



Corporate Parenting Committee
13th April 2026

**Report from the Corporate Director of
Children, Young People and
Community Development**

**Lead Cabinet Member for Children's
Services, Education and Employment
- Cllr Gwen Grahl**

**Brent Fostering Service 6-monthly Monitoring Report: 01
October 2025 to 31 March 2026**

Wards Affected:	ALL
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	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.
List of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	Renewing fostering: homes for 10,000 more children (February 2026) https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/renewing-fostering-homes-for-10000-more-children
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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 October 2025 to the 31 March 2026.

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 Children in Care.

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 children in care 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 this reporting period against our priorities so far, include:

- The service has recruited 3 carers this period. There are 5 assessments in progress as well as 5 potential carers who are at the initial visit stage considering progressing to an assessment. 1 foster carer has resigned this period and 2 foster carers were deregistered by the service, due to safeguarding concerns. The net increase for this financial year so far is 0.
- Brent's fostering offer is competitive and is well received by Brent foster carers. In this period no 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 continues to progress well. 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 there hasn't been an increase in 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 significantly 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) started a regional fostering hub; Foster with West London. The Department for Education has asked all Local Authorities to expand the remit of regional fostering hubs by summer 2026 to undertake 'end to end' recruitment, which will include assessments of new foster carers.
- The Brent fostering 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 service launched a WhatsApp Community to share updates, feedback, events and information as requested by the Brent foster carers.

4.2 Staffing Arrangements

4.2.1 The organisational structure of the Fostering Service remains consistent with that outlined in 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 a Service Manager.

4.2.2 The Fostering Support and Assessment Team consists of 8 supervising social workers and one Team Manager. There are also two part-time fixed term contract posts in the service:

-0.5 Fostering Recruitment Officer

-0.5 Mockingbird Liaison Officer

Both of these posts are currently held by one individual staff member. The current post-holder has secured employment in another directorate in the Local Authority and leaves the service on 01 April 2026. A decision has been made to not recruit to these roles until clarity is known regarding the resources required by Brent for the expanded regional fostering hub, Foster with West London (FwWL) is known. Further information in relation to the FwWL is included later in this report.

4.2.3 The Kinship Care Team consists of 8 social workers and one Team Manager. One social worker left the department in January 2026, after a successful round of recruitment the vacancy is expected to be filled by an external candidate by May 2026.

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

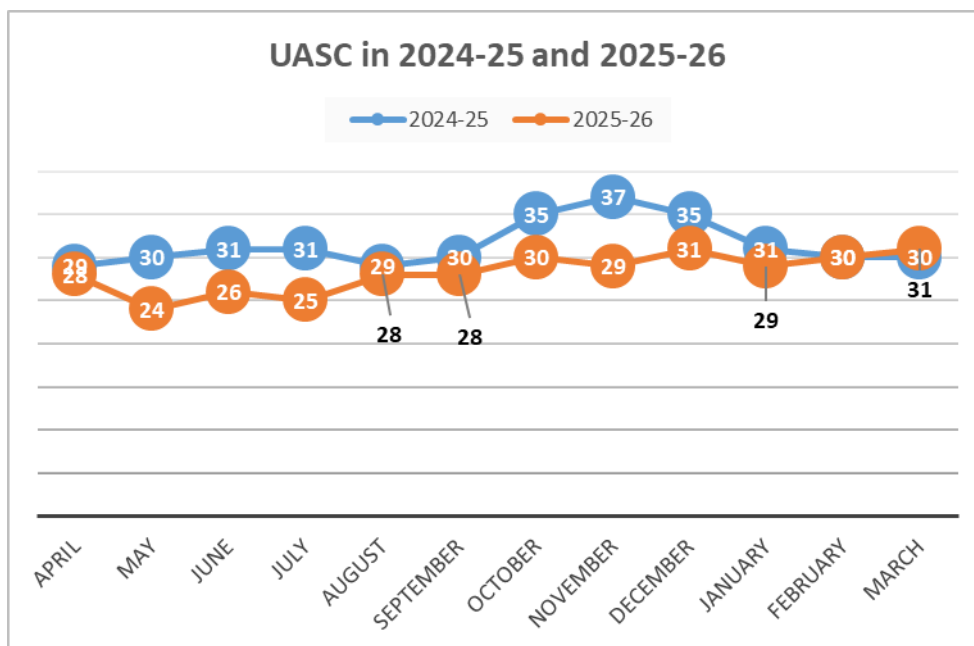
4.3.1 The total number of children in care as of 16/03/2026 was 299, an increase of 8 children from 291 on 30/09/2025.

