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MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

Monday 13 October 2025 at 5.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Grahl (Chair), Gbajumo, Kennelly (substitute for Councillor Dixon), Hirani and Smith

1. Exclusion of the Press and Public

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

2. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

Apologies were received from Councillor Dixon, who was substituted by Councillor Kennelly.

3. Declarations of interests

None.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting

None.

5. Matters arising (if any)

In relation to page 7 of the minutes where officers made a commitment to work with Public Health to improve vaccination rates for HPV immunisations and messaging around eligibility for children, the Committee asked for an update. Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) advised that officers had worked with Public Health at several different forums and meetings over the summer holidays around vaccination across the board for children, but this had not been specific to HPV. The LAC and Permanency Service Manager was working closely with Public Health currently around the way the service recorded and managed LAC immunisations. The Committee asked to receive an update specifically in relation to HPV immunisations for both boys and girls at the next meeting.

6. Update from Brent Care Journeys 2.0 (BCJ 2.0) Representatives

The Chair welcomed representatives from Brent Care Journeys 2.0 (BCJ 2.0) to the meeting and invited them to provide updates from the group. Prior to hearing from each of the young people present, the Chair advised that this would be J's final meeting with BCJ 2.0 and offered thanks for his involvement over the years. The Committee wished J well for the future.

K advised that she had recently worked with Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Community Development, Brent Council) and Palvinder Kudhail (Director for Early Help and Social Care, Brent Council) to interview candidates for Heads of Service roles, which had been a great experience for those involved.

N updated the Committee on summer activities, advising members of the summer fun day that took place in August 2025 for foster carers, looked after children and care leavers. There had been a DJ, food and drink, gifts, a bouncy castle and a ball pit.

NA updated the Committee on the residential trip that BCJ 2.0 had taken and presented some pictures from the trip. Activities included a farm visit, axe throwing, and pedalo rides which the organisation running the residential had offered for free.

S informed the Committee of the Ikea Day that BCJ 2.0 had undertaken following the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and School's lobbying for care packages. Those who had attended had been able to make suggestions to the care packages such as a laundry box, kitchen appliances, cutlery, crockery, towels, pillows and lights and the care packages included a living Bonsai tree. The Group presented a video of the day working with Ikea, which had included workshops where BCJ 2.0 learned more about the Company and its values. Following the day, Ikea was now looking to partner with Brent to provide jobs for care leavers, and NA highlighted that it seemed like a good place to work with good benefits.

The Group then made a presentation to the Committee outlining their wants to make BCJ 2.0 a success moving forward. Care leavers had come together across 5 workshops to design the BCJ 2.0 brand, with the aim to take control and ownership of their community, brand and identity. The group had brainstormed what their values were and what they wanted to stand for to create a name, logo and motto. Some of those values were around respect and feeling heard. The agreed name was currently 'Empire Care Leavers', and a logo had been designed representing a building with ladders towards a flag to represent care leavers building something together and reaching their highest potential. The motto was 'Empire believe in better' which BCJ 2.0 hoped would give care leavers hope towards a bright future and empower each other.

In outlining the new brand, the Group highlighted the importance of having their own identity, but the need to also consider younger groups, so care leavers would work with younger children to co-design their own brand and ideas that would link and co-align with Empire Care Leavers. A workshop to do that was scheduled during the October half term.

The Group had agreed to meet in person every 2 weeks going forward and virtually every week to plan activity. They were hoping to make care packages for care leavers in prison for Christmas and birthdays and start a mentoring programme for young people based on having an older and younger 'sibling' who would do activities together.

As a call to action to the Committee, the Group asked the Council to prioritise an increased budget for this work. This could be put towards branded hoodies and other merchandise, and, most importantly to them, a dedicated space for care leavers where they could relax, work, study, plan events and talk together.

