	<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b> 23 April 2025
	<b>Report from the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development</b>
	<b>Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools - Cllr Gwen Grahl</b>
<b>Learning from Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) and Brent's Participation Offer</b>	

<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)	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.
<b>List of Appendices:</b>	Appendix 1 – Participation and Engagement Strategy 2024-2027 (to follow)
<b>Background Papers:</b>	N/A
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Alice Weavers Participation and Engagement Manager alice.weavers@brent.gov.uk  Nicole Levy Service Manager Quality Assurance and Learning and Development <a href="mailto:nicole.levy@brent.gov.uk">nicole.levy@brent.gov.uk</a>

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an update regarding the participation offer, the transition from Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) to Brent Care Journeys 2.0 (BCJ 2.0), the response to the Bright Spots survey and progress in the Brent Children and Young People Participation and Engagement Strategy 2024-2027, which underpins all participation activities.
- 1.2. This report provides examples of participation activities undertaken since

April 2024.

## **2. Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1. 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 including opportunities for children and young people to participate in decisions which affect them.

## **3. Detail**

### **3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities and Strategic Context**

This report sets out updates on participation programmes and activities for children in care and care leavers. The work of the participation team contributes to the following borough priorities:

- **The Best Start in Life**
- **Prosperity and Stability**
- **A Healthier Brent**
- **Thriving Communities**

## **4. Participation team**

- 4.1. Participation programmes and opportunities are led by a participation team based within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance service. The team applies the core principles of youth work as set out by the [National Youth Agency](#).
- 4.2. The team comprises a Participation and Engagement Manager (0.6 FTE), a Participation and Engagement Officer (0.6 FTE), two Participation Support Officers (0.3 FTE) and Sessional Participation Workers (bank staff). As detailed later in the report, these sessional roles are currently in process of job evaluation and will then be advertised.
- 4.3. The Participation and Engagement Officer is new to the team and started on 31 March 2025. The position was vacant before this point and the team has not been at full capacity during this reporting period.
- 4.4. The Sessional Participation Worker role is aimed at care experienced individuals to offer opportunities for care leavers to become formally employed in the Council. This follows a successful model with Brent Care Journeys (see section 5) and the role of Care Quality Ambassadors in which several Brent care leavers are now working in the Council to quality assure different accommodation settings.

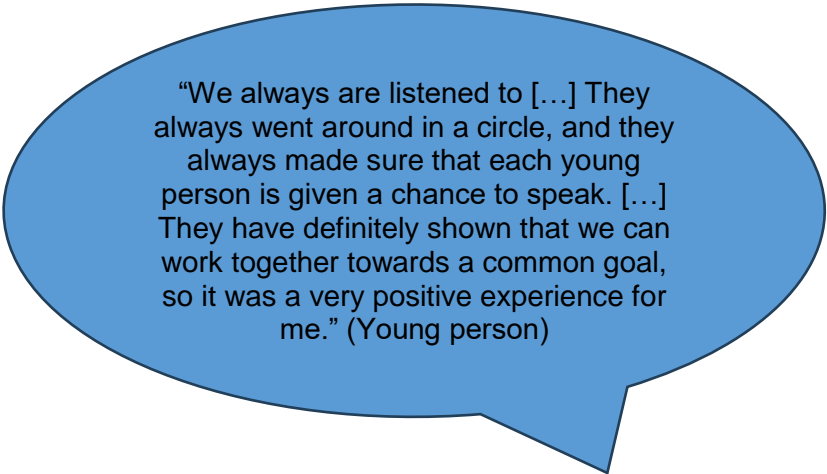
- 4.5. The Sessional Participation Workers will help to support participation staff run sessions and activities for children in care. They will be supported in the role to develop youth work skills by running activities for younger children under the supervision of participation team members who hold JNC youth work qualifications. If staff wish to go further with a youth work career, they will be supported to study and qualify as youth support workers under a government backed youth work training scheme with level 2 and 3 qualifications available locally.
- 4.6. The Sessional Participation Worker role is a new post, and work is underway to establish the position and open recruitment. A job description has been written and is being evaluated by HR. The participation team hopes to open recruitment later in the spring with workers in post in the summer.
- 4.7. The new Participation and Engagement Officer previously worked within Brent Care Journeys. They helped to develop the sessional worker role there, in which several care leavers were employed to run activities. They bring this experience and knowledge to BCJ 2.0, and they will be leading the recruitment and supervision of the new Sessional Participation Workers.
- 4.8. The participation team have ensured that they have aligned the work they do with the priorities set out in the Brent Youth Strategy, approved by Cabinet in March 2025 and launched in April 2025. The participation team helped facilitate co-design opportunities with children and young people.