The corporate performance targets for 2025/2026 are as follows:

- Percentage of children looked after placed with in-house (Brent) foster carers as of 31st March 2026 was 17%, a decrease of 5 children to 52 children. However, this remains below the annual target of 25%
- Percentage of looked after children placed with a relative or family friend as of 31st March 2026 was 15%, an increase of 3 children (44) – below the annual target of 20%
- Percentage of looked after children placed with independent fostering agencies as of 31st March 2026 was 30% (89 children), the same percentage of children as 30/09/2025
- Percentage of looked after children overall within foster placements as of 31 March 2026 was 62% (185 children), a decrease of 3 children and 2%.
- There were 44 looked after children placed in registered supported accommodation as of 31 March 2026, an increase of 7 young people from 30 September 2025. 44 children represent 15% of all looked after children placed in registered supported accommodation.

There were 31 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) as of 31 March 2026, an increase of 3 UASC from 30 September 2025 (28 UASC).

The number of UASC placed in registered supported accommodation as of 31st March 2026 was 19, 8 more UASC as of 30 September 2025, none in residential children's homes and 12 UASC placed in foster placements.



17 children were placed with 14 new Kinship Carers who have started fostering since October 2025, 4 of whom have also ceased placements.

At 31 March 2026 there are 6 children in 6 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.

1 Brent child was made subject to a Special Guardianship Order 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 moved from Zoom to Microsoft Teams, following feedback from attendees. The service 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. 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 to FwWL 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 and putting up posters.

Schools - The service maintained a consistent presence in Brent schools through regular poster drops to ensure that information about fostering remained accessible to families, staff and school communities. Poster deliveries have so far taken place at 24 schools in the borough. These visits ensured fostering messaging remained visible on reception and community boards.

Libraries - To strengthen collaboration with libraries, important community hubs across Brent, the fostering service established a regular monthly slot on the final Thursday of every month, rotating between libraries across the borough. A system for ongoing check-ins, allowing staff to request new posters and leaflets when needed. Continued display of fostering materials on local community noticeboards within libraries. A new partnership with the Brent Libraries lead, who will notify the service of upcoming community events that may offer further outreach opportunities.

Supermarket and High-Footfall Engagement - To increase visibility in everyday community spaces, fostering posters were delivered in January 2026 to 4 of the biggest supermarkets in Brent. Posters were placed on in-store community noticeboards.

Community and Faith Outreach - In January 2026, the service visited the Brazilian community (SCHILD) and engaged with parents to promote fostering and provide information about the approval process. In February 2026, the service attended the Brent Multi-Faith Forum, establishing valuable links with faith networks. In February 2026, the team attended the Serene One outreach day on Harlesden High Street. This event enabled direct engagement with members of the community and resulted in new contacts within the Brent Health, Somali Community and Brent Libraries. In February 2026 the service held a stall at Wembley Mosque encouraging members of the Muslim community in Brent to consider fostering.

Civic Centre Engagement - Throughout this reporting period, the fostering service maintained a physical presence at Brent Civic Centre through information tables. These engagements provided opportunities for staff, visitors and residents to speak directly with fostering officers, increasing awareness across the council and the wider public.



Finding Foster Carers using advanced digital marketing:

4.4.3 To tackle continued recruitment challenges, the service completed a three-month recruitment campaign with CAN Digital between late November 2025 and the end of January 2026. The campaign significantly improved Brent's search visibility in a highly competitive fostering landscape, the headlines included:

- Search impression share increased from ~30% to ~76%, placing Brent at the top of search results for fostering-related terms.
- Brent outperformed Independent Fostering Agencies across key indicators including click-through rate, top-of-page rate and overall visibility.
- META activity alone produced over 100,000 impressions and more than 2,200 link clicks across Facebook and Instagram.
- Display advertising reached over 250,000 users across high-traffic national and local news sites such as Sky News, The Guardian, Evening Standard, BBC Good Food and Kilburn Times.
- Enquiries to FWWL significantly increased (from around 30 per month to 120 per month) during the period the CAN digital campaign ran. The service plan to run a similar campaign from April 2026 to July 2026.

As stated in previous reports, feedback from FWWL and other Local Authorities is that new foster carers find fostering services via word-of-mouth or online searches rather than social media or traditional leaflets. The CAN digital campaign invested mostly in search, to ensure that potential fostering families saw Brent fostering in their results over other fostering providers. Some spend was utilised in social media to spread the Foster with Brent brand however it is believed that those who are searching for fostering are more ready to foster than those who click through via social media.

