

# Public Document Pack



## MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE Monday 16 October 2023 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Grahl (Chair) and Councillors Dixon, Gbajumo and Hirani

### 1. **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

RESOLVED: that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the duration of the meeting, on the grounds that the attendance of representatives from the council's Children in Care council, necessitated the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 2, Part 1 of Schedule 12A, as amended, of the Act, namely: Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.

### 2. **Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members**

None.

### 3. **Declarations of interests**

None.

### 4. **Deputations (if any)**

None received.

### 5. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the last meeting, held on 17 July 2023, be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

### 6. **Matters arising (if any)**

None.

### 7. **Update from Care In Action and Care Leavers in Action Representatives**

J (Care Leavers in Action) informed the Committee that the group had a Fun Day at the end of the summer holidays with young people and their carers. There had been activities for younger children to participate in and it had been good to see everyone interacting with each other. J had been involved in recent interviews for a new Participation and Engagement Manager. The new Bright Spots Survey would be launched soon.

S (Care Leavers in Action) explained that she had been working with the London Children in Care Council on the Pan-London Care Leavers Compact where they had considered the benefits of recognising being care experienced as a protected characteristic. She thought that some children in care and care leavers may benefit from this, such as being guaranteed an interview when they applied for jobs, but older care leavers were conflicted as to whether this would have an impact or whether it would be a 'tick box' exercise

because it would not be protected by law. She thought the potential benefits outweighed the negatives.

S asked whether the Council had considered any sessions with care leavers around voting and voter ID, particularly in relation to local democracy and politics. She highlighted that many care leavers may not know much about the political landscape including how to register to vote or that voter ID was now required. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) highlighted that Brent Youth Parliament had been looking at voting as an issue to promote, particularly for 17-year-olds becoming 18 soon. This would include awareness of how to register to vote in the first place and information on voter ID. He suggested a session with Care Leavers in Action could take place to get higher numbers of young people registering to vote.

The Chair thanked those present for their contributions and invited members of the Committee to ask questions to the CIA / CLIA representatives. The following questions were raised:

The Committee asked whether the new half price bus and travel card from TfL for 18–24-year-olds would make a difference to care leavers. K highlighted that she currently spent around £15 per day on travel to get to work, which sometimes came out of her savings to pay for, so this would make a big difference to her daily travel expenses. J agreed, explaining that he travelled by bus mainly which could add up and sometimes he would need to take money from another bill to pay for travel. CLIA asked whether the travel subsidy that was offered through Brent's Care Leaver Charter would continue with the new TfL initiative, but officers were unsure how it would work as they had not yet seen the detail from the GLA.

The Committee asked how CLIA felt about the rent deposit and housing deposit scheme proposed in the Pan-London Care Compact. For some care leavers, they were still in semi-independent provision, but this commitment would affect them in the near future. One care leaver explained that they did not know much about housing and they were nervous about it, but their personal adviser helped them to feel safe about the future.

The Committee asked what other trips and activities CIA and CLIA would be interested in. Some were interested in doing more theatre trips but recognised that not everyone was interested in that, and residentials were a good activity for team bonding and encouraging people to join the CIA and CLIA groups.

The Committee thanked the representatives for the updates and **RESOLVED:**

That the updates by the representatives of Care in Action/Care Leavers in Action be noted.

## 8. **Annual Report: Participation and Engagement with Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2022-23**

Sonya Kalyniak (Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Brent Council) introduced the report, which provided an overview of participation activity for care experienced children and young people in 2022-23. In introducing the report, she highlighted the following key points:

- One of the key achievements of the reporting year was that young people had been trained as interviewers and participated in the interviews of key members of staff, including the Chief Executive and Director of Children and Young People.
- The Council had hosted a Pride of Brent Youth Awards ceremony with members of Care in Action (CIA) and Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) being both part of the judging panel and receiving awards.

- A staff conference which had included Brent Care Journeys had involved different multi-media presentations from young people for them to express their experience of being in care, and 400 people saw those visual presentations which included a moving dance production.
- The service had been considering how Brent Care Journeys ways of working could be incorporated into future service design when the partnership came to an end in early 2025.
- The Council would be starting a new round of Bright Spots surveys in collaboration with the University of Oxford and Coram Voice, which would be the third time using the tool meaning it would yield some comparable data and results. Those results were then used for CIA and CLIA to advocate on behalf of other young people. The previous round had found that it was not always easy to build relationships with foster carers when a child first entered care, and so the groups had created a leaflet of 'dos and don'ts' for foster carers, which they had now developed into training that they would deliver.
- It was highlighted that there had been several changes in Participation Workers over the past 6-12 months, which had been challenging for CIA and CLIA because that work was very relationship focused. The service was working hard to get more permanent recruitment into those teams and had now recruited a Participation Manager who had already been involved in participation work in Brent and had been endorsed by CLIA representatives.