Kelli Eboji highlighted that, corporately, the participation budget was limited and, whilst a certain amount of money was set aside, it was not large. She asked Committee members to reach out to organisations within Brent or to inform the service if they knew of any organisations that could provide materials that could then be branded or printing services for less. Members agreed to reach out with their contacts and consider other fundraising activities to fund the proposals.

The Chair thanked BCJ 2.0 representatives for their updates and invited comments and questions from the Committee, with the following points raised:

In relation to the request for a dedicated space for care leavers, Kelli Eboji highlighted that the Curve space on the third floor of the Civic Centre had been given to young people and there was a want to improve that space for young people, but there were also potential spaces in other areas that could be considered. BCJ 2.0 expressed that there would need to be significant adjustments to the Curve space to make it practicable, as the space was sometimes used externally meaning young people did not have access to it. The space was also very open and used by many, meaning there was no ownership of it by BCJ 2.0. They did not want their space to be a professional space but more like a common room that they had permanent and reserved access to with bean bags and comfortable areas. It was agreed that Nigel Chapman and Palvinder Kudhail would attend a fortnightly meeting of BCJ 2.0 to talk about the specific requests and the options available.

BCJ 2.0 asked whether there had been any progress in the request to look at discounted driving lessons for care leavers. They advised that Barnet Council had a partnership with driving schools where they offered free or discounted driving lessons, so Brent could reach out to their counterparts to learn how they had achieved this. Kelli Eboji advised that she would look into this and feed back to BCJ 2.0 before the next Committee meeting.

As no further issues were raised, the Chair thanked BCJ 2.0 for their updates and closed the item.

7. Progress report - the London Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Afzal Ahmed (Service Manager, LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report which updated the Committee on the London Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers, published in March 2021. In presenting the report, he highlighted the following key points:

- This was a joint report between the LAC and Permanency Service and Early Help.
- Emphasis over the past several years had been on prevention, such as through the Covid-19 Pathfinder 3-year Preventative Programme for Overrepresented Children, the investment in trauma recovery by Early Help, and the MOPAC funded disproportionality project that ended in 2023 which funded a range of activities in Brent Family Wellbeing Centres that were co-designed by young people.
- Early Help was now running Turnaround, a project contributing to the decrease in LAC participation in the youth justice system, which would run until 2026.
- He had been involved in the Your Choice programme providing training in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques to youth practitioners working with young people between 11-17 years old at risk of elevated harm. A total of 66 children and young people accessed the programme with 5 reoffending, only one of which was from the LAC cohort.
- Training for both services was delivered which had raised the need for clear protocols outlining when carers or key workers should make contact with the police. A grid system had been agreed and introduced to define when it was appropriate to call the police. The service now wanted to upskill providers to work with young people proactively before going to the police and give providers confidence in managing young people without police involvement. The intention was that every provider or commissioned service working with looked after children signed up to a protocol on this.

- In terms of the impact of the work, it was highlighted that, compared to the previous year, there had been a decrease in the number of care experienced young people involved in the youth justice system. This was attributed to effective partnership work, the preventative approach being taken, the work of the Exploitation, Violence and Vulnerability Panel (EVVP) and increased awareness of the protocol amongst practitioners.

The Chair thanked Afzal Ahmed for the introduction and invited contributions from the Committee, with the following points raised:

The Committee asked whether the London protocol was working as intended, and, if so, what impact it had in Brent. Afzal Ahmed replied that the protocol had emphasised the importance of working in partnership with other stakeholders, as the solution and responsibility did not sit with the local authority on its own and needed partners to make that difference. The people that the LAC and Permanency Service worked with daily, including foster carers and key workers, needed to be upskilled in terms of their confidence in managing young people without police involvement through a child-focused approach.

