

	Corporate Parenting Committee 14 July 2026
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development
	Lead Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Employment and Climate Action - Cllr Jake Rubin
Annual Corporate Parenting Report 2025-2026	

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)	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:	None
Background Papers:	None
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Kelli Eboji Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Kelli.eboji@brent.gov.uk Palvinder Kudhail Director of Early Help and Social Care Palvinder.Kudhail@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report fulfils the Council's statutory obligation to present an annual report to the Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC) on outcomes for Children Looked After (CLA) and Care Leavers, in line with The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010). The report provides a summary of the activity alongside strengths and areas for development in supporting children in care and care leavers in Brent.
- 1.2 CLA and care leavers in Brent continue to benefit from stable leadership, an experienced and largely permanent workforce, and sustained investment in services that improve permanence, wellbeing and independence. Ofsted inspection activity confirmed that children continue to receive effective services,

supported by strong political and corporate commitment.

1.3 During 2025/26, significant progress was made and key achievements were:

- Successful implementation of Phase 1 of the Early Help and Social Care redesign, strengthening family support pathways and reducing unnecessary transfer points for children and families.
- Achievement of a stable and predominantly permanent workforce across CLA and Leaving Care services, resulting in greater continuity of relationships for children and young people.
- Expansion of the Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) offer through Family Group Conferences and the recruitment of a Lifelong Links Co-ordinator to strengthen family and community networks for children in care and care leavers.
- Significant progress in care leaver accommodation pathways and independence planning, improving preparation for adulthood and move-on arrangements.
- Positive external validation through Ofsted inspection activity, which identified effective services, stable leadership and improved workforce retention.

1.4 Whilst progress has been substantial, the following risks and challenges remain:

- Greater consistency is required in the quality and timeliness of life story work and case summaries to ensure all children have a coherent narrative of their care journey.
- Continued recruitment and retention of local foster carers is needed to maximise opportunities for children to remain close to family, school and community networks.
- Sustaining workforce stability during ongoing service transformation and delivery of Families First reforms.
- Implementing and embedding learning and improvement actions arising from recent inspection activity.

1.5 The report also sets out the priorities of the Looked After Children and Permanency service (LACP) for 2026/27. The service is well placed to build on a strong year of improvement. Workforce stability, positive inspection feedback and progress against key strategic priorities provide a solid foundation for strengthening outcomes further for children in care and care leavers. The priorities for 2026/27 will focus on embedding recent reforms, addressing remaining areas of inconsistency and ensuring that children and young people continue to receive high-quality, relationship-based support that improves their long-term outcomes.

1.6 In this reporting period, Ofsted carried out a Focused Visit on the 18 and 19 November 2025. The focus of the inspection was the Local Authority's arrangements for, and experience of children in care, specifically in relation to assessment, planning and decision-making. A report on this inspection activity was presented to CPC on the 2 February 2026.

1.7 In addition, although just outside this reporting period, an ILACS inspection took place in April 2026. A report on this inspection activity will be presented to CPC alongside this report.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 It is recommended that the CPC review and comment on the contents of this report. This ensures the CPC is fulfilling its responsibility to monitor and scrutinise the activity of Brent's Children, Young People and Community Development (CYPCD) service over the past year, thus ensuring that adequate care and support are being provided to Brent's care experienced children and young people.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

This report sets out the management of the local authority's Corporate Parenting service and the developments that have taken place in the 2024/25 reporting period. The work of the LACP service contributes to the following borough priorities:

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

4.0 Corporate Parenting

- 4.1 The concept of Corporate Parenting was introduced by The Children Act 2004, which placed collective responsibility on local authorities and their partners to achieve good outcomes for all children in, and those leaving, public care. The term 'Corporate Parent' defines the collective responsibility of elected members, employees and partner agencies to provide the best possible care for Brent's care experienced young people.

- 4.2 The notion of being a 'corporate parent' was strengthened further by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which highlighted the following seven principles of being a corporate parent. These are:

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being of those children and young people;
- to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
- to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

- 4.3 Elected members in Brent carry out their corporate parenting duty as follows:

- The CPC, chaired by the Lead Member for Children's Services, Education and Employment, with cross party Member representation, scrutinises service performance. This occurs on a quarterly basis.

- By ensuring the attendance and engagement of BCJ Empire representatives at the CPC.
- Weekly liaison meetings between the Lead Member for Children's Services, Education and Employment, the Corporate Director CYPED and other senior staff within the Local Authority as appropriate.
- By ensuring Brent's 'promises' to children in care and care leavers are adhered to and in line with our Practice Promises, Pledge to children and young people in care, Care Leavers' Charter and Local Offer.
- By attending Member Learning and Development sessions on Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting.

4.4 Members of BCJ Empire continued to attend the CPC throughout 2025/26 to provide updates on their recent activity and engage Members in discussions about issues pertinent to them. These updates were noted and supported by the Committee. The CPC in 2025/26 scrutinised reports on various issues affecting Brent care experienced children and young people including the following:

- a. In April 2025, the CPC was presented with a report on learning from the transition from BCJ to BCJ Empire facilitated by BCJ members with the support of Participation Officers. The CPC were also presented with an annual report from Brent Virtual School, and six-monthly reports from the Fostering Service and Adoption London West separately on fostering and adoption activity.
- b. In July 2025, the CPC was presented with the Annual Corporate Parenting report for 2024/25, Annual LAC Health report 2024/25, and the Annual IRO report for 2024/25.
- c. In October 2025, BCJ Empire members delivered a presentation on a co-produced Bright Spots Action Plan. Reports were provided on the London Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers, and both six-monthly monitoring reports for Fostering and Adoption.
- d. In the February 2026 meeting, the Committee was presented with a progress report in respect to the new Brent Residential Children's Home, a report on the Ofsted ILACS Focused Visit, and a report on the updated Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2025-2029.

5.0 Profile of Looked After Children

5.1 At the 31 March 2026 Brent had 295 CLA compared to 297 children on 31 March 2025, a decrease of 0.7%. This represented 39.3 children per 10,000 child population against the rate for England of 67 per 10,000 head of child population. In 2025/26, 152 children became looked after compared to 138 children last year and, compared to an average of 148 per year over the previous four years.

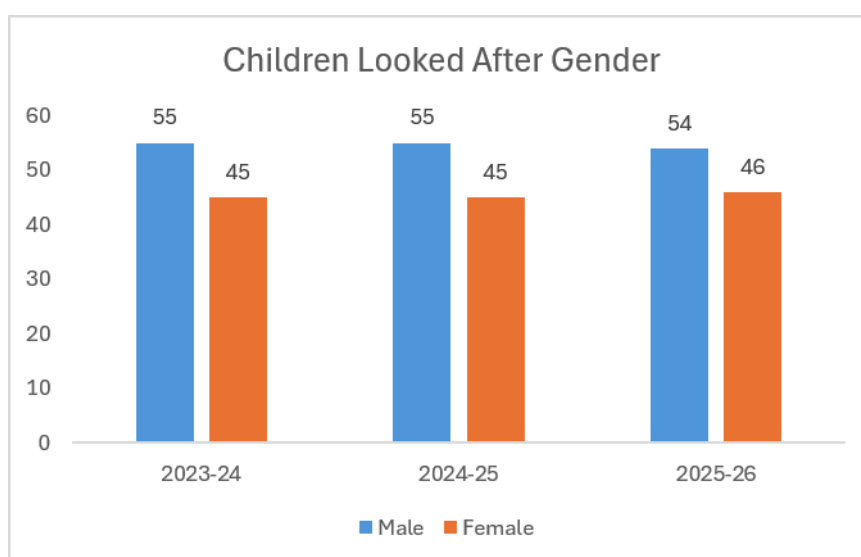
The reduction in the number of CLA is likely to reflect a combination of strengthened entry to care oversight and gatekeeping processes, alongside an increased use of pre-proceedings to support children safely remaining within their families where appropriate.

On 31 March 2026, the Local Authority looked after 30 UASC compared to 31 UASC in March 2025. This represented 10% of the total Brent CLA population. It appears

that Brent's UASC numbers have stabilised with no significant change in numbers since 2023/24.

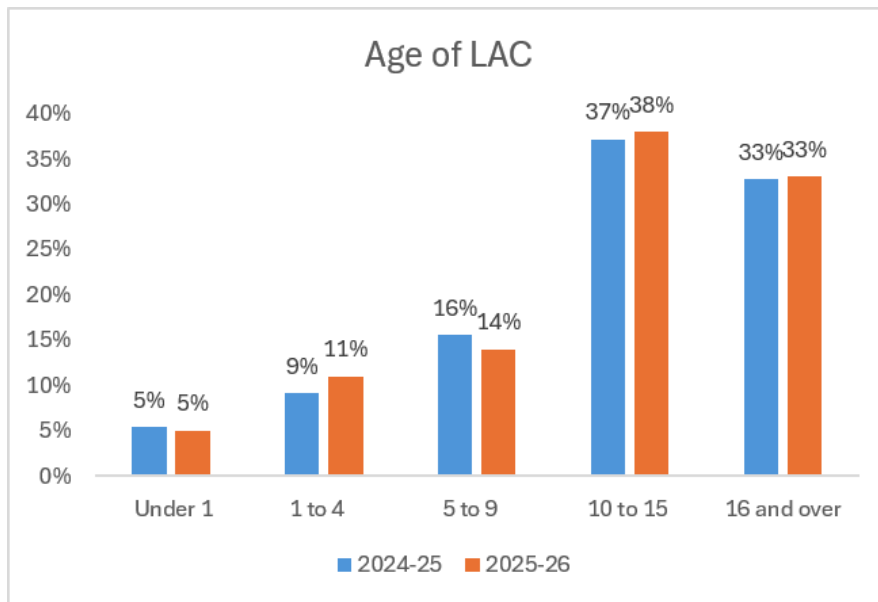
On the 31 March 2026, there were 21 CLA and 28 care leavers allocated within the Disabled Children and Young People's 0-25 Team.

- 5.2 Of the 295 CLA on 31/03/26, 43 children had a previous looked after period. This represents 14.6% of the CLA cohort.
- 5.3 The gender of the CLA population consists of 54% male and 46% female; with the gender split narrowing slightly.



- 5.4 At the 31 March 2026, 32.5% of the care population in Brent was aged 16 and over, compared to 33 % at the end of March 2025. In addition, 70.5% of the care population was aged 10 and over. A predominantly adolescent care population presents a number of challenges, particularly in relation to outcomes such as placement stability, education, employment, and training. Many young people present with emotional and behavioural difficulties, as well as complex needs that foster carers may not always feel equipped to manage. Furthermore, there continues to be a national shortfall of foster carers with the specialist skills required to support teenagers.

