

	Corporate Parenting Committee 13 October 2025
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development
	Lead Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools - Cllr Gwen Grahl
Brent Fostering Service 6-monthly Monitoring Report: 01 April 2025 to 30 September 2025	

Wards Affected:	ALL
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
List of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	N/A
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1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children. It includes relevant data on the service's performance and activities, as well as updates on the functioning and progress of the Fostering Panel. Additionally, the report outlines the developments that have taken place in

the Service throughout the year, as well as any planned initiatives for the upcoming period. This is in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).

- 1.2 Brent Fostering Service operates in accordance with the Fostering National Minimum Standards, the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. These regulations are the foundation of the regulatory framework for fostering services under the Care Standards Act 2000. This report details the activity of Brent's fostering service from the 01 April 2025 to the 30 September 2025.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review and comment on the contents of this report. This is to provide evidence that the management of the fostering service is being monitored and challenged in order to promote good outcomes for Brent Looked After Children.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

- 3.1.1 This report sets out the management of the Local Authority's in-house fostering service and the developments that have taken place in the reporting period. The work of the fostering service contributes to the following borough priorities:

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

In order for care experienced young people to have the best start in life, prosperity and stability, safety, and good health they need safe, stable homes with primary carers who love them and who are able to meet their holistic needs. The fostering service contributes to these priorities by recruiting, assessing, and supporting foster carers and connected person carers for Brent children and young people. Providing safe, stable, loving homes for children and young people when they are unable to remain with their birth parent/s, means that they will have the best life chances.

4.0 Background

4.1 Service Priorities

- 4.1.1 The in-house fostering function, located within the Looked After Children and Permanency Service (LACP) in the Children, Young People and Community Development Directorate has the following service priorities for 2025/2026:

- To have a strong and renewed focus on recruitment, assessment and approval of new foster carers with the view to achieve a net gain of **10** new carers by the end of the financial year.
- To enhance the support offer to Brent's foster carers and kinship carers, by rolling out the new fostering offer and deliver existing and new therapeutic support to increase placement stability and develop carers' ability and resilience in managing more complex and challenging placements.
- To implement the first Mockingbird constellation in Brent. The Mockingbird Family Model of fostering builds communities of six to ten foster families called constellations. Each constellation is led by a hub home carer and liaison worker. The constellation offers vital peer support and guidance alongside social activities and sleepovers to strengthen relationships and permanence.
- To improve the outcomes for the looked after children by providing local and in-house placement options, minimising change of social workers and placements and keeping children connected to their networks.
- To promote and improve the take up of learning opportunities for new and experienced foster carers and connected persons using different delivery methods comprising of face-to-face, online/virtual and E-Learning.
- To consolidate and strengthen the partnerships with neighbouring authorities to recruit and retain more foster carers by working collaboratively with neighbouring local authorities to implement the West London Recruitment Hub.
- To recruit, train and retain foster carers that can offer emergency placements to children and young people who come into care in unplanned circumstances.
- To continue to develop and transform the service in consultation and collaboration with care experienced young people and foster carers through regular feedback and co-designed training and steering groups.
- To ensure that the foster carers feel supported and valued by providing regular service updates, promoting a sense of belonging to a wider fostering community and celebrating the carers achievements and commitment to their role.

4.1.2 Progress on these priorities will be explored throughout this report, in summary achievements in 2025 against our priorities so far, include:

- 0 foster carers have resigned this period. The service has not recruited any new carers this period; the net increase for this financial year so far is 0. The Local Authority continues to be ambitious in relation to fostering recruitment and continues to strive to meet the goal of 10 new carers by the end of this financial year. Presently the service has 6 assessments in progress as well as 6 potential carers who are considering progressing to assessment.
- Brent's fostering offer is competitive; it is well received by Brent foster carers. In this period 0 carers have transferred from Brent to other Local Authorities or Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) however foster carers do feedback they would like more benefits including council tax reductions/reimbursements, financial contributions to utility bills as well as

other benefits including better parking options in the London Borough of Brent.

- Brent's first Mockingbird Constellation is now live. The foster carers in this programme have fed back they are thankful for the support of this new programme and enjoy the community that is being built.
- Whilst the Local Authority have not increased in-house fostering capacity in this reporting period, placement stability is good and the vacancies with in-house carers are being fully utilised, meaning if a carer is free to foster a child then a child is placed with them swiftly, after careful planning, risk assessment and matching.
- Uptake of training by foster carers still needs to improve but the number of training courses available is good; the training catalogue is robust and additional training courses are added on specific topics when requested by foster carers.
- Brent, and 7 other neighbouring West London Local Authorities (Ealing, Harrow, Hounslow, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster and Hillingdon), received funding from the Department for Education for the West London Fostering Hub to improve recruitment and retention of foster carers in September 2023 and a new joint fostering recruitment hub (dedicated "front door" for fostering enquiries) was created and became operational from May 2024. The 8 Local Authorities share training, resources, ideas, feedback and good practice to improve all services in West London.
- The service utilises the current pool of foster carers for emergency care arrangements whenever a vacancy arises.
- The fostering service has identified a lead social worker to work closely with Brent's participation service. Work is ongoing to identify a foster carer to lead the Foster Carer Forum and better utilise feedback from the foster carers who attend the Brent support groups.
- The fostering service provides regular service updates to foster carers via monthly email newsletters as well as sharing updates in foster carer support groups. 'Coffee with Kelli' sessions continue to be offered to foster carers and carers are encouraged to provide feedback via surveys sent to them and via their supervising social worker. Carers are celebrated at fostering panel and events such as the end of year celebration; letters of thanks are also sent from the Head of Service or Service Manager when carers have gone above and beyond. The next step is to implement a WhatsApp Community to share feedback, events and information as requested by the Brent foster carers.

4.2 Staffing Arrangements

- 4.2.1 The structure of the Fostering Service remains the same since the last report. The Fostering Service consists of two teams: one Recruitment, Support and Assessment Team, and one Kinship Care Team. The service is overseen by Service Manager, Tom Donovan.
- 4.2.2 The Fostering Support and Assessment Team consists of 8 supervising social workers, one Team Manager, one part-time Fixed Term Contract

Mockingbird Liaison Officer and one part-time Fixed Term Contract Fostering Recruitment Officer post.

4.2.3 The Kinship Care Team consists of 8 social workers and one Team Manager. Following recruitment activity taking place, the Kinship Care Team has been a stable team of permanent social workers since May 2025.

4.2.4 The workload in the fostering team continues to be at manageable levels, whilst the Kinship Team has experienced an increased number of cases over this reporting period as new kinship carers are assessed, approved and allocated to supervising social workers for ongoing support.

4.3 Placement Activity

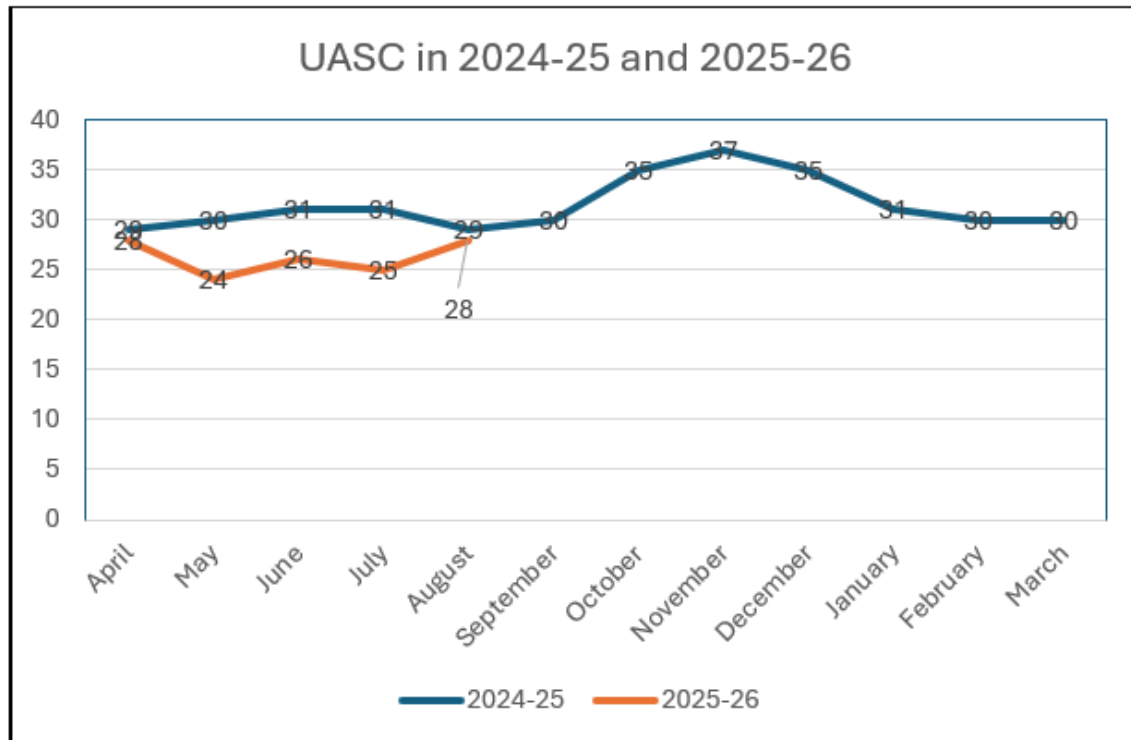
4.3.1 The total number of looked after children as of 30/09/2025 was 291, a decrease of 7 child from 298 on 31 March 2025.

