



**Transitions Services Task Group Report**

**March 2010**

**Membership:**

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## Contents

	Page Number
Chair's Foreword	3
Executive Summary	5
Recommendations	8
Introduction	10
Terms of reference	10
Task group membership	10
Methodology	11
National context	11
Brent context	12
Services working with young people in transition	13
• Localities Services – Ensuring services are joined up and effective from early childhood	14
• Care Planning Services	14
• Adult Social Care	15
• Brent Mental Health Services	15
• Community Safety and Youth Offending Team	16
• Housing young people and homelessness prevention	17
• Connexions Services	17
Main Findings	18
• Corporate responsibilities	18
• Young people that do not meet service criteria	19
• Early identification and intervention with young people and their families	21
• Focus on prevention	21
• Moving to independent housing	22
• Bringing transitions services together	25
• Youth Offending Service and Probation	27
• Impact of the recession	27
Conclusions	28
Appendices	29

## Chair's Foreword

The transitions services task group was set up to consider the services provided for vulnerable young people in Brent to help them move successfully into adulthood. The majority of young people have very few issues in moving from childhood to adulthood that can't be resolved with the support of their parents, friends or teachers. However, there are some young people in our borough who need extra care and support to help them make this transition successfully. Between the ages of 16 and 25, young people move from the responsibility of children's services to adult services, but the way services are delivered, the intensity of support and the types of support provided can be quite different from the services young people are used to. The task group has focussed on the needs of the most vulnerable in Brent to see what can be done to ease the transition period to avoid greater intervention later in life.



The task group has found that there is much good work going on in Brent to address the needs of vulnerable young people so that they receive the support and guidance they need. That said, there are some issues that need to be addressed to ensure that young people get the best start in life and are able to access appropriate services. One thing is clear to the task group – addressing the problems associated with vulnerable young people, such as youth offending, teenage pregnancy or homelessness requires far sighted, long term solutions with a focus on prevention and early intervention. Fortunately, service providers are already starting to reconfigure services in this way, through the development of schemes such as the Family Intervention Project.

The task group has made a number of recommendations which it hopes, if implemented, will make a positive contribution to the transitions services available in the borough. Whilst addressing the causes of an individuals' vulnerability requires early intervention and a focus on prevention, there are some issues that the task group would like to see addressed relatively quickly. For example, providing siblings who have been in care a property so they can continue to live together to provide support to each other. It is these small interventions which can really make the difference in the lives of young people, but don't require a major reconfiguration of services.

During this work the task group spoke to a number of young people who were in the transitions phase, or would be reaching their late teens in the coming years and moving into transition. The young people provided an invaluable insight into their lives and where they were concerned for the future. The task group has taken some of their thoughts and ideas and used them as the basis for recommendations. Throughout the review we made sure that the needs of young people were at the forefront of our thinking. Whilst some of the recommendations may be a challenge to implement, especially in the current financial climate, we need to be bold if we are to provide a service that addresses the needs of our most vulnerable young people.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all those who participated in this work – the young people we met through the Care in Action Group and those at the De Paul Hostel in Willesden; the service managers who spoke at length about their services and the work they do in Brent. Their information was extremely important to the task group and we are very grateful that they gave up their time to assist us in this work. Finally, I would like to thank my fellow task group members, Councillor Will Motley and Councillor Arthur Steel for their help and support.

Councillor Lesley Jones  
Chair, Transitions Services Task Group

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## Executive Summary

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee established the Transitions Services Task group to look at the services in place for vulnerable young people in Brent aged 16 to 25. The term “vulnerable” can be applied to many different groups of people, but the task group’s focus was on the following groups:

- young people who are offenders or at risk of offending
- care leavers
- those in contact with secondary mental health services
- those who have a moderate learning difficulties
- teenage parents
- young people who are not in full time education, training or employment

The challenge for many young people and this does not apply just in Brent but is a nationwide issue, is that services they have received as children often end abruptly at eighteen when their entitlement to youth provision ends. Young people move from services provided for children to services provided for adults, if they are eligible for services at all. During this process it is essential that an effective transition service is in place. This involves a holistic, person centred approach to assess an individual’s needs and the services needed to support them in their life. The task group wanted to assess how transition services in Brent were meeting the needs of young people who need them.

The task group found that there is much good work going on in Brent to address the needs of vulnerable young people so that they receive the support and guidance they need. That said, there are some issues that the task group believes should be addressed to ensure that young people get the best start in life and are able to access appropriate services. It is clear to the task group that addressing the problems associated with vulnerable young people, such as youth offending, teenage pregnancy or homelessness requires far sighted, long term solutions with a focus on prevention and early intervention.

The key findings that the task group wishes to highlight include:

### *Corporate responsibilities*

One of the issues that the task group was keen to highlight was the importance of reinforcing councillors’ responsibilities as corporate parents to young people in care. Steps should be taken to raise the profile and importance of care services to elected members. Greater interaction between councillors and children in care could benefit both groups. At the very least members would be able to share the achievements of young people in care and see the impact that care services have had on their lives. The evidence the task group heard directly from looked after children was of great value and has resulted in recommendations suggested directly by young people. Regular contact between councillors and looked after children can help to inform decisions that members have to make about services for young people in Brent. This is an area that should be strengthened.

### *Young people that do not meet service criteria*

Providing services for young people who do not meet the criteria for children’s services or adult social care services and mental health services is essentially what this task group has been looking at. At present Brent is no different from the majority of councils in that services are set up to address crises and to help those people with the most complex needs. It has been acknowledged that there needs to be greater intervention with young people and their families at an early stage to prevent problems developing further down the line.

In an ideal world there would be a service in place for 18 to 24 year olds with moderate needs that don't currently meet secondary mental health service criteria or criteria for adult social care. Organisations like Connexions provide help and guidance for young people in this situation, but more is needed. Care leavers are able to use the Leaving Care Service – it is those that haven't been in care that can suffer because of the gaps in services.

The task group hopes that consideration can be given to the criteria for adult services to reflect the needs of young people. It is of concern to the task group that arbitrary age limits are used to determine eligibility for services, even though young people have different levels of need and maturity that can't be defined by age alone. Individual circumstances need to be taken into account. The task group is not suggesting that the criteria for adult social care or mental health services is changed, but it does advocate the weighting of service criteria in favour of young people in transition.

#### *Early identification and intervention with young people and their families*

Early identification and prevention of problems in young people is crucial. The task group was informed that the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) should make a big difference for young people in the future as it will help professionals to make early, fast decisions about the needs of young people and to address those needs at the first opportunity. The 14 and 15 year olds who are NEET, or young offenders were probably the same young people having problems in primary school or even in pre-schools. The CAF should help to pick these young people up much earlier than is currently the case. The task group advocates a greater focus on early intervention and is pleased that schemes such as the Family Intervention Project are being piloted in Brent.

#### *Focus on prevention*

There is a debate to be had about front loading service provision so that there is greater focus on preventative services by working with families and young people at an earlier stage to stop problems developing and becoming more serious. There is an argument that money will be saved if this approach was adopted. However, it requires spending more money in one area of service (children's services) and less in another (adults services), whilst at the same time continuing to provide services for those who need them. It is a complicated picture without an easy solution.

The task group is firmly of the view that rather than letting a young person's problem reach a stage where they meet service criteria before receiving help, switching the emphasis of services to proactive, early intervention where possible, will help address the needs of young people at an earlier stage.