Below are the number of enquiries made to FWWL (specifically in relation to Brent) before the CAN campaign and during the CAN campaign:

- August 2025, 40 enquiries, 3 referrals to Brent for an initial home visit (IV)
- September 2025, 35 enquiries, 5 referrals to Brent for an IV
- October 2025, 32 enquiries, 1 referrals to Brent for an IV

- November 2025, 115 enquiries, 3 referrals to Brent for an IV
- December 2025, 125 enquiries, 1 referral to Brent for an IV
- Jan 2026, 148 enquiries, 4 referrals to Brent for an IV
- February 2026, 31 enquiries, 3 referrals to Brent for an IV

For the 3 referrals received by Brent in February 2026. 1 candidate has their initial visit booked for 30.03.2026, 1 candidate asked for their initial visit in April 2026, 1 candidate had their initial visit undertaken on 09.03.2026 (unfortunately this candidate cannot progress).

Although the significant increase in enquiries has not resulted in the same increase in referrals, we have committed to a further 3-month campaign with CAN digital to continue to test and refine our online presence.

To assist the Committee, here is a brief outline of the fostering assessment process in Brent:

- The potential fostering family makes an enquiry to FwWL hub. FwWL provide information about fostering. FwWL ask for consent for the potential fostering family to be passed to Brent for an Initial Home Visit or to attend a Brent fostering information session (whichever approach the candidate prefers).
- The referral is passed to Brent by FwWL. Brent staff ask to book an Initial Visit as soon as possible to the potential fostering family.
- Initial Visit takes place. The supervising social worker provides more information about the assessment process, completes a health and safety check and asks the carer to sign a consent form to progress to stage 1 of a fostering assessment.
- Stage 1 – During this stage the potential fostering families usually attend a skills to foster training. The service aims to get Stage 1 completed in 8 to 10 weeks.
- Stage 2 – The service aims to get Stage 2 completed in 4 to 6 months. To avoid delay in some circumstances Stage 1 and Stage 2 can be completed concurrently.

Finding Foster Carers using other digital approaches:

- 4.4.4 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. In this reporting period 7 enquiries came to FwWL from individuals who saw this job advert on the Brent website.

FwWL launched 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.

Of all the Local Authorities in West London, Brent's fostering community downloaded and registered the most amount of users for the app. We have assured foster carers who do not want to use the app that our "refer a friend scheme" still continues without the app (either approach can be utilised). One of our recently approved foster carers was from the 'refer a friend' incentive and the Brent foster carer received her £1000. To clarify the individual receives the £1000 once the referred individual has passed their fostering assessment and has begun fostering for Brent.

Regional Fostering Hub (FwWL):

4.4.5 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 Brent fostering service (including our Mockingbird Home Hub Carers) were invited to attend an event with the new Minister for Children and Families, Josh MacAlister, on 03 February 2026 held at Coram BAAF's offices in Bloomsbury. Josh MacAlister made an announcement about the forthcoming publication from the Department for Education about reforms to the fostering system in England.



The key headlines from the fostering reform include the following:

- Mr MacAlister has a clear aim of 10,000 more fostering places for children in England.
- The fostering reforms aim to avoid delays in assessment of foster carers, reduce the reliance on residential care and avoid children living further away from their home local authority.

- The Department for Education (DfE) are of the view that regional fostering hubs get better results therefore want Local Authorities without a regional fostering hub to implement a hub.
- Those Local Authorities with a hub already (such as Brent) will expand their hubs to an 'end to end' model; to include processing enquiries, completing Form F (fostering) assessments and training of new foster carers. £12.8 million to expand and redesign regional fostering hubs will be provided in England. DfE have confirmed this will be £602K for FwWL. FWWL predict their annual costs will be £1.4m to £1.6m annually (more accurate costings are expected to be presented to cabinet in the coming weeks).
- A 6 week consultation to take place, to consider how to improve assessments of new fostering carers, including considering removing the need for new fostering households to be presented to a fostering panel. The consultation period ended on 17 March 2026. Brent foster carers were encouraged to provide their views to the DfE. Consultation feedback was sent on behalf of the Brent fostering service.
- A 6 week consultation to take place to consider updating/revising the Care Planning, Placement and Review Guidance; Fostering National Minimum Standards; and the Fostering Regulations. To remove some potential barriers and reform the approach taken when allegations are made in respect of foster carers. This also closed on 17 March 2026.
- The DfE want to see more Mockingbird constellations, to support foster carers. £8.9million will be provided in England.
- There will be an expansion on the 'Roommakers' programme (started in Greater Manchester), meaning Local Authorities will be asked to rapidly approve loft extensions, room dividers, garden pods and other creative solutions to support carers make room for children. £25 million in capital grants will be provided in England. DfE have asked Local Authorities to ensure financial processes in Local Authorities do not cause delay for foster carers receiving this funding.
- There will be an expansion on the 'Weekenders' programme, providing more respite opportunities for children.
- The DfE have given an ambitious timescale of expanded hubs being active from Summer 2026.

