 Brent	Corporate Parenting Committee 30 th October 2019
	Report from the Head of Looked After Children and Permanency.
Children's Commissioner's 2019 Stability Index for Children in Care	

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)	Open
No. of Appendices:	0
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Onder Beter, Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency Nigel Chapman Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report aims to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC) about findings of the annual 'Children's Commissioner's 2019 Stability Index' for Children in Care. This report contains Brent's response to the findings and provides a summary of activities undertaken to achieve stability for looked after children in Brent. This is to provide evidence that looked after children in Brent receive the appropriate stability of care arrangements, wherever they might be placed.
- 1.2 A previous report including the summary of the 2018 Stability Index and Brent's response was presented to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee in October 2018.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 The CPC is requested to review, comment on and question the contents of this report.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 The Stability Index (SI) was launched in 2017 by the Children's Commissioner¹ as an annual measure of the stability of the lives of children in care. The Children's Commissioner's intention in publishing the SI is to highlight the importance of promoting long-term relationships for children in care. Research evidences that outcomes are stronger for children who remain in the same placement for longer, at the same school and are supported by social workers who know them well.

- 3.2 The 2019 SI provides the latest national data available, by local authorities in England as at 31st March 2018. The report includes an analysis of the previous two years (2016/17 and 2015/16) against three data measures:

- change of placements for looked after children
- change of schools
- change of social workers.

- 3.3 The 2019² SI found out that there has been little change in stability for looked after children (LAC) at a national level over the last 12 months. Some of the national key findings are as follows:

- 7,900 children (10.4%) experienced multiple placement changes in 2017/18.
- Multiple placement changes are more common amongst Looked After Children with complex needs. Complex needs are seen to be the key determinants of a local authority's rate of placement change. The SI 2019 has clustered a number of complexities which have an impact on placement stability such as children in contact with Pupil Referral Units, children in residential or secure placements at their first placement, children who are remanded due to criminal activity, children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder or those with education health and care plans.

¹ The role of the Children's Commissioner was established under the Children Act 2004 which gave the Commissioner responsibility for promoting awareness of the views and interests of children. The Commissioner's remit includes understanding what children think about things that affect them and encouraging decision makers to take their best interests into account. The current Children's Commissioner is Anne Longfield OBE. The Children and Families Act 2014 further strengthened the remit, powers and independence of the Commissioner.

² For further details of 2019 Stability Index, please click on the following link:
<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publication/stability-index-2019/>

- Children with complex needs are more likely to move into private/residential care within 2 years. These placements are generally of much higher cost due to a child's complexity of presenting need.
- There has been a small decrease in the rate of mid-year school moves amongst LAC, from 13% in 2016/17 to 11% in 2017/18. However, the percentage of LAC experiencing school moves over a two-year period remained the same at 3%. The rate of school placement instability is influenced by the complexity of a local authority's LAC cohort.
- Around 1 in 5 LAC currently attend schools judged as 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate'.
- Around 1 in 4 LAC experience multiple changes of social workers. When moves across social work teams are discounted, i.e. a child moving from a short-term to a long-term team, it still remains the case that 10% of LAC experience multiple changes of social workers.