One of the real challenges facing those planning services is that switching the focus of services entirely to early intervention and prevention will require significant investment and of course, this isn't a time of financial growth in the public sector. It is further complicated by the fact that savings produced from such an approach are likely to be delivered in adult social care services, youth offending services or health services, but not necessarily in the area where the extra investment is made. This will require a "one council" approach to service development, working across departmental and organisational boundaries to realise benefits and savings. If savings are delivered they are likely to be achieved in the longer term and could be hard to evidence initially. Current caseloads will also stretch existing resources and resources in the future. That said, the task group is keen that a preventative approach is developed over time.

#### *Moving to independent housing*

One of the most challenging aspects of transition for young people in care is the move to independent housing. The Care Planning team has a monthly meeting with officers in the Housing Department to improve the referrals process between the two departments and to improve the transition for young people from care services to independent living. The task group was told that the arrangements between the Care Planning Team and Housing Services largely worked well, but speaking to young people directly about their experiences there are some issues that the task group would like the council to consider – whether care leavers can share a housing tenancy and whether anything can be done to provide housing for young care leavers who chose to go to university outside of London. Both of these issues affect a small number of care leavers each year, but finding solutions to them could help to improve the quality of life for those involved.

### *Bringing transitions services together*

The task group would like officers to address the complications inherent in the service model for young people in transition by putting together a prospectus of services. This could act as a guide to services for young people aged 16 to 25 in Brent, including contact details and referral routes. Statutory services and voluntary sector organisations should be included to build a comprehensive reference guide for young people and staff working with those in transition.

Whilst the prospectus will be a useful addition to the resources available for service users and people working with young people in transition, it doesn't represent a radical step change in approach to working with vulnerable young people. The task group is also proposing that a foyer project is developed in Brent to act as a central hub for services for vulnerable young people. Foyers are centres for young people, normally between the ages of 16 and 25, that provide opportunities for education, training, advice and support as well as accommodation for residents.

The task group believes that there will be tremendous benefit to young people if they were able to call into one office for a range of advice and guidance, as well as a place to directly access services to assist their transition. A foyer project, with a small amount of accommodation, bringing together services such as housing, adult social care, children's services, Connexions, Youth Offending Service, Probation Services etc as well as voluntary and community organisations would be a useful addition to the service landscape in Brent and something the task group hopes can be progressed.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1** – The task group recommends that officers working with the Children in Care Council, known as Care in Action, develop a range of activities to bring elected councillors and young people in care together to discuss ways of improving council services. This should not just be restricted to services for looked after children, but the range of services provided in Brent.

**Recommendation 2** – The task group recommends that steps are taken to weight the criteria for adult social care services and mental health services to better reflect the needs of young people in transition. For example, mental health assessments for 18 to 25 year olds are adapted to meet the needs of young people to recognise the difference between those in transition and older adults.

**Recommendation 3** – The task group recommends that NHS Brent fully re-commissions the early intervention in psychosis service in 2010/11 and that it reports to the Health Select Committee during 2010/11 outlining the work of the service and the commissioning priorities for mental health services in Brent.

**Recommendation 4** – The task group recommends that officers develop a proposal for the remodelling of services for vulnerable young people so that there is greater emphasis on early intervention and preventative services. This should build on initiatives such as implementation of the Common Assessment Framework, the development of children's centres and introduction of the Family Intervention Project. The task group believes the development of a fully integrated preventative service is an aspiration the council and partners should be aiming to deliver and see this as a long term project. If implemented, it could ease the difficult transition from children's to adult's services as positive interventions will happen at an earlier stage in a young persons' life. Initial follow up on this recommendation will take place in 12 months time (April 2011) by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to see how it has been progressed.

**Recommendation 5** – The task group recommends that Brent Housing Partnership and Registered Social Landlords in Brent change their tenancy management procedures and policies to allow siblings who are leaving care the opportunity to share a tenancy if there is a desire to do so. This will affect a small number of care leavers each year that would benefit from the support provided by living with a brother or sister.

**Recommendation 6** – The task group recommends that the Young People in Care Services Team and Housing Services work up a solution to allow young people in care the opportunity to go to university outside of London but maintain a tenancy in Brent so they retain a link with their home area. This will affect a small number of young people each year, but could have a significant impact on their life chances if implemented.

**Recommendation 7** – The task group recommends that adult social services makes it clear who is the named contact for organisations working with vulnerable young people to improve the referral process and to assist young people when they are contacting statutory services.

**Recommendation 8** – The task group recommends that a prospectus of services for young people aged 16 to 25 in Brent is developed to help sign post young people in transition to the most appropriate services. The prospectus should include contact details for services and referral routes and should be used as a one-stop guide for staff and young people. Statutory services and voluntary organisations should be included in the prospectus.



**Recommendation 9** – The task group recommends that officers are instructed to work up proposals for a foyer project in Brent, bringing together a small amount of accommodation plus associated services to deliver a holistic, one stop service to meet the needs of vulnerable young people in transition from childhood to adulthood. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee should consider an update on progress in implementing this in October 2010.

**Recommendation 10** – The task group recommends that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee asks officers to prepare two further task group scopes to look at services in place for young people in Brent:

- (i). Transition services for young people with physical disabilities
- (ii). Mental health services for young people in Brent aged 16 to 25.

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## **Introduction**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee established the Transitions Services Task group to look at the services in place for vulnerable young people in Brent aged 16 to 25. The term “vulnerable” can be applied to many different groups of people, but the task group’s focus has been on the following groups:

- young people who are offenders or at risk of offending
- care leavers
- those in contact with secondary mental health services
- those who have a moderate learning difficulties
- teenage parents
- young people who are not in full time education, training or employment

The group was interested in the transition from childhood to adulthood, which can be a difficult time for any young person, even those that grow up in a stable family environment with strong parental support. The groups of interest to the task group capture the majority of Brent’s most challenging young people. Ensuring these young people receive the help and guidance they need during transition is crucial. The task group was keen to look at the journey young people go on as they leave the responsibility of children’s services and become adults.

It was decided early on in the review not to look at transition services for young people with physical disabilities. This is such a broad issue that could easily be the subject of a separate task group. It is also a One Council gold project and is an area that will be reviewed in the coming months, so it made little sense to duplicate this work.

## **Terms of reference**

The task group agreed to:

- Establish what services are in place currently for young people moving from the responsibility of children’s services to adult’s services.
- Seek the views of service users about to move from children’s to adult services – what support do they think they need, are they satisfied with arrangements that have been made for them.
- Consider how those who have already moved onto adult services regard the transition arrangements in place, and whether they were satisfied with the process when they were changing services.
- Look at best practice in this field that Brent can learn from.
- Consider the ambitions for services in Brent and the steps have been taken to realise those ambitions.
- Look at areas service providers feel that changes can be made to improve the services on offer.

## **Task group membership**

The members of the task group were Councillors Lesley Jones (chair), Will Motley and Arthur Steel. The councillors were supported by Andrew Davies, Policy and Performance Officer.