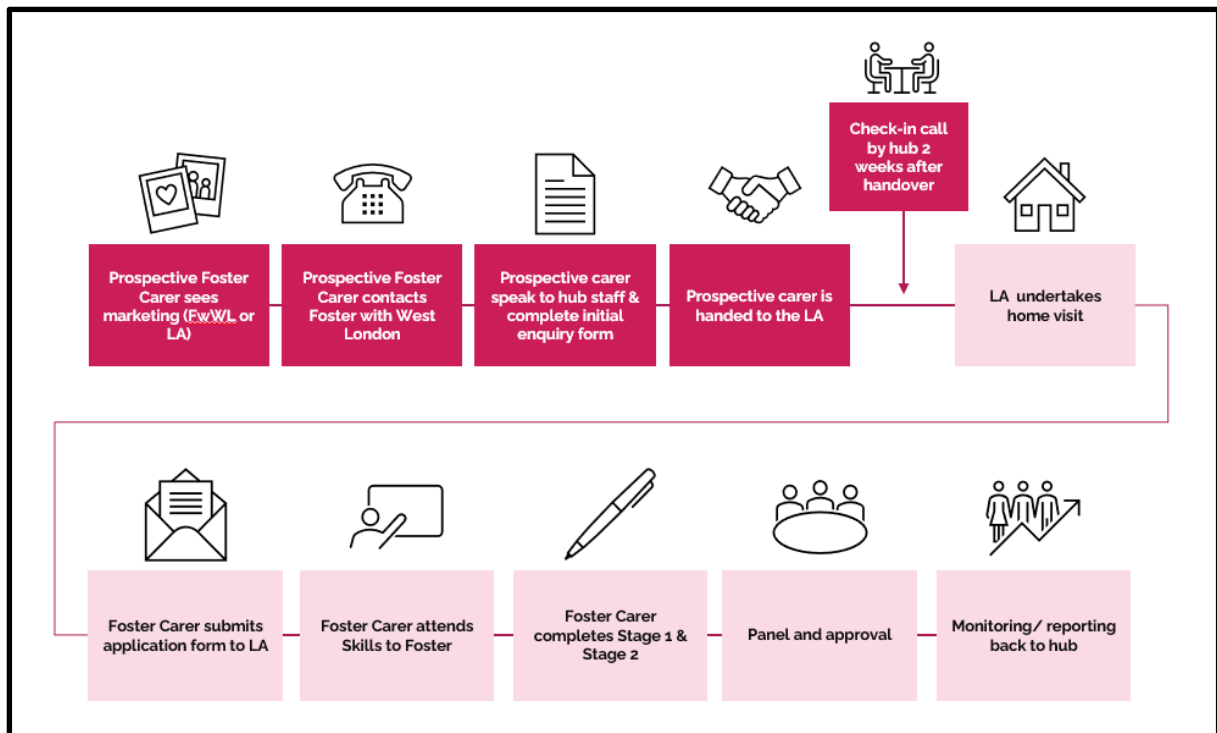
In response to the DfE announcement, FwWL are consulting with local authorities to create the new model for FwWL. Final costings will be presented to cabinet for formal sign off following the May 2026 elections. Staff in Brent's fostering service have been kept up-to-date and are aware that secondments, taupe or other arrangements may be considered.

Assessments

- 4.4.6 Following feedback from a 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
451 contacts made to FwWL for Brent this reporting period.	12 Referrals passed to Brent. (Which recommend Brent call the potential carer and book a home visit) (Please note 8 referrals from the previous reporting period were carried over, still in the IV stage)	5 are currently 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)	0 currently in Stage 2 (please note 3 carers recently at stage 2 are now approved carers, which is positive)	3 in this reporting period
		3 IVs were completed and the applicant progressed to Stage One.			There has been 1 formal resignation and 2 terminations
		6 withdrew from having an initial visit when offered by Brent			
		3 withdrew after having an initial home visit by Brent			
		3 families were rejected by Brent following the home visit			

This diagram below from FwWL depicts the potential carer's current journey in the fostering recruitment system. As outlined above, when FwWL implement an end-to-end system, this journey will change.