Highlighting the reality that care experienced young people were more likely than others to experience the youth justice system, the Chair asked BCJ 2.0 to reflect on what they thought would be successful at supporting those young people at an early stage to prevent them becoming involved in the justice system. BCJ 2.0 felt that males in particular were vulnerable to exploitation through gangs, and emphasised the need for discussions with young people around these types of situations early, with a focus on prevention. Sometimes, care experienced young people might get involved in risky situations due to a lack of activity and friends due to multiple placement moves, resulting in boredom and getting involved with exploitative individuals. Money was seen as another motivator, particularly for young men, where they saw their peers getting money from their parents, or where they were not able to work but did not have the security of parental support, and they looked to build a safety net for themselves. BCJ 2.0 added that, where a care experienced young person did not have family, they needed community, and they might then find it amongst criminal groups. This was linked back to BCJ 2.0's request for a dedicated space for themselves to build a safe community.

In continuing to consider what support might help, BCJ 2.0 felt that the reaction that many people had to get police involved in a challenging situation often made things worse as it created tension and trust issues, so BCJ 2.0 agreed with the need for upskilling in that area. Many felt like their social worker saw them as a 'case', particularly when they were moved between placements often, as key workers behaved a certain way towards them based on what had been recorded in their file. Some care leavers had experienced their key workers telling them that their personality did not match up to what they had read about in their file, which they highlighted lacked sensitivity. As such, BCJ 2.0 felt that key workers could benefit from training in this area. In addition, a programme to help young people regulate their emotions, with parallel training for key workers to help young people manage their emotions, was proposed. Emphasis was given to social workers and key workers using a person-centred, sensitive approach based on the individual. They advised that, where possible, having a social worker who had a similar culture to the young person also helped young people stay on track.

In response to the comments from BCJ 2.0, Palvinder Kudhail confirmed that the service was working hard to understand children's networks and who might be the best person within that circle to manage a particular situation, which might be different at different times in that young person's journey. She assured the Committee that, once a person became known to the youth justice system, the assessment was very individualised and focused on the person's wishes, feelings and ambitions for the future. Nicole Levy (Quality Assurance

and Learning Service Manager, Brent Council) committed to providing training for practitioners on recording in files to incorporate positive details, in collaboration with young people. The Committee noted the importance of the information professionals recorded about young people and how that impacted how young people felt about themselves, their future and their sense of identity.

The Committee asked whether young people were given access to their record. Nicole Levy advised that young people could make a formal Subject Access Request for that. Nigel Chapman added that young people had access to many documents written about them on a daily basis, such as their LAC reviews and personal education plans, which they were able to talk through and contribute to, but there would be a need to follow appropriate processes in terms of accessing their entire file.

In relation to priority C of the London protocol, training for personal advisors on providing advocacy when supporting young people in prison, the Committee asked whether that training was being provided. Afzal Ahmed explained that the training was being delivered as a joint initiative with NYAS who worked in prisons and youth justice system secure units. A programme had been developed, to be delivered between October – November 2025, for personal advisors to advocate on behalf of the young people they were visiting in prison to support them in their rights. He agreed to report back to the Committee on that work in the next update.

The Committee asked whether there were appropriate employment, education, skills and training placements available for care leavers to help to deter them from the youth justice system. Officers felt that the opportunities for employment for care leavers in Brent were good, with Brent Start helping to secure apprenticeships and apprenticeships within the Council. There were also initiatives across London that the service benefited from, and the dedicated Leaving Care Manager who led on those opportunities ensured that the Council was securing every opportunity it could for young people. Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) highlighted the importance of diversifying those options and having as many opportunities for care leavers as possible. The service connected with partners in the NHS and Ikea to expand those opportunities, and where opportunities did come up, they were shared in the care leaver WhatsApp group, made up of around 180 young people. Personal advisors also encouraged young people to get into employment, education or training.

The Committee highlighted the new space in the Civic Centre called the Base that could be used to hold training and skills workshops for care leavers. Afzal Ahmed agreed this was something that the service could look at utilising, working with Brent Start.