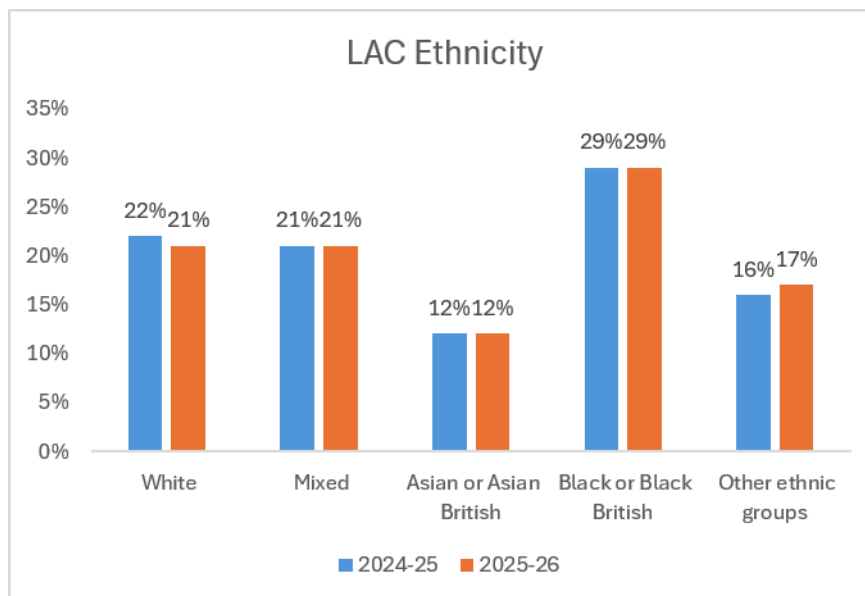
Whilst the number of children in care in Brent remains lower than that of our statistical neighbours, the children entering care are more likely to be older and to have entered the system at a later stage, increasing the likelihood of placement instability. Notwithstanding these challenges, placement stability in Brent has improved during this reporting period.



5.5 Ethnicity of CLA

- 5.5.1 The ethnicity¹ of CLA broadly remained the same compared to the previous year with a 1% decrease in the “White” demographic and a 1% increase in our “Other” demographic.

17% of our children in care were from ‘other’ ethnic groups. The greatest proportion of ethnicities noted within this group includes children and young people from Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq.

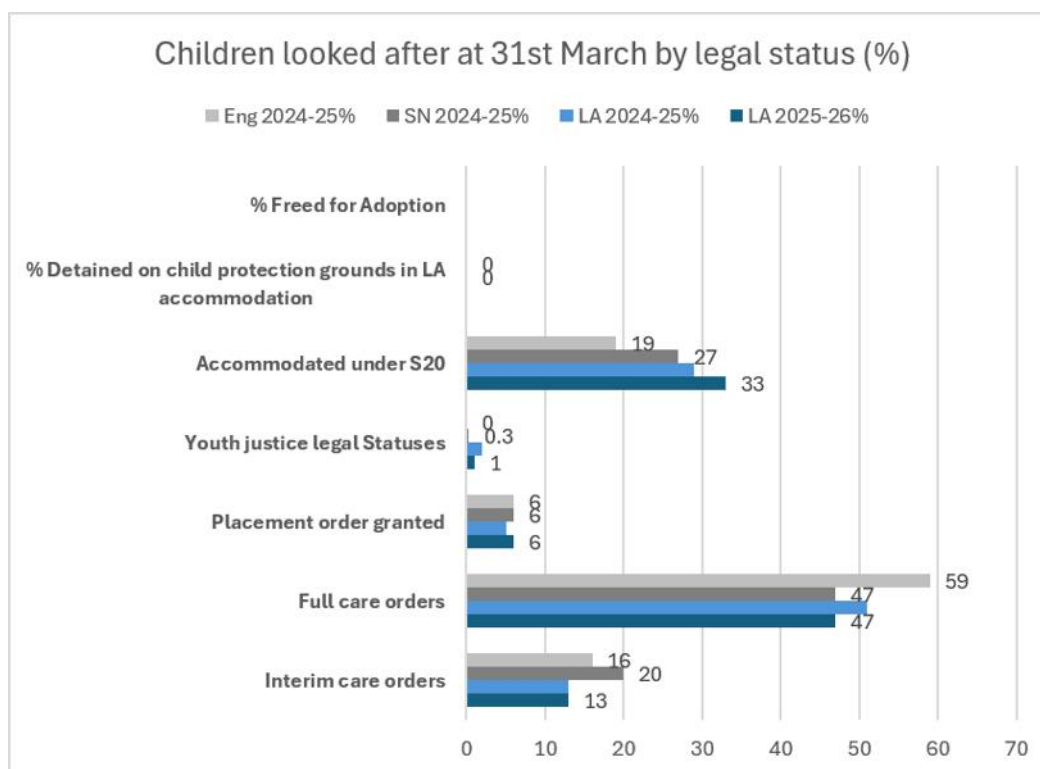


5.6 Legal status and placement location

1. [Children looked after return 2025 to 2026: guide - GOV.UK](#)

- 5.6.1 The majority of children in care were subject to Care Orders (both Interim and Full Care Orders) under the Children Act 1989, representing 60% of the care population. A further 96 children (33%) were looked after under voluntary arrangements with carers, pursuant to Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. All unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) are accommodated under Section 20 arrangements.

In this reporting period, 16 young people aged 16/17 present as homeless to the local authority. Of these 16, 9 became “looked after”.



- 5.6.2 As of 31 March 2026, 20% of children were placed more than 20 miles from their home address, representing an increase of 2% compared to the previous year (18%). The national average is 17%.
- 5.6.3 Brent aims to place children closer to their families and local support networks. However, in many cases where children enter care in adolescence, young people may need to be placed out of borough for their own safety. Placement sufficiency issues in London are also evident as it is challenging to identify local placements for adolescents with highly complex needs. Brent's current Sufficiency Strategy identifies this issue as a local and regional issue, including measures to work in partnership with internal and external partners to broaden placement options for looked after children.
- 5.6.4 Most children were placed in foster care (180), representing 61% of all children in care, an increase of 2% from 2024-25.
- 5.6.5 The Local Authority operates an in-house fostering service which, as at the end of March 2026, was supporting 49 children in mainstream fostering placements, representing an increase of two children compared to March 2025.

Brent maintains a strong commitment to supporting family members and friends to become kinship foster carers, with the aim of enabling children to remain within their wider support networks and reducing the need for mainstream or alternative placements. As at the end of March 2026, 42 children were supported in kinship fostering (connected persons) arrangements.

6.0 Placement Stability

6.1 Number of Brent fostering households and approved fostering places (mainstream and kinship) on 31 March 2026 (and trend):

Collection year	Number of households	Number of places
2021	100	153
2022	98	142
2023	101	145
2024	103	145
2025	88	128
2026	95	132

6.2 Recruitment and retention of Brent foster carers remained a priority during 2025/26, with a significant amount of work being done in this reporting period with our neighbouring local authorities to share best practice and work together to drive fostering recruitment and retention in West London. There were 3 new mainstream fostering households approved in 2025/26. This was a net increase of 0, against the ambitious target of 10 for the year, due to 1 mainstream fostering household resigning and 2 mainstream fostering households being deregistered in the same period (due to safeguarding concerns). This was compared to a net increase of 6 mainstream foster carers in the previous year (2024/25).

This reporting year saw an increase in the number of fostering households, from 88(2024/25) to 95 (2025/26) which is attributed to kinship fostering households approved during the period. Aside from the resignations and deregistrations mentioned above, placement endings come about due to a number of reasons, including young people turning 18, rehabilitation to parents. In this reporting period 4 Kinship foster carers were granted Special Guardianship Orders (SGO).

6.3 In February 2026 the Local Authority was notified by the Department for Education that Brent, and 7 other neighbouring West London local authorities (Ealing, Harrow, Hounslow, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster and Hillingdon), that are currently in the West London Fostering Hub were asked to expand the current Fostering Hub to be an end-to-end model. The aim of this expansion is to improve recruitment and retention of foster carers by working together as a region.

Since February 2026 the Local Authority have been working closely with the Fostering Hub (Foster with West London) to plan the expansion by attending workshops, planning forums and other design mediums. The aim is for the new model to go live on 30th September 2026. After this date the current Brent fostering assessment and support team will move to a fostering support only team. All fostering enquiries and assessments will move to Foster with West London (FwWL); the aim is to have a

regional strengthened response to fostering recruitment to meet the DfE's ambitious aim of having 10,000 new fostering places across England. A report will be taken to Cabinet in July 2026 on this issue.

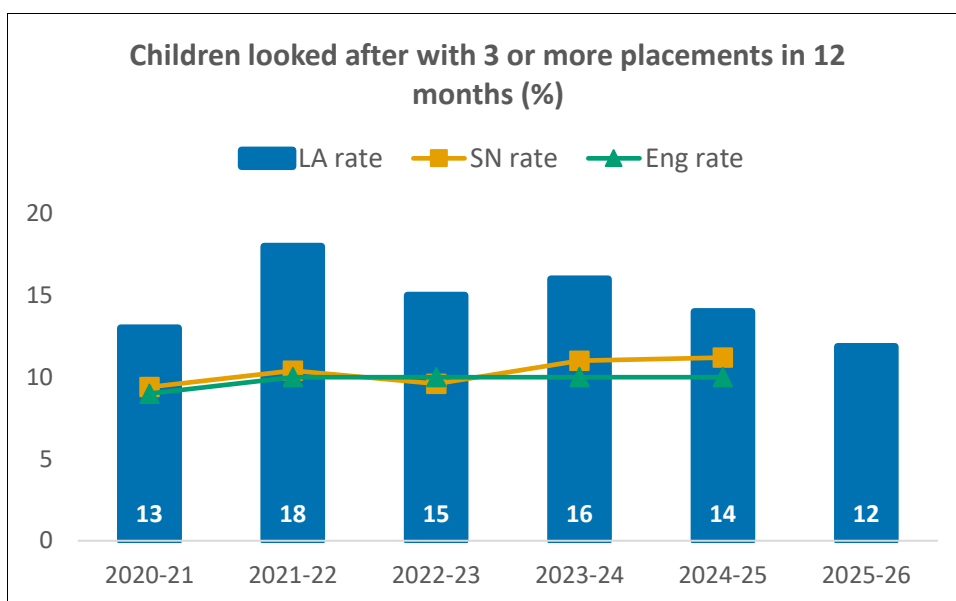
In this reporting period Brent launched its first Mockingbird constellation. The Mockingbird programme is an innovative method of delivering foster care using an extended family model where mockingbird hub carers are specially trained to offer sleepovers, peer support, emergency support, joint planning and social activities to fostering homes. Mockingbird supports children and foster carers by creating extended communities of support around the child and their fostering family.

The Brent Mockingbird Hub Carers have been appointed, they have received their training, and the project went live in May 2025. The Department for Education were pleased with Brent's progress and agreed the continued funding for Mockingbird for 2025/26. The DfE have confirmed that they are making funding available to support the continued rollout of Mockingbird constellations during 2026/27, only if a local authority is within a fostering hub. Brent plans to launch a second constellation in 2026/27.

There has already been great feedback from the Brent foster carers involved in the constellation regarding the support they receive from the project. Impact measures for this project are related to increasing placement stability for children, reduction in the use of residential care, increased foster carer satisfaction and retention for those in the constellation. In Brent we have already seen improved placement stability for the carers in the Mockingbird constellation; one foster carer reported '*I would have left fostering if I did not have this support in place*'.