4.4.7 As highlighted in previous reports, when a referral is received from FwWL the Brent fostering service contacts the potential fostering family promptly. It is common at the initial visit stage however for applicants to put off their initial home visit for some time. The assessing social workers are patient, supportive and understanding at this stage to ensure all potential fostering families feel that their fostering journey takes place at their pace. 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.

4.4.8 To review if there are any potential difficulties for applicants to move from enquiry to referral, the service manager in Brent undertook two 'secret shopper' exercises. Feedback was provided to FwWL highlighting where the service from FwWL could improve but overall it was felt that FwWL dealt with the enquiries appropriately, worked at the pace of the applicant and passed the details to Brent in a timely way.

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

4.5.1 The retention of Brent 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 fostering 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. Many of the Brent foster carers have had the same supervising social worker for many years.

One foster carer provided feedback via email to the service on 22 October 2025 stating: *"I feel over the last five years Brent has been a part of my life I feel sometimes they're more like my family. Especially Tamiko. She's ever so supportive between the good days and the bad days she's always at the other side of the phone even half the time I don't know what I'm on about. I just thought I'd share that today girls thank you all ever so much for being ever so understanding"*.

Another fostering family provided feedback on 04 December 2025 via email following a difficult incident; the foster carer was supported over the phone outside of working hours to unpick the difficult experience: *"I really appreciate you taking some time to discuss the matter with me today. I am truly grateful"*.

- 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, children in care 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.
- 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, on 23 October

2025. 1 session in February 2026 was cancelled due to limited uptake by foster carers. Topics raised by the foster carers in the October 2025 session included:

- Challenges of managing contact (family time) in kinship fostering arrangements.
- Positivity around Brent's Mockingbird constellation, the carers were very happy to be part of the constellation
- Positive feedback in relation to the Mockingbird celebration event held in October 2025.
- How foster carers can contribute positively to Life Story Work for children.

Due to limited booking on the February 2026 Coffee with Kelli session, the fostering service will offer this event as a virtual session on 23.04.2026 to explore if holding this virtually increases participation.

4.5.6 The fostering service with the support of the Brent Communication service keeps foster carers engaged and informed by providing a monthly newsletter. Updates are also provided by the Brent fostering service in the WhatsApp community.

4.5.7 Tickets for Foster Carers and Children in their Care: As stated in previous reports, Brent's fostering service are linked in with the Wembley Community Club and the Disney Theatre Group to access discounted or free tickets for fostering families. There are a number of different events for children in care and care experienced young people however some young people and their carers have feedback there is a benefit to events being offered to the entire fostering household as it can avoid children in care feeling a stigma or them simply not wanting to alone. These joint events are also a great opportunity for children to strengthen relationships with their foster carers, their families as well as Brent staff. When possible to do so the Brent fostering service has also encouraged children's social workers and leaving care personal advisors to attend alongside their young people. This helps to strengthen professional relationships and reduce barriers between young people and the professionals supporting them. During this reporting period the service has organised 2 theatre trips: The Lion King (November 2025) and Hercules (January 2026).

The service is already planning future events, which currently include:

- Football Match, England vs Japan, 31 March 2026
- Football Match, England vs Spain, 14 April 2026
- Hercules Theatre Trip, May 2026

Brent Annual Foster Carer Celebration Event: As part of Brent's fostering offer the service holds an annual celebration event. One of the foster carers recommended a sports club for the event to be held at.

On 5 December 2025, Brent's fostering community gathered at Tithe Farm Social Club in Harrow for our annual End of Year Celebration. It was a wonderful opportunity to honour and celebrate the hard work, commitment, and dedication shown by our foster carers throughout the year. The event brought together foster carers, their families, staff, and special guests, including the

Deputy Mayor, Cllr Narinder Bajwa. Guests enjoyed a delicious Caribbean buffet, accompanied by live music from a talented saxophone player, creating a warm and uplifting atmosphere. The evening was expertly hosted by MC Mr Cee, whose humour and energy kept the celebration lively and engaging.

A key highlight of the night was the Foster Carer Awards, recognising the remarkable contributions made by carers across the service. This was followed by heartfelt speeches from Head of Service Kelli Eboji and Corporate Director Nigel Chapman, both expressing deep appreciation for the dedication and resilience shown throughout 2025. The celebration continued with an exciting raffle before the DJ brought everyone to their feet.

