs placed in Residential Education Provision which highlighted the positive findings of this review for these specific Brent children. The North West London CCG gave a presentation on the ways health services are responding to the health needs of Looked After Children. The CPC also received quarterly activity on Brent's in-house fostering service. The committee was informed at this meeting that the service would be providing 6-monthly reports for fostering moving forward in line with the bi-annual adoption report.

#### 4.0 Profile of Looked after Children

4.1 As at 31 March 2023 Brent had 319 children in care compared to 341 children on 31 March 2022, a decrease of 7%. This represented 43.7 LAC per 10,000 child population against the rate for England of 62 per 10,000 head of child population, a decrease in rate by 3.3 from previous year (47). In 2022/23, 160 children became looked after, compared to an average of 180 per year over the previous four years. The decrease in LAC has primarily been driven by a decrease in UASC. On 31 March 2023, the Local Authority looked after 45 UASC compared to 74 UASC in March 2022. This represented 14.1% of the total Brent LAC population. The increase and subsequent decline in UASC numbers were related to the number of people accommodated in hotels in Brent by the Home Office, which has fluctuated over the period.

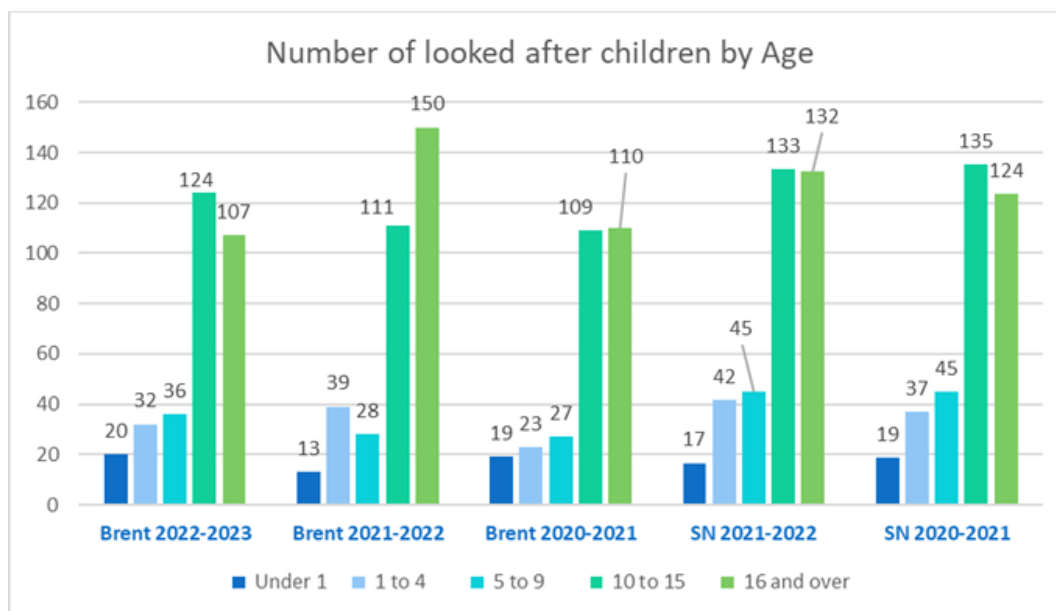
4.2 In 2022/23, 46 children became children looked after for a second or subsequent time, compared to 49 in 2021/22.

4.3 The gender of the LAC population consists of 58% male and 42% female; with the gender split narrowing slightly compared to the previous years.



4.4 33.5% of the care population in Brent is aged over 16 years old, compared to 44% at the end of March 2022. Over 72.4% of the care population in Brent are aged 10 and over. Having a predominantly adolescent LAC population and associated risks presents challenges around outcomes

such as placement stability, education, employment and training. Many young people present with emotional and behavioural difficulties and complex needs that foster carers do not feel equipped to manage. Additionally, there is a national lack of sufficiency around foster carers for teenagers.



## 4.5 Ethnicity of LAC

4.5.1 The ethnicity<sup>1</sup> of looked after children broadly remained the same compared to the previous year. However, there has been a 4% decrease in the number of looked after children from Other Ethnic groups and Asian background. This is mostly related to the decreased number of UASC taken into care in 2022/23.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-looked-after-return-2022-to-2023-guide>

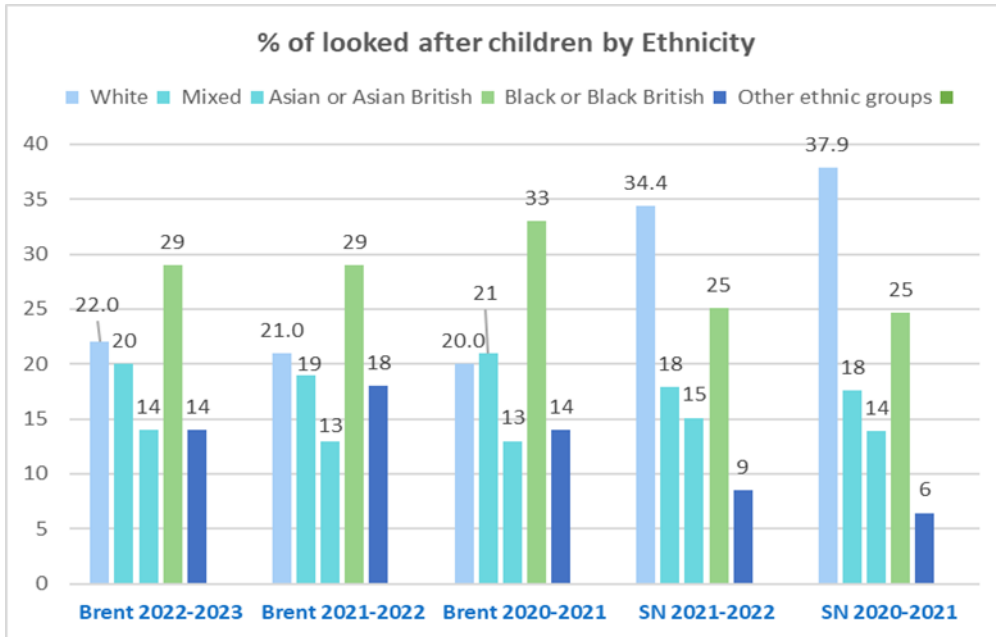
**White includes** (White –British, White-Cornish, White-English, White Scottish, White Welsh, White-Irish, Traveller of Iris heritage, Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, Greek, Italian, Kosovan, Portuguese, White Eastern European, White Western European, Gypsy/Roma, Turkish, Serbian, any other white background)

**Mixed includes** (White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Pakistani, White and Indian, Asian and any Black, Asian and Chinese, Black and Chinese, Chinese and any other ethnic group, White and Chinese, Any other mixed background)

**Asian or Asian British includes** (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, African Asian, Nepali, Sri Lankan, Any other Asian background)

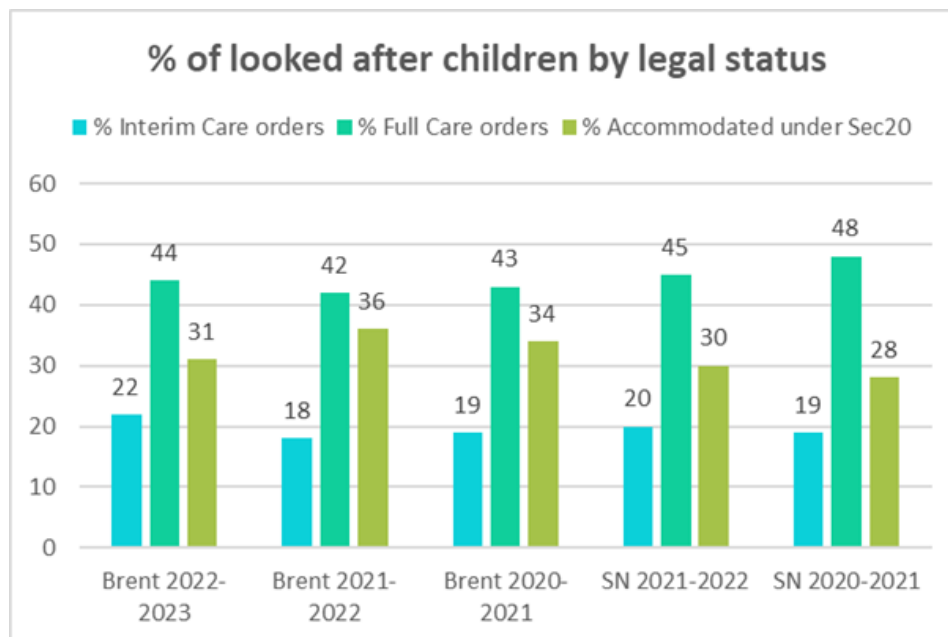
**Black or Black British includes** (Black Caribbean, Black African, Black Angolan, Black, Congolese, Black Ghanaian, Black Nigerian, Black Sierra Leonean, Black Somali, Black Sudanese, Black European, Black North American and Any other Black background.)