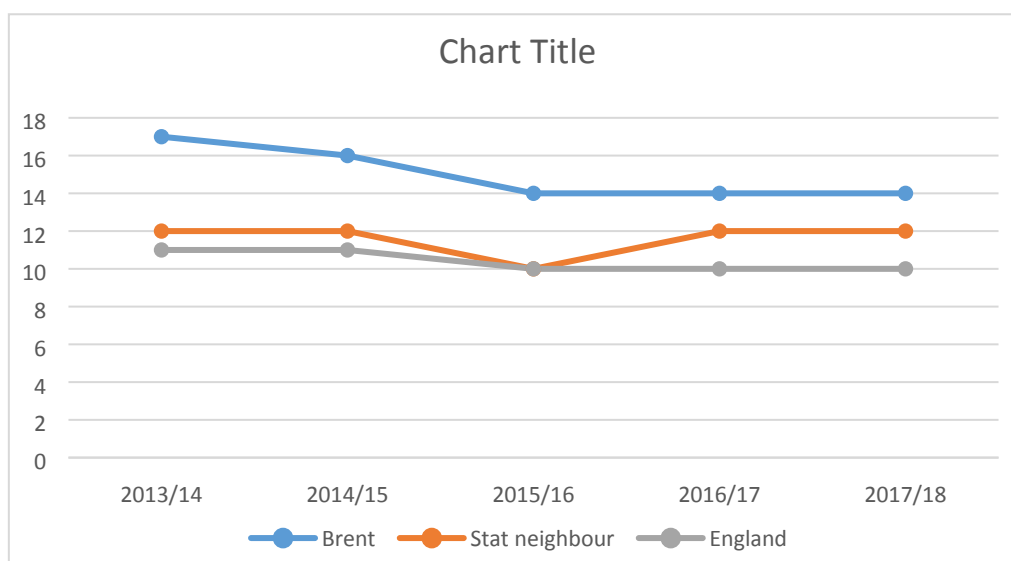
4. Stability Index for Brent

- 4.1 The SI 2019 contains a comparison of national data, with Brent's local context being compared to statistical neighbours across the three domains described in paragraph 3.2 above.

4.2 Placement Changes in Brent

- 4.3 The placement stability rate for looked after children in Brent has gradually improved and stabilised over the last 5 years even though it remains higher than statistical neighbours and the England average. The 2019 SI findings have confirmed this and showed that children in care in Brent have experienced more placement changes compared to the national average. 14% of Brent LAC had 2 or more placement changes over a 12-month period in 2017/18, an improvement of 1% from 2016/17, but higher than Brent's Statistical Neighbour average of 12%.

Table 1: 3+ Placement moves for looked after children



4.4 **Brent's Context and actions taken to improve placement stability for LAC**

4.5 The placement stability rate in Brent is linked to a number of factors that have an adverse effect on the life journey of children in care: traumatic childhood experiences prior to coming into care; the age of children at the point of entry to care and the multiple complex vulnerabilities in adolescence when many of Brent's children enter care including child sexual exploitation and gang affiliation. The challenges in ensuring a sufficient range and quality of foster care and residential provision for children with the most complex needs also impacts upon the indicator.

4.6 The majority of Brent's LAC population consists of older children, some of whom have multiple vulnerabilities that play a role in placement changes. In some cases, children and young people are moved to out of borough placements for safeguarding reasons such as breaking their links with local gangs. In 2017/18, 63.5% of Brent's LAC population was aged over 13, with 40% being over 16. Children entering the care system at an older age is one of the most significant factors to explain multiple placement moves. In 2017/18, 35% of new entrants to care were over the age of 16. The majority of these young people have experienced complex trauma and extra-familial abuse prior to becoming looked after. For example, some of them are already out of education or having additional needs. These complex needs and vulnerabilities may result in highly challenging behaviours that foster carers and many residential homes are not equipped to manage. It takes time for young people to settle into their placements and start having positive relationships with their care givers.

4.7 Identifying a suitable placement for an older young person with complex needs has become challenging due to the national insufficiency of appropriately

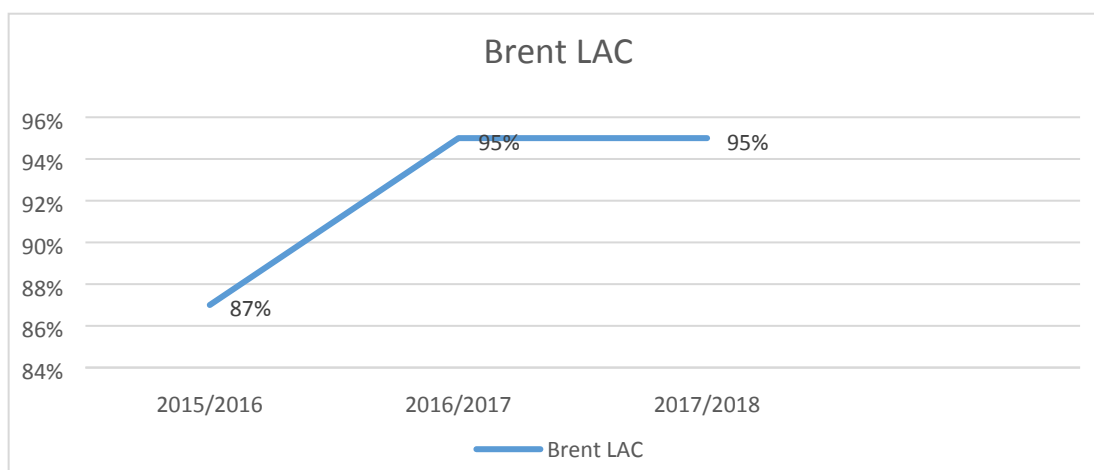
equipped foster or residential placements. In addition to that, the national availability of secure accommodation is scarce, that means identifying a secure accommodation for a vulnerable adolescent could take a long time due to a waiting list and in the meantime young people could have different placement moves. The DfE has initiated a Residential Leadership Board to look at and find solutions to the issues of quality and sufficiency in the residential children's home market.