- 6.4 Placement stability for children who have had 3 or more placements in a year has improved. Brent's data for 3 or more placement moves decreased by 2.1% from 14% in 2024/2025 to 11.9% in 2025/2026. The work being done to stabilise placements via Placement Stability meetings and the Children in Care Resilience Service (CRS, previously LRS) support have contributed to this improvement, please see more detail below.

The London Q4 data for looked after children who have experienced 3+ placements was 10.2% compared to Brent's 10.1%. Placement stability performance remains relatively high when considering the London data, however this is directly related to Brent's smaller care population and larger proportion of adolescents in care.



6.5 Achieving stability and consistency for children in care continues to be a priority together with creating opportunities for children to develop secure attachments and providing a sense of security and identity. Placement instability not only reduces children's chances to form warm and enduring relationships but also exacerbates behavioural and emotional difficulties which contribute to further placement breakdown and rejection.

6.6 Where placements are at risk of breaking down a stability meeting will be convened, attended by key professionals and where appropriate the child or young person placed. If the child or young person is not able or willing to attend the meeting, the child's social worker ensures that their views, wishes and feelings are gathered and shared with the participants. The placements concerned have included in-house foster placements, Independent Fostering Agencies, residential placements, including residential schools as well as semi-independent (supported accommodation) units. In this reporting year, placement stability meetings have been chaired by the allocated Team Manager for the social work team allocated for the child. Following our Early Help and Social Care redesign in June 2025, children in care now sit within the Child Protection and Court Teams, the 0-25 Children with Disabilities Teams as well as the Care Planning Teams. Advice and guidance for stability meetings can be sought from the LACP service as well as our commissioned service CRS.

The focus of these stability meetings is understanding the holistic needs of the child or young person, the carers' strengths as well as identifying and agreeing the right support package that would ensure placement stability. These meetings are an opportunity to reflect on what has worked well in the past, which helps inform the plan. Whilst these meetings can be challenging for young people at times, the feedback received from children, young people and carers is that they feel heard and supported. These meetings have meant that issues have been able to be resolved, children have avoided experiencing a placement breakdown (and move) and the child has learnt how to resolve issues in relationships in future should issues arise. Investing time and resources in these meetings when placements are fragile has meant better outcomes for children overall.

6.7 The children and young people who are most in need of support and intervention

are the children with additional needs and mental health difficulties, followed by those who have been affected by contextual safeguarding issues, or are at risk of gang involvement and have a history of going missing from placements.

- 6.8 CRS was launched in January 2024, and it offers a three-tier support offer:
- Tier 1: a universal training offer (co-designed with carers and young people) focusing on skills, resilience, and confidence to reduce placement breakdowns.
 - Tier 2: direct intervention and support to the carer; engagement in network meetings and development of a crisis response plan.
 - Tier 3: provides Tier 2 support plus intensive goal directed support for both the carer and young person; behaviour assessment and support plans and more direct staff time allocated to the carer and young person.

34 foster carers were offered training, including all of the carers in the Mockingbird constellation.

In this reporting period CRS received 29 referrals. Children referred were between 4-17 years old, evenly split by gender, and covered a range of placement types including Brent foster care (mainstream and kinship), IFAs, and residential homes. Reasons for referrals were split equally between “risk of placement breakdown” and “behaviours of concern”, with 6 children on a suicide prevention pathway and 21 children receiving the intensive support on Tier 3.

Positively, 89% of children referred to CRS sustained their placement or moved in a planned way as part of their care plan. Of all the children and young people closed to CRS in this reporting period, all reduced their risk scores, increased their goal scores and sustained their placement or moved in a planned way.

- 6.9 CRS estimate that they have saved Brent around £2.8mil by avoiding children moving from Brent foster care to IFA placements, and children moving from IFA placements to residential care. Not only is this a significant saving, but research also tells us that outcomes for children are better if they have fewer placements and more support.

7.0 Permanency Planning

- 7.1 Permanency planning remains a key priority within care planning, as it focuses on ensuring that children who become looked after are provided with stability, security, and a sense of belonging as quickly as possible. The core objective is to ensure that every child has a safe, stable, and loving home environment, where they can build secure attachments and receive consistent care that supports their emotional, physical, and developmental needs into adulthood.
- 7.2 When working towards permanency for a child, the approach is to ensure that social workers develop parallel care plans, so that a safe and stable long-term option can be secured for the child as quickly as possible. This helps to reduce delays and provides clarity about the child’s future. Permanency outcomes can include a return to the care of the child’s parent or parents where it is safe to do so, a long-term placement with extended family members or friends (kinship care), or alternative arrangements such as long-term fostering or adoption outside of the child’s immediate network.

- 7.3 In the April 2026 ILACs, Ofsted inspectors commented that permanency planning for Brent CiC was embedded, and permanency was being achieved for children without delay. The continued ambition is to see Brent children and young people settled in long term, permanent homes in a timely manner.

In the previous reporting year, there has been a continued emphasis on securing permanency for children. The monthly permanency panels, chaired by a senior manager, has remained a key part of this approach. The purpose of the panels is to review progress, identify any delays or gaps in planning, and determine the necessary actions to move cases forward. The panel is organised by age group, separating older and younger children. For younger children, a representative from Adopt London West (ALW) attends to provide updates and insights on family-finding efforts and adoption planning, helping to support timely and appropriate permanency outcomes. For the older children, the focus is on securing permanency with their current foster carer or working towards returning them home, if they have been on a Permanency with Parents (PWP) arrangement.

- 7.4 Between 01/04/2025 and 31/03/2026, 6 children were adopted and 5 children left care through the making of Special Guardianship Orders.

- 7.5 At the 31/3/2026:

- 18 children were subject of Placement order
- 10 children with a Placement order waiting to be matched
- 8 children with a placement order who were matched and placed for adoption.

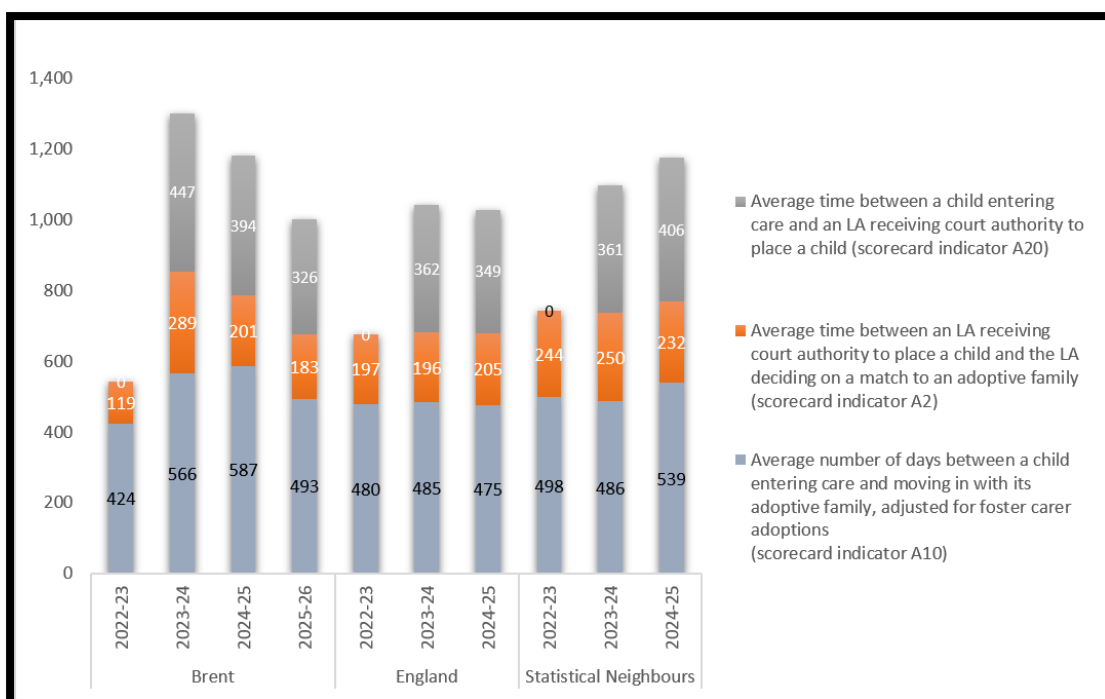
3 of the children placed this year have been placed in Early Permanence placements, allowing the children to move earlier and begin building attachments to their new families sooner.

- 7.6 The non-published data at the end of March 2026 compared to the published national and statistical neighbour averages demonstrates that adoption timeliness remains above statistical neighbour averages.

Brent's 3-year performance for 2023-26 is:

- **A1** (The average time taken for a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 554 days (3-year average) (493 in the last 12 months) compared with 503 days in 2024-25.
- **A2** (The average time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 212 days (3-year average) (183 in the last 12 months) compared with 180 days in 2024-25
- **A20** (The average time between a child entering care and the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child): 383 days (3-year average) (326 days in the last 12 months).

The below graph provides a comparison across Brent, England and statistical neighbours performance in relation to the A1, A2, and A20 indicators for each year. This demonstrates a comparative and improving performance picture for adoption timeliness for Brent children.



Variations in performance within this small group of children can arise from a number of factors. In some cases, delays affecting a single child such as prolonged and complex care proceedings can significantly impact overall outcomes. Additionally, a child's specific needs may limit the availability of suitable adoptive families, meaning that the family-finding process can take longer than anticipated. These factors can, in turn, influence the average timescales for all children being placed.

7.7 Adopt London West (ALW)

Adopt London West (ALW) was established in October 2019 and continues to provide adoption and special guardianship support services on behalf of Brent. Adopt London West is hosted by Ealing and works closely with the other three regional adoption agencies within the Adopt London group, together this partnership offers services to 24 London boroughs, there are a number of shared projects across the Adopt London partnership, including nationally funded projects to improve practice in family finding, matching and early permanence.

ALW continues to work closely with staff in Brent CYPCD once permanence for a child is first discussed. ALW ensures that adoption plans, and associated family finding are progressed quickly, and a robust approval and matching process is in place for children. Family finding for Brent children has continued to be a priority with ALW involved in monthly permanency tracking and leading on permanency planning meetings for children who have a care plan of adoption.

Case Study – Adoption Family Finding

Child N was born to his birth mother, who was in the UK on a student visa studying at university. On Child N's birth, his parents signed section 20 for Child N to be accommodated, as they stated that they wanted him to be adopted.

Birth parents shared that they are from different castes, and their family would not be accepting of each other and would never agree for the relationship to continue. Birth mother was worried that she would be disowned and was quite clear with her wish for Child N to be adopted, however N's birth father was more ambivalent about adoption, feeling that things may change in future.

A family finder from ALW was allocated and family finding commenced, with Child N's profile being circulated within ALW initially and then broadened to a nationwide search to find the right family for Child N.

Birth parents were provided counselling via ALW and a Children's Guardian was appointed from CAFCASS to take forward the adoption by consent process.