4.3.2 The corporate performance targets for 2024/2025 are as follows:

- Percentage of looked after children placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers as of 30th September 2025 was 20%, an increase of 12 children to 57 children. However, this remains below the annual target of 25%
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend as of 30th September 2025 was 14%, a decrease of 4 children (41) – below the annual target of 20%
- Percentage of looked after children placed with independent fostering agencies as of 30th September 2025 was 30% (87 children), the same number of children as 31/03/25
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements as of 30 September 2025 was 64% (185 children), an increase of 6 children and 3%.
- There were 37 looked after children placed in registered supported accommodation as of 30 September 2025, a reduction of 5 young people from 31 March 2025. 37 children represent 13% of all looked after children placed in registered supported accommodation.

4.3.3 There were 28 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) as of 30 September 2025, a decrease of 2 UASC from 31 March 2025 (30 UASC)

4.3.4 The number of UASC placed in registered supported accommodation as of 30 September 2025 was 11, 4 less UASC as at 31 March 2025, none in residential children's homes, and 17 UASC placed in foster placements. 8 UASC are aged under 16.



4.3.5 10 children were placed with 10 new Kinship Carers who have started fostering since April, 2 of whom have also ceased placements.

4.3.6 As at 30 September 2025 there are 2 children in 2 unregulated placements which have exceeded 24 weeks where the carer has not yet been approved as a connected persons carer. The carers have been presented to the Panel for approval, but the ADM is awaited.

4.3.7 3 children were made subjects to Special Guardianship orders in this reporting period.

4.4 Recruitment and Assessment of new foster carers

Recruitment

4.4.1 During this reporting period, the monthly information evenings were held on Zoom, and the team attended both face-to-face and online recruitment events targeted at communities in various parts of the borough. The recruitment activity continues to have a broad focus, to capture as much interest as possible. Foster with West London (FwWL) offer regular information evenings run by the foster carer ambassadors that potential Brent carers can also utilise.

Any potential enquiries that come to Brent are redirected swiftly via Foster with West London to ensure the regional hub are capturing all potential enquiries. Brent marketing material and information make clear the working relationship

between Brent and FwWL. Brent and FwWL work together to establish as many potential enquiries as far as possible.

Outreach Work:

- 4.4.2 The fostering service has been working hard to raise awareness of fostering across Brent through targeted outreach. As part of this effort, we have visited 5 Brent libraries, 10 schools and 10 GP surgeries to display fostering recruitment posters in key areas and to supply leaflets to families who utilise these services. This helps us to reach families and staff who may be interested in fostering. This work is part of our ongoing strategy to increase enquiries and highlight the vital role foster carers play in supporting children and young people in Brent.
- 4.4.3 Foster Care Fortnight ran from 12 – 25 May 2025, the service had stalls at Brent Civic Centre (public areas) as well as organising a professionals specific event targeting Brent employees in breakout/lunchrooms.



- 4.4.4 The Brent communications service used social media to promote foster care fortnight with organic posts on Facebook, Nextdoor, Whatsapp and Instagram Stories - promoting the Foster Care Fortnight stands at the Brent civic centre. There are 16k followers on Facebook and nearly 8k followers on Instagram.

The Brent communications service also supported promoting the foster care fortnight foster carer celebration event, as well as the Brent staff information stands for staff to attend. On the combined posts there were 651 views, 15 reactions and 4 comments.

Posted in All Company

 **Thomas, Khadisha**
May 13 • @3

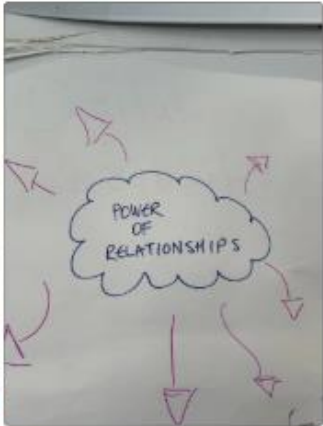
Seen by 368 ...

Foster Care Fortnight Celebration 🎉

Today we hosted a lunch with our amazing foster carers to show our appreciation for their hard work providing loving and safe homes to children and young people in Brent.

In keeping with this years theme of Foster Care Fortnight: the power of relationships, foster carers and care leavers shared stories about the connections that made all the difference on their journey, and interacted with each other over a fun general knowledge quiz.

On 21 May there will be a Fostering stand on the **1st Floor of the Brent Civic Centre**. If you have ever considered fostering pop by to meet with our friendly social workers and foster carers to find out more about fostering.


👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

👍 ❤️ Nessa, Sheikh and 7 others

[Show 2 previous comments](#)

4.4.5 In July 2025 a Brent Fostering advertisement was placed in Police Life Magazine and Metropolitan Life Magazine, promoting the Brent fostering offer and benefits in a magazine that is distributed to and read by public servants. Police Life and Metropolitan Life is a national magazine/newspaper for the Police Service which provides a mixture of news from around the UK combined with features on topics away from the job, for ex professionals in this industry as well as current employees.

Tech boosts Met's fight against violence towards women and girls

The Metropolitan Police Service has unveiled a revolutionary new technology being rolled out across London that makes it easier to photograph and visualise bruising on victims of violence, particularly on darker skins.

A trial of the first of its kind device, known as Project Archway, allows officers to better assess victims' injuries – a game-changing development in the ongoing fight against violence towards women and girls (VAWS).

Previously, officers often faced challenges in capturing visible evidence of bruising, particularly on darker skin tones or during early stages of injury. This could limit evidential strength at the charging stage. Now, with Project Archway, this critical gap is being closed.

The innovative handheld device, developed in-house by the Met, uses a technique called cross-polarisation to dramatically enhance the visibility of injuries, particularly bruises that may not appear clearly to the naked eye.

This is not just about visibility

– it's about viability in court. Clearer images help investigators build stronger files, support CPS charging decisions, and give courts the visual evidence needed to hold perpetrators accountable.

The technology is already improving justice outcomes – of 33 uses during a pilot in south London, 45% have resulted in charges, with several others under investigation.

With this innovation, the Met becomes the only force in the UK to develop and deploy this kind of frontline equipment to strengthen evidence, support victims from the first police contact, and help bring violent perpetrators to justice.

Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley said:

"We have made big strides in protecting women and girls from predatory men – and this

new device is a bold symbol of that transformation.

"Compared to three years ago, our charge rate for offences for violence against women and girls offences has tripled, and we're going after the most dangerous individuals through our V100 programme. Women in London are better protected, and this is reflected in the trust gap between men and women closing.

"These improvements are a credit to our people – to their empathy, determination, and courage as they take on these heartrending cases day after day.

"The Met is leading nationally on innovation that puts victims first. We are the only police service to develop this kind of frontline technology, and we're already seeing how it strengthens evidence, builds trust, and ensures victims feel seen and heard from the moment they report abuse."

Plans to regulate pedicabs in London

Transport for London (TfL) has announced the next steps for regulating pedicabs in London after publishing the results of a consultation held earlier this year, which contained proposals to regulate pedicabs in London for the first time.

Safety

The report says bringing pedicabs into regulation will make them safer, ensuring that they are driven, maintained and operated in a safe and professional manner. The report shows the public's overwhelming support for regulation of the industry, to improve driver and safety standards.