## Methodology

The task group collected much of its evidence from interviews with people working within the services connected to the transition of young people. The task group met with:

- Angela Chiswell, Head of Connexions
- Elzanne Hook, Head of Care Planning
- Genny Renard, Interim Head of Community Safety
- Perry Singh, Assistant Director, Housing
- Jenny Dunne, Homelessness Projects and Strategy Manager
- Sharon Stockman, Head of Localities Service
- Anita Dickenson, Acting Head of Youth Offending Service
- Graham Genoni, Assistant Director, Social Care
- Keith Skerman, Interim Assistant Director of Community Care
- Kofi Nyeru, Head of Learning Disabilities Partnership
- David Dunkley, Brent Mental Health Services
- Andrew McKnight, Regional Manager, De Paul
- Anthony York, Prison Sector Manager, De Paul
- 10 young people either in care or formally in care, facilitated by Natasha Thomson, Children in Care Participation Worker and Anne Edwards, Looked After Children Improving Outcomes Manager
- Four young people staying at the De Paul Hostel in Willesden

The task group spoke to two separate groups of young people who were either in the transitions phase, or were approaching the age when they would be moving into transition. One group had been in care or were still in the care of Brent Council. The second group were residents of the De Paul Hostel in Willesden. The young people were able to talk about their experiences and tell the task group about the services they thought worked well in Brent, where there were gaps and what they were concerned about as they moved towards the transitions period. Some of the ideas suggested by young people have become recommendations of the task group.

Desk-based research was carried out to look at examples of best practice in other parts of the UK. The national government has also produced a number of helpful papers on this issue, specifically “Transitions: Young Adults with Complex Needs” and “Realising Young Potential – supporting care leavers into education, employment and training”. The information collected from the desk based research has helped inform the task group’s findings and recommendations.

## National Context

A report on social exclusion produced in 2005 entitled “Transitions: Young Adults with Complex Needs” highlights that, “many of the issues that are thought of as the problems of teenagers are in fact as bad (or worse) for those in their early twenties, on whom much less policy has been focused – the phenomenon of ‘the invisible early twenties’”.<sup>1</sup>

The challenge for many young people is that services they have received as children often end abruptly at eighteen when their entitlement to youth provision ends. Young people move from services provided for children to services provided for adults, if they are eligible for services at all. During this process it is essential that an effective transition service is in place. This involves a holistic, person centred approach to assess an individual’s needs and

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<sup>1</sup> Transitions Young Adults with Complex Needs, A Social Exclusion Unit Report, 2005

the services needed to support them in their life.

When transition services are not in place young people can face great difficulty in accessing adult services as referral arrangements vary and assessment criteria for adults services are often stricter than for children's services (i.e. there is a higher eligibility threshold for adults services). For example Adult Mental Health Services (AMHS) tend to focus on people who have severe and enduring disorders, while specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have a different perspective, with the result that young people who have been receiving CAMHS find that they are not eligible for AMHS.<sup>2</sup>

In 2007 the Socially Excluded Adults Public Service Agreement (PSA 16) work programme was agreed by seven government departments with the aim of improving the life chances for the most vulnerable members of society. PSA 16 will tackle the barriers to getting a home and a job for four disadvantaged groups:

- Adults in contact with secondary mental health services
- Adults with moderate to severe learning disabilities
- Offenders under probation supervision
- Care leavers aged 19

There is an acceptance at a national level that more needs to be done to help these groups which could otherwise fall between the responsibility of different service areas and end up not being picked up at all. The long term consequences of this could mean that more intensive intervention is required later in a young person's life to ensure they are able to sustain themselves.

### **Brent Context**

It is useful to know how many young people in Brent the council believes may be in the transition phase and could need the support of services in some way.

*Young offenders* – As of November 2009 the Brent Youth Offending Service was working with 212 young people on court ordered sentences, nine of whom were in the care of Brent Council. Over the course of the last year, the YOS had worked with 459 people in total, some of whom will have been on their "final warning" and not actually sentenced by the courts. This equates to 2% of the population of 10 to 17 year olds in Brent. Brent has relatively low levels of youth offending taking into account its large population of young people and its relative deprivation.

*Looked after children* – The number of looked after children in Brent has declined over the last three years. In 2007 there were 429, in 2008 there were 370 and in 2009 there were 359 looked after children. It is known that care leavers are over represented in the homeless, prisoner, mental health and learning disabled population<sup>3</sup>.

*Young people in contact with secondary mental health services* – **Need to add this**

*Young people who have a moderate to severe learning difficulties* – **Need to add this**

*Teenage parents* - As of December 2007 (the latest available figures in July 2009) Brent showed 43.1 teenage conceptions per 1,000, an increase of 3.1 since 2006. Brent was

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<sup>2</sup> Transition of adolescents to adult mental health services , Research in Practice, January 2006

<sup>3</sup> Realising Young Potential: Supporting care leavers into education, employment and training. November 2009

performing marginally better than the London average for the same period which was 45.6 teenage conceptions per 1,000.

*Young people who are not in full time education, training or employment* – The number of young people who are not in education, employment or training is set out in the table below.

**Table 1 - Number of young people NEET in Brent<sup>4</sup>**

Year	Post compulsory education cohort	16-18 year olds NEET (Adjusted number)	NEET (target)	% 16-18 yr olds whose current activity is not known (target)
2006	6,680	450	6.7% (7.8%)	5.0% (6.8%)
2007	6,405	370	5.7% (7.4%)	6.0% (6.8%)
2008	6,767	310	4.6% (7.1%)	5.2% (6.6%)
Nov 2009 – Jan 2010	6,899	307	4.5% (6.5%)	5%

This task group has not focussed on the majority of young people in Brent who will move from childhood to adulthood without major problems. The actual numbers of young people known to the youth offending team, children's services or who Connexions record as NEET and therefore at risk of a difficult transition is relatively small compared to the total number of young people in the borough (and there is overlap between the young people in the groups recorded by statutory agencies). The task group has focussed its work on this small group of people, who without the help and support of statutory agencies in their late teens to early twenties may not be able to support themselves, lead "normal" lives and make a full and positive contribution to society.

### **Services working with young people in transition**

There is a wide range of service providers working with young people in transition, from schools and colleges through to youth clubs, sports clubs and church groups. The task group has considered the services provided by the main statutory agencies that work with the client groups of concern – Connexions, Children's Services including the Localities Service and Care Planning Service, Housing Services, Community Safety and the Youth Offending Service, Adult Social Care and Brent Mental Health Services.

The task group spent time interviewing people who work in service areas that are supporting young people in transition. It is clear that there is a vast amount of good work going on in the borough, including effective partnership working between different arms of the council and external agencies. Summarised below are the main issues relating to the transition of vulnerable young people within services provided in Brent.

<sup>4</sup> Brent Connexions, August 2009

### *Localities Services – Ensuring services are joined up and effective from early childhood*

The Localities Team picks up all new referrals to the Children and Families Department and is the first point of contact with all children that need a statutory social care service that aren't in care in Brent. The service was established in January 2009 and there are five localities teams in the borough – one for each locality in Brent. The Localities Team works with homeless young people, intentionally homeless families and families without recourse to public funds. They work with children with high level support needs such as children subject to child protection plans. The team will support other agencies, such as children's centres to deliver child protection plans.

Each of the localities teams is based in the area they are working in, except for the Willesden Team which is based at Chesterfield House in Wembley. They will become part of an integrated children's service from April 2010 bringing the localities teams together with the preventative arm of the Youth Offending Service and the Connexions service.