After receiving counselling and support from social workers and meeting with CAFCASS several times, both parents made the decision that it would be in their sons' best interest to be adopted.

Child N was placed with Early Permanence Foster Carers (approved adopters who are temporarily approved as foster carers) The plan moving forward is for Child N to be matched with his prospective adopters at the Adoption Panel and then for the adopters to make an adoption application to court, where Child N will be formally adopted.

8.0 Care Proceedings

- 8.1 The number of care proceedings initiated by Brent increased with 45 care applications being issued in 2025/26 compared to 41 care applications in 2024/25. There were 67 children on Brent's care applications in 2025/26 compared to 51 children the previous year.

At the 31 March 2026 Brent had the largest number of open cases in the West London Family Court of the 7 West London local authorities.

Nationally, between April 2025 and March 2026 CAFCASS worked on 16,195 (for 25,801 children) new public law cases which is an increase of 0.7% compared to the previous year (117 more children's cases, but 151 fewer children on new cases).

- 8.2 In 2025/26, 77 children's cases concluded, compared to 89 in the previous year, with the following outcomes:
- 19 Full Care Orders
 - 8 Full Care Order and Placement Order
 - 3 Child Arrangement Orders and Supervision Orders
 - 1 Family Assistance Order
 - 16 No Order
 - 5 SGOs
 - 25 Supervision Orders
- 8.3 The timeliness of concluded care proceedings in 2025/26 is 45 weeks, compared to 66 weeks in 2024/25.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Brent Internal Data	39.5 weeks	43 weeks	55 weeks	56 weeks	66 weeks	45 weeks
National Average (CAFCASS data)	41 weeks	45 weeks	45 weeks	44 weeks	40 weeks	TBC

- 8.4 Brent's five longest running cases were reviewed at the end of the reporting period, with the longest running case at approximately 70 weeks. The delay in this case has been because of parental immigration matters and international elements and assessments.

Care proceedings delay in Brent, like many other local authorities, are influenced by a combination of factors including increased complexity of cases, court capacity issues, and challenges in securing suitable placements for children. Specifically, factors like international issues, parental non-engagement, assessment delays, additional assessments, court availability, fact-finding, and criminal matters within care cases can significantly extend the timeline. Additionally, a lack of sufficient foster placements, particularly for older children and teenagers, can lead to delays in finding appropriate homes and contribute to placement instability which can also contribute to delay in care proceedings.

- 8.5 In Brent, we continue to place high importance on the timeliness of care proceedings, in line with the Government's statutory timescale for care proceedings which is 26 weeks (approximately 6 months) from the date the application is issued in court. This timeline was introduced in the Children and Families Act 2014 to reduce delays and ensure timely decisions for children's welfare.

- 8.6 Timeliness is monitored through a 'Care Proceedings Tracking meeting', chaired during this reporting period by the Service Manager/Head of Service with lead responsibility for court proceedings and senior lawyers of the Local Authority. The focus of these tracking meetings is to provide challenge and guidance on cases and to identify specific legal challenges or drift. This panel has provided an opportunity for discussions with lawyers, who are able to give advice in relation to moving the case forward. Practitioners have continued to share how useful they find this forum, as it provides a space to speak directly with senior managers and senior lawyers and tease out any complex issues and identify any learning.

As a result of the 2025 Early Help and Social Care redesign care proceedings work has moved from the Care Planning teams to the new Child Protection and Court Teams. This means that children and their families will experience continuity of social worker throughout child protection, pre-proceedings, and court proceedings work. Cases will transfer to Care Planning at the conclusion of proceedings when Full Care Orders are granted. Early indications of this change have been positive, with timeliness improvements(above).

Case Study – Care Proceedings

Child J has been known to Brent Social Care on and off, due to her mother's chaotic lifestyle and poor parenting. Child J had no contact with her father for a significant period, and he was absent from her life. The most recent referral was in relation to concerns that Child J was "out of parental control" and at risk of sexual and criminal exploitation.

Following threats to Child J's life, the local authority issued care proceedings, applying for an ICO, which was granted. Child J's father did not engage in the proceedings. Exploration of Child J's extended family members was prioritised, however following assessments there were no available or suitable long term care options within her network.

Unfortunately, during care proceedings, Child J's mother initially refused to engage in any of the assessments directed, which significantly impacted on the court timescales. Towards the latter part of the proceedings she agreed to engage however then failed to make herself available. Despite mother's vocal wishes to resume care of her daughter, her refusal to engage with experts and assessors resulted in the court granting a full Care Order to the local authority for Child J.

Child J was later placed in a residential unit outside of London, due to the presenting safety risks where she remains.

The long-term care plan for Child J is to step down from residential care to a supportive and well-matched foster family, where she can remain for her minority.

9.0 Participation of children and young people in care and care leavers

9.1 CLA and care leavers had their voices reflected in various ways during 2025/26, starting with direct work at the assessment stage, continuing through regular visits via longer term intervention and then also as part of the IROs overseeing the progression of their care plans. CLA also have access to Coram Voice advocacy that enables them to have independent support in expressing their views. IROs are often a continuing person of trust for many CLA, who might have several social workers involved in their lives.

9.2 Young people have their voices heard in the design and delivery of services and within council decision-making processes through the BCJ Empire programme, led by the participation team. BCJ Empire is the programme for Brent's Children in Care Council (previously called 'Care in Action'), providing space and opportunities for different groups to meet in a safe environment to take part in participation activities throughout the year and engage in trips and events in school holidays.

9.3 BCJ Empire is run by the participation team, comprising a Participation and Engagement Manager (0.4 FTE), a Participation and Engagement Officer (0.8 FTE) and two Participation Support Officers (0.3 FTE). In 2026/27, three sessional participation worker roles will be added to the team, with the roles aimed at care experienced individuals to offer opportunities for care leavers to become formally employed in the Council. The participation team are developing a comprehensive training package for sessional workers.

9.4 BCJ Empire projects and events in 2025/26

- 9.4.1 We provided fun spaces for young people to connect and build positive relationships during the holidays. In May 2025 half term, young people aged 7-17 took part in a mini golf activity at Box Park. In October 2025 half term, young people aged 7-17 attended a Halloween party in the base in the civic centre. This included fun Halloween themed games and was supported by young people from the care leavers group. In November 2025, young people aged 7-17 attended an end of year party. They took part in fun games, shared food and were joined by the Mayor of Brent who answered their questions about his role.
- 9.4.2 The participation team formed a new partnership with arts charity Create Arts in 2024 which continued into May 2025 to deliver an arts programme for young people in BCJ Empire. The programme included four projects: two with care leavers (ceramics and music) and two with young people aged 11-17 (visual arts and drama). The ceramics project ran in November 2024 for 6 weeks and the visual arts project ran for 3 days in February 2025 half term and were reported on in the last annual report.
- 9.4.3 The drama project ran for three days in the easter holidays and the music project ran for 6 weeks in April 2025. Young people really enjoyed being creative and having a social and creative space to chat to each other. Young people involved in the music project enjoyed being able to work with a professional musician and have access to music production software and instruments. The group wrote, produced and recorded their own song about their experiences of being a care leaver which was really powerful and has since been used in presentations.
- 9.4.4 We hosted a summer fun day in August at the Unity Centre in Harlesden for children in care, care leavers, foster carers and staff with over 60 people attending. There were a lot of indoors and outdoors activities for all ages, including a bouncy castle, ball pit, arts activities, pool table, quiz and a DJ. Attendees shared positive feedback of the event:



- 9.4.5 In summer 2025, 11 care leavers attended Stubbers Adventure Centre for a two-night residential. The aim of the residential was for care leavers to get to know each other and begin a co-design project to rebrand BCJ Empire. The trip involved fun activities, workshops, and discussions. They took part in activities such as high ropes, kayaking and laser tag.
- 9.4.6 In summer 2025, seven young people from the 11-17 group attended a one night residential at Gordon Brown Centre. They took part in activities such as climbing, laser tag and spending time with the animals. The group also took part in a co-design session to share their ideas on rebranding BCJ Empire and an activity linked to Bright

Spots about trusted adults to share their views on the skills and qualities a social worker and foster carer should have.



9.4.7 In September 2025, 12 care leavers took part in a workshop with Ikea to design care crates for young people leaving care. The group worked with Ikea staff to put together the ideal crate with all the equipment and furnishings they felt were important for young people to create their own homes. This included kitchen equipment, bedding, storage units and plants.

9.4.8 In December 2025, care leavers attended an end of year dinner in Wembley. They shared their reflections on the year and chatted with the Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Community Development who attended to meet the group. These trips ran alongside other projects in the BCJ Empire programme including co-design workshops, arts programmes and a range of participation opportunities.

9.5 Young people's participation in decision-making and service design

- 9.5.1 Young people have led a co-design project to rebrand BCJ Empire which has involved sessions with both groups since summer 2025 and ending with a launch event in April 2026 (which will be reported on in the next annual report). This involved 21 sessions with care leavers, three sessions with the 11-17 group, group catch up calls, weekly group updates, one-to-one support and home tasks, research and prep. The group led a consultation with their peers on branding and logos and used this to design and test several different logos. They presented their work at Corporate Parenting Committee and took on board feedback from Councillors and officers. Through the co-design project, young people developed confidence and skills in decision-making, consultations, leadership and design.



- 9.5.2 Participation has been embedded in the Corporate Parenting Committee since the space was re-designed by young people and councillors in 2024/25. Young people now have a dedicated slot to set the agenda for a discussion topic, and they feel more comfortable in the re-designed space to share their views and work with the committee members. Young people have attended every committee meeting and have shared updates on their activities and discussed issues related to the agenda papers. Young people look forward to attending the committee and have developed their understanding of local democratic structures and decision-making processes.
- 9.5.3 Young people from BCJ Empire and BYP have spoken at staff conferences to hundreds of members of staff about their experiences of participation. Young people developed their confidence in public speaking, and their participation was praised by staff members:

“There are some very impressive young people striving to make difference for the youth of Brent”

“Leadership comes in different forms and the great opportunity for young people to support each other care experienced young people.”

- 9.5.4 Care leavers have been involved in several interview panels to recruit staff for roles in the new children’s home and three Heads of Service roles. On all panels, young people have joined senior staff to ask interview questions and share their views in recruitment discussions.