A fostering survey has recently gone out to the Brent fostering community asking for feedback on the fostering service but also exploring what activities or celebrations they want to see for the remainder of 2026.



Brent Participation & Brent Fostering – The link supervising social worker meets regularly with Brent’s participation service to discuss, plan, prepare, and support events and activities. Recent events have included the Halloween activity, the end of year celebrations, and the upcoming February half term event. The two services are also currently working together to support the Brent children in care community to design a logo or mural for ‘The Curve’ area of the civic centre, which is the area for Brent children and young people.

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 49 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 22 positive viability assessments, 17 Connected Persons assessments were allocated to social workers. 2 of these assessments did not progress fully as the family made the decision that they did not wish to be assessed at this time. Of the positive viability assessments, 5 were not progressed to a Connected Persons assessment as the child returned home to the care of the birth parent or another alternative arrangement was made for the child.

The service has noticed an increase in families making their own private applications to family court for Special Guardianship Orders. In these circumstances the Local Authority are still required to undertake the assessment. In this reporting period 6 private application assessment were undertaken by the team.

4.6.4 In this reporting period 13 children were placed in 11 new Regulation 24 (often referred to as Reg 24) Connected Persons arrangements between October 2025 to March 2026. 1 child was placed in a respite arrangement with a Connected Person when their foster carer needed respite.

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 February 2026, there were 5 children in 5 unregulated placements. 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 child in care becomes unregulated a risk assessment is completed for the unregulated placement which is signed by the 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 4 Connected Persons foster carers were presented to the Brent Fostering Panel for approval as carers between October 2025 and March 2026.

4.6.7 3 Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) were granted in this reporting period; the SGOs granted were all private applications made by family that Brent had

completed the assessments for. In this reporting period 1 SGO was granted for children open to Brent Children's Social Care.

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. In March 2026 the elected member Councillor Moeen resigned from the central list; a replacement councillor will be considered following the May 2026 elections.

The new independent fostering panel chair started in September 2025. Appraisals of current panel members took place in March 2026 with the independent panel chair and service manager (panel adviser). The service added 7 internal social workers to the central list, following their induction training on 14th November 2025, to provide more flexibility for the fostering panel.

4.7.2 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. The service is recruiting a young care experienced panel member as well as a representative with a background in health.

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 October 2025 to April 2026: 7 panels were held with 29 fostering households presented, of which:

- 4 carers were recommended for approval as short-term connected persons (kinship carers).
- 3 carers were recommended for approval as new short-term carers.
- 6 carers were re-approved as part of their 3 yearly annual review.
- 3 carers were re-approved as part of their first annual review.

- 5 fostering approval/status - terminated/resigned (this includes kinship carers who ended being carers as an SGO was granted or the child returned home).
- 0 (zero) carers were terminated at stage 2 of assessment.
- 1 carer was presented for change of approval, to a long-term carer.
- 1 carer was re-approved as a long-term carer.
- 4 carers were presented for Standards of Care, 2 resulted in deregistration.
- 5 children were presented for Long Term Matches with their IFA foster carers.

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 is booked to observe on 10.04.2026 and the Director of Early Help and Social Care is booked to observe on 22.05.2026.

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. All carers have been given a laptop or tablet to access training on.

4.8.2 Virtual delivery remained the preferred format for the majority of carers, based on ongoing consultation in support groups and through supervising social workers. Across the reporting period, carers participated in 14 facilitated sessions, marking an increase in attendance compared with the previous period. These sessions covered a wide and purposeful range of topics, including Paediatric First Aid, Safer Caring, Digital Safety, Drug Misuse in a Safeguarding Context, Professional Boundaries and Record Keeping, Loss and Bereavement and Health and Safety. These sessions included 7 externally commissioned trainings, two multi-agency workshops delivered via the Brent Safeguarding Partnership, two sessions from the Wellbeing and Emotional Support Team (WEST), and two joint workshops delivered with broader CYPCD practitioners, demonstrating the strength of collaboration across services.