The Committee asked why there had been no public health element included in the report. James Salter (Service Manager, Youth Justice Service, Brent Council) drew members' attention to the substance misuse provision within the Youth Justice Service and officers were in advanced discussions about extending that offer. They were also considering how sexual health could be incorporated into that service. He added that the Youth Justice Service was led by the programmes that officers could access at a given time, which was often dependent on funding which came with its own remits and conditions, but the service could now influence and develop the Targeted Prevention Hub in partnership with others, including health. That hub focused on early intervention to ensure support was provided early to young people through a partnership approach.

The Committee advised that, using the data in the report, it was difficult to follow the degree to which looked after children were following the same trends as all children and young people in Brent, with the data often switching between cohorts.

As no further issues were raised, the Committee resolved to note the report.

8. Six-Monthly Adoption Report - Adopt London West

Debbie Gabriel (Head of Service, Adopt London West) introduced the report which provided an update on the adoption performance data for the period 1 April 2025 to 30 September 2025, the progress, activity and outcomes of Adopt London West, and the Adopt London West Annual Report 2024-25. She advised that Adopt London West had approved 8 adopter households during the reporting period and had since approved a further 3, and had a target to approve more than 20 adopters by year end. Brent had placed 10 children the previous year which had been the highest for several years and, whilst the numbers were slower this year, Adopt London West was likely to place a few more by the end of Quarter 3.

The Chair thanked Debbie Gabriel for the updates and then invited comments and questions from Committee members with the following raised:

The Committee noted that the average time taken to place a child entering care had increased from 180 days the previous year to 208 days in the reporting period, and asked if there was any insight into why that was. Debbie Gabriel advised that the cohort size was small, so delays with only a few children, as a result of care proceedings or finding a placement for children with complex needs for example, could skew the average number of days. She advised that, when placing a child, the focus was about the particular child and their needs, and it was important to take the time to get that right. She added that the average number of days was still in line with the London average and only slightly outside of the national average.

The Committee asked whether it was easier to find people who wanted to adopt in London compared to other areas of the country. Debbie Gabriel confirmed that there was a steady stream of adopters coming to the attention of Adopt London West, which was not the case nationally and there were parts of the country struggling to attract adopters. The sufficiency issue had not yet affected London, but where Adopt London West were not able to place a child then there was a need to look across the country for adopters which caused delays. Two separate children had recently been placed in Devon. She added that Adopt London West would always place children with the best adopters for their particular needs.

The Committee asked about progress on the Black Adoption Project. Debbie Gabriel stated that the project had been busy with activity outlined in the annual report. There had been a need for some additional funding for a particular initiative which had now been secured and committed, and a Project Manager was leading on several workstreams for the project. A young people's group was also up and running. Adopt London would be launching phase 2 of the project soon which included a Black Education Programme that young people had specifically asked for. She added that the 'let's talk about adoption' group for Black adopters was going very well and entirely facilitated by Black adopters affiliated with the project. In terms of the project's impact, she explained that it was a long-term change so it would take time to see the effects of the activity, but there was a lot of interest already. A Meet The Adopters event for Black adopters had recently been ran which had seen all spaces filled for that event.

In relation to the reduction in funding for the Adoption Special Guardianship Support Fund, the Committee asked how Adopt London West was dealing with that. Debbie Gabriel confirmed it had been challenging but there was a lot of lobbying of central government around that. Families were relieved that the government had announced a public consultation about the future of the fund, due to go live in the new year, that they could put their voice to. Adopter peer support groups across the country were also lobbying. In terms of managing without that funding, she advised that some activity could be delivered through the core offer, but many therapeutic parenting programmes were seeing a dip in take-up

because without that fund adopters were now required to fund the course through their allowances. As a result, many families were declining those courses and using funds for individual therapy. At the same time, the government had also removed the £2.5k grant for specialist assessments, which was also having an impact on families. The Committee asked for the public consultation information to be shared with members.