There are 206 children in Brent subject to child protection plans. BME children are over represented in this group (as well as being over represented in the numbers of children in care). Child protection plans are usually put in place for children under the age of 12. The focus on children aged 12 or over is normally on preventing family breakdown rather than child protection. There are 706 children in need – 70 of these come from families with no recourse to public funds. If it is established that a child needs to go into the care of the local authority responsibility for that child passes from the Localities Team to the Care Planning Service.

Some young people over the age of 10 in contact with the Localities Team will be known to the police or the YOS preventative arm. If there is a family support meeting for the child, the YOS will be present at that meeting. The young person also attends to help improve communication between agencies and the young person. When the Localities Team was formed 80% of staff were employed from agencies. This affected relationships with other services but in recent months the numbers of agency staff have reduced. Relationships with other agencies are improving as a result.

Support for frontline safeguarding services is vital. Although the council has recruited permanent children's social workers to the localities teams, many of them are newly qualified and still need management support. This is crucial if the council is to run an effective child protection service. The task group does not want to see resources in this area of council activity reduced.

### *Care Planning Services*

Brent provides care services for all children and young people from the borough aged 0 to 24 who are unable to live with their parents. Care services are also provided to unaccompanied asylum seekers who are either placed in Brent by the home office, or who arrive here of their own accord.

The Care Service in Brent is split into two parts – the Care Planning Service works with children aged 0 to 13 year olds and the Young People in Care Service looks after children from the age of 13 and up to 24 if they remain in full time education (to HND or degree level). There is a strong academic focus on those who are 16+ and in care. They have to attend school or college, whilst unaccompanied asylum seekers have to attend English lessons. However, there are gaps in the service affecting the educational needs of those aged 16+.

Educational attainment of young people in care is low, but improving. The Care Planning team is working with Connexions to address these gaps.

Normally young people move on from care when they are 18, but the Young People in Care Team will stay in touch with them until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. The idea behind dividing the teams in this way is to ensure that the same social workers remain with a child throughout their time in care (as far as this is possible). There has been a trend in Brent towards older children coming into the care service, rather than returning home. This is usually as a result of a breakdown in the relationship with their family meaning that they can no longer remain in their family home.

To assist in the transition phase, each young person in care has a needs assessment carried out three months before they turn 16. The needs assessment informs the pathway plan for the young person as they approach a time when they will be able to leave local authority care.

It should be noted that of the 358 looked after children in Brent, seven are in custody (information correct in October 2009).

### *Adult Social Care*

The adult social care service provides care and support for adults aged 18 plus. There are some specific projects in place to help younger clients in transition, specifically the PSA 16 group – socially excluded adults including care leavers at 19, offenders under probation supervision, adults receiving secondary mental health services and adults with learning disabilities known to councils. A successful bid has been made to fund employment and housing schemes for these groups. Funding will come from the Department of Health to pump prime projects. £100,000 has been awarded towards this project, which will help provide settled accommodation and training for people in this group. A diagnostic is to be carried out to look at the gaps in provision for the PSA 16 group in Brent before the funding is allocated.

Third sector organisations and other partners will contribute to this project – the £100,000 funding is to be used to provide capacity in the third sector to help meet the needs of the PSA 16 group. There is support for young people in these groups already, through Supporting People. Supporting People priorities include care leavers and homeless people. The schemes arising from the PSA 16 project will be provided in addition to current Supporting People funded schemes.

### *Brent Mental Health Services*

Brent Mental Health Services provide an early intervention in psychosis service. This is a new service aimed at people having a mental health breakdown. It is a multi-disciplinary team, including social workers and mental health specialists. It works closely with CAMHS in an attempt to keep young people out of mainstream, adult mental health services. Where possible, steps are taken to not diagnose young people as “mentally ill”, to avoid labelling them or stigmatising them from an early age. Brent Mental Health services will also physically locate services for young people away from adult mental health services to avoid stigmatising young people.

There are criteria for qualifying for support from this service – young people may have substance misuse problems or extreme adolescent issues, such as depression. It is a secondary mental health service so eligibility criteria are set at a high level and will work with

people with critical or substantial need. The service has high staff to patient ratios to reflect the needs of patients. Typically the service will work with a young person for around 3 years. Most young people are referred to the service by their GP, although the police and social services have made referrals.

Funding for a full early intervention service has been in place for a year. The team, when fully staffed, will be 13 strong. The strength of the service is that arbitrary age cut offs are removed. Broadening the criteria for this type of service for people in transition would be of benefit to the borough, to take in the wider issues connected to transition. However, the early intervention service is currently stretched – the service manager is normally only responsible for staff management but at present has their own case load because the service doesn't have a full complement of staff. There is also a concern that it won't be fully commissioned by NHS Brent in 2010/11.

### *Community Safety and Youth Offending Team*

The Brent Youth Offending Service works with young people aged 10 to 17 on court ordered sentences. It also runs two crime prevention programmes, one based on the Church End Estate, the second a borough wide scheme. In limited circumstances the YOS will work with young people over the age of 18 if it is their best interests to remain within the scope of the YOS. However, these cases are exceptional and the vast majority of young offenders subject to a court order will transfer to the responsibility of the probation service when they turn 18.

In October 2009 the Brent YOS was working with 212 young people on court ordered sentences, nine of whom were in the care of Brent Council (it was noted that nationally, two out of three young people on court ordered sentences will have been known to social services or been on the at risk register). Of the young people aged 18+ that the YOS was working with, eight were male and three were female. Over the course of the last year, the YOS has worked with 459 people in total, some of whom will have been on their "final warning" and not sentenced by the court for an offence. This equates to 2% of the population of 10 to 17 year olds in Brent. Brent has relatively low levels of youth offending considering its relative deprivation and large population of young people. The vast majority of young offenders are male.

Each YOS case worker is responsible for around 20-25 young people compared to the 45-50 that probation staff have in their case load. This reflects the more intensive one to one support that the YOS provides for young people. Services for young people aged 18-21 have been discussed at a national level and whilst there is a recognition that this group does need to be dealt with differently to other adult offenders, there are no immediate plans to provide such a service. Probation services are quite different to those provided by the YOS. There is considerably less one to one support which young people aged 18 to 21 often need and the Probation Service is unable to offer the more holistic approach delivered by the YOS which is a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary service.

Black African and Black Caribbean males are over- represented in the numbers of young offenders compared to the overall population in Brent – a phenomenon common across London. It is hoped that the Triage Project, a pre court intervention service being run in conjunction with the police will work to reduce this over representation as well as reducing the number of First Time Entrant to the youth justice system.

Broadly speaking, the YOS will often be working with young people who will already be known to children's services. Many will display a number of the following risk factors:



- Dysfunctional family background
- Single parent families, where the father is often absent
- Parent (particularly the father) in prison
- Young offenders are much more likely to be male than female
- Parents may have substance misuse problems (drugs or alcohol) or mental health needs
- Young offenders have often dropped out of education or been excluded from school or college

Efforts are made not to criminalise young offenders at an early age. Emphasis is placed on changing behaviours via a community based approach to sentencing rather than seeking early custodial sentences. It is known that young people who serve a custodial sentence are more likely to reoffend – approximately 75% of under 25s who serve time in prison will reoffend within two years of being released. This compares to a reoffending rate of around 66% for all offenders, within two years of release from prison.

