

	Corporate Parenting Committee 12 October 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 Participation 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)	Alice Weavers Participation and Engagement Manager alice.weavers@brent.gov.uk Nicole Levy Service Manager Quality Assurance and Learning and Development nicole.levy@brent.gov.uk

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an overview of participation activity with Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) 2.0. BCJ 2.0 is the participation programme for children in care and care leavers. Through BCJ 2.0, young people share their views about the

development of services. This report highlights how young people have been involved in decision-making and service development.

- 1.2. The work of the Participation Team aligns with the Brent CYP Participation and Engagement Strategy 2024-2027.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1. That the CPC review and comment on the contents of this report. This ensures the CPC is fulfilling its responsibility to monitor and scrutinise the activity of Brent's Children and Young People (CYP) service including opportunities for children and young people to participate in decisions which affect them.

3. Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities and Strategic Context

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

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

4. Participation team

- 4.1. The participation team is part of the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance service. The team runs Brent Youth Parliament (BYP) which is Brent's youth council open to all young people and BCJ 2.0 for care experienced young people. The team works with other teams to advise and collaborate on participation activities, such as staff recruitment, training and council decision-making.
- 4.2. When fully staffed, the team comprises a Participation and Engagement Manager (0.4 FTE), a Participation and Engagement Officer (0.8 FTE) and two Participation Support Officers (0.3 FTE).
- 4.3. In 2026/7, 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 improved in the Council. This follows a model used within Brent Care Journeys (run by Barnardo's) which transitioned to BCJ 2.0 in 2024/25. The participation team is developing a comprehensive training package for sessional workers.

- 4.4. The team has experienced staff vacancies since the second half of this reporting period. Recruitment is underway for Participation and Engagement Officer and Sessional Participation Worker roles with new staff expected to start in autumn 2026.

5. Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) 2.0

- 5.1. Young people have their voices heard in the design and delivery of services and within council decision-making processes through the BCJ 2.0 programme, led by the participation team. BCJ 2.0 is the programme for Brent's Children in Care Council for young people age 7-17 (previously called 'Care in Action') and projects for care leavers age 18-25 (previously called 'Care Leavers in Action'), providing space and opportunities for different groups to meet in a safe environment to take part in participation activities throughout the year and engage in trips and events in school holidays.
- 5.2. In 2025/26, 28 young people under 18 and 25 care leavers engaged in BCJ 2.0 activities and events and many more young people shared their views through peer research and consultation opportunities which are led by BCJ 2.0 members. For example, young people attending Corporate Parenting Committee as BCJ 2.0 representatives share questions on the Hub WhatsApp group to ask care leavers what they think about different issues, such as whether they would like support from the council for driving lessons. Another example is a BCJ 2.0 member who is developing a trusted buddy scheme for care experienced young people and wrote her own survey for care leavers and staff which over 20 people in each group have taken part in. The participation team will be continuing to recruit young people to the group and activities and reach more young people.
- 5.3. Looked after children and care leavers also had their voices reflected in various ways during 2025/2026, 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. Looked after children also have access to Coram Voice advocacy that enables them to have independent support in expressing their wishes and feelings. IROs are often a continuing person of trust for many looked after children, who might have several Social Workers involved in their lives.
- 5.4. BCJ 2.0 projects and events in 2025/26
- 5.4.1. 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.

5.4.2. In December 2025, care leavers attended an end of year dinner in Wembley. They shared their reflections on the year and chatted with Nigel Chapman who attended to meet the group. These trips ran alongside other projects in the BCJ 2.0 programme including co-design workshops, arts programmes and a range of participation opportunities.

5.4.3. 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 Brent Care Journeys 2.0. 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.

5.4.4. 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 create 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.

5.4.5. 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:



"Friendly people
very kind and
helpful"



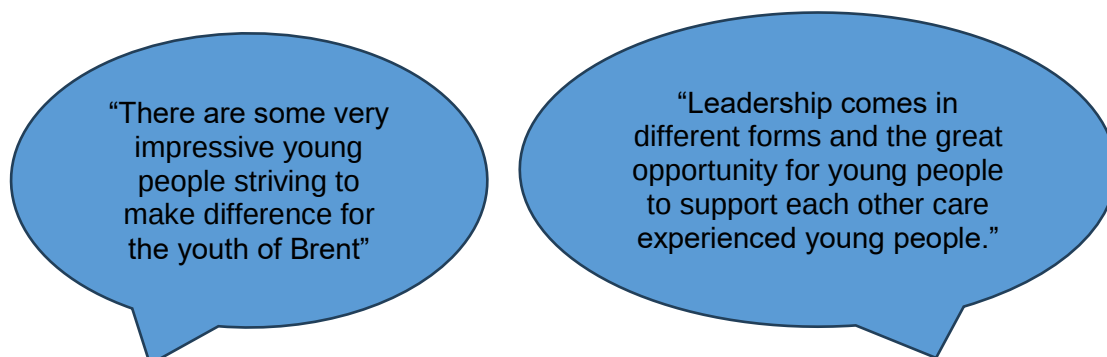
"The staff/workers
were a blessing very
nice each and
everyone"

- 5.4.6. 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 2.0. The trip involved fun activities, workshops, and discussions. They took part in activities such as high ropes, kayaking and laser tag.
- 5.4.7. 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 2.0 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.
- 5.4.8. 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.

5.5. Participation in decision-making

- 5.5.1. Young people have led a co-design project to rebrand BCJ 2.0 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 built confidence and skills in decision-making, consultations, leadership and design.
- 5.5.2. 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.

- 5.5.3. Young people from BCJ 2.0 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:



- 5.5.4. 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.
- 5.5.5. Representatives from BCJ 2.0 care leavers group wrote the Forward to the Looked After Children and Care Leaver's Strategy 2025-2027, in collaboration with the Head of Service of Looked After Children and Permanency Service.
- 5.5.6. Young people in the 11-17 group took part in the Ofsted focused visit in November 2025 as BCJ 2.0 ambassadors. They represented their peers in meetings with Ofsted Inspectors to share their views about their time in care.
- 5.5.7. 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.
- 5.5.8. Young people from BCJ 2.0 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 2.0 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 2.0 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).

- 5.5.9. 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.

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.

- 5.10. Participation priorities for 2026/27 include; launching the rebranded BCJ 2.0; recruiting and training care experienced sessional participation workers; involving more looked after children and care leavers in participation opportunities; exploring opportunities for external funding with national charities.

6. Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

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

7. Financial Considerations

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

8. Legal Considerations

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

9 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

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

10. Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

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

11. Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

11.1. There are no human resource or property considerations.

12. Communication Considerations

12.11 At this stage there are not any communication considerations.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development