## **5. Learning from Brent Care Journeys and the transition to BCJ 2.0**

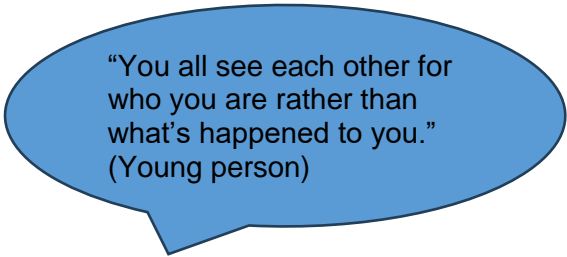
- 5.1. The London Borough of Brent entered into a 5-year strategic partnership with Barnardo's in 2019 called Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) which aimed to bring about transformational change in the children's social care system, leading to better outcomes for young people, and to provide learning for the wider social care system. Brent Care Journeys aimed to achieve these goals through collaboration with care-experienced young people and professionals based on a robust partnership.
- 5.2. The three key outcome areas were:
  - Outcome 1: Strategic Partnership with Care-Experienced Young People
  - Outcome 2: Viable Partnership Working Towards Outcomes
  - Outcome 3: Improvements in Children's Social Care Systems.
- 5.3. The ambition, and ultimate aim, of this partnership was to improve the children's social care system to support young people to achieve "positive destinations", a broader concept of positive outcomes for care experienced young people which went beyond the traditional focus on education, employment and training.

- 5.4. Brent Care Journeys was an innovative programme for care leavers. This established a programme of activities to support young people who have grown up in the care system to lead service design. Through a relationship-based approach and the active collaboration of people and communities, the programme supported young people to design, review and implement changes in services.
- 5.5. Brent Care Journeys was due to end by March 2025, but in June 2024 Barnardo's ended the programme early, due to an internal restructure. The Council worked with the team at Barnardo's in 2024 to enable a smooth transition to a new programme renamed as Brent Care Journeys 2.0 (BCJ 2.0).
- 5.6. BCJ 2.0 amalgamates Brent's Children in Care Council (previously called 'Care in Action') and projects for care leavers (previously called 'Care Leavers in Action'), providing space and opportunities for different groups to meet in a safe environment to take part in participation activities throughout the year and engage in trips and events in school holidays.
- 5.7. Learning examples from Brent Care Journeys
- 5.7.1. During the course of the BCJ partnership the following activities and initiatives were delivered:
- Social, educational and leisure activities
  - Co-designed and facilitated training for staff, carers and Ofsted
  - Power Groups: workshops or group activities that were designed and delivered directly by young people for young people, e.g. Vibes in the Kitchen, Brothers, Therapart.
  - Events: Kiln Theatre-BCJ Showcase "Dear Social Services", Listen Up, BCJ Fun Affair
  - 'Test and Learn' projects, using a co-design methodology, resulting in tangible resources and tools that have been inspired, developed and championed by care experienced young people. This has included:
    - Welcome Packs for young people moving into semi-independent placements now part of commissioning agreements.
    - Activity budgets for relationship building between key worker and young people.
    - Pre-birth Assessment tool designed by Care Leavers who were parents which are now used within Brent's pre-birth assessment work.
- 5.7.2. Many of the young people who were interviewed talked about the strong, meaningful relationships that they had developed with other Care Journeys peers throughout the course of the projects, and how important these had become to them. For several young people, this was the first time that they had been able to develop social connections with peers who shared their

experience of the care system and for this reason they felt more understood and accepted within these new friendship groups.