- 4.8 Clinical case consultation is offered to social workers and foster carers of LAC in Brent by the Brent Emotional Well-being Team and a social pedagogue. This is to assist professionals and carers to help young people with complex behavioural and emotional difficulties. Foster carers and social workers' feedback is positive about the impact of this consultation.
- 4.9 Achieving better placement stability for LAC continues to be a priority for the CYP department. Robust processes are in place to ensure procedures are adhered to when a placement change is requested. This is to ensure all placement requests result in a well-planned move involving young people and their carers. All emergency placement moves are scrutinised by senior managers to ensure that it is in children's best interest to move.
- 4.10 A weekly Children's Placement Panel (CPP) takes place, chaired and attended by senior managers. The CPP has scrutiny on all placement changes with monitoring and tracking arrangements to ensure that children only move placements when it is in their best interests. Individual placements continue being monitored by social workers and by Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) as part of LAC Review.
- 4.11 The Head of Service, LAC and Permanency, has oversight of all placement change requests. It is a requirement that children and young people, their parents and carer, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), Brent Virtual School for LAC and other professionals are consulted prior to placement moves. Additionally, the Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes in CYP scrutinises any placement change requests for out of borough placements consistent with the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.

5 School Changes

- 5.1 Children in care in Brent experience fewer changes of schools compared to their peers nationally: 9 % of Brent LAC had a midyear move in 1 year, below the statistical neighbour average of 10% (range 5% -16%). In 17/18, 94% of Brent LAC were placed in 'Good' or 'Outstanding' schools compared to an average of 87.2% across statistical neighbours. 31% of Brent LAC were in Outstanding schools, an increase from 28% in 16/17. Brent ranks joint 2nd within the statistical neighbour cohort for the proportion of LAC in 'Good' or 'Outstanding' schools. Table below shows the progress for the last three years of published data:

Table 2: Proportion of LAC in 'Good' or 'Outstanding' Schools.



- 5.2 Brent Virtual School for Looked After Children works in partnership with social work teams to ensure that no looked after child is permanently excluded at statutory school age. Over the last 2 years, no LAC of statutory school age has been permanently excluded. Social workers, foster carers and schools work with BVS in completing a Personal Education Plan (PEP) that sets out educational targets based on individual circumstances and required standards.

6 Change of Social Workers

- 6.1 The 2019 SI reported data suggested that children in care in Brent experience more changes in their social workers compared to national data. There is however a wide variation in local authority reporting on this figure that makes meaningful comparison difficult.
- 6.2 The 2018 Brent figure of 25% has improved from the previous year when it was 36%. The rate of permanent social workers in the Looked After Children and Permanency Service has increased to 90% in 2019 from 75% last year. This is more likely to have a positive impact on stability for children. The impact of positive long-term relationships for children in care in Brent was recognised by Ofsted in the 2018 inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS).
- 6.3 In supporting recruitment and retention of permanent social workers for children, the Council's General Purposes Committee agreed in 2018 to introduce initiatives such as offering retention bonuses and 'golden hello payments' to new staff in hard to recruit posts. Some of the other activities that have assisted in creating an improvement in the number of social workers are:
- Having a comprehensive support package for newly qualified social workers known as the Assessed Year in Practice (ASYE) programme where newly qualified social workers are supported via more frequent supervision, mentoring, reflection time and protected caseloads

- Recently developed career progression pathways for social workers that allows social workers to progress in their career within the local authority rather than seeking these opportunities elsewhere.
- Participating in specific programmes to recruit social workers such as 'step up to social work programme' that provides a social work qualification to individuals with a first degree other than social work.
- The focus on international recruitment of social work staff in 2019 that resulted in 14 social workers being recruited from southern Africa and India.

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