The Chair thanked Sonya Kalyniak for her introduction and invited contributions from the Committee, with the following points raised:

The Committee asked whether Brent Care Journeys would be continued past the end of its partnership in 2025. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) explained that Brent Care Journeys was a partnership with Barnardo's but not a contract so was a slightly different way of working. The Council had a strong relationship with Barnardo's and worked with them in a number of other areas such as the Family Wellbeing Centres. As such, the Council was hoping this was not the end of Brent Care Journeys and was in conversations as to what that provision would look like beyond 2025 in its evolved state.

The Committee noted that the report detailed the disruptive nature of changes in children's social workers, and asked whether the service was doing anything to make that transition between social workers easier, particularly because social worker changes would become more likely with the current national workforce issues. Members of CLIA shared their own experience of managing changes in social worker, highlighting that sometimes it was hard when one social worker left to feel motivated to build a relationship with someone new. Some of the work CLIA was doing to combat that was work around trusted relationships where the young person had a trusted person they could talk to about these issues to help with that transition. The young person could get to know their new social worker with that trusted person to allow the new social worker to get a sense of the young person for themselves rather than through their case files. CLIA acknowledged that this could be a time-consuming process but worked to establish that relationship at the first instance.

In response to CLIA, Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) highlighted that she agreed this should happen, but currently it was difficult to create that sense of handover due to the amount of vacancies within the service. In the LAC service, there was around 30% vacancies, which meant people were coming in and out at different times and when one person left there was not automatically someone there to take over straight away, creating a gap for young people. She highlighted that there was a need to be creative to ensure that sense of consistency for young people and the service was always open to suggestions on how that could be made easier for young people. Sonya Kalyniak

added that the social work induction programme used a trauma informed approach to inform incoming staff where young people had already had changes of social workers and what they had told the service made things easier for them. Leaving social workers were also asked to do later life letters and end relationships with children and young people properly, including recording the work they had done with the young person. Palvinder Kudhail (Director Integration and Improved Outcomes, Brent Council) added that the Council was now collecting data on the number of transitions a child had, and if they had more than 3 social worker changes then the Council would look to see if there was anyone else within that person's network who had been more stable and could provide that consistency. It was often found that the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) was consistent and so the Council might look to them and ask them to reassure the young person and do an extra visit with them.

In considering that transition period and the work the service were doing to minimise that disruption, the Committee asked how long that gap might be between a child's previous social worker leaving and being allocated a new social worker. Kelli Eboji answered that the 'worst case' scenario would be a week or fortnight gap where the service was waiting for someone to start. Where a social worker left and there were no other social workers with capacity, the Team Manager would hold that young person's case until someone new started to ensure the young person was always allocated.

The Committee asked about the uptake of participation projects and whether children and young people were making use of them, such as the grand mentoring scheme and apprenticeship scheme. They heard that there was a cohort of around 20 young people making good use of the grand mentoring scheme and the Council was in the process of renewing that contract so that it could continue. Officers and the Committee felt that more needed to be done around the apprenticeship scheme, particularly around the promotion of those opportunities. Some members of CLIA had not heard about these opportunities. Officers explained that, normally, a care leavers' personal advisor or social worker would let them know about the opportunities available to them and share the local offer with them, and if they joined their local hub that information would be available there too. The Committee felt there was still work to do around communicating effectively with care leavers to ensure they could access these schemes and the Committee asked for a follow-up on communication of the local offer in a future report.

RESOLVED:

- i) To endorse the development areas for 2023-24 outlined in section 4.11 of the accompanying report.
- ii) For a future report to detail the communication and engagement of the local offer with care leavers.

## 9. **Progress Report on Pan London Care Leavers Compact**

Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report which informed the Corporate Parenting Committee of the Pan London Care Leavers Compact and the Council's progress against the Compact. In introducing the report, she highlighted the following points:

- London local authorities were all being asked to make 6 commitments to London's care leavers by the end of December 2023. These were five housing related positions and an additional commitment relating to whole council support of care leavers through membership of the Care Leavers Covenant. The Compact aimed to

maximise consistency and quality in the local offers of support from local authorities.