The consultation, which received more than 7,500 responses, set out policy principles and sought views from a wide range of stakeholders. Feedback from the consultation included:

- 75 per cent of people who responded currently feel unsafe when using a pedicab in London;
- 95 per cent of respondents agreed that pedicab drivers

should be required to pass UK criminal background checks, bringing them into line with taxi and private hire vehicle drivers;

- 97 per cent of respondents felt that pedicabs should have appropriate insurance in place to carry passengers;
- 96 per cent of respondents felt that music and other audio from pedicabs should be controlled. More than 2,400 comments in response to the consultation were about music in the vehicles;

- 85 per cent of respondents felt that pedicab fares are too expensive.

The consultation responses are now being used to develop

op detailed policy proposals for pedicabs in London which will be subject to a further consultation later this year.

This further consultation is necessary to ensure that the pedicab industry and Londoners are able to have their say on TfL's specific proposals for regulations, including details on safety regulations and a potential fare structure, this is with a view to regulations coming into force in early 2026.

This ongoing engagement will ensure that any future regulation is fair, proportionate and effective in addressing concerns raised while supporting a safe and professional pedicab industry in London.

Will Norman, London's Warring and Cycling Commissioner, said:

"Pedicabs should be a fun and sustainable way to explore what our city has to offer, but without regulation some drivers are behaving unsafely or anti-socially and charging extortionate prices. The Mayor and I have always been clear that regulation is needed to ensure pedicabs can operate safely in London, and this report shows that Londoners agree. We're looking forward to pressing on with next steps and further consultation, with a view to introducing regulation next year, as we build a fairer and safer London for everyone."

Have you ever considered fostering?

- ✓ Brent foster carers can live anywhere in England
- ✓ Earn up to **£495.00** per child, per week
- ✓ Benefit from extensive learning and training opportunities
- ✓ Receive dedicated support

Find out more

Phone: 0800 001 4041

Email: fostering@brent.gov.uk



4.4.6 In August 2025 a Brent foster carer case study was utilised in an article, alongside the Brent advertisement in the same magazines.

Become a Foster Carer for Brent

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Janet's Story

Janet started her fostering journey with Brent Council in 2008, what started as a short-term placement soon developed into a long-term placement.

As a single mother Janet would often host her nieces and nephews so that her son had company and because she enjoyed playing with the children. Her brother who had been approved as a foster carer suggested that she would be a good candidate for fostering which encouraged Janet to start the fostering process with Brent.

Initially Janet's day to day with her foster children was busy, consisting of preparing pack lunches, doing the school run, and attending medical appointments. The routine changed as her foster children grew older. Despite the hard work Janet believes the best thing about

being a foster carer is having the ability to change a child's situation.

"I have been even more blessed that what started as a short-term placement back in 2008 turned into a long-term placement that has been running for over 16 years. They joined our family as toddlers and are now young ladies in their late teens. The girls are fully integrated in my family and are rarely referred to as 'foster girls' within my family" Janet said.

When asked about what advice she would give a prospective carer, Janet said: "if you are patient, understanding and of course open and loving you have the perfect skill set to be-

come a foster carer. There will be challenges as is the way in life but the rewards of seeing a young person flourish and making progress is priceless."

"My experience as a foster carer with Brent has been positive. I have found that both teams have been very supportive and responsive. My current social worker has supported me greatly as I have carried out my role. When there has been challenges in the placement or I have needed help in another way, she has always been just a phone call away and that can also be said for her manager and the various children's social workers that I have worked with over the years."

• To find out more about fostering call 0800 001 4041 or email fostering@brent.gov.uk

£6m Holiday Hope programme for young Londoners

Last month before the summer holidays The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, launched a new £6 million programme to provide holiday activities and opportunities for young people at greatest risk of exploitation and violence.

The Mayor's new Holiday Hope programme provides young people at greatest disadvantage with something to do, something to aspire to, and something to eat.

Key to his ambition of supporting young people is Holiday Hope, which will deliver positive activities over the summer and school holidays to keep children and young people safe, combined with access to skills and routes into training and employment. Every activity funded through the Mayor's £6m Investment will also come with food.

Holiday Hope is a key manifesto commitment that will directly contribute to the Mayor's pledge to provide 250,000 young people with activities and positive opportunities during their term.

Holiday Hope will bring together and strengthens activities delivered across the capital

for young people in the greatest need of support.

It builds on existing and effective delivery of summer holiday activities funded through London's Violence Reduction Unit, the Mayor's Fund for London, The Felix Project and wider City Hall delivery.

Increased funding through the Holiday Hope programme will bring delivery together through investment in more than 100 community organisations, increasing young people's access to youth spaces, activities, opportunities, and food during the challenging holiday period.

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said: "I'm determined to make London the greatest city in the world to grow up in and one where every young person has the support and opportunities that they need to be safe and to thrive."

"The school holidays should be a time to celebrate the best

of our city and build experiences and friendships, but we also know it also is a time when young people are vulnerable to exploitation and violence."

"Our Holiday Hope programme, backed up by £6m investment, will provide the helping hand and support that children and young people need, offering them something to do, something to aspire to and something to eat, as part of my commitment to build a fairer and safer London for everyone."

Lib Peck, Director of London's Violence Reduction Unit, said: "School holidays are both a time of fun and opportunity for young people, but it also represents challenge as we know there is greater risk of violence."

"The Mayor's new Holiday Hope programme seeks to bring together diversionary activities and opportunities to develop important life skills that will provide support for children and young people throughout the crucial summer period."

"We are committed to delivering what young people need to stay safe and to thrive."

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Find out more

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Email: fostering@brent.gov.uk



4.4.7 On Sunday 14 Sep 2025 Queen's Park Day was held, the Brent fostering service held a stall and obtained details for 6 potential fostering families whilst also raising awareness of fostering in the borough to local residents and communities.



- 4.4.8 Brent currently does not have any foster carers who identify as LGBT+ despite the 2021 Census highlighting that 3.2% of Brent's population identify as LGBT+, which is average for England and Wales (although lower for London). The Brent fostering service's next campaign will focus on this community (see leaflets below).



Finding Foster Carers using advanced digital marketing:

- 4.4.9 To tackle continued recruitment challenges, the service finalised a plan to use CAN digital (Council Advertising Network), an outside agency that specialises in working with local authorities, to trial a 3-month digital campaign to target potential foster carers to make enquiries to Brent, via Foster with West London (FwWL). CAN digital has had success with FwWL and other local authorities and will target Brent information and adverts to those considering fostering. The 3 month campaign will run throughout October, November and December 2025 with frequent review points throughout.

FwWL are aware of the Brent campaign with CAN digital and have reassured the Local Authority they are equipped to process a surge in enquiries expected to result from this campaign. Similarly, the Brent fostering service will undertake more initial visits and fostering assessments. The Local Authority is optimistic that this campaign will result in more enquiries; CAN digital are aware of the

need to target the right individuals to ensure those enquiring are able to progress through the fostering pipeline to approved foster carers.

Finding Foster Carers using other digital approaches:

- 4.4.10 The Brent communications service released a foster carer (JG) case study on YouTube, since this was published in April 2025 there has been 930 impressions (total number of times video thumbnail was shown to viewers) 2.4 click through rate (the amount of times a viewer watched the video after seeing the impression) 68 views of the video in total. The analysis of the interactions with this video informs the service that shorter videos are required next. A plan is in place with Brent's communications service to undertake filming to create shorter video content that can be used on YouTube and other social media platforms.

In June 2025 the same foster carer case study (JG) was placed in Your Brent Magazine (Summer Edition) with a summary of the events that took place in foster care fortnight. Impressions (potential reach): 135,000 homes and community venues in the borough. Brent is home to 329,800 residents of whom 64% are from Black, Asian and other minority groups. Your Brent is promoted across Brent social media channels. There are over 24,000 Twitter (now called 'X') followers.

Since July 2025 a Brent Foster Carer 'Job Advert' has been placed on the Brent Job section web page. Whilst the Brent Fostering pages are up-to-date on the Brent Website, this job advert aims to target individuals who may be looking for work or additional income, to consider fostering. This job advert has been promoted on the National Careers Service Website, Indeed, LinkedIn and on the Department for Work and Pensions website. On Indeed the role had 2456 impressions and 113 clicks. The job role was also promoted in the Autumn Edition of the Your Brent Magazine.