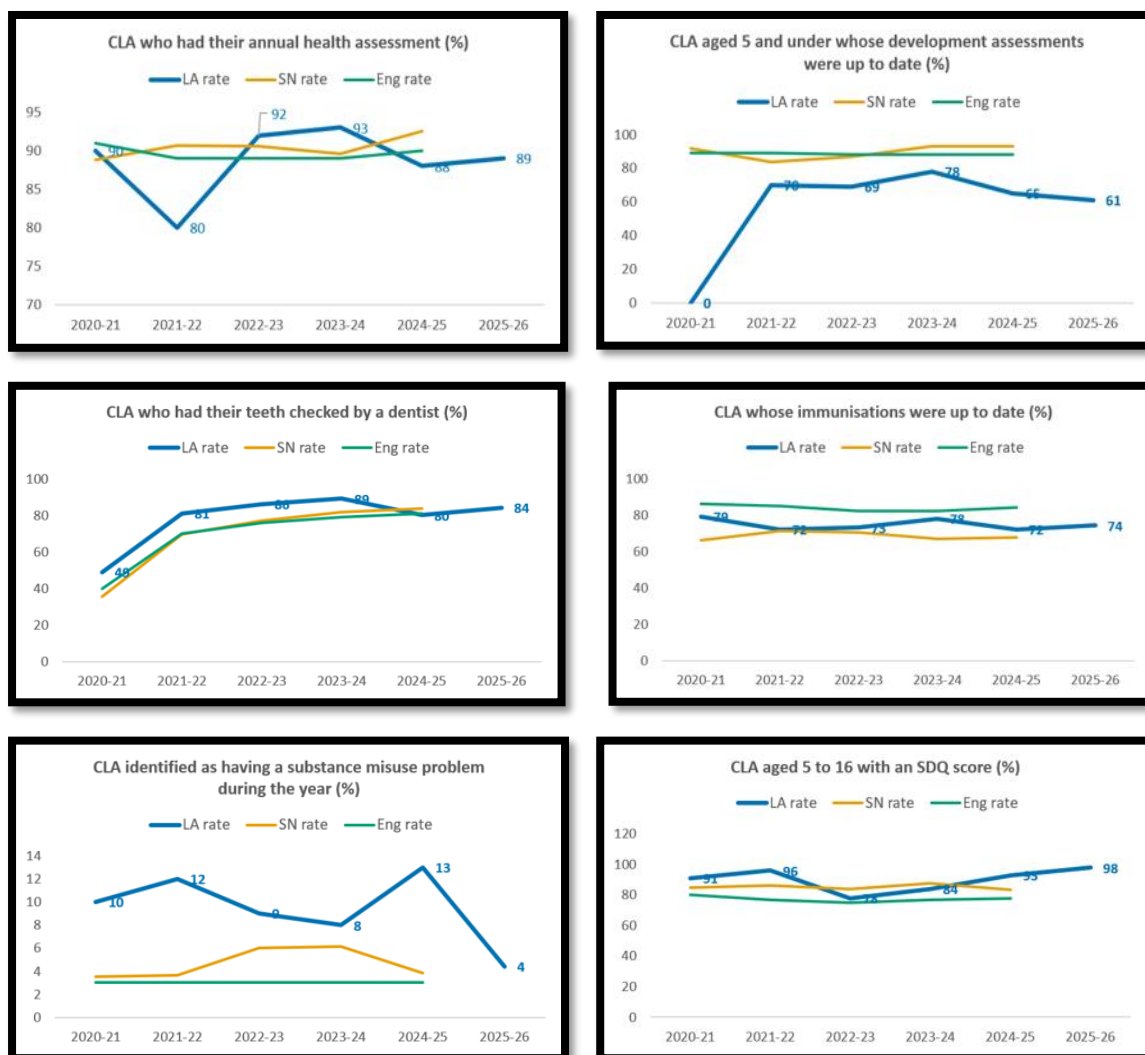
- 9.5.5 Representatives from BCJ Empire care leavers group wrote the Forward to the Looked After Children and Care Leaver's Strategy 2025-2027, in collaboration with the Head of LACP Service.
- 9.5.6 Young people in the 11-17 group took part in the Ofsted focused visit in November 2025 as BCJ Empire ambassadors. They represented their peers in meetings with Ofsted Inspectors to share their views about their time in care.
- 9.5.7 Young people in the 11-17 group refreshed the Brent Pledge at the end of 2025. They shared feedback on the design and ideas for how it could be improved. The refreshed pledge was presented to Corporate Parenting Committee in April 2026.
- 9.5.8 Young people from BCJ Empire helped participation staff write a funding application for the Amplified By Care Experience project ran by Coram Voice. The project will identify strong youth-led initiatives created by children in care councils, care experienced groups and local authorities and support them to grow. The aim is to take the best local ideas and help them reach more care-experienced young people across England. The BCJ Empire application focused on youth voice and leadership to show how care experienced young people can be more involved in decision-making in local authorities. In April 2026, BCJ Empire was shortlisted for the project and young people presented at a national event in Birmingham in May 2026 (this will be reported on in the next annual report). The outcome is expected in June 2026.
- 9.5.9 Six care experienced young people continued to be employed as Care Quality Ambassadors (CQAs), one of whom also attend the Corporate Parenting Panel. Care Quality Ambassadors continue to be encouraged to attend quality assurance visits and positively impact on the lives of other children and young people. On these visits they speak to the children and young people living in the placement to hear directly from them, and they provide their own report at the end of a quality assurance visit.
- 9.5.10 In the 2025 /2026 financial year, Care Quality Ambassadors participated in 16 quality assurance visits out of a total of 32 undertaken by the Commissioning Resource Team, which was 50% of all quality assurance activity undertaken. Quality assurance visits have been undertaken to children's residential home providers and supported accommodation providers. This approach will continue for the 2026/2027 financial year.
- 9.6 Participation priorities for 2026/27 include; launching the rebranded BCJ Empire; recruiting and training care experienced sessional participation workers; involving more children in care and care leavers in participation opportunities; exploring opportunities for external funding with national charities.

10.0 Health of Looked After Children

- 10.1 Local Authorities, in their role as Corporate Parents, have a responsibility to ensure that children in care receive appropriate and timely health support. This includes regular health assessments every six months for children under five, and annually for those aged five and above, alongside routine dental check-ups and up-to-date immunisations. Statutory health performance data is reported specifically for children

who have been in care for a continuous period of 12 months or more, to monitor and ensure their health needs are being effectively met.

- 10.2 Unpublished data shows that there has been an upward trend in performance during this reporting period across the spectrum of health-related measures compared to the last reporting year, apart from 6-monthly health assessments for under 5s.



- 10.3 The completion of six-monthly health assessments for under 5s will continue to be a priority for the coming months. Quality assurance work is underway currently to understand the reasons for declining performance in this area and to identify the actions required to improve performance. This information will be shared with health partners and will feed into the quality assurance work being led by health that has informed joint action planning to date. For more detailed information refer to the CLA Health Service Annual Report 2025/26.
- 10.4 The Health and Wellbeing subgroup of the Local Partnership group meets every other month and includes representatives from children's Social Care, the health provider team, ICB, CLCH, Public Health, and community organisations. This subgroup, accountable to the Local Partnership group for CLA and care leavers, is also

responsible for quality assurance in relation to timeliness and quality of health services to CLA. Where there are areas of underperformance, these are addressed by partners within the subgroup, in the first instance. Persistent areas of underperformance are escalated to the Head of Clinical Services for Brent children (CLCH) and the Head of Service for LACP.

- 10.5 In line with our priorities for 2025/26, there was continued focus on providing support regarding emotional wellbeing of looked after children and care leavers in this reporting period.
- 10.6 The Wellbeing and Emotional Support Team (WEST) continued to provide a wide targeted service for identified vulnerable groups, including children in care and children with a disability, until January 2026. The service provided support, clinical advice and training for professionals working with children and young people and a range of evidence-based interventions working directly with children, young people and families in the identified priority vulnerable groups.
- 10.7 In January 2026, Brent Partnership Local Youth Resource and Advice Service (LYRA) was launched and is a new Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Service for children and young people in Brent. LYRA offers support for emotional wellbeing needs, working closely with families and professionals to provide joined up help in schools, community spaces and online. This is a partnership offer provided by Brent Wellbeing Team (Anna Freud), Brent Young People THRIVE, Brent Centre for Young People, and CNWL CAMHS.

The support from LYRA includes:

- Peer Support Groups
 - Mentoring
 - Building Resilience and Confidence
 - Psychoeducation and Coping Skills
 - Therapeutic support
- 10.8 Other low to moderate mental health and wellbeing services that are providing support to our looked after young people are Via (formerly Elev8) and CRS (please see section 6 for more information) These resources have been well received by children, young people and professionals.
- 10.9 During this reporting period the CAMHS Looked After Child and Transition Mental Health Care Coordinator post was vacant, and recruitment is still underway. This is a CAMHS funded post, and the intention is that this post will be dedicated to 0–18-year-old children in care living in Brent. This role, when filled, contributes to the Health and Wellbeing subgroup (linked to the Local Partnership group) which brings together professionals who focus on and work to drive forward improvements for the health and wellbeing of our care experienced young people.
- 10.10 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)
- In 2025 ongoing support has been provided to the UASC population through individual and group therapeutic work provided by WEST.
 - The service successfully applied for Public Health funding during the previous reporting period to deliver a bespoke Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health support for UASC and Former UASC over the next three years. During this

reporting period, the Afghanistan and Central Asian Association (ACAA) was commissioned to deliver this project on behalf of the service. The project was mobilised in November 2025 and went live in December 2025.

11.0 Multi-agency Partnership of LAC and Care Leavers

- 11.1 Brent CYP have well established and mature relationships with partners resulting in strong and effective multi-agency arrangements. The Brent Children's Trust, chaired by the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development plays a key role within Brent's Corporate Parenting Strategy via setting priorities for all partners working with children and families including children in care and care leavers. A range of activities undertaken by partners, including service providers, is routinely reported from the Children's Trust to the Health and Wellbeing Board.
- 11.2 The Local Partnership Meeting (LPM) for Care Experienced Children and Young People consists of relevant officers from Brent Council (including CYP Departments (LACP, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Inclusion/SEND, Youth Justice Service within Early Help, Housing Needs, Public Health), Community Wellbeing, Regeneration and Environment) and partners such as NHS North West London ICB, Probation, Via, and Central London Community Healthcare (CLCH) NHS Trust. Members of BCJ EMPIRE attend and contribute to the LPM priorities via the Voice and Influence subgroup and act as conduits between the LPM and representatives of BCJ EMPIRE.
- 11.3 The LPM has been responsible for driving and delivering the priorities set out by the Brent Children's Trust for 2024/25 and 2025/26 and continues to drive activity through the subgroups with multiagency membership. Progress on activity is reported on throughout this report.

Chairs of the working groups attended the LPM to report on their progress. The priority areas are:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Education, Employment and Training
- Voice and Influence (participation and engagement)
- Paths to Independence

12.0 Children Missing or Absent from Care

Definitions of 'missing' and 'absent'

Missing: Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another'.

Absent: A person is not at a place where they are expected or required to be'.

London Child Protection Procedures 2025

- 12.1 At year ending 31st March 2026, 80 CLA were reported to be missing from their placements at least once, compared to 78 in the previous year. This represented 17.6% of all children in care at any point during the year (n=455) compared to 17% in the previous year (n=460).

14.1% of Brent CLA had more than one missing incident in the year.

- 12.2 An absence refers to a situation where a child has not returned home at an agreed time, but their whereabouts are known, or where their location is known but permission for their absence has not been granted. During this reporting year, there were 728 absent incidences compared to 723 the previous year.

18.5% of CLA had an absent incident in the year which is a reduction from 20% last reporting year.