Course	Attendees	Mandatory
First Aid	6	Yes
TSDS	3	No
Safer Caring	9	Yes
SUDI	6	Yes (for baby carers)
Advanced Safeguarding level 3	13	Yes
Building connection with your child	6	No

Digital Safety	9	No
Drug Misuse in a Safeguarding Context	3	No
PREVENT WRAP: Concerned with Radicalisation	3	No
Professional Boundaries and Record Keeping	12	Yes
Loss and Bereavement	5	No
Safeguarding level 1 and 2	6	Yes
Health and Safety	13	Yes

The data shows strong engagement in mandatory safeguarding-related courses, with Advanced Safeguarding Level 3 and Health and Safety being the most attended (13 attendees each). Professional Boundaries and Record Keeping and Safer Caring also attracted high numbers, indicating carers' priority on core safeguarding competencies.

There was steady uptake in child-specific safety courses, such as Paediatric First Aid (6) and SUDI (6), reflecting continued focus on safe care for younger children as well as therapeutic courses such as Loss and bereavement (5) and Building connection with your child/young person (6).

Non-mandatory courses such as Drug Misuse in a Safeguarding Context (3) and PREVENT (3) may indicate perceived low relevance or that carers are engaging in wider contextual safeguarding topics.

Overall, safeguarding and compliance-based courses are the most popular, while reflective or relational training areas may need further promotion or alternative delivery approaches.

Training attendance, while improving, continues to reflect national patterns of lower engagement in facilitated sessions. To encourage participation, the Learning Academy issued reminders and outreach messages and ensured that online session links were widely circulated. The Learning Academy continued to track participation rigorously and collected feedback after each session, with carers consistently reporting that the training was relevant, well-delivered and practically useful. Carers commented on improved communication with children, increased confidence in safeguarding responsibilities and a greater commitment to supporting educational progress, illustrating that the learning offer is contributing to meaningful changes in day-to-day practice.

E-Learning continued to play a key role demonstrating a steady increase in engagement. 59 e-Learning courses were completed by 23 carers. There has also been a slight increase in uptake among existing carers who had not previously engaged with the e-learning offer. Alongside these formal learning routes, members of the Mockingbird Constellation continued to engage in informal training sessions, offering additional opportunities for carers to learn and reflect together. The Children in Care Resilience Service (CRS) also delivered tailored sessions during Mockingbird Coffee Mornings, with plans to promote and widen access to carers outside the constellation in the coming year.

Feedback from carers and social workers highlighted the importance of accessibility, particularly for carers with disabilities or communication needs. In

response, accessibility statements were added to training communications. In addition, the Learning academy are exploring providing one to one sessions with carers who may require an interpreter to go through particular training. It is also positive that devices were provided to support digital inclusion under the 2025 offer to foster carers which allowed for better access to online training. As the Learning Academy, attendance at carer support groups continued to be an essential mechanism for hearing carers' views directly, ensuring training remains relevant, responsive, and aligned with carer preferences.

The Brent fostering service has recognised a pattern of foster carers completing several different training courses but not always completing their mandatory training on time. For Foster Care Fortnight in May 2026 the fostering service plans to launch new annual review forms, foster carer agreements and other updated templates making clear the expectations on foster carers to complete their mandatory training to ensure all these documents consistently highlight what training carers are required to complete and by when.

A significant upcoming development is the introduction of Brent Oracle access for carers from April 2026, allowing them to manage their own training records and track their progress more easily. The Learning Academy will also work more closely with fostering and kinship teams to explore creative ways of learning such as hourly lunch and learn workshops. Work is also planned to address gaps in learning provision for kinship applicants, SGO carers and privately fostering families, with attendance at SGO support groups forming part of efforts to understand and respond to their specific training needs.

4.9 Monitoring – reviews, allegations, complaints

4.9.1 During the reporting period, there was one formal allegation made against a Brent foster carer by a child. This was promptly investigated and resulted in the foster carer being booked onto relevant training. The foster carer felt supported throughout this process and understood why the concerns had to be investigated.

The Brent fostering service holds Brent foster carers to a high standard ensuring our children receive the best care and support. Aside from the one allegation outlined above, concerns for Brent fostering families were identified by the service and during this reporting period 5 standards of care investigations have been undertaken in response to these concerns. These standards of care investigations were presented at Brent's fostering panel. 2 fostering households were deregistered. 3 fostering households were given further training and support to continue fostering with close monitoring by the department.

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 were **44** 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 The Kinship Charity has initiated a week each year in which Kinship Carers are recognised nationally; this year Kinship Care Week was 6-12 October 2025. Brent partners with The Kinship Charity to ensure Brent's Kinship Carers are celebrated and have an opportunity to get together.

Our carers attended their celebration day on 8th October 2025; we had 16 carers attend and it was a great way to celebrate with fun, food and cake.