West London Fostering Hub:

- 4.4.11 Alongside our local recruitment efforts, work continues in partnership with the FwWL Hub, a collaborative initiative between several neighbouring boroughs aimed at increasing the visibility and impact of fostering recruitment across the region. Our involvement includes joint planning, shared campaigns, and contribution to regional strategy. The hub has enabled us to pool resources, learn from best practice, and reach a wider audience of prospective foster carers. We have participated in collaborative events, supported the development of shared FwWL marketing assets, and aligned our messaging to ensure consistency and stronger brand recognition across West London. This joint approach is helping to strengthen Brent's fostering presence while ensuring we benefit from collective insight and economies of scale.

FwWL held a 1 year anniversary event on 15 May 2025. This event noted the milestone of pooling resources to enact a coordinated sub regional and local recruitment strategy, which has seen increased interest and profile. The event identified unique London challenges to fostering regarding housing, cost of

living and demographics – which requires pan London and cross governmental approaches.



Also, on 15 May 2025 FwWL, Brent and other Local Authorities met with MP Janet Daby. At the time Ms Daby was the minister for children and families. The ministerial visit was for Ms Daby to review the regional approach to fostering and explore the challenges local authorities face in increasing the number of fostering families.

FwWL are launching an App called 'Care Friends', which has had success in Wales, the app gives points (that can be converted into cash prizes) for every friend/associate in your network who applies to be a foster carer. It works on the principle that current carers know other potential carers and pays current carers to refer their network to Brent. This further incentivises and digitises our existing 'refer a friend' offer in Brent. The points are allocated as below:

- *3 points – downloading the app (funded by FwWL)
- *1 point – sharing a listing (funded by FwWL)
- *2 points – initial enquiry (funded by FwWL)
- *1000 points – approval (from Brent's existing refer a friend scheme)

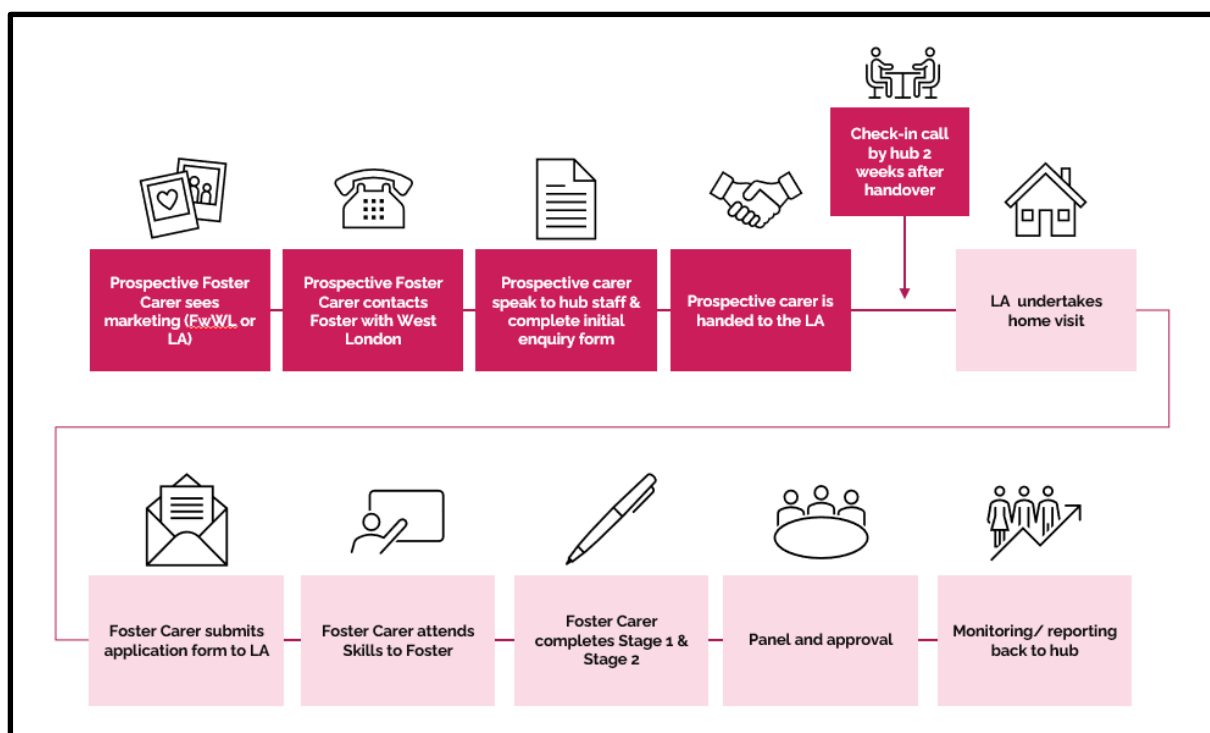
FwWL suggested spreading the £1000 referral bonus to paying referrers at earlier stages, such as paying the referrer 50 points when their referred individual completes their fostering application, 250 points when their referred individual completes their fostering assessment, then in turn reducing the approval points from 1000 to 700. The app was launched on 15 Sep 2025 and will be promoted by FwWL and Brent.

Assessments

- 4.4.12 Following feedback from the previous Committee discussion, a table has been included below depicting the 'fostering journey pipeline' to highlight where potential fostering families left the pipeline during this reporting period. As a reminder, if any prospective carer presents directly to Brent asking to become a carer, the individual is processed via FwWL, to ensure we capture all our enquiries via our FwWL hub.

Contacts made to FwWL specifically for Brent	Enquiries passed to Brent from FwWL (Referrals)	Initial Visits to be undertaken by Brent	Stage 1 of Fostering Assessment	Stage 2 of Fostering Assessment	Approved by Brent Fostering Panel and ADM
269 contacts made to FwWL for Brent this reporting period.	16 Referrals passed to Brent.	6 at IV Stage, the social workers are encouraging the applicant to have a home visit currently	5 currently in Stage 1 (please note 2 of these applicants were carried over from the previous reporting period)	1 currently in Stage 2 (please note this applicant was carried over from the previous reporting period)	0 in this reporting period
		3 IVs completed and the applicant progressed to Stage One.			There have been 0 formal resignation or terminations
		4 withdrew from having an initial visit when offered by Brent			
		2 withdrew after having an initial home visit by Brent			
		1 family was rejected by Brent following the home visit			

This diagram from FwWL depicts a potential carer's journey in the fostering recruitment system.

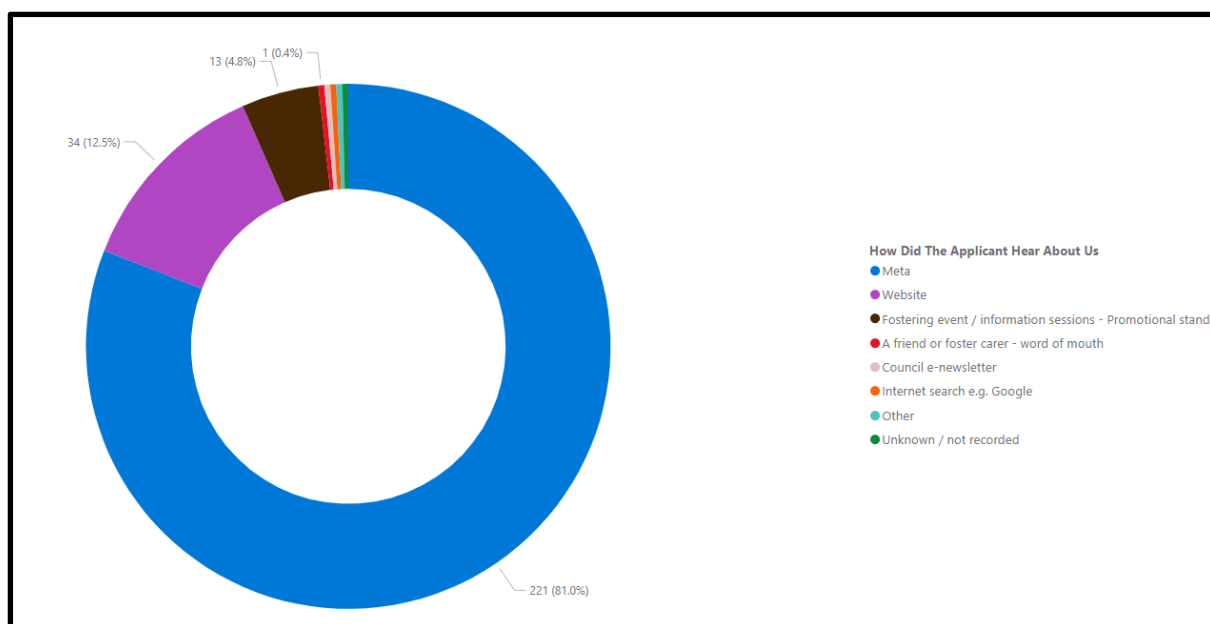


4.4.13 Of the 6 families at the Initial Visit stage outlined above, 1 applicant has asked for more time before scheduling their home visit, 1 is no longer responding to the service. It is common to have applicants put off their initial home visit for some time however the service is supportive and proactive at this stage.

