



**Children and Young People's Department  
Looked After Children and Care Leavers' Strategy  
2018-2020**

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## 1. Foreword

In Brent we are passionate about improving the lives and life chances of our looked after children and care leavers. Our role is that of any good parent - to help children and young people to access opportunities and to have high aspirations for them.

This strategy confirms our commitment to work in partnership with children and young people, their parents, carers, families and partner agencies. This is with the aim of ensuring the best possible outcomes for children and their families and delivering the services they need to live safe, happy, healthy and successful lives.

We are ambitious for our children and young people. We want them to achieve their potential, especially at school or college, to make the most of the learning opportunities they are offered and to participate in the decisions affecting their care and their lives. This includes making the transition to adulthood with continuity of support, access to good jobs and higher education, while living in good housing and being financially secure.

There is evidence to show that the challenges children who come into care often face can lead to poorer outcomes. This means that as corporate parents, alongside our strategic partners, we have to increase our focus and attention to ensure positive outcomes are achieved for children and young people in or leaving our care. We want to ensure that when children become looked after they feel settled in their placements and are supported to leave care when they are ready. For those children and young people who remain in long term care we want to create a sense of belonging, emotional security and ambition to succeed.

This strategy outlines the values, principles and key priorities to support children and young people who are looked after or who are care leavers in Brent and is informed by the work we have done to listen to children and young people.

We want all of the services we offer to enable children to develop the life skills and qualities they need to lead independent lives. This will help us to achieve our ambition, where every looked after child or care leaver is happy, healthy and has a promising future.

As appendices to this strategy we have included our pledge to children and young people in care and our care leavers' Charter so that we can be held to account for what we say we will do (appendix one and two).



*Gail E. Tolley*

## 2. Outcomes, Values and Principles for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Everything we do with children, young people and their families is aimed at ensuring the following *outcomes* are achieved:

- Children and young people are happy, healthy and thrive.
- Children, young people and their families have the opportunity to reach their full potential.
- Families and communities are safe and resilient.
- Children and young people live in safe and secure homes.

In order to achieve these outcomes, we have worked hard in Brent to create services that work together, building a common culture and structures that are improving outcomes for children and young people. We are constantly looking ahead to identify and plan for future changes and pursue continuous improvement as well as delivering evidence based services, fostering innovation and creativity.

Our *values* for children and young people are at the centre of what we do:

- We put children, young people and their families at the heart of service design and delivery and adopt a child/family journey approach to service delivery.
- We hold the views of children and young people and their families as of paramount importance.
- We ensure that frontline staff are able to spend as much time as possible with children and young people, and their families, so that they can make a real difference to their lives.
- We enable children and young people and their families to only have to tell their story once and are able to rely on long-term relationships with professionals.

In order to realise these values and achieve positive outcomes and for children and young people we work in partnership through Care in Action (CIA) and Care Leavers in Action (CLIA), the Brent Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Children's Trust.

We are on a continuous journey of learning and development to improve outcomes for children and young people and, in March 2018, published the Brent Practice Framework, 'Growing Together' ([www.socialworkbrent.co.uk/brentpracticeframework](http://www.socialworkbrent.co.uk/brentpracticeframework)). This articulates the key theories, values, principles and approaches that inform the way we work with children and families in Brent, and how we work together as professionals. In short, it describes the way we do things in Brent and why we do them that way. These *principles* and beliefs stem from our overarching council values of fairness, respect, equality and excellence, and are evident in the way we behave towards the children and families we work with, our partners and our colleagues:

- We adopt a whole family approach and intervene as early as possible to ensure children, young people and their families get the right services at the right time;
- We acknowledge and believe that each family member has strengths to be built upon and expanded;
- We appreciate that people and situations can change and resilience can be grown;
- We listen and respond to children, young people and families' voices and experiences;
- We are transparent, clear and honest with families and each other;
- We value different cultures, recognise all elements of diversity and are inclusive;
- We challenge inequality to promote the best interests of children, young people and families;

- We maintain a position of professional curiosity and value different perspectives;
- We support and empower those working closest to children and families to make decisions and manage risk;
- We challenge and support each other to collaboratively achieve our outcomes.

#### **Views of Children in Care:**

- 'What is good about being in care? Living near my birth town and been with my friends and surroundings' (young person aged 11-18, 2017 Bright Spots Survey (BSS)).
- 'For the most part it (*being in care*) is something that you kind of just have to go through if your thrust into it at a young age, but what I feel is that young people like myself in care would value from having it feel less like we are living in people's homes than this is our home as well' (young person aged 11-18, BSS).