### *Housing young people and homelessness prevention*

The focus of Brent Council's homelessness work is on homelessness prevention, regardless of the client's age. The council uses a range of options to prevent homelessness, including the private rented sector public sector, hostel accommodation or temporary accommodation (often rented from the private sector). Bed and breakfast accommodation will be used as a last resort on a short term basis for young people in need of temporary accommodation. In October 2009, 10 young people were housed in B&B accommodation in Brent, but use of alternative accommodation is preferred for this client group. There are three temporary crash pad places in Brent to be used on a temporary basis, as well as 80 permanent units for 16 to 24 year olds.

The majority of young people who present to the council claiming they are homeless have usually left their family home because of difficulties with their parents and family. The Housing Solutions Service will work with the young person to try and resolve the problems which have led to them leaving the family home and negotiate a settlement to try and get the young person to return home. In most cases this is the best outcome for the individual and the local authority, although there are times when it is not appropriate for the individual to return to their family.

Housing Services has a well developed protocol for working with Children and Families so that care leavers can be housed. They are re-housed through the LOCATA Scheme, and floating support is provided for all care leavers. However, some young people don't want to engage with floating support, which can lead to difficulties with their tenancy. It is not possible to force young people to work with the agencies who are trying to help them – some people are fiercely independent as the task group heard from service providers and young people themselves. In 2008/09 36 care leavers were placed in local authority housing; this number has fallen since an initial surge of cases following the [Hillingdon Judgment](#) (in previous years as many as 85 care leavers have been housed in local authority accommodation).

### *Connexions Services*

The Brent Connexions Service works with all young people aged 13 to 19 (up to age 25 for young people with learning difficulties or physical disabilities) and provides information, advice, guidance and support to young people to help them make informed choices about learning and work options and to make effective transitions to adult and working life. Where

needed, the service will provide sustained one-to-one support for young people to help them access services or remain in education or work. Services are delivered by Connexions Personal Advisers under a range of contracts and service level agreements and an in-house delivery team. Connexions delivers services in schools the College and alternative education providers and through a range of outreach locations e.g. in collaboration with the Youth Service and voluntary sector. There is a Connexions Centre at Willesden.

Connexions keeps in contact with all young people aged 16 to 18 who live in the borough, or who are educated in Brent so that the current activity of young people is known as accurately as possible. This information is used to support the Service targets. Department of Children, Schools and Families have drawn up minimum contact levels and where a young person's activity cannot be confirmed within the specified time frame their activity becomes 'not known'. It is a significant challenge for the Connexions service to keep in touch with young people. Table 1 above shows that the percentage of 16 to 18 years whose current activity was unknown was 5%. Although this was below target, it still represents a significant number of young people whose current activity was unknown. This is partly a reflection of Brent's mobile population, changing phone numbers and the fact that young people travel across boroughs to take up learning or work. A pan-London Connexions database is assisting greatly in keeping in contact with young people who move across Borough boundaries. Where young people are off the radar and not in touch with Connexions, Connexions Personal Advisers work in teams to go out into the community and re-engage young people who may have not had recent contact with the service.

Young people aged 16-18 who are not in education, employment or training are known as NEET. The NEET figures for Brent are included in the context section of this report. As of August 2009, 82 out of 150 local authorities in England were showing an increase in the number of young people NEET, compared to the same period in 2008. In Brent 6.3% of 16-18 year olds were NEET, against a target of 6.5%. However, there were 53 more young people who were NEET in August 2009 than in August 2008, owing to an increase of 641 in the number of young people in the cohort over the same period. Broadly speaking, the number of young people NEET in Brent has been constant between 2008 and 2009.

## **Main Findings**

The evidence gathered by the task group produced a number of common themes raised by officers in different service areas, as well as by young people. There are a number of areas that the task group would like to be addressed, although it is appreciated that there are no easy solutions to helping vulnerable young people in transition. In the current climate where public services are facing significant funding cuts, putting more resources into service provision for vulnerable 16-25 year olds may not be possible. It will take a fundamental change in the way services are delivered to meet the needs of this group, and it will take time and careful planning to deliver the changes needed. There is not a quick fix to the transition problem. That said, the task group feels that it needs to highlight its findings, which are set out below, along with recommendations it would like to see implemented in the short, medium and long term.

### *Corporate responsibilities*

One of the most striking issues brought to the task group's attention during their work was the need for councillors to be aware of their responsibilities as corporate parent to children in care. In order to make this responsibility explicit, some authorities have notionally divided responsibility for specific children to members of the council. This reinforces the duty that

members have and raises the profile and importance of care services to elected members. Greater interaction between councillors and children in care could have benefits for both groups, not least that members would be able to share the achievements of young people in care and see the impact that care services have on the lives of this vulnerable group of people. The task group benefited from the evidence it received from the group of looked after children it met and hopes that the recommendations suggested directly by young people will have a positive impact on their lives. Regular contact between councillors and looked after children can help to inform decisions that members have to make about services for young people in Brent.

**Recommendation 1 – The task group recommends that officers working with the Children in Care Council, known as Care in Action, develop a range of activities to bring elected councillors and young people in care together to discuss ways of improving council services. This should not just be restricted to services for looked after children, but the range of services provided in Brent.**

#### *Young people that do not meet service criteria*

There was a reoccurring issue raised by virtually every officer interviewed by the task group and also by some of the young people – that there is a lack of services for vulnerable young people who have support needs but don't quite meet the criteria for adult services or children's services. For example, they may have a minor learning disability, a substance misuse problem or at they're at risk of offending, but they are not vulnerable enough to meet service criteria. Some young people, such as disabled children, follow a well defined route into adult services. Likewise, if children have been in care they will be eligible to receive support services until the age of 21. Care leavers have a pathway plan, which takes in services such as education, health and skills needed for independent living. A care leaver is someone between the ages of 16-21 who is leaving or has left the care system having spent at least 13 weeks (continuously or in aggregate since the age of 14) in the care of the local authority. Young people who were in care before the age of 14, but not since their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday are not necessarily eligible for leaving care services. Children who have been privately fostered or the subject of a Special Guardianship Order may be eligible for some leaving services. For young people who haven't been in care at all, as well as those who were in care before they turned 14 any support they may have received from children's services can stop once they turn 18.

Providing services for this group is essentially what this task group is about. At present Brent is no different from the majority of councils in that services are set up to address crises and to help those people with the most complex needs. It has been acknowledged that there needs to be greater intervention with young people and their families at an early stage to prevent problems developing further down the line.

Specific issues in Brent include a gap in services for people with mental health problems and those with minor learning disabilities. Young people receiving services for a learning disability or minor mental health issue from children's services may not meet adult social care criteria. There are different IQ levels required to qualify for services from children's and adult's services. Alternative solutions are sought, such as referrals to Connexions, but it is common that support for young people can reduce significantly when they turn 18. An individual with low to moderate learning disabilities would be unlikely to meet the adult social care criteria, unless they have a dual diagnosis (such as mental health issues as well). It is this group of people that are likely to end up with problems in the future, such as involvement with the criminal justice system, homeless or a teenage parent.

In an ideal world there would be a service in place for 18 to 24 year olds with moderate needs that don't currently meet secondary mental health service criteria or criteria for adult social care. Organisations like Connexions provide help and guidance for young people in this situation, but more is needed. Care leavers are able to use the Leaving Care Service – it is those that haven't been in care that can suffer because of the gaps in services.