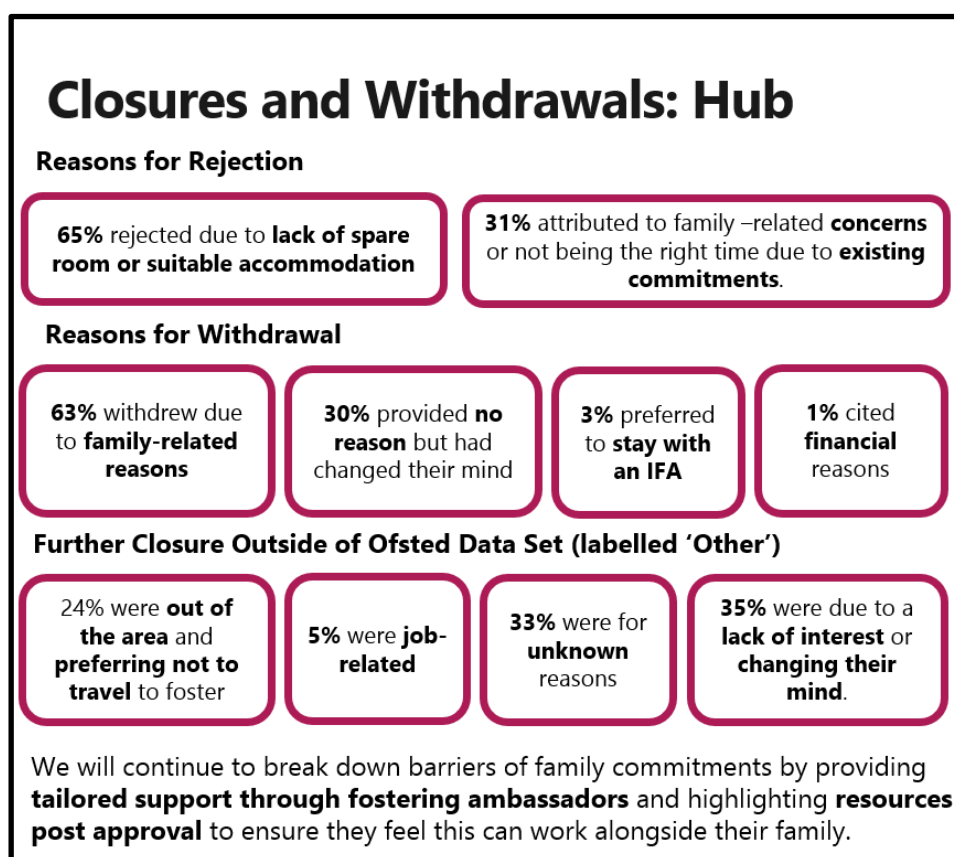
Of the 5 families at the Stage One stage outlined above, 2 have had concerns raised that require further exploration, the remaining 3 are progressing well.

4.4.14 The 1 family at Stage Two outlined above; there have been some delays to this assessment however the assessing social worker has booked her into the Brent Fostering Panel for in late November 2025.

The chart below identifies where the enquiries made to FwWL originated. The feedback from FwWL is that whilst Meta (Facebook and Instagram) provides the highest number of enquiries; the analysis by FwWL has shown that these applicants are usually not ready to start fostering. Whilst there are fewer enquiries made via the websites (and Google searches) these applicants are felt to be more ready to foster and progress further in the fostering pipeline.



4.4.15 Across the FwWL network there is a significant number of potential carers who drop out during the 'enquiry stages', please see below summary from FwWL in relation to this.



FwWL and Brent's fostering service work at the pace of the applicants. Whilst all services are very keen to progress applicants as quickly as possible through

the fostering pipeline the services take a pragmatic approach to ensure applicants feel informed, held and supported throughout their fostering journey. This can mean that applicants look as though they remain at the FwWL enquiries stage and the Brent initial visit stage longer than necessary however this is usually at the request of the applicant.

- 4.4.16 FwWL are piloting their service completing initial visits on behalf of local authorities. Brent have not taken up this offer from FwWL as the number of referrals passed to Brent from FwWL that progress to an Initial Visit are currently low. Not all referrals made to Brent from FwWL result in a home visit at the IV stage as many candidates do withdraw.

The Brent fostering service have capacity to complete all IVs, the Brent social workers have local Brent knowledge and since the service is 'assessment and support' the service is able to reassure potential carers they will remain with their allocated worker from the first home visit all the way through their fostering journey and beyond. The service wants to avoid changes of worker where possible therefore are committed to completing the Brent IVs and assessments within Brent. Should there be a surge of enquiries, the service will ask FwWL to support Brent with IVs to avoid any delay for applicants. When comparing ourselves to our neighbours in West London, Brent had the fewest closures at the 'pre initial home visit stage' compared to the other 7 Local Authorities evidencing that the assessment process is successful at retaining potential carers where possible.

FwWL plan to build a pool of Independent Social Workers (ISWs), to be managed by FwWL, to complete assessments as/when required. As above, Brent do not require this support/service at this stage but will utilise if/when required. IVs and fostering assessments are initiated promptly by Brent. Any delays in fostering assessments reaching completion are often due to delays in references/checks from other organisations or information not being provided by the applicant in a timely way. The service is confident that the fostering assessments are not related to capacity issues in the service.

4.5 Support from Supervising Social Workers (SSW) and the fostering service

- 4.5.1 The retention of foster carers continues to be one of the fostering service's main priorities. The foster carers continue to report positive relationships with their supervising social workers and the feedback received during their annual reviews and attendance at panel has highlighted the importance of the support received from the highly skilled and experienced supervising social workers. The quality of the relationship they have with the social workers has been cited as the main reason for their commitment to Brent and this continues to be the case. The foster carers report being able to contact their supervising social worker when in need and receive appropriate level of support and guidance during difficult periods.

One foster carer provided verbal feedback at the Brent Fostering Panel on 05 September 2025 stating: *"It has been great working with Varghese and Rocio,*

I found the support really helpful. There has been great teamwork between all the social workers and the children have been doing really well".

Another fostering family provided verbal feedback at the Brent Fostering Panel on 16 May 2025 stating: *"Jenine has been our social worker for years, she really is great and we can ask her anything, it has made things so easy for us. Our experience has been great with Brent"*.

- 4.5.2 The fostering team works closely and in partnership with the children's social work teams to ensure that the care plans for children are progressed without delay and the children's needs are met whilst receiving the best care. The supervising social workers (and team managers when needed) attend placement planning and permanency planning meetings, looked after children's reviews and all other relevant statutory and non-statutory meetings, supporting their foster carers to build positive relationships with the 'team around the child'.
- 4.5.3 Placement stability is an important factor in offering an effective fostering service and is crucial to ensuring that Brent delivers good outcomes for each child in care. Over recent years, there has been considerable focus on supporting foster carers to maintain placements. It remains a necessary and priority task to ensure that foster carers and their families feel supported in their valuable role therefore supervising social workers work to support carers to carry out their role successfully. Supervising social workers source external support promptly when required also.
- 4.5.4 In addition to the support the carers received from social workers, the foster carers attend monthly support groups organised and facilitated by the fostering service. This is an informal and relaxed event where foster carers new and more established are able to meet and get to know each other. This works well to provide support to newly approved carers. The monthly foster carers' support group continues to be facilitated virtually as this remains the foster carers' preferred option. Minutes of these meetings are taken and shared with the carers. With permission from attendees, guests attend this group at times to meet with the carers, including the Service Manager and Training Co-ordinator. In August 2025 Ofsted released an update to their inspecting local authority children's services (ILACS) framework; the update *'Added the head of the foster carer forum to the list of people the social care regulatory inspector will speak to when evaluating the effectiveness of the recruitment, assessment, training and support for foster carers'*. Brent's foster carer forum does not currently have an assigned head therefore the service have asked the foster carers for nominations; a lead foster carer will be selected by 10 October 2025. The service manager and/or Head of Service will meet quarterly with the support group forum head/lead carer to continue to develop the service utilising the feedback from the foster carers.
- 4.5.5 As part of the commitment to engaging with foster carers and improving the service, we have continued with Foster Care Reference Group feedback sessions previously rebranded previously as "Coffee with Kelli." These informal gatherings provide foster carers with a valuable opportunity to discuss their experiences, share feedback, and offer recommendations directly with the