- 12.3 Missing data for 2025/26 demonstrates a similar position as 2024/25, with very small fluctuations. Brent's care population is predominantly children aged 10 years and above, making the likelihood of more absent/missing episodes a possibility.

- 12.4 The allocated social worker is responsible for assessing risk, coordinating the professional network around the young person, and completing Safety Plans specific to each young people who are regularly missing.

- 12.5 As part of the Early Help and Social Care re-design a new target operating model was implemented on 2 June 2025 with new family support and child protection and court teams. This redesign included the creation of a new Targeted Prevention Hub (TPH). The missing children (both from home and care) functions now sit in a single service area within the TPH. The service includes a Missing Coordinator and a Return Home Interview (RHI) Key Worker under the leadership of the Contextual Safeguarding Lead.

It was recognised that additional capacity was required to deliver RHIs. As a result, three new Social Work Assistant roles were introduced. Two posts have been filled since January 2026, with the third due to commence in summer 2026. This additional resource demonstrates the Local Authority's commitment to addressing missing children and has contributed to increased RHI offers and improved acceptance rates since February 2026.

The Key Worker, who has undertaken RHIs in Brent for the past four years, demonstrates a proactive and persistent approach in engaging young people. Their ability to build relationships and explore wider issues beyond missing episodes has been key in improving RHI engagement. For young people who go missing frequently, established relationships with both them and their families help build trust and confidence in professional support.

A bi-weekly high-risk Missing Management Panel is in place, chaired by the Contextual Safeguarding Lead and attended by Children and Young People (CYP) officers and the Police Missing Persons Unit. This panel reviews cases, confirms actions, and ensures effective tracking of children who are currently missing. Plans for safe recovery are agreed, and adherence to missing protocols is monitored.

Daily monitoring reports have been replaced by a Missing Children Tracker, enabling Heads of Service to better monitor key actions. Weekly exception reports are shared with Directors and the Director of Children's Services (DCS) for children missing for extended periods. Data indicates a significant reduction in children missing for 10 days or more, with such cases now increasingly rare, demonstrating the impact of targeted interventions.

Through this oversight, it was identified that recent changes to Mosaic workflows limited visibility of RHI offer and acceptance rates. Specifically, the system did not record offers that were declined, resulting in underreporting. As offering an RHI is not mandatory, this reduced the granularity of available data. This issue has been identified, and a scheduled system fix went live on 1 May 2026.

12.6 In this reporting period, audit activity highlighted that although practitioners were identifying safeguarding risks for vulnerable young people, improvements were required in relation to adherence to protocols, delivery and recording of RHIs, timeliness of risk assessments, communication with multi-agency partners, and overall management oversight and escalation processes.

12.7 Actions Taken as a result of audit activity

- A multi-agency working group was established to review processes, resulting in a revised Missing Children Protocol issued in April 2026.
- Learning from the audit and inspection has been shared through staff forums.
- Training workshops on Missing from Care and the Philomena Protocol have been incorporated into the 2026/27 training programme.
- A multi-agency workshop (January 2026) strengthened collaboration between police, care homes, and social workers.
- Staff have been instructed to review missing child notifications daily and address backlogs in care planning.
- RHI processes have been reviewed to ensure sustainability, with clear tracking of offers, completions, and reasons for non-completion.
- Additional staffing capacity has improved consistency in RHI delivery.

12.8 Strengthening the Response to Missing Children

12.8.1 The response to children reported missing has been significantly strengthened through a combination of service redesign, increased capacity, enhanced oversight, and a clear focus on partnership working as described above.

12.8.2 The response to missing children has also undergone significant review, with a renewed focus on proactive, joined up working with police and safeguarding partners. Close partnership with the Missing Persons Police Team has led to the co-design and delivery of targeted training, equipping practitioners to apply the Missing Child Protocol, understand police risk assessment processes, and implement the Philomena Protocol that supports children missing from residential children's homes. This protocol strengthens joint responsibility and accountability across agencies, particularly in relation to children looked after, by clearly setting out roles when children go missing from care, alongside the introduction of practical measures such as grab packs to support swift and informed responses.

- 12.8.3 The Missing Children Policy has been updated to reflect these developments, including the use of grab packs for children in care, ensuring clarity of expectations and consistency across services. In response to lower recorded RHI figures, there has been increased scrutiny of practice, including robust daily tracking of missing children overseen by the Contextual Safeguarding Lead. These layers of oversight support both individual safeguarding responses and the identification of emerging patterns.
- 12.8.4 Ongoing workforce development ensures that training on missing episodes is delivered across all relevant services, while additional analytical capacity has strengthened understanding of data, improved recording, and supported timely completion of RHIs on Mosaic. Fortnightly multi-agency Missing Meetings provide structured quality assurance, enabling detailed case analysis of repeat missing incidents and the identification of themes such as geographic hotspots and peer group links. Together with improved performance monitoring, including the Missing Children Tracker and regular reporting to senior leaders, these developments have created a more robust, coordinated, and intelligence-led response to children who go missing.

13.0 Education of Looked After Children

- 13.1 The Brent Virtual School for Looked After Children Annual Report September 2024 – August 2025 was presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in April 2026.
- 13.2 The BVS sits within the Education, Partnerships and Strategy Department in the Children and Young People and Community Development (CYPCD) directorate. The Virtual School operates as a multi-disciplinary team focused on supporting children and young people in care to achieve their full potential and experience positive educational outcomes. The team includes a range of specialist roles, comprising both teaching and non-teaching advisory staff, an Educational Psychologist, Education Officers, a dedicated Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and Year 11 Education Officer, a Post-16 Advisor and an Enrichment Coordinator. A nominated officer in the CYPCD Performance Team also provides analytical and data support to the service, strengthening the Virtual School's ability to monitor outcomes and identify areas for targeted intervention. During the 2024/25 academic year, in addition to the core team, BVS draws on the expertise of commissioned services delivered on behalf of the local authority, including Prospects, which provides careers education, information, advice and guidance, and the Wellbeing and Emotional Support Team (WEST), which offered specialist support to promote emotional wellbeing and resilience.
- 13.3 In the 2026 ILACS inspection Ofsted found that *"Children in care are supported well to progress in their education. The experienced and aspirational headteacher of the virtual school, supported by a stable and well-regarded team, knows children and their individual circumstances well. The virtual school plays a key role in maintaining the quality and timeliness of personal education plans. Educational outcomes for children in care are improving, with increasing engagement from schools and education providers in supporting children's progress. Improving school attendance levels for children in care is still a challenge, especially for children in secondary schools, and the service is rightly giving this a high priority. Children benefit from a wide range of enrichment and wider learning opportunities."*

14.0 Care Leavers

- 14.1 In Brent, we have a dedicated Care Leavers Service comprising three teams who work together to provide high-quality support to young people as they transition to adulthood. The service provides support to all young people who leave care from the age of 18 years (including those leaving care at the age of 16 and 17) until they reach the age of 25.
- 14.2 At the 31 March 2026, Brent was responsible for support to 311 Former Relevant Young People [aged 18 - 21] (a decrease from 357 reported for 31 March 2025) and 239 *eligible* young people aged 22-24, of which 138 are currently receiving support (an increase from 125 last year). In line with the Social Work Act 2017, Brent offers a 21+ service providing support, advice and guidance to any care leaver who may wish to have this support up to the age of 25.
- 14.3 All care leavers have an allocated personal advisor, whom we aim to introduce to them at age 17.5 to begin building a relationship and to advocate for them as they approach 18. This approach ensures that all those in care who are approaching 18 already know their personal advisor and have developed a positive relationship with their allocated social worker; this helps smooth the transition into adulthood. During this reporting period, this has not always been possible due to the capacity within the Leaving Care teams; however, the service continues to aim for allocation by 17.5.
- 14.4 A personal advisor is not a qualified social worker but often has a background in working with young people in a variety of settings, such as youth justice, housing organisations or youth groups. In 2025/26, the staffing establishment of the Leaving Care Service comprised three teams with 6 personal advisors, each supervised by a team manager. The teams also work closely with external partners such as Prospects, Grandmentors, and Settle. The team managers each have a specific area of responsibility; for example, one manager has built strong partnerships with Youth Justice, Probation, and Housing, where she sits on the tenancy allocation panel. The other areas of responsibility are Employment, Education and Training. One of our managers has built strong relationships with internal and external partners, and the remaining manager has lead responsibility for our life skills independence programme and Grandmentors. Personal Advisors have also been encouraged to develop specialisms in different areas, and currently we have two PAs who organise the Gordon Brown Residential weekends for young people, and a PA who works with care experienced young people to co-design the annual Care Leaver week activities and celebrations.
- 14.5 There is also a PA established within Disabled Children and Young People (0-25). They work alongside social workers in this team to support disabled care leavers.

15.0 Brent's Local Offer for Care Leavers

- 15.1 Our Care Leaver Local Offer was refreshed, updated and presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in October 2024, prior to being published. Our Care Leaver Local Offer can be found at: [Care leavers | Brent Council](#)

- 15.2 The service has begun the process of reviewing our Care Leavers Local Offer for 2027–2029. The review will include consultation events, online questionnaires, and direct engagement with young people via PAs. Feedback from stakeholders will also be sought. Feedback will play a central role in shaping future priorities and ensuring that the refreshed Local Offer reflects the aspirations of care leavers, the council (as Corporate Parents), and the commitments made through the Care Leavers Compact. The new revised Local Offer will be brought to CPC in October 2026.

15.5 Pan-London Care Leavers Compact and Covenant

The Pan-London Care Leavers Compact and Covenant creates a shared framework for London boroughs and partner organisations to improve outcomes for care-experienced young people. Working collaboratively and agreeing on commitments ensures care leavers have consistent support, opportunities, and services as they move towards independence. These commitments are now part of our revised Local Offer.

In 2025, the Council continued to strengthen its commitment to the Pan-London Care Leavers Compact, which promotes consistent and high-quality support for care leavers across London. The Compact sets out five housing commitments: the Council exempts care leavers from council tax, prevents them from being found intentionally homeless, provides access to rent deposit schemes, recognises care leavers as a priority group for housing support, and ensures strong joint working arrangements between Housing and Children's Services.

15.6 Brent Care Leavers Charter

The Charter for Care Leavers is designed to raise expectations, aspirations and understanding of what care leavers need and what local authorities should do to be good Corporate Parents. The Brent Care Leavers Charter was last updated in January 2025 and will be reviewed along with the Local Offer.

15.7 Extended Youth Justice Service (YJS) offer

During this reporting period an extended YJS offer has been designed and agreed for care experienced young people. This voluntary offer will apply to young people already supported by YJS and also those who are already in custody.

YJS will work with young people to co-produce an Enhanced Exit Plan which will set out clearly their access to a range of services. This is an opportunity for 18+ to receive co-ordinated, multiagency, wraparound support during a period (transition to adulthood/release from custody) of extreme vulnerability.