The government would like councils to do more for these groups, but this requires resources that aren't readily available. Initiatives such as the PSA 16 project will help, but won't provide a fix to all problems. It is within the gift of the council to set criteria for services and so in theory, if there was the political will and the funding available, the criteria for support from adult social care could be extended to include a greater number of young people. At the moment care will only be provided to people with substantial or critical support needs (a full definition of criteria is included at appendix 2).

There are steps being taken already within Brent to improve this situation. Housing services are working with Children and Families to create a multi-purpose team to work with young people in transition. This team will be in place from March 2010 and will include staff from Connexions, housing advisors, and social workers to work on a holistic basis with families, and not just the young person, to address their needs.

The task group hopes that consideration can be given to the criteria for adult services to reflect the needs of young people. It is of concern to the task group that arbitrary age limits are used to determine who qualifies for services, even though young people have different levels of need and maturity that can't be defined by age alone. Individual circumstances need to be taken into account.

The task group is not suggesting that the criteria for adult social care or mental health services is changed, but it does advocate the weighting of service criteria in favour of young people in transition. The needs of a young person are very different to those of a forty year old, and yet the same eligibility criteria for services apply. As the task group was told in relation to mental health services, misdiagnosing an 18 year old can have a far greater impact on that persons' life then the misdiagnosis of a 40 year old. Adapting the mental health assessment process for those under 25 might be a useful service change, to better reflect their needs and to take into account age differences.

The task group would like discretion to be shown by service providers to ease the transition of young people who had been receiving support services as children, but find themselves ineligible for services as adults.

**Recommendation 2 – The task group recommends that steps are taken to weight the criteria for adult social care services and mental health services to better reflect the needs of young people in transition.**

The task group has received legal advice on this recommendation. It is possible that if this was introduced the council could be open to challenge from judicial review and also under age discrimination legislation. Therefore, further work will need to be done to see whether it is possible to implement this. At this stage, the task group is keen to draw attention to the issue, that the needs of young people aged 18-25 are different to those of an older person and need to be recognised. Even if the recommendation can't be implemented, this is an issue that will need to be resolved.

The task group is concerned that existing services for young people with mental health needs are retained and fully re-commissioned in 2010/11. The task group was informed that the early intervention in psychosis service is already stretched and may not be fully re-

commissioned by NHS Brent in 2010/11. The service is a secondary mental health service, working with people who have substantial or critical needs. It does not address the needs of many young people in Brent, who fall below the criteria threshold, but is a crucial service for young people with high level needs, keeping them away from mainstream mental health services. The task group does not want to see any reduction in service.

**Recommendation 3 – The task group recommends that NHS Brent fully re-commissions the early intervention in psychosis service in 2010/11 and that it reports to the Health Select Committee during 2010/11 outlining the work of the service and the commissioning priorities for mental health services in Brent.**

#### *Early identification and intervention with young people and their families*

Early identification and prevention of problems for young people is crucial. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) should make a big difference for young people in the future as it will help professionals to make early, fast decisions about the needs of young people and to address those needs at an early opportunity. The 14 and 15 year olds who are NEET, or young offenders were probably the same young people having problems in primary school or even in pre-schools. The CAF should help to pick these young people up much earlier than is currently the case.

There still needs to be a concerted effort to implement the CAF to get all children who would benefit from services into the support packages they need. The shortage of school nurses and health visitors is a barrier to effective implementation. These professionals pick up the tell tale signs that young people have issues that should be addressed (such as being unclean, or bruised etc). The task group was told that it is common that young people who are neglected in their early years end up in care, in the youth justice system, or NEET in the future. The CAF should help to deal with these young people at the earliest opportunity.

There are areas of best practice in Brent that should be highlighted and applauded. The Family Intervention Project (FIP) has been launched to work with families who are affected by problems such as worklessness, offending or substance misuse, where interventions by single services have failed to address their issues. The FIP uses a multi-agency, holistic approach to problem solving and will work with 18 to 24 year olds if they are still part of the family unit. The FIP has been focussed on high risk families, where expenditure is significant and they will have been in contact with a number of services over a long period of time. Each service area involved (YOS, probation, CIST, RSLs and Housing) have been asked to nominate their most difficult families – there is likely to be overlap between the nominations.

One of the main benefits of this project is that the transition element for young people is removed. Transition is built into the FIP and the needs of young people moving from childhood to adulthood are addressed as part of the package of services. It should be noted that this service has only recently been implemented and its success is still to be evaluated, but it is based on a best practice model and supports the objective of early intervention and working with families to address problems.

#### *Focus on prevention*

There is a debate to be had about front loading service provision so that there is greater focus on preventative services through working with families and young people at an earlier stage to stop problems developing and becoming more serious. There is an argument that money will be saved if this approach was adopted. However, it requires spending more money in one area of service (children's services) and less in another (adults services),

whilst at the same time continuing to provide services for those who need them. It is a complicated picture without an easy solution.

The task group is firmly of the view that rather than letting a person's problem reach a stage where they meet service criteria before receiving help, switching the emphasis of services to proactive, early intervention where possible, the needs of young people can be addressed if issues are identified in their formative years. This is a long term aspiration that won't be quickly implemented as it requires a step change in service provision. Already in Brent services are moving towards this – the development of Children Centres and implementation of the Common Assessment Framework help the council and other organisations engage with young people and their families at an early stage. The task group hopes that Brent can build on these developments.

One of the real challenges facing those planning services is that switching the focus of services entirely to early intervention and prevention and not on responding to current need is that it will require greater investment initially, especially in children's services. However, any savings produced from such an approach are likely to be delivered elsewhere, such as in adult social care services, youth offending services or health services, but not necessarily in the area where the investment is made. This will require a "one council" approach to service development, working across departmental and organisational boundaries to realise benefits and savings. If savings are delivered they are likely to be achieved in the longer term and could be hard to evidence initially. Current caseloads will also stretch existing resources and resources in the future. That said, the task group is keen that this approach is developed over time.

The task group appreciates that this is a long term aspiration, not a short term goal. It also needs to be fully worked up by professionals in the services involved, to see what the scope is for the realignment of services to focus on prevention. The task group was told repeatedly that this would be the most appropriate way of delivering services – the challenge is in implementing this change particularly in an environment where funding for additional investment in services may not be forthcoming.

**Recommendation 4 – The task group recommends that officers develop a proposal for the remodelling of services for vulnerable young people so that there is greater emphasis on early intervention and preventative services. This should build on initiatives such as implementation of the Common Assessment Framework, the development of children's centres and introduction of the Family Intervention Project. The task group believes the development of a fully integrated preventative service is an aspiration the council and partners should be aiming to deliver and see this as a long term project. If implemented, it could ease the difficult transition from children's to adult's services as positive interventions will happen at an earlier stage in a young persons' life. Initial follow up on this recommendation will take place in 12 months time (April 2011) by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to see how it has been progressed.**

#### *Moving to independent housing*

One of the most challenging aspects of transition for young people in care is the move to independent housing. The Care Planning team has a monthly meeting with officers in the Housing Department to improve the referrals process between the two departments and to improve the transition for young people from care services to independent living. The task group was told that the arrangements between the Care Planning Team and Housing Services largely worked well, but speaking to young people directly about their experiences there are some issues that the task group would like the council to consider.