Noting that the report detailed a fall in webpage views compared to an increase in social media following, the Committee asked whether social media was the right platform for promotion. They highlighted that social media might receive more followers but if that did not translate to clicks through then it was unlikely to be increasing interest in adoption. As such, they asked whether Adopt London West was promoting adoption in the right places and to the right audiences. They added that LinkedIn and TikTok were also good platforms to spread the message. Debbie Gabriel agreed this was a fair challenge and agreed to get feedback from the Communications and Marketing Team. In terms of feedback on promotion, she advised that feedback did suggest that the website was helpful, particularly blogs and articles which made people want to be a part of the Adopt London West partnership. Adopt London West continually improved and evolved the website to ensure it was appropriate for its aims so that anyone affected by adoption could find the website useful to them.

In response to some of the queries raised during the discussion, Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Schools, Brent Council) assured the Committee that there was appropriate challenge of Adopt London West performance overall. He and Palvinder Kudhail (Director of Early Help and Social Care, Brent Council) were members of the Adopt London West Partnership Board where that performance was scrutinised.

As no further issues were raised, the Committee resolved to note the report.

9. **Fostering Service 6-monthly Report**

Tom Donovan (Service Manager, Looked After Children and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report, which provided information about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it achieved good outcomes for children, including relevant performance data and updates on the functioning and progress of Foster Panel. In introducing the report, he highlighted the following key points:

- The service was focused simultaneously on recruitment and retention of foster carers to ensure Brent had as many foster carers as possible.
- The service had a duty to raise awareness of fostering and did that through a mixture of digital campaigning and outreach. A digital campaign would be launching that week to boost digital awareness raising and see whether that translated into interest.
- Enquiries had increased through Meta to Fostering West London, but the quality of applications through that route were not what the service would want, so there was a need to put more investment into search engines. It was noted that someone was more likely to be ready to foster if they were already doing their own research.
- Foster West London had launched a new application called Care Friends, which was helping people to refer their friends to fostering.
- The Fostering Recruitment Manager, Tee Malik, was supporting the fostering team to set up stalls in different areas to have a physical presence to promote fostering, and had done some promotion in Queen's Park, libraries, schools, and GP surgeries.

- Good feedback was being received on the Mockingbird Project.
- An upcoming celebration was scheduled to show support for carers, and officers would use that opportunity to get marketing materials through photos and testimonials.
- The service had visited other local authorities to learn from them.

The Chair thanked Tom Donovan for the introduction and invited comments and questions from those present, with the following issues raised:

Noting that the report detailed the role of housing in foster carer application's being rejected due to the lack of a spare room, the Committee asked how the housing crisis was impacting fostering. Tom Donovan confirmed that, nationally, the housing crisis and cost-of-living crisis was impacting fostering recruitment, which Foster West London had fed back to the previous Children's Minister. Children were moving out of their parents' houses much later meaning there were fewer spare rooms for a placement and people were retiring much later. He advised that the service was limited in what it could do to influence the housing crisis, but officers were being creative where possible. For example, when doing outreach work, officers raised the possibility of fostering very young babies if there was no spare room, or to install a fire-safe partition between two rooms. Children could also share bedrooms where they were placed with certain family members such as cousins so there was still energy and focus encouraging kinship placements. Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) added that, previously, if an applicant were in social housing, they could apply for another bedroom to foster, but that was no longer an option. She had not heard from other local authorities whether they were doing anything in this area with their housing departments.

The Committee noted that Brent's next recruitment campaign would focus on LGBT+ communities and asked if officers felt that would help to increase the number of LGBT+ foster carers. Tom Donovan highlighted that he was hopefully and ambitious that the campaign would attract carers, as the service did not currently have any LGBT+ carers. He added that the campaign would not have a significant cost but if there was no evidence of an increase in enquiries and applications then the service would move on to a new group.

As no further issues were raised, the Committee resolved to note the report.

10. **Any other urgent business**

Brent Care Journeys 2.0 advised the Committee that November marked Care Leavers Month and activities would be shared with members.

The meeting closed at 7:30 pm

COUNCILLOR GWEN GRAHL
Chair