16.0 Care Leavers' Enrichment Programme

“The Hub”

- 16.1 The ‘Hub Group’ is an integral part of the Care Leavers Service. It seeks to combat isolation, build a network of friends, and bridge the gap between younger and older care leavers. The group plans activities, maintains contact, and meets monthly. Some care leavers also meet outside the Hub Group and have formed closer friendships. Each monthly session sees 6 - 15 young people attend. We continue to see more younger care leavers join the group.

- 16.2 The Hub Group provides a valuable forum for care leavers to discuss the challenges of everyday life, current world events, and the ongoing cost-of-living pressures. The group also serves as a platform for sharing employment opportunities, job vacancies, and other relevant information.

Care leavers continue to use these sessions to share their experiences, offer peer support, and engage in meaningful and informative discussions. The Hub Group remains a safe and supportive environment where young people can build relationships, socialise, and reduce feelings of social isolation. Feedback from participants consistently highlights the value they place on this dedicated space and the positive impact it has on their wellbeing.

“Its great to be here and be able to talk and chat with other people and speak to staff and ask them questions and what we would like together during the summer.”

- 16.3 Care leavers aged 18 to 25 attend the Hub Group, with some care-experienced adults over 25 also continuing to participate. Older members (aged 22 and above) actively mentor and support younger care leavers, sharing their experiences and offering guidance on parenthood, independent living, managing finances, higher education, apprenticeships, employment, and future aspirations.

These peer relationships significantly shape the personal development of group members. Many young people report feeling less isolated and more confident, progressing from initially being quiet and withdrawn to becoming active, confident, and valued members of the Hub community.

Several Hub members over 25 have expressed a desire to continue attending, reflecting the strong relationships and lasting sense of support and belonging the Hub provides.

In the last quarter of this reporting period, the service received some feedback about the Hub structure and events which were listened to and a new programme and structure for the Hub was discussed and proposed. Young people were happy to be able to have options and assist with planning events, hence every other month there is the opportunity for an “away” event. Care leavers have also shared that they also appreciate being able to gather locally and bring their children along.

- 16.9 Grandmentors continue to have a significant impact on young people's emotional wellbeing, particularly in addressing low self-esteem, which remains a common need among those referred.

The programme offers young people aged 16–24 a consistent, trusted adult relationship that differs from statutory support. Grandmentors are not assigned in the same way as professionals; instead, matches are carefully tailored based on shared interests, experiences, and the young person's individual goals.

Through regular and meaningful engagement, Grandmentors:

- Build confidence and self-esteem
- Support young people to set and achieve personal goals
- Encourage progress in education, employment, and independence
- Promote the development of healthy relationships

Ultimately, the programme supports young people to develop the skills, confidence, and self-belief needed to lead successful and independent lives.

- 16.10 While the programme is now in a more stable position, there remains an opportunity to further strengthen outcomes through consistent referral pathways and ongoing volunteer training, ensuring a steady flow of successful matches. Detailed case studies and further analysis will be included within the full Annual Report, which will provide deeper insight into individual outcomes, programme impact, and future recommendations. The service provided by Grandmentors is overseen by a manager and service manager for the Leaving Care service with quarterly meetings, with the Head of Service attending an annual meeting. The annual report is presented to the Local Partnership meeting which provides an additional layer of governance.
- 16.11 In February 2026, Grandmentors hosted their first-ever breakfast morning, bringing together mentors, mentees, and colleagues from across the Leaving Care, Looked After, and Permanency teams. The event provided a valuable opportunity to build connections, share experiences, and the impact mentoring is having across the service. They also welcomed four new volunteers, all of whom have successfully completed their training and are now ready to be matched, further strengthening our pool of available mentors. A new Grandmentor said, *"It was a useful networking event. Good to meet experienced mentors too and hear about their journeys with their mentees. The most valuable part was meeting the social work team and hearing how they felt Grandmentors could support the young people that they are working with."*
- 16.12 The following feedback from a young person demonstrates the impact a Grandmentor can have on their lived experience:

"I'm really grateful to have such an amazing mentor. She's helped me a lot with budgeting and always makes me feel comfortable opening about both work and personal things. She's been incredibly supportive of my mental health even coming with me to doctor's appointments which has meant a lot and made me feel like I'm not alone. Her support has truly made a big difference in my life"

Support for Care Leavers who are parents

- 16.13 During the reporting period, the service had hoped to establish a support group for care leavers who are parents. The group was initially due to be co-facilitated by a

care leaver; however, they were unable to continue with the project due to personal reasons. Despite efforts to promote the group and encourage participation, interest from young parents was limited, and the initiative was not successful in its current format.

Moving forward, we plan to focus our engagement efforts through a programme of summer holiday activities and trips. These activities will provide opportunities to re-engage young parents, strengthen relationships with staff, and better understand the barriers that may be preventing participation. We hope that these informal engagement opportunities will help build trust and confidence, enabling young parents to access future support services. During the autumn and winter months, we aim to introduce targeted drop-in sessions where young parents can receive advice, guidance, and practical support around parenting, employment, education, and independent living.

Care Leavers Month 2025

16.14 During Care Leavers Month, held in November 2025, the service celebrated the

the



achievements and contributions of young people who have left care and highlighted the ongoing support available to them as they transition into adulthood. Activities throughout the week provided opportunities for care leavers to share their experiences, build connections, and access information on education, employment, housing, health, and wellbeing. Feedback was positive, with young people valuing the opportunity to have their voices heard, celebrate their successes, and influence development of future services. The timetable was full of activities ranging from football to our MasterChef competition, which was as popular as ever. A party to mark the end of the month ended the month, where staff cooked and acted as waiters for our care leavers so that they could enjoy the event.

17.0 Care Leavers in Education, Employment and Training

17.1 There were 38 young people in higher education in 2025/26(unpublished data). Of these 38 young people, 15 are in the 19 to 21 age range.

The historical data below suggests that while more young people are engaging in education overall, they are increasingly choosing alternative further education and training/employment rather than university. This reflects changing aspirations, labour market opportunities, and financial considerations.

This data is also directly impacted by an increase in young people choosing to pursue self-employment and an increase in the number of former UASC who have No

Recourse to Public Funds(NRPF) representing a larger proportion of the NEET population. It is also recognised that many care leavers access higher education later than their peers who are not care experienced. This is evidenced by the increase in the number of care leavers entering higher education after age 21.

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Care leavers aged 19,20,21 looked after for at least 13 weeks after their 14 th birthday, including some time after their 16 th birthday	239	250	243	264	255
In higher education	24	22	19	20	18
In education other than higher education	53	75	62	67	67
In training or employment	51	42	48	50	69

Care leavers currently engaged in higher education are undertaking a diverse range of courses, including Business Management, Psychology, and Health and Social Care. The table below provides provisional comparative data relating to care leavers participating in higher education.

Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in Higher Education	Brent	Brent %	Statistical Neighbour average %	National %
2020-21	24	10%	8%	6%
2021-22	22	7%	8%	7%
2022-23	19	8%	8%	6%
2023-24	20	8%	7%	6%
2024-25	18	7%	6%	6%
2025-26	15	6.5%	TBC	TBC

- 17.2 At the end of the reporting year, the percentage of young people aged 19-21 in education, employment and training was 60%, matching the figure from last year. The national key performance measures as related to outcomes for care leavers in education, employment or training are set out in the table below. Brent's data is higher than the statistical neighbour average.

Care leavers aged 19 - 21 in Education, Employment or Training	Brent	Brent %	Statistical Neighbour average %	figure %
2020-21	128	54%	52%	52%
2021-22	140	56%	57%	55%

2022-23	131	53%	57%	56%
2023-24	117	53%	53%	54%
2024-25	153	60%	54%	54%
2025-26	139	60%		

- 17.3 The percentage of care leavers aged 19 to 21 engaged in education, employment or training (EET) highlights the need for continued targeted support and engagement. Many care leavers are exploring alternative pathways and may require additional time, encouragement and personalised support to identify and pursue opportunities that align with their aspirations and individual circumstances.

Some young people are undertaking informal or short-term work arrangements to supplement their income. While these arrangements do not contribute towards formal EET measures and are not encouraged as long-term sustainable options, they can reflect young people's motivation to generate income and develop independence. The Care Leavers Service continues to work closely with young people to promote access to accredited education, training and sustainable employment opportunities, while providing advice and guidance on the benefits of engaging in formal employment and learning pathways.

A care leaver in Higher Education

A is a 19-year-old care leaver who is currently living with his former foster carer under a 'staying put arrangement'. He has also shown an interest in computer animation and has worked hard to secure a place at Escape Studios London, where he is completing an undergraduate degree in Animation and Games. This is a unique, amazing opportunity that R is fully committed to!

A care leaver in Higher Education

K is a 21-year-old care leaver who, through his own personal journey and exposure to the industry, has committed to a four-year degree in Psychology at the University of East London. K has embarked on his 4th year and has now secured a job in the Care Sector, further developing his skills in the field and preparing himself for independence. K has shown himself to be a capable, likeable, and empathetic young man, and we are all excited to see how he will progress into this field.

A care leaver applying for Higher Education

C is an 18-year-old care leaver who has shown remarkable resilience. She overcame significant adversity in her childhood. Although initially adopted, challenges in her adoptive placement led C to return to Local Authority care.

Despite these experiences, C stays committed to her education. She always demonstrates determination and perseverance. After achieving her GCSEs, C is now studying A Levels in sixth form and making excellent academic progress.

C aspires to higher education and has applied to study law at university. Her hard work and ambition have earned her four conditional offers. She is considering Westminster University or Queen Mary University as her preferred choice. C's achievements show her resilience, strong work ethic, and positive aspirations for the future.

- 17.4 Brent has several current employment schemes, some of which are targeted exclusively at care experienced young people. For example:

Prospects

Prospects is a service within The Shaw Trust supporting NEET young people in finding suitable Education, Training and Employment opportunities. Prospects currently support the Leaving Care Service with a designated worker 3 days a week. This worker covers the 18–25-year-old cohort, ensuring they have an allocated education, employment and training specialist to support them moving forward. Senior management meet with the Prospects team on a monthly basis to review cases and identify any themes or areas we could support. Referrals can be made independently or via the monthly meeting and the Prospects team support our care leavers into a wealth of different education, training, and employment opportunities. Below is an example of the work they do:

A care leaver supported by Prospects

S is a 22-year-old care leaver. He first came to Brent's attention at age 13, when he presented to the Local Authority as an Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child. S has faced significant challenges throughout his journey as a looked-after child and care leaver, largely because he experienced trauma both in his country of origin and during his journey to the UK.

These experiences impacted S's emotional wellbeing and, at times, his ability to engage steadily with education, training, and employment. During his time as a care leaver, he accessed therapeutic and substance misuse support to address these challenges.

Over the past year, a key milestone was S's renewed engagement in education and employment planning. With support from the Leaving Care Service and Prospects, he explored pathways and enrolled on a Construction course—a significant step. His successful course completion and receipt of a Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card mark concrete achievements along his journey.

S is now awaiting confirmation of employment opportunities within the construction sector. This milestone highlights his resilience, perseverance, and dedication to building a positive future.