An online survey was sent to attendees following this event, 5 attendees completed the survey. All 5 of these respondents stated they were 'very satisfied' or 'extremely satisfied' with the event. The respondents were asked how likely they were to recommend the event to other carers and all carers marked '10 (highly likely)'. The kinship carers enjoyed connecting together and have now made their own carer led and carer run support group, open to all kinship carers.

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 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 51 active referrals since Jan 2024, an increase of 11 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.

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 remain the key priority for the fostering service. 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. It is hoped, with fostering becoming more regionalised, that a consistent offer across all Local Authorities that is competitive with Independent Fostering Agencies will prevent Local Authorities competing with each other. Brent implemented a significant fostering fee uplift in 2025 however many other Local Authorities took a similar approach making Brent's offer less competitive.

Brent's First Mockingbird Constellation

7.2 Brent's first Mockingbird constellation has continued to develop strongly during this reporting period, with carers reporting high levels of support, connection and shared problem-solving. The constellation has now established a rhythm of regular activities, peer support structures and training opportunities, which have contributed to increased stability and strengthened relationships within fostering households.

Since October 2025, the constellation has held official monthly social gatherings, creating positive shared experiences for fostering families. Activities have included: Tenpin Bowling, Visit to the Upside Down House and celebrations/ gatherings at the hub home.

In addition to scheduled activities, carers also benefit from regular coffee mornings, which provide a safe and informal space to discuss challenges, share advice and offer mutual support. These sessions have been described as invaluable in helping carers feel less isolated and better equipped to respond to children's needs.

The hub home has been used effectively throughout the period, providing sleepover support, childcare during the day, assisting carers to facilitate family time (contact) arrangements, assisting carers with school runs as well as emotional support for each other. These carer led flexible support structures have strengthened placement stability and provided practical, timely assistance when families needed it most.

The constellation share learning with each other but also have asked external organisations to speak at their coffee mornings. The constellation has had bespoke training sessions delivered, including:

- Groundwork for Success in Fostering
- Prevent and Prevail
- Navigating Relationships in Fostering

- IT and digital skills training

The Mockingbird model continues to demonstrate clear impact on placement stability and carer resilience. One example during this period involved a carer who was experiencing significant strain due to increased contact commitments for their foster child. The placement was at risk of breaking down. The hub home carers stepped in, providing temporary support with contact arrangements and helping establish a sustainable longer-term plan. This intervention directly contributed to preventing a placement breakdown and stabilising the situation.

Carers have shared the following feedback during this period:

“The support from other carers has made such a difference.”

“Mockingbird feels like having an extended family.”

“The hub home has helped us feel less alone.”

New families have joined the constellation during this period and have been warmly welcomed. Hub carers have supported their induction, helping them settle in, build relationships and understand how to access the range of support available. Feedback from new carers has been positive, and they are integrating well into the community.

While the service has not yet made progress toward forming a second constellation, the recent positive government announcements regarding funding and national support for the Mockingbird programme are encouraging. Brent is awaiting further detail on how this support will be implemented practically and operationally. Once this becomes clearer, the service will be better positioned to explore sustainable expansion.

As a service we still hear some professionals say “what is Mockingbird” therefore the service held a Mockingbird Celebration event on 21st Oct 2025 to spread awareness of the Mockingbird programme. Foster carers, their families, social workers, fostering network representatives, FwWL representatives and other professionals were invited for tea, cake and sandwiches to meet the Brent Mockingbird Constellation. Attendees listened to the positive experiences from home hub carers Michael and Misgana and constellation carer Barbara.

7.3 Service Priorities for 2026-2027:

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.

- To maintain a strong focus on recruitment, assessment and approval of new foster carers, in partnership with FwWL, keeping our target 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 improve the outcomes for the children in care 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 recruit, train and retain foster carers that can offer emergency and respite 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.

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, Child in Care 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 specific financial implications with the report. The cost of implementing the various priorities of the plan will be met within existing resources. The current budget allocation for the Fostering Support and Kinship teams in Brent is £1.27m with a projected break-even position for 2025/26. In addition, a £0.4m contribution is being made to the Adopt London West Partnership in collaboration with neighbouring boroughs.

9.2 Increasing and retaining the pool of in-house foster cares is also a priority from a financial perspective as they provide a more cost-effective way of meeting the statutory obligations of the department for children in care.

10.0 Legal Considerations

10.1 Regulation 35 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 provides for a system of monitoring and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. These obligations align with the overarching duties of

local authorities under the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in care.

11.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

11.1 There are currently no Equity, 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 4.5.6 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 utilises 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