Head of Service. 1 session was held during this reporting period, in July 2025. Topics raised by the foster carers in this session included: Parking at the Civic Centre for bringing /picking up children for Family Time (Contact), currently foster carers need to pay for this

- Identifying the supervisor when bringing children to Family Time at the Civic Centre, as there have been changes of staff in the contact service
- Brent's Mockingbird Programme, the support has been appreciated
- Updates on Freeman Family Centre, the family centre is currently being refurbished
- Communication when children are being placed with foster carers and the need for Discharge Planning Meetings when children are placed directly from hospital, to ensure all information is provided to foster carers
- Foster Carer recruitment, all foster carers were encouraged to refer friends, family, neighbours, acquaintances to Brent (via FWWL) to increase our pool of foster carers

4.5.6 The fostering service with the support of the Brent Communication team keep foster carers engaged and informed by providing a monthly newsletter and the carers also receive a quarterly letter directly from the Head of Service.

4.5.7 Brent Foster Carer's Summer Trip to Southend-On-Sea: The Brent foster carers were asked where they wanted to go for their summer trip; Southend-On-Sea in Essex was the winner from the vote. 2 small coaches were organised to take Brent foster carers and their families on 02 Aug 2025. 80 people attend including foster carers, their children, their family members and friends who support them in fostering. This was very well received by the Brent foster carers; feedback included:

"It was a fantastic day out, we had lots of fun and a lovely time – music, food and drinks, basked in the sun, games, rides on the theme park, played in the seawater, made new friends, lots of young people who were well behaved, we enjoyed and had a lovely time".

"I just want to thank you and all of the fostering team for organising this lovely day out to the beach. We really had a wonderful time. We all enjoyed ourselves. Again, many thanks".

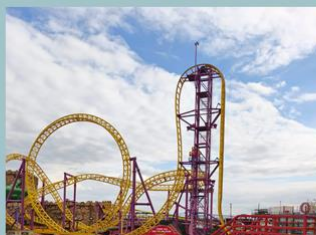
A post in relation to the summer trip was included in the monthly foster carer newsletter.



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A Successful Summer Trip!



4.5.8 Tickets for Foster Carers and Children in their Care: The fostering service ask for support from other departments (and partner organisations) to ensure foster carers and their families are celebrated as key members of Brent's community. In this reporting period our foster carers have enjoyed free tickets to football matches at Wembley stadium. The carers fed back that they feel the offer of free tickets to these events make them feel special, valued and appreciated.

Brent Summer Fun Day: Brent Fostering Families were invited to attend the Children's Social Care Summer Fun Day on 01 Aug 2025 at Unity Centre, Willesden. This fun day was organised by the Brent participation service. The children thoroughly enjoyed all the activities including basketball, bouncy castles, board games, colouring and football. Children, their fostering families and Brent staff all sat down for a catered lunch sharing stories and catching up. Then the day ended with dancing and music as seen in the photo below! Brent foster carers enjoyed the day and expressed feeling lucky to spend time as a community with staff and other fostering families.



Summer Fun Day

Brent Care Journeys 2.0 invites Care-Experienced Children, Young People, and their Carers to join us for a day of Summer Fun.

WHY YOU'LL LOVE IT

- ✓ Bouncy Castle, Popcorn, Candyfloss
- ✓ Trivia Quiz with Prizes
- ✓ Caribbean Style Lunch
- ✓ Crafts, Pool Table, Sports

12pm - 4pm
Friday 1st August 2025
Unity Centre, 103 Church Road, NW10 94G

RSVP ONLY BY WEDS 30TH JULY
PARTICIPATION@BRENT.GOV.UK
07703945534

ALL CHILDREN MUST BE ACCOMPANIED AT THE EVENT
INFORM STAFF OF DIETARY REQUIREMENTS

4.6 The Kinship Care Team

- 4.6.1 The Kinship Care team undertakes both planned and emergency assessments of prospective family members and friends who come forward as alternative carers when it is not possible for a child to remain in the care of their parents. The team provides placement support to the connected persons carers and training during the assessment period.
- 4.6.2 In this reporting period the Kinship Care team received 44 referrals for viability assessments of a relative, friend and people connected to the child. Kinship referrals do fluctuate month to month and are demand led.
- 4.6.3 In this reporting period, following 21 positive viability assessments, 14 Connected Persons assessments were allocated to social workers. 1 of these assessments did not progress as the family made the decision that they did not wish to be assessed at this time. Of the positive viability assessments, 7 were not progressed to a Connected Persons assessment as the children remained in their birth parents' care and an alternate living arrangement was no longer needed.
- 4.6.4 7 children were placed in 7 new Regulation 24 (often referred to as Reg 24) Connected Persons arrangements between April 2025 to September 2025. 1 child was placed in a respite arrangement with a Connected Person for one week while their foster carer travelled on a holiday.
- 4.6.5 Children who remain in kinship placements beyond 24 weeks, where the carer has not been approved as a Connected Persons carer (following presentation and recommended for approval at the Brent Fostering Panel) are considered to be in 'unregulated placements' because the temporary approval under regulation 24 and regulation 25 has expired. As at the end of August 2025, there was 1 child in 1 unregulated placement. Most often the reasons for delays in presenting carers to the Brent Fostering Panel are primarily in relation to delayed information being shared by the carer, delayed DBS and medical checks or lack of clarity with the care plan for the child.

When any living arrangement for a Brent Looked After Child becomes unregulated a risk assessment is completed for the unregulated placement which is signed by a Head of Service. There continues to be close monitoring of this unregulated placement through more frequent visits being undertaken by the child's social worker and the supervising social worker, until the arrangement is regulated again - by the carers assessment being presented at the Brent Fostering Panel and the approval being ratified by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for the Fostering Service.

- 4.6.6 3 Connected Persons foster carers were presented to the Brent Fostering Panel for approval as carers between April 2025 and August 2025.

4.6.7 6 children were made subject to Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) in this reporting period. 1 of these was a private application while 5 children had been subject to public care proceedings.

4.6.8 Brent's Kinship Local Offer, which will replace the Kinship Policy in Brent, has been completed and is in its final sign-off stage. The last step, prior to publication, is to review the final draft with kinship carers during Kinship Care week which is taking place from the 6-10 October. The Kinship Local Offer will be published in early November 2025. The process of developing our new Kinship Local Offer has taken longer than originally anticipated, however it has been essential, in line with the intention of this offer, to engage with kinship carers directly, as well as wider services and partners in the development of the offer. As a reminder, an in-person consultation morning was held with the Brent Kinship Carers on 26th February 2025 to obtain their views on what they would like to see included in the Local Offer. A virtual consultation morning was held with the Brent Kinship Carers on 24 March 2025 to obtain the views of carers who were unable to attend in person.

A new support group was started by the Kinship Care team for Brent Kinship Carers, with the first session taking place on 23rd July 2025, this was in response to the feedback received from Brent Kinship Carers when exploring what support they feel would be of benefit to them. The Brent Kinship Carers expressed a need to have a local in-person support group in order to support each other. Whilst initial attendance at this group was low it will continue to be promoted.

Kinship Care Week runs from 06 to 12 October 2025; it is a national week of awareness, recognition, and celebration of kinship families across England and Wales. In Brent the Kinship Care Team will hold an afternoon tea celebration for Kinship Carers and their families. Awareness raising events of Kinship Care will also take place to spread awareness within the Local Authority, partner agencies and local communities. The service will utilise Kinship Care Week to raise awareness for the upcoming Brent Kinship Local Offer publication, to ensure families and professionals are aware of the support available to Kinship Carers.

4.7 Fostering Panel

4.7.1 The Brent Fostering Panel is constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The service maintains a diverse and highly experienced central list of panel members that includes an elected member. The previous independent fostering panel chair retired from chairing Brent's fostering panels in February 2025 after 11 years of service. Recruitment for a replacement independent chair took place in March 2025; it was hoped the new chair would be in post by May 2025 however due to delays with references she did not start until September 2025. In the interim the vice chair of Brent's Fostering Panel continued to chair the panels ensuring there was no disruption to service in the interim period.