The task group spoke to young people in care specifically about housing. They reported that the council needed to be better at helping care leavers find a place to live on their own, and assist them as they move in to their new place. It can be quite daunting for a young person to sign a tenancy agreement, set up gas and electric services and organise their move in to a new home and many will need help and support to do this. Assistance with this varies, depending on the key worker. One young person reported a good experience, where a key worker had been really helpful. Others were worried how move on arrangements would be implemented when they left their foster home.

There were two specific issues that were raised by young people in care that the task group would like to see addressed. The first related to siblings in care, who are moving to independent housing. Siblings leaving care are not currently housed together, even if they would benefit from the mutual support this could provide. The reason that this doesn't happen at present is that there is a shortage of larger properties in the borough, but also because housing providers prefer to have one named tenant rather than shared tenancies in case there are problems with the property or tenancy. This affects a small number of siblings each year, but is an issue which the task group feels should be addressed. When the group spoke to young people in care, contact with family was an important issue for them. It would be unfortunate if young people were isolated because it wasn't possible to overcome this housing problem.

**Recommendation 5 – The task group recommends that Brent Housing Partnership and Registered Social Landlords in Brent change their tenancy management procedures and policies to allow siblings who are leaving care the opportunity to share a tenancy if there is a desire to do so. This will affect a small number of care leavers each year that would benefit from the support provided by living with a brother or sister.**

The task group would like housing providers to offer siblings a joint tenancy if they are leaving care at the same time and being housed in social housing. If one sibling is already living in RSL or local authority housing, the task group would like them to be given the opportunity to change their tenancy to a joint tenancy if the siblings wish to do this. It is acknowledged that there are restrictions in this area. A secure tenancy can only be changed from a sole tenancy to a joint tenancy if one sibling has been living in the property for at least 12 months.

Secondly, the task group hopes that looked after children can be given every opportunity to go to the university of their choice. At present looked after children in Brent will generally go to university in London (if they go to university at all) in order to sustain the tenancy they have on their home in Brent (usually provided by the local authority). The task group is concerned this is limiting their choice of university. The group believes that there should be a way of ensuring that young people who have been in care can maintain their links with home area whilst at university in another town and are able to return home to see siblings or other family and reconnect with support networks during holidays. There are issues here – resources are scarce and so it will be difficult to maintain a property in London as well as in the university town. It would not be ideal to have an empty property whilst the young person is away at university. But, this would only affect a small number of young people each year and is something the task group believes that should be investigated further.

**Recommendation 6 – The task group recommends that the Young People in Care Services Team and Housing Services work up a solution to allow young people in care the opportunity to go to university outside of London but maintain a tenancy in Brent so they retain a link with their home area. This will affect a small number of**

**young people each year, but could have a significant impact on their life chances if implemented.**

The task group has taken legal advice on this recommendation. One requirement of a secure tenancy and an assured tenancy respectively is that the tenant must reside at that property as their only or principal home (section 81 of the Housing Act 1985 for secure tenancies and section 1(b) of the Housing Act 1988 for assured tenancies). Satisfying this requirement if a tenant lives in another town for a significant part of the year might be difficult, though it is not impossible. One key issue is the length of the term times during the year. However, the issue of maintaining a tenancy in London and living and studying in another town is practically difficult as highlighted above. Issues include paying the rent on a tenancy in London, as housing benefit may not be paid for these purposes.

Whilst the task group appreciates that there are difficulties with this recommendation, it is not expecting a quick fix to the problem, but for officers to look at the issue and see if there are ways to improve the situation for the small number of young people in the borough affected by this problem. An alternative would be to delay tenancy acquisition for young people who have been in care wanting to go to university outside of London and setting up alternative arrangements for them in Brent during university holidays. The task group would like more work to be done before ruling out this option altogether.

There are initiatives designed to ease the transition for young people who are not ready to move on when they reach 16 or 18. Brent operates a scheme called the My Place Scheme. This gives children in care the opportunity to stay in foster care after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. This is part of the planning that goes into giving young people more independence as they are not strictly in foster care any longer. But they can make a gradual transition to independent living. The young person's foster carer receives a reduced allowance after the 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, whilst the young person can claim housing benefit to help with their rent.

Preventing homelessness by working with families and young people is crucial. In the vast majority of cases it is far better for a young person to remain at home than to be accepted as homeless. Housing services work on a preventative basis, doing what they can to help people consider alternatives to the homelessness route. One of the important issues that the service has to tackle is changing the expectation culture. Maintaining the family unit and staying at home is far preferable for most 16 or 17 year olds, rather than going into hostel accommodation. Mediation has an important role to play here, as well as reinforcing messages that there are not enough local authority or RSL homes available for all who want them. This message has to get out to young people to stop them presenting as homeless.

Where family relationships do breakdown and a young person ends up presenting as homeless efforts are made to repair the relationship so that the young person can return home. Mediation services are engaged to do this. The importance of mediation across a range of services was apparent to the task group in carrying out this work. Making best use of mediation services can have a positive impact on homelessness cases, as well as addressing some of the cases picked up by care services. The task group believes that Brent would benefit from a single, council wide mediation contract which covers the full range of services needed not just those related to transitions services for vulnerable young people.

Other approaches have been tried to educate young people on the realities of homelessness. As part of the council's homeless prevention work, housing officers visit secondary schools in the borough to explain to students the harsh realities of homelessness. Through role play, question and answer sessions and one-to-one conversations, staff explain to young people the difficulties that they may face, and what practical steps they can



take to avoid homelessness. This programme has now been running for several years and has been commended by CLG as best practice.

The full impact of the [Southwark Judgement](#)<sup>5</sup> in Brent is still to be played out. The Southwark Judgement means that if a child of 16 or 17 who has left the family home presents himself to a local authority and asks to be accommodated, if the child is judged to be in need they will have to be accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 (i.e. they are the responsibility of children's services) rather than accommodated under the homelessness provisions of Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, as had been the case in most circumstances prior to the judgement.

Housing services used to pick up homeless people aged 16 and 17, but they are now the responsibility of children's services and are considered looked after children. There were sixteen 16 and 17 year olds housed in this way in the whole of 2008/09. To date in 2009/10 (October 2009), fifteen 16 and 17 year olds have been housed by Children's Services.

Senior managers in Children's Services believe that the Southwark Judgement is flawed. A blanket decision that all 16 and 17 year olds should become looked after children is not considered helpful. Many 16 and 17 year olds do not need the level of support provided to looked after children. The cost implications are significant as their housing cannot be paid for from housing benefit, which was the case when 16 and 17 year olds were the responsibility of housing services. There are also additional support costs that will have to be picked up by children's services.

Children's services is looking at increasing the amount of shared housing with support available in the borough to house these young people. The commissioning service is working with providers in Brent to see what housing can be offered to 16 and 17 year olds and where there are gaps in provision in order to comply with the Southwark Judgement.

### *Bringing transitions services together*

One of the issues reported by some services and their service users is frustration when having to deal with adults services when they have previously received support from children's services. Named contacts in adult services would be helpful for service managers and for the young people themselves. Young people would appreciate having a named contact in the services they are dealing with, particularly in the transitions period when assessments are being carried out. Any steps that can make the process easier for young people in dealing with statutory agencies would be welcomed by the task group.