### **3. Our Pledge and Care Leavers' Charter**

#### **(i) Our Pledge**

The Brent Pledge 2018 is our promise to all of our children and young people looked after by Brent. It is based on what children and young people in Brent said was important to them and can be found at appendix one of this strategy.

The document is structured around the areas of priority identified by our children and young people. These are:

- To respect and honour children and young people's identity;
- To involve children and young people in the decisions about their lives;
- To provide stability for children and young people;
- To provide safe, stable and happy places for children and young people to live;
- To support children and young people to be active and to stay healthy;
- To ensure children and young people achieve their goals and targets in education;
- To prepare children and young people for independence.

#### **(ii) Our Care Leavers Charter**

Similarly, the Care Leavers' Charter is a set of principles and promises that Brent has committed to our care leavers. These commitments were developed by listening to care leavers about their experiences of leaving care and moving into adulthood. The Care Leavers' Charter strongly influenced the production of Brent's Local Offer for Care Leavers in 2018 (<http://democracy.brent.gov.uk/ielssueDetails.aspx?Ild=32649&Opt=3>). The Care Leavers' Charter can be found at appendix two of this strategy.

The key promises within the Charter are:

- To respect and honour young people's identity;
- To believe in young people;
- To listen to young people;

- To ensure young people have sufficient information to make good choices;
- To provide sufficient support to young people, including finding a suitable home and;
- To be a lifelong champion for our young people.

We continue to listen to what young people tell us in a structured way by taking part in the annual 'Bright Spots' survey, engaging with CIA and CLIA and through regular social work activity.

#### **Views of Children in Care:**

- 'Being part of Care in Action helped me to become more confident and I now speak out more' (young person aged 11-18, BSS).
- 'Care in Action helps me to speak out and feel confident in myself. I am able to make new friends that help me get through my problems' (young person aged 11-18, BSS).

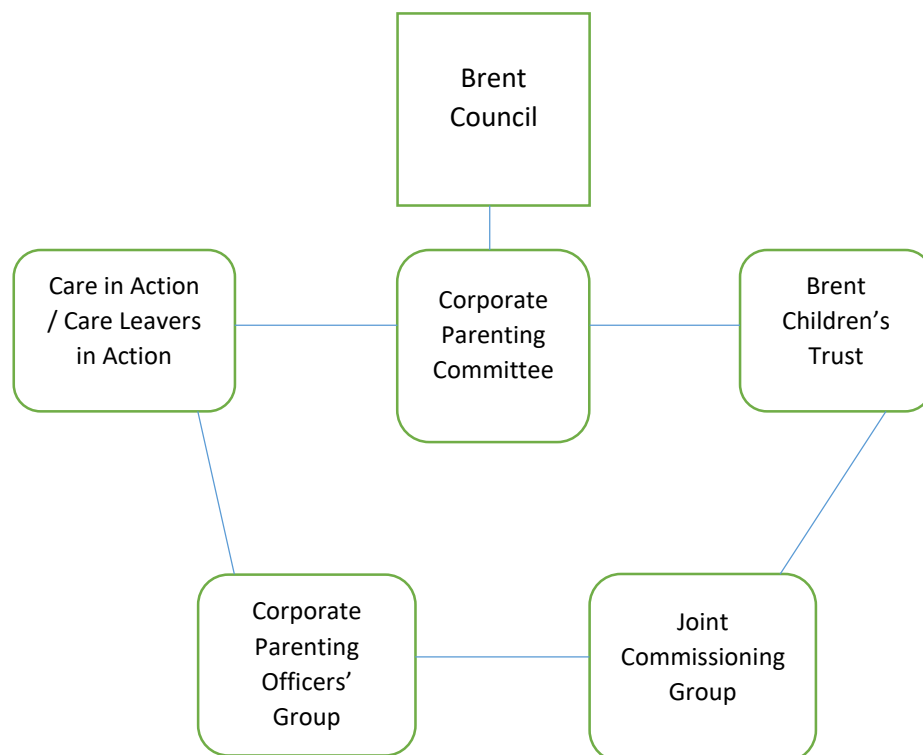
#### **4. Corporate Parenting**

'Corporate Parenting' is the term used to refer to the collective responsibility of the Council to provide the best possible care and protection for children and young people who are 'Looked After', that is, those who are in public care or who have left care and are considered to be 'Care Leavers'. The term 'Looked After' refers to any child or young person for whom the authority has, or shares, parental responsibility, or for whom the authority provides care and accommodation to the child or young person on behalf of their parent. When a child or young person becomes 'looked after', the tasks of their parent become the responsibility of everyone working for the Council, including the elected Members and partner agencies and not just Children and Young People's Services. Corporate parenting is about doing the same for children in care that caring parents do for their own children. Effective corporate parenting requires a commitment from all council employees and elected members with an authority wide approach and with partner agencies working together to meet the wide ranging needs of our children and young people.