**Any other ethnic group includes** (Afghan, Arab, Egyptian, Filipino, Iranian, Iraqi, Japanese, Korean, Kurdish, Latin American, Libyan, Lebanese, Malay, Moroccan, Polynesian, Thai, Vietnamese, Yemeni, Refused, Information not yet obtained)



## 4.6 Legal status and placement location

4.6.1 The majority of looked after children were subject to Care Orders (Interim and Full Care orders) under the Children Act 1989, representing 66% of all LAC in this reporting year. A further 99 children (31% of all LAC) were in care through a voluntary agreement with the parents/carers as pursuant to Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. 45 of these children are UASC who are looked after via Section 20 agreement.



- 4.6.2 The proportion of children placed more than 20 miles away from their home address as of 31 March 2023 was 17.2%, an increase of 0.8% on the previous year's figure of 16.4% (the national average is 14%).
- 4.6.3 Brent CYP aims to place children closer to their families and local support networks. However, in many cases where children enter care in adolescence, young people may need to be placed out of borough for their own safety. Placement sufficiency issues in London are also evident as it is challenging to identify local placements for adolescents with highly complex needs. Brent's Sufficiency Strategy 2022-24 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.
- 4.6.4 Most children resided within fostering placements (206) – 64.6% of all LAC, an increase on 2022 (60%). This area of work remains a challenge for most London local authorities and nationally. Identifying foster placements for adolescents has continued to be a challenge due to lack of sufficiency in foster placements and the majority of LAC being teenagers (57.4% are over the age of 13 and 33.5% over the age of 16).
- 4.6.5 The LA has an in-house fostering service that at the end of March 2023 supported 58 children, 7 more children than in March 2022.

## 5.0 Placement Stability

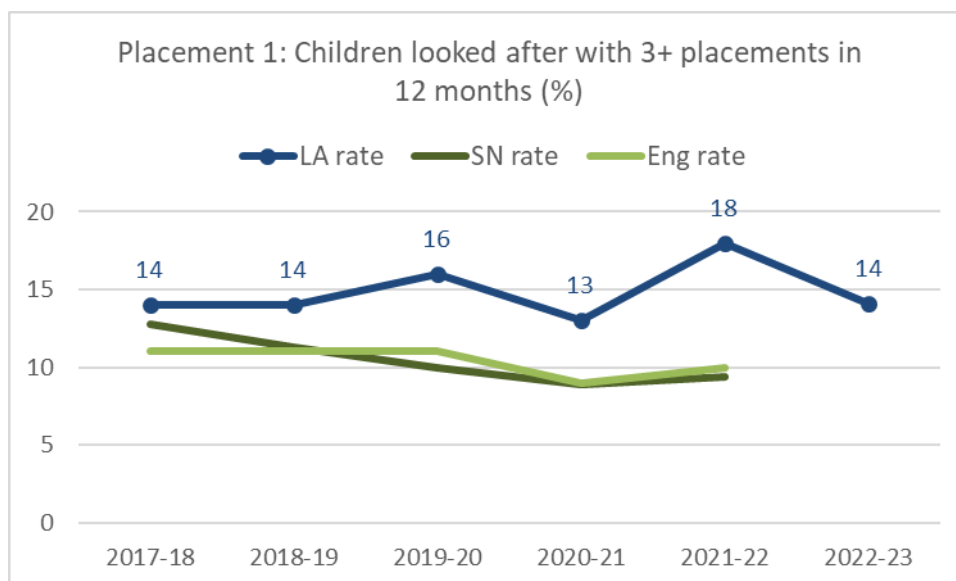
- 5.1 Recruitment and retention of foster carers remained a priority for 2022/23. As reported to CPC in April 2022 the West London Fostering project was placed on hold, however we continue to explore ways of improving the recruitment and retention of foster carers by updating the fostering offer.
- 5.2 Number of Brent fostering households and approved fostering places at 31 March 2023 (and trend):

Collection year	Number of Households	Number of places
2020	99	155
2021	100	153
2022	98	142
2023	101	145

- 5.3 Placement stability for children who have had 3 or more placements in a year has improved. Brent's data around 3 or more placement moves



decreased from 17.9% in 2021/22 to 14.1% in 2022/23. This is particularly related to Brent's profile of looked after children as described above.



- 5.4 A stability meeting is convened every time a placement is at risk of breaking down and is attended by key professionals. These meetings are chaired by a Social Work Practice Consultant who leads on placement stability. The focus of these meetings is understanding the holistic needs of the child or young person, the carers' strengths as well as identifying the right support package that would ensure placement stability. During 2022/23 the Social Work Practice Consultant chaired 42 placement stability meetings, and as a result of robust planning and individualised support packages, 22 children and young people remained in their current placement. A follow up meeting is offered in some cases to help sustain the placements, a new initiative that has been well received by social workers, foster carers and placement providers. If a placement cannot be sustained, robust planning and a transition plan is formulated.
- 5.5 The children and young people who are most in need of support and intervention are the children with additional needs and mental health difficulties, followed by those who have been affected by contextual safeguarding issues, or are at risk of gang involvement and have a history of going missing from placements.
- 5.6 Stability meetings are not required when the placement change reflects a positive and appropriate move for the child or young person, such as adoption, children matched with long term foster carers or young people moving from fostering placements to semi-independent units as part of their preparation for independence.
- 5.7 Some feedback received from social workers, carers and professionals who have attended these meetings:

Feedback from child social worker: *“Placement stability meetings are very relevant and beneficial to ensure/prevent placement breakdown for LAC. Such meetings provide a platform for key professionals to discuss and understand the needs of child, needs/expectations of carers, risks and safety concerns for child and together come up with ideas, suggestions, action plans to address the needs of child, support carers in order to better manage risks and have a safety or support plan in place to ensure placement stability for children. I have had a few of these stability meetings and we were able to prevent placement breakdown.”*

Feedback from Fostering SSW: *“All meetings requested have been organised swiftly. Placement Stability meetings have mirrored the SOS model and what is working well is emphasised. The meeting provides a good reflective space for all to think about the mechanism of the placement. The chair always presents as polite, calm, friendly, non-judgemental and knowledgeable during meetings. Chair has varied Social Worker experience and is able to give/make good independent advice/suggestions. Foster Carers have reported feeling listened to and respected. We have been able to develop good plans of support for placements in attempt to minimise any disruption for the child.”*

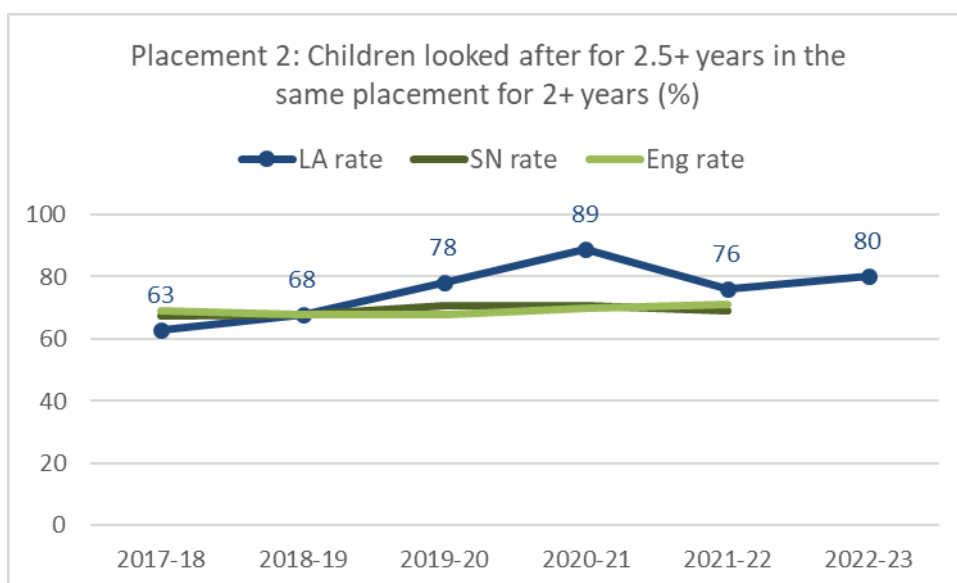
Feedback from carers:

*“The chair really listened to me, I felt able to share all of my concerns and challenges and I felt valued and respected.”*

*“I was touched when the chair remembered me from 2011, I felt supported by him then and felt his input in the stability meeting was also supportive.”*

Feedback from an external provider- Semi- Independent Unit Manager  
*“This is why I love working with Brent; the team around the child are committed to the needs of the children and willing to go the extra mile to offer support.”*

- 5.8 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. Monthly stability performance meetings continue to scrutinise all the planned and unplanned 2+ moves. The findings and learning from the meetings are shared with the social work team and inform future placement planning to prevent further moves.
- 5.9 The robust placement planning and individualised packages of support have enabled more looked after children to remain in their long-term placements for more than 2 years. This is well above national and statistical neighbour performance.



## 5.10 Permanency Planning

5.10.1 Permanency planning for children who have become looked after is a priority for the local authority, and one of our key pillars of care planning. The object of planning for permanence is to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond, and that this placement is found for them as quickly as possible.

5.10.2 Our approach when working towards permanency for a child is to ensure that we are progressing a parallel plan which ensures a secure and stable permanent option for the child is available to them in the quickest available time. Permanence options can be to return to the care of a parent/s, a permanent placement with someone from the child's family or friend network, long-term fostering or adoption outside the child's family or friend network.

5.10.3 In February 2023 Ofsted inspectors commented that permanency planning for Brent LAC was embedded and permanency was achieved for children without delay. We continue to build upon the progress we have made in this area by increasing our capacity to secure permanency for our young people aged 12+, by trialling a specialist social work resource within the looked after children and permanency teams. This social worker will work alongside LAC social workers to guide and assist them to progress the permanency plans for children and young people. They will support with family finding, matching, permanency reports (CPR and APR), and reinvigorating our placement profiles to ensure that we represent

our children in the best possible light. This is a 3-month trial and will be reviewed in terms of impact and effectiveness.

5.10.4 Between 01/04/2022 and 31/03/2023, there were 7 children adopted and 10 children who left care through the making of Special Guardianship Orders. In addition, in this reporting period, 9 children were made subject of a Placement Order and 5 were placed with their adopters.

5.10.5 On 31/3/2023 there were 4 children subject to a Placement Order waiting to be matched and placed.

5.10.6 The non-published data at the end of March 2023 compared 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. The average time taken for a child entering care to being placed for adoption is 443 days and is comparable against 2022's 3 year average of 436 days. The average time taken from the local authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved is 128 days which compares favourably to last year's position (142 days).

5.10.7 Adopt London West (ALW)

5.10.7.1 Adopt London West (ALW) established in October 2019, continues to provide adoption and special guardianship support services on behalf of Brent. Adopt London West is hosted by Ealing and works closely with the other three regional adoption agencies within the Adopt London group, together this partnership offers services to 24 London boroughs, there are a number of shared projects across the Adopt London partnership, including nationally funded projects to improve practice in family finding and matching and also in Early Permanence.

5.10.7.2 ALW works closely with staff in Brent CYP 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.

5.10.7.3 Over this past year we have worked proactively with ALW to ensure that children can be placed with their siblings. Of the four children placed in 2022/23, all were placed together with their siblings or have joined their sibling in the same adoption placement at a later date, this demonstrates the tenacity and determination that children's relationship with their siblings is a high priority for Brent, with a fifth child being placed with their sibling at the time of writing this report.

### **Case Study – Adoption Family Finding and Early Permanency with adopters**

**Child A** born March 2020 and **Child B** born March 2022 (full sibling to Child A)

Child A is a mixed heritage child, whose birth mother is White British and birth father is of Black British/Caribbean heritage. Placement and Care Orders in respect of Child A were granted in May 2022.

Several potential families were considered for a then single child, two-year-old Child A, there were concerns about his in-utero experiences, as well as instability and loss, caused by numerous placements moves and changes of care givers. However, in March 2022, Child A's birth mother presented at hospital just prior to giving birth to Child B. Following DNA testing it was confirmed that the children were full siblings. Therefore, the family finding criteria for Child A was changed and the search was widened to seek families who could consider two children who would likely be placed at different times, as it was important to avoid delay for Child A, who was now two years old and whose legal status was more definitive.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to place the children together in foster care, however once Child B was settled, sibling contact was established and continued until the children could be placed together.

In June 2022 a potential family were identified via Link Maker (national database of adopters in the UK), the family were a dual heritage couple (one of whom is White British and Black African and the other is of White British heritage), with several Black Caribbean friends in their network. Initial discussions were held with the potential family to include the children's history and likely transition plans.

A fuller Family Finding Visit took place in July 2022, in respect of Child A in the first instance, and the family was formally selected later that month. The couple were then matched with Child A only at the Adopt London West panel in November 2022 and Child A was placed in December

2022. There were regular updates shared by the children’s social worker and the family finder attended an in-person LAC Review in February 2023, which allowed opportunity for further exploration about their readiness to proceed with Child B.

The family were then formally selected in March 2023, in respect of Child B and the couples second Matching panel took place in May 2023. Child B has also now moved to the family and is living alongside his sibling for the first time. Both children are settling well, and the adopters have commended the thoughtful planning of placing the children separately, with an extended time period between moves. They have stated that this has benefited Child A’s development and security, whilst continued sibling contact has meant the children and the couple had a growing knowledge and appreciation of each other.

## 5.11 Care Proceedings

5.11.1 The number of care proceedings initiated by Brent has remained consistent with 54 cases (82 children) being issued in 2022/23 compared to 58 cases in 2021/23. Nationally there was a 9.8% decrease in care proceedings applications.

5.11.2 52 cases (74 children) concluded in this reporting period with the following outcomes:

- 25 Full Care Orders (34%)
- 4 Full Care Order and Placement Order (5%)
- 18 No Order (24%)
- 14 SGOs (19%)
- 12 Supervision Orders (16%)
- 1 designation out (1%)

5.11.3 The timeliness of care proceedings which concluded in 2022/23 is 55 weeks, compared to 43 weeks in 2021/22.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
<b>Brent (Internal data)</b>	35 weeks	38 weeks	35 weeks	39.5 weeks	43 weeks	55 weeks
<b>National average (CAFCASS data)</b>	29 weeks	31 weeks	32 weeks	41 weeks	45 weeks	45 weeks

5.11.4 There continues to be multiple and complex reasons for cases that exceeded the expected 26-week timeframe for proceedings, and these include:

- Complexity within cases with larger sibling groups with varying ages and different care plans, an increase in Fact Finding hearings and continued delays due to outstanding criminal charges/court processes.
- International elements requiring travel, identifying suitable assessors/professionals outside the UK, liaising with foreign authorities and legal bodies, and often prolonged, complex family assessments.
- Delays caused by difficulties in securing independent experts and completing expert assessments.
- Courts hearings are re-timetabled alongside court hearings being spread out over a longer period as a result of the courts trying to catch up with the back log of hearings caused by Covid.

5.11.5 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 continues to identify issues that might cause or create delay within proceedings with the aim of rectifying them as well as provide advice and guidance to practitioners on complex court cases. Social work managers have stated that they find this forum useful as it provides a space to speak directly with senior managers and senior lawyers and tease out any complex issues.

5.11.6 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, as well as taking the lead social work role when there are complex court or designation cases. The support provided by this role has continued to be invaluable, particularly for the newly qualified and less experienced social work staff in the service who benefit from the additional support, expertise and modelling that the SWPC provides on court work cases.

5.11.7 A high number of court hearings have continued over the last reporting year, however in 2022/23 there have been less virtual hearings and an increase in face-to-face hearings. Parents have reported that they find face to face hearings more interactive with several benefits, like seeing the Judge face to face, hearing first-hand evidence in person, clarity can be sought straight away with less time spent using emails following the hearing, as well as less

time spent navigating the courts electronic system, which did not always work effectively.