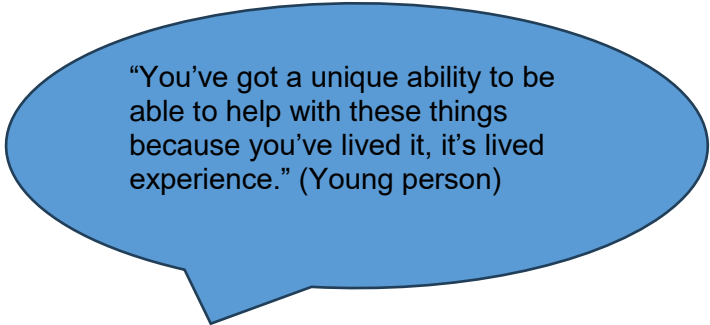


"We always are listened to [...] They always went around in a circle, and they always made sure that each young person is given a chance to speak. [...] They have definitely shown that we can work together towards a common goal, so it was a very positive experience for me." (Young person)



"You all see each other for who you are rather than what's happened to you." (Young person)

5.7.3. Young people who had been involved in projects like Alpha Labs said that they had developed a broader knowledge of issues that are present throughout the care system at a national level. Furthermore, they were not only aware of what problems exist but had also developed an understanding of how their skills and experiences put them in a good position to help tackle these problems, which fed into a greater motivation to do so.



"You've got a unique ability to be able to help with these things because you've lived it, it's lived experience." (Young person)

5.7.4. The participation team has learnt from the successes of the Brent Care Journeys programme to help develop BCJ 2.0 and to ensure that there was continuity for young people with projects for them to take part in.

5.7.5. The former Care in Action programme involved regular participation sessions for young people within three age groups: Junior Care in Action (ages 7-11), Care in Action (ages 12-17) and Care Leavers in Action (ages 18-25). The model of regular sessions focused on participation activities had varied results and in recent years attendance has been low. Young people in the Care Action group fed back that it not always possible to meet on weekday evenings due to school activities and Saturdays can also be difficult for young people who have contact time then. Young people like having a space to meet which is not

entirely focused on participation activities and instead has a more informal atmosphere with different youth-led activities like a youth club.

- 5.7.6. The developing model of BCJ 2.0, co-designed with young people, learns from Brent Care Journeys and the feedback from young people to create a youth-led model of different projects and opportunities which caters to young people's different interests and availability. This has shown the importance of creating time and space for young people to develop peer relationships and take part in a range of youth-led and informal education activities. This then leads into more formalised participation opportunities, such as attending Council meetings or taking part in interview panels.
- 5.7.7. Relational practice was central to Brent Care Journeys and BCJ 2.0 has taken a similar approach. Participation staff taking time to develop positive relationships with young people by getting to know them individually and taking their lead in how they want to work and what their interests are. The voluntary principle of youth work is at the heart of this by supporting young people's agency to decide themselves whether they want to engage and take part.
- 5.7.8. Some young people are keen to get involved in participation activities straight away but most need encouragement and extra support. The team is always looking to engage young people who are new to BCJ 2.0. This involves running youth activities and conducting outreach work in semi-independent provision and activities run by the Leaving Care team to build relationships and trust first before young people take part in participation activities, such as attending Corporate Parenting Committee.
- 5.7.9. Brent Care Journeys ran creative projects for care leavers to boost their mental health and provide a safe space to form relationships with peers. BCJ 2.0 has learnt from this to establish new creative projects for young people. This follows the principle above of building relationships with young people first to then encourage and support them to get involved in participation. We have formed a new partnership with the charity Create Arts to deliver an arts programme for young people in BCJ 2.0.
  - The programme includes four projects: two with care leavers (ceramics and music) and two with young people aged 11-17 (visual arts and drama).
  - The first project with care leavers ran in November and December 2024 for six weeks on Thursday evenings. There was a good turn out with seven core members and five new members.
  - Young people enjoyed being creative and having a social and creative space to chat to each other every week.
  - There was also feedback received that they enjoyed the 'routine' of the sessions as they ran consecutively for 6 weeks. Young people found these sessions "therapeutic" and it "makes you happy to do stuff".
  - The second project took place in February half term over three days for young people aged 11-17 with a focus on visual arts. The young people

made notebooks, tie-dye fabric items, lino print stencils and more. Each day was attended by at least 8 young people.