- 4.7.2 Despite the previous chair retiring no other fostering panel members have resigned from our central list. Most of the independent panel members have personal experience of the fostering system, including one independent panel member who was brought up in a kinship arrangement and three panel members who are care experienced. The work of the Fostering Panel is supported by the Panel Adviser.

Whilst our fostering panel central list is compliant with the regulations and already diverse the Brent Fostering Service want to continue to improve and develop the service. Now the new independent fostering panel chair is in post the service will look to increase the fostering panel member central list with more social work representatives and health representatives. The annual training day for fostering panel members will be combined with an induction for new fostering panel members; this is booked to take place in-person on 14 Nov 2025 at Brent Civic Centre.

- 4.7.3 Fostering Panels are generally held three times every two months and extra panels are arranged if there is an increase in demand. Most panels take place virtually; and face to face when the number of cases presented is high or if the nature of the circumstances would benefit from a face-to-face panel.

- 4.7.4 The functions of the fostering panel are to consider:

- Each application and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a foster carer or Connected Person(s) foster carer and the terms of their approval.
- The first annual review of each approved carer and any other review as requested by the service, including those of a Standards of Care issue and those exploring any allegations made.
- The termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a foster carer.
- The long-term fostering matches of all children below the age of 12.

- 4.7.5 During this period April 2025 to September: 6 panels were held with 25 cases presented, of which:

- 5 carers were recommended for approval as short-term connected persons (kinship carers)
- 0 carers were recommended for approval as short-term carer
- 7 carers were re-approved as part of their 3 yearly annual review
- 1 carer was re-approved as part of their first annual review
- 6 connected person carers had their fostering approval/status terminated/resigned (due to the child no longer being looked after)
- 1 carer was terminated at stage 2 of assessment
- 3 carers were presented for change of approval, to long-term carers
- 1 carer was re-approved as a long-term carer
- 1 fostering family were long-term matched to the children in their care

- 4.7.6 All the recommendations made by the panel were ratified by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

- 4.7.7 The Head of Service for Looked after Children and Permanency acts as the ADM for the Fostering Service. The ADM, upon reviewing the recommendation

of the Fostering Panel, decides whether applicants should be approved as foster carers or not. The ADM also has the responsibility of determining the continued suitability of foster carers following completion of annual reviews of foster carers and recommendation from the Fostering Panel. The ADM meets with the Panel Chair several times a year and observes the independent chair at the fostering panel at least once a year. The ADM will observe the chair in panel in the next reporting period once the new chair has settled into their role.

4.8 Training and Support for Foster Carers

- 4.8.1 The Brent CYPCD Learning Academy, part of the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service, provides training for carers, including foster carers and connected persons. Training is available in-person, virtually, and through E-Learning. E-Learning can be accessed by foster carers whenever they wish. Virtual and in-person sessions take place on weekdays and Saturdays for flexibility.
- 4.8.2 During the reporting period, carers participated in nine learning sessions. These included five workshops exclusively for carers, one multi-agency session delivered through the Brent Safeguarding Partnership, and two workshops conducted jointly with broader CYP Practitioners. The carer-only workshops covered Paediatric First Aid for Foster Carers, Managing Behaviours and De-escalation Techniques, Safer Caring, Decriminalising Young People and Oral Health Awareness for Foster Carers.
- 4.8.3 Most sessions continue online, reflecting carers' feedback gathered during periodic consultations by Brent CYPCD Learning Academy in carer support group meetings, and Fostering and Kinship Team meetings with supervising social workers.
- 4.8.4 Attendance at facilitated learning sessions remains low, matching national trends. The Fostering Panel monitors and follows up on training compliance, while the CYPCD Learning Academy sends reminders. Sessions with fewer than five pre-booked carers for external commissioned training had to be rescheduled to improve participation. Attendance improved somewhat after online links were sent to all carers, and targeted outreach emails addressed mandatory training renewals.
- 4.8.5 The service track attendance and collect feedback after each session to support improvement. Post-session feedback shows participants are satisfied with session relevance, content quality, and trainer expertise.
- 4.8.6 Participant feedback:
For "Supporting the Learning and Achievement of Children in Care" in response to the evaluation question: "What is the most significant piece of learning you have taken away from the session?"
"That children in care massively under achieve compared to those who are not"
"Be non-judgemental but look at the bigger picture"

“Understanding the development of our children in early year stages of their development.”

In response to evaluation question *“From what you learned, what do you plan to apply to your role as a carer?”*

“Try and give more educational support to looked after child. Show more interest in their homework. Work closer with the school.”

“To make sure our children stay in school and get the education they need from an early age.”

- 4.8.7 In addition to facilitated learning, Brent CYPCD Learning Academy provided carers with the option to access E-Learning courses at any time. Since April 2025, 35 carers have completed 119 courses in a range of subjects. During the August summer holiday, E-Learning courses are available as facilitated sessions are not offered. From middle July 2025 to 2nd September, there were 221 logins from 13 carers, resulting in the completion of 34 courses on the platform. The platform has enabled carers to prepare for new placements and address emerging needs, with an increase in participation from those who had not previously used e-learning.
- 4.8.8 There are some exciting developments planned for the next reporting period to streamline the training offer to carers. The service are collaborating with the wider Brent Council Learning and Development Team to make our current Learning Hub Learning Management System available to foster carers for self-service training enrolment. This change is expected by the end of 2025.
- 4.8.9 The Brent Fostering Learning and Development Brochure April 2025 to March 2026 offers a wide range of training for foster carers, including some local support such as an overview of Brent Family Wellbeing Centre support for children and carers, and digital skills resources at the Brent Digital Skills Hub.
- 4.8.10 Training was also provided through utilising partner agencies and internal staff, including Brent Safeguarding Partnership, Brook, and Brent WEST, to offer carers a wide range of support and development opportunities. In September 2025, Brent CYPCD Learning Academy, with support from supervising social workers, will promote five facilitated courses for carers: (1) Sleep Routines for Young Children, (2) Sexual Health in the Community, (3) Child Development & Attachment, (4) Advanced Safeguarding Level 3, and (5) Roles & Responsibilities of Foster Carers.
- 4.8.11 In addition to this formal training offer for foster carers, outlined above, Brent also commission Brent Children-In-Care Resilience Service (CRS). This service offers drop in training to foster carers; in this reporting period an estimate of 240hours of training has been offered to foster carers. The focus of this training is to support the emotional wellbeing and family functioning of fostering families, with a focus on preventing placement breakdown and support families to live happy, healthy lives.
- 4.8.12 In June 2025 Brent launched its first Mockingbird Constellation, further information is outlined later in this report. It is important to note that an

expectation of the fostering families in the Mockingbird Constellation is for the entire constellation to attend an informal training session per month to learn and reflect together. This is another training source Brent Foster Carers access. The CRS service attended the Mockingbird Coffee morning to deliver training to the families in the Mockingbird community, tailored specifically to their needs.

- 4.8.13 Overall, the fostering training and development offer for this reporting period was successful in enhancing the skills and knowledge of foster carers. The upcoming offer for 2025-2026 aims to continue this trend, providing a comprehensive range of training sessions to support foster carers in their roles. The upcoming offer will continue to provide a mix of online, in-person, weekday, evening, and weekend (Saturday) sessions, with a focus on mandatory trainings.
- 4.8.14 The Practice Development Lead in the Brent CYPCD Learning Academy occasionally attends the foster carer support groups to ask carers directly for their views and feedback on training, to ensure training is targeted at their preferences and any barriers to training are removed where possible. The majority of carers have stated they prefer virtual training as this is more convenient for them.
- 4.8.15 For Foster Care Fortnight in May 2025 the fostering service completed a short training on ICT upskilling, where foster carers were asked to complete an 'ICT Skills Quiz' to focus on filling the gaps in their computer and online skills. As the needs of our children continue to evolve and our ways of working continue to develop the service wanted to ensure foster carers are supported during these changing times.

4.9 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints

- 4.9.1 During the reporting period, there were no formal allegations or complaints made against Brent foster carers by children, families or professionals. The Brent fostering service holds Brent foster carers to a high standard ensuring our children receive the best care and support; concerns for Brent fostering families were identified by the service and during this reporting period and 3 serious concerns investigations have been undertaken in response to these concerns. These will be presented at upcoming Brent fostering panels for formal review.
- 4.9.2 The Fostering and Kinship Teams received numerous positive comments from foster carers during assessments, annual reviews and from other colleagues and professionals. The practitioners' achievements and good practice continued to be acknowledged and celebrated at the bi-monthly LAC and Permanency Forums. Additionally, the Fostering Panel provides feedback to practitioners on the quality of the reports and their presentation at panel.
- 4.9.3 All the foster carer annual reviews that were due in this reporting period have been completed. There have been **35** annual reviews completed in this reporting period.