The aim of corporate parenting is to ensure that the life chances of every child and young person, in or who has left care, are enhanced by providing effective support that addresses disadvantage and enables them to individually reach their full potential in every way. This reinforces the corporate responsibility of the whole council and partner agencies through a range of initiatives that reflect both national and local policies and best practice to improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers. By listening to children and young people Corporate Parents will provide:

- Leadership
- The right resources
- Plans, policies, procedures and partnerships
- Provide scrutiny and ensure the actions identified are carried out.

The Lead Member for Children and Young People chairs the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee and, along with other elected Members, holds the Council, officers and partner agencies to account in delivering the outcomes as set out above.



*Corporate Parenting Governance Structure*

## 5. The Corporate Context

This Looked After Children and Care Leavers' Strategy forms part of a group of documents that help inform our work and ensures that outcomes and achievements of our looked after children are at the centre of our operations.

The Brent 2020 Vision and the 2015-19 Brent Borough plan (<https://www.brent.gov.uk/your-council/about-brent-council/council-structure-and-how-we-work/strategies-and-plans/>) set out the challenges facing the Local Authority. With less public spending available but a rising population we must continue to closely scrutinise the work we do to ensure that we are delivering key services and to a high standard. This challenge requires that services must be responsive to needs and demands, looking at different ways of working whilst retaining the capacity to be responsive, flexible and effective.

This Looked After Children and Care Leavers' Strategy is guided by the key approaches outlined within the Council's 2020 vision. These are primarily:

- To use and create opportunities innovatively when they present themselves;
- To ensure services help to lift people out of poverty and welfare dependency;
- To manage the pressure on needs-led budgets such as children's social care;
- To embed co-operation, collaboration and partnership as a way of thinking and acting;
- To explore the potential of different structures of delivery and governance to establish new and more effective and efficient ways of working

## 6. Partnerships and Delivery Arrangements.

Brent Council will continue to work with partner agencies and support them in their roles to ensure that children, young people who are looked after and care leavers achieve their full potential. Dedicated teams of professionals from health and education backgrounds work

alongside social care practitioners to ensure that the needs of our looked after children and care leavers are met.

Through the work of the Brent Children's Trust strong strategic and operational partnerships are in place between the Local Authority and Health partners. Chaired by the DCS, the Children's Trust provides effective strategic oversight of services.

The Local Safeguarding Children's Board ensures that all partners work to protect children and young people with a focus from 2018 on contextual safeguarding and the needs of looked after children within this approach.

An operational multi-agency partnership meeting for looked after children and care leavers, with the active participation of CIA and CLIA ensures that the outcomes contained within this strategy are realised. The group comprises professionals from within the Local Authority, Health providers, commissioners as well as young people.

#### **Views of Children in Care:**

- 'My IRO listens and helped me to move with a better foster carer, I am now very happy' (young person aged 11-18, BSS).

### **7. Areas of Progress in Delivering Outcomes**

Between 2016-18 Brent made **positive progress towards realising the outcomes** within this strategy in the following areas:

- Sustained progress in achieving early permanence options for children with an adoption performance that is better than the London and national average.
- An improved proportion of children living within stable placements compared to the 2013-2016 period.
- Good progress has been made to ensure that children in care and care leavers actively participate in the completion of their care plans and pathway plans.
- In partnership with both internal and external partners, health outcomes have continued to improve for looked after children.
- Looked after children continue to make good progress at Key Stage 1 and 2.
- A significant number of young people are supported within higher education.
- The recently completed Care Leavers' Local Offer was finalised with strong corporate support and active engagement of care leavers.
- The stability of the workforce within the Looked After Children and Permanency service has improved significantly.
- A consistent and stable group of Independent Reviewing Officers remain in place to provide effective challenge on behalf of children and young people.

#### **Views of Children in Care:**

- 'I've been in care most of my life and I feel like I'm getting raised better than I would being with my parents' (Child aged 11-18, BSS).