- Young people mentioned that they felt heard by the Council and felt a sense of belonging:

“When we want something, you can just put it out there saying, we want this, this makes us feel happy, and they’ll try their best to bring it for us.”

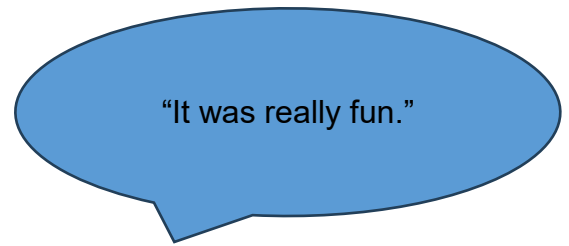
“It actually affected my wellbeing, you know, because it’s like, you know, you go out there, you can tell people, yeah, I’ve done clay. I go to like a thing every Thursday.”



## 5.8. Development of BCJ 2.0

- 5.8.1. BCJ 2.0 was soft launched in the summer of 2024 at the annual summer fun day event at the Unity Centre in Harlesden. Over 60 people attended including young people, carers and staff. There were lots of indoor and outdoor activities for all ages such as a DJ, bouncy castle, arts and crafts and a quiz. Guests shared positive feedback of the event:





5.8.2. BCJ 2.0 is still evolving, with young people providing feedback about the types of projects and activities they would like to do. Young people are able to hold the participation team to account through the Voice and Influence subgroup meetings.

5.8.3. The focus in BCJ 2.0 has been on establishing a permanent staff team, running sessions and maintaining an active participation offer with opportunities for young people to participate in decision-making, such as taking part in Corporate Parenting Committee.

5.8.4. **Evidence of impact:** Since April 2024, we have worked directly with over 40 young people across all age groups in projects, events and participation opportunities. Our work with care leavers has grown and we have gone from three young people at the start of 2023 to engaging 15 young people. We have also had new young people aged between 7-17 join activities and trips and reconnected with past members of Care in Action who have come back to participation through BCJ 2.0.

5.8.5. Highlights of BCJ 2.0 since April 2024 include:

- engaging more care leavers with a bigger group now accessing participation opportunities,
- increasing opportunities for care experienced young people to join projects with young people from other participation groups and youth projects, such as Brent Youth Parliament and the Brent Youth Strategy,
- supporting young people to develop their public speaking skills through speaking at Brent and pan-London conferences,
- care leavers working with Councillors and officers to re-design Corporate Parenting Committee to make it a more accessible space for young people and something they now look forward to attending,
- supporting young people's campaign to make care experience a protected characteristic, this was passed as an unopposed motion at full council in December 2024,
- young people working with the NHS to co-design an animation video about health services for children in care,
- care leavers attending a summer residential to build teamworking skills and plan participation activities,
- supporting young people to advocate for themselves with their personal goals, such as resitting exams, applying for jobs and being open to new participation opportunities within and outside of Brent,
- seeing young people form new friendships and look out for each



other, particularly in the care leavers group where they always help each other out,

- seeing children and young people have fun in projects and on trips where the focus is on providing a safe space for them to relax and enjoy activities.

5.8.6. There have been some challenges with the logistics of sessions. There has been a lack of suitable spaces to run sessions in the Civic Centre which is the most easily accessible location for children and carers to come to. Sessions often take place in training rooms or boardrooms which are not welcoming spaces for young people.