Additional organisations

John Lewis

The Leaving Care Service is currently one of the Local Authorities participating in the John Lewis 'Building Happier Futures' programme. This initiative provides care leavers with valuable employment opportunities through a combination of work experience placements and guaranteed interviews across a number of John Lewis branches.

The programme offers care-experienced young people an easy way into work. It helps reduce barriers common in usual recruitment. It gives them practical experience, support, and direct access to jobs, helping them build skills, confidence, and employability. This supports them to achieve lasting employment.

Lumina Future Pathways

The Leaving Care Service has formed a new partnership with Harrow School and its employment initiative, Lumina Future Pathways, through our local community work. Lumina Future Pathways helps talented young people with higher education or further qualifications consider their next career move. Harrow School's network provides them with strong connections to employers across the UK and a range of employment opportunities.

Lumina representatives have met Leaving Care Service staff and now accept referrals from Brent care leavers. This early-stage partnership offers our young people tailored support, networks, and clear employment routes.

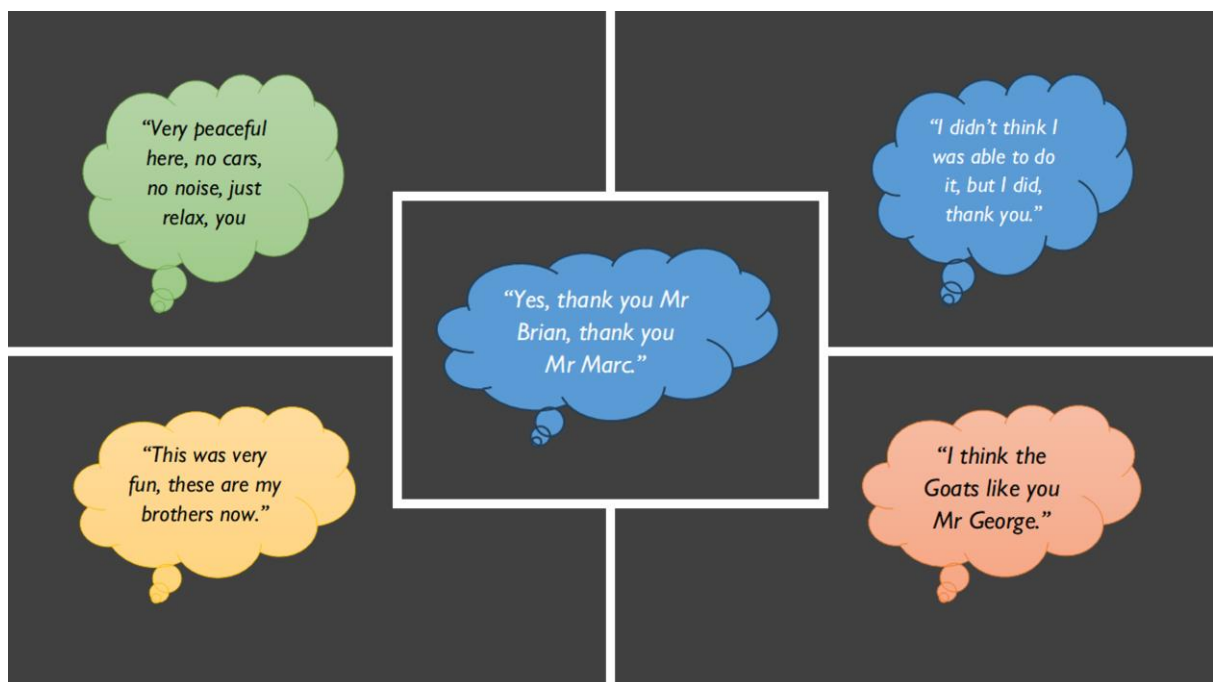
This partnership shows our commitment to all care leavers, including those advancing in education and employment. We ensure that high-achieving young people continue to receive guidance and opportunities to realise their potential.

18.0 Care Leavers' Accommodation

- 18.1 Brent Council is responsible for supporting Care Leavers until they are ready and able to move into independent living arrangements and this support is via the provision of commissioned supported accommodation placements. These placements, coupled with the length of time it is currently taking for care leavers to achieve their own social tenancy via the Council, is a significant cause of financial pressures within the CYP placements budget.
- 18.2 Currently supported accommodation placements are commissioned through either the Commissioning Alliance DPV or a spot-purchase arrangement with private supported accommodation providers. In the previous reporting period, we launched our first Shared House model with a 6-bed block contract with Single Homeless Prevention Service (SHPS). This option has been designed to provide a more affordable, independent housing option for Care Leavers who are ready and waiting for their own tenancy.
- 18.3 The Brent Shared House model has been operational since September 2024 when our first home became operational, with the second shared home operational in this reporting period. 6 care leavers are living in this property and receiving 'floating support'. The number of support hours would be low compared to what a significant proportion of Care Leavers receive in semi-independent provision. The 18 hours of floating support provided are shared across the care leavers in the house based on their support requirement that week and can be flexed. This means all young people could receive three hours one week or one young person might require four whilst another young person receives two hours.
- 18.4 The young people in the shared homes are the young people bidding for independent housing via LOCATA, the Council's social housing bidding route. With an established waiting list of identified care leavers, the risk of voids is reduced and the turnaround time for re-let is 48 hours which has been achievable to date. In 2025/26 we secured a second 6-bed block contract, and both houses continue to support care leavers waiting for their own tenancy.
- 18.5 In preparation for independent living, young people are supported to complete either the ASDAN Independent Skills Programme or the Gordon Brown Practical Skills Weekend along with the Money Ready Course and in-housing Housing Workshop before being referred for their own accommodation. PAs continue to complete a

vulnerability assessment as well as provide evidence of the young person's readiness for their own accommodation.

- 18.6 The Leaving Care service and the Housing team meet monthly for the Housing Allocations Panel where referrals are discussed and accepted for housing, thereafter, care leavers can bid for six months before being eligible for a Direct Offer to which they are added to the waiting list. Once a care leaver has secured their own accommodation, they are supported to furnish and buy essential items for their property with a 'setting up home allowance' of £3000. In this reporting year we have supported approximately 28 young people into their own tenancies.
- 18.7 The Gordon Brown Centre is now fully embedded and part of Brent's life skills programme. The centre is in a natural setting that enables young people to experience positive activities such as low ropes, high ropes, archery, farm animals, and a fire-making woodland/campfire area. Gordon Brown weekends are run every alternate month with males and females attending separately. Each young person is given a starter pack for when they move into their tenancy which includes a tool kit, pots and pans and other essentials for living independently. 24 young people attended Gordon Brown in 2025 the majority have been presented and accepted at housing panel. In addition to this, each young person being nominated for a tenancy has to complete the ASDAN workbook and Money Ready Course and Housing workshop, this gives the young people the confidence and the skills to be able to manage a tenancy.
- 18.8 Below are some comments young people have made about the Gordon Brown Centre and pictures of young people engaging in practical and fun activities:



- 18.9 The Team Manager who leads on housing continues to work with the Social Housing Team and jointly chairs the monthly Housing Allocation Panel meetings where young people are nominated for tenancy. The manager also continues to liaise with the Area Management Team to discuss care leavers who have fallen into arrears and plan a way to address this matter to include setting up payment plans, applying for Crisis

Relief Fund payment or other financial support, i.e. residency support fund they are eligible for and further budgeting and other support provided by their PA.

In addition, in this reporting period, joint Leaving Care, Commissioning and Housing meetings have been held as part of our ongoing commissioning work, chaired by the Head of Service, to develop closer relationships across services, trouble shoot specific issues related to accommodation for care leavers, and to explore different and creative ways of supporting care leavers into independent living.

- 18.10 At the end of the reporting year 2025-26, 92% (211) of care leavers aged 19-21 were in suitable accommodation, compared to 85% the previous year. The care leavers who are deemed not to be in suitable accommodation would be either on remand or have lost touch with the service and therefore the nature of their accommodation is unknown.

Care leavers	Brent	Brent %	Statistical	Statistical	National	National
aged 19 - 21			Neighbour	Neighbour	Figure	figure %
in suitable			average	average		
accommodation				%		
2020-21	208	88%	210	83%	28270	88%
2021-22	213	86%	212	85%	29270	88%
2022-23	206	83%	212	85%	30320	88%
2023-24	224	85%	198	94%	31630	88%
2024-25	229	90%	209	89%	33810	89%
2025-26	211	92%				

**Brent's statistical neighbours changed in 2024/25 to: Ealing, Newham, Hounslow, Haringey, Luton, Slough, Barking and Dagenham, Enfield, Waltham Forest*

- 18.11 Care Leavers continue to be placed in appropriate and safe accommodation. Those who are not ready to move to independence are encouraged to stay put with their foster carers or in semi-independent accommodation until they are ready, with the expectation that carers identify how they will support transition to independence. The number of care leavers in semi-independent provision has risen to 260 in March 2025, compared to 227 in March 2024. This increase is mainly due to the pressure on the availability of social housing tenancies for care leavers. Additionally, there are several former UASC who have been waiting for a Home Office decision which has been delayed due to the backlog of cases being dealt with by immigration caseworkers. We currently have 20 young people who have had their 1st appeals rejected and have submitted a further appeal. We have 6 young people under the age of 21 who have NRPF (no recourse to public funds), at 21 they will be referred to the Home Office for section 4 support.

19.0 Priorities for Corporate Parenting 2026/27

- Continue implementation of the Families First Programme, including embedding the new Family Group Decision Making offer by launching "Lifelong Links" for children in care and care leavers, continuing to prioritise kinship care options and ensuring that where children are returning home there is a safe and supportive network involved to ensure successful reunification.

- Launch and embed a digital life story work platform, alongside strengthening compliance with life story work standards and practice guidance.
- Further improve health outcomes for children in care and care leavers, with a particular focus on timeliness of health assessments, immunisations, emotional wellbeing and access to health summaries.
- Strengthen placement sufficiency through recruitment and retention of Brent foster carers, working with West London partners and developing the Fostering Hub.
- Maintain workforce stability and further improve practice quality through learning from inspection findings, quality assurance and workforce development.

20.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 20.1 Stakeholder consultation and engagement take many varied methods within the service, and we are committed to evaluating and developing new and creative ways of hearing from stakeholders.
- 20.2 Carers views are sought through one-to-one discussions with their SSW, Annual Foster Carer Reviews, and Support Groups. Carers are encouraged to provide written feedback on their experiences.
- 20.3 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, and Brent Care Journeys 2.0 activities and programmes.

21.0 Financial Considerations

- 21.1 There are currently no additional financial implications arising from this report.

22.0 Legal Considerations

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

23.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

- 23.1 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) considerations are within the body of this report.

24.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 24.1 There are no climate change or environmental considerations.

25.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

- 25.1 There are no human resource or property considerations.

26.0 Communication Considerations

- 26.1 There are no additional communication considerations.

Relevant Documents:

1. Ofsted Focused Visit for Children in Care report- presented to CPC in February 2026

2. BVS Annual Report 2024/25- presented to CPC in April 2026

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development