- 4.9.4 Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) for fostering conduct all the annual reviews of foster carers, ensuring impartiality and providing a safeguarding mechanism for both the child and the carer. The Fostering Independent Reviewing Officers also complete Serious Concerns and Standards of Care Review meetings, where concerns have been identified regarding carers. This allows a level of independence from the Fostering Service, and the officer will then take these to Fostering Panel where appropriate for fuller discussion and recommendations on continued approval.

Service Development

5.0 Kinship Care

- 5.1 As outlined above, Kinship Care Week 2025 will be held from 06 to 12 October 2025. Any feedback received from kinship carers during this week will be implemented into service development.

As outlined to the committee on 03 February 2025, the service has developed and designed Brent's Kinship Local Offer in consultation with kinship carers in response to government guidance released in 2023 and 2024. Once Brent's new Kinship Local Offer is published in early November 2025, a 'user friendly' short version will be created alongside this and used in promotional materials to support Kinship Carers to be fully aware of the support available to them in Brent. The Kinship Care Team also plan to deliver workshops to partner agencies and schools to raise awareness of what Kinship Carers do and Brent's Kinship Local Offer; this is in response to Kinship Carers informing the service that they are frustrated when some professionals are not aware of the role of a Kinship Carer.

6.0 Enhanced Support and Resources for Brent Carers

- 6.1 The Fostering Service continues to remain committed to supporting carers and maximising the chances of placement stability/success by providing practical, financial and therapeutic input. Foster Carers and the children in their care are supported to access help from Brent WEST or CRS (Children-In-Care Resilience Service) when they are struggling, feeling vulnerable or need to debrief after a difficult incident. Brent Fostering Service are embedding a culture of children, Foster Carers and professionals reflecting on themselves and accepting help – in order to reduce carers feeling isolated and alone when undertaking care of children.
- 6.2 CRS Brent has had a total of 44 active referrals since Jan 2024, an increase of 9 referrals since the last reporting period. It is positive referrals for CRS have increased, believed to be due to CRS visiting team meetings and spreading awareness of the service. Brent CRS has worked with 18 children intensively and offered consultations to 13 families. The remaining 3 have been given brief advice and signposted to other services.

As outlined earlier in this report, CRS Brent offer drop-in trainings which foster carers are encouraged to attend. These sessions can be adjusted according to the needs and wishes of the foster carers attending.

7.0 Recruitment and retention

- 7.1 Recruitment and retention remains the key priority for the fostering service, and this reporting period has seen significant activity and efforts to improve both the recruitment of new foster carers and the retention of the carers the service has.
- 7.2 The service continues to compare the Brent fostering offer to other Local Authorities and IFAs, to ensure it is competitive. The service uses details of the Brent fostering offer on promotional marketing materials consistently. In this reporting period 1 potential new carer made clear they are going to pursue fostering with an IFA due to a better financial offer, despite this feedback it is the assessment of the service that the service is not losing significant number of potential carers to other Local Authorities, but Brent is facing challenges like most London Local Authorities that are preventing families from fostering. In summary these challenges include the national housing crisis impacting the number of spare rooms available for potential carers, the housing crisis impacting older adult children from moving out of the family home, the current cost of living concerns resulting in potential carers needing to work full-time and not being available for fostering, families retiring later and not being available to foster.

Brent's First Mockingbird Constellation

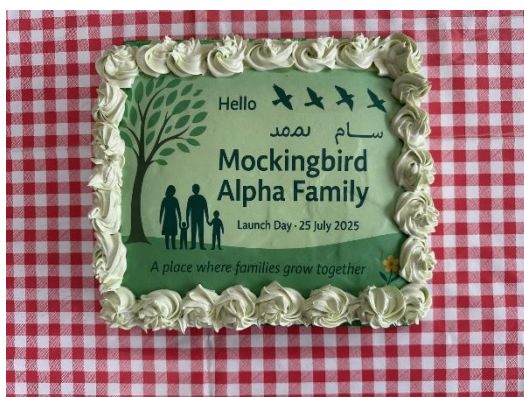
- 7.3 The Fostering Service launched Brent's first Mockingbird constellation in May 2025. The Mockingbird programme is an innovative method of delivering foster care using an extended family model where mockingbird hub carers are specially trained to offer sleepovers, peer support, emergency support, joint planning and social activities to fostering homes. Mockingbird supports children and foster carers by creating extended communities of support around the children and fostering families in the constellation. Mockingbird Home Hub carers are supported by a Mockingbird Liaison Officer to deliver support to other foster carers in the constellation. The overarching aim of the Mockingbird model of fostering is to support foster carer retention and placement stability.

Mockingbird has proven to be successful in over 100 Local Authorities. As of Feb 2025, 220 constellations were in place in England, Scotland and Wales. The Brent Mockingbird Liaison Officer and Service Manager attended a South London Local Authority to learn best practice around implementing Mockingbird successfully as the South London Local Authority have 6 constellations in place with no additional funding from the Department of Education.

The Brent fostering service recruited Home Hub carers in November 2024 after an extensive awareness and recruitment campaign. The Home Hub carers are experienced Brent Foster Carers. In March 2025 the couple were presented at Brent's Fostering Panel for a change of circumstances to become Mockingbird Home Hub carers. The Home Hub carers and the Brent Mockingbird Liaison

Officer received Mockingbird training from The Fostering Network in May 2025 allowing us to go live with our constellation shortly after.

The Fostering Network advised the constellation should be as varied as possible. Brent's first constellation therefore consists of Kinship Foster Carers, Carers with a preference to care for babies as well as Carers with a preference to care for older children. The constellation has named themselves the 'Alpha Family' and had their first celebration social event in July 2025.



- 7.4 A celebration event of Brent Mockingbird is scheduled for 21 Oct 2025 12.15pm to 2.30pm at Brent Civic Centre. All Committee members are invited to attend. The service will use photos and videos from this event as marketing materials to encourage potential carers to apply as foster carers to be part of our Brent family/community as other Local Authorities have informed that new carers have only agreed to come to their Local Authority if they are guaranteed to be in Mockingbird.

Informal feedback from the families in the constellation is very positive. One of the 'baby carers' has utilised the respite/sleepovers and has found the support invaluable in order to allow her to continue fostering. The service has had one expression of interest from another Brent foster carer wanting to be considered as Mockingbird Hub Carers for the next Brent constellation.

7.5 **Service Priorities for 2025-2026:**

The service priorities for the next period remain the same as outlined earlier in this report. The service priorities will be reviewed again in the next reporting period.

8.0 **Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement**

- 8.1 Stakeholder consultation and engagement takes many varied methods within the service, and we are committed to evaluating and developing new and creative ways of hearing from stakeholders.
- 8.2 Carers views are sought through one-to-one discussions with their SSW, Annual Foster Carer Reviews, Support Groups and Foster Carer Reference Groups. Carers are encouraged to provide written feedback on their experiences of assessment and panel process.

- 8.3 Children and young people provide feedback through discussions with their social worker, IRO, or their carers SSW, Looked After Children Reviews, written feedback for Annual Foster Carer Reviews, Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings, Care in Action/Participation activities, Brent Care Journeys.

9.0 Financial Considerations

- 9.1 There are no immediate financial implications associated with this report. The current budget allocation for the Fostering Support and Kinship teams in Brent is £1.2m, with a projected underspend of £0.1m for this financial year. In addition, a £0.4m contribution is being made to the Adopt London West Partnership in collaboration with neighbouring boroughs.

10.0 Legal Considerations

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

11.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

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

12.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 12.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

13.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

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

14.0 Communication Considerations

- 14.1 As detailed at section 4.6.8 Brent's new Kinship Local Offer publication will be complemented by effective awareness raising to ensure officers, professionals and families are aware of the support available for kinship carers and how this support can be accessed.

As detailed at section 4.4.2 Brent's fostering service continue to raise awareness around the important role the Brent foster carers undertake as well as the need for more foster carers for Brent children. The fostering service utilise several communication channels to raise awareness and promote Brent's fostering offer.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children, Young People and
Community Development