5.8.7. The priorities for BCJ 2.0 in 2025 will concentrate on building on our existing work to formalise the BCJ 2.0 offer. The newly appointed Participation and Engagement Officer previously worked at Barnardo's Brent Care journeys. Her recruitment provides continuity for young people and helps to ensure that the legacy from Brent Care journeys is maintained. She will be leading work to promote BCJ 2.0 to young people and staff. This will involve working with young people to co-create branding, a promotion strategy to recruit their peers and a programme of projects and activities. This will then be shared with relevant services to ensure all teams are aware of the full BCJ 2.0 offer to encourage more young people to take part. We will also explore new options for securing accessible spaces to deliver sessions and activities.

5.8.8. The Participation and Engagement Officer will also prioritise establishing contact with young people who were previously involved in Brent Care Journeys. Some young people did continue to take part under BCJ 2.0, but others moved on, sometimes due to family and work commitments or aging out of services, however others found the end of Brent Care Journeys upsetting and needed some time before re-engaging. The Participation and Engagement Officer will be in a unique position to leverage existing relationships with young people under Brent Care Journeys, to try to involve as many young people as possible with BCJ 2.0.

5.8.9. The full BCJ 2.0 offer will include learning from Brent Care Journeys and activities run over the past year to establish a programme of sessions, projects, trips and participation opportunities. The focus of BCJ 2.0 will be supporting young people to get involved with service design and improvement through their feedback and ideas. We want young people to be able to hold the Council to account on services for care experienced young people and initiatives such as the care leavers' charter and the London wide care leaver covenant. The BCJ 2.0 programme will be accessible to all young people by recognising that not all young people want to attend a regular in-person group or a formal Council meeting. Therefore, the programme will incorporate different types of opportunities with a balance of in-person and virtual; one-off, short-term projects and long-term programmes; activities and formal opportunities; local, regional and national opportunities; voluntary and paid opportunities. Participation will be built into everything with opportunities for young people to share their views, co-design initiatives and lead projects.

5.5.10 BCJ 2.0 provides opportunities for young people to develop their skills and experiences which builds their future employability. For example, young people have paid opportunities to join staff interview panels where they experience interviews from the other side. Participation staff work with young people to articulate their experiences on their CVs and in interviews.

5.5.11 BCJ 2.0 will also connect to regional and national opportunities for young people to further develop their experiences of participation. Participation staff are connected to regional and national participation networks and regularly share opportunities with young people. However, many young people need encouragement and support to apply for these opportunities which the participation team provide. The team recently supported two care leavers to apply and interview for the Family Justice Young People's Board, led by the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), the young people were successful and are now representing Brent at a national level to share their views on family courts.

5.5.12 A focus of BCJ 2.0 for 2025 will be projects linked to the findings of the Bright Spots survey with young people sharing their ideas for service improvement and co-designing new initiatives.

## **6. Response to Bright Spots**

### **6.1. Background**

6.1.1. Brent has, over several years, been a Local Authority who have partnered with Coram Voice to complete the Bright Spots Survey with children in care and care leavers. Coram Voice states that *"The Bright Spots Programme is a research and service improvement project. The Programme was set up to understand what is important to children in care and care leavers and share learning about what makes life good for them"*.