**Recommendation 7 – The task group recommends that adult social services makes it clear who is the named contact for organisations working with vulnerable young people to improve the referral process and to assist young people when they are contacting statutory services.**

Each young person has a designated key worker. Consistency in this area is crucial but the task group was told that there have been too many staff changes – high numbers of agency staff haven't helped in forging long term relationships. The key worker could be a council employee or a health service employee and their relationship with a young person often holds the key to a successful transition. The young people that the task group met were firmly of this view.

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<sup>5</sup><http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/publications/documents/laeHouseofLordsJudgementonwhenlonechildren/>

The task group would like officers to address the complications inherent in the service model for young people in transition by putting together a prospectus of services. This could act as a guide to services for young people aged 16 to 25 in Brent, including contact details and referral routes. Statutory services and voluntary sector organisations should be included to build a comprehensive reference guide for young people and staff working with those in transition. The task group envisages this as an online resource, so updating it will be relatively straight forward and shouldn't involve expensive reprints. Of course, a small number of hard copies of the prospectus would be useful if it is launched to help raise awareness.

**Recommendation 8 – The task group recommends that a prospectus of services for young people aged 16 to 25 in Brent is developed to help sign post young people in transition to the most appropriate services. The prospectus should include contact details for services and referral routes and should be used as a one-stop guide for staff and young people. Statutory services and voluntary organisations should be included in the prospectus.**

Whilst the prospectus will be a useful addition to the resources available for service users and people working with young people in transition, it doesn't represent a radical step change in approach to working with vulnerable young people. The task group was keen to ask those interviewed how they would address the variety of issues associated with vulnerable young people, from offending, to homelessness, unemployment and substance misuses. One of the many views the task group heard included the development of a foyer project in Brent to act as a central hub for services for vulnerable young people. Foyers are centres for young people, normally between the ages of 16 and 25, that provide opportunities for education, training, advice and support as well as accommodation for residents.

The task group believes that there will be tremendous benefit to young people if they were able to call into one office for a range of advice and guidance, as well as a place to directly access services to assist their transition. A foyer project, with a small amount of accommodation, bringing together services such as housing, adult social care, children's services, Connexions, Youth Offending Service, Probation Services etc as well as voluntary and community organisations would be a useful addition to the service landscape in Brent. As well as providing accommodation for some young people, outreach projects, drop in sessions and classes to give young people the skills needed to lead "normal" lives could all be run from a foyer. The task group believes that development of a foyer could have a better chance of success if it was done in conjunction with an existing or planned development project. However, the task group is realistic that this isn't something that can be quickly developed, but is something which is considered to be a medium to long term ambition.

The task group hopes that the council's Executive can support this suggestion and ask officers to begin working up an outline for the development of a foyer. The funding situation facing local government is referred to elsewhere in this report. The task group does not think that ambitious recommendations should be rejected outright before the viability of a project such as a foyer is fully assessed, even in the current economic climate.

**Recommendation 9 – The task group recommends that officers are instructed to work up proposals for a foyer project in Brent, bringing together a small amount of accommodation plus associated services to deliver a holistic, one stop service to meet the needs of vulnerable young people in transition from childhood to adulthood. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee should consider an update on progress in implementing this in October 2010.**

## *Youth Offending Service and Probation*

There are serious concerns about the reduction in support provided to young offenders when they move from the responsibility of the Youth Offending Service to the probation service aged 18 because of the change in the intensive support provided. However, this is a national issue and not something that Brent has the power to change locally. Brent needs to be involved in the national debate, advocating a change to the system with other organisations to put forward a persuasive argument for changes to the status quo. Age thresholds are confusing for this group. Young offenders' institutes hold offenders up to the age of 21, but the YOS only works with people aged 17 and under. This aged base split in responsibility isn't helpful.

Unless there is an exceptional reason not to, all 17 year olds serving court ordered sentences are transferred to the supervision of the probation service once they turn 18. This can cause real problems because they will move from the more intensive support of children's services to adult services. The seriousness of offences committed generally escalates between the ages of 18 and 24, whilst substance abuse often becomes more serious during this period. The transfer from YOS to probation services is yet another example of an inappropriate, arbitrary age limit which fails to take into account the needs of the young people involved.

Another weakness in the system is the prevention agenda. Funding for projects like the Church End family intervention scheme is uncertain. The police and children's services are working together from Wembley Police Station to try and take a more progressive approach to youth crime, particularly for first time offenders. A young person may be asked to attend a crime prevention project instead of being charged with a crime – this is to keep them out of the youth justice system and to not criminalise young people at an early stage in their life. One of the problems with the YOS is that officers are struggling to bring in money to fund services, rather than working on crime prevention. There is a conflict here. The YOS's crime prevention role is limited, but again, the task group believes that this is where the focus for youth offending services should be. It is a concern to the task group that officers time is taken away from the job they know best, working with young offenders or on crime prevention projects, and instead is focussed on fundraising and ensuring services have the resources to keep going.

In general, young offenders in Brent come from the most deprived parts of the borough and in addition there is an interface between this deprivation, ethnicity and social housing which means that a disproportionate number of the YOS client group is drawn from the south of the borough.

### *Impact of the recession*

The task group has been concerned that the recession would have a significant impact on the number of young people NEET in the borough, especially those who were unemployed. We know that the recession has hit young people particularly hard. Unemployment figures for the UK released in January 2010 showed that the number of people unemployed was 2.46 million. Of this figure, 927,000 were aged 16 to 24<sup>6</sup>. The recession, inevitably, has had an impact on young people in Brent but steps are being taken to address this. A National Apprenticeship Service and a Brent Apprenticeship Scheme have been launched. The Brent scheme offers administration type placements within the council (up to 8 places are available). The national scheme offers apprenticeships in areas such as construction and

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<sup>6</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/7789784.stm>

hairdressing. More young people are staying in school or college, perhaps beyond the time they would have done in a more buoyant economy. But, more needs to be done to address youth employment if young people aren't to become rooted in a cycle of low paid, temporary jobs and unemployment.

## **Conclusions**

The task group is encouraged that there is a great deal of work taking place in Brent to improve the lives of vulnerable young people who require help and assistance for a variety of reasons, to ease their transition to adulthood. That said, there are issues in Brent that need to be addressed to make sure that young people get the best start in life and are able to access the services and support they need. The task group believes that dealing with some of these issues is relatively straight forward and low cost – it needs the will of those working with young people to implement changes, such as the introduction of joint tenancies between siblings leaving care that could have a positive impact on their lives. Other issues will take longer to address and involve the remodelling of services and a step change in approach to working with young people and their families. The reality is that there aren't quick solutions to some of the problems facing young people in the borough, but the task group believes that prevention and early intervention with families must be the driving principle behind service delivery.

The task group does not want overview and scrutiny's interest in transition services to finish once this review is completed. Follow up work will be carried out with service areas responsible for the implementation of recommendations to check on progress. The task group members have also suggested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the possibility of carrying out two further task groups – one looking at transitions services for people with physical disabilities (assuming it doesn't duplicate the gold project currently in progress) and a second to look at the provision of mental health services for young people in Brent aged 16 to 25 and in transition. If the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agrees to this request, these subjects will be included in the 2010/11 committee work programme.

**Recommendation 10 – The task group recommends that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee asks officers to prepare two further task group scopes to look at services in place for young people in Brent:**

- (i). Transition services for young people with physical disabilities**
- (ii). Mental health services for young people in Brent aged 16 to 25.**