## **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 2022/23. 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 majority of children and young people aged over four years (60%) attended their review and spoke for themselves. This is a slight reduction from 62% the previous year. The Ofsted ILAC inspection (February 2023) noted that we need to improve the direct participation of children and young people in their reviews. The IRO is key to achieving this and increasing direct participation of children in LAC reviews is an area of practice improvement focus.

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:

- Junior Care in Action (JCIA) (7-11 year olds) who meet in the school holidays
- Care in Action (CIA) (12-17 year olds) who meet monthly
- Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) (18 – 25 year olds) who meet monthly.

6.3 Key achievements in 2022/23 include:

6.4 In April 2022 a cohort of 10 young people attended 'youth interview' panel training. This was co-facilitated by a trained participation worker and a senior representative of CLIA.

6.5 Young people interview panels were a feature for all senior appointments including the Chief Executive, Corporate Director, 2x CYP Directors as well as the Head of Service for LAC and permanency.

6.6 Young people also took part in several other interview panels including for Personal Advisors and Participation Officers and the participation manager.

6.7 CLIA members were trained to take part in the tendering process. These commissioning projects were:

### Mental health and wellbeing project

In September 2022 young people from CLIA were initially involved in the original tender for Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing tender and took



part in a panel – however this process was suspended when extra funding was secured enabling the project to widen its initial scope.

Subsequently CLIA members took an active role by evaluating the tenders returned for Targeted Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing provision. Their feedback influenced the final decision for the award of contract to the preferred provider.

#### Hospital Discharge Project

Young people from CIA and CLIA were involved in the evaluation of tender applications relating to a test and learn project originally funded from the Integrated Care System (ICS) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Provider Collaborative, Central North West London (CNWL) and West London (WL) health trusts.

The aim of the project is to identify the most appropriate means of supporting discharges of children and young people from emergency departments and acute hospital settings, within the most appropriate and expedient timescale.

The target group for the service are young people who have presented with a mental health crisis including suicidal ideation, but who are assessed to have not met the criteria for a Tier 4 setting and therefore are deemed medically fit for discharge.

- 6.8 A campaign focus in 2022/23 was improving relationships with carers, this was in direct response to findings from our last Bright Spots survey. The Bright Spots survey is a service improvement tool, designed by CoramVoice, the University of Oxford, and care experienced young people, that supports local authorities to systematically listen to their children in care and care leavers, about the things that are important to them. One of the specific pieces of work developed by our children and young people was a “Do’s and Don’ts” poster for foster carers which is being incorporated into foster carer training.
- 6.9 CIA worked with BCJ to develop a codesigned prototype to enable system change. A result of which was a pilot project of enabling funding for workers to spend quality time with the children they work with.
- 6.10 Representatives of CIA and CLIA took a lead role in planning and organising the Pride of Brent Youth Awards. Members of CIA were on the young people panel. In addition, the achievement of both CIA members and wider care experienced young people was recognised and celebrated.
- 6.11 The Gordon Brown Centre is an outdoor centre, run by Brent Council, that offers a range of outdoor learning opportunities for children and young people. In 2022/23 the participation team ran two residential trips to Gordon Brown Centre, one in the summer holiday and one in the October

half term. Both attracted new members that the team have worked with to continue engaging.

6.12 There were also varied and regular half term, Easter and summer activities for JCIA, for example a trip to indoor bouncy castle venue, Inflatation.


6.13 Other events for the wider care experienced group included:

- C(L)IA hosted a summer fun day that was attended by over 50 children, foster carers and care leavers
- In December 2022 the Participation Team applied to London Zoo community engagement initiative and were able to secure discounted tickets. A day trip was organised for Care Experienced children and young people and foster carers and their families; over 60 people attended.



6.14 There continues to be a core group of children and young people in each of the Care in Action groups with a focus on understanding the views of their care experienced peers through Bright Spots surveys. They are actively involved in ways to recruit more children and young people into the groups. The groups are directly promoted to children and young people through foster carers, social workers, personal advisors, the Virtual School and Independent Reviewing Officers.

6.15 Young people have continued to regularly attend and contribute to Corporate Parenting Committee, new young people were supported to attend for the first time in 2022, before each committee young people are prepared with a briefing session in which they develop messaging to senior leaders.



*"We have both attended  
[Corporate Parenting Committee]  
before and enjoyed going. It's  
good to see important people."*

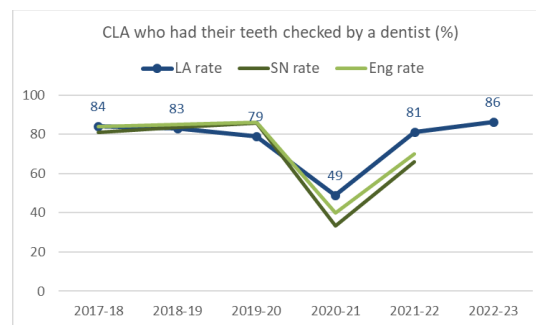
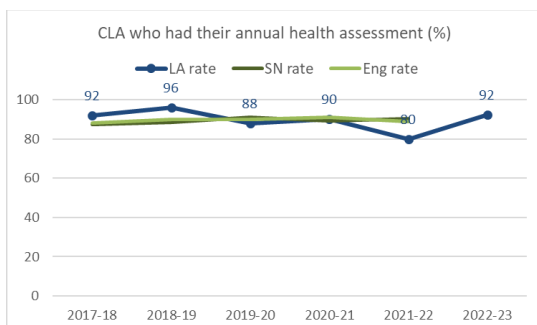
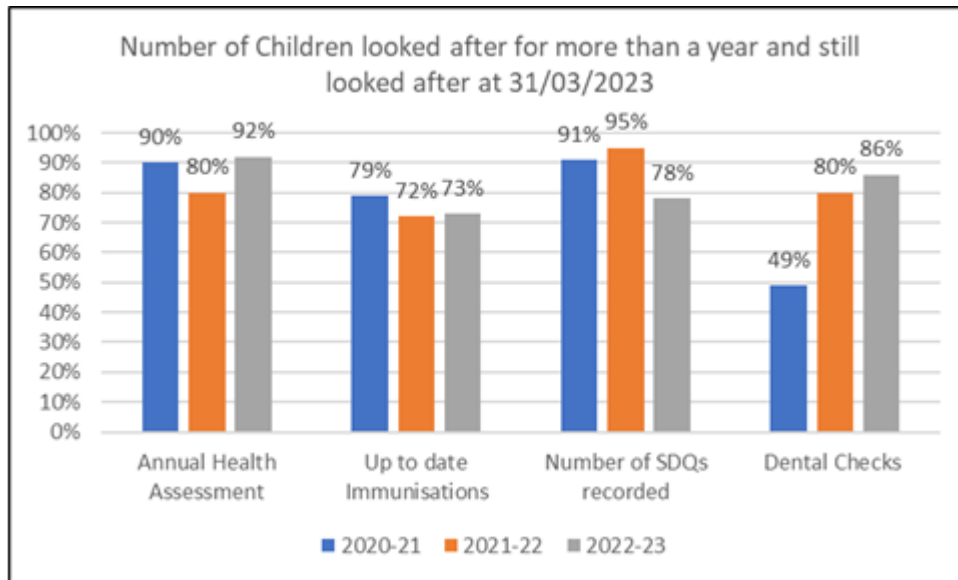
CIA member (12-17) April 2022

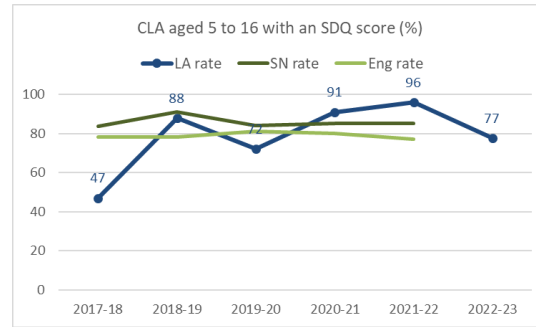
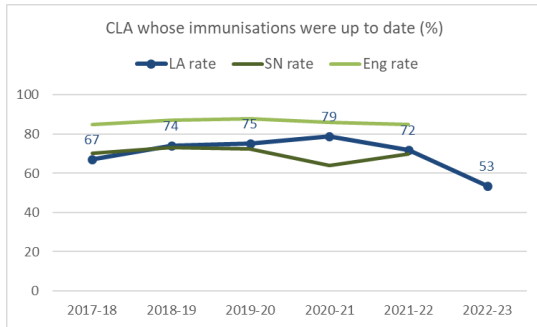
- 6.16 Representatives of CIA/CLIA have also attended the Local Partnership Meeting for LAC and Care Leavers and are members of the Voice and Influence sub-group of this meeting. The Local Partnership Meeting is a multi-agency meeting of partners working together to improve outcomes for care experienced children and young people. 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, Localities, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance and Looked after Children and Permanency service.
- 6.17 Children and young people who regularly attend CIA, CLIA or BCJ report that they enjoy and value the groups for a wide variety of reasons. These include having an opportunity to meet other care experienced young people and make new friends in a safe space; being provided the opportunity to influence the way services are delivered for the wider care experienced population; and being afforded the opportunity to see how decisions are made. This year the impact of participation activities has been evidenced by the increased use of co-production and co design evidence by initiatives such as tools for life story work and developing of resources for foster carers. This will continue to be a focus and the impact of these codesigned resources will be reviewed going forward, including by seeking more in depth feedback from care experienced young people and from groups utilising the materials developed.
- 6.18 Having met with young people from CIA, CLIA and BCJ, Ofsted determined that *"Members of the council and senior leaders are listening, committed and caring corporate parents. Members of the vibrant child in care and care leavers' councils, called 'Care in Action' and 'Care Leavers in Action', attend the corporate parenting board and are actively involved in initiatives and innovative projects that help to improve and strengthen services and support. Co-design with children and care leavers is at the heart of the approach to children's services improvement. Managers are working on plans to increase participation activity and the numbers of children and care leavers who attend these groups."*
- 6.19 Over the coming year we will be working with Barnados to integrate our Brent Care Journey and CLIA work as we enter the final phase of our partnership with Barnados.

## 7.0 Health of Looked After Children

7.1 Local Authorities, as 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 2022/23 has been submitted to the DfE as part of the statutory data reporting requirement. Unpublished data shows that there has been positive progress made with health and dental assessments compared to the last reporting year. Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs) and immunisations are an area that require improvement, and this will be a focus for the service in 2023/24.





- 7.3 In line with our priorities for 2022/23, there has been increased activity to support emotional wellbeing of looked after children and care leavers in this reporting period.
- 7.4 The Wellbeing and Emotional Support Team (WEST) now provides a wider targeted service for identified vulnerable groups, including Looked After Children and children with a disability, 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.
- 7.5 Over the reporting period WEST worked with 44 LAC (Apr-Aug 2022), 36 LAC (Sept-Dec 2022) and 45 LAC (Jan-Mar 2023) They have offered a range of direct, face to face and indirect sessions.
- 7.6 Other low to moderate mental health and wellbeing services that are providing support to our looked after young people are WDP Elev8 and the Brent Centre for Young People. Safe Base also continues to provide therapeutic counselling support to Care Leavers.
- 7.7 Our CAMHS Looked After Child and Transition Mental Health Care Coordinator, is co-located within the LAC and Permanency service and continues to work alongside social workers and Personal Advisors to provide direct intervention, support, advice and guidance to looked after children and young people, living out of the borough, who are experiencing poor emotional wellbeing and mental health. Although this role is to work with children and young people living outside of Brent, support has been provided to some in-borough children when the appropriate support cannot be accessed straight away. This role contributes to the monthly Health and Wellbeing subgroup (to the Local Partnership Meeting) which brings together professionals who focus on and work to drive forward improvements for the health and wellbeing of our care experienced young people.
- 7.8 In this reporting year CAMHS Looked After Child and Transition Mental Health Care Coordinator has provided direct therapeutic work for 28 children and young people. Thirteen girls aged 13 years and up and fifteen

boys aged 3-18 years. A number of these young people have turned 18 and she has provided support to them during this transitional period. Weekly or fortnightly therapy sessions have been provided for those young people, along with support to their carers or placement providers.

- 7.9 In 2022/23 we have provided ongoing support to our UASC LAC population through individual and group therapeutic work provided by WEST. We are currently working with WEST to consider ways of developing this work further, using a Reflective Care model and the use Virtual Mental Health leads for staff working with our UASC population. There has also been several successful BCJ power groups started in this reporting year which provide community and friendship to our UASC and former UASC young people, specifically “Therapart” and “Brothers” which are groups that have been co-designed and developed by care experienced young people and are well attended by, but not exclusive to, UASC and former UASC. Our regular weekly football group that has been consistent since 2018 is also considered part of our health and wellbeing offer for UASC.
- 7.10 During the summer of 2022 staff ran a successful 8-week Health Relationship parenting course for our care experienced young people who are already parents. The course includes exploring what a healthy relationship is, first aid for children, baby massage and aims to give insight to the young parents on how to keep themselves healthy in order to parent healthy children.

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

- 8.1 Brent CYP have well established and mature relationships with partners resulting in strong and effective multi-agency arrangements. The Brent Children’s Trust, chaired by the Corporate Director of Children and Young People plays a key role within Brent’s Corporate Parenting Strategy via setting priorities for all partners working with children and families including children in care and care leavers. A range of activities undertaken by partners, including service providers, is routinely reported to the Joint Commissioning Group, a sub-group of the Children’s Trust.
- 8.2 The Local Partnership Meeting (LPM) for Care Experienced Children and Young People is one of the five transformation groups reporting to the Joint Commissioning Group. The LPM consists of relevant officers from Brent Council (including CYP Departments (Looked after Children and Permanency, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Youth Justice Service within Early Help, Housing Needs, Public Health), Community Wellbeing, Regeneration and Environment) and partners such as NHS North West London ICB, Probation, Westminster Drug Project (WDP) and Central London Community Healthcare (CLCH) NHS Trust. Care Leavers in Action attend and contribute to the LPM via the Voice and Influence subgroup and act as conduits between the LPM and representatives of the CLIA group.

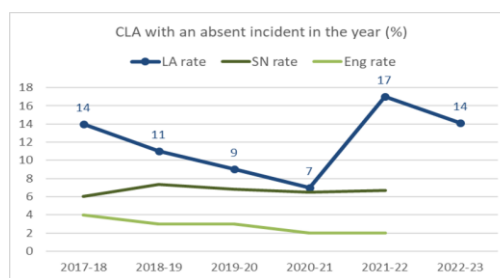
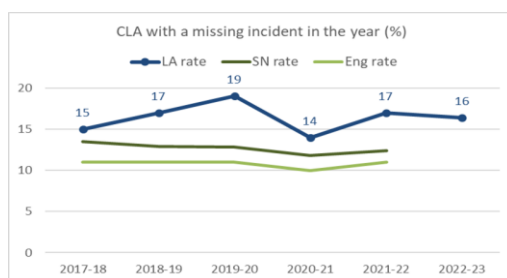
8.3 The LPM has been responsible for achieving the priorities of 2022/23. Six working groups were set up by the LPM with relevant representation, each group working on one particular priority area. Chairs of these priority area working groups regularly attended the LPM to report on their progress. During this reporting period, due to a number of staff changes, we have refreshed our TOR and membership and have reinvigorated the working groups. The priority areas are:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Education, Employment and Training
- Voice and Influence (participation and engagement)
- Path to Independence
- Transitional/Contextual Safeguarding
- Stability for LAC and Care Leavers.

## 9.0 Children Missing or Absent from Care

9.1 In the year ending 31st March 2023, 78 children in care were reported to be missing from their placements at least once, compared to 94 in the previous year. This represented 15.8% of all LAC looked after at any point during the year (n=495) compared to 18% in the previous year. 57 of the 78 had more than one missing incident in the year.

9.2 An absence may be a situation where a child has not returned home at an agreed time but their whereabouts is known. In this reporting year 68 children were reported as being absent from their care placement compared with 87 in 2021/22.



9.3 The Social Work Practice Consultant (SWPC) in the LACP services is responsible for overseeing young people who go missing. The SWPC specialises in supporting vulnerable young individuals within the service and delivering an effective service that safeguards young people and promotes their overall well-being.

9.4 Children who are missing from care are offered return home interviews (RHIs) by Children's Rights Officers (CRO) embedded in the LACP and Early Help services. The goal of this work is for young people to receive a consistent response from an independent person. In addition, these consistent workers have a much clearer overview of all the missing young

people in the borough and are able to help identify trends and patterns within the regular operational missing forums.

- 9.5 Following the RHI, the Social Work Practice Consultant (SWPC) liaises daily with the CRO to gain a better understanding of themes. Through data collection, we have been able to identify the potential involvement of young people in cross-county criminal activities, Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE), and being subjected to sexual exploitation (CSE).
- 9.6 In the RHI feedback form, our young people express the need for a more holistic approach to their care within their placement and emphasise the importance of warmth from staff in their interactions. A recurring theme emerges where most young people do not perceive themselves as missing, stating that they were simply out with friends. Others mention that they do not have any activities to engage with. Additionally, some individuals are over 17 years old and consider themselves old enough to make decisions about their whereabouts.
- 9.7 The below quotes from our young people after RHI being completed:



- 9.8 Close collaboration with partner agencies has allowed us to gather essential intelligence to locate young people. We consistently apply a proactive approach for young people who have missing episodes. Strategy meetings provide a platform for key professionals to discuss and understand the needs of a child, plan to disrupt behaviour, evaluate risks and devise a safety plan to ensure young people are kept safe.
- 9.9 One of the ways we do this is with joint supervision between social work teams and the Youth Justice Service for the young people known to both services. These joint sessions provide a space where the practitioners and managers can share risk, agree priorities for case work and safety planning. Another example is with the police when they have been able to attend strategy meetings promptly and provide updated information in cases involving contextual safeguarding concerns. This collaborative approach, alongside a strengthened emphasis on peer mapping across services, aims to provide a cohesive response to children and young people who are at risk and improve outcomes for them.
- 9.10 During the weekly missing meeting with the police there is an opportunity to review progress of young people that are still missing and facilitate



information sharing between agencies. If necessary, cases can be escalated to senior managers where cases have become stuck or little progress has been made which can in some cases instigate a police review of a case where a young person has been missing for a long period of time. Furthermore, a monthly Missing Operations meeting is conducted to analyse missing data in-depth, identify barriers to working collaboratively and to ensure that lessons learned are being applied in practice.

- 9.11 A quantitative contextual safeguarding audit was carried out in the past six months in relation to our most vulnerable young people and identified that social workers demonstrate a clear understanding of the importance of engaging young people in conversations to understand their perspectives on risk and safety. This approach also extends to involving caregivers and other partners in the decision-making process.
- 9.12 The SWPC continues to collaborate with the LAC and Leaving Care teams to enhance their confidence and proficiency in using the Vulnerability Adolescent Risk Assessment (VARA) and consistently understanding and evaluating risks. We are also working with the Contextual Safeguarding operational group to develop a Missing Response Plan, which is a plan specifically focused on disruptive activities and actions required to locate the young person.
- 9.13 There is recognition across Brent's partnerships that risk and harm continue into adulthood, particularly for young people during the 18-25 transitional period. Practitioners are encouraged to attend one-on-one consultations with the CSL, who provides advice and tools to identify young people at risk of exploitation or other vulnerabilities. Other organisations and resources for practitioners include the NRM (National Referral Mechanism), St Giles, Global Thinking and Rescue and Response (GTRR).

## **10.0 Education of Looked After Children**

- 10.1 There is a multidisciplinary team operating within Brent Virtual School (BVS) to support young people in care to achieve their best educational outcomes. This comprises lead advisory teachers, educational psychologists, clinical psychologists, emotional wellbeing practitioners, mentors, education officers, a UASC and year 11 education officer, post 16 advisors and a performance officer. The team draws on the expertise of colleagues in the Inclusion Support team and works closely with social workers and foster carers, as well as school and setting staff.
- 10.2 The annual report 2021/22 provides a detailed outline of the achievements of young people looked after in Brent and provides the Virtual School priorities for 2022/23.
- 10.3 Key highlights for 2021/22 includes the continued high attendance of children in care that is on par with children not looked after. Whilst

attendance in 2021/22 was lower than pre-pandemic years the impact of the pandemic is a feature that is reflected across all pupil groups. Attention therefore for the Virtual School has been on mechanisms to support attendance particularly working with social workers, foster carers and wider professionals such as clinical psychologists to address barriers to education.

- 10.4 Looked after children continue to achieve well and make significant progress in education once in care. With the re-introduction of examinations in the summer of 2022, the BVS focused on supporting those in key stage 2 and key stage 4 through homework clubs, online and face to face booster classes. In 2021/22 LAC achieving the 5 passes at 4-9 including English and maths was higher than the previous academic year by 2%. However, the most accurate data set to compare to is 2018/19, the last time examinations were held.
- 10.5 **Post-16:** The number of post-16 young people that were in education, employment, or training (EET) at the end of the academic year 2021/22 increased compared to the same reporting period last year - 80% compared to 73% in 2020/21. This was achieved through close working with social workers, corporate colleagues, careers advisory hubs, and through targeted youth employment workers.
- 10.6 **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC):** 17 new UASC entered the care system in the academic year 2021/22. All but one of these young people were in Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 5, 33 UASC entered the care system during 2021/22. A dedicated BVS welcome pack has been developed for the UASC cohort and translated into relevant languages. Additionally, a dedicated BVS staff member works with statutory aged UASCs to ensure that appropriate education provisions are in place as soon as possible and where there is a dispute with a young person's age, tuition is provided until the outcome of the relevant age assessment is known.

## 11.0 Care Leavers

- 11.1 The Local Authority has a dedicated Leaving Care Service that provides services and support to all young people who leave care from the age of 18 years (including those leaving care at age of 16 and 17) until they reach the age of 25.
- 11.2 All care leavers have an allocated personal advisor who is introduced to them at the age of 17 to start building relationships and advocate for young people as they approach 18. 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, this then helps smooth the transition into adulthood. Due to the impact of the Social Work Act 2017, there has been an expected increase in the overall number of care leavers. In line with this growth in demand

Brent allocated additional resources to increase the capacity of Leaving Care Teams.

- 11.3 A personal advisor is not a qualified social worker but often has a background in working with young people in a variety of settings such as in youth justice, housing organisations or youth groups. In 2022/23, the staffing establishment of the Leaving Care Service consisted of three teams with 6 personal advisors supervised by three team managers. The teams also had co-allocated external partners such as Prospects, 2 part-time DWP workers, personal advisor with a lead in housing as well as Barnardo's Care Journey's (BCJ) Team members. We have encouraged personal advisors to develop specialisms in different areas and currently we have three PAs who are BCJ champions, two PAs who organise the Gordon Brown Residential weekends for young people, and a PA who coordinates the weekly football sessions as part of the enrichment offer.
- 11.4 As of 31 March 2023, Brent was responsible for the support to 332 Former Relevant Young People [aged 18 - 21] (no change from 333 last year) and 125 young people aged 22-24 (a decrease of 6% from 133 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.

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

- 12.1 The comprehensive local offer for care leavers (2022-2024) shows that the local authority is an ambitious corporate parent for care leavers. As part of reviewing the local offer in 2022, a series of workshops were delivered in conjunction with Brent Care Journeys for the purpose of consultation with young people who attend the care leavers' hub and Care leavers in Action (CLIA). The next formal review of the local offer for care leavers will be in April 2024.
- 12.2 The main findings from the consultation were captured in several themes, some of these have been converted to actions and have been part of the revised local offer, for example under 'User Experience' care leavers wanted to know about the local offer in person. Under 'Inclusion and Accessibility' care leavers were concerned that the local offer may be inaccessible to those who have no or a low level of English, or those with special needs such as a learning disability. As part of the local offer, we agreed to assess the financial viability of making the offer available in different languages as well as a more visualised version. 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.
- 12.3 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 Family Wellbeing 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.

- 12.4 DfE guidance suggests that local authorities should review their local offers every 2-3 years. The Brent Local Offer will be formally reviewed in a 2-yearly cycle, with the next formal review due in April 2024. The offer has been informally reviewed and updated in early 2023 to include a new gym membership offer for young people and the co-produced "Welcome Pack" for young people moving into semi-independent placements. The service, in partnership with BCJ, is arranging workshops over the summer period (August 2023) to begin the formal review process, which will also include a review of our Financial Policy.

### **13.0 Care Leavers' Enrichment Programme**

- 13.1 The Enrichment Programme 'Hub' remains an integral part of the Care Leavers Service and continues to address and combat isolation faced by some care leavers. Over the last twelve months, care leavers continued to meet at their chosen venue and engaged with activities such as bowling and mini golf. Those that attend the Hub are aged between 18-25 years and during the sessions the older young people support the younger ones often talking about independent living skills and managing a tenancy. A member of the group has given birth to a baby in this reporting period and continued to attend the Hub events right up until her due date. She said, *'I am just at home on my own and coming to meet the group gives me something to look forward to'. The Hub has also celebrated the achievement of a member of the group who graduated after achieving his master's degree in law and others celebrated their birthdays. The graduate said when he was asked how it feels to receive his certificate, 'it was hard work but I needed to go a step further than degree level to be able to work in a law firm of my choice'.*
- 13.2 The Hub group continue to discuss the challenges of life and world events such as the King's coronation to which some of our care leavers were for and others against the celebration. Other topics discussed include the feelings about how Covid was handled and the behaviour of some government politicians in regard to supporting the public were highlighted, those who took the vaccine and others who did not and life after Covid and lockdown overall with the impact on mental health and wellbeing. The young people discussed their holiday experiences including one that was missed because the young person did not have the correct documents to

travel. The care leavers most definitely used this time and opportunity to share their experiences with each other.

- 13.3 The Hub hosted another well attended Christmas dinner that was organised by staff with the help of the manager of the Learning Zone. They were offered the opportunity to do a stadium tour before dinner and said they enjoyed the experience. One of the young people who is studying music at university volunteered to be the DJ for the night. The young people said they enjoyed their dinner and that for some of them would be their only Christmas dinner as a family.
- 13.4 Our Care Leavers Hub activities are usually held in the last week of each month to encourage good attendance. The activity is to offer care leavers who are identified by their personal advisors as being affected by isolation. Some of these young people do not have families, support or trusted friends. The young people who attend the activities are supported by some older care leavers to combat that feeling of isolation and sometimes shyness. The sessions are usually vibrant with a variety of conversations taking place. It also enhances maturity and confidence in our young people.

From a young person who comes to Hub activities, *“It is a great opportunity for everyone to feel included and appreciated when being a social gathering on a monthly session to catch up on life and with the people who are almost like family and it is without saying that Emily does a phenomenal job at organizing events. Emily includes us all in what we would like the socials to be about and what activities we should do. This level of commitment is terrific for us young people to engage with the wider community to enrich our culture integrity and intelligence. This is paramount to ethos and values of Personal Advisors in supporting young people”.*

- 13.5 Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) a five year partnership between Brent Council and Barnados, is one of Barnardo’s Core Priority Programmes as part of their 10-year strategy focusing on outcomes for care experienced young people and will continue until 2025. BCJ has continued to deliver a wide range of activities, from one-off events, to training, and ongoing workshops. The codesigned projects from 2022 phase of co-design have been implemented as pilots. For example:
- Memory Boxes – Young people wanted creative resources to record memories and experiences.
  - Activity Budget – Young people said that they wanted to spend more time developing relationships with their social workers. So every 6

months the social worker is able to get some funding to do an activity with their young person.

- 13.6 One of the highlights of last year was the development of a theatre production at the Kiln Theatre which involved 3 films, movement, soundscape, monologue, poetry and set design. A part of that production was introduced at the 2022 staff conference which highlighted young people's experience of being in care.
- 13.7 BCJ have continued to deliver a range of opportunities for engagement, codesign, social support, activities, and system change. Ofsted commented re: BCJ *'[CYP] are actively involved in initiatives and innovative projects that help to improve and strengthen services and support. Co-design with children and care leavers is at the heart of the approach to children's services improvements'*.
- 13.8 Last year Brent worked with BCJ to find opportunities and experiences for young people within the local authority. Since July 2021 this process has evolved to include the recruitment of care-experienced young people to junior staff roles within the BCJ team. Currently there are 3 care experienced project workers working alongside Barnardo's and engaging with young people.
- 13.9 The Grandmentors programme aims to transform the lives of young people through the emotional and practical support of older volunteers. The trained volunteers aged 50 and over, forge trusting and positive relationships that support, challenge and empower mentees to unlock their own skills and to shape their own future. Grandmentors provide a vital link for young people as they navigate life after care. The support Grandmentors provided varied depending on the individual's needs, i.e. from managing a budget, to finding a job or progressing in education and/or building confidence and healthy relationships. Each relationship helped to provide the essential building blocks to support young people in their transition from care to independence. 19 care leavers have benefited from this support to date and the service is working with Grandmentors to recruit more mentors in 2023/24.
- 13.10 Grandmentors have made the most significant impact addressing the health and wellbeing of young people. Most young people who are referred to the project score low in this area. Grandmentors have reported high levels of stress and anxiety with their mentees which at times has required professional intervention. A lack of motivation has also been fed back. Grandmentors are able to make an impact by incorporating practical achievable goal setting and being a constant source of encouragement. As goals are met, this has a direct impact on their sense of wellbeing and self-esteem.
- 13.11 The following case study demonstrates the impact grand mentors have on young people's lived experience:

### **Case Study – C receives support from her grand mentor**

*Ranii and C were matched in October 2021, making them one of our earliest matched. Ranii is a well-known radio presenter on Sunrise radio which broadcasts out of Hounslow. C was referred due to being NEET and having issues with her housing. C was also on medication due to her depression and anxiety. Over the last few years Ranii has helped C find part time work and resolve issues with her landlord. However, for C, the real impact came is her improved sense of self-esteem and mental health following Ranii's introduction to holistic health practises.*

*The match has now ended successfully. C in her feedback said that **"Ranii has helped me in so many ways, I'm now a much happier and confident person and so much of this is down to Ranii"**.*

- 13.12 Other examples which demonstrate the positive relationship that develops between the young person and mentor:

*"When M was matched with Barbara in December 2021, he was NEET. Barbara helped M create a CV and supported him through a series of applications and interviews until he secured employment. Barbara has helped him maintain this employment and has supported him with a few work-related issues."*

*"A was matched with Godwin in December 2001 and was also NEET. A lacked motivation and was also in danger of becoming involved in offending behaviour. Godwin helped him find a part time course in Health and Social Care and a few months later he also supported A with getting a part time job at a local supermarket."*

## **14.0 Care Leavers in Education, Employment & Training**

- 14.1 There were 42 young people in higher education in 2022/23. These included 19 young people aged 19-21 at university (a decrease from 22 last year), studying a variety of subjects from Sociology, Health and Social Care, Early Childhood Studies and Politics and Economics. Additionally, 23 care leavers aged between 22 and 25 were in higher education at the end of the reporting year (an increase from 22 last year). Brent had an equal percentage of care leavers in higher education than statistical neighbours and higher than 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 %
2020-21	24	10%	20	8%	2040	6%
2021-22	22	7%	25	8%	2,230	7%
2022-23	19	8%				

- 14.2 At the end of the reporting year, the percentage of young people aged 19-21 in education, employment and training was 53%, down from 56% last year. The difference is mainly due to the impact of the 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 was 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 below:

Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in Education, Employment or Training	Brent	Brent %	Statistical Neighbour average	Statistical Neighbour average %	National figure	figure %
2020-21	128	54%	131	52%	16900	52%
2021-22	140	56%	142	57%	18610	55%
2022-23	131	53%				

#### A care leaver in Higher Education

JFM is currently 23 years old. JFM is currently attending Warwick university and is studying History and Politics. JFM is in his 3rd year and hopes to do a Masters degree one day. JFM is currently working towards independent living now that university is almost complete and looking forward to getting his result in August. JFM hopes to get a job as a political historian or a researcher and throughout his studies he worked part-time as a Project researcher where the core focus was about Care Leavers.

#### A care leaver applying for Higher Education

MF is a young man who entered the UK as an unaccompanied minor – he has with all exceptions demonstrated his understanding in preparing for independence. His education path is exemplary despite having and acute skin condition that is triggered by anxiety. MF's education schedule was interrupted by having to spend time in hospital because of the severity of his skin condition. He managed to achieve some of the highest awards for his college work and was awarded certificates and trophies. He shared with me that 'I want to be a doctor practicing in brain



injuries and return to my country of origin to help my people'. MF is in the process of applying to university to do a degree in medicine and brain injuries surgery.

14.3 Brent has a number of current employment schemes, some of which some are targeted exclusively at care experienced young people. For example:

- **Barnardo's**

Barnardo's have been working in partnership with Brent for the past 3 years fulfilling a 5 year project entitled Brent Care Journeys. The project is set to work with Brent care experienced young people to use their experience to improve the care journey for children looked after and care experienced young people. Throughout this partnership, care experienced young people can volunteer, and complete paid work with Barnardo's working with looked after children and care experienced young people.

- **Prospects**

Prospects is a service within the Connexions organization supporting NEET young people in finding suitable opportunities. We work closely with Prospects, meeting every month with a focus on our 19 to 21-year-old care leavers. Referrals can be made independently or via the monthly meeting and the Prospects team support our care leavers into education, training, and employment.

LACP also work with other agencies that provide service to the wider community in Brent for example Brent Start, Brent Works and Catch 22, a charity specialising in supporting ex-offenders or those at risk of offending. Their workers are trained in working with this 'hard to reach' cohort and supporting them into work or education for a 12-month period. They work across London which increases the reach of services as many care leavers live outside the borough.

## 15.0 Care Leavers' Accommodation

15.1 Care Leavers in Brent continue to be awarded priority housing banding due to their leaving care status. Young people are supported to complete either the ASDAN Independent Skills Programme or the Gordon Brown Practical Skills Weekend along with the My Bank Money Programme before being referred for their own accommodation. Personal advisors continue to complete a vulnerability assessment as well as provide evidence of the young person's readiness for their own accommodation.

15.2 Our service and the housing team meet monthly for our Housing Allocations Panel where referrals are discussed and accepted for housing, thereafter our care leavers can bid for three months before being eligible for a Direct Offer. Once a care leaver has secured their own accommodation they are supported to furnish and buy essential items for their property with a 'setting up home allowance' of £2000. In this reporting

year we have supported approximately 20 young people into their own tenancies.

- 15.3 Following the success of the Gordon Brown pilot, this skill-based weekend remains a pathway for our care leavers in building their independent living skills. The centre is in a natural setting that enables young people to experience positive activities such as low ropes, high ropes archery, farm animals, and a fire-making woodland/campfire area. At present, there are monthly sessions at Gordon Brown with males and females attending alternative months. Each young person is given a starter pack for when they move into their tenancy which includes a tool kit, set of knives, pots and pans and other essentials for living independently.
- 15.4 Below are some comments young people have made about the Gordon Brown Centre:

**Gordon Brown Centre – Feedback from participants**

*“I still have all the pots and pans they gave me at Gordon brown it was so good!”*

*“The rooms are nice, bed was comfortable.”*

*“They need to make this more often, it’s good for Care Leavers.”*

*“Never knew how to chop veg properly, now I know this technique.”*

*We learned a lot of new stuff”*

*“This is like a holiday and to be honest I haven’t had one”*

*“It’s nice being out here with nature”*

*“Brent need to do this for more young people”*

*“What, we get our own drill kit? To KEEP FAM?” Nar when’s the next trip, this is sick, big man ting.”*

- 15.5 Our Leaving Care Service has a Team Manager with a YJS background and pre-existing working relationships with Probation therefore our joint protocol with the Probation Service remains a positive aspect of our service with more dialogue and support offered jointly by personal advisors and probation officers and more joined up working prior to release from prison to ensure young people’s needs are being addressed before they leave custody so that they are provided with suitable accommodation with the right level of support when they are released from prison. Our Team Manager attends the monthly Risk Forum hosted by the Youth Justice Service along with the Transitions to Probation Meetings held quarterly as well as the Resettlement and Aftercare Meetings held in relation to custody release.
- 15.6 We have a Team Manager dedicated to addressing the housing issues faced by our care leavers to include care leavers at highest risk of homelessness/rough sleeping. Within this provision, bi-monthly Rent Arrears Meetings are held with the Income Revenue Teams to discuss care leavers who have fallen into arrears and plan a way to address this matter

to include setting up payment plans, applying for discretionary housing benefit payment or other financial support, i.e. residency support fund they are eligible for and further budgeting and other support provided by their PA.

- 15.7 The service is planning to host an event to celebrate our young people that have completed their training, i.e. ASDAN or Gordon Brown and My Bank within this reporting period, 2022/23.
- 15.8 The collaboration between BCJ and Brent commissioning team has resulted in our care leavers receiving a welcome pack when moving into a new semi-independent accommodation. This includes essentials and a local supermarket voucher. At the end of the reporting year, 84.4% of care leavers aged 19-21 were in suitable accommodation. Apart from the cohort of care leavers on remand or incarcerated, this is due to former UASCs being refused leave to remain in the UK and choosing not to continue to be in touch with the Local Authority.

Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in suitable accommodation	Brent	Brent %	Statistical Neighbour average	Statistical Neighbour average %	National Figure	National figure %
2020-21	208	88%	210	83%	28270	88%
2021-22	213	86%	212	85%	29270	88%
2022-23	206	84.4%				

- 15.9 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 independence. The number of care leavers in semi-independent provision has risen to 96 in March 2023 from 91 in March 2022. This increase was partly due to the pandemic delaying young people's move into their tenancies. Additionally, there are several former UASC who have been waiting for a Home Office decision on their applications (mainly from countries like Albania, Iran and Iraq) due to a backlog. However, a new fast track process has been introduced by the Home Office in March 2023 which will consider applications by people from Afghanistan, Sudan, Syria Eritrea and Vietnam, which could see the timeframe for decisions reduce to several weeks.
- 15.10 The following case study demonstrates evidence of good joint work between LACP and the housing department. There was evidence of strong professional network and communication between various professionals:

### **Case Study – Accommodation**

TC is a 19-year-old mother to a three-month-old son. TC is of Black British Caribbean heritage who grew up across several different countries with various family members. TC reports having 23 siblings which whom she has a relationship with the majority.

TC had several missing episodes while living in semi-independent placements and there were CSE concerns, TC experienced disruption to her education TC experienced breakdown in relationships with at least three different family members which resulted in TC becoming known to Children Services in the latter part of her teenage years.

TC has settled well in her last placement however due to safeguarding concerns (not related to TC) she had to move which was very disruptive for TC as the news came whilst she was in hospital giving birth to her son. TC was supported to move to a new placement, TC had little family support and her relationship with her son's father was not what she expected it to be therefore her personal advisor supported her with managing the move.

Prior to this, TC had been referred to our Housing Allocation Panel and was successful therefore she was bidding for her own accommodation and was eligible for a direct offer therefore TC's PA approached housing to see if there was any eligible accommodation for TC when we received notification that she was required to move placement, this caused TC considerable emotional distress and uncertainty however, within weeks, TC was put forward for a two-bedroom newly built flat to which she was successful. There was a lot of communication, flexibility, and collaborative working in a short space of time allowing for TC and her son to move into permanent accommodation. TC was further supported with the Set-Up Home Allowance of £2,000 to enable her to purchase household items needed to furnish her home. TC has reported that she is happy in her new home and her baby is thriving.

TC has since, settled into motherhood and her accommodation and maintains a good rapport with her PA and continues to manage her emotional health well.

## **16.0 Priorities for Corporate Parenting Partners 2023/24**

- The highest priority for the LACP service, and wider CYP, is to stabilise and retain our workforce, so that children and young people will benefit from long-term, stable, caring relationships.
- Continuous focus from all partners to improve health services and outcomes for LAC and care leavers including emotional wellbeing and CAMHS i.e. ensuring all young people leaving care understand how to access their health histories, system improvements for collaborative

reporting with health partners, targeted wellbeing support for UASC and former UASC.

- Visioning and future development work for Brent Care Journeys to be prioritised in anticipation of the end of our 5-year partnership with Barnados in March 2025, which will continue to enable young people to be involved in design and improvement of services across CYP, the council and wider.
- Continued work on accommodation pathways and developing independence skills for care leavers, particularly those placed within semi-independent provision and their readiness to move on.
- Continue to promote the voice and engagement of children and young people in day to day practice, i.e. improve the uptake and usage of our Pathway Plan App, complete a new cycle of Bright Spots Survey, and ensuring children and young people participate fully in their LAC Reviews.
- To continue to develop and improve practice in relation to life story work for children in care.

**Report sign off:**

***Nigel Chapman***

Corporate Director Children and Young People