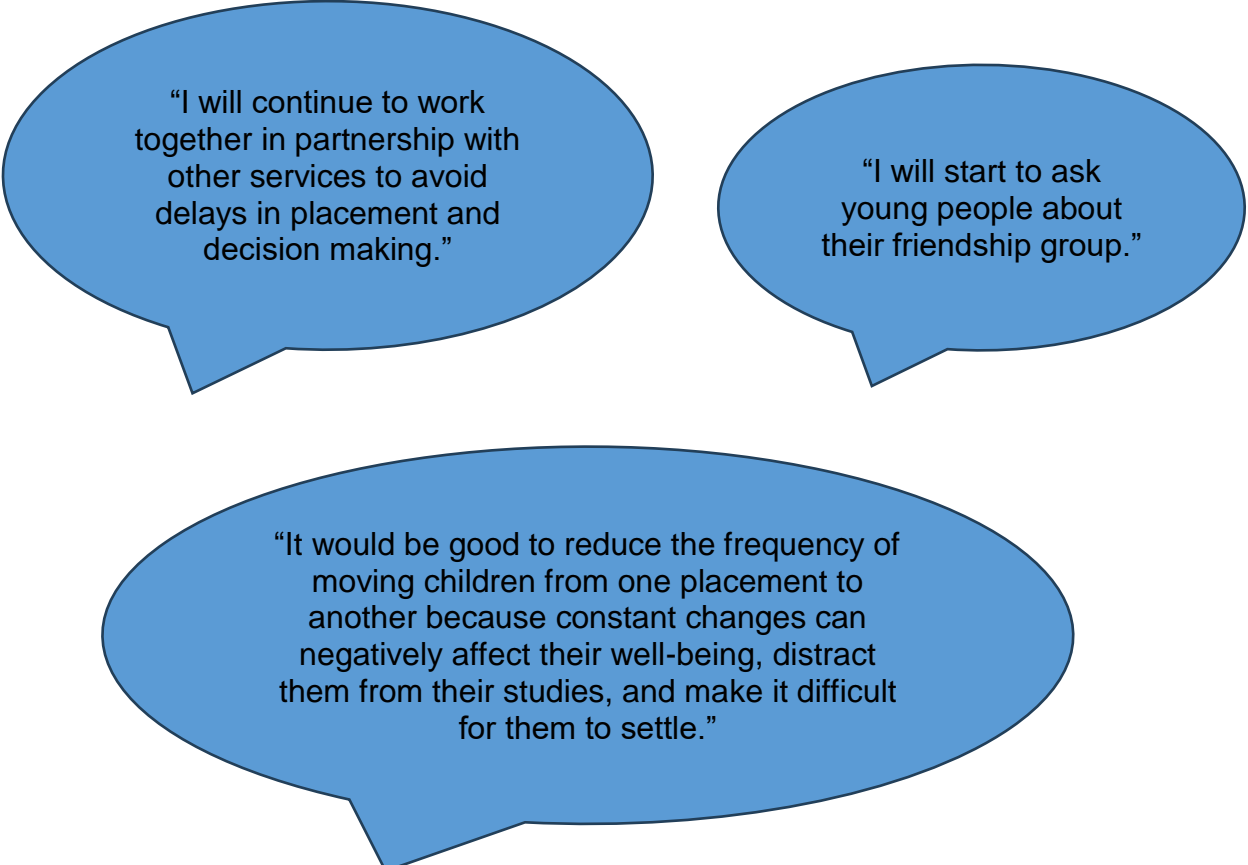
6.1.2. Between 1 March and 30 April 2023 and again between 11 October 2023 and 29 March 2024, all Brent children in care aged 4-18 years were asked to take part in an online survey to find out how they felt about their lives.

6.1.3. Findings are split into two separate reports *Your Life, Your Care* (for those aged 4-17) and *Your Life Beyond Care* (for Care Leavers). The Your Life, Your Care report was presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee by young people in October 2024 and the Your Life Beyond Care report was presented by young people in February 2025. In these meetings, young people discussed the findings with the Committee.

### **6.2. Action plan**

6.2.1. Since the reports have been published, young people and staff have been reviewing the findings to understand the different views across all age groups.

6.2.2. The reports have been shared with staff across CYP and two workshops were run by Coram Voice to celebrate success, go through the findings and share learning. These workshops were attended by staff from different services and involved interactive activities for staff to reflect on what they would continue doing, start doing and stop doing in response to the findings.



"I will continue to work together in partnership with other services to avoid delays in placement and decision making."

"I will start to ask young people about their friendship group."

"It would be good to reduce the frequency of moving children from one placement to another because constant changes can negatively affect their well-being, distract them from their studies, and make it difficult for them to settle."

6.2.3. The reports have been shared with young people involved in BCJ 2.0 and care leavers have been involved in creating the presentations for Corporate Parenting Committee. Over the Easter holidays, the participation team will be running an activity in all sessions to share the findings more widely and listen to young people's ideas for how services could be improved.

6.2.4. Young people will then use this feedback to co-design initiatives, campaigns or longer-term projects to help improve services based on the findings of the surveys. This will learn from previous Bright Spots project to build on the work of their peers. For example, in the previous round of Bright Spots surveys, young people developed a guide for practitioners about how to build trusted relationships with young people. This guide is still very relevant for today and young people will look at whether they want to update this in line with the most recent findings.

6.2.5. Opportunities to get involved in Bright Spots participation initiatives and projects will be shared across services to encourage young people not

involved in BCJ 2.0 to take part. Participation staff will then get to know new young people and encourage them to get involved in other participation projects within BCJ 2.0.

6.2.6. Young people will be leading the way with Bright Spots activities, they will also be working closely with staff from different services to understand what could work and hear their ideas too. There will be opportunities for staff and young people to work together on Bright Spots, including through the Voice and Influence meetings and at the annual summer fun day.

6.2.7. Young people will be empowered to also involve elected members and learn about opportunities outside of Corporate Parenting Committee to raise awareness of their campaigns, learning from their success with the campaign to make care experience a protected characteristic which was debated at full council, with care leavers attending the meeting in November 2024.

## **7. Progress in the Brent Children and Young People Participation and Engagement Strategy 2024-2027**

### **7.1. Background to the Participation Strategy**

7.1.1. The Brent Borough Plan 2023-2027 makes an explicit commitment to increasing the active participation of Brent children and young people by stating: *“We want all our young people from all backgrounds to be seen and heard in our services. We will create more opportunities and spaces to empower our young people to have their say.”*

7.1.2. In Autumn 2023, a draft Participation and Engagement strategy was developed, and consultation took place with children and young people and the CYP workforce. Following the consultation process, the strategy was re-drafted and launched at the CYP staff conference in June 2024.

7.1.3. The Participation Strategy covers both a universal and targeted participation offer but this report focuses only on the participation offer for children in care and care leavers. The strategy underpins all participation work.

### **7.2. Involvement of young people in the Participation Strategy**

7.2.1. Throughout the development of the participation strategy, we have gathered feedback from young people and implemented changes. Young people were consulted about their views on participation and what they felt were the benefits and barriers with their feedback included in the final version (Appendix 1).

- 7.2.2. A Voice and Influence subgroup for staff and young people meets once a month to discuss participation priorities which feeds into Local Partnership meetings. Through this group, several care leavers gave feedback on earlier versions of the Participation Strategy and one of their suggestions was for a video version which they felt would be more accessible for young people.
- 7.2.3. The participation team worked closely with young people to co-design a video version of the participation strategy. Young people have been involved in developing the video behind and in front of the camera. Young people have helped to write the script, record voiceovers, interview each other and share feedback on editing.
- 7.2.4. An initial version of the video was shown at the December CYP staff conference and different versions of the video have been shared with young people to gather their feedback at different stages and shape the final design. The final video is expected to be finished in spring 2025 and will be used to promote the participation strategy and activities to young people and staff.

## **8. Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement**

- 8.1. Stakeholder consultation and engagement is essential to participation, and we are committed to continuing to evaluate and develop new and creative ways of hearing from young people, carers, staff and partner organisations.

## **9. Financial Considerations**

- 9.1. There are currently no financial considerations arising from this report.

## **10. Legal Considerations**

- 10.1. There are currently no legal considerations arising from this report.

## **11 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations**

- 11.1. There are currently no Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) considerations arising from this report.

## **12. Climate Change and Environmental Considerations**

- 12.1. There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

## **13. Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)**

- 13.1. There are no human resource or property considerations.

## **14. Communication Considerations**

14.11 At this stage there are not any communication considerations.

**Report sign off:**

***Nigel Chapman***

Corporate Director of Children, Young People  
and Community Development