- Being in care has its upsides and downsides. For me mostly upsides. I have experienced a lot however, I think that if I hadn't been in the position that I'm in now then I would be in the positive I'm in currently which is very stable and secure' (young person aged 11-18yrs, BSS).

## **8. Areas for development 2018-20**

Young people and children tell us, supported by quality assurance and performance information, that services are improving, but there is still work to do. Our priorities are focused in the following areas in order to ensure that every child and young person is able to achieve a positive outcome:

- Increasing the number of care leavers who are in education, employment and training.
- Achieving better progress and attainment outcomes for looked after children in Key Stage 3 and 4, particularly those entering the care system late.
- Ensuring that young people who need to access therapeutic services, particularly as care leavers, are able to do so quickly and that these are responsive to need.
- Continuing with progress in providing appropriate support to vulnerable adolescents who are at risk of various forms of exploitation. This includes improving access to a range of high quality placements for those entering care in their teenage years.
- Continuing to proactively recruit, retain and train highly skilled foster carers.
- Building on the 2018 realignment of social work services in order to create and sustain a highly skilled workforce focused on outcomes for children.

### **Views of Children in Care:**

- 'What would make care better? It would be nice to have more time with my foster carer, so I can do more things with her before I move on' (young person aged 11-18, BSS).
- 'What would make care better? To see my cousins more' (Child aged 4- 7, BSS).
- 'What would make care better? Get my carer more involved in decisions involving school and my life' (Child aged 8-11, BSS).
- 'I would like to have my own room and not with my sister. I wish there was a room in the attic with a stair case' (Child aged 4-7yrs, BSS).
- 'I want to see my mum and I want to see my dad more. I would like it if my carer had the internet so I could Facetime my brother and not have to speak to him on the phone by loudspeaker' (young person aged 11-18yrs, BSS).

## **9. Realising Outcomes**

The means of delivering the outcomes as set out in this strategy will be realised and evidenced in the following ways:

### **a. Children and young people are happy, healthy and thrive.**

- Annual Bright Spots Survey
- Consistent and regular engagement with CIA/CLIA



- An inclusive enrichment programme for children in care and care leavers.
- Continued enhancement of the Quality Assurance Framework and performance management systems.
- Effective joint commissioning of services through the CAMHS Transformation Plan
- Continued effective delivery of LAC health services
- Maintaining the proportion of LAC attending good and outstanding schools.
- Continued effective entry to care scrutiny arrangements
- Ensuring the 2017-20 Sufficiency Strategy is implemented.

b. Children, young people and their families have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

- Continued effective permanency planning
- Virtual School development priorities realised
- Ensuring the Care Leavers' Offer has wide take up
- Implementing the Brent CYP Workforce Development Strategy
- Combining LAC review with Education, Health and Care Plan processes for children and young people with additional needs.

c. Families and communities are safe and resilient.

- Vulnerable adolescents' partnership delivers agreed strategic aims.
- Effective analysis of missing from home and care episodes enhances professional responsiveness to identified risk.
- MOPAC County Lines programme is delivered.
- Continued effective joint operational activity between YOS and LAC teams create strong plans for children and young people.

d. Children and young people live in safe and secure homes.

- Delivering the Brent Sufficiency Strategy 2017-2020.
- Delivering the aims of the fostering and adoption statements of purpose that will enhance service quality.
- Fostering and adoption recruitment strategies produce greater quality and choice of placements.
- The West London Alliance completes framework agreements for residential accommodation and enhances the existing Semi-independent accommodation and Independent Fostering Agency framework agreements.
- Operational protocols with Housing Needs ensure care leavers remain in suitable accommodation.

**Views of Children in Care:**

- 'I don't get bullied at school. It's very good and fun being in care' (child aged 8-11yrs, BSS).

This strategy, along with our Sufficiency Strategy 2017-20 (<https://www.brent.gov.uk/services-for-residents/children-and-family-support/child-protection-and-care/children-in-care/looked-after-children/>) has set out how Brent aims to meet our promises to children and young people, respond to wider corporate challenges whilst relentlessly focusing on improving outcomes for both our looked after children and care leavers.

## **Appendix A**

The Brent Pledge 2018

## **Appendix B**

Care Leavers' Charter, 2018

## **Appendix C**

List of Related Documents

- a) Brent Practice Framework
- b) Brent Sufficiency Strategy 2017-20
- c) Brent Local Offer for Care Leavers