- The report set out each commitment, including the current position in Brent for each of those. The Council was meeting most key elements of the Covenant, for example, Brent had implemented a Council Tax Scheme in 2018 waiving the requirement of Brent care leavers to pay council tax.
- Brent Council ensured care leavers were offered supported accommodation until they felt ready for their own tenancy which ensured no care leaver was found intentionally homeless. Brent was the only Council still offering social housing tenancies to care experienced young people.
- The Council did not currently offer a rent deposit scheme and would look at that as part of the work on the Pan-London Compact. Any proposals would be presented to senior managers.
- In relation to adopting the principle that care leavers up to the age of 25 should be placed in 'priority need' under homelessness legislation, Brent Council had not officially adopted that principle, but in practice there was close working between the Council's Housing Need Service and Looked After Children and Permanency Service through the joint protocol. That protocol would be revised during the current financial year.
- The Committee may ask the Council to do more work to present a position on the possibility of recognising being care experienced as a protected characteristic. In law, it did not appear in the Equalities Act, so it was not likely to be legally enforceable and would be more of an intent towards care leavers.

The Chair thanked officers for the update and invited comments and questions from Committee members with the following raised:

S (Care Leavers in Action) had been involved at a London level in developing the proposed Compact, which had been a long process involving a lot of research. She had found it an interesting experience to be involved in, particularly in hearing what other local authorities offered as part of their local offer. Personally, S was conflicted around recognising care experience as a protected characteristic as she was concerned it may turn into a 'tick box' exercise, but she did see benefits to this and it if a care leaver did not want to then they did not have to disclose their status.

The Committee asked whether there had been any further work around lobbying at a national level for the rights of care leavers. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) advised that being part of the London Covenant was in itself a commitment from the local authority to support the rights of care leavers. Part of the reason for the establishment of the Compact was the recognition that, across London, there was difference in service depending on where a care leaver was. In relation to the specific proposal to recognise being care experienced as a protected characteristic, Councils did not have a common view on that point and it was still an emerging issue. Committee members felt that sometimes words were important and although it may not be legally binding it could be a big statement and gesture to care experienced young people to have that enshrined in writing. As councillors, Committee members highlighted the possibility of bringing forward a motion to Full Council to have wider publicity around the commitment.

The Committee heard that the Council had not yet looked at supporting care leavers with private rented accommodation because the Council provided social housing tenancies, but there may be a need to look at that in the future as housing became more pressured.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report and support the improvement in the consistency of Brent's local offer to include updating some elements of the housing offer, set out in section 3.3 of the report.
- ii) To endorse the Council's adoption of the national Care Leavers Covenant and support its implementation across the Council.

**10. Brent Fostering Service Six-Monthly Monitoring Report: 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023**

Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report, which provided information on the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it was achieving good outcomes for children. In introducing the report, she highlighted the following key points:

- Fostering fortnight had taken place, focused on recruitment of foster carers, and there had been some follow up events throughout the summer. These had proved productive in terms of raising awareness and increasing enquiries.
- A fostering walk had taken place in Gladstone Park which ended with a cream tea for foster carers and had been a nice celebration event.
- There were several assessments in progress, with 5 at Stage 1 and 4 at Stage 2 which was promising and reinforced the belief that going out to the community through events was beneficial.
- The report had new sections focused on kinship to give kinship carers a more prominent profile. Some recent kinship activity involved a funday during kinship care week.
- The Council had bid for funding from the DfE for recruitment and retention of foster carers jointly with West London and had been successful. The Council was now in the process of starting a Fostering Recruitment Hub with West London which was being led by Hammersmith and Fulham. As part of that project, a model of support known as 'mockingbird' was being piloted, where foster carers supported each other through self-sufficient support clusters.

In considering the reports, the following points were raised:

The Committee asked what the difference between kinship carers and foster carers was. Kelli Eboji explained that if a child was placed in an emergency placement with their kin and that kin then became a carer then they would only receive a basic allowance because they would not yet have been to Foster Panel for approval. The connected person did not need to be a blood relative but connected to the child in some way. Once that carer had been approved at Foster Panel then they would get a slight increase in the fostering allowance they were paid. The fostering allowance was calculated on an age basis and had 4 tiers with 3 levels, including an enhanced rate for children with additional needs. In terms of support, kinship carers were entitled to the same level of support as traditional foster carers, including an allocated social worker.

The Committee asked whether the service had plans to bring more activity face to face instead of virtual, such as training, foster carer support groups and Foster Panel. Kelli Eboji highlighted the need for balance in this regard, as it was important that foster carers completed their training and foster carers could not always attend in-person training. The evidence showed that, generally, foster carers did attend online training as a preference to face to face, but the service did not want to stop face to face training completely. The

service was clear with foster carers on the expectations for them to undertake training, but having that flexibility was important, in particular for kinship carers who the service may struggle to engage in training as they had come to fostering through a different route. The service used every opportunity to train foster carers in multiple creative ways, such as asking the foster carer to read an article and then discuss it with their social worker.

The Committee was interested in the Brazilian Community Day that the LAC and Permanency Service had attended and asked whether the service had seen any interest in fostering from attendees that day. Elena Muller (Service Manager – LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) replied that the day had gone very well and the service would be looking to attend more of these community events in future. The service had recently been to a Somali activity day. The focus was on being present in the community in order to ensure Brent's multiple diverse communities knew about fostering. The service would also be attending multi-faith forums. Kelli Eboji thanked social workers who had attended those events who had taken time out on their weekends to talk about fostering with the community. The Committee asked for councillors to be sent information on these events and for the Committee to receive the foster carer newsletter.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the contents of the report.

#### 11. **Brent Adoption Report Six-Monthly Update: 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023**

Debbie Gabriel (Adopt London West) introduced the report, which provided both a six-monthly update and the Adopt London West annual report of adoption activity. In introducing the report, she highlighted the following key points:

- Performance regarding children's timescales and timeliness of the adoption pathway was strong against national data. Brent's individual performance was detailed in the report.
- Placement of children with Adopt London West adopters in Brent had not performed as strongly in the annual report year. It was highlighted that Adopt London West recruited adopters that they believed were suitable to adopt, but this did not always mean they were the right match for a particular child. That sometimes meant that where Adopt London West adopters were not happy to wait for a match, they might get approached by other regional adoption agencies looking to place their children with them. As such, there had only been 4 children placed with Adopt London West adopters in Brent the previous year. There had been measures put in place to focus that issue, and of the 3 children in Brent placed in the current year, 2 were placed with Adopt London West adopters, showing a stronger position than the previous year.
- Performance around recruitment was strong across Adopt London. Within a national context, Stage 1 was very lengthy and it was difficult to meet that timescale but all Adopt London agencies were doing well against that target.
- Adopt London West continued to have strong relationships with its partners.
- There had only been a small number of complaints received which all related to access to records which was a well-known challenge.

The Chair thanked Debbie Gabriel for her introduction and invited comments and questions from those present, with the following raised:

The Committee was pleased to see the high percentage of LGBTQ+ adopters outlined in section 7.1 of the report. The report had not mentioned the number of Black adopters that had been approved and the Committee asked whether there had been any. Debbie Gabriel explained that Adopt London West had not yet approved any entirely Black households within the current year but had approved some mixed ethnicity households. Debbie Gabriel provided further information on the Black Adopters Project that was currently underway. She highlighted that Black Adopters Project had been informed by a focus group of young people who gave clear messages about what they wanted and needed from the project, as well as a Steering Committee which had been informed by a working group of Black adopters established by We Are Family. Some of the pilot programmes focused on setting up regular opportunities for young people to come together socially. There was also a focus on influencing schools and a community engagement focus. It was agreed that the Committee could be provided with an update on the project in the next report.

In relation to the plans for DfE and Ofsted to pilot direct inspections of Regional Adoption Agencies with 6 agencies, the Committee was advised that it was not yet known which agencies would be inspected until the call was received. The pilot would not look into Special Guardianship.

The Committee highlighted the positive of the stable workforce in Adopt London West and asked if there was any insight as to how that had been achieved. Debbie Gabriel highlighted that, very often, Adopt London recruited social workers who were burnt out from being on frontline teams, because they had the ability to do therapeutic social work in a less demanding area. As such, it was positive for Adopt London West that it was attracting young social workers from a children in need background, but this then impacted on frontline teams who may be losing out on those staff.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the contents of the report.

## 12. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 18:30 pm

COUNCILLOR GWEN